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Working with Teenagers and their Charts

As a profession, astrology is ruled by Uranus, the same planet most strongly connected with the adolescent period and its turmoil, so we naturally have something to offer this age group. Looking at the horoscope as a blueprint of the individual, we can help identify the young person's true self, as opposed to peer, family, and societal pressures to conform. Thus, an astrology session given by a sensitive, supportive, positive, and constructive adult can be very helpful to teens in finding out who they are. No doubt, you and I could have used input like that when we were young.

First, it is important to confront your own attitudes about adolescence. Some astrologers are especially gifted with teenagers. These are often people who have raised teenagers and enjoyed them or who have worked with them in other contexts, like school or recreational settings. On the other hand, if you are currently raising teenagers—or still dealing with the aftereffects of that typically tumultuous phase—conflicts, wishes and fears about your offspring may also interfere. Other astrologers, because their own adolescence was difficult and remains green in their minds, have a special empathy for this age group. If you are uncomfortable with teens or dislike them, however, this will come through and contaminate the session. You are better off referring them to someone who just thinks teens are the best thing God ever made.

If you have unresolved issues from your own adolescence, be aware that working with this age group may trigger them. For instance, you may over-identify with the teen against the parent, thereby inflaming their conflicts. Or, you may be overeager to suppress their natural rebelliousness if you had to suppress your own in youth. To discover what your personal issues might be, spend some time remembering those years, what you were like, and how you got along with your parents and peers. Your natal Uranus and its aspects may give you some clues, as well as transits and progressions for that period.



When Parents Ask You to Look at a Teen's Chart

Sometimes parents ask you to look at teenagers' charts during their own session. This is an instance where, to my way of thinking, astrology skates perilously close to being an invasion of privacy—kind of like prying open a teen's padlocked diary. That's an interesting question, isn't it? Could an astrologer be sued for violation of the constitutional right to privacy? If we were taken more seriously, we'd be enjoined from looking at a person's chart without written consent. (If we *were* taken seriously as a profession, we'd probably need malpractice insurance!)

You are looking at the chart of an emerging individual, so be respectful of that young person's search for an identity. Ask yourself, what if this teenager listens to the tape? (You can bet they probably will, somehow, some time. In their shoes, wouldn't you have?) What would teens want you to tell the parent and what would they not? What would they want to hear about themselves? You might do well to act as though the young person were present.

Attention to the parent's motivation in asking is merited. If it comes from a genuine and heartfelt wish to help, you will sense it and act accordingly. If you sense that control is a primary issue--and you might already know that from the parent's horoscope and your interactions--caution is in order. Be circumspect and think about how your words would sound quoted out of context. Parents may well use your pronouncements as ammunition against the young person. "You'd better watch you step, young lady. That astrologer said you'd probably get pregnant before you marry."

Assessing the Parents' Motivation and Expectations

Sometimes, especially after you've commented on a teenager's chart, the parent will ask you to see their son or daughter. Since parents are usually paying for the session, attention to their motivation in sending the child is important. Sometimes a parent asks out of a genuine belief that the consultations will help - their son or daughter make the right choices in terms of schooling and vocation. When the young person is earnestly searching for a vocation, astrology can be an excellent tool. Or, parents may feel their teens who suffer from low self-esteem could discover their personal gifts and potentials, which the chart does so well.

Occasionally, however, clients who've been well impressed with your work will ask you to see their difficult teenager. This is tricky--really tricky. You might start by talking with these parents about what they hope the session will accomplish. The intimate understanding astrology lends doubtlessly has given you an aura of divine wisdom. Consciously or unconsciously, they maybe saying, "Here, you fix my problem child."

Suppose you discuss the expectations and conclude that the parent hopes you will talk some sense into Jared or Ashley. Where control is the motivation, caution is warranted. You need to clarify what astrology can and cannot do. You

cannot sic Saturn onto this young person and straighten them out. Explain that an astrological consultation is not a substitute for therapy when there are serious conflicts or behavior problems. It cannot scare a young person out of a drug - problem. It is not a birth control method. You would do well to talk parents who are having serious problems with their kids into going for family counseling or to a parent group—for which you just happen to have the phone number. Otherwise you may be caught in the middle in a most unpleasant way.

The Question of Confidentiality and Your Teenage Client

When you talk with the parent beforehand, you also need to stress that the session will be absolutely confidential. What is said will be just between you and the young person. You will not be sharing with the parents the information gained in the session. (It's another thing if the teen later allows the parent to listen to the tape, but do be judicious about what you say on tape about their parenting abilities!) Unless you can agree on this issue, don't proceed. And you need to honor that commitment. Otherwise, there's no hope of any real communication between you and troubled or rebellious youngsters.

How would you deal with the subject once you had the teenager in front of you? As with any other client, you will want to assure teenage astrology clients that what is said in the consultation is held as confidential. With this ground rule, they are more likely to be honest about what's going on than if you're seen as a potential snitch. In addition, adolescents are generally so painfully self-conscious and so desperate for acceptance that the very idea of adults talking about them is horrifying and humiliating. Can you remember how important privacy was to you in those turbulent years?

Suppose, however, that the teenager tells you something is happening that is potentially life threatening and therefore crucial for the parent to know? Suppose that the youngster is shooting hard drugs like cocaine or is planning on running away or committing suicide? Or, suppose the youngster is being molested by another adult or family member?

In cases like these, even a licensed therapist cannot guarantee confidentiality. The parent has both a legal right and a necessity to know such things, and the therapist could be sued for not reporting it. While astrologers can't be sued for malpractice, you are still morally responsible and have to take action. You would need to explain to the



teenager that you must discuss this with the parent and why. You might offer to sit with the teenager while he or she tells the parent what is going on. You also need to have emergency numbers, like suicide or drug hot lines on hand.

Is it fair, though, to swear that everything is confidential and then go back on it? In order to maintain integrity within the discussion of confidentiality, then, perhaps it is better to add a disclaimer right at the start. You might say something like, "Of course, if you told me you were shooting drugs or planning on doing away with yourself, then your parents would have to know. Anything else is - between you and me."

Pregnancy, incidentally, is not a life-threatening condition and will eventually reveal itself. In my opinion, the young woman who tells you she is pregnant should retain the right to confidentiality. You would do well, however, to suggest that she seek prenatal care and talk to a health professional who would help her discuss it with her parents.

Given the complexity of confidentiality with an adolescent, the routine discussion you would have with any client of whether to tape the session becomes serious. You might want to ask whether the young person feels privacy would be respected with regards to the tape. Bringing it up and discussing it in an understanding way shows that you respect their need for privacy.

You need to know, however, that there's no reciprocity in this agreement. In the heat of a future battle with the parent, the teenager can and will throw up in the parent's face anything and everything you said . . . or could conceivably have been construed as saying . . . or didn't say but felt. "That astrologer you sent me to said I didn't need to go to college." Choose your words carefully--with all teens, not just the troubled ones--with an ear to how they could sound quoted out of context.

The Actual Session with a Teenager

Self-awareness and honest self-examination of where you stand with teens is as crucial in your advance preparation as finding all the natal aspects and transits. Teens are particularly acute in seeing through adult hypocrisy--it's their job. Whenever you are anything but honest with them--or yourself--they will catch it immediately and let you know in no uncertain terms. Straight speaking, albeit in a gentle and respectful way, is probably your best shot with this age group. If you don't know something, say so. Don't try to fake anything.

Establishing rapport is likely to be different from establishing rapport with an adult and is not always easy. Remembering yourself and your confusion in that phase can give you empathy and understanding of young people's struggles. Reading about teenagers, looking at their books, magazines, and favorite t.v. shows, and listening to their music will remind you of what that time of life is like, as well as giving you a base for communication. (Recall, however, that any slang you may pick up has a life cycle of about three months.)

In order to begin your discussion well, you need to discover and align - yourself behind what teens would see as a need the consultation could meet.

Most teens have never had a chart done before and thus won't know what is possible. You might start by mentioning typical adolescent concerns it could shed light on--like friends, school, and dating. Focus on those concerns without a hidden agenda of your own. The microcosm of the adolescent's world will lead you naturally into any problem you may see in the chart. You are unlikely to get anywhere unless you listen seriously and respectfully to the matters that interest and trouble them. Remember how dramatic the teen years are, where a pimple can be a major social catastrophe, and don't minimize their concerns.



If the consult was arranged because the parent consciously or unconsciously expects you to straighten their son or daughter out, you are probably in for it. Adolescents rebel against adult authority--again, that's their job. The more controlling the parent, the more rebellious the child is likely to be. Potentially strong defiance will show up in the chart as a strong Uranus influence, natal or by transit. You will doubtlessly have to contend with some degree of defiance even if your preparation has been flawless. If you are seen as an adult authority figure aligned with the parent, a troubled teen is going to be just about as thrilled to see you as if the parents sent him or her to a shrink. In these instances, the work of establishing rapport and of focusing the conversation around the young person's own concerns is even more important and even more difficult.

In an earlier chapter, we spoke of the need to put your values and judgments aside while doing a session, rather than imposing them on the client. Nowhere is this principle more crucial to establishing rapport—and yet often more difficult—than trying to fathom the world of teenagers today and to understand what is important to them. Things have changed drastically since we were teens.

For instance, I would wager that few of us cheated on exams, and yet recently ABC's *Prime Time* presented a disturbing investigative report on a six-month study of kids and cheating in high school and college¹. It found that cheaters are becoming the majority, up to 90% of kids in some schools. They use high tech like text messaging, advanced calculators, and palm pilots to score higher on tests and commit plagiarism through the Internet.

Several groups of proud, defiant kids were interviewed who thought it was a joke to do it. One earnest and seemingly decent young man said that even honest kids cheat now to keep up with the cheaters because if you don't cheat, you won't get into college and you won't have a future. One said that cheating in school is good preparation for the cutthroat world of business. I would relate this change in ethics to Pluto's long transit through Sagittarius, which also has accelerated the dumbing down of education.

Bullying has also become a big problem in schools, so much so that Dr. Phil McGraw and his son Jay have started a program in schools across the

¹ The Thursday edition, April 29, 2004.

country to raise awareness of this problem and of its devastating effects on the young people who become targets. Information about their efforts and the Anti-bullying Pledge Jay asks students to sign in a general assembly can be found on their web site.² If a parent raises concern about a youngster's withdrawn state, the lack of friends, and resistance to going to school you might look at the chart to consider whether bullying is a factor. That could be one expression of difficult outer planet aspects to Mars, especially in the 11th house or in the 1st, though those aspects, of course, have many other possible expressions.

Sex and the Teenage Years

Sex is a specific issue that may come up in the consultation and one to handle delicately. Detailed discussion of sexuality exceeds our province as astrologers, unless we also have other qualifications. I am not in any way meaning to imply that this is a subject we should take it upon ourselves to raise with a teen. If one did so consistently, it might even be suggested that it was for prurient interest. The reason for this segment, however, is that the topic is bound to come up if teenagers feel safe in confiding in you. Foot soldiers don't need to be demolition experts, but they'd better know what to do with the mines that are directly in their path.

Most parents are terrified that their teenagers might be having sex. It is hard for them even to contemplate. For instance, one of my students brought in the chart of her 16-year-old daughter, who had Scorpio Rising and Pluto crossing it by transit. The woman was freaked out about the transit, convinced that her daughter was going to die, just as her elderly mother did when Pluto crossed her Ascendant. My student was a staunch and very ladylike Catholic. She didn't know whether to be more relieved or alarmed when I pointed out as tactfully as possible that a more realistic concern at age 16 would be whether the girl was having her first sexual experiences.

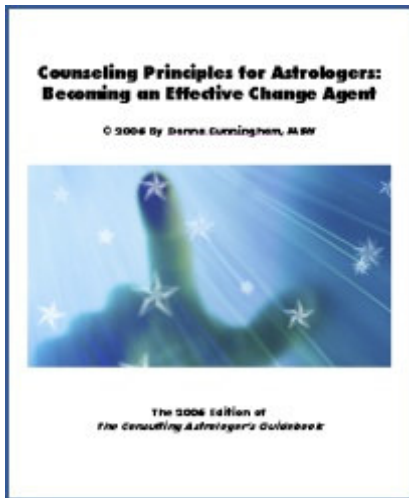
Teenagers are likely to be thinking about sex, even if they are not actively engaging in it. How do you talk about it to either parent or teen if it came up? How comfortable are you in talking about sex in general? How comfortable would you be discussing birth control or safe sex? If these topics are hard for you, perhaps it would be helpful to practice discussing them aloud with a friend or on a tape. It might also be helpful to read some current books for parents on sex education.

As with any deeply personal subject, your own feelings, judgments, and blind spots are likely to interfere unless you practice self-awareness and self-discipline. This would be equally true whether you were inhibited about sex or whether it was your favorite sport. Put your own feelings and judgments, pro or con, aside in favor of empathic understanding of the adolescent. If the area is too embarrassing, the best practice might be to suggest that the teen talk to the

² <http://drphil.com/shows/show/115>. You will find many other useful and current articles on teens and parenting as well.

parent or, if that is too difficult, to a guidance counselor, nurse, or other professional.

Teenagers could find it both embarrassing and invasive for a stranger to introduce the topic. Let the question come from them, although you may subtly let them know that the door is open for such discussion. If the young woman with Pluto crossing her Ascendant had come to me, for instance, I might have asked whether her relationships with guys were becoming more intense and if she was having difficulty handling them.



Remember that there are major controversies in many cities and towns about sex education. Parents have been known to throw huge demonstrations at school over the issue. We are not talking about a rational subject, even when the parent is otherwise a rational and even liberal-minded individual. Thus, phrase anything you say with great delicacy, as it is very likely to get back to the parent. In the heat of battle, a teen is likely to say, "The astrologer said it's normal for me to be experimenting with sex at this age."

Today young people face some new and painful questions—are you ready for them? It was heartbreaking when a cute young college student in my astrology class came for a consult to ask whether her boyfriend, whom she was sleeping with, had AIDS, due to some symptoms she had observed. It

certainly was one possibility, as she had a strong Pluto natally and transiting Pluto crossing the Ascendant. Most people who die of AIDS are in their early to middle twenties, and it is spreading rapidly among heterosexual youth. Since the disease appears to take several years to reach a critical stage, many of the victims got it when they were teenagers. How well informed are you about AIDS? In such an instance, could you talk comfortably and knowledgeably about safe sex? If not, perhaps you should read about it and practice discussing it with a friend. A visit to the web site I Wanna Know³ produced the following statistics: Every year 3 million teens--about 1 in 4 sexually active teens--get a Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD). Chlamydia is more common among teens than among older men and women. Teens have higher rates of gonorrhea than do sexually active men and women aged 20-44. Some studies show that up to 15% of sexually active teenage women are infected with the human papillomavirus (HPV), many with the extremely dangerous and contagious type of HPV that causes cervical cancer. Sexually-transmitted Hepatitis B is also a rising concern, is incurable, and can cause death by cirrhosis.

Relationships themselves are far from the sort we experienced as teens⁴. About one in four girls who are in relationships has been physically abused by a boyfriend, though few of them will talk about it with adults—typically, they make excuses for the boyfriend and feel it is their own fault. Violence is especially common if the girl tries to break up with the boy.

³ <http://www.iwannaknow.org/>

⁴ From the Liz Claiborne sponsored site, *Love is Not Abuse*, at http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/teen_fastfacts.htm

Adolescence--the Age of Identity Formation

Even after you negotiate the possible stumbling blocks we've discussed, the session should be different from one for an adult. Teens are--and need to be--very focused on the present and on themselves, because this is the age of self-discovery and the formation of an identity. They are insatiably curious about themselves and all their possibilities, almost obsessed with the question of, "Who am I?" Because the natal chart is a map of the self and its potentialities, a natal interpretation can be fun and exciting for both of you.



This age is a major one in terms of defining one's identity. Thus, the things you tell young people about themselves could easily become fixed features in their self-concept. Your interpretations may well stay with them and form part of their identity. Thirty years from now, they'll still be saying, "I went to an astrologer when I was young, and he said I'd never be any good at business."

Thus, you would want to rely heavily on the strengths and abilities shown in the chart and on the constructive expressions of any difficult placement. Focus on talents, gifts, and assets--remember to look for quintiles. Downplay their limitations--they will, after all improve with age--and keep any

assessments conditional.

Should You Tell A Teenager's Future?

Too much prognostication about the distant future is ill advised, even if the teen asks. Here again, you don't want to be Oedipus' soothsayer and create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Given teens' notorious propensity for drama, they might find it interesting to act out your worst predictions, sooner rather than later.

Teens are not that focused on the future, except in very romantic and unrealistic ways--like believing that they'll be a movie star or marry someone rich and gorgeous. It can be devastating to put too much attention on the unlikely prognosis of these adolescent dreams. We all outgrow them, but only in our own time, and they serve a purpose while they are with us. Nor should you give too much attention to the difficult areas of the chart as they relate to adulthood rather than the now. Extreme gentleness is in order. Imagine how you would have felt if you were 15 years old and an astrologer told you something negative and fatalistic about how your life was going to be.

For example, you would not tell a hopelessly romantic teenage girl with burgeoning hormones and a stressfully-aspected Pluto in the 7th that she might marry a real bastard who wouldn't let her out of the house. Talk, instead, about how she might be attracted to passionate and possessive fellows, but that as romantic as that might seem in the beginning, she might wind up feeling

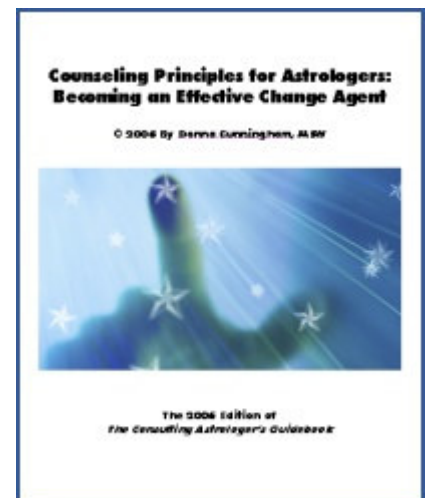
suffocated by that possessiveness. You might engage her in a discussion of boyfriends she's already had who were like that and what went wrong in those relationships.

You are planting a seed that may take hold and make her think twice, but you're not coming down like the Oracle of Doom. If you were too negative, her life might be rearranged to avoid your prophecy. She decides never to marry because she can't trust men—another interpretation of Pluto in the 7th!

Likewise, you wouldn't tell a motherly little Cancer with Saturn in the 5th that she might never have kids. What you might say instead would be that her own family might be small or come later in life, but that a career involving children would be highly rewarding to her. Stress that with her strong sense of responsibility she could make a fine contribution in those fields, for that is very likely to be the case.

By focusing on current situations that are forerunners of adulthood, you may be able to help the teen learn to use difficult chart positions more consciously. That way, the most negative potentials of those placements can be avoided. Almost any situation that is currently important to the teen has its adult equivalent. Dating issues can be similar to problems they will meet in marriage, problems with parents may be similar to those they may encounter with bosses, and concerns about acceptance by peers can be similar to those they would meet in adult social life. If teens can use the session to gain the insight to handle today's problems intelligently, they will have tools to approach adult difficulties intelligently as well. That outcome is all you can hope for in reading charts at any age, and it is service well done.

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