



Teen Years are Challenging

Going through the teen years is a bit like finding your way through a maze – suddenly everything in your life seems different and you are trying to figure out all the changes that are happening. Entering high school is a big change... you may feel like the little fish in a big pond, where as before you were the big fish in a little pond. You will get through the maze of the teen years and come out at the other end having learnt a great deal along the way. All teens find these years challenging – you are not alone.

As an amputee you have more than the usual teen issues to deal with. While all teens worry about how they fit in with their group of friends and have the need to feel part of a crowd and be accepted, as an amputee you may also wonder what others are thinking about your amputation(s) and/or artificial limb(s).

Think back to when you were younger. Do you feel differently about your amputation or artificial limb now? Are you more conscious of your amputation and what others may think or say? Do you wear long sleeves or pants so that your amputation or limb will be less visible – even when it's really hot? Do you wonder if you'll be able to keep up with your friends? Do you worry about what a girlfriend or boyfriend will think about your amputation or if you'll even get a boyfriend or girlfriend? If the answer to any of these questions is 'yes' then you are a perfectly normal teenager who happens to be an amputee.

Some of the challenges you face will be the same whether you are an arm or a leg amputee and some may be different. CHAMP graduates have some experiences to share about their teen years:

“It's funny how in the period of one year your thoughts and ideas can really change about yourself. All through school until junior high I wore my artificial hand every day. Then grade seven and grade eight came along and one day I had to go without it for some reason (I think it was being repaired). So for the whole of grade seven and eight I didn't ever really wear my artificial hand at all. Then high school came along and the physical aspect of things came in, and all of a sudden, one day, I put my hand on as soon as I got up and started wearing it to school again.” – Tom

“Every girl is self-conscious about themselves in some way. And I guess my arm is just more noticeable than other things, and so once I overcome it, I'm fine. I call it, 'bad arm days.' Like it's a 'bad hair day' where nothing goes right. I mean, my arm might not be working as I want it to that day, or I might have trouble doing some things, but I just say 'Hey, tomorrow's another day.' And hopefully, things will look better the next day.” – Emma



“When I was little my biggest concern used to be when I went to high school, going to dances and things like that, because my leg sticks out a bit on the side. And I thought, we’re wearing dresses, and people will see, and I sort of wobble when I’m dancing. But now it doesn’t matter to me, and if I do meet someone new that I am interested in and we go out on a date I tell them right away.” – Rhonda

“I tire out easier than other kids my age because of the energy required to operate my artificial foot. This extra effort is something I’m more than willing to make. I love sports and I don’t mind having to work harder or try more than once to succeed.” – Bob

“I think as an early teenager (13 to 15 years old) I had some apprehension of how someone, if I was dating, would consider my artificial arm. For example, would they be apprehensive about touching my artificial arm, or walking hand in hand down the street, would that be uncomfortable? You have to accept how you are, and until you do that, then dating and relationships might be difficult. And if you’re wondering how your partner is feeling, then you have to be open enough, and just ask ‘Do you mind if I put my artificial arm around your waist while we dance?’ Because if you don’t ask, you won’t know.” – Chris

“When I was a young teenager I found I didn’t have a lot of confidence in myself. Whereas when I was a really young kid I had kind of an attitude that if somebody didn’t like me for who I was, that was their problem. And I kind of got back to that when I hit about 16 or 17. I became a little more comfortable with who I was and accepting of who I was.



Now I’m married and my wife comes with me to my prosthetic appointments and she says ‘I love your legs. They’re neat. I wouldn’t want you any other way.’ And that’s nice to kind of counteract that part of me, that when I was 13 and 14 years old, that I really wished I just blended in like everyone else.” – Tim

You may think that some of your friends are just sailing through their teen years and don’t seem to have any issues or concerns, but rest assured everyone has concerns, they may be similar or different to yours, but they have them.

In years to come you will look back on your teen years with a sense of accomplishment and pride in how you coped with the challenges you faced!

Teen Talk and Super Teen Talk (for multiple amputees) are great video resources for you or your family – to order them call CHAMP at **1 800 267-4023** or email **champ@waramps.ca**.