

ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

*“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters
compared to what lies within us.”*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

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Introduction

Teenagers seem to be in such a hurry to grow up. With each birthday, they grow closer to the magic age in which the privileges of adulthood are accessible. Rarely do adolescents understand that with those privileges come personal responsibility, or acknowledge the need to accept consequences for their own actions. It is much easier to see the “fun part” of achieving adult status rather than the “hard part” of working to support oneself and family. Adolescence is said to be the period during which the child has achieved sexual maturity but has not yet taken on the roles and responsibilities, or the rights, that accompany full adult status (LeFrançois, 1993). The remainder of this section will explore the stages of development in adolescence.

Adolescence occurs for most children between the ages of 12 and 20. Except for gestation and infancy, there is no other time when change is so great as during the adolescent years. Bodies change and grow, thinking becomes more concrete and logical, emotions become more mature, and moral convictions become internalized. These changes are frightening and bewildering, yet at the same time, wonderful and full of excitement. It is part of the mentor’s responsibility to help the mentee explore and understand the changes occurring in his or her body and mind.

Physical Development

The adolescent growth spurt begins between the ages of 9 and 15. Hormonal (estrogen for girls and androgens for boys) changes involving the pituitary gland include an acceleration in growth rate, the development of pubic hair, changes in the structure and functioning of the reproductive organs, the appearance of ancillary hair, and the development of the sweat glands which often leads to an outbreak of acne.

Girls usually begin the growth spurt around age 10, peak at about 12, and then decelerate by age 14. The enlargement of the breasts is usually the first external sign of impending puberty; actual puberty is marked by the beginning of menstruation or menarche (Sugar, 1979). In the United States, 80 percent of girls reach menarche between the ages of 11.5 and 14.5, and 50 percent of them between 12 and 14. The average age at which menstruation begins for American girls has been dropping about six months every decade, and today contrasts greatly with the average age of a century ago, between 15 and 17 (Feldman & Elliot, 1990). However, a recent study shows that black females enter puberty far earlier than their white peers. A *Science News* article cited a study in which 17,077 girls were surveyed, and found that on average, puberty begins at age 9 for black girls and age 10 for white girls. Three percent of black girls and 1 percent of white girls began to develop breasts and pubic hair by age 3. By age 7, 27 percent of black girls and 7 percent of white girls have begun to mature, and by age 8, 48 percent of black girls and 15 percent of white girls have entered puberty (*Science News*, 1997). Because their emotional and cognitive abilities have not developed in a similar fashion, it is difficult to help adolescents understand the changes they are experiencing and how to deal with them.

Boys typically begin their rapid increase in growth at about 12.5 years of age, reach a peak slightly after the age of 14, and decline by the age of 16. This period is marked by the enlargement of the testes, scrotum and penis; the development of the prostate gland; darkening of the scrotal skin; enlargement of the larynx; and the growth of pubic hair and pigmented hair on the legs, arms, and chest (Feldman & Elliot, 1990).

Cognitive Development

Current views on the intellectual changes that take place during adolescence have been heavily influenced by the work of the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, who sees the mental capabilities of adolescents as qualitatively and quantitatively superior to that of younger children. Piaget proposed four stages of development: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operations.

The sensorimotor stage occurs in the first two years of life. A child understands his or her world in the “here and now.” If the child cannot sense a person or object, it does not exist. Toward the end of the second year, the child begins to understand that even though an object or person may not be in sight, it still exists. The preoperational stage is between the ages of 2 and 7. The child relies on what he sees in order to make judgments, rather than thinking logically. Concrete operations occur between the ages of 7 and 12. In this stage, the child begins to think more logically, but still cannot think hypothetically. The last stage Piaget proposes is formal operations. Children around age 12 can begin to think hypothetically as well as logically. Piaget suggests the thinking capacity of young people increases in complexity as they get older. Children go from concrete thinking to formal thinking in which they can imagine possibilities and think hypothetically. Developmentalists find distinct differences between younger and older adolescents in their ability to generalize, to handle abstract ideas, to reason logically, and to understand the connection between cause and effect (Sprinthall & Collins, 1985). Whether these changes in cognitive ability are the result of a new developmental stage as Piaget indicates, or should be attributed to the accumulation of knowledge, is controversial among psychologists (Brooks, Fusco, & Glennan, 1983).

Another theorist, Erik Erickson (1963), suggests eight stages of human development: trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame and doubt, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, identity vs. identity diffusion, intimacy vs. isolation, generosity vs. self-absorption, and integrity vs. despair. For the sake of brevity, only the stages relevant to adolescent development will be discussed here. Erickson proposes that in each stage a child experiences a conflict that he or she must successfully resolve in order for the child to grow into an emotional healthy adult.

Industry vs. inferiority occurs between the ages of 6 and 11. In this stage, the child begins to develop a sense of importance and self worth through interacting with his or her peers. The child who has few friends or who is very shy and withdrawn does not develop good self-esteem and begins to feel “inferior” in comparison to others in his or her age group.

The next stage is identity vs. identity diffusion, which occurs from 11 years onward. During this stage, the child begins to develop a sense of who he or she is. The child may experience several different “selves” in an effort to find the one that truly fits. Some parents may characterize their child as “going through a phase.”

The effects of physical change, increased intellectual capacity, the development of sexual impulses, and social pressure to achieve independence all contribute to an adolescent’s formation of an identity (Gordon, 1971). An adolescent’s self-image is greatly affected by the opinions of those individuals who are important to him. Gradually, the emotional dependency of childhood yields to an emotional commitment to meet the expectations of others. If adolescents fail to meet the goals set for them by important people in their lives, they usually feel obligated to reevaluate their motives, attitudes, or activities. Hence, the experience of censure or approval helps determine the adolescent’s later commitment to responsible behavior and the sense of social competence (Gerard, Gibbons, Benthin, & Hessling, 1996).

The peer group provides a standard by which individuals can evaluate themselves during the process of identity formation. Within the peer group, a young person can try out a variety of roles. The values and norms of the group permit adolescents to acquire a perspective regarding their own values and attitudes. A peer group can also help them to make the transition from reliance on the family to relative independence. By adopting the customs and language of their peer group, an adolescent expresses a distinct identity that eases the anxiety of separation from past sources of reference (Muss, 1990).

The Family

The family has traditionally provided a set of values and an environment where young people can observe and learn adult behaviors. The extended family of previous generations has in many Western countries given way to the nuclear family unit, consisting of parents and one or two children. In modern industrial societies, however, the nuclear family has become relatively unstable as divorce is common and many children are raised by one parent. Individual adolescents can be expected to react differently to parental divorce. Adjustment to a parents' divorce may depend upon the adolescent's personality, the socioeconomic status, the ability to cope, and the nature of the relationship between parents after the divorce.

Also, it is fairly clear that adolescents respond differently to divorce than younger children. Whereas younger children are confused about what happened and are afraid of being abandoned by the parents or believe the parents will reunite, adolescents are more realistic and objective (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). However, adolescents face other challenges associated with their parents' divorce. The maturity level of older children makes them more aware of their parents' turmoil and their own emotions. Springer and Wallerstien (1993) found that 10 years post-divorce, adolescents who were not adults were still burdened by the memories of their parents' divorce. In addition, the subjects reported apprehension about repeating their parents' mistakes in their own marriage.

Moral Development

Kohlberg (1964) proposes three levels of morality within which are two stages each of moral orientation. Kohlberg suggested that the levels are ordered, and none of them ever completely replaces the one preceding it. Therefore, it is impossible to assign ages of development to these levels.

In the preconventional level, the child believes that bad behavior will be punished and good behavior is based on obedience. The child doesn't consider whether his or her actions are morally right, but only if he or she is following the rules. In the second stage of this level, the child sees good as what is rewarded and evil as that which is punished. The child will do something that is good in order to be rewarded.

In the conventional level, the child wants to remain in good standing with the important people in his/her life; therefore, he/she conforms to the rules and regulations set forth. Stage four in this level says that children learn that conforming to rules is important in gaining and retaining parents' approval. One must follow the rules to be morally acceptable.

In the last level, morality is viewed in terms of personal rights. Democratic society should govern ideals and principles in order for each individual to be treated morally and fairly.

Adolescent Tendencies

Adolescents also develop a sense of invulnerability. Unfortunately, this manifests itself in adolescents having the highest accident rate of all age groups except those over 65 (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1994). Unintentional injuries, in particular those from motor vehicle crashes, are the leading cause of death for adolescents ages 15-19. Sixteen-year-olds are 20 times as likely to have a crash, as is the general population of drivers.

Adolescents engage in risky behavior believing they are invincible and that nothing will happen to them. However, such thinking has caused the rise in automobile insurance rates for males ages 16 to 24 because of alcohol related accidents. Over one-third of all drunk drivers involved in fatal accidents are in this age group, which represents less than 20 percent of all licensed drivers (U. S. Bureau of Census, 1994). Adolescent females who think they won't get pregnant fail to use contraception and thus over 1 million unmarried teenagers become pregnant in the United States every year (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1994). However, not all teens engage in such reckless behavior. In 1992, more than 6.7 million 16- to 19-year olds worked, and over 10 million went to school regularly. In a 1992 survey, 96 percent of 12- to 17-year olds did not use marijuana, 98.6 percent had never used crack, and more than 50 percent did not use alcohol (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1994).

Rites of Passage

In American culture, adolescence is viewed as a time of turmoil, frustration, and change. There is no official rite of passage from childhood into adulthood; however, there are organizations that have developed programs in which young people experience a meaningful transition between these stages of life. The National Trust for the Development of African-American Men is a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., that addresses the development, needs, and challenges of African-Americans, especially males, in the areas of health, leadership training, economic development, education, and crime prevention from an African view of the world (The National Trust for the Development of African-American Men, 1998).

A component of the Trust is a school, the Children of the Sun School, for African-American boys and girls. The school's curriculum focuses on five major areas of risk facing the African-American culture, specifically males, which include crime, education, health and longevity, employment and economic development, and family life. The basic values of respect, responsibility, and self-development are strongly accentuated. The curriculum guides students in generating behaviors that are less risky but acceptable both socially and "in the streets." The students learn about specific risks; how attitudes, values, and behaviors contribute to those risks; and how African-American values reduce high-risk behaviors.

The Rites of Passage program instills in its youth the importance and significance of becoming responsible men and women in this society. The Rites of Passage activities include: 1) mentoring by an African-American adult, 2) writing a Life Plan, which is a plan in which the mentor assists the student in developing and implementing strategies for achieving a specific goal, 3) learning specific African rituals that enforce the values of self-respect, development, and discipline, 4) participating in community service, 5) constructing family trees, and 6) experiencing retreats that focus on African traditions. These activities give the students a sense of cultural heritage and pride, which in turn helps them build self-esteem and self-worth and gives them a sense of belonging. Upon completion of the six-month period of activities, students will creatively develop a ceremony that incorporates traditional African ceremonial practices. This ceremony will represent the symbolic transition from adolescence to adulthood (The Trust, 1998).

The Role of Mentor

When working with young people, it is of critical importance to understand the development stages of adolescence. Such drastic changes in body and mind can be difficult for a mentee to understand, and the mentor can be a great source of empathy and support during this time. Children do not always have an adult who will explain the changes they are experiencing and help them understand that the changes are normal. The mentor should be someone the child can turn to for unconditional support and encouragement, as well as someone who will give them reliable and accurate information.

Adolescent Development

Lesson Plan

Objectives: To help mentors understand the stages of adolescent development and apply them to their mentoring relationship.

Lesson: The instructor will discuss:

- Physical development
- Cognitive development
- The family
- Moral development
- Adolescent tendencies
- Rites of passage
- The role of the mentor

Materials:

- Adolescent Development Activity: Unit Outline
- Overheads 1–10

Adolescent Development Activity

I. Adolescence

A. Definition

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

B. Puberty—Definition:

C. Cognitive Development

1. Concrete Operations _____
2. Formal Operations _____
3. Criteria indicating presence of formal operations:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - c. _____
 - e. _____
 - f. _____
 - g. _____

II. Changes

A. General Changes During Adolescence

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

B. Puberty—Early Adolescence

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

C. Special Characteristics of Boys

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

D. Special Characteristics of Girls

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

III. Middle Adolescence

A. Stage of Experimentation

1. _____
2. _____

B. Risk Taking

1. _____
2. _____

C. Striving for Independence

1. _____
2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

D. Sexual Development

1. _____

2. More boys than girls engage in sexual activity because:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

3. Motivation to participate in sexual activity can arise for two reasons:

a. _____

b. _____

IV. Late Adolescence

A. Characteristics of Both Sexes

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

B. Special Characteristics of Boys

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

C. Special Characteristics of Girls

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

V. Communication Barriers

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

Adolescent Development

I. Adolescence

A. Definition: The transition from childhood to adulthood.

1. Time for formulating personal identity.
2. Time for gaining emancipation from family unit.
3. Generally (and flexibly) regarded as ages 11–19.
(Some persons function as adolescents well into the 20s or later).
4. Time for driving moms and/or dads crazy!

B. Puberty—a stage of adolescence

1. Beginning of **physical** transition from childhood to adulthood.
2. Reproduction becomes possible (internal phenomena).
3. Not noticeable externally.

C. Cognitive Development

1. Concrete Operations (ages 7–11)

- a. Child able to solve new problems related to immediate present world.
- b. Reasons inductively (based on the influence of others).
- c. Cannot yet reason by deduction or by hypothetical reasoning.

2. Formal Operations (ages 12–15)

- a. Child develops hypothetical reasoning.
- b. Problems are attacked from all angles and multiple solutions are considered.
- c. Can systematically isolate variables and can think introspectively.

3. Evidence of Capacity for Formal Operations:

- a. Can manipulate two or more variables simultaneously
- b. Can hypothesize about logical consequences of events
- c. Can foresee the consequences of personal actions
- d. Can detect the logical consistency within a statement
- e. Can think realistically about self, others, and their world
- f. Can think without egocentrism (thinks about the whole and not the self)

II. Developmental Changes

A. General Changes during Adolescence

1. Rapid growth (early in adolescence)
2. Confused by changes
3. Curious about final outcome of changes
4. Rebellion against home/parents
5. Vacillation between considerable maturity and babyishness
6. Absorption with close friend(s) of same age and sex
7. Moodiness, sloppiness, and disorder
8. Establishing independent self: “Who am I?” “What kind of person am I?”
9. Acute body-consciousness
10. Appearance of sexual maturity
11. Skin problems

III. Early Adolescence—Puberty (ages 11–13)

A. General Characteristics

1. Constantly hungry (noticeable increase)
2. Enjoy companionship at meals and at after-school snacks
3. Sleep more than previously
4. Sleepy at “getting up” times
5. Want to stay up late as a sign of increasing maturity

B. Special Characteristics of Boys

1. Boisterous
2. Clumsy
3. Secretive, uncommunicative at home
4. Aggressive
5. Dirty—poor personal hygiene
6. Gain more weight and height than do girls in puberty
7. Much talk about sex and girls
8. More interested in companions and activities outside the home

C. Special Characteristics of Girls

1. Vague and scattered
2. Have crushes on older men
3. Interested in romantic love
4. Engage in playacting
5. Talkative, but not communicative
6. Giggly!

IV. Middle Adolescence (ages 14–16)

A. Experimentation

1. Drinking, drugs, smoking, and sexual experimentation are often of the highest interest
2. Possible first intercourse or first pregnancy occurs

B. Risk-Taking

1. Have little concept of cause and effect
2. Perceived omnipotence and invulnerability are the rule
3. Unable to link drinking with auto accidents, pregnancy, or STDs

C. Striving for Independence

1. Strong need to strive for independence and autonomy
2. Frequent conflicts with parents need confrontation and resolution
3. Parental conflicts are normal and necessary
4. Confide in other adolescents

D. Sexual Development

1. Sexuality is a major preoccupation. Experience unpredictable surges in sexual drive—accompanied by unavoidable sexual fantasies and impulses.

2. Boys more sexually active than girls because:
 - a. Females less likely to discover sexual responses spontaneously because their sexual organs are less prominent and subject to manipulation
 - b. Testosterone increases are much more abundant in boys
 - c. High male testosterone may result in greater aggressiveness and more purely physical drives for gratification
 - d. Girls tend to view sexual gratification as secondary to fulfillment of other needs, e.g., love, affection, self-esteem, and reassurance
 - e. Girls, thus, are less likely to abstain from sex in a relationship

3. Motivation to participate in sexual activity arises from need to:
 - a. Gratify true sexual impulses
 - b. Gratify nonsexual needs (achieve sense of closeness to someone, bolster self-esteem, to consolidate gender identity, or to act out against authority)

V. Late Adolescence (ages 17–19)

A. Characteristics of Both Sexes

1. Rebellious
2. Concerned with personal appearance
3. Moody
4. Interested in opposite sex
5. Ego identity established—“Where do I fit into the world?”
6. Growth subsides; full stature nearly attained
7. Sleep and food requirements approach adult level
8. Prefer companionship when eating
9. Intimate relationship with buddy fades
10. Greater interest in opposite sex
11. Need acceptance by society, in job, and in college
12. Need parental respect for opinion and acceptance of maturity

B. Special Characteristics of Boys

1. Sexual problems prominent and demanding
2. Interested in career planning
3. Less interested than girls in mate seeking

C. Special Characteristics of Girls

1. Interest in boys now directed toward mate seeking
2. Absorbed in fantasies of romantic love
3. Less interested than boys in career planning
4. Sexual problems less demanding than in boys

VI. Communication Barriers

- A.** Commonly distrust adults and authority figures
- B.** Question whether adults actually listen to them or understand their feelings
- C.** Limit communication to avoid revealing their vulnerabilities
- D.** Typically fearful of adults asking questions
- E.** Intent upon preserving their privacy
- F.** Wish to be treated with respect and trust as young adults
- G.** Distrust parental involvement, as they fear punitive consequences may result

(Taken from www.andrews.edu/IPA/education/adolescent_health/growth_development/sld001.htm)

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