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## DEFINITION OF ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence is a dynamic evolving theoretical construct informed through physiologic, psychosocial, temporal and cultural lenses. The critical developmental period is conventionally understood as the years between the onset of puberty and the establishment of social independence (Steinberg, 2014). The most commonly used chronologic definition of adolescence includes the ages of 10-18, but may incorporate a span of 9-26 years depending on the source (APA, 2002).

## STAGES OF ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence is the period of transition between childhood and adulthood. It includes some big changes—to the body, and to the way a young person relates to the world.

The many physical, sexual, cognitive, social, and emotional changes that happen during this time can bring anticipation and anxiety for both children and their families. Understanding what to expect at different stages can promote healthy development throughout adolescence and into early adulthood.

### Early Adolescence (Ages 10 to 13)

- **During this stage, children often start to grow more quickly.** They also begin notice other body changes, including hair growth under the arms and near the genitals, breast development in females and enlargement of the testicles in males. They usually start a year or two earlier in girls than boys, and it can be normal for some changes to start as early as age 8 for females and age 9 for males. Many girls may start their period at around age 12, on average 2-3 years after the onset of breast development.
- **These body changes can inspire curiosity and anxiety in some—especially if they do not know what to expect or what is normal.** Some children may also question their gender identity at this time, and the onset of puberty can be a difficult time for transgender children.
- **Early adolescents have concrete, black-and-white thinking.** Things are either right or wrong, great or terrible, without much room in between. It is normal at this stage for young people to center their thinking on themselves (called "egocentrism"). As part of this, preteens and early teens are often self-conscious about their appearance and feel as though they are always being judged by their peers.
- **Pre-teens feel an increased need for privacy.** They may start to explore ways of being independent from their family. In this process, they may push boundaries and may react strongly if parents or guardians reinforce limits.

## Middle Adolescence (Ages 14 to 17)

- **Physical changes from puberty continue during middle adolescence.** Most males will have started their growth spurt, and puberty-related changes continue. They may have some voice cracking, for example, as their voices lower. Some develop acne. Physical changes may be nearly complete for females, and most girls now have regular periods.
- **At this age, many teens become interested in romantic and sexual relationships.** They may question and explore their sexual identity—which may be stressful if they do not have support from peers, family, or community. Another typical way of exploring sex and sexuality for teens of all genders is self-stimulation, also called masturbation.
- **Many middle adolescents have more arguments with their parents as they struggle for more independence.** They may spend less time with family and more time with friends. They are very concerned about their appearance, and peer pressure may peak at this age.
- **The brain continues to change and mature in this stage, but there are still many differences in how a normal middle adolescent thinks compared to an adult.** Much of this is because the frontal lobes are the last areas of the brain to mature—development is not complete until a person is well into their 20s! The frontal lobes play a big role in coordinating complex decision making, impulse control, and being able to consider multiple options and consequences. Middle adolescents are more able to think abstractly and consider "the big picture," but they still may lack the ability to apply it in the moment. For example, in certain situations, kids in middle adolescence may find themselves thinking things like:
  - *"I'm doing well enough in math and I really want to see this movie... one night of skipping studying won't matter."*
  - *Do I really have to wear a condom during sex if my girlfriend takes the pill?"*
  - *"Marijuana is legal now, so it can't be that bad."*

While they may be able to walk through the logic of avoiding risks outside of these situations, strong emotions often continue to drive their decisions when impulses come into play.

## Late Adolescents (18-21... and beyond!)

Late adolescents generally have completed physical development and grown to their full adult height. They usually have more impulse control by now and **maybe** better able to gauge risks and rewards accurately. In comparison to middle adolescents, youth in late adolescence might find themselves thinking:

- *"While I do love Paul Rudd movies, I need to study for my final."*
- *"I should wear a condom...even though my girlfriend is on birth control, that's not 100% in preventing pregnancy."*
- *"Even though marijuana is legal, I'm worried about how it might affect my mood and work/school performance."*

Teens entering early adulthood have a stronger sense of their own individuality now and can identify their own values. They may become more focused on the future and base decisions on their hopes and ideals. Friendships and romantic relationships become more stable. They become more emotionally and physically separated from their family. However, many reestablish an "adult" relationship with their parents, considering them more an equal from whom to ask advice and discuss mature topics with, rather than an authority figure.

#### DEFINITION OF SELF-IDENTITY

- ▣ Refers to the global understanding a person has of themselves. Self Identity is composed of relatively permanent self-assessments, such as personality attributes, knowledge of one's skills and abilities, one's occupation and hobbies, and awareness of one's physical attributes.
- ▣ For example, the statement, "I am lazy" is a self-assessment that contributes to the self-concept. In contrast, the statement "I am tired" would not normally be considered part of someone's self-concept, since being tired is a temporary state.
- ▣ The Self Identity is not restricted to the present. It includes past selves and future selves. Future selves or "possible selves" represent individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming. They correspond to hopes, fears, standards, goals, and threats. Possible selves may function as incentives for future behavior and they also provide an evaluative and interpretive context for the current view of self.

All children will develop a sense of identity and this is about Who am I? Where and how do I belong? What influence do I have in my world?

Having a strong sense of identity is about learning that you're valued and worthy of attention. Children with a strong sense of identity look for and are open to new challenges. They ask questions and try new things. They know they can contribute to the world and make a difference. They also persist with things and enjoy their achievements.

Relationships are the foundations for your child's strong sense of identity.

To build a strong sense of identity, your child first has to feel they belong. They learn this through safe and secure relationships – first with their family and later with other caring adults and children. Your child's identity is also shaped by the ways that you and others respond to them.

As they grow, most children show interest in being part of a group and playing with others. They become increasingly confident in different social situations and learn that their actions can have effects on themselves and others. Having a strong sense of identity doesn't mean you have an outgoing or social personality. A quiet or shy child can also have a strong sense of identity.

**Children will have strong self-identities and will feel respected and affirmed as unique individuals when they:**

1. build respectful relationships with others
2. appreciate the features that make a person special and unique (name, size, hair, hand and footprint, gender, birthday)
3. understand that as individuals they are separate from others with their own needs, interests and abilities
4. have a sense of 'who they are' and be able to describe their backgrounds, strengths and abilities
5. feel valued and see themselves and their interests reflected in the environment
6. express their own ideas, preferences and needs, and have these responded to with respect and consistency.

**Children will have a sense of group identity when**

1. They feel that they can have a place and a right to belong to a group
2. They know that members of their family and community are positively acknowledged and welcomed
3. They can share personal experiences about their families and cultures
4. They can see themselves as part of a wider community
5. They understand the different roles of people in the community

**Children will be able to express their rights and show an understanding for the identity, views of others when...**

1. They can express their views and help them to make decisions that matter and affect them
2. They understand the rules and boundaries of acceptable behavior
3. They can interact and help others
4. They be aware of and respect others' needs, rights, feelings, culture, language, background and religious beliefs
5. They have a sense of social justice and recognize and deal with unfair behavior
6. They can demonstrate the skills of co-operation, responsibility, negotiation, and conflict resolution

## **Children will see themselves as capable learners when...**

1. They can develop a broad range of abilities and interests

They show an awareness of their own unique strengths, abilities and learning styles and they can share their skills and knowledge with others

2. They show increasing confidence and self-assurance in directing their own learning

3. They dispositions like curiosity, persistence and responsibility

4. They experience learning opportunities that are based on personal interests, and linked to their home, community and culture

5. They motivated and began to think about and recognize their own progress and achievements

## **How can parents help their children to build a strong self-identity:**

Value what is unique about your child and accept your child for who they are right now:

Pay close attention to your child's attempts to communicate or interact with you – this tells children they are important and valued.

Acknowledge what your child says or does without being dismissive or judgmental – this tells them it is safe to express feelings and opinions.

Encourage your child to make choices and decisions (within appropriate limits). This recognises that your child is able to make decisions.

When your child says 'I can do it' – let them try.

Support your child's efforts to be more independent (while still offering your guidance).

Encourage your child to solve problems or to keep going when things get tough. This builds your child's resilience and sense of wellbeing.

Help your child to learn how to treat others:

Give your child time to play alone and time to play with others.

Hold back and see if your child can fix their own problems or disagreements (but be ready to step in when they need support).

Model care, empathy and respect in your own interactions with children and other adults. Older children will be able to understand that some people have differing needs and they learn to respect the rights, feelings and efforts of others. As they grow they will be able to behave appropriately in a range of social Situations and begin to develop and exhibit appropriate behaviours for maintaining positive social relationships.

Talk to your child about how each of us has similarities and differences to help them be comfortable and confident in who they are.

Encourage your child to take pride in their home language and culture and encourage early childhood

professionals to include your children's languages, relevant images, books and resources in their work.

Encourage your child's interests and abilities – these are important ways for your child to express who they are. As children grow they can begin to appreciate the similarities and differences between individuals and groups including the language, cultural and religious groups that make up society.

Give your child the opportunity to explore identity through dress ups and dramatic/pretend play. Other related newslet

### **How can teachers help their children to build a strong self-identity:**

#### *Supports children to think about themselves, who they are and their strengths, interests and abilities:*

→■ encourages children to make 'all about me' posters with photographs and/or drawings of the children, their families, homes, pets, and favorite toys and activities, and talk about these

→■ provides art materials reflective of different skin tones

→■ explores with children what makes them special, for example their own characteristics and what makes them different from their siblings and peers

→■ discusses children's individual strengths and interests, for example sport, animals, cars, dancing, singing, playing an instrument, computers, literacy, numeracy

→■ uses drawings and early writings to help children create books, for example about their favorite sports team or their holidays (with the adult acting as a scribe for younger children)

→■ acknowledges and, if appropriate, celebrates events such as birthdays, Chinese New Year, Christmas or Diwali, Ramadan, and Rosh Hashanah

→■ displays children's work where others can see it

→■ takes photographs or video recordings of children taking part in music-making, creative activities, dance, drama, and pretend play, and shares them with children and their families

→■ sources books or makes books that show the children's backgrounds and cultures, including Travelers, lone parents, and people with disabilities

#### *Creates multiple opportunities for young children to talk, listen and be heard whenever possible with peers, with adults, or in small groups:*

→■ sits with children during break-times, encouraging them to chat, to share experiences, and to listen to others

→■ encourages discussions about children's work and play, for example what they are doing now and what they have seen and done

→■ displays posters of people showing different emotions, occupations, and places, as a starting point for discussion

→■ records sequences of events in personal or family histories, for example looking at their own baby and toddler photos, talking about toys their grandparents played with, clothes their parents wore, and music their parents listened to

→■ encourages speaking and listening to others in a group, for example passes round a pretend microphone giving each child an opportunity to say something, as well as hearing what others have to say

Uses pretend play to encourage and support children to empathise with others and see things from another's point of view:

→■ uses props such as dressing-up clothes to help children take on new identities, or provides an assortment of small world figures and models to mirror life around them

→■ encourages children to experience sensory impairment through playful activities, for example Blindman's Buff, wearing ear muffs, and empathising with people who have physical disabilities by using play resources, such as a doll-sized wheel chair, small world crutches, Zimmer frames, guide dogs

→■ uses stories to discuss the actions, feelings and motivations of characters, saying, for example, Sarah is sad because she can't find her blanket. How can we help her to feel better? How does John feel when you ...? How would you feel if ... How did the little pigs feel when the wolf was outside their door? How did Declan feel when he got lost in the shop?

→■ encourages children to compliment each other on their achievements

Adapts routines to cater for individual needs, interests, preferences, and capabilities:

→■ enables children to be involved in or to choose alternative activities →■ respects children's preferences, for example supports their preference to play alone, with a sibling or peer, or in a group

→■ sets tasks for varying abilities so that everyone has a chance to be successful

→■ encourages and affirms effort

Creates a language environment that reflects the languages of all the children and adults in the setting:

→■ labels regularly used objects and resources using pictures and different languages, for example coat hangers, shoe boxes, pigeonholes for work, place mats for snacks, daily routines, different areas of the room

→■ invites children to teach their peers words in the language of their home country, writes and displays these key words and phrases

→■ uses the correct spelling and pronunciation of children's names

Develops young children's awareness of the community in which they live:

- helps children become aware of and be active in their setting (their micro-community)
- helps ensure children know the name of the setting and that they recognise some of the other adults and children involved
- includes the children in making decisions and in participating in community activities such as concerts, assemblies and displays
- visits places in the community and facilitates visits from, and interactions with members of the community
- encourages children to ask visitors questions
- discusses the roles of people in the community such as a garda, a nurse, a social welfare officer, a librarian, a teacher, a lollipop person
- works on projects such as 'Our Community' – involving where to go and what to do, making maps or posters of the local area with pictures of significant features such as a sculpture, a castle or a mountain, makes a community wall
- uses ICT equipment, such as scanners, digital cameras, interactive white boards, or slide shows to collect and display information about their community
- helps children to develop a sense of place and a responsibility to care for that place, for example looking after their place in the room, keeping their things tidy, having responsibility for a particular area such as tidying up the dress-up clothes, gathering up recyclables, planting and caring for flowers at the entrance to the setting, picking up litter.







## Identity definition

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