

STAGES OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

Approximate Age	Early Adolescence: Females 11-14 and Males 13-15	Middle Adolescence: Females 15-17 and Males 16-19	Late Adolescence: Females 18-25 and Males 20-26
Cognitive Progress	Concrete Thinking: Totally focused on the here & now; can appreciate immediate reactions to behavior but have no real sense of later possible consequences; emotional under stress	Early Abstract Thinking: Some inductive / deductive abilities, but reverts during stress; able to connect separate events; understand cause/effect and consequences. Often very self-absorbed & introspective, daydreaming	Abstract Thinking: Near or full adult ability to think abstractly; able to set goals and be future-focused; can be very philosophical & intensely idealistic about love, religion or social problems
Relationships with Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May outwardly challenge family structures and authority, but still has underlying need to please adults • Can be argumentative & disobedient • Rejecting things of childhood • Struggle to find balance between dependence and independence • May idolize perceptions of other families/adults – which may manifest as hero-worship or crushes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family struggles may intensify as teens insist on greater independence, privacy • May overtly rebel or sulk & withdraw • Much testing of limits – parents need to remain calm and consistent as possible • Increased awareness of status • Teens long for adult privileges, so some roleplaying of adult roles but since role doesn't feel real, it's easily abandoned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus is on emancipation—leaving home; college or vocational training • Often experience a steep learning curve about credit & financial matters • Desire to re-establish some family connections and ties • More invested in family rituals, etc. • Begin to assume true adult roles with commitment and follow-through
Relationships with Peers (Social, Sexual)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peers become standard to determine “normal” appearance • Often intense friendships with same sex, but more contact with opposite sex – often in safe group settings • Much of life is lived before an imaginary audience • Overly emotional or magnified reactions – “no one understands” • Sexual behaviors are mostly flirtatious; experimentation may happen to counteract fears of worthlessness, obtain friends, embarrass or control parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong peer allegiance – often showing in fad behaviors, inside jokes or personal language/slang • Sexual drives emerge and teens explore ability to date and attract a partner • Sexual experimentation may begin • Risk-taking is very common • Unrealistic concept of partner's role • Need to please significant peers of either sex. For females, boyfriend alone may be “significant peer” • Continued strong group mentality and/or group activities – even group dating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater self awareness and understanding of the need to balance pleasing yourself & pleasing others • Friendships are valued, appreciated and maintained, but decisions/values are less influenced by peers • As self-identity solidifies, it makes possible true intimacy with friends and romantic partners • Establishment of sexual identity and probable sexual experimentation • More realistic expectations of partner and romantic/sexual relationships
School (Vocation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still need structured school setting • Goals unrealistic, always changing • Grades often drop due to priority on socializing with friends • Shift in approach to homework and learning – often need help learning HOW to study and retain information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoy having class choices at school • Begin to identify skills and interests • May start part-time job or enjoy intense focus on talents or hobbies • React to perceived system expectations: may decide to beat the establishment at its own game (super achievers) or to reject the game (drop-outs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full time work or college • Identify realistic career goals • Watch out for apathy (no future plans) or alienation, since lack of goal-orientation is sometimes correlated with unplanned pregnancy, juvenile crime, etc.
Self Perception: (Identity, Values)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incapable of true self-awareness while still concrete thinker • Losing child's role but don't have adult role – can lead to frustration, depression or low self-esteem • Denial (“that can't happen to me”) • Begin to develop own value system, but often still based on what they get in return for certain behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some peace made with body changes, but greater attention to personal attractiveness/appearance • Confusion/flux about self-image • Seek group identity • Very narcissistic, impulsive, impatient • Values still largely determined by peer group, conformity and perceptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realistic, positive self-image; often want to convey “professional” image • Able to consider other's needs and perspectives, less narcissistic • Able to reject group pressure if not in self-interest • Develop sense of ongoing social responsibility—behavior consistent with laws and duty
Health Issues (Physical)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puberty begins/continues • Rapid growth, which can produce fatigue & literal growing pains • Need 9+ hours of sleep a day; often shift to sleeping & waking later • Preoccupation with physical changes and “Am I Normal?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 95% of adult height reached • Advance of secondary sexual characteristics—hair, body shape, etc • May take health-compromising risks (sex, drugs, alcohol, driving) • Crisis counseling (runaways, acting-out, family conflict) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving towards adult physical development & maturity • Begin to take more self-responsibility for health care and promoting healthy lifestyle • Need to consider sexual behavior choices and contraception
What they need from Adults: FOR ALL AGES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Firm, direct support communicated in a loving, positive way; convey limits—give simple concrete choices • Don't get sucked into us vs. them with teens or parents; be objective, caring adult who sees both sides • If evidence of crushes or hero-worship, encourage transference • Sexual decisions—directly encourage to wait 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be objective sounding board; help them negotiate options and view choices, but let them solve their own problem • Be positive role model and point out newly emerging talents or traits • Confront gently—help them think about consequences, responsibilities • Use peer-group sessions • Ensure appropriate confidentiality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize the progress & growth they've shown and acknowledge their new adult status • You can act as a resource, but encourage them to show mature participation in decisions • Help them continue to examine their own underlying wishes and motives in choices they make