

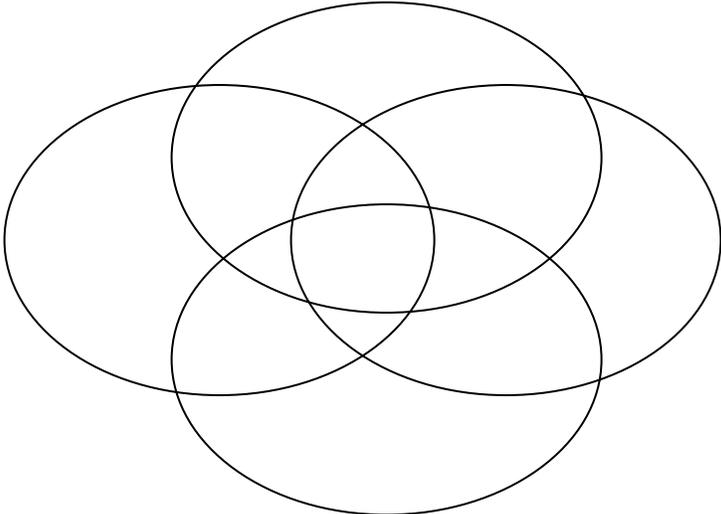
The Challenge of Connecting with Adolescents

Presented by Ilyssa Swartout, Psy. D.
Licensed Psychologist

Development During Adolescence

Physical Development

Cognitive
Development



Emotional
Development

Social Development

Physical Development

- Girls are developing breasts, growing pubic hair, menstruation begins
- Starts around age 12 and is usually completed around age 19
- Boys experience enlargement of testes, progressing to first ejaculation, body hair and voice changes
- Starts around age 11 and development is usually completed by age 20

Physical Appearance and Body Image

- The need to fit in is huge while balancing having one's own style
- Concerns about acne, eyeglasses, weight, or facial features should be taken seriously
- Weight gain is associated with puberty
- Some adolescents, mostly girls, become overly preoccupied with their physical appearance, and in an effort to achieve or maintain a thin body, begin to diet obsessively.

Cognitive Development

- Move from concrete black and white thinkers to becoming able to think abstractly
- Analyze situations logically in terms of cause and effect
- Entertain hypothetical situations and use symbols such as metaphors
- Allows for introspection and mature decision making
- Ability to reason effectively, problem solve, think abstractly and reflect, and plan for the future

Emotional Development

- Involves establishing a realistic and coherent sense of identity in the context of relating to others and learning to cope with stress and manage emotions
- Adolescence is the first time when individuals have the cognitive capacity to consciously sort through who they are and what makes them unique

Identity includes two concepts:

- Self-concept: the set of beliefs one has about oneself
 - Includes beliefs about one's attributes (tall, intelligent)
 - Roles and goals (occupation one wants to have when grown)
 - Interests, values, and beliefs (religious, political)
- Self-esteem: involves evaluation of how one feels about one's self-concept
 - Global self-esteem: refers to how much we like or approve of our perceived selves as a whole
 - Specific self-esteem: refers to how much we feel about certain parts of ourselves (as an athlete or student, how one looks)
- Achieving a realistic sense of identity involves:
 - Experimenting with different ways of appearing, sounding and behaving
 - Experimenting with alternatives is developmentally appropriate

Social Development

- Hub around which the adolescent's world revolves shifts from the family to the peer group
- This does not mean that family closeness is less important:
 - Family closeness and attachment is the most important factor associated with not smoking, less use of alcohol and drugs, later initiation of sexual intercourse, and fewer suicide attempts.
- Peer groups provide a temporary reference point for developing a sense of identity.
- Begin to develop moral judgment and values
- Define how they differ from their parents
- Provide a source of information about the world outside of the family and about themselves.
- Involvement with peer groups changes over the course of adolescence
- Younger adolescents have at least one primary peer group with whom they identify
- Middle adolescents have more gender mixed peer groups
- Late adolescents have often replaced peer groups with more intimate dyadic relationship (one-on-one friendships)
- Parent-adolescent conflict tends to increase, particularly between adolescent girls and their mothers
- Gaining independence while learning new ways of staying connected
- Conflict tends to peak with younger adolescents.

Social Development

- Spontaneous conflict over day-to-day matters
- Conflict over important issues (academic performance)
- Media – including music, television and the internet are important parts of adolescent's community.
- Religious issues are important to many adolescents
- Benefit from explicit discussions of moral values and community activities promoting pro-social values

In this context, it is normal for adolescents to...

Argue for the sake of arguing

- Adolescents often go on tangents
- Exercising new reasoning capabilities can be exhilarating
- Need the opportunity to experiment with these new skills

Jump to conclusions

- Even with the newfound capacities for logical thinking, sometimes jump to startling conclusions
- May be staking out a position verbally
- Might come across as brash but this might be bravado to cover anxiety

Be Self-Centered

- Very “me-centered”
- Takes time to learn to take others’ perspectives into account
- This is a skill that can be learned

Constantly find fault in the adult’s position

- Newfound ability to think critically encourages them to look for discrepancies, contradictions, or exceptions in what others say
- Usually most openly critical or questioning of adults with whom they feel especially safe (parents, teachers)

Be Overly Dramatic

- Everything seems to be a big deal to teens
- Exaggerating their opinions / behaviors comes with the territory
- Dramatic talk is best seen as a style of oration rather than an indicator of possible extreme action, unless adolescent’s history indicates otherwise

Development Tasks of Adolescence

- Need to experiment with new behaviors in order to transition from childhood to adulthood
- Helps them fine-tune their development cognitively, physically, socially and emotionally
- Risk-taking in adolescence is an important way that adolescents shape their identities, try out their new decision-making skills, and develop realistic assessments of themselves, other people, and the world.
- Need room to experiment and to experience the results of their own decision-making in many different situations.