

Stages of Healthy Adolescent Development

Stage with Approx. Age Range	Early Adolescence (ages 10-14 years)	Middle Adolescence (ages 15-17 years)	Late Adolescence (ages 18-21 years)
Characteristic Development Milestones and Tasks			
Physical Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puberty: Rapid growth period • Secondary sexual characteristics appear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secondary sexual characteristics advanced • 95% of adult height reached 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical maturity and reproductive growth leveling off and ending
Intellectual/Cognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concrete thought dominates "here and now" • Cause-effect relationships underdeveloped • Stronger "self" than "social awareness" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth in abstract thought; reverts to concrete thought under stress • Cause-effect relationships better understood • Very self-absorbed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstract thought established • Future oriented; able to understand, plan and pursue long-range goals
Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge authority, family; antiparent • Loneliness • Wide mood swings • Things of childhood rejected • Argumentative and disobedient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict with family predominates due to ambivalence about emerging independence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emancipation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - vocational/technical/college and/or work - adult lifestyle
Body Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preoccupation with physical changes and critical of appearance • Anxieties about secondary sexual characteristic changes • Peers used as a standard for normal appearance (comparison of self to peers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less concern about physical changes but increased interest in personal attractiveness • Excessive physical activity alternating with lethargy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually comfortable with body image
Peer Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serves a developmental purpose • Intense friendship with same sex • Contact with opposite sex in groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong peer allegiances - fad behaviors • Sexual drives emerge and teens begin to explore ability to date and attract a partner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decisions/values less influenced by peers • Relates to individuals more than to peer group • Selection of partner based on individual preference
Identity Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Am I normal?" • Daydreaming • Vocational goals change frequently • Begin to develop own value system • Emerging sexual feelings and sexual exploration • Imaginary audience • Desire for privacy • Magnify own problems: "no one understands" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experimentation - sex, drugs, friends, jobs, risk-taking behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue realistic vocational goals with training or career employment • Relate to family as adult • Realizations of own limitations and mortality • Establishment of sexual identity; sexual activity is more common • Establishment of ethical and moral value system • More capable of intimate, complex relationships

Chart information synthesized and adapted by the Konopka Institute for Best Practices in Adolescent Health, University of Minnesota, 2002.

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