

Adolescent Development

Area of Development	Early Adolescence (ages 12-15)	Middle Adolescence (ages 15-18)	Late Adolescence (ages 18-22)
Physical Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peak time of physical growth—puberty • Transitions towards adult body • Eats and sleeps more • Demonstrates or does not demonstrate behaviors that may indicate risk for eating disorders or depression • Seeks support for self-esteem and body image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops sexuality more fully • Negotiates feelings of gendered attraction and sexual orientation • Navigates greater risks relating to alcohol, drug use, sexual activity • Peak physical growth stage for male youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieves full physical development • Gains more assurance about body image • Engages in sexual activity; more likely to be partnered • Learns to manage stress and maintain health
Cognitive, Intellectual Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moves from only concrete thinking to more abstract thinking, including hypothetical thinking • Concentrates on self and other's perceptions of self • Engages an "imaginary audience," a mental idea of others watching • Particular intelligence strengths become evident (linguistic, mathematical, interpersonal, musical) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the ability to think deductively, inductively, conceptually, hypothetically • Able to synthesize and use information efficiently • May engage in celebrating new mindfulness about self (journal writing, re-reading emails, etc.) • Becomes more interested in and critical of the wider world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Particularly open to learning; a time ripe for formal / informal education • Expresses ideas with more linguistic skill • May see many points of view and may claim multiple realities as the truth (relativism) • May claim self as a "producer" of knowledge (not just a consumer)
Social, Affective Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social relationships with peers are very important • Acceptance with peers is often important—may seek "similar" peers as a means of affirming self (e.g. same race peers, or similarly athletic peers, etc.) • Explores racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities • May enact racial/ethnic/gender stereotypes as part of the process of developing their own identity • May have heightened consciousness about race (e.g. multi-racial youth may feel pressure to "fit in" with one racial group) • Learns social scripts (embedded in the contexts of race, ethnicity, and class) about what it means to be a sexual person • Expresses criticism of self and others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tries to claim identities, both independently and in relationships with others • Needs to belong and have a sense of self-worth • May start to conform less to peer groups • Needs engagement with diversity of peers to broaden notions of racial and ethnic identity • May claim boldly racial identity—may seek same-race peers to affirm identity • Youth in mostly mono-racial environments may just be starting to realize salience of their racial identity (particularly White youth) • Struggles with gender and sexual identity—often a time of increased stress for GLBTQQ youth • Tries to reconcile scripts about "normative" sexuality with feelings that may or may not be similar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases self-reliance • Develops sense of identity and intimacy • Expresses interest in vocational and personal life choices • Brings to realization sexual identity of self • Makes choices (either explicitly or not) to claim sexual identity • While relationships with peers are still important, they do not define the self • May feel pressures to claim racial/ethnic identity in different spheres • May reject alliances based solely on race • Negotiates more knowledgeably racism as a system of privilege and oppression • Needs involvement with diverse peers to continue healthy racial and ethnic identity development
Moral Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates interest in ethics of care and justice • Respects social order, although sometimes challenges it as well • Learns how to put ethics of justice into action through community service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinks conceptually and enjoys moral reasoning • Engages in "principled morality"—principles are more important than laws • Often has increased social awareness and activism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrestles with personal morality and life choices • Expresses interest in moral and philosophical thinking, for self and wider world
Spiritual, Religious, Faith Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoys presence or absence of religious creed • Expresses interest in religion that embodies one's values • Sustains faith development by engaging with a community that allows questioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptualizes religion as an outside authority that can be questioned • Questions faith, leading to deeper ownership or disenfranchising • Deepens religious spiritual identity • May use faith as sustaining presence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Claims authority around issues of faith • Further develops spirituality as an important part of self • Engages in "faith" beyond traditional organized religion • Considers the role of faith in identity

Support for Stages of Adolescent Development

Early Adolescent (12- 15 years old)

- Support a critical perspective on media images of beauty and adulthood
- Promote healthy body image and self-esteem
- Affirm and support the youth's many physical, emotional and cognitive changes
- Be flexible and responsive
- Model respect
- Provide opportunities for complex thinking and the pondering of big questions
- Listen first
- Recognize that challenging authority provides an outlet for new cognitive skills
- Afford autonomy within limits of safety
- Engage in honest, supportive talk about sexuality
- Provide information and resources about healthy sexuality that affirm a range of sexualities and gender identities
- Provide outlets for questioning faith, religion and creed
- Have a sense of humor!

Middle Adolescent (15 – 18 years old)

- Affirm that sexuality is a healthy part of human development
- Provide information about safe sex and contraception
- Be available for conversation; be a sounding board
- Offer fair and grounded support around risk taking; provide safety limits
- Enjoy the youth's ability to think critically, hypothetically, and conceptually
- Encourage practices that celebrate youth's mindfulness (such as journaling)
- Understand that new thinking skills may result in new criticisms?
- Encourage involvement in multiple realms of activity or achievement (e.g. music, faith, community groups, sports)
- Strongly encourage sustained engagement for youth with ethnically and racially diverse peers and seek role models for Youth of Color who lack them
- Learn and support youths' realities and struggles
- Engage openly with the youth about moral reasoning

Late Adolescent (18-22 years old)

- Continue providing information about safe sex and contraception
- Provide for self-care including stress management
- Respect the privacy and intellect of the young adult
- Provide complex problems and thick questions to ponder
- Tie activities to broader concepts or issues (i.e. philosophical, existential, social activist lenses)
- Understand that intimacy and identity development are tied together and respect the young adult's attention to this aspect of life
- Provide models and conversations about vocations and life choices
- Celebrate and channel the young adult's moral idealism into action
- Celebrate the process of searching that is part of late adolescence