

# 14. Adulthood and Aging

## Objectives

---

- Explain the effects of individual differences in adult development
- List and define the three main periods in adulthood
- Explain the activities, physical and cognitive changes, and developmental tasks of early adulthood
- Explain the activities, physical and cognitive changes, and developmental tasks of middle adulthood
- Explain the physical and cognitive changes and developmental tasks of late adulthood

## Vocabulary

---

|               |             |                    |                 |
|---------------|-------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| ego-integrity | intimacy    | menopause          | senile dementia |
| generativity  | isolation   | middlescence       | stagnation      |
| gerontology   | living will | midlife transition | thanatology     |
| hospice       |             |                    |                 |

## Background

---

Though they probably seldom think about it, students have changed a great deal since they were born. Childhood and adolescence bring extreme changes in both body and mind. This chapter helps them look forward to their futures. They learn that changes they'll experience during adulthood are more subtle and continue over a much longer period of time.

In this chapter, students explore the three important stages of adulthood, learning about physical and cognitive changes that occur as well as developmental tasks that are expected. Students learn that, in early adulthood, a person's identity often changes from the more exploratory adolescent to a person who is more fully developed. Normally, people in this stage of life are concerned with establishing independence and individual identity. They tend to do things like move away from home, establish careers, create more intimate relationships, and develop their own home lives. For most people, this stage is the height of their physical and cognitive skills.

Some experts argue that middle adulthood doesn't always bring on the mythical "midlife crisis." Many people feel that middle adulthood is a time of adjusting to life changes—such as children moving

out and caring for aging parents. In this stage, both women and men experience their own forms of physiological change (menopause). These and other changes often lead middle adults to reassess their personal identities and life goals.

Late adulthood is the final stage of life. It is a time to reflect on one's life, adjust to new challenges, and take pleasure in a more social and leisurely lifestyle. Remaining active is a key factor in the enjoyment of this natural stage of life.

Modern views of adult roles have experienced a welcome change in the past century. Activity, attitude, and the ability to adjust can lead to a fuller, more active life—even the final years of late adulthood. Less than a century ago, small percentages of adults were living into late adulthood, but today's seniors are running marathons, establishing Web sites, and out-performing people half their age. Times are changing.

### Further Resources

- Erikson, Erik H. *Identity and the Life Cycle*. New York: Norton, 1980.
- Morris, Desmond. *The Book of Ages*. New York: Penguin, 1983.

## For Discussion

---

### Review

1. How can an individual's personal development at the beginning of adulthood affect his or her progress in the stages of adult life?
2. What are the main developmental tasks of early adulthood?
3. How do developmental tasks change for those in middle adulthood?
4. What developmental tasks should those in late adulthood strive for?

### Critical Thinking

1. Why do you think it is difficult to define an adult?
2. How can lack of intimacy lead to isolation in early adulthood? Do you agree?
3. How important do you think it is for a young adult to live on his or her own?
4. How do you think that attitude can influence the effects of menopause?
5. What do you think that a late stage adult should do to "stay young"? Explain your answer.

## Activities

---

### 1. Role Play

Ask students to break into three groups—each representing a stage of adulthood. Ask a student from each group a question concerning a common life topic (i.e., job, family, relationships). Have them respond according to their group's life stage.

### 2. Interviews: Life Stage Development

Have the class develop a list of interview questions that will help them determine a person's life stage development. Have them interview anonymous subjects and discuss and contrast their results.

### 3. Internet: Life Stage-Related Web Sites

Have students use search engines to find Web sites that address the needs of people in each adult stage. What do these sites assume are the needs of people in each stage?

### 4. Special Sources: Primary Sources

Have students use the library to research census information, presenting statistics and demographic information about Americans at each life stage.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## 14. Adulthood and Aging

As you read Chapter 14, write an answer to each question below.

1. What is the "primary task" of early adulthood (Erickson's stage 6)? What results from a person's inability to achieve this task?

---

---

---

2. What elements can help lead to a successful marriage?

---

---

---

3. What is a "midlife crisis"? How does it differ from a "midlife transition"?

---

---

---

4. In what ways are male and female menopause different?

---

---

---

5. What are the five stages in the acceptance of imminent death?

---

---

---

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## 14. Adulthood and Aging

Find the best answer for each item. Then circle that answer.

1. What is the term for feeling separate from others and a lack of support?
  - a. intimidation
  - b. isolation
  - c. stagnation
  - d. gestation
2. What legal document insures that someone's wishes will be carried out when they cannot make decisions about health care?
  - a. right to life
  - b. dying will
  - c. right to die
  - d. living will
3. What describes the change that occurs when life events compel a person to undertake new activities?
  - a. midlife transition
  - b. midlife decision
  - c. midlife stagnation
  - d. midlife integrity
4. What is a hospice?
  - a. a hotel for young travelers
  - b. a person who seats people
  - c. a place for terminally ill people
  - d. a small hospital
5. This is the ability to relate to another human being on a deep, personal level.
  - a. infancy
  - b. discrepancy
  - c. indecency
  - d. intimacy
6. Which term means to reflect on and accept one's life as it has been and is?
  - a. ego-integrity
  - b. ego-gerontology
  - c. thanatology
  - d. dementia
7. What is generativity?
  - a. ability to generate a family
  - b. ability to create and produce in life
  - c. ability to communicate with others
  - d. ability to accept death
8. What term describes the cessation of a woman's menstrual cycle?
  - a. menopause
  - b. puberty
  - c. menstruation
  - d. stagnation
9. What is a period of middle adulthood in which one focuses on establishing a new identity?
  - a. generative stage
  - b. midlife crisis
  - c. midstream
  - d. middlecence
10. What is gerontology?
  - a. study of life stages
  - b. study of mental disorders
  - c. study of the effects of aging
  - d. study of young adulthood

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## 14. Adulthood and Aging

Read each description, and write the letter of the correct term on the line.

- Commitment for a young adult is difficult without a sense of his or her own \_\_\_\_\_.
  - integrity
  - identity
  - cognitive ability
  - insight
- Freud believed that a healthy adult is one who can \_\_\_\_\_.
  - live and learn
  - grow and share
  - love and work
  - think and feel
- The average ages of marriage for men and women are \_\_\_\_\_.
  - 22 and 25
  - 29 and 21
  - 27 and 25
  - 30 and 25
- \_\_\_\_\_ has a better chance of having a successful marriage.
  - An uneducated teenage couple
  - A rich couple in their early 20s
  - A well-educated couple in their late 20s
  - A well-educated teenage couple
- In the U.S., \_\_\_\_\_ of first marriages end in divorce.
  - forty percent
  - fifty-five percent
  - thirty-seven percent
  - forty-three percent
- In middle adulthood, "the loss of something" should compel a developmentally healthy person to focus on \_\_\_\_\_.
  - the past
  - saving for the future
  - new possibilities
  - feeling young
- In middle adulthood, the term \_\_\_\_\_ is an appropriate instruction regarding physical and mental abilities.
  - take it or leave it
  - use it or lose it
  - do or die
  - stop and go
- The \_\_\_\_\_ generation describes the double responsibility of middle adults who care for aging parents and children who return home.
 

|             |          |
|-------------|----------|
| a. cake     | c. stew  |
| b. sandwich | d. pizza |
- In 2020, Americans over 65 will comprise \_\_\_\_\_ of the population.
 

|               |               |
|---------------|---------------|
| a. 7 percent  | c. 20 percent |
| b. 12 percent | d. 24 percent |
- Just like young and middle adults, people who reach late adulthood should strive to \_\_\_\_\_.
  - stay active
  - adjust to changes in life
  - establish new relationships
  - all of the above

### Essay Question

Choose three adults from your life, each from a different stage of adulthood. Discuss whether or not they resemble Erikson's description of their group.