

## Adolescence

In this chapter, you will learn about:

- how adolescence is defined across cultures
- the biological and cognitive development that sets the stage for psychological changes
- the social context in which adolescents develop
- challenges and possible crises facing adolescents today

Adolescence is a relatively new term, having first been used in 1904 by a psychologist named G. Stanley Hall. Before the twentieth century, young people commonly passed from childhood into adulthood after whatever schooling they received. Their work was a valuable commodity for their families and the economy. Hall's research developed during the Industrial Revolution, when the labor market shifted in emphasis from rural work to urban factories and service industries. Adolescence is identified as a stage between childhood and adulthood and is primarily a phenomenon of the Western world today.

## What Is Adolescence?

Adolescence is the period of life between about 12 and 20 years of age. The beginning of this time in the life span is typically marked by bodily growth and sexual maturation. The end of adolescence, however, is more difficult to pinpoint because it is influenced by individual maturity as well as social factors.

When is a person ready to assume the role of an adult? One determining factor may be education. In many developing countries, a high school education is a luxury. In these societies, children experience little time between childhood and a life of work, and working brings adult status.

What is an adolescent today? According to developmental psychologist John Santrock, adolescents in our culture are achievement oriented, are likely to work at a job, experience adult roles earlier than in the recent past, show more interest in equality between the sexes, and are heavily influenced by the media. Does this sound right to you?

How do you think the North American mix of ethnic and economic differences figures into this description? As you read this chapter, use what you learn to think critically about this important phase of your life cycle and its psychological impact.

## Two Phases of Adolescence

Because of the diverse changes that a young person experiences over the course of adolescence, it helps to break down the study of adolescence into **two** phases:

1. **Early:** Middle school and junior high years; includes most changes of puberty.
2. **Late:** High school up to about age 20; includes concerns about career, dating, and identity, according to Santrock.

## A Time of Change

Adolescence is a time of change on at least **four** levels:

1. Biological, or physical.
2. Cognitive, or intellectual.
3. Social, including peers and family.
4. View of self, including self-esteem.

Changes in emotions occur, too, but emotional changes reach across all four levels.

## A Time of Challenge

Psychologists differ on ways of looking at adolescence. Here are **three** points of view:

1. According to Erik Erikson, the primary challenge for adolescents is forming an adult **identity**. This means developing a sense of yourself, who you are as an adult, what you believe in, and what you value. It is difficult work and it takes a long time—eight years or longer. Erikson's personal experiences growing up in a Jewish, immigrant family and his work with Native Americans and with soldiers returning to civilian life



after World War II gave him insights into the “crisis” that people experience as they develop their sense of self.

2. Another popular notion, actually the original notion put forth by G. Stanley Hall, is the “storm and stress” point of view, which suggests that biological changes largely account for apparent turmoil.
3. Other researchers disagree with views 1 and 2. Anthropologist Margaret Mead, who studied adolescents in non-Western cultures, observed no major turmoil in the societies she studied. In these societies, roles and expectations were well defined,

which may explain why people had a smoother transition into adulthood.

Mead’s research may suggest that, within cultures like that of the United States, where roles are less well defined and expectations of one’s life’s work are largely unformed, adolescents can face some significant challenges and may react accordingly.

Each of these three different points of view lends some insight to the study of adolescence, but we are still far from a definitive understanding of this period of life.

## Biological Changes

Researchers see changes in the brain and motor development of adolescents as well as the very clear physical changes that come at this age. Two major physical changes in adolescence are the **growth spurt** and **puberty**, or sexual maturation. These changes occur simultaneously.

### The Growth Spurt

Can you recall when you noticed your body beginning to change? Suddenly you were taller, heavier, more muscular. Boys may have developed broad shoulders, girls may have developed wider hips. You eat constantly, it seems. Your voice changes. Perhaps your skin breaks out. You need new clothes.

Before any noticeable growth happens, greater amounts of hormones start to kick in—estrogen in girls, testosterone in boys. These hormones stimulate the production of an increased amount of **growth hormone (GH)**.

For girls, the growth spurt might begin around age 10-1/2, peak at about age 12, and slow down at about 13. The growth spurt for boys might begin at around age 12 or 13, peak at age 14 or 15, and slow down at 16 or so. Keep in mind, though, that the rate of physical change varies from person to person. Just look around the halls of any junior high or high school for an endless array of body shapes and sizes.

Boys experience bigger growth spurts than girls because testosterone has an effect on muscles and bones that estrogen does not have.

Genetics has a lot to do with an adolescent's growth, but good (or poor) nutrition can also play a role.

### Puberty

During puberty, girls and boys develop secondary sex characteristics, which simply means the appearance of adult genitalia, pubic hair, and increased breast size in girls. With sexual maturity, girls menstruate and are able to conceive children, and boys can physically father children. Again, this happens at varying individual rates; there is no rule as to when all aspects of puberty happen to everyone.

### Differences Between Boys and Girls

Each person experiences changes during adolescence. But is it the same experience for everyone? Researchers who study this experience have set out the following pattern:

- \* Girls who physically mature earlier than other girls in their class experience self-consciousness.
- \* Boys who mature earlier tend to be proud of their physical changes.
- \* Girls who mature later seem to be satisfied with their rate of development.
- \* Boys who mature later tend to suffer from a lack of self-confidence.

Note that the pattern of the girls' responses are opposite the boys' responses.

## Differences Do Even Out

Many young people are concerned that they are maturing at a rate different from their friends. Differences in physical development eventually even out and can even reverse themselves as life continues.

Young people who worry about the physical changes they are experiencing can do several things to help ease their minds.

They can talk about their concerns with friends or their doctor. They can also learn about the normal physical changes from health-care providers. It is usually better for people to talk about any concerns they might have, instead of worrying about them alone.



### What Happens to “Bad Girls”?

Writing in 1997, researcher Kathleen A. Pajer described Jennifer, a 16-year-old girl who had threatened her mother with a knife during an argument about telephone privileges. Other problems included a history of truancy, shoplifting, and assault. “What happens to girls like Jennifer as they mature into women?” Pajer asked. Pajer analyzed twenty studies on the adult outcomes of girls with antisocial behavior or criminal behavior in adolescence. The subjects had committed one or more offenses (such as assault or running away) which resulted in their entering the juvenile justice system. After a follow-up period (average 15 years), the studies investigated whether the subjects had committed crimes as an adult or were exhibiting other antisocial behavior.

Pajer found that females who behaved in an antisocial manner during adolescence had higher mortality rates, were 10 to 40 times more likely to commit crimes as adults, and had a variety of psychiatric problems. The antisocial adolescents were also more likely than a control group to have adult substance abuse problems, more likely to raise children who would be arrested, more likely to be divorced, and less likely to attain education beyond high school.

Pajer’s research suggested that if she did a 10-year follow-up on Jennifer, she would find that Jennifer “has not graduated from high school, has had multiple unstable relationships, is using drugs and alcohol, uses aggression to solve conflicts, has received psychiatric and social services, has been in jail, and has had difficulties caring for her children.” Sadly, this pattern, long known to be true for boys as well, is all too familiar.

## Cognitive Changes

The work of Jean Piaget heavily influences understanding of adolescent cognition. Psychologists have also commented on how adolescents—as compared to younger children and adults—process information, pay attention, perceive, remember, and use language.



### Sidebar



### Quiz Your Cognition

Try this quiz to see where you are on Piaget's scale.

1. Can you imagine a world with more justice, less poverty, or a cleaner environment?
2. Do you think people can do much right now to achieve a better world?
3. Can you solve an algebra problem, read a map, or make a plan?
4. Have you written an organized essay or term paper, engaged in a debate, or used logic in an argument?

If you answered yes to these questions, you are thinking according to what Piaget calls "formal operations." The abilities to 1) imagine hypothetical scenarios, 2) think idealistically, 3) understand abstract thought, and 4) use logic and organizational skills are all signs of this stage.

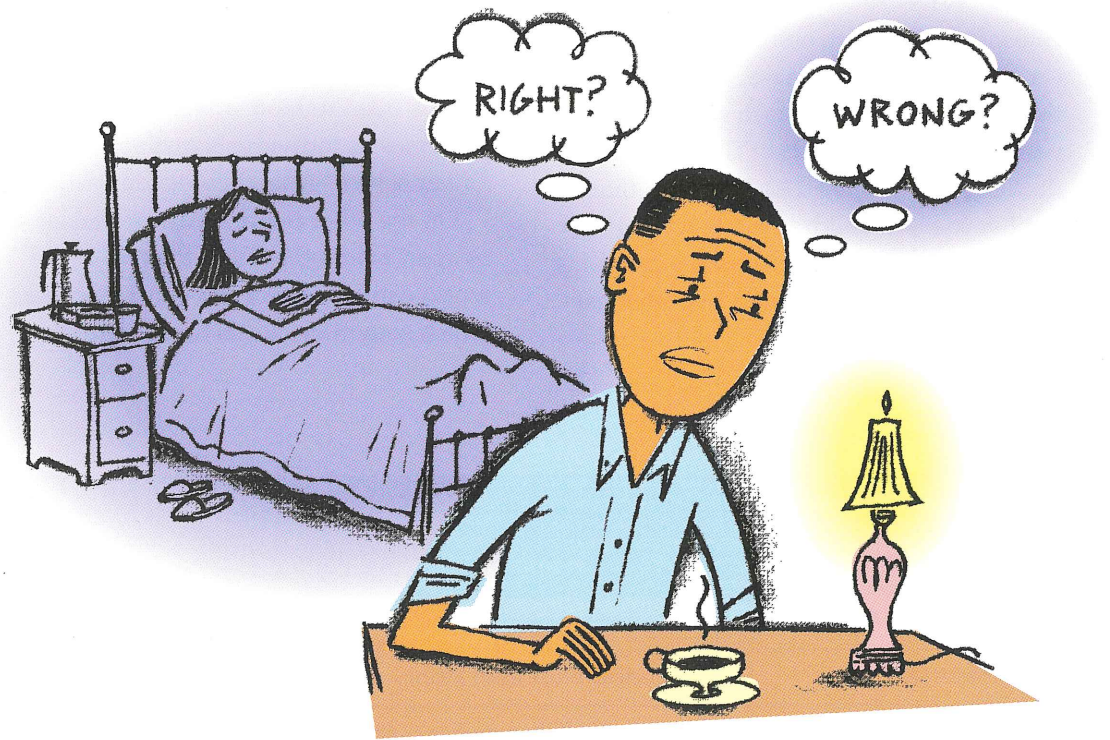
## Piaget on Adolescence

According to Piaget, children and adolescents move through stages; patterns in thinking are shaped at each stage by a particular view of reality. (This was first discussed in Chapter 12.) The stage that applies to older children is the formal operational stage. At this point, a person is able to think in abstract and hypothetical

terms. Most researchers agree that the start of adolescence does not immediately signify this formal stage. Rather, it means that the door is open to more advanced thought processes as individuals distinguish their “inner selves” from the outside world.

On the other hand, an awareness of self as apart from others and the rest of the world can also mean self-consciousness, which sometimes leads to anxiety.

Adolescent Cognition	
Aspect of Cognition	What's Happened Since Childhood
Information Processing	Improves throughout childhood until early adolescence.
Perception	Changes most from infancy to childhood.
IQ	Stays relatively constant over a relevant 10-year period, such as age 8 to 18.
Attention	Improves through childhood and early adolescence; strategies become more “planful”; adolescents can screen out irrelevant information better than younger children.
Memory	Use of such memory strategies as rehearsal and organization improves. Adolescents can express or describe memories more easily.
Language	Reflects abstract thinking abilities; shows increased sophistication, such as in the use of irony and humor.



### Moral Reasoning

Lawrence Kohlberg's study of moral development in children showed that moral reasoning evolves well into adolescence and young adulthood. Kohlberg presented the subjects of one experiment with a story of a moral dilemma in which a man has a choice of stealing a drug to save his wife's life. He evaluated the reasons the subjects gave for deciding that the man was right or wrong to steal and found a pattern related to age. Kohlberg's stages are not completely based on age, however, and

not every person reaches the highest moral level.

Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning are summarized in the table that follows. In the right-hand column of the table, only one alternative is given for each of the stages. Think about the reasoning for alternatives not provided. For example, in Stage 2, what would be the "self-serving" reason the man might use *not* to steal the drug? What would be the Stage 4 reason *to* steal the drug?



## Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

Stage	Motivation	Reasoning and Actions
<b>Preconventional Morality</b>		
Stage 1	Punishment and obedience	Consequences determine morality. The man should not steal the drug because he could go to jail.
Stage 2	Naïveté and hedonism	Rules are all-important; morality is self-serving. The man should obey the law. Or he should steal to get something for himself—his wife lives to help him.
<b>Conventional Morality</b>		
Stage 3	Pleasing other people, receiving approval for behavior	Decisions for what's right are based on what helps others or gains approval. The man loves his wife, so stealing the drug is not wrong.
Stage 4	Good of society, maintenance of law	Respect for law dictates that stealing is wrong. The man should work "within the system" to help his wife.
<b>Postconventional Morality</b>		
Stage 5	Distinction between legal and moral	Choices are based on weighing circumstances and evaluation; it is wrong to steal but more wrong to let a person die. The man should choose life over property and steal the drug.
Stage 6	Individual conscience	Choices reflect an evolved, complex personal belief system. The man loves his wife and wants the drug for her but believes what's right cannot be defined for one case but rather relates to what is good for humankind; hence he chooses not to steal the drug.

## Connecting the Study of Morality and Adolescence

Adolescents think idealistically, critically evaluating their world and looking for better answers. In understanding adolescence, it helps to consider how a framework for moral thinking develops. Theorists after Kohlberg shed further light on the complexities of moral decision making.

**Four** areas emerge.

As you read, apply your own idealistic thinking and form a critical view. Try to reach a personal belief about each role, then discuss your conclusion with others. What ideas do others have to add that change your thinking?

### 1 The Role of Culture

A comparison of Indian Hindu Brahmin children and U.S. children ages 5 through 13 reveals how concepts of right and wrong can differ significantly between two cultures.

Brahman children believe the following acts are right: hitting a disobedient child, eating with your hands, and having your father open a letter addressed to you. They think the following acts are wrong: calling your dad by his first name, eating beef, and cutting your hair soon after your father's death.

William Damon, director of the Stanford Center on Adolescence, found that in some cultures such as that of India, where special practices have social or religious meaning, a definition of morality includes maintaining tradition. In Western cultures, people emphasize the abstract concepts of justice and social welfare.

### 2 Gender Differences

Kohlberg's theory has been criticized as failing to include the views of women, who see caring for others as a high moral value. On the other hand, in recent studies women have scored similarly to men on Kohlberg's scale, suggesting that they perceive justice as morally valuable in the same way that men do.

### 3 The Role of Parents

Martin Hoffman compared **three** parental approaches to discipline:

1. Love withdrawal.
2. Power assertion.
3. Induction, or explaining why a behavior is wrong and how it affects other people.

Only induction was shown to be effective in helping children develop moral maturity. It provides a framework for children to use to evaluate their own behavior, promotes sympathy toward others, and offers a model for future better behavior.

### 4 The Role of Schools and Other Institutions

All in all, how has society helped or hindered the development of morality in young people? What roles have our institutions—our schools, churches, and synagogues—played? You may want to come back to this question after you explore the rest of this chapter.

## Social Development

Adolescents develop within contexts provided by the family, the peer group, and schools. Gender and sexuality are also meaningful contexts of adolescent development.

### The Family

The family is meant to be a unit of caring in which older members provide shelter, love, and training for the young. Close family relationships serve as models for the individual throughout his or her life span. Socialization—the process by which the values, beliefs, and behaviors of the older generation are transmitted to the young—is an important role of the family.

### Changes Within the Unit

Do you and your family really change that much when one member is going through adolescence? The answer is yes; the entire family is affected. Relationships are constantly changing anyway, and the onset of adolescence adds to and magnifies these changes. Here are some ways in which your family relationships can change during this period:

- \* As an adolescent, you use your more advanced cognitive skills. For example, you use logic to question discipline, and others react.
- \* Because you think idealistically, you may compare your parents or family to an ideal situation (and be disappointed).
- \* Family members' expectations of you may continue to be shaped by your

behavior as a child, which may create misunderstanding.

- \* Your parents are likely to be in middle adulthood, undergoing their *own* changes (see Chapter 14), which interact with yours.
- \* You show increased independence from the family—and again, your parents are likely to react to your changed behavior.

### Why All the Conflict?

You're not imagining it—often there is more conflict in the parent-adolescent relationship than in the parent-child relationship. The most intense time for conflict is in early adolescence, the period of striking changes in physical growth and sexual maturation.

Research has shown that even though conflict may increase, it is usually focused on everyday life—messy rooms, what to wear, with whom to go out, when to be home, and so on.

Conflict isn't necessarily a bad thing. It can promote a healthy separation between parent and adolescent and encourage autonomy. As teenagers test their understanding of their identities and their goals, they may also be rejecting relationships and changing their behavior in ways that catch others off guard. Why is she suddenly dressing that way? Why won't he spend more time with the family? Why must they come home just after curfew, instead of just before? This type of conflict in the family can result in healthy maturation of the adolescent, and parents can help the process by leaving the lines of communication open.

Still, conflict is not much fun, and it is often difficult to keep focused on the ultimate goal: the development of healthy and self-reliant young adults within the family unit.

### Two-Way Communication

*Your Adolescent*, a guide for parents published by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, has the following advice for parents:

“Remember that communication is a two-way activity. Teens who don’t seem to want to communicate may have parents who cut them off, who won’t tolerate dissenting views, and who ridicule their friends or jump to conclusions. Communication is more than simply answering and asking questions. Communication is about giving and receiving. It’s about talking and listening.”



This is good advice for both parents and adolescents. Parents most often want to reach out to their children but don’t know how to do it. Young people can make a world of difference by letting their parents know the most effective ways to communicate with them.

### The Peer Group

Adolescents generally spend an average of 22 hours a week with their friends, not including time spent in school; that’s a lot more time spent with friends than with family. Although adolescence is a time of increased importance of the **peer group**, research has shown that peers—those of the same age and social group—are a key influence at all stages of the life span.

### Importance of Peer Influence

How important are peer influences? Researcher Harry Harlow has focused on this question in his well-known work with rhesus monkeys. In these studies, Harlow and his associates raised two groups of monkeys: a “mother only” group and a “peer only” group.

Those in the first group, attended to only by their mothers, experienced no interaction with young monkeys. They were antisocial and behaved aggressively when later coming into contact with peers. The second group, raised with same-age peers and without mothers, tended to cling together and became easily “stressed out” over small disturbances. As adults they showed unusual aggression to monkeys outside their peer group.

Developmental psychologists also learned a great deal from the work of Anna Freud and Sophie Dann. They studied a group of six orphans who, in 1945 at age three, were discovered raising themselves in a Nazi concentration camp. The children first displayed intense hostility to the adults who cared for them at the end of the war. They couldn't bear to be separated and were extremely considerate of each other.

These studies suggest that both the family—for security—and the peer group—for socialization—are vital to human development.

### Is Peer Influence Positive or Negative?

Because teenagers spend so much time with other teenagers, the influence peers have comes as no surprise. But how strong is this influence and is it positive or negative?

Peer influence is more likely to encourage positive behavior than negative behavior. Researchers have found that teenagers choose friends with similar values.

### More Facts About Peers

Briefly, here are some more facts about peer influence from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry:

- \* Peer influence reaches its height in early adolescence.
- \* Girls may be slightly more susceptible than boys.

- \* Adolescents who are not confident about their social skills are most likely to be influenced.
- \* Even those most susceptible are less likely to follow friends into antisocial behavior than they are to follow neutral or positive behavior.

### Conflicts and Pressures

Difficulties that crop up in adolescence may have something to do with reactions to the conflicts between the values of parents and those of peers. Some adolescents form cliques and engage in deviant behavior, or behavior that most people find unacceptable. However, youths who engage in deviant behavior tend to alienate most other teenagers as much as they alienate the older generation. In addition, the number of adolescents who actually engage in deviant behavior is small, compared to the adolescent population as a whole.

The majority of adolescents do not suffer much from conflicts between peer values and those of family and society at large. Why? One reason may be that the influence is spread across very different areas of an adolescent's life.

For example, peers win out when it comes to fashions to follow, clubs to join, and places to go. But parents and other adults have influence over life goals such as where to go to college, what to do after college, and other big decisions.

## School

School has a significant influence on children and adolescents, if only because they spend so much time there between pre-school and high school graduation. Hours spent in school add up to about 10,000 total. But research has not provided a completely clear picture of just how school affects adolescents.

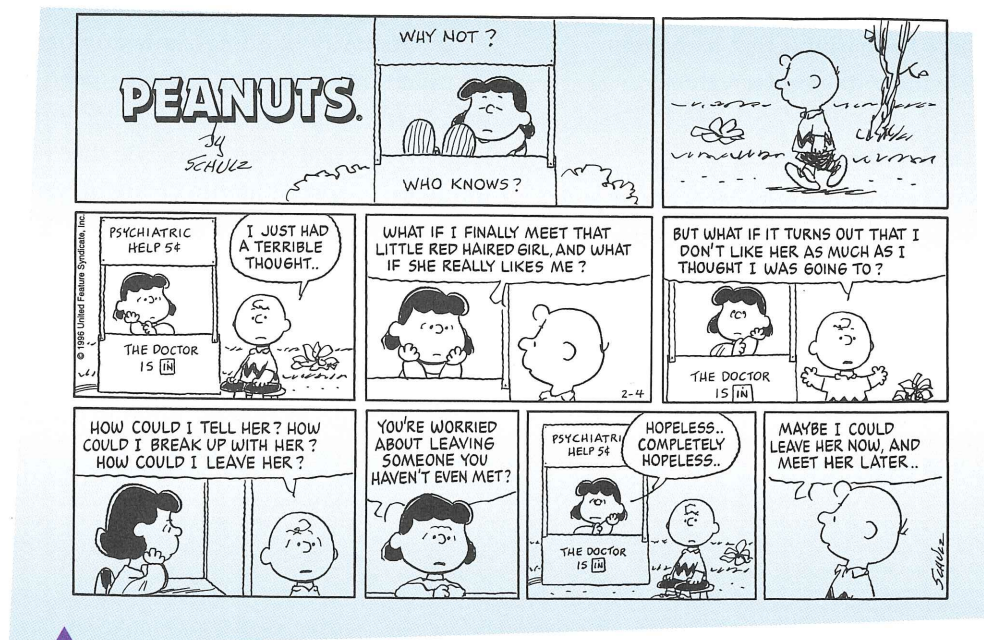
## Transitions in Schooling

Transitions in schooling are important to adolescents. The transition from elementary school to middle school or junior high can be a tumultuous time. That is likely because this transition is happening along with so many other life changes, from physical changes to social relationships. Positive aspects, on the other hand, include more freedom from family and time with peers, as well as intellectual challenge.

The transition to high school presents challenges, too. The “top-dog phenomenon” occurs when students literally move from being the oldest in middle school to being the youngest in high school. Back at the bottom of the pecking order, they have to get used to a new school with new policies, new teachers, and new students. This phenomenon can affect self-esteem, discussed later in this chapter. And guess what? It happens again with the move to college, and then again in the world of work.

## Gender and Sexuality

The transitions of adolescence also involve the complex issues of gender identity and sexuality. Psychologists distinguish between gender, which is simply the state of being male or female within a society, and sexuality, which is one’s physical and emotional feelings and behaviors surrounding sex.



▲ Worry about boy-girl relationships is universal in adolescence.

Different societies treat sexuality in many different ways. Adults in Western cultures tend to restrict the information on sex they give children in an attempt to protect them. As adolescents search for answers to their questions about sex, however, they are often exposed to misinformation. Against a backdrop of sexual references and images in the media, the result can be extremely confusing.

### Male and Female Perspectives

Some of the differences in the way boys and girls feel deserve attention. From a psychological perspective, it is important to evaluate the motivation behind certain behaviors, as well as how healthy these behaviors are.

Girls value emotional connection and intimacy. As a result, they are more likely to want a long-lasting relationship. Boys tend to be more concerned with physical pleasure itself and less focused on commitment to any one person at this age.

Many factors influence a young person's decision-making process. Peers influence how teenagers experiment with sexual behaviors. In addition, our culture is filled with sexual suggestions. Families can also greatly influence a young person's decision regarding sexual behavior. It is important to recognize that while many factors may be at work, responsibility for the decisions regarding one's sexual behavior are the individual's alone.

Teenage sexuality is a serious issue. Engaging in sexual intercourse carries the risks of AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, and teenage pregnancy. In addition, feeling pressured to do something one is not ready to do causes stress, and the negative feelings of regret can damage self-esteem.

## Psychological Challenges

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Forming an identity is a critical task in adolescence. The work of Erik Erikson and James Marcia illuminate this process.

### Identity and the Self

"What do I want to do—now, this afternoon, or with my life?"

"What are my special talents and skills? What are my values and beliefs?"

"What am I going to do when I'm older?"

These are just some of the questions most of us try to answer as we work to discover who we are. During adolescence, these questions can seem especially overwhelming, because we may be considering them seriously for the first time.

Erikson described the psychological conflict of adolescence as "identity versus role confusion." This conflict is resolved in adolescence. This means that by the late teens or early twenties, people have a good idea of who they are. Erikson called the sense of confusion and anxiety that may accompany this work "the identity crisis."

Professionals widely agree with Erikson that attaining “identity achievement” means reaching a healthy place. Higher self-esteem and less self-consciousness are happy benefits.

What happens to people who do not achieve identity formation? Erikson believed they become depressed and drift through life or form a negative identity as “black sheep” or “losers.” He believed that on some level people feel it is better to have a negative identity than to have no identity.

### Identity Development

James Marcia outlined **four** stages in identity development. Each stage relates to how the individual is tracking in four “real world” areas: career and other achievement goals, values and religion, sexual orientation, and politics.

1. **Identity Diffusion.** The person has not thought about major life choices and is nowhere near committing to a course in life. “I just haven’t thought about my values; I don’t know what I think.”
2. **Foreclosure.** The person does not question his or her life choices but instead bases them on those of parents. “I guess I have the same values as my parents—that’s the way I was brought up.”
3. **Moratorium.** The person is taking the time to think, question, and experiment with life choices. “I am working on my own sense of right and wrong; I see some good things in the way I was brought up, but I am considering other choices as well.”

4. **Identity Achievement.** The person has made some personal commitments to his or her own choices. “I know what I believe and what’s right for me.”

James Marcia found that adolescents in the moratorium stage generally feel better about themselves than people in the identity diffusion or foreclosure stages. In other words, it is normal to be open to alternatives, to be engaged in a searching process.

### The Identity Process

Here are some important points to remember about the process of forming identity:

- \* The identity process moves through the stages progressively, although a person starts out with either identity diffused or foreclosed.
- \* Forming identity takes time. Erikson was probably optimistic in stating that the identity stage is commonly resolved by age 18. Instead, the process typically continues well into the college years.
- \* The process is uneven. One may have a great sense of identity about religion, for example, but almost none about politics; a finely honed sense of self in terms of sexuality, but no career goals.
- \* Adults continue to struggle with identity; stressful life events such as divorce can cause an adult to reopen whole areas of their lives and re-evaluate them.



## The Role of Self-Esteem

Self-esteem in adolescence has been studied with interest. Some psychologists theorize that people value themselves less during this challenging time than at other stages of life.

Life experience is broadening, and with it come new areas of evaluation. By age eight children can evaluate how well they perform physically, academically, and socially. In adolescence, success in work, friendship, and attractiveness to the opposite sex matter as well. Once again, there is much to measure up to, and it is normal to have some feelings of doubt.

### Declining Self-Esteem

Erik Erikson believed that a decline in self-esteem comes with all the challenges of the teen age. Other researchers have come to the same conclusion, particularly during school transitions and the top-dog phenomenon. Mary Pipher, in her book *Reviving Ophelia*, discusses the risks to self-esteem adolescent girls face in a culture that does not value their gifts. Boys tend to show more self-esteem than girls do in early adolescence, perhaps because of the boost they receive from increased freedom.

### Increasing Self-Esteem

It is difficult to say when feelings of self-esteem even out, since it varies so much from person to person. In fact, studies show modest increases in self-esteem throughout the teenage years. Perhaps the most encouraging fact from all the

self-esteem studies is that most adolescents arrive at adulthood feeling pretty good about themselves. This ties in with Erikson's identity achievement concept: once you do the work, you're on your way.

## Challenges and Crises

The identity crisis is not the only crisis some adolescents go through, unfortunately. While most adolescents react normally to life challenges during this time, some succumb to harmful or antisocial behaviors.

### Substance Abuse

Substance abuse affects the largest number of people of all categories of psychological problems. It is one of the most serious problems in our society. Unemployment, school dropouts, crime, domestic abuse, and child neglect all result from it. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable.

#### What Is Substance Abuse?

Substance abuse is the use of any substance to the detriment of your health—including psychological and social health. While alcohol, tobacco, and drugs are what most people think of when they hear this term, it also includes substances such as glue or paint thinner, which can cause a "high" when sniffed but also serious damage to the vital organs of the body.

## Causes of Substance Abuse

Teenagers and adults may use drugs and alcohol initially for pleasure or to “fit in” with others. Then they may begin to think they are using them for other reasons: to “manage” anxiety or sadness or to “cope” with pressure—according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. But adolescents who abuse substances are not managing or coping well. They have more trouble than others their age in dealing with all the normal challenges of life. As a result of substance abuse, they may have trouble in school, on a job, or with relationships, and they are more likely to become involved in accidents.

Perhaps it is no surprise that when parents abuse drugs and alcohol, their children are more likely to do so as well. Both genetic and environmental factors may play a role. Children of abusers should be aware that they are at risk of developing addictions.

## How to Cope

Addressing the life stresses that lie beneath adolescent substance abuse is key to finding a way out. Discovering alternative, healthier ways to cope can be a solution. Treatment often includes a therapy program for the family as well as the individual.

## Delinquent Behavior

The term *juvenile delinquency* may sound a little dated, but it has meaning in the study of adolescent development. Juvenile delinquency covers a range of behaviors, from

“acting out” and antisocial behaviors to threatening and criminal acts. It usually refers to a pattern of destructive and illegal behavior, and unfortunately it is increasing.

In 1993, more than one in three students reported gangs in school, nearly half knew that weapons were being brought to school, half had witnessed violence at school, and one-quarter worried about becoming a victim of violence at school. Statistics indicate the situation is worsening today.

## Psychological Factors

Many psychological factors contribute to delinquency:

- \* **Having a “negative identity”** is Erikson’s term for the desire to be “someone everyone thinks is bad” rather than “nothing at all.” If you can’t be a good guy, you might as well be a bad guy rather than a zero.
- \* **Experiencing difficulty with self-control** means not being able to “delay gratification” or wait for what you want—stealing instead of working to buy a CD, for instance.
- \* **Having “inadequate standards of conduct”** means not being able to see that wrong is wrong and not being able to stop before committing a wrongful act. This person doesn’t recognize it is wrong to steal and doesn’t stop himself when tempted.

# CRITICAL THINKING



## What Can We Do About Juvenile Delinquency?

Once, the term juvenile delinquent conjured up a leather-jacketed tough kid straight out of a fifties movie. Juvenile delinquency has changed over the years. Today, some adolescents are committing serious crimes and are a danger both to society and to themselves. How should society address juvenile delinquency?

### THE ISSUES

Why do some adolescents exhibit delinquent behavior while others do not? While the answers are complex, the way a child is raised can make a difference. Many delinquent adolescents were punished harshly by parents as children or were given “mixed signals” about their behavior, which can promote an inconsistent sense of right and wrong.

Influences come from outside the family as well; as children witness the world’s real violence (war, crime in their neighborhood), along with a reflected violence in the media, they may become desensitized, especially if they are susceptible in other ways.

Preventing delinquent behavior is not easy. Here are a few facts:

Programs need to include many approaches and methods for helping adolescents; there is no “magic bullet.”

The quality of education matters, and schools play an important role.

The burden of “reform” cannot be placed strictly upon the individual; society’s institutions need to change.

Attention to at-risk children needs to start early in their lives with individual attention.

Group counseling, “scaring straight” programs, vocational training, and the juvenile justice system have not limited delinquency. Neither have such school practices as suspension, expulsion, detention, or the presence of security guards.

### THE PROCESS

- 1 Restate the issues.** In your own words, state the nature of the issue.
- 2 Provide evidence.** List the ways you believe professionals, parents, and peers are addressing the problem of delinquent behavior *constructively*. With what ideas do you most strongly agree?
- 3 Give opposing arguments.** List ways of addressing delinquent behavior that *seem negative* or counterproductive. Has anything been left out of the picture that you believe would help?
- 4 Look for more information.** What else would you like to know before you form an opinion? On the Internet, in the library, or in the index of psychology and other social science books, research *juvenile delinquency*, *parenting and juvenile delinquency*, *violence in society*, and *discipline problems in schools*.
- 5 Evaluate the information.** Is the information you’ve gathered cohesive, contradictory, or confusing? What are the main themes that seem to be emerging?
- 6 Draw conclusions.** Write a paragraph supporting your answer to the question “How can we constructively address delinquent behavior?” State reasons, not just opinions.

## Eating Disorders

While many of us probably feel we overeat from time to time, the term *eating disorders* refers to much more severe reactions to psychological stresses. For a person with an eating disorder, food may represent something entirely different from just good-tasting nourishment. Instead, eating or refusing to eat can become a control issue for adolescents as they cope with changes in their lives. *Anorexia*, *bulimia*, and *binge eating* are **three** eating disorders teenagers may face.

- 1. Anorexia.** One in every 200 teenage girls (as compared to 1 in 2,000 boys) in the United States develops anorexia nervosa (“nervous loss of appetite”); up to 10 percent of those may die from the disorder. Symptoms include significant weight loss, continuing to diet even though very thin, and preoccupation with food. Many anorexic teenagers are classic “good girls” who struggle for a sense of control. Treatment includes helping the sufferer regain self-esteem and take some control—to “nourish” herself in other ways—as well as to encourage parents to exert less control.
- 2. Bulimia.** More common than anorexia, a person suffering from bulimia (or bulimia nervosa) binges, or eats large amounts of food in one sitting, and then purges by vomiting, using laxatives, or even exercising extremely vigorously.

Many bulimic sufferers may look only slightly underweight or even overweight. Symptoms include many digestive disturbances and conditions related to poor nutrition, as well as damage to tooth enamel from the effect of stomach acids. In recovery, bulimia sufferers must address issues of self-esteem and may realize that they are clinically depressed. Often, however, people with bulimia may not realize that they have a problem and therefore may not seek help.

- 3. Binge-Eating Disorder.** Perhaps most common and least recognized as serious, a binge eater uses food as comfort. This individual needs to seek help in addressing underlying psychological problems. Binge eaters often are overweight, and their problems can be lifelong. The distinction between a person with a real problem and someone who may just need to improve his or her diet is that the binge eater has a crisis in self-esteem that underlies his or her destructive behaviors surrounding food.

Solutions include therapy for the individual and the family. Family therapy has been identified as an important step in recovery for young people who suffer from eating disorders.

## Teenage Pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy affects almost one million girls a year in the United States, and about 29,000 of them are under the age of 14. The problem is deeply rooted in social and economic causes.

### Some Important Facts

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry reports that:

- \* Most teenage girls who have babies drop out of high school and never go back.
- \* Most teenage mothers live below the poverty level.
- \* Only about one in five teenage mothers receives support from a teenage father.
- \* Teenage fathers are less than half as likely to complete high school as their peers.
- \* Teenage mothers face more serious medical complications giving birth and have a 60 percent higher death rate than mothers first giving birth in their twenties.
- \* One-third of teenage mothers 16 years and younger have a second child within two years.

## Suicide

Romeo and Juliet are perhaps the most famous pair of teenage suicides. Their story is beautiful and poetic and heartbreaking—and completely fictional. Suicide is not beautiful or romantic in real life.

Almost half a million teens in the United States attempt suicide each year, and suicide has crossed the mind of 1 in 10 teenagers. It is now the third leading cause of death for high school students in this country.

What brings a young person to this desperate point in his or her life? Pressures, crises, rejections—all sorts of problems combined with depression and difficulty in coping can lead to a suicide attempt. All too often people are not aware that feelings of despair and hopelessness can be temporary. They have a difficult time imagining that they will ever feel better. Most people who commit suicide have earlier shown friends or family members it was on their minds. Mental health experts advise you must always take someone's comments about doing away with himself or herself as a sign of trouble and get help.

## Heading Off Crises

If this section on crises seems sobering, remember that most adolescents do make it to adulthood with many problems solved—and, most important, with the tools to solve many others. Erikson's idea of forming an identity recognizes that adolescence is a time of overcoming obstacles and gaining the inner strength to continue doing so as an adult.

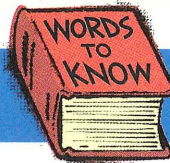
Psychology teaches that when you are facing a crisis, the best thing to do is find a way to ask for help. And finding help may be as simple as talking it out with another person. The study of psychology also demonstrates that challenges are a part of everybody's life. Developing methods to cope with and learn from challenges—developing inner strength—is in itself extremely satisfying.

## Chapter 13 Wrap-up

### CHILDHOOD

Culturally, people experience adolescence, the period in human development between about ages 12 and 20, differently around the world. Some things are the same everywhere, however: all early adolescents experience significant biological changes as they undergo a growth spurt and complete puberty. And the cultural and social contexts of adolescence, whatever they may be, contribute to setting the stage for, adding to, or smoothing out the key psychological challenges. The process of forming an adult identity is the key psychological challenge of childhood. Despite bumps in the road, most adolescents emerge with self-esteem intact and ready to face the challenges of adulthood.

### Psychology



**growth hormone (GH)**—hormone stimulated in early adolescence that controls the growth spurt. *p. 214*

**growth spurt**—active physical growth taking place in early adolescence; starts at about age 10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> for girls and about age 12 for boys. *p. 214*

**identity**—sense of who one is, what one believes in, and what one values. *p. 212*

**peer group**—people of the same age and social status; influences socialization in important ways. *p. 222*

**puberty**—time of sexual maturation, the point at which adolescents develop secondary sex characteristics and begin to be capable of reproduction. *p. 214*