

Adolescent Development Quick Reference Chart

Effective youth development programs apply an understanding of adolescent development to their goals, strategies and program components. This chart offers a snapshot view of the stages of adolescent development and the corresponding characteristic milestones and tasks. Use it to gauge how well your program matches the developmental needs of youth.

STAGES OF HEALTHY ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT			
Stages with Age Range (Approx)	Early Adolescence (ages 10-14 years)	Middle Adolescence (ages 15-17 years)	Late Adolescence (ages 18-21 years)
Characteristic Developmental 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 under-developed • 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 • Philosophical and idealistic
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 behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pursue realistic vocational goals with training or career employment • Relate to family as adult • Realizations of own limitations & mortality • Establishment of sexual identity, sexual activity is more common • Establishment of ethical and moral value system • More capable of intimate, complex relationships

(Source: Compiled by Kristin Teipel, MPH, BSN of the State Adolescent Health Resource Center, Konopka Institute)