

Changes in adolescence

[Life, Adolescence](#)



Adolescence is a socially-constructed phase of life used to identify people who are between the phases of childhood and adulthood. These people are typically teenagers who are more mature and responsible than children, yet are not at the maturity and responsibility level of adults. A long time ago adolescence did not exist, and children would enter right into adulthood. These children would not be enrolled in school as long and would be socially ready to join the work force, marry, and start a family at much younger ages. Back then this was a social norm, whereas today it is not a normal occurrence. As jobs in the workforce became scarce the phase of adolescence developed. With the development of adolescence, teenagers were no longer considered adults and were kept in school longer, which had the effect of prolonging childhood. The adolescence phase is still very present today, but the adolescents of today have many different experiences than adolescents in the past. One such area is within work and leisure activities. The novel *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott, which is also a movie, features the lives of four adolescent girls, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy, who are growing up in the nineteenth century during the American Civil War. These four girls had very different experiences in adolescence than the adolescents of today. Today's adolescents spend a lot of time in school with their peers and many have after school or weekend jobs. However, in *Little Women* the girls are either enrolled in schooling or are working, but not both. The eldest, Meg, has completed school and is now working as a governess for a wealthy family. Jo, the second eldest, has also finished school and works for their aunt, caring for her and reading her stories. The next in line is Beth, who is being home schooled, followed by Amy, the youngest, who has

been taken out of the public school and is now also being home schooled. None of the girls have much money since the two oldest are working to earn extra money to support the family, not themselves, and the two youngest do not work. This is a very different concept than today. Adolescents today work to earn money for themselves in order to purchase luxury items such as buying a car, movies, music, and going out places. The adolescents' parents typically can make enough money to sustain themselves without the help of the adolescents, and can also afford to provide the adolescent with all the necessities. However, today there is a lot of peer pressure put on adolescents to have these luxury items which in turn forces them to have to work. Amy and Beth were both home schooled and so did not have as much contact with their peers, thus there was no pressure to work and buy things. In addition, the jobs are very different, past adolescents had more practical jobs, helping them prepare for later life, such as caring for children and elderly, and housekeeping. These jobs are very similar to the jobs younger adolescents hold today. Older adolescents today, on the other hand, have jobs in retail and the service industry, which was unheard of for adolescent girls in the past and still not as common for boys who tended to be farmers' assistants. As far as leisure activities go, they are pretty different. The March girls all had their own interests, Jo enjoyed writing, Beth played the piano, and Amy loved to paint. Meg was always described as helping to run the household since she was the eldest, but enjoyed going to balls immensely. The girls spent a lot of time together and not with other peers, and so balls were the social event of the season where they got to get out, meet new people, and spend time with their peers. The girls used to act out plays in

the attic and tell stories. Today's adolescents also participate in writing, playing the piano, painting, and acting but not to the extent that these girls did, and it is usually only those who have a passion for such things and are really good at them that do. The balls of the past can be considered an equivalent of today's proms and school dances; however, they are not as important to the adolescents today as they were to those of the past. This is because today adolescents spend a lot of time with peers and do not need a formal event in order to do so. The March girls, not being very wealthy could not afford much and so had to entertain themselves with their talents and what was around them. Today's adolescents have so much technology available to them with the television, radio, telephone, computer, internet, and video games, that activities involving, reading, writing, acting, playing music, or creating art are not as present among everyday activities. Today there are more adolescents in the school systems and around the town to hang out and communicate with. Technology has also allowed adolescents today to communicate and hang out with adolescents who live further away, and go further away from home for leisure activities. The girls in Little Women kept to themselves, but ended up also hanging out with a boy named Laurie who lived next door. The girls were a bit hesitant to let him in at first since they were only used to being with themselves, but soon did let him into the group. These girls hung out with Laurie because he lived close by. Today proximity to each other is not a deciding factor in who adolescents spend time with. Today's adolescents are also very much influenced by what they see in the media since it is around them everywhere. The March girls, and adolescents of their time, did not have this access to mass media that

adolescents have today. There was no television, computer, or radio, only newspapers which did not seem to impact them much. Nevertheless, we do see Meg, the eldest, greatly influenced by wealthier peers in matters of dress when she is going to the ball. Thus, past adolescents were somewhat influenced by peers, and today's adolescents are somewhat influenced by both peers and mass media. Adolescents today have some similar and some different experiences to the adolescents of the past. Most adolescents of the nineteenth century and today go to school, but today most adolescents also work at the same time, while adolescents of the past either went to school or worked, but not both. Jobs held by adolescents in the past were also different and more practical than jobs held by adolescents today. The leisure activities adolescents of the past enjoyed are also enjoyed today, but not to the same extent. Adolescents today are much more involved in leisure activities involving technology that was not available to adolescents in the past. Since there were less people in schools and within a certain radius of each other, many adolescents of the past spent time with siblings and neighbors and not the rest of their peers. A population growth and increase in schooling and technology today has opened the door and made it possible for adolescents to have more contact with peers than they had been able to have before and to thus become more social with others. Mass media was also not as present to past adolescents as it is today and tended to be in the form of newspaper ads advertising what to wear and how to do your hair, not body shape and appearance like today's media. So in conclusion the experience of adolescents today has changed from that of the past in both positive and negative ways.