

# Emily: a case study in adolescent development

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Emily has developed before or along with her peers physically, cognitively, and psychosocially. Emily appears to be developing a healthy sense of Independence and self concept.

Finally, Emily is healthy and appears to be progressing through puberty at a normal rate. Emily is a 12-year-old girl. Since birth she has lived with her mother Elizabeth in a small South Carolina town - population 60, 000. She was an only child until three years ago when her brother Wade was born. Emily's mother Elizabeth is a single mother.

Emily has never met her own father but had grown close to Wade's father, her step dad, when he died nine months ago from Hodgkin Lymphoma. Emily's mother According to Militias and Perkins (2010), a child's family is central to their successful development. Their research suggests that children who are raised in non-traditional families are at a disadvantage in all areas of development as well as socioeconomics. This case study will examine typical physical, cognitive, and psychosocial milestones of adolescent children and if 12-year-old Emily has been negatively affected in these areas as a result of her living in a single parent home.

**LITERATURE REVIEW** At 12 years old Emily is entering adolescence.

It is during adolescence that puberty begins. The time of adolescence is a time of rapid changes and physical growth in children. Rapid growth occurs in the bones and muscles, changes in body shape and size occur, and sexual maturation begins, essentially ending childhood. Beginning with hormonal changes, including an increase in estrogen and progesterone, girls typically begin experiencing pubescent changes at the approximate age of eight.

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Soon after, the uterus and vagina begin to grow larger and girls begin to develop breast buds.

Around the age of eleven, girls begin to develop pubic hair. Girls can expect their weight and height to increase during this time as well. As girls approach menarche, their breasts will become wider. The first menstrual period typically occurs around the age of twelve; however, this can happen earlier for some girls and much later for others. Puberty continues through the age of 18 as girls' breasts fully develop and their first ovulation occurs (Berger, 2011).

In addition to sexual development during puberty, adolescents develop physically as well.

A growth spurt occurs during adolescence where nearly every body part grows, most notably at different and uneven rates. According to Berger (2011), the fingers and toes of an adolescent grow longer before the hands and feet. The hands and feet grow longer before the arms and legs, and the arms and legs grow longer before the torso. It is not uncommon for an adolescent's body to appear unsymmetrical. "One foot, one breast, or even one ear may grow later than the other," (Berger, 2011, p. 393).

The hormones responsible for puberty and growth spurts in adolescent girls are also responsible for emotional changes. It is not uncommon for girls experiencing these hormone changes to have sudden outbursts of anger, sadness, or even lust. Neurological changes occur as the "limbic system,

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responsible for intense fear and excitement from the amazedly, matures before the frontal cortex, where planning ahead, emotional regulation, and impulse control occur," (Berger, 2011, p 400). These neurological changes often lead adolescents to throw caution to the wind, especially in social situations.

Adolescents are more likely to act impulsively. Their impulsive behaviors coupled with their increase in hormones and interest in sexual activities puts adolescents at risk for sexual abuse and early pregnancy (Berger, 2011). During adolescence, physical and hormonal changes aren't the only changes occurring. Brain maturation also occurs and cognitive growth increases. Adolescent children will experience increased independence, a heightened sense of self-consciousness, the ability to think more abstractly.

According to Swiss developmental psychologist and philosopher, Jean Piaget, adolescents develop the ability to use abstract logic, in contrast to children in early and middle childhood who primarily only have the ability to think in concrete terms (Congou, & Able, 2011).

In addition, during adolescence, identity struggles often begin.

Developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst, Erik Erickson, described this stage of development as identity versus role confusion. According to Erickson, an adolescent's mission during this state is to unearth who they are as individuals, apart from their families and as members of society at large.

Futile navigation of this stage, according to Erickson, results in role confusion and upheaval. Adolescents develop a sense of personal identity through many avenues including religion, politics, natural abilities, and gender.

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Merging holding events, social ideals, and their distinctive ambitions, identity is developed.

However, according to Erickson, adolescents seldom reach identity and role confusion is more probable (Badminton, 2009). Emily is attending a Adulterant party Tort one AT near peers at cocoons. Nine party is Delve held at a local church, in the church's social hall.

According to Emily's mother this is not the first birthday party that Emily had attended where both boys and girls are present; however, it is the first co-De party that she has attended since she began showing an interest in boys.

Most of the girls are wearing dresses and shoes with modest heels; their hair perfectly tended to with hints of gloss on their lips and blush on their cheeks. Emily wears blue jeans, a blue and white striped long sleeved shirt and boat shoes.

Her normal blond curls have been flattened with a straightening iron, according to her mother. Emily likes her hair better straight and she hates dresses.

Emily is tall, standing at 5 feet 6 inches tall. She weighs 150 pounds. Her body is well proportioned and she does not appear to be overweight. Emily has developed breasts and she has the appearance of some acne on her chin and forehead.

The overhead fluorescent lights are dimmed in the social hall but the area is lit well with blue, red, and green lights which flash in sync with the music playing over a pair of large speakers. A DC encourages the 28 eleven and

twelve year olds to join the only two boys on the dance floor. The room is divided. Girls stand near a row of metal folding chairs lining a wall.

The boys gather near a stage on the far end of the room. Emily's mother Elizabeth is also attending the party as a chaperone.

Elizabeth motions for Emily to come to her three times during a thirty minute period in an effort to encourage Emily to join the others on the dance floor. Each time Emily ignores her mother's encouragements. The third time Emily's eyes grow wide and from across the room she mouths the word "stop" to Elizabeth. Nearly an hour into the party, the girls scream with delight when a popular song begins to play and several rush to the dance floor.

Emily rushes to the dance floor with a number of other girls and they begin to dance to the music. Song after song, Emily and her group of friends stay on the dance floor.

They stop occasionally to chat with one another but never leave the dance floor. Emily dances and laughs with her female friends for nearly an hour before the group is called to have birthday cake and watch as the birthday girl opens presents. While the children are eating Emily socializes with both her female and male friends. She is particularly friendly with a male named Dawson.

The two stand beside one another and talk while their friend opens her birthday presents. She playfully hits him on the arm six times during their exchange.

She blushes as he playfully hit her back. Soon the group of adolescents is back on the dance floor for another half hour of dancing before the party is over. This time both the boys and girls are on the dance floor together. Emily dances alongside both her female and male friends for the remainder of the party. As the party comes to close, Emily hugs each one of her female friends' goodbye as they leave.

When Elizabeth summons Emily to leave the party, Emily shouts out to Dawson, telling him goodbye. On Sunday rotenone, Elation welcomes me to spend time Witt Emily In ten Tamale's home. Email's family lives in a modest three bedroom, two bath house in a popular neighborhood on the North side of town. Their large fenced in back yard is filled with right colored, plastic play-things belonging to Email's younger brother Wade. Email's purple Next bicycle leans against a wall in the home's garage.

The bicycle is much too small for her growing stature and Emily readily admits that she hasn't ridden the bike in at least a year.

Nothing else in the yard or garage suggests that a young girl live there but inside the home tells a different story. On the kitchen counter lays a knotted green ribbon with long blonde hairs tangled within the knot. Emily explains that she wore the ribbon on SST. Patriot's Day this year because she had no other green in her wardrobe. Lying on the family couch is a blue and purple fleece blanket and a fuzzy heart-shaped fuchsia pillow donning the words " Drama Queen.

" It's Email's favorite pillow. The floor in the living area is scattered with green toy tractors and an incomplete train set.

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Leaving the living area and entering the long narrow hallway, Email's bedroom is the first room on the left. Her doorway stands open but a handmade foam door hanger hangs from the door knob reading " Do Not Enter. " Email's room is pink and white with accents of black and grey.

Her hot pink sheets peek out from under the wrinkled black and white polka dot comforter on her bed. Her bedroom walls are adorned with pictures of her favorite singers, Cody Simpson and Selene Gomez. A large bean bag chair takes up much of the floor space in her bedroom.

A large bookcase runs nearly the length of one wall while a keyboard and microphone stand sit against the opposite wall. Emily loves to sing and often spends a great deal of her time singing along with her favorite musicians on her karaoke machine.

A framed piece of child-drawn art hangs to the right of her bed. Emily says she completed the work in third grade. It depicts a boy who is seemingly stuck inside of a glass bottom room. Emily explains the technique she used is called foreshadowing. When asked if it has an underlying leans, Emily whips her hair and nonchalantly replies that it does not.

Emily is welcoming and excited to show off her space and her things, including her three dance trophies and her second place youth photography ribbon she won at last year's South Carolina Festival of Flowers.

Emily is creative and has an artistic side through her love of music, photography, drawing and painting, and dance. I inquire more about Email's art work and she pulls from her closet several pieces of art work sandwiched



between two pieces of cardboard. She ruefully pulls out several pieces of art and tells me how old she was when she completed it.

Before we can finish, Email's phone alerts her that she has a text message. For the next 15 minutes Emily sends and receives text messages from her cell phone.

She tells me that she is discussing an upcoming school trip to Philadelphia with her friend Jenny. They are discussing room arrangements. After testing with Jenny, Emily shows me information she has printed from the internet pertaining to her trip to Philadelphia. Emily says she is excited about the trip as she has never been away from home for more than two or three days at a time. She will be in Philadelphia for six days.

Emily says she cannot wait to go and excitedly explains how she will be staying in a hotel room with three of her female friends, without an adult. Emily explains that the girls will stay on the third floor of the hotel while the boys will stay on the second floor. Emily receives another text message just as I am leaving. Seen says gooey walkout looking up Trot near cell phone.

INTERVIEW Elizabeth is a thirty-two year old mother of two.

She gave birth to Emily at the age of nineteen. Emily was born December 10, 1999 by cesarean section after a full term pregnancy.

Email's mother Elizabeth reports no prenatal problems and no complications during labor. At birth Emily weighed seven pounds and eleven ounces. She was twenty one inches long. According to the Centers for Disease Control

(2000) Email's weight put her in the thirty sixth percentile for newborns and her height put her in the ninety third percentile for newborns.

As an infant, Emily was breast fed for seven months, according to Elizabeth. Elizabeth explains that as an infant, a toddler, and a young child, Emily hit all of her developmental milestones early, including puberty which began for Emily around age nine.

Email's father is not active in Elizabeth and Email's lives. Emily has never met her father. Elizabeth explains that Email's father attended college with her. They were casually dating when Elizabeth became pregnant.

Email's father did not want anything to do with Elizabeth after she told him she was pregnant. After finding out that she was pregnant, Elizabeth quit school until she gave birth to Emily then quickly returned to finish her degree. Elizabeth obtained a four year degree in marketing from a local college when Emily was three.

She now works for a major hotel chain as their director of communications. Elizabeth earns \$43, 000 annually.

She has no other income. Elizabeth grew up in the Catholic Church but left the church as a teen. Today she is a member off local Presbyterian church. Elizabeth considers herself an authoritative parent. She says that while she has great deal of expectations for her children, she also has a close and warm relationship with each of them.

She says her relationship with Emily has become closer since Emily has begun middle school.

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Elizabeth believes that it is most important that her children trust her. She explains that she wants her children to feel as if they can talk to her about anything. Elizabeth expects Emily to perform well in school and says Emily has not ever been in trouble at school because Elizabeth does not tolerate disobedience, especially in school. Elizabeth believes she holds the three traits that she says make a great parent: she commands respect; she works constantly to ensure good communication with her children so that they trust her, and she has clear expectations of her children.

Elizabeth says that if she were to give new parents three pieces of advice she would impress upon them how quickly time passes. " Enjoy every minute, and don't take one second for granted," she says. Elizabeth says she would also tell new parents to make sure they make time for themselves. Finally, Elizabeth says she would tell them to be honest with their children. " Share your life experiences with them. Tell them the things you did right and the things you did wrong.

Tell them about the lessons you've learned. Children learn to respect you and trust you in that sense. Emily is nine months shy of her thirteenth birthday. Emily is five feet, six inches tall. She weighs one hundred and fifty pounds. According to the Centers for Disease Control (2000), Emily's height is greater than the ninety seventh percentile for height.

Emily is at the ninety seventh percentile for weight. Although Emily is taller and heavier than more than ninety five percent of her peers, according to her mother, Emily has hit developmental milestones earlier than her peers

since she was an infant. Furthermore, Emily is currently experiencing puberty, an expected occurrence at her age.

She has developed breasts and she has had her first menstrual period. Emily is not sexually active, according to her mother and therefore she is currently not at risk for early pregnancy. Cognitively, Emily is progressing as a typical 12 year old girl.

She displays eagerness to establish a sense of independence from her mother with her upcoming school trip to Philadelphia. She looks forward to being away from her mother, and proving to both her mother and herself that she is maturing in the ability to make her own choices.

Emily's cognitive development is also apparent in the choices she made when dressing and styling her hair for the birthday party she attended.

Emily's mother explained that Emily used a straightening iron on her hair because she was not fond of her naturally curly hair. This demonstrates that Emily has developed a sense of self-consciousness.

Lastly, Emily's psychosocial development is apparent in that Emily is working to develop her own identity. Although Emily's friends wore dresses to the birthday party, Emily opted for blue jeans and boat shoes.

Emily chose to wear what she was comfortable wearing instead of what social norms would have her wear. In addition, Emily knows what she loves. She immerses herself in her art, her music, and her photography.

While her friends are participating in sports and trying out for cheerleaders, Emily is comfortable in her own vocation and does not seem eager to

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change. SUMMARY Emily is a typically developing 12 year old girl. It does not appear that her physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development has been negatively affected by her growing up in a single parent home.