# Development stages: adolescence

[Life](Life)

Development refers to growth, adaptation and change that occur over the course of a lifetime (Papalia, et. al, 2007). Thehuman beingis never static, from conception to death, physical and psychological change is constantly taking place in all of us. The process of development has been thought of in terms of stages that each of us must go through. These stages are characterized by certain behavioral or developmental characteristics that each of us goes through at different rates and even at different ages.

Among the stages of development, no other aspect of the life cycle has commanded as much attention as adolescence. Adolescence can easily be described as the best of times and the worst of times. This stage is affected by the structure of the society in which the individual is raised. Hence, different cultures may have different conceptions of adolescence. Many cultures have rites of passage when the child enters adolescence or adulthood.

While in Western cultures, it is a gradual transition fromchildhood to adulthood. Adolescence is marked by changes in the physical, emotional, social and cognitive aspects of the individual. The rapid physical changes occur at the onset of puberty; during adolescence the bodily changes often occur at a slower rate. In this stage, due to increased activity of the gonads at puberty, sex glands develop rapidly and become functional, the sex organs mature and the major secondary sex characteristics are more defined.

The skeleton stops growing, hence the adolescent reaches his/her mature height in this stage and the various parts of the body gradually come into proportion (Steinberg, 2002). The physical changes that adolescents

experience causes their preoccupation with their physical appearance and of what may be considered as " normal" Developmental Stages Page #2 development. Few adolescents are content with their bodies, and this discontent can lead to lowered self-esteems and insecurity. Moreover, adolescence discovers their sexuality in this stage and tends to act on it.

Adolescents also experience heightened emotional tensions, which may result from the hormonal and physical changes they are going through, it can also be brought about by the social pressures they must face and of which they have not been prepared. Adolescents experience emotional instability from time to time, which results from their adjustments to changes in their lives. Like when they are angered by the thought that they are being treated like a child or treated unfairly. However, they express their anger by sulking, refusing to speak our loudly criticizing those who angered them.

While adolescent emotions are often intense, uncontrolled and seemingly irrational, it improves with age (Geselle, et. al, 1956). Adolescent's emotions also impact the way they relate with other people and how they view their social sphere. Adolescent's thought patterns are generally egocentric. Elkind (1967) proposed that adolescents assume that everyone else in the world views the world as they do. Adolescent egocentrism has two facets, the personal fable and the imaginary audience. The personal fable is a romanticized self-generated story of one's personal destiny.

Like when the adolescent believes that shoplifting is bad and there is a possibility of being caught by the police, but feels that it will not happen to him/her. The imaginary audience refers to the adolescent's belief that other people are scrutinizing him/her because he/she is the most important

concern of other people. The concept of the imaginary audience may help explain why students are not comfortable in giving reports or presentations in class, as they believe that they are under scrutiny when they do so.

This feeling is very real for the adolescent and may impair his/her Developmental Stages Page #3 learning in the classroom. Teachers can help by being sensitive to this issue and thus provide encouragement and positive feedback on improvements made by students, or to assign presentations in groups of two, where the team presents it to the class to diffuse the feeling of being scrutinized. According to Piaget (1972) by the time a person reaches adolescence, he/she begins the final phase of intellectual development, which is called formal operation.

This stage is characterized by the ability to solve abstract problems. The formal operational thinker is not bound by content and available experience, rather he/she can hypothesize and deal with the " what ifs". The adolescent therefore is able to think of concepts and ideas well beyond his/her knowledge and experience, to look for answers in a systematic way and to use logical reasoning. Considering the cognitive stage of adolescents, teachers can challenge students to think beyond the common and simple responses to questions put to them.

Theteachercan also encourage students to make use of their cognitive skills by analyzing, predicting, justifying, and defending their ideas in class. The teacher however, has to recognize that student's conception of their ideas and abstract thoughts are products of their social and cultural backgrounds, thus students may give different explanations to a particular question or hypothesis. Like when students are asked to analyze the reasons why

societies celebrate events, the teacher must allow for other cultural celebrations and not limit it to American celebrations.

## References

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