



Adjust to new physical sense of self

Young adolescents experience rapid and profound physical changes triggered by hormones acting on different parts of their bodies.

In early adolescence these include:

- Rapid physical growth and body changes.
- Uneven growth of bones, muscles, and organs, sometimes resulting in awkward appearance.
- Frequent feelings of fatigue.
- Intense concern with body image; may be self-conscious about growth.
- Worries about being normal, with peers often perceived as the standard.

Adjust to a sexually maturing body and feelings

With the significant changes they experience in adolescence, youth must adapt sexually and establish a sense of sexual identity. This includes incorporating a sense of gender identity; establishing values about sexual behavior; and developing skills for romantic relationships.

In early adolescence:

- Individuals assigned female at birth (AFAB) generally develop earlier than those assigned male at birth (AMAB).
- Young people of all genders experience shyness, blushing, a sense of modesty, and greater interest in privacy.
- Individuals experience emerging sexual feelings and exploration.
- Normal behavior includes experimentation with their own body (masturbation).
- Worries about being normal are normal.
- Contact with potential romantic partners happens in friend groups.

Brain development

By age 6 (on average), a young person's brain is 95% of its adult size. However, the brain continues to physically develop in the teen years and even into the 20s. A second growth spurt of gray matter (peaking at age 11-12) is followed by a "pruning" process in which connections among neurons in the brain that are not used wither away and those that are used remain. The front part of the brain, responsible for functions such as complex reasoning, problem-solving, thinking ahead, prioritizing, long-term planning, self-evaluation and regulation of emotion, begins to develop in early adolescence with a final developmental push starting at age 16 or 17.

It is not that these tasks cannot be done before young adulthood, but rather that it takes more effort and requires practice.

Physical growth & puberty	Assigned male at birth (AMAB)	Assigned female at birth (AFAB)
Growth starts (average)	Age 14 (range 12-16)	Age 12 (range 10-14)
1-year average height increase during growth spurt	4.1"	3.5"
Starting age of puberty (average)	Age 11-12 (range 9-14), individuals continue to grow for about 6 years after the first visible signs of puberty.	Age 10-11 (range 8-13), individuals continue to grow for about 4 years after the first visible signs of puberty.
Length of puberty	3-4 years	4-5 years
Progression of changes	• Growth of testicles and penis • First ejaculation (average age 13-14; range 12-16) • Hair growth in pubic area and armpits • Muscle growth, deepening voice, acne, and facial hair develop	• Breast development • Hair growth in pubic area and armpits • Acne • Menstruation starts (average age 12-13; range 10-16)
Young people of all genders	• Enter puberty now at earlier ages than ever. • Experience a wide range of "normal." • Experience physical maturation and cognitive development in stages that don't always correlate to each other (e.g., youth that look physically older do not yet necessarily have higher levels of cognitive ability).	

Define a personal sense of identity

Adolescents move from identifying themselves as an extension of their parents (childhood) to recognizing their uniqueness and separateness from parents. They develop a sense of self as an individual and as a person connected to valuable people and groups. They refine their sense of identity, exploring issues such as: "Who am I? How do I fit in? Am I loveable and loving? How am I competent?" This process often manifests as exploration of alternative styles of dress, jewelry, music, hair, and mannerisms. Teens may struggle to identify a true self amid seeming contradictions in the way they feel and behave in different situations, and with fluctuating levels of thought and understanding.

In early adolescence:

- Identity is influenced by relationships with family members, teachers, and, increasingly, by peers.
- Worries about being normal are normal, with peers being viewed as the standard.
- Often magnify their own problems and feel misunderstood.
- Feel observed by an imaginary audience.

Adopt a personal values system

Adolescents develop a more complex understanding of moral behavior and underlying principles of justice. They question and assess beliefs from childhood and restructure these beliefs into a personal ideology (e.g., more personally meaningful values, religious views, and belief systems to guide decisions and behavior).

Early adolescents:

- Begin to question and try out value systems.
- Move from thinking in terms of "What's in it for me?" fairness

(e.g., if you did this for me, I would do that for you), to wanting to gain social approval and live up to the expectations of people close to them – "golden rule" morality. As they become able to see the perspectives of others, they may place the needs of others over their own self-interest.

Renegotiate relationship with parents/caregivers

Adolescents negotiate a change in relationship with parents that begins to balance autonomy (independence) with connection. Overall, the adolescent's task is one of separating in some ways, while maintaining and redefining connections in others. Through this process, they make room for a more adult relationship that both meets cultural expectations and provides necessary support.

In early adolescence:

- Differentiation presents as being argumentative with their adults.
- Individuals tend to be closely attached to parental figures.
- Their parents are still making most of their decisions for them.
- Their parents' listening skills can support their development.

Develop stable and productive peer relationships

Peer relationships change during adolescence, giving youth more support and connection as they spend less time with adults and in supervised activities. These peer relationships often compete with parents and schools in terms of their influence on teen's attitudes and behaviors. As networks with peers broaden, peer relationships become deeper and play an increasing role in shaping an individual's self-concept and interaction.

Throughout adolescence, teens experience three changes in their peer relationships:

1. Reorientation of friendships from activity-based relationships of childhood to more stable, affectively oriented friendships based on idea and value sharing.
2. Growth of romantic and sexually oriented relationships.
3. Emergence of peer "crowds."

Throughout adolescence, friendships become more stable, intimate, and supportive, providing a cornerstone for learning about adult relationships.

Early adolescents:

- Experience increasing influence of and connect to peers.
- Start choosing friendships based on affective characteristics (loyalty, trust, and willingness to confide) rather than shared interests and activities.
- Gravitate toward same-gender friends and group activities.
- Being to label or group their peers (e.g., cliques).
- Experience fear of peer rejection.

Meet demands of increasingly mature roles and responsibilities

Adolescents gradually take on the roles expected of them in adulthood. They learn the skills necessary for these roles and manage the demands of the labor market as well as meet family, community, and citizenship commitments.

Early adolescents are:

- Mostly interested in the present and near future.
- Likely to change vocational goals often.

