

Adolescence—Door to Adulthood

HEALTH TERMS

cognitive
developmental task
personal identity
empathy

HEALTH CONCEPTS

- There are nine developmental tasks identified for adolescents.
- Your personal identity involves the factors you believe make up the unique you.
- During adolescence, your abstract and logical thinking skills develop, your memory improves, and your thinking becomes more flexible.
- Being considerate of the needs of others is a part of social development.

THINKING SKILLS. Discuss male and female roles depicted on TV programs. Ask students to spot ways in which these roles are stereotypes and to determine the effect such stereotyping has on their personal identities and their ability to achieve a healthy sexuality.

Think of all the changes that take place in the human body during adolescence. There are the physical, mental/emotional, and social changes. There is also the more subtle **cognitive** (*intellectual*) development. As an adolescent you learn to think differently than you did as a child. There is perhaps no other time in our lives when we experience so many changes.

Everyone goes through this process to get to adulthood. Your parents once went through the same changes you are now experiencing. Ask them about their adolescent years. What were their questions, worries, or problems? Though you may face different situations than they did, you may be surprised to find that they had some of the same concerns you now have.

Tasks of Adolescence

The period of adolescence has been carefully studied by psychologists and sociologists for more than 50 years. These people have identified certain developmental tasks that can be considered basic to adolescence. A **developmental task** is *something that needs to occur during a particular age period for a person to continue his or her growth toward becoming a healthy, mature adult.*

Robert Havighurst, a well-known sociologist who studies adolescence, suggests that there are nine such tasks developed throughout the teen years and often into one's twenties. These tasks are listed as follows:

1. forming more mature relationships with peers of both genders
2. achieving a masculine or feminine social role
3. accepting one's physique and using one's body effectively
4. achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults
5. preparing for marriage and family life and/or career
6. acquiring a set of personal standards as a guide to behavior
7. developing social intelligence, which includes becoming aware of human needs and becoming motivated to help others attain their goals
8. being able to cope with success and failure
9. developing conceptual and problem-solving skills

As you can see, there is quite a lot involved in growing up and becoming a mature adult! Many of these tasks can be grouped under the general task of achieving a **personal identity**, the *factors you believe make you unique*. This task has a great impact on all of the other tasks and centers around one's self-concept. Questions like, "Who am I?" and "What do I want to be as a person?" are common in this search for identity.

PERSONAL-IDENTITY QUIZ

Read each statement. After each statement, is the number of the developmental task to which it relates. If you feel the statement does *not* describe you as you are now, record the number of the task indicated.

1. I have a picture in my mind of what kind of man/woman I want to be as an adult. (2)
2. I think through the problems I face, looking at several possible solutions. (9)
3. I have one or two very close friends with whom I can talk about almost anything. (1)
4. I know of several jobs I would be good at as an adult. (5)
5. I am aware of the activities of some of the civic groups in my community. (7)
6. I have more adult discussions with my parents or other adults at home than I used to. (4)
7. I am concerned about national and world problems that are in the news today. (7)
8. I can list at least four important beliefs I have. (6)
9. I know of some of the qualities I would look for in a marriage partner. (5)
10. People who know me know I act in a way that supports what I believe in. (6)
11. I am usually comfortable with my behavior in social settings. (2)
12. I can describe some ways my lifestyle would change if I were married and if I had children. (5)
13. I listen to other people's ideas, even though they may differ from my own. (9)
14. I usually have success in making both male and female friends. (1)
15. I know and am able to accept my physical characteristics. (3)
16. I do some things alone or with my friends that I used to do with my family. (4)
17. I am able to learn from disappointments and setbacks. (8)
18. I make choices that promote my overall health and well-being. (3)

Note the number of the developmental task or tasks indicated after the statements that did *not* describe you. These could be tasks that you need to work on.

Intellectual Development

Responsible decision making becomes a critical issue during adolescence. Certainly you made many decisions as a child. However, as an adolescent, you are making decisions in a different way, using a higher level of awareness and judgment.

As a child, you were a "concrete thinker." What you saw was what you believed existed. Consider showing a child two containers that hold exactly the same amount of water, but are different shapes. One is tall and thin, the other short and wide. Now, pour the same amount of water in each container. The child is likely to say that there is more water in the taller one because the water comes up higher in the glass. This is an example of concrete thinking.

Abstract Thinking

During adolescence, you develop abstract thinking skills. Abstract thinking includes analyzing a problem in your head and having your own thoughts. Using abstract thinking, you are able to consider alternatives



▲ Many changes occur in the human body during adolescence.



▲ Your ability to think on a higher level increases in adolescence.

THINKING SKILLS. Have students compare the responsibilities they had at home four years ago to those they have now.

STRESS. Help students make the connection between higher-level thinking skills and their ability to care for others. Allowing another person to express feelings that may make the listener angry or unhappy not only shows that they care about that person but that they are able to use flexible thinking.

and examine consequences. You also can better understand cause-and-effect relationships. If you were now shown the two containers of water, you would be able to reason that although it looks like there is more in the tall glass, there is actually the same amount of water in both.

Logical Thinking

During adolescence, your ability to think logically—to reason things out—increases. You can begin to solve more complicated problems. You also learn to back your opinions with sound reasoning.

Other Higher-Level Thinking

Your ability to remember also increases. Your thinking becomes more flexible. Where you used to see things as either “black or white” (right or wrong), you now are able to distinguish “gray” areas. This allows you to form your own beliefs.

Remember, these changes develop over time. As you try out these higher-level thinking abilities, you are likely to make mistakes—everyone does. What is important is that you learn from those mistakes.

Becoming Responsible

As you learn to think in more abstract and logical ways, your decision-making skills improve. During adolescence, you will become more independent of your parents. This means that you will have to rely more and more on your own decision-making skills and accept the consequences of your decisions. One of the most important points to remember in the decision-making process is that *you* are the one responsible for your choices. While you learn to make your own decisions, you also learn to accept responsibility for the outcome of those decisions.

Making Responsible

Decisions

Paul or the Mall?

Alex, his best friend Paul, and a group of other boys have gone to an evening movie. After the movie ends, the other boys invite Alex and Paul to walk with them to a mall about a mile away. Paul thinks that it's dangerous to walk along the



dark highway at night. He also knows his parents expect him home in 20 minutes. Paul tells the others that he thinks he should just go straight home. The other boys, except Alex, tell him to stop acting like a baby and come with them anyway. Alex wants to support Paul's decision to go home but he's afraid the other boys will make fun of him

and not want to include him next time they go out.

What Would You Do?

Apply the six steps of the decision-making process to Alex's problem.

1. State the situation.
2. List the possible options.
3. Weigh the possible outcomes.
4. Consider your values.
5. Make a decision and act.
6. Evaluate your decision.

Becoming A Caring Person

A growing ability to feel more deeply and to consider the needs of others is a part of social development. All the aspects of being socially healthy relate to getting along well with others and forming healthy, and sometimes new, relationships. It is easiest to form relationships with others when we care about those people. One way of expressing our concern for others is through empathy. **Empathy** is the ability to feel what others feel, to put yourself in someone else's place. Most people learn empathy as children. A small child, on seeing another child cry, might also cry.

As an adolescent, your empathic skills are more developed. Your maturing thinking skills enable you to understand what that person is feeling. Being aware of the feelings of others is one of the developmental tasks of adolescence. This means that you not only empathize with your friend, you probably want to help your friend resolve whatever is bothering him or her.

An important aspect of caring for others is showing respect for their feelings, goals, and ideas. By allowing others to express their feelings, even if they differ from your own, you show you care about them. Good friends, however, would never challenge each other to do something that goes against what they believe.

Did You Know?

Responsibility means moral, legal, or mental accountability, reliability, and trustworthiness. Are you responsible?

- Do you carry through with what you say you are going to do?
- Are you usually on time?
- Do you admit to the mistakes you make?
- Do you try not to make the same mistakes repeatedly?
- When conflict arises, do you attempt to discuss differences rather than argue about them?
- Do you show consideration for other people's needs or concerns?
- As you show that you can handle responsibility, you are likely to be given more.

LESSON

2

Review

LESSON 2 REVIEW ANSWERS ARE FOUND ON PAGE TM13.

Reviewing Facts and Vocabulary

1. Define *developmental task*.
2. Name four developmental tasks for adolescents suggested by sociologist Robert Havighurst.
3. Describe abstract thinking ability, including the stage of life during which it fully develops.
4. Questions like "Who am I?" and "What do I want to be?" relate to what concept?

Thinking Critically

5. **Evaluating.** What problems might occur if a person developed friendships only with people of the same gender?
6. **Synthesizing.** Explain why preparing for a career is an important developmental task for you to accomplish as a teenager.
7. **Analyzing.** How might your personal identity influence your standards and behaviors?

Applying Health Skills

8. **In Your Home.** Observe a brother, sister, or other youngster between the ages of two and six. Take notes as they play and notice the type of activity in which they are engaged. From your observations, give an example of one concrete thinking skill that the child was performing.
9. **In Your School.** Find a book about adolescence in the library. Locate any descriptions or definitions for "self-concept," "developmental task," and "personal identity" in the library book. Compare the definitions from the library book with those in this chapter.