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## THE PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGES IN ADOLESCENCE

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### ANNOTATION

The concept of adolescence is relatively new, having only been recognized in the United States starting in the late nineteenth century. Previously, adolescents were essentially seen as "*miniature adults*." However, we currently understand that development continues throughout the lifespan, meaning that teenagers are different from adults developmentally. Specifically, decades of research have shown that adolescents undergo significant brain development, impacting their behavior and functioning during this phase.

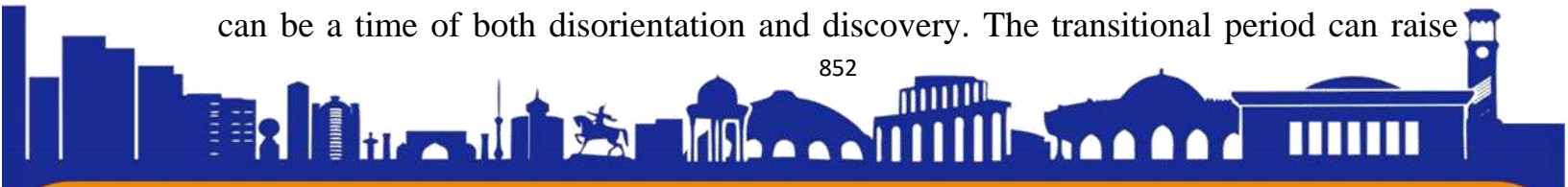
Adolescence is a phase of change that bridges the gap between childhood and adulthood. It usually occurs between the ages of 13 and 19, but the physical and psychological transformations often start earlier, around the preteen or tween years, typically between the ages of 9 and 12.

**Key words:** *Adolescence, disorientation, discovery, transitional period, independence, identity, friendship, gender identity, drugs, alcohol;*

**Jean Piaget.** Jean Piaget was a child psychologist who studied child and adolescent psychological development and provided insight into adolescent psychology.

According to Piaget, adolescents transition from the "concrete operational stage" to the "formal operational stage." In the concrete operational stage, children understand logical thinking and understand that their perspective is not necessarily the only perspective.

During the formal operational stage, understanding of abstract thoughts develops, and the individual can grasp symbolism and develop and test hypotheses about the world around them. However, not everyone can reach this stage: Piaget determined that only about one-third of adults are fully in the formal operational stage. Adolescence can be a time of both disorientation and discovery. The transitional period can raise





questions of independence and identity; as adolescents cultivate their sense of self, they may face difficult choices about academics, friendship, gender identity, drugs, and alcohol.

**Erik Erikson** also studied lifespan development, though his work emphasized ongoing development through adolescence and adulthood occurring in eight phases. Each phase seeks a healthy balance (or "competence") in handling specific tasks in each phase.

***Adolescence overlaps with three of Erikson's phases:***

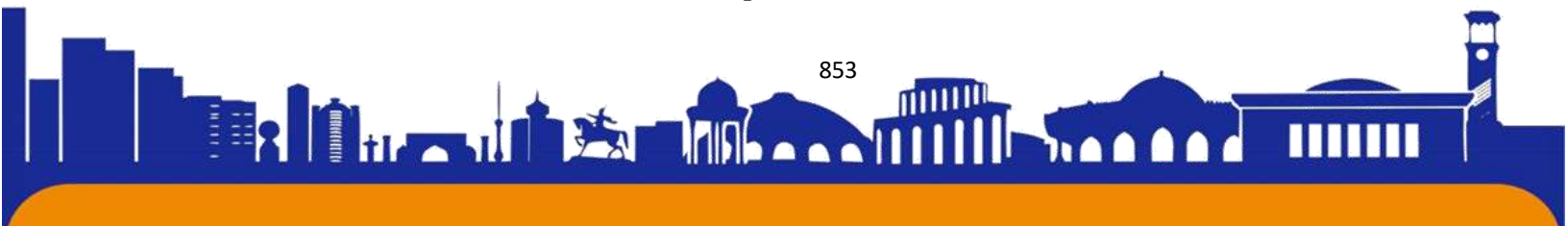
- ✓ *Industry vs. Inferiority*: Until approximately age 12, individuals develop their ability to overcome challenges and learn new skills.
- ✓ *Identity vs. Role Confusion*: This occurs approximately between ages 12 and 18. This phase includes significant identity development and understanding one's sense of self, including gender identity, sexual orientation, political leanings, and religious beliefs. During this phase, many teens begin to question what they were taught by their parents, leading to challenges in the parent-child relationship as the teen develops a sense of autonomy.
- ✓ *Intimacy vs. Isolation*: Starting at approximately age 18 and lasting into adulthood, individuals in this phase develop intimate relationships to avoid feelings of isolation.

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Most teens have a relatively egocentric perspective on life; a state of mind that usually abates with age. They often focus on themselves and believe that everyone else—from a best friend to a distant crush—is focused on them too. They may grapple with insecurities and feelings of being judged. Relationships with family members often take a backseat to peer groups, romantic interests, and appearance, which teens perceive as increasingly important during this time.

The transition can naturally lead to anxiety about physical development, evolving relationships with others, and one's place in the larger world. Mild anxiety and other challenges are typical, but serious mental health conditions also emerge during adolescence. Addressing a disorder early on can help ensure the best possible outcome.

- *Which phases constitute adolescence?*





Adolescence is comprised of three stages, namely early adolescence spanning from ages 10 to 14, mid-adolescence from ages 15 to 17, and late adolescence from ages 18 to 24. These stages bring forth distinct challenges for teenagers, requiring parents to provide varied responses.

- *What is the aim of the adolescent phase?*

The primary goal of adolescence is for individuals to undergo psychological and social changes that enable them to transition from childhood to young adulthood. Moving away from the emotional and physical dependence of childhood, adolescents gain autonomy and responsibility to cultivate independence and create their distinct identity, separate from their parents and previous experiences.

- *Why is puberty so challenging?*

Puberty begins between ages 9 and 15, and it lasts between a year and a half to three years. The hormonal and biological changes that occur can lead adolescents to feel anxious and self-conscious and to require more privacy and become preoccupied with their appearance, which can influence how they are perceived and accepted.

- *Why do teens make bad decisions and take risks?*

Adolescent risk-taking is often blamed on hormonal changes, but relationships play a key role as well. The teenage years are devoted to creating friendships that can serve individuals for life. Along those lines, research suggests that adolescents are motivated by peer acceptance more than adult perceptions—for better or for worse.

- *How does sleep alter in adolescence?*

During puberty, the biological clock changes, causing teenagers to feel drowsy later and wake up later to achieve the recommended 8 to 10 hours of sleep. This is why commencing middle and high school later in the day is linked with better attendance and academic performance, and a reduced risk of depression.

- *How to communicate with teenagers?*

A crucial aspect of communicating with adolescents is to help them understand what changes lie ahead. Informing them early about the physical changes that their bodies will undergo during puberty can alleviate any apprehension that they might have. In addition to the physical changes, parents should initiate a conversation about the social and lifestyle changes that come with adolescence. Discussing the





consequences of significant decisions, such as having sex or experimenting with drugs, can encourage teenagers to weigh their choices carefully.

Listening is a powerful tool that is often underestimated. Parents frequently give directives and solutions instead of listening. However, putting aside these tendencies and simply listening to the teenager can strengthen the relationship. Asking intrusive or judgmental questions can make the child feel uncomfortable and unwilling to speak candidly. Paying close attention while listening shows interest, validation, and support. It also enhances the likelihood of a teenager confiding in a parent when needed. Active listening fosters intimacy and trust while allowing the teen to process their experiences.

- *What can I do to keep a strong bond with my teenager?*

During adolescence, teenagers need to explore new relationships and activities to establish their independent identity while also distancing themselves from their parents. However, you can still maintain a close relationship with them despite this process. Expressing interest and asking questions about their new interests and hobbies can help you stay connected. Welcoming their friends and providing family structure can also help. In situations where discipline is required, it's better to criticize their choices rather than their character.

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