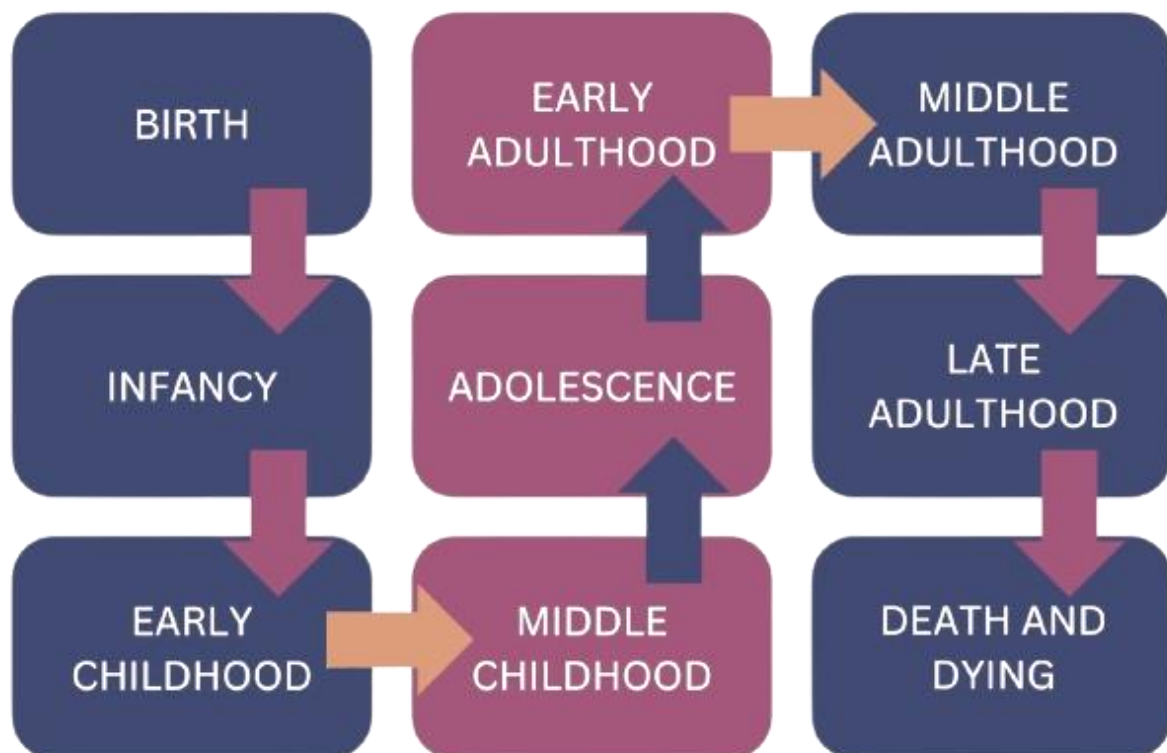


# Human Development

## Introduction

Human being is a social being and being a part of social and cultural structure heavily influences our behaviour, however we should not forget that we are also a biological structure with the world on its own. Adults tend to forget about the struggles we went through while growing up, which happened due to changing bodies. Some were not even aware that some struggles were connected to biology. That is why this chapter is important not to skip. Take it as a short refreshment course about the development of the human body and how this contributes not only to the sexual health but also to the mental and physical health of the young person.

For the sake of understanding our target group of young people and enabling us to take their perspective, we will take a closer look at the periods of interest, namely the middle childhood, the adolescence, and the early adulthood. Middle childhood is not a part of our target group in youth work, but it is important to understand what might have happened in the life of a person before they entered youth (work). Furthermore, basic knowledge about middle childhood will help you understand if a young person lacks some of the development from this earlier period. According to developmental psychology, lifespan of a person can be described by the following periods:



## Middle childhood

Middle childhood marks the life span between entering school and the beginning of adolescence (between the age of 7 and 11 years of age).

### Physical development

During middle childhood, a slow, but steady growth (of the body) is happening. Due to muscle gain, children can be active for a longer time. An intense development of motoric skills happens and needs to be finetuned/adjusted to the steady growth of the body. The brain is reaching its full capacity. This results in a better controlling of emotional outbursts and an improved competence of planning.

### Cognitive development

In this period, children start understanding logic in terms of their own experience, but not yet hypothetical logic. The so-called ´inductive reasoning´ is developing, which is the reflection of one's own experience and helps to base future decisions on this reflection. In middle childhood, children often assume that what is happening to them is true for everybody. Their vocabulary grows immensely as well as their understanding of grammar and the competence to apply it. Slowly, children start detecting, understanding, and solving moral issues from the perspective of how this is perceived by others. So, the foundation for competences like empathy or abstract thinking is set.

Wikipedia: [LINK](#)

### General characteristics

Children in middle childhood start building their self-concept more realistically. The influencers slowly shift from family to peers and media.

In this period, children are constantly very active with playing and planning. Friendship takes up a huge space of their lives and starts being more important than family. Friends and peers are now those with whom they compare their worth, their competences and skills, their look, etc. Friendship also offers numerous possibilities for learning social skills like communication and negotiation. By copying their peers, children learn how to achieve some tasks, how to dress, how to act, what music to listen to, etc. Self-esteem mostly comes from their peers, not from their parents anymore.

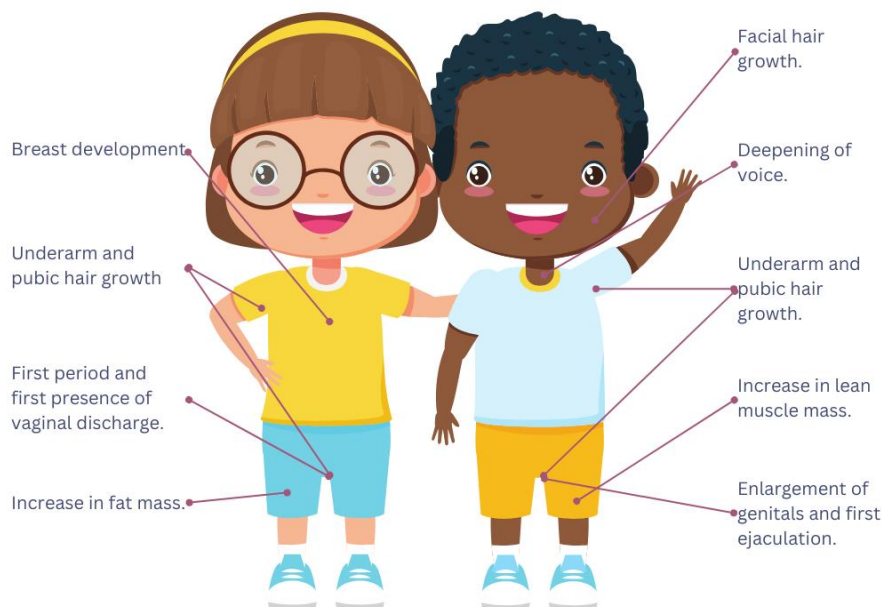
## Adolescence



Adolescence is a transitional stage of physical and psychological development that generally occurs during the period from puberty to adulthood. This is a period in life from 12 to 18 years of age.

### Physical development

This period is known for rapid growth (of the body), hormonal changes, and sexual maturation, which is visible in sex characteristics of the body. Sexual maturity of girls usually starts at the age 10 or 11 and ends by ages of 15 to 17. For boys, the process starts at 11 or 12 and ends by 16 or 17. During this time, both girls and boys develop secondary sex characteristics, which are physical signs or sexual maturation like growing pubic and underarm hair. Girls develop breasts, their hips start widening, and they experience an increase of body fat. This transformation goes hand in hand with developing and experiencing sexual desire, as well as with the beginning of menstrual periods. Boys start growing facial hair and their voice gets deeper. Their bodies grow more muscle. While developing and experiencing sexual desire, the first ejaculation takes place. The hormonal changes are causing a massive amount of sex hormones (like oestrogen, progesterone, and testosterone) and do not just affect the reproductive system. They trigger different behaviour. The adolescents experience many different emotions, impulses, and mood swings, and they should learn how to deal with these overwhelming situations.



## Cognitive development

Cognitive improvements in adolescence are rapid and huge. With a growing perspective, adolescents develop deductive reasoning, which is now more fact-based. Their cognitive abilities are already mostly improved in the following areas: attention, memory, processing speed, organisation, and metacognition. Metacognition is relevant in social cognition, increasing introspection, self-consciousness, and intellectualization. It also encourages adolescents to question rules, assertions, and such. Wisdom, or the capacity for insight and judgement, is developing through experience, and increases steadily through age 25, however, young adolescents have an increased tendency to engage in risky behaviour.

Furthermore, adolescents start understanding that morals often aren't black or white and that morals are something different than a rule or even a law. Since they are acting and socialising more and more outside their families, they see so many different levels of moral rights and wrongs. Sometimes, they even see rights and wrongs about the same moral question, which is very confusing for them. Usually, they will not solve this confusion during their adolescence, but they develop a first sense of moral dilemmas.

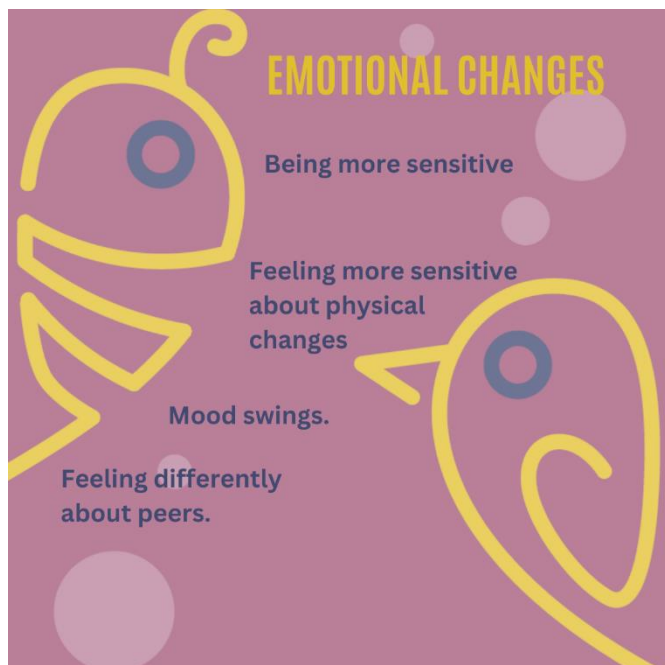
*F. Bobola, N. Walker: Psychology 172, Developmental Psychology: [LINK](#)*

*E.M. Winpenny, M.R. Winkler, J.Stochl, E.M.F. van Sluijs, N.Larson. D. Neumark-Sztainer: Associations of early adulthood life transitions with changes in fast food intake: a latent trajectory analysis. [LINK](#)*

## General characteristics

Adolescence is a period of questioning and testing out. On one hand, the adolescents question their own existence and need to master and overcome massive amounts of self-doubt. On the other hand, they also need to question the world around them with all its barriers, rules, and routines and test it out. So, adolescents explore and experience their multiple possibilities. They test limits, break rules, and rebel against authorities.

As the young people slowly move away from their parents, peer groups become more and more important. To find and secure their place in the world they should tolerate a lot of peer pressure and consequently stress, all of which helps them to form their own identities, to become more autonomous, to grow as a person, and finally to become young adults.



A huge part of a young person's identity forms during the adolescent years. This process is influenced by parents, peers, and society at large, and often these groups provide different answers to the same question or different solutions for the same task. This discrepancy results in several conflicts because these groups usually do not coordinate their advice. This often results in confusion, which pushes young people to form their own belief system.

## Early adulthood

Early adulthood is a period of rapid personal development when individuals experience major life transitions (e.g., leaving the parental home, leaving education, beginning employment, cohabitation, and parenthood). This is a period in life from the ages of 17 or 18 into the 20ies.

### Physical development

From the physical perspective, early adulthood represents the peak of human development, when all physical systems operate at their finest. From a strictly biological point of view, this is the best time to reproduce. All body systems such as lungs, motor ability, and strength are functioning perfectly. However, in the early thirties, the system will slowly start to decline.

### Cognitive development

During early adulthood, cognitive development continues. People gain the ability to abstract thinking, but not only about what is possible, but also what is likely. Walter and Bobola explain that this happens because "The adult has gained experience and understands why possibilities do not always become realities." Adolescents mostly think in black and white scenarios, while the thinking in adulthood introduced shades of grey, so much more realistic. Their self-identity still develops.

### General characteristics

Being a young adult is mostly about becoming independent and autonomous. Young adults often feel like their lives are on hold because important thoughts and tasks are future oriented, and nothing seems safe. They need to finish school, find a job, get their own place, etc. But these everyday practical issues are not the only thing that feels like being on hold in early adulthood. As we could see, young people already made huge steps in terms of physical, cognitive, and psychological development. There are many things they have experienced or tried out for the first time, which helps them to start seeing things from a wider perspective. On their way to become adults, they now need to apply everything that was developed, experienced, and discovered. They need to try out their fully developed sexuality, balance a variety of emotions, deal with broken hopes and dreams, recognize and accept necessities, and much more.

While transitioning to adulthood, young people often experience a lot of stress and become less physically active. On the other hand, they become more actively involved in their communities (volunteering, activism etc.).



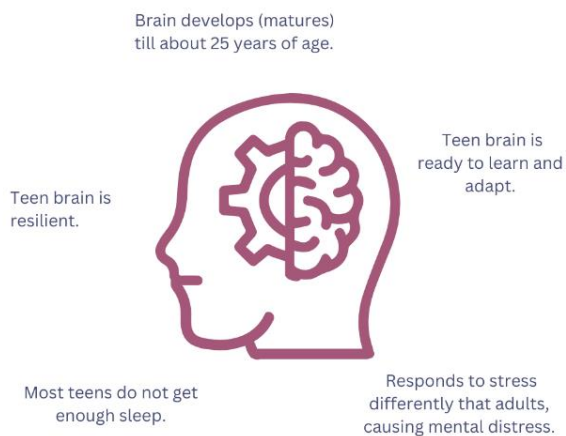
## Brain development

In adolescence, the brain is rapidly developing, which influences the mental health and perception of young people about their mental health. We want to focus a bit on the brain description.

### Brain

The size of the brain stops enlarging in adolescence, but the next ten years is all about maturing the brain. This process will stop somewhere around mid-twenties. The last area to mature is responsible for skills like planning, prioritising, and making good decisions. This means that young people make decision mostly based on their emotions.

Most teens do not get enough sleep. The hormone melatonin works differently in teens, enabling them to stay up late at night and have troubles getting up in the morning. A lack of sleep affects their attention, impulse control etc.



The teen brain is **ready to learn** and adapt, especially when in new situations or experiences.

The teenager's brain may **respond to stress** differently than adults. This could increase their chances of developing stress-related mental illness such as anxiety and depression.

**Mental illness may begin to appear** during adolescence, because teenagers experience physical, emotional, and social changes at the same time.

The **teen brain is resilient**, which means that despite the stresses and challenges in adolescence, most teens go on to become healthy adults.

Video content on brain development we recommend. [THIS](#) It is a movie about neuroscience behind the brain of teenagers.

National Institute of Mental Health: *The Teen Brain*: [LINK](#)

## Other teen development point

Young people questioning their own existence.

Young people question the world around them with all its barriers, rules, and routines and test it out.

Young people explore and experience their multiple possibilities. They test limits, break rules, and rebel against authorities.

Young people are prone to make risky decisions and risky behaviour that may cause physical or mental harm. Such activities are unintentional injuries and exposure to violence, sexual risk behaviour, and tobacco, alcohol, and illicit substance use.

They move away from their parents.

Peer groups become more important.

To find and secure their place in the world they learn to tolerate a lot of peer pressure and consequently stress, all of which helps them to form their own identities, to become more autonomous, to grow as a person, and finally to become young adults.

A huge part of a young person's identity forms during the adolescent years. This process is influenced by parents, peers, and society at large, and often these groups provide different answers to the same question or different solutions for the same task.

This discrepancy results in several conflicts because these groups usually do not coordinate their advice. This often results in confusion, which pushes young people to form their own belief system.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of a human being is complex, influenced by both biological factors and social and cultural structures. Understanding the stages of development, such as middle childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood, is crucial for comprehending the challenges and experiences faced by young people. From physical changes to cognitive advancements, each stage brings its own set of transformations and implications for mental and physical health. Additionally, the influence of peers, family, and society plays a significant role in shaping identity and behaviour. By recognizing the interaction between biology and environment, we can better support young individuals as they navigate through these critical stages of life and foster their overall well-being.

*National Library of Medicine: Factors associated with risk behaviours in adolescence: [LINK](#)*



## References

- F. Bobola, N. Walker: Psychology 172, Developmental Psychology: [LINK](#)
- National Institute of Mental Health: The Teen Brain: [LINK](#)
- Wikipedia: [LINK](#)
- E.M. Winpenny, M.R. Winkler, J. Stochl, E.M.F. van Sluijs, N. Larson. D. Neumark-Sztainer: Associations of early adulthood life transitions with changes in fast food intake: a latent trajectory analysis. [LINK](#)

