

Ages & Stages of Youth Development 13-15 Year Old Fact Sheet

Physical Growth

Last year's little girls may be this year's young women. Some boys of 13 may still be the size of an 11-year-old, while other boys of the same age may have grown 6 inches. The growth spurt that marks the beginning of adolescence may occur across a wide range of ages, with girls maturing before boys. Rapid changes in physical appearance may make teens uncomfortable. They are uneasy with their changing bodies. Hands and feet grow first, creating a problem with clumsiness. Acne, voice changes, and unpredictable menstrual cycles can create embarrassment. At the same time, late-developing teens may be uneasy about the lack of changes. Even when physical development is slow, however, social growth, changes in thinking, and emotional development are occurring.

Growth in Thinking

Young teens enjoy mental as well as physical activities. They move from concrete to more abstract thinking during this time. They still tend to think in all-or-nothing terms, however. If a subject is of interest, it will be intensely explored. Ready-made solutions from adults may be rejected in favor of finding solutions on one's own. Adults who can provide supervision without interference can have a great influence on these youth. If an adult leader is respected, his or her opinion will be highly valued by young teens. Small groups provide an opportunity for young teens to test ideas. They can be very self-conscious, so a smaller group is less intimidating. Small clubs with many positions for developing leadership are ideal for this age group. As early teens start to deal with abstract ideas and values, justice and equality become important issues for them. Project judging now may be viewed in terms of what is fair, as well as a reflection of the individual's self-worth.

Social Growth

As they move away from depending on their parents toward eventual independence, early teens enjoy participating in activities away from home. While teens still seek the counsel of parents and other adults, they also seek the support of peers. Young teens are comfortable away from their parents and are beginning to develop mature friendship skills. Parents may need help in understanding that this is a healthy sign of growing maturity, not a rejection of past or future family activities. Groups and clubs provide an opportunity for early teens to experience social acceptance. Rather than the adult recognition sought earlier, young teens now seek peer recognition. Providing members with the opportunity to learn being at ease with members of the opposite sex is an important function of group social activities. For most activities, boys still cluster with boys and girls with girls, but they are beginning to be very interested in what the other group is doing. Opportunities are needed for boys and girls to mix without feeling uncomfortable. This seems to work best if teens plan the activities themselves and if the boys are slightly older than the girls (because girls

often mature earlier).

Emotional Growth

As puberty approaches, young people's emotions begin the roller coaster ride that often characterizes them throughout adolescence. Changes in hormones contribute to these mood swings, as do changes in thinking. Young teens are beginning to test values. Spending time with adults who are accepting and willing to talk about values and morals has a lasting effect on young people. The early teen years seem to present a real challenge to a young person's sense of self. So many changes are occurring—everything from entering a new school to developing a new and unfamiliar body—that young people hardly know who they are. This is a time for adults to help with self-knowledge and self-discovering activities. Teens need to be assured that some uneasiness about one's self is normal during this time period. It still is important to avoid comparing young people with each other. Instead, compare the young person's present performance with his or her past accomplishments. Be especially careful at this age not to embarrass the young person.

Tips:

- Concentrate on developing individual skills—help learners compare skills to their own standards
- Encourage learning experiences related to understanding self and getting along with others
- Encourage active and fun learning experiences such as canoeing, hiking, and environmental stewardship—but not weighted toward physical prowess
- Encourage learning experiences involving boys and girls—provide activities to be with the opposite sex in healthy ways such as planning groups, parties, fund raising activities, etc.
- Provide hands-on and skill-centered experiences in specific subject matter
- Give learners a chance to choose when and if they are “on stage”
- Allow chances for quiet time
- Tasks can be more difficult and of longer duration—making a model, keeping a journal, etc.—allow for creativity!
- During activities, ask questions to encourage predicting and problem solving such as “What if this doesn't work? What could then happen?”
- Help learners find necessary information and support activities
- Encourage working with older teens and adults to complete learning experiences and apprenticing
- Teen and adult leaders must be well-liked to be effective—teen leaders should be three or four years older than the learners and considerably more mature
- Encourage deeper exploration of leadership roles—provide opportunities to practice leadership roles with coaching, and encourage keeping more detailed records of leadership experiences

- Encourage involvement in teen councils and planning boards
- Involve the group in setting rules for the group or for the program
- Provide realistic parameters—explain why they are necessary
- Do NOT use put-downs or “in-the-face” behaviors with this group
- Avoid singling learners out in front of others either to commend or to criticize
- Provide learning experiences outside of the community
- Ask learners to reflect on what they learned in the activities
- Ask learners to share feelings about any relational interferences they encountered during the activities
- Have learners prepare and give presentations on what they gained from or thought of the activities completed
- Ask learners to share how their personal values interfaced with the decisions of the group
- Ask learners to share any emotions they observed in the group
- Ask learners to define their leadership style based on their performance in the activities completed
- Based on observations of the activities completed, ask learners to state what they think would be an appropriate symbol for the group
- Ask learners to explain the plan of action undertaken to complete the activities—or the steps involved in creating the resulting product
- When activities result in a product, ask learners what could have been done to improve the product
- Ask learners to share observations they made of how different group members went through the same experiences
- Provide opportunities for learners to ask and question ways of doing things in the group
- Provide opportunities to explore the values and beliefs of the group—encourage them to articulate aspects of their group’s culture they can identify
- Have learners articulate or demonstrate in a creative way how they benefit from their association with the group
- Have learners list and examine varying points of view surfaced in the activities
- Have learners describe ethical dilemmas they observed in the activities and how they were resolved
- Pose abstract questions to help learners process realizations made during activities
- Present similar scenarios, and ask learners to predict results
- Provide honest information for the sexual issues and questions they have—listen to their fears and worries about their sexual development without judging or trivializing
- Find time to talk with them individually to help them work through problems or to discuss personal issues

- Present multiple alternatives in related situations, and ask learners to compare and choose the best possible option
- As a result of the activities, ask learners to set long-term goals and to plan strategies for reaching those goals
- Ask learners to construct simple budgets to reach stated goals
- Assist learners in identifying ways they can practice assertiveness around the results of the activities completed
- Ask learners to share, in detail, skills and education needed for related jobs
- Ask learners to explain actions or decisions that took place in the activities related to healthy or safe living
- Have learners keep a journal of personal decisions and changes they make related to the activities experienced
- Encourage technological application of key concepts presented
- Help learners identify and perform personal and group community contributions that meet special needs within their community
- Relate activities completed to career choices
- Have learners shadow experienced workers in related fields

Characteristics:	Teaching Tips:
Can take responsibility in planning and evaluating own work.	Give youth responsibility for group activities, including planning, implementing and evaluating.
Can plan own social and recreational activity.	Provide opportunities for youth to work together. Form committees to plan recreational and social activities.
Can discuss current events, international affairs and social issues with some help.	Use discussion activities and games that encourage awareness of current events and issues.
Want to make decisions but still depend on adult guidelines.	Establish guidelines that give parameters for youth to follow.
Gain skills in social relations with peers and adults.	Provide activities that foster social interaction with peers and adults.
Peer pressure mounts, first from same sex, then from opposite sex.	Use peer pressure to influence positive behavior. Have group give encouragement to individuals.
Change at different rates, according to highly individual "clocks". Can be quite self-conscious. Vulnerable to low self esteem.	Avoid asking youth to share their work individually until they feel more comfortable with the group.
Strong emotional attachment to older youth and adults.	Encourage youth to participate in activities with older youth and adults.
Choices are often unrealistic.	Assist youth in making realistic choices. Review their plans, discuss alternatives and help them weight options before making decisions.
Are concerned about physical development, being liked by friends, social graces, and good grooming (even though they don't like to admit it).	Encourage learning experiences related to understanding oneself and getting along with others. Be willing to talk about physical changes.
Are ready for in-depth, longer learning experiences.	Encourage deeper exploration of leadership roles: encouraging more detailed recordkeeping of leadership experiences.
Begin to think about the future and make realistic plans.	Encouraging learning experiences that will relate to their vocational interests.