

Ages & Stages of Youth Development 16-18 Year Old Fact Sheet

Physical Growth

By this time, teens are more comfortable with their adult appearance. They fit their bodies, so they are less awkward. Some late-maturing boys, however, experience growth spurts well into their teens. Gone is the early teen, who was adjusting to the seemingly ever-changing size and shape of the adolescent body. Teens 16 to 18 know their own abilities and talents. Many perfect athletic talent during intense hours of training and competition. New skills, such as driving a car, serve to move teens further away from the family and into the community as independent people.

Growth in Thinking

Adolescents are beginning to think about the future and to make realistic plans. Because they are mastering abstract thinking, they can imagine things that never were in a way that challenges—and sometimes threatens—many adults. They still have difficulty understanding compromise, however, and may label as “hypocrisy” adult efforts to cope with the inconsistencies of life. As middle teens think about the future, tomorrow’s vocational goal influences today’s activities. The middle teen years are a time of exploration and preparation for future careers. Teens set goals based on feelings of personal need and priorities. Any goals set by others are apt to be rejected. College visits, part-time jobs, field trips to factories and businesses, and conversations with helpful to teens of this age by arranging new experiences in their areas of interest. Information about trips and other projects associated with 4-H and reserved for older members can be made available. To be successful in these activities, members need a leader to guide them through the qualification requirements while allowing plenty of input from the teens themselves. As teens prepare for jobs, advanced schooling, and scholarship opportunities, a leader who knows the members well is a valuable resource for references.

Social Growth

At this stage adolescents would be capable of understanding much of what other people feel—if they were not so wrapped up in themselves. Relationship skills are usually well developed, however, and friendships formed at this stage are often sincere, close, and long-lasting. Recreation continues to move away from the family and also away from the large group. Dating increases. Among most teens, group dates gradually give way to double dates and couples-only dates. Acceptance by members of the opposite sex is increasingly important. Other activities, such as sports and clubs, are still important. Teens want to belong to the group but also want to be recognized as unique individuals within that group. Teens’ individually set priorities will determine how active they remain in past organizations. Leader-member relations should now change from that of director follower to that of advisor-independent worker. Adults need to understand the many changes occurring in teens’ lives. Consistent treatment from adults is

important even though teens act like adults one day and children the next.

Emotional Growth

Two important emotional goals of the middle-teen years are independence and identity, although neither is completely achieved during this period. Factors in these goals include achieving a satisfactory adjustment of sexuality and defining career goals. Middle teens are learning to cooperate with others on an adult level. Time is precious. If programs are filled with “busy work” or meaningless activities, teens soon lose patience and interest. The task of learning to interact with members of the opposite sex may preoccupy teens. Unsettled emotions may cause them to be stormy or withdrawn at times. In general, though, teens pride themselves on their growing ability to be responsible in their own eyes as well as in the eyes of peers and adults.

Characteristics:	Teaching Tips:
Personal philosophy begins to emerge.	Use activities where youth search for experiences that will allow them to identify their own philosophies.
Enjoy discussing the world situations, as well as personal activities.	Encourage discussion of events and feelings.
Abstract thinking and problem solving reach a higher level.	Put youth into real-life, problem-solving situations.
Strong desire for status in peer group.	Develop a climate in which youth are encouraged and supported by peers.
High interest in social activity.	Encourage youth to plan and carry out own social activities.
Need freedom from parental control to make decisions.	Help youth realize their decisions have consequences.
Widespread feelings of inferiority and inadequacy.	Encourage and help youth see their positive worth.
Want a stronger voice in planning own programs.	Provide suggestions and several alternatives rather than detailed instructions.
Are beginning to know self as individual. Personal philosophy begins to emerge.	Allow time for youth to explore and express their own philosophies. Use activities that have them search for experiences that will allow them to identify their own philosophies.

Tips:

- Provide opportunities for self-expression—emphasize leadership life skills related to social development
- Provide some experiences around body image, etiquette, grooming, hair styles, health and fitness, etc.—avoid comments that criticize or compare stature, size, or shape!
- Provide activities to test out interactions with the opposite sex such as trips, dances, workgroups, etc.
- Provide opportunities for learners to talk about their own beliefs
- Plan some group time where learners can discuss ideas and abstract concepts such as current political issues, world peace, virtual reality, etc.
- Involve learners in carrying out plans—they are ready to be creative at a level of action, and they are at a level of responsibility to do this
- Plan activities where learners can experiment with different roles
- Encourage greater in-depth study of leadership roles and life skills
- Involve learners in more direct developmental activities such as tutoring, helping coach, leading groups, speaking to community groups, mentoring younger children, etc.—activities that place them “in front” of others
- Encourage learners to plan programs (even social activities) with guidance and support from and involving adults
- Support learners as they set, work to reach, and evaluate long-term goals
- Encourage working with adult role models—emphasize guidance and counsel from adults rather than controlling direction
- Be willing to admit mistakes as an adult
- Ask learners what new information they learned in the activities
- Challenge learners to interpret and creatively communicate learning through symbols, pictures, graphs, etc.
- Ask learners to share personal strengths accessed in the activities
- Ask learners to share how they prioritized roles and functions in completed activities
- Ask learners to share what constraints they encountered in the educational activities
- Ask learners to share emotions and feelings witnessed in the activities
- Ask learners to share personal and group risks associated with the activities completed
- Ask learners to summarize how the group made decisions together throughout the activities
- Ask learners to detail personal and group records kept in the activities completed
- Ask learners how the activities could have been structured differently to more efficiently accomplish the same educational goals
- Ask learners to describe or demonstrate how they compensated for unexpected challenges and changes in the activities
- Ask learners to detail resources needed (available and missing) to complete activities just finished

- Ask learners to list adjustments made in behavior and plans while completing the activities
- Ask learners to generate and evaluate additional alternatives to activities completed
- Ask learners to share personal value criteria they used in the activities completed—if in a trusting relationship, ask them to compare what they did to what they SHOULD have done in certain situations
- Ask learners to describe underlying rules or principles at play in the activities completed and how they influenced the results
- Ask learners to identify related instances where they need to convey personal opinions and ideas to persuade or convince others
- Ask learners to speculate long-term consequences of results of the activities completed
- Ask learners to identify skills used in their group that are also needed in the workplace
- Ask learners how they contribute to the well being of their families in similar ways to their participation in this group
- Challenge learners to find answers to similar problems
- Encourage application of leadership life skills to living on their own—incorporate budgeting and money management applications in activities
- Assist learners in making related wise, healthy, and safe lifestyle choices
- Construct experiences that expose learners to and involve them with the larger society
- Support learners as they design follow-up related independent learning experiences
- Ask learners to develop plans for future life transitions
- Assist learners in applying leadership life skills to career exploration—especially decisionmaking
- Offer Career or College Days—including the wide spectrum of options (not just white-collar positions)
- Encourage career exploration within specific subject matter—offer vocational activities
- Arrange or locate internships (paid and unpaid) based on skill-specific career interests
- Provide activities (actual and theoretical) to explore the job market
- Encourage learning activities involving the community such as service groups, political parties, Habitat for Humanity, ecology, Adopt a Highway, etc.—involve them as spokespersons for the activities
- Provide guidance and support to learners as they work to meet actual and real community needs
- Organize experiences for learners outside of their own community