

TEACHING ADOLESCENTS

Educators of adolescents have not only the task of teaching difficult material but also have the task of understanding and “dealing” with the teenage learner. The following points briefly describe the “teenage condition” to help you understand your students better.

This age holds quite a few difficulties and at the same time, offers certain opportunities for development that if tackled appropriately can truly help this child develop into a successful and capable adult.

A common preconception of adolescence is that it’s a carefree time, characterized by fun and physical attractiveness. For some teenagers, this is the case but for many others, the teenage years are perceived as a trying and extremely difficult period.

Basically, the teenage years are a period of change. First and foremost, teens are going through **puberty**. They are becoming sexually and reproductively mature. These changes are happening really quickly and consciously. The teen is watching these mutations take place. The teen is affected both physically and psychologically. Large amounts of hormones are being secreted which may cause moodiness, substantial mood swings, irritability and restlessness. They grow in height and weight quickly and suddenly and sometimes different parts of the body grow at different speeds. This is called **asynchrony** and can cause clumsy behaviour. Usually teens feel self-conscious and awkward when they grow in asynchrony.

They have a very fragile **self-image**, anything that differs from the norm can make them feel uncomfortable and cause distress.

They have a need for emotional and psychological **independence from adults**, while still showing respect for authority and keeping some adult values.

They have to form positive and healthy relationships with **peers**.

Deal with more complicated **ethical and moral issues**, such as when to begin sexual interactions with others, whether to try drugs and other substances etc.

They have to understand and master more difficult and abstract **academic materials**.

Begin identifying and implementing adult **occupational goals**.

Teens have to develop an **identity and a self-concept**. “Who am I?” “Who am I to be?”

It's a person's placement in the world. Keep in mind that an identity is not fixed it keeps re-shaping throughout our lives but it becomes more or less fixed by the time we reach adulthood. Part of forming an identity involves making certain adult decisions. These children need to make an occupational choice and decide whether to continue formal schooling. They experiment with different roles, often attach to a group of friends or a clique. Common forms of an unhealthy identity are the following:

Identity diffusion – no identity

Negative identity – a view of themselves as worthless

Deviant identity – one that goes against the norms of society

Difficult time for parents but society also confuses, tells them they have grown up but still keeps them living at home and supports them financially.

Piaget refers to the period of **formal operations** as far as an adolescent's cognitive development is concerned. This means that they start to think about their thinking. They can reason. They can also imagine many possibilities inherent in a situation. They can therefore think in logical and abstract terms. They are more proficient in organizing and structuring input from their environment.

Adolescent egocentricity. Can conceptualize their thoughts and the thoughts of others BUT do not always make a clear distinction between the two. They often believe that their thoughts and actions are equally interesting to others. Other people are as admiring or critical of them as they are of themselves. This makes them feel really self-conscious. They take the other person's point of view to an extreme degree.

They become very concerned with **moral issues**, they love too much, they hate too much and the same with everything else.

Marialena Kalyva
BA, MA, MSc
Counseling Psychologist
