

## Parenting Before Their Time: The Implications of Early Childbearing on Adolescent Development

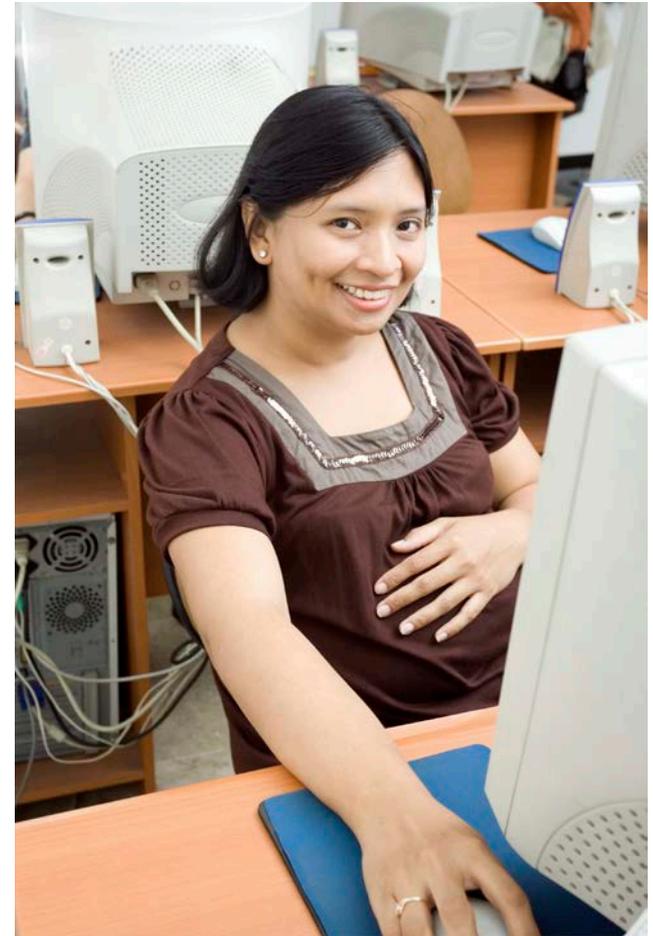


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# Disclaimer

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- Adolescence is marked by remarkable physical, cognitive, and interpersonal changes.
  - Understanding these changes (and what is “normative”) can help program providers serving adolescents and emerging adults.
- Early childbearing can have considerable implications for adolescent development.



- In some cultures, the transition to adolescence is marked by rites of passage, puberty rites, or ceremonies.
- Many expect young people to start acting like adults quite abruptly, but the timing of this transition is ambiguous.



- What to expect during adolescent development...
  - From childhood to early adolescence...
    - Individuation and differentiation
    - Appreciation of diverse self-attributes and traits
    - Integration of past, present, and future roles
    - Fragile sense of self
  - Early to late adolescence...
    - More sophisticated understanding of self
    - Integration of contradictory aspects of self
    - Decline of fragility in sense of self

## How do these stages relate to teen pregnancy?

- Early Adolescence (~11-13 years)

Once adolescents go through puberty, they are capable of getting pregnant/getting someone pregnant!

- Middle Adolescence (~14-16 years)

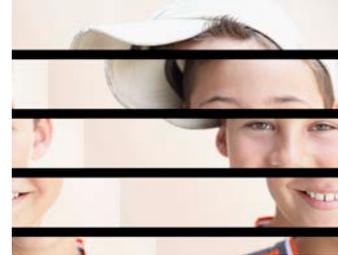
With increasing independence comes more time to engage in sex—half of all high school students have had sexual intercourse!

Source: YRBS

- Late Adolescence (~17-19 years)

1 out of 6 girls has a birth before age 20... and early childbearing can disrupt college and career preparation!

Source: National Vital Statistics



- As children become adolescents, many changes can be expected:
  - Physical
    - Growth spurts, hormone changes, sexual maturation.
  - Social/emotional
    - Conflict with parents, desire to spend more time with peers, more intimate relationships with friends/romantic partners, a quest for independence.
  - Cognitive/neurological
    - Changes in brain structure, increases in abstract, idealistic, and logical thinking.

# Physical Development

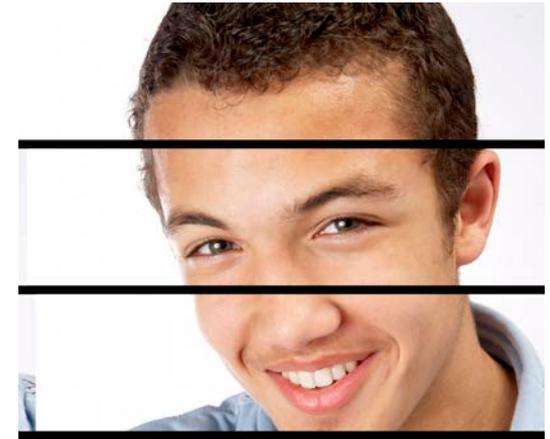


- Puberty is key part of adolescence; many believe it marks the start of adolescence. It can include:
  - Internal changes, which directly affect feelings, behaviors, and sexual desire.
    - For girls, these can include anger and depression.
    - For boys, these can include anger and irritability.
  - External changes, which can affect body image and reactions from other people.

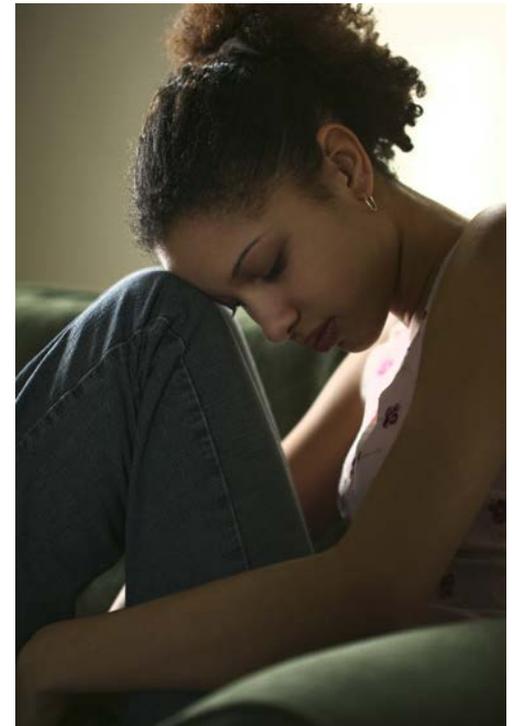


- Puberty is...
  - Not a single event, but an extended period that starts when hormones begin changing and ends when sex organs and other sex characteristics are developed.
  - Marked for girls by menarche (onset of menstruation)
  - Marked for boys by spermarche (first ejaculation of mobile sperm)
  - When an adolescent changes from a sexually “immature” person to one who is capable of getting pregnant or getting someone pregnant.

- Physical changes during puberty include:
  - Primary sexual characteristics
    - Features directly related to reproduction
      - Example: the onset of menstruation or the beginning of sperm production
  - Secondary sexual characteristics
    - Features that differentiate adult males from adult females, but are not directly involved in reproduction
      - Example: body hair



- Puberty is sometimes linked to problem behaviors, especially for early-maturing girls:
  - Truancy
  - Academic trouble
  - Drug and alcohol use
  - Running away
  - Shoplifting
  - Negative body image
  - Older romantic partners
  - Sexual risk taking and pregnancy

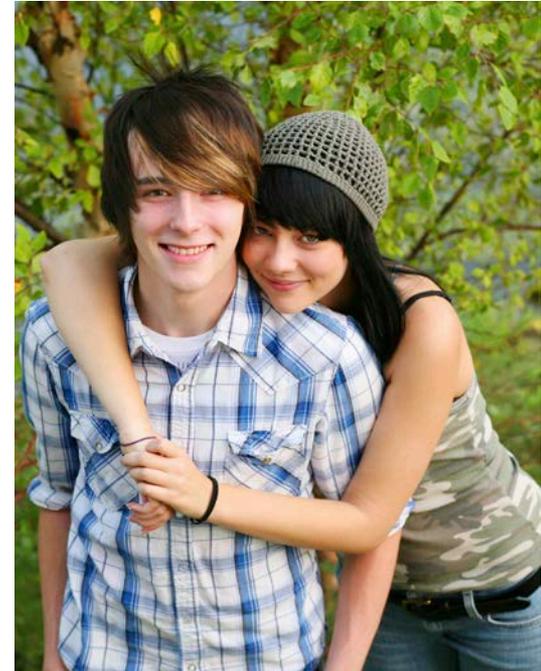


# Social/Emotional Development



- Some socio-emotional changes that emerge during adolescence:
  - Increasing autonomy/need for autonomy
  - Fragility of self
  - Perceptions of physical invulnerability
  - Exploration and refinement of self-concepts and identity
  - More complex relationships/interactions with others
  - Increased self-reflection and more complex emotions

- In adolescence...
  - Most teens begin dating, and roughly half have sex by the time they finish high school.
  - Teens spend double the time with friends as they do with their parents.
  - Belonging to a group/following group norms is very important.
  - But virtually all of their relationships are forced to change when a teen has a baby...



- What do teen moms have to say?



- Emotion is closely connected to self-esteem and can contribute to identity.
- Adolescence is a time when emotional highs and lows occur more frequently.



- Which of the following is true for adolescent emotions?
  - Moodiness is normal.
  - Intensely negative emotions can reflect serious problems.
  - Unhappiness generally represents inner turmoil, not conflict.
  - As adolescents mature, moods become less extreme.
  - All of the above.



- These questions, not usually considered in childhood, are virtually universal concerns in adolescence:
  - Who am I?
  - What am I all about?
  - What is different about me?
  - How can I make it on my own?
  - What am I going to do with my life?



- One of the key milestones in adolescence is identity achievement!
- Identity achievement involves:
  - Deliberate effort on the part of adolescents to find their place in the world.
  - Personality and role experimentation.
- Having an early pregnancy can affect how adolescents explore identities and roles and can have implications for how they view themselves/how others view them!

- Four stages of identity development:
  - Diffusion: not engaged in figuring out an adult identity for self
  - Foreclosure: commitment to certain roles and values without going through a period of crisis
  - Moratorium: exploring options for identity, but no commitment yet
  - Achievement: commitment to certain roles and values after active exploration

- Identity represents a personal sense of an integrated, coherent, goal-directed self:
  - Political
  - Religious
  - Relationship
  - Cultural
  - Physical
  - Sexual
  - Intellectual
  - Vocational
- Consider how having a baby affects these identities.



- Which of these does your program focus the most on?
  - Political identity
  - Relationship identity
  - Cultural identity
  - Physical identity
  - Sexual identity
  - Intellectual identity
  - Vocational identity

- What do teen moms have to say?



# Cognitive/Neurological Development



- Relatively recent advances in neuroscience have revealed that considerable changes occur in the brain during the second decade of life.
  - This contradicts the long-held idea that the brain is nearly "formed" by the end of childhood.
  - There is still much to learn about adolescent brains, especially relationships with genetics/environments.

- Changes to brain structure include:
  - Corpus callosum thickens, improving efficiency, ability to process information.
  - Amygdala, which controls emotion, changes.
  - Prefrontal cortex grows, furthering the ability to form ideas and strategies, make decisions, set priorities, and control impulses/attention.

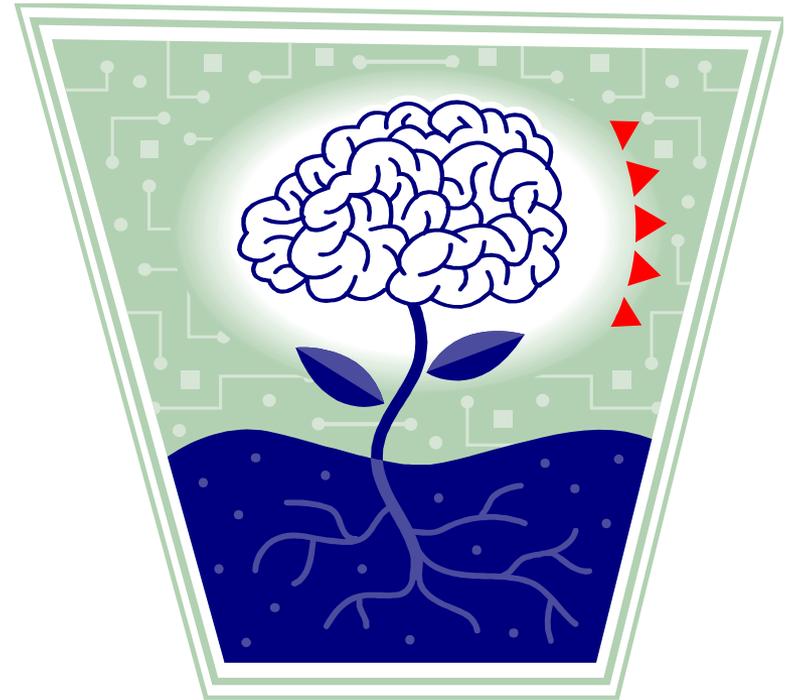


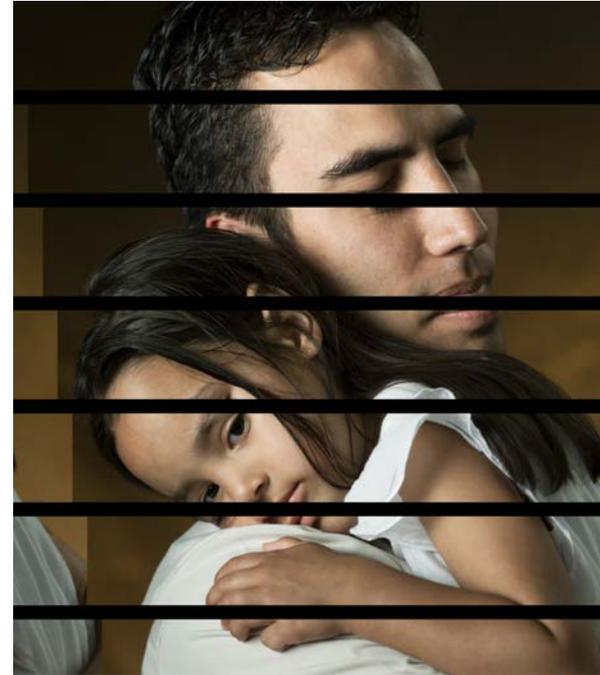
Image: Gary Olsen

- Neurological changes include more complex and efficient brain structures and neural connections.
  - New neurons/brains cells are generated (neurogenesis).
  - Brains demonstrate greater plasticity.
    - Neural connections that remain become stronger/allow for greater and more complex abilities.
    - Neural connections that are no longer needed disappear, allowing for greater brain efficiency.

- Cognitive improvements include:
  - Improved selective and divided attention.
  - Improved short- and long-term memory.
  - Ability to use metamemory and mnemonic strategies.
  - Automatization of certain tasks and skills.
  - Development of moral thinking.
  - Ability to use hypothetico-deductive reasoning (when hypotheses, logic, abstract thinking can be used).

- The use of formal operational thinking and hypothetico-deductive reasoning is a major advancement in adolescence:
  - Two potential sub-periods?
    - Early (11-15) – too idealized, not balanced
    - Late (15+) – tempered by experience, more balanced
  - Not all adolescents/adults achieve this type of thinking or use it at all times - formal schooling plays a role.
  - Consider how hypothetico-deductive reasoning plays into the decision to have sex, use contraception, have a baby.

- Cognitive changes in adolescence ALSO affect abilities to:
  - Self-regulate and make decisions.
  - Plan, adapt, and consider future outcomes.
  - Regulate and gauge emotions.
  - Retrieve memories and details of past experiences.
  - Think contextually about situations.
  - Make “moral” decisions, which take into account one’s role in society.



- What do teen moms have to say?



- Adolescence is marked by unique cognitions:

<b>Adolescent Egocentrism</b>	Teenagers' assumptions that they are the focus of everyone's attention and that their experiences, thoughts, & feelings are unique.
<b>Imaginary Audience</b>	Teenagers' unjustified concern that they are the focus of others' attention.
<b>Personal Fable</b>	Teenagers' exaggerated belief in their own uniqueness.

- Which of these socio-emotional reasons for not using contraception or having a teen pregnancy have you heard?
  - I didn't think a girl like me could get pregnant.
  - I thought having a baby would bring us closer.
  - I wanted sex to be spontaneous.
  - Contraceptives are unsafe.
  - My parents might find out.
  - I thought my partner would take care of that.
  - Using it would tell everyone that I was planning to have sex.



- The transition to adulthood is long and complex – especially for young parents.
- Possible markers of adulthood include:
  - Economic independence and self-responsibility.
  - Independent decision making.
  - Deciding on one's own beliefs and values.
  - Establishing a relationship equal with parents.
- Early childbearing forces adolescents into adult roles – but they may not always be prepared!

- Reasons why input, guidance, and monitoring from caring adults still matters:
  - Adult cognitive responses tend to be more intellectual; adolescents responses tend to be “from the gut,” signifying the continued importance of adult input into teens’ decision-making.
  - There is evidence that adolescents can help shape their own brains – learning and positive experiences can both contribute to the development of complex, efficient, and adaptive brains!

- Questions?



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