

Developmental Characteristics of Adolescence and Young Adulthood

	Physical Development	Cognitive Development	Social and Emotional Development
Early Adolescence (10-14)	Puberty: growth of body hair; increased perspiration and oil production in hair and skin; physical growth (both height and weight); breast and hip development and onset of menstruation (girls); growth of testicles and penis, wet dreams, and deepening of voice (boys).	Growth in capacity for abstract thought; mostly interested in present with little thought for future; expansion of and increased importance placed on intellectual interests; deepening of moral thought.	Struggle with sense of identity; feel awkward about themselves and their body; worry about being 'normal'; developing critical lens of and heightened conflict with parents; increasing identification with peer group; increase in desire for independence; prone to mood swings; beginning to test rules and boundaries; increased interest in privacy; increased awareness of sexual desire.
Late Adolescence (15-19)	Physical growth slows for girls, continues for boys.	Continued growth in capacity for abstract thought; increased and evolving capacity for goal-setting and decision-making; interest in moral reasoning; growth in connection to peer group, community; questioning of faith, beliefs, and meaning of life; growing interest in social justice, equity, and fairness.	Intense self-involvement alternating between high expectations and poor self-identity; adjustments to changing body and corresponding swings in self-esteem and confidence; worry about being 'normal' and comparing self to others in peer group; occasionally fluid or rapidly changing understanding of sexuality and gender; heightened sense of justice and fairness; increased drive for independence with resultant distance from parents or other authority figures; increasing awareness of responsibilities to family and community; greater reliance on friendship networks and peer group; heightened capacity for emotional regulation; experience feelings of love and passion; increasing interest in sex.
Young Adulthood (20-24)	Young women are typically fully physically developed; young men continue to gain height, weight, muscle mass, and body hair.	Ability to plan ideas from beginning to end; increased ability to delay gratification; examination of inner experiences; increased concern for the future; deepening of moral reasoning.	Firmer sense of independent identity, including sexual identity; increased emotional stability and self-reliance; deeper connection to peers, community and family relationships; regrowth of interest in social and cultural traditions; development of serious romantic relationships.

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Source: Sawyer S., Afifi R., Bearinger L., Blakemore S., Dick B., Ezeh A., Patton G., Adolescence: a Foundation for Future Health, The Lancet Volume 379, No. 9826, p1630–1640, 28 April 2012

SEXUALLY HEALTHY ADOLESCENT CASE STUDIES

1. Bina and Deepak, who are both 19 years old, have been together for seven months. Bina always hears her mother tell her older sister that she must abstain from having sex until she gets married. Bina disagrees, but wants to wait until she finds the right person. Two months ago, Bina decided that Deepak was the right person. Before becoming sexually active, Bina and Deepak visited a clinic together. They were both screened for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and Bina decided to begin taking birth control pills. Bina feels loved and respected when she has sex with Deepak. Sometimes, however, she does not want to have sex when he does. Deepak often expresses his frustration when Bina stops them, but she never allows him to change her mind.

Questions for group discussion:

- Do you consider Bina a sexually healthy young person? Why or why not?
- Does Bina engage in behaviors that are sexually healthy? If so, what are they?
- Does Bina engage in behaviors that are sexually unhealthy? If so, what are they?

2. Laura and Carlos are both 17 years old. They have been practicing safer sex for the last nine months because neither of them wants to get a sexually transmitted infection (STI) or have a baby. They love each other and are looking forward to graduating from high school next year. Laura cannot wait to leave home. She usually complains about being abused at home, but she has never given Carlos any details. Carlos cannot wait to meet more mature and experienced girls when he moves to the city next year. He tells Laura that she is lucky to have him for a boyfriend and that she would have trouble finding another boyfriend like him. Laura agrees, even though sometimes she is scared of Carlos but does not know why. Sometimes he yells at her because she does things he does not like.

Questions for group discussion:

- Do you consider Laura a sexually healthy young person? Why or why not?
- Does Laura engage in behaviors that are sexually healthy? If so, what are they?
- Does Laura engage in behaviors that are sexually unhealthy? If so, what are they?

3. James and Nancy have been together for three months. He is 27 years old, and she is 16. Nancy likes James because he is older than she is and has a good job. He gives her money when she needs it and buys her gifts that she cannot afford. Nancy is worried about getting pregnant, but she never uses birth control. She is planning to go to the clinic so that she can get on the pill. She is feeling a little jealous because James spends so much time drinking with his friends. Nancy wants to talk to James about this each time they see each other, but she never brings up the subject because

she is afraid of how he will react.

Questions for group discussion:

- Do you consider Nancy a sexually healthy young person? Why or why not?
- Does Nancy engage in behaviors that are sexually healthy? If so, what are they?
- Does Nancy engage in behaviors that are sexually unhealthy? If so, what are they?

4. Grace, who is 15, has been dating her boyfriend Simon for the past six months. She enjoys kissing him, but she is very uncomfortable when he touches her. Although his touch feels good, she is embarrassed by her body. She feels that she is too heavy and that her breasts are not big enough. Sometimes Grace stops eating for days in order to lose weight, but she never has any success. Simon is very frustrated that Grace does not want to have sex with him. He has threatened to break up with her if they do not have sex. Grace is thinking of having sex with Simon because she does not want to lose him. She has asked her friends to help her with her problem. She has also talked to a counselor at a clinic, and she has obtained some condoms in case she decides to have sex. She is very nervous about her situation. She does not want to have sex, yet she is afraid that she will give in to Simon.

Questions for group discussion:

- Would you consider Grace a sexually healthy young person? Why or why not?
- Does Grace engage in behaviors that are sexually healthy? If so, what are they?
- Does Grace engage in behaviors that are sexually unhealthy? If so, what are they?