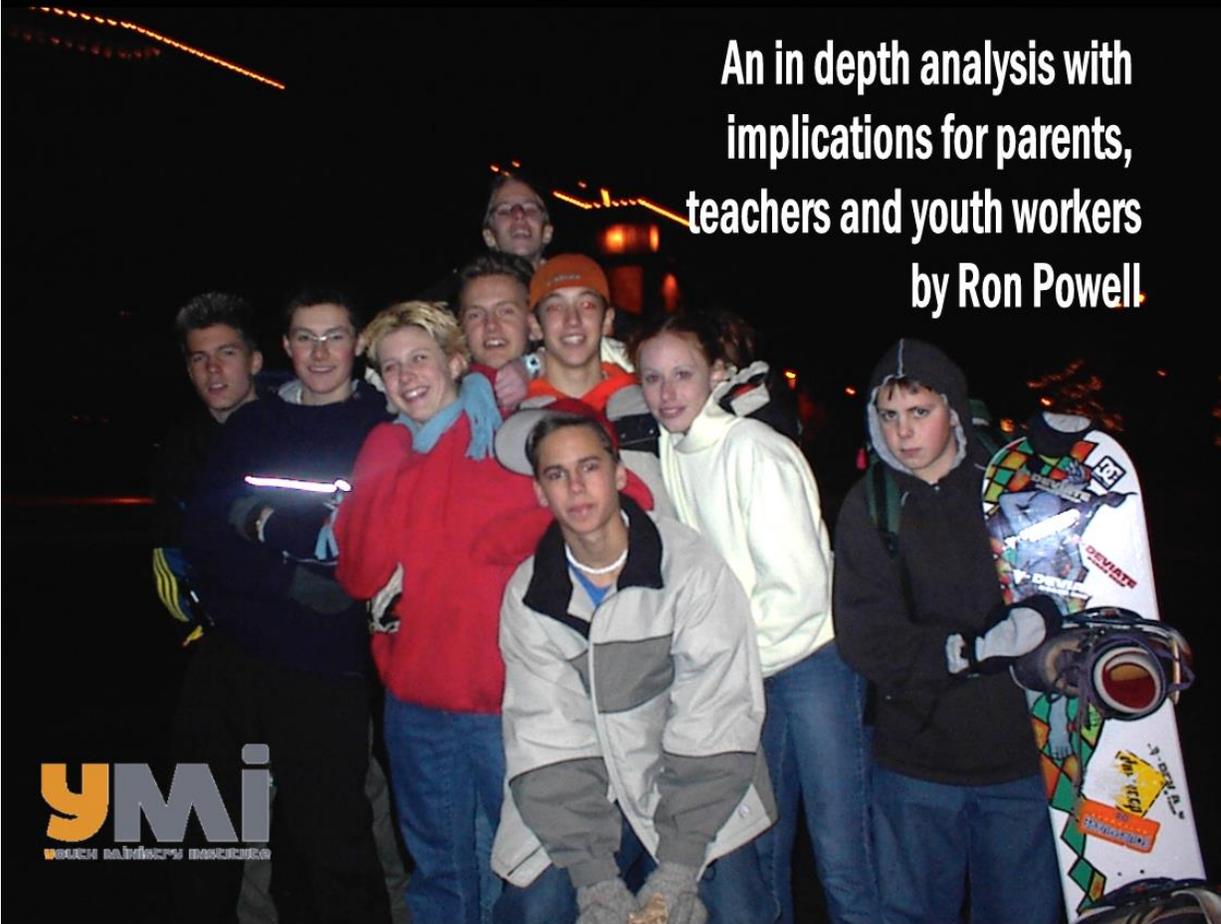


# Understanding Adolescent Behaviour

for greater effectiveness in parenting, teaching, and youth ministry

An in depth analysis with  
implications for parents,  
teachers and youth workers  
by Ron Powell



**yMi**  
YOUTH MINISTRY INITIATIVE

# **Understanding Adolescent Development:** for Greater Effectiveness in Youth Ministry

**By Ron Powell**

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# Adolescence

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## Welcome

Welcome to the important study of youth and youth ministry. I hope that this will both challenge and inspire you! Wide margins have been set aside so that you can make your own notes, comments, or questions. I hope that you will find studying through this material very helpful as you work with youth. If at any point you wish to contact me, I can be reached at [ron.powell@vanguardcollege.com](mailto:ron.powell@vanguardcollege.com)

Ron Powell

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## Introduction

This book attempts to introduce you to two very important interrelated subjects; the study of adolescent development and the application of that knowledge to relating to youth. Obviously, each of these subjects requires much more study. I hope that this information will whet your appetite for further study while preparing a foundation for effective interaction with youth today.

The latest research on youth has been investigated while preparing this book so that the material is current and reliable. At the same time, the study of adolescence is constantly changing as youth and youth culture continue to change. Note also that there is a purpose to studying the biological, cognitive, psycho-social, and spiritual development of contemporary youth. The intention is that by understanding how teens think and feel, that the Christian teacher, sponsor, or minister can more effectively connect with youth.

That brings us to the other dimension of this book: Youth Ministry. The application of this material to the spiritual development of teens is an essential component of this book. Understanding how teens are “wired” is the first step toward communicating the gospel in terms that teens can understand. However it is only one facet of the complex world of youth ministry. Effective youth ministry has the complicated task of meeting teens where they are at developmentally and introducing them to Christian life and discipleship on that level. Meeting the needs of early, middle or late adolescents requires the youth worker to be effective in other areas like leadership, programming, working with volunteers and time management.

This may sound overwhelming but chapter by chapter we will build a foundation for developing a workable approach to understanding and ministering to today’s teens.

# Adolescence

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## An Introduction to the Study of Adolescence

### Introduction

Carefully read this description of youth. What statements do you agree with? Which do you think are overstated?

*The young are in character prone to desire and ready to carry any desire they may have formed into action. Of bodily desires it is the sexual to which they are most disposed to give way, and in regard to sexual desire they exercise no self-restraint. They are changeful too, and fickle in their desires ...*

*They are passionate, irascible, and apt to be carried away by their impulses. They are slaves, too, of their passions, and their ambition prevents their ever brooking a slight and renders them indignant at the mere idea of enduring an injury ...*

*They are charitable rather than the reverse, as they have never yet been witness of many villainies; and they are trustful, as they have not yet been often deceived ... They have high aspirations, for they have never yet been humiliated by the experience of life ...*

*If they commit a fault, it is always on the side of excess and exaggeration for they carry everything too far, whether it be their love or hatred of anything else. They regard themselves as omniscient and are positive in their assertions; this is, in fact the reason of their carrying everything too far.*

ARISTOTLE: circa 300 BC

Were you surprised that this was written in Greece three hundred years before Christ and not last week in a newspaper editorial? This is a stereotypical view of youth held by many, but is it accurate? Mark Twain quipped that when a boy turns twelve you should put him in a barrel, nail the lid shut and feed him through a knot hole. When he reaches sixteen, he advises, "Shut the hole!" --So much for early unscientific views of youth. Let's look at some more accurate representations of adolescence.

### Defining Adolescence

Gary Ingersoll defines Adolescence as "a period of personal development during which a young person must establish a sense of individual identity and feelings of self-worth which includes adaptation to an altered body image, to improved intellectual abilities and to society's demands for behavioral maturity and readying oneself for adult roles." (Ingersoll, 1989, p. 2)

### ***It is personal***

It is important to see what is being said in this statement. Ingersoll's definition is superb because he includes a number of perspectives at the same time. He begins by affirming that adolescence is *personal*. One of the common errors of youth workers is assuming that one youth is like another or that any teen is a "classic, text book example" of adolescence. As we will see throughout this book, a text book may describe the condition of puberty but it cannot describe *me*. Our text book takes a multi-discipline approach to adolescence which means it draws from many sources to explain this physical, psychological, social time of transition. Any view point that tries to simplify human development or behaviour has to be wrong. Often simplistic analyses are made in the context of the church. As we understand adolescents better we will be less likely to fall into the trap of attributing youth choices and actions to simply "hormones" or a *spiritual problem*.

### ***It is unique to each individual***

Another aspect of the personal development described by Ingersoll, Steinberg and others, is that puberty arrives for each youth on its own time table. Although we can determine the markers of the onset of puberty and describe many of the changes that will eventually occur, the transitions happen on an individual basis. This can have serious consequences for some youth and makes for interesting challenges for those who work with them.

In this picture each of the students are in grade seven. Would you have guessed that they are all within one year of each other and attend the same class at school? Recognizing the disparity in size and weight, is only a superficial understanding. From a photo you cannot determine who is confident, verbal, analytical, or exceptional. Now add another dimension. Educators may not be as concerned as Christian parents, Sunday school teachers, and youth workers, but where is each in their spiritual development? With such diversity in just one photo, how do you create an effective nurturing environment or experience that will benefit a whole room full of adolescents at different ages, from different school or even different ethnic origins? One approach is to ignore the diversity and hope that "*somebody will get something out of what I am doing.*" A more thoughtful approach involves researching the group, knowing the *individuals* in it and developing chapters, and activities that are more tailored to the students in the room. Understanding the major needs, tasks, concerns of adolescence takes the teacher or youth worker one step closer to making a difference in the lives of teen, but knowing each personally and communicating relationally makes all the difference. Effective youth ministries recognize the wide diversity and utilize a multiplicity of leaders, small groups, mentoring programs, and opportunities for feed back.

### ***It is a time of transition***

Our definition above also underscores another essential for understanding teenagers. Whatever our agenda may be for youth, or whatever aspirations parents may have for their offspring, well adjusted adults must come through adolescence having successfully accomplished a number of developmental tasks. Here is a list that is accepted among most researchers:

Developmental Tasks: Robert Havighurst (1972) ·
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The adolescent must:
----------------------

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• adjust to a new body image.</li></ul> |
|---|

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adapt to increased cognitive powers.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adjust to increase cognitive demands in school.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• expand her or his verbal repertoire.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop a personal sense of identity.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establish adult vocational goals.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establish emotional and psychological independence from his or her parents.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop stable and productive peer relationships.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• learn to manage her or his sexuality.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• adopt a personal value system.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop increased impulse control and behavioral maturity</li> </ul>

### ***It is multi-dimensional***

As you read through this list you probably noticed that there are a number of categories represented. Adolescents must adapt on all; fronts, physically, emotionally, socially, sexually, morally, and psychologically. These areas of development or adjustment are characteristic to this transitional period. Throughout the first part of this book we will explore these different, categories, or domains in which teens must develop.

### ***It is universal***

One important consideration we will also study is the spiritual dimension of a student's development. It is interesting to note that in the Gospel of Luke, the doctor describes Jesus' development using similar categories. See if you can recognize them from this verse:

*And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men.* Luke 2:52

Four areas of development are in view here. The first two are cognitive and physical development. You may recall that this statement directly follows after the twelve year old astounds the temple teachers with his questions. Already his intellect was developing. *Growing in stature* signifies that he had a normal adolescent development, during which time he would have experienced accelerated growth rates, development of body and facial and hair as well as a deepening of his voice. The other two areas of development cited are social and spiritual development. In the years after his twelfth birthday Jesus also grows in favor in his community. He takes upon himself the privileges and responsibilities of the eldest son while in the home and his place among the men in the synagogue. We hear later that it was his custom to read the scripture in the synagogue.

### ***It doesn't fit the stereotypes***

From one perspective it may seem that adolescence is a modern invention. In the minds of many, the word adolescence evokes images of a Norman Rockwell painting, *Happy Days*, or more recently *American Pie*. Others will see visions of MTV stars dancing in their heads. Historically, the scripture and Aristotle describe it as a time of development. The biblical picture of Jesus' is however far from Aristotle's description of wayward youth. In the scripture we have another picture of

adolescent development that does not indicate storm and stress, upheaval and uncontrollable desire. Could it be that the moral dimension, faith development, was a key ingredient lacking in the proper adjustment in the youth Aristotle had observed? We will address this in our chapter on faith development. At this point it is enough to point out that the stereotype of reckless, rebellious teens that the media would like to paint represents the minority.

## **Conclusion**

The study of adolescence can be compared to the study of anthropology when it comes to ministry. In the same way that a missionary studies a culture before attempting to minister in that context, the thoughtful youth worker will learn as much as possible about youth and youth culture. Effectiveness in a culture is directly related to an understanding of the language, values, and traditions of that people group. The many subcultures represented by adolescents world wide must be understood before they can be reached and disciplined. A better grasp of the biological, cognitive, social, and spiritual development of teens is essential to communicating Christ to young people in the second decade of their lives. As this book progresses, continue to ask yourself, “How can this information about youth help me to relate to them more effectively, and communicate with them on their level for the purpose of nurturing their faith in Christ?”

# Part 1

# Physical and Sexual Development

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## Chapter 1 -Puberty: Physical Development

### Introduction

Teen entertainment is replete with scenarios of youths experiencing incredible transformations. In the old movie “Big” Tom Hanks plays the role of a 12 year old in the body of a thirty year old man who becomes a successful marketing wizard. In Teen Wolf, Michael J. Fox plays a troubled teen that discovers his family is affected by the curse of the werewolf. In this circumstance, the werewolf is not hunted down but becomes the high school basketball star. Teenage mutant Ninja Turtles and the X Men, even the recent release of Spiderman focus on abnormal development that results in unique abilities. These themes resonate with youth because they are encountering a metamorphosis and hope that the final outcome will be positive!

Understanding the impact that this accelerated physical development has on the feelings, thoughts, and actions of teens is essential to relating to youth. One would think that having experienced this time of life would alone prepare the teacher or youth worker for empathizing with youth but this is seldom the case. A careful organized study of the events related to puberty is needed. For clarity sake I will adhere closely to Stein berg. Be sure to read, understand, be able to remember the process of development in both males and females. Later, the ramifications of the physical manifestations associated with this time of transition will be considered along with the implications for ministry to early and middle adolescents.

### Overview of Physical Transformation

#### *Puberty*

The physical changes that accompany sexual maturation are called puberty. Puberty the most visible characteristic adolescence but individuals develop physically at different ages and at different rates. For example, since 1900 women have begun adolescence earlier and earlier in North America so that girls are beginning puberty at nine or ten who at the turn of the century began puberty at 16 or 17. Also, where adolescence begins in some industrialized nations quite early, it is often later in developing countries.

#### *The Markers*

The signs of puberty are readily apparent. As Santrock points out, these are: rapid acceleration in growth, the further development of ovaries and testes, the development of secondary sex characteristics, changes in fat to muscle ratio, and changes in the respiratory and circulatory systems. In many cultures these changes

are greeted with an appropriate rite of passage to mark socially what is happening physically. David Elkind in “All Grown up and No Place to Go” points out that in the absence of these social markers some youth in North America face difficulties resulting in stress, depression, and risk taking behaviours.

### ***Hormonal Balance***

The term adolescence and hormones, for some are synonymous. Many of the texts on youth sexuality have the word right in the title, as in the case of “Handling Your Hormones” by Jim Burns. The myth is that *raging* hormones are responsible for teens arousal, “boy craziness” or general moodiness. The myth is that it is this surge of hormones that brings on puberty and has such dramatic affects on teens thoughts and behavior. What needs to be understood is that all development is orchestrated by a delicate hormonal balance between the Hypothalamus, the pituitary gland and the gonads. Properly understood, *“puberty is a gradual process that begins at conception. The endocrine system produces, circulates, and regulates levels of hormones that are already present since birth. These hormones perform both an organizational role (e.g., organize or program the brain to behave in Certain ways) and an activational role (e.g., activate changes in behavior) during adolescent development.”* Steinberg, 24-25

### ***The catalyst***

If the levels of estrogen and androgen can be found in males and females through out our life span it is reasonable to ask, “What is the catalyst that tips the scales and begins the process of puberty?” Recent studies point to a protein called Leptin as the chemical catalyst that sets the process in motion. Leptin is produced by fat cells and has a trigger like affect on the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus calls for a release of androgen or estrogen which control a major role in sexual development. The hypothalamus also controls changes in the secretion of hormones that act on the thyroid and the adrenal glands. These hormonal changes stimulate many of the changes in size and weight.

### ***The Affects:***

The effects of the release of chemicals (hormones) are dramatic. During the book of puberty, increases in the levels of hormones lead to the adolescent growth spurt, which occurs about 2 years earlier in girls than in boys. During peak height velocity, an adolescent is growing at approximately the same rate as a toddler (about 4 inches per year for boys and 3.5 inches per year for girls). During this time, cramps, aches, muscle spasms or “growing pains” are not uncommon. It is important to recognize the huge transformation that is taking place. Also, as we will discuss later, the different rates of maturity for males and females will pose serious challenges for activities, games and chapters that involve early adolescents.

Unfortunately, this pattern is not uniform. The *asynchronicity* in growth of body parts during early adolescence often result in a clumsy or gawky appearance. Breasts will develop unevenly causing concern in some females, and males may stumble as they have gone through 2 shoe sizes in a summer. In addition to overall changes in height and weight, there are changes in the relative proportion of body muscle and body fat, and changes in the circulatory and respiratory systems. This is an important distinction. Where males will more likely have increased muscle and decreased fat healthy females will experience an opposite trend. There may also be frustration over the distribution of this fat. Fighting the onset of puberty with excessive dieting, may have serious repercussions for the developing female.

Beyond the gain in height and girth, the sexual development brought on by puberty is a key aspect of development. Ultimately, the goal of this development is the capability to reproduce

### **Boys.**

- rapid growth of testes and scrotum and appearance of pubic hair;
- the beginning of the growth spurt,
- enlargement of the penis and thickening of pubic hair;
- growth of facial and body hair and lowering of the voice.
- The first ejaculation usually occurs about a year after the beginning of the accelerated growth of the penis.

**Girls:** In boys, the changes in physical development usually occur in the following order (Girls' development is in a less regular sequence),

- begins with the development of the breast buds or growth of pubic hair.
- Later, breasts develop nipples and areola (the area around the nipple) and enlarge, and pubic hair thickens.
- Menarche, the first menstrual period, occurs later in puberty, and ovulation
- the ability to carry a baby to full term usually follow menarche by several years, although it is possible for a girl to become pregnant at any time following her period.

### ***The Process***

There are tremendous variations among individuals in age of onset and the rate of change of puberty. Some individuals will have completed the maturation process before their same-age peers will have even begun puberty. This huge disparity among teens is very visible not only to outsiders but to the teens themselves. Studies show that especially girls who mature early face difficulties with self esteem when their development coincides with difficulties in relationships, dating or moving to a new area. Late blooming males are sometimes the object of bullying and taunting. The timing and tempo of the process can be attributed to genetic factors, but not completely. The process is also influenced the environment, nutrition, social factors and nationality.

***Environmental Factors*** –One of the classic arguments in psychology is the age old controversy over nature vs. nurture. In other words, which determines your behavior, your genetic code or how and where you were brought up?. Is behaviour written in the genetic code or is it learned? Obviously it is not an either or situation. In the case of puberty, the genetic code sets the stage, determines a predisposition toward the onset of puberty and the rate at which it will progress but it can be influenced by environmental factors

### ***Health Factors***

Santrock points out that although the most important influence on the timing of maturation is genetic, adolescents who have been well-nourished and healthy during childhood go through puberty earlier than their less fortunate peers. New health risks to adolescents like poor nutrition, excessive dieting or obesity also have serious consequences during puberty in North America.

## **Socio-Cultural Factors**

Recent studies suggest that social factors may also influence the onset of maturation. For example, family conflict and stress may accelerate the pubertal process while living in the proximity of one's biological relatives appears to slow it down. Studies have shown that women living in dormitory conditions begin to synchronize their menstrual cycles. The social situation of an adolescent may also have a similar impact on their physical development.

## **Secular Trend**

Research shows that girls reach menarche at different ages world wide and that each decade for over a century puberty has arrived 4 months early than the decade previous. Generally, teenagers in industrialized nations such as Japan, mature earlier than their counterparts in developing nations, where health and nutritional problems slow growth. The age at menarche has declined from about 17-14 over the past 150 years. This has been termed the *secular trend*, which may be attributed to better nutrition, sanitation, and control of infectious diseases.

## **The Impact of Puberty**

It is difficult to catalogue all of the possible affects of puberty on the life of a teen. Individual differences abound and there so many factors involved that it is challenging to isolate what is a result of puberty and what is the result of home, school, or the community. Researchers have been able, however to distinguish three characteristics that appear to be universal to in adolescents. Regardless of the timing and tempo of puberty the process has been found to affect self image, moods, and relationships with parents. Specific events during puberty must also be taken into consideration

### **Self Image**

In James Dobson's *Preparing for Adolescence*, puberty is compared to a dangerous winding road that approaches the "canyon of inferiority" While low self esteem is not inevitable outcome for all youth, studies show that girls who are facing challenges of adaptation during adolescence are more prone to poor self image. Poor self esteem is linked to some of the greatest dangers to youth including depression, substance abuse, and promiscuity.

### **Moods**

During the early stages of puberty when there is a stronger fluctuation of hormone levels teens have expressed the occurrence of more negative feelings. The junior high years have been characterized as "intense." There is some truth to the notion that during early adolescence "the highs are higher and the lows are lower." During late adolescents healthy teens have more stabilized feelings that are more predictable and less intense.

### **Parental Conflict**

There is wide agreement from researchers and parents that the onset of puberty is accompanied with new challenges for the parent teen relationship. Studies indicate that there is less positive interaction with parents and increased instances of negative interaction especially with their mothers. This is less pronounced in single parent families.

## **Specific Events**

The storm and stress view of adolescence proposed by G Stanley Hall, one of the earliest theorists does not fit with the facts. In general teens regard the changes brought on by puberty positively especially if they have been well prepared for the event. Studies show that girls who have a positive attitude toward menarche fair much better and report less negative feelings than girls who view it negatively. Santrock explains that less is known about males' response to first ejaculation.

## **Implications for Ministry**

Those who work with teens and their parents need to be constantly reminded about the impact of puberty. It is impossible to discuss every effect in detail and this discussion needs to look specifically at the implications for ministry that are a response to only the *physical* aspects of puberty. Other aspects will be considered later in the book. Most importantly teachers and pastors need to go through the weekly exercise of asking "Understanding what is going on in their bodies, how do we create a nurturing, caring learning environment?" Beyond that here are some important considerations for working with early adolescents.

## **Education**

Grace, a grade five girl in a suburban elementary school, ran into the nurses office in a panic. She was bleeding, "*Down there.*" An only child of very restrictive parents, she felt betrayed. Her mother had never discussed menstruation with her. The parents had hoped that "the school taught about *those things.*" This was not a subject covered in her Sunday school curriculum either. She had been let down by the school, her family and the church.

With the age of menarche declining and many girls menstruating as early as ten years old, the church needs to be proactive working with parents and their children to prepare them for adolescence. An holistic approach to ministry concerns itself with more than the impartation of faith. By communicating to children that the creator who made the human body loves them and will be with them through puberty children have better chances of developing a healthy self image.

Although Santrock points out that less is known about males first ejaculation, Keith Olson in *Counseling Teenagers* describes how young Christian males are in anguish over the habit of masturbation. Some researchers even trace a connection between this and the drop out rate of teenage males from church. If this issue and other developmental issues cannot be addressed with young men in the context of the church, they are forced to look for answers elsewhere.

To address these and other issues, James Dobson<insert hyperlink> has developed a curriculum that can be used with pre teens to help them to understand the road ahead. It can be taught by parents to their children at home or could be offered as an elective or part of the Sunday school program with parental permission. Whatever curriculum is used the point is that we can not wait until there are problems, or until student have received misinformation from peers, the media, or the public school system.

## **Recreation**

At the third church that I was hired as youth pastor I was confronted early in my tenure by a well meaning deacon who was given the portfolio of "director of Christian education." His plan for the youth ministry was to buy desks and binders so that students could take notes when I taught them on Friday nights. It took me a week or two but I was able to explain to him why the class room style approach had

no place in my philosophy of ministry and that recreation was essential for this age group.

Movement is important for early adolescents. Sitting still for long periods of time is a physical endurance test for them. Programs that allow for periods of sitting mixed with opportunities for activity and interaction hold the attention of junior high students. Allowing for activity in middle school or junior high program allows students to learn while moving.

Activities that focus on cooperation are more effective than competition at this stage. Most importantly, it is wise to avoid direct physical competition between girls and boys. With girls developing 2 years earlier and often being taller and stronger, the boys can be feel intimidated and become vicious. Also, games that favor the early maturing teens should be avoided to protect the self esteem of their smaller friends.

A final consideration is segregation of males and females during early adolescents. Some groups have found that the interests and needs of boys and girls differ so widely at this age that it was more effective to separate them for all teaching times and some activities. Girls in grade seven will sometimes refer to the boys in their class as “little boys” and consider them “so immature.” The opportunity to discuss the physical and sexual aspects of puberty without the opposite sex present is seen as a plus in this situation. The downside is that boys and girls at this age need to begin to develop the ability to relate to the opposite sex. One of the goals should be to promote love and acceptance as brothers and sisters.

### ***Nutrition***

Youth camps are not generally known for healthy cuisine. Recently I was speaking at a summer camp and for a week where I was offered fries and little else two meals each day. Where pop, pizza, and potato chips are considered the three food groups of a youth ministry we are not promoting healthy choices for teens and leave them with the choice to indulge or starve. Pastors and teachers need to provide healthy options and keep an eye out for those who may have an eating disorder.

### ***Mediation***

When teens are in conflict with their parents youth workers, sponsors and teachers are sometimes asked to take sides. Taking the role of mediator, the worker can help bring reconciliation. To do so the leader must be an advocate for youth and for parents helping each side to understand each other better. Parents of early adolescents can be as vulnerable as the parents of newborns when suddenly their compliant child begins to exert their own will and become defiant. The reasons for this are more social and cognitive that physical and will be addressed in the next unit.

### ***Protection***

The literature on adolescent development is filled with studies on “risk taking behaviours” from students engaging in unprotected sex to students who climb behind the wheel of a car totally drunk. Exploring the limits of their freedom and their physical endurance, teens are increasingly putting themselves in dangerous situations. Teens need to be protected but must also protect themselves. Creating a safe place for teens is essential in ministry. This involves more that just taking safety concerns seriously. A safe place also demands that students are protected from violence and from bullying.

Early adolescents are sometimes merciless when assessing the physical attributes of their peers. In some settings there is little tolerance if a youth is overweight, has acne, is short, or does not excel in sports. Fortunately many youth groups have policies that demand that no one hurts another physically or emotionally. Leaders should not promote or tolerate initiations, hazing, insults, or discrimination of any kind. The youth class, or youth group must be free from the school yard caste system that is based on who is strong or beautiful. Evangelistic strategies that suggest that leaders pursue the popular teens so that other youth will be drawn are flawed at best and destructive at the worst. One important role that the Christian youth group can play in society is to reject the warped value system of the media and the school yard rather than perpetuate it and promote love unconditional acceptance.

## **Conclusion**

Puberty, although mostly a physical transformation directed by the genetic code, has a wide ranging impact on attitudes, behaviour and relationships. In general teens progress through this period of life feeling positive about the changes. Some of the risks involved are that self esteem could be damaged, mood swings can be experienced, and relationships with parents can be strained. These effects are more common for the early stages of puberty and should improve with time. Parents, teachers and youth workers need to take a supportive understanding and protective role at this time paying special attention to teens who are at risk of poor nutrition or poor self esteem. The church needs to take a proactive role preparing parents and teens for the challenges of puberty.

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# Chapter 2 –Puberty: Sexual Development

## Introduction

In the last chapter we explored the physical changes associated with puberty. From a biological perspective, we pointed out, that the goal of puberty is to prepare the male or female body for reproduction. This requires growth of the sex organs and the emergence secondary sexual characteristics like pubic hair or breast development. For the teen, puberty takes on the dimension of sexuality that, although not totally new, is so pronounced that it will preoccupy a great deal of their attention during this decade of their lives and have a profound impact on their entire life. From a Christian perspective sexuality also has a moral dimension that must be addressed.

In this chapter the perspective from the text book must be understood to describe what researchers find to be the norm among youth. That does *not* imply that they prescribe this process or that this book is in agreement with the sexual behaviour of North American teen. Also, most research will not consider the biblical perspective on sexuality, or gender roles however, in this book, helping students develop a healthy sexual identity, and guiding them to set Biblical sexual standards for their lives is must be considered.

## Sexuality and Biology

Researchers have found that sexual behaviour is related to hormonal changes in puberty. Rising androgen levels were found in boys to be related to increased sexual activity. In girls there was also a correlation but the deciding factor was the friends they associated with rather than androgen levels. In the same study, Robert Udry (1990) tried to determine whether hormone levels in puberty were related to gender behaviors but was not able to find a clear association between the two. So how are puberty and sexuality related?

Pubertal change contributes to an increased awareness of sexuality that is incorporated in interaction. Inwardly, behaviour changes as boys and girls adopt sex role stereotypes related to maleness or femaleness. Outwardly, parents, peers, teachers can pick up on the signals that the adolescent is becoming an adult. A change in appearance and behaviour influences those around the youth to treat them differently.

## Sexual Activity

Researchers have discovered a standard progression of sexual activity among adolescents. This is obviously based on opportunity. What this means is that all sexual activity beside masturbation requires a partner. Students who do not date, or have opportunity to be alone with the opposite sex cannot participate in these activities. Also, studies show that the earlier teens begin to date seriously (steady dating) the quicker they move through these stages.

Autoerotic behavior:.	Sexual fantasies and masturbation. Nocturnal emissions “wet dreams
Socio-sexual behavior:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• necking and petting,</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• genital sex,</li> <li>• oral sex.</li> </ul>
Premarital sex:	½ of adolescents have sexual intercourse before H.S. graduation

### **Risk Factors**

According to a study published in the Journal of Marriage and the family (56, 181-192) Luster and Small were able to isolate the main risk factors associated with early sexual activity. These are:

- Having a steady boyfriend or girl friend
- Using alcohol regularly
- Having parents with permissive values about sex
- Being worried about ones future occupational chances

Other factors that played a significant role in the study that should be a concern for parents, teachers, and church leaders are:

- Alcohol use
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Poor academic performance
- Antisocial friends
- Unsupportive school environment
- Home alone for five or more hours each day

Even with no risk factors present 1% of teens will be sexually active, but the risk of sexual involvement increases exponentially as risk factors increase. Note well that even if a parent disapproves of sexual activity, if they are alone for many hours after school each day, are involved with alcohol, a steady boyfriend and antisocial friends the likelihood of keeping their virginity is very small. Any serious approach to reducing the risk of sexual activity among teens must address multiple risk factors.

### **Technical Virgins**

Bev Hadland, author of straight talk on sex and international speaker on promoting celibacy as a positive expression of sexuality for youth, says that the main question she gets from Christian teens at Christian High school assemblies is “Are anal and oral sex sin?” Recently at a large meeting of female teens age 14-19 dozens of girls confessed to being involved with oral sex. In her seminars Hadland discusses the serious problem of *technical virginity*, where teens have engaged in every possible sexual practice, including mutual masturbation, anal and oral sex, but have avoided genital sex and claim that they are “virgins.” For many Christian teens there seems to

be only one rule concerning sex “*you can’t go all the way.*” Clearer discussions on what constitutes sexual immorality need to take place in youth ministries.

## Sexuality and Identity

Freud and Erikson both held that “anatomy is destiny.” By this they meant that “gender and sexuality is unlearned and instinctual.” Erikson explains that “psychological differences between males and females stem from their anatomical differences.”(1968) These views have undergone intense criticism and are not widely held by researchers today. There is some credence to the theory however that could be called *intentional design*. By this all that is meant is that God created male and female. Before birth these physical characteristics are evident. Through puberty these characteristics are accentuated and further pronounced. To ignore anatomy in identity is absurd and yet anatomy alone is not enough to convince today’s teens of their gender. Statements like “I am a girl in a boys body” or “I am more male than female inside,” are not unheard of. Teens question, “Am I gay, am I straight, am I bi –who knows?”

## Homosexuality

Up until the 1970’s the American Psychiatric Association classified homosexuality as a form of mental illness. Since that time the acceptance of homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle has changed faster than any other attitude toward sexuality, even the acceptance of premarital sex, or cohabitation.(Bibby, 2000) While activists assert that there are over 10 percent of north Americans that are exclusively gay, most reliable studies show that the gay population is really less than 3 per cent in the United States.(Guttmacher 1993) Part of this huge change in perception began with the study by Alfred Kinsey (1948) that explained sexual orientation as a continuum from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual. In Kinsey’s study only 4.7 percent of the men and 1.8 percent of the women were exclusively homosexual.

One of the most hotly debated issues surrounding sexual orientation is the cause of homosexual behavior. Studies show that on average, homosexual males had their first crush on a male at around 12 years old. Were they predisposed to this behaviour because “they were *born that way?*” The rationale is that if “God created them that way how can their behavior be wrong?” One study showed a difference in the hypothalamus of homosexuals but the study has been discredited because the subjects examined had died of AIDS. The hypothalamus may have been changed by the disease. Studies of identical twins and fraternal twins show a greater instance of homosexuality in the identical twin than the fraternal.(Whitman, Diamond and Martin 1993) The researchers interpret this to indicate a biological basis for homosexuality.(Santrock, 2002) However it shows equally *that biology alone does not determine sexual orientation* since not all of the identical twins had a sibling who was a homosexual. To date there is no positive evidence that homosexual orientation has a genetic origin.

## Gender Roles

Gender specific roles have more to do with identity than whether a child is attracted to boys or to girls. Gender refers more to the expectations of male and female behavior in a certain society. Most influential in this area of development is the parents actions and example.

## **Parental Influence**

The way parents behave as male or female models behavior to the children. Not only that but the way parents treat their boy or girl is an education in gender roles. A mother may tell her daughter “Ladies do not sit that way.” A father may tell his son “Big boys don’t cry.”

## **Peer Influence**

If gender roles begin in the home they are policed in the school yard. Boys teach each other the required masculine behaviour and reinforce it. Girls do the same in younger grades and on into high school. In adolescence peer approval or disapproval or gender appropriate behavior is a powerful teacher. Students who display gender inappropriate behavior can be ostracized. Boys can be categorized as wimps and girls labeled “butch.”

## **Teacher Influence**

Studies show that peers are not the only influence at the school. The school program and the teachers have ways of communicating sex role stereotypes to teens. Compared to elementary schools, middle and junior high schools provide a more impersonal environment which matches the adolescent male much better than the relationally oriented female. (Huston and Alvarez, 1990) In one study male students were clearly given greater attention than female students, and better instruction especially in math and science. (Myra and David Sadker, 1986) It would be interesting to study the interaction between Sunday School teachers and Youth Pastors and their students. Is one gender favored over the other and if so, why. Could this have anything to do with the statistics that show males leaving the church earlier and participating less in the life of the church than women?

## **Media Influence**

A recent PBS Frontlines report analyzed the role of the huge corporations influence on youth world wide in an expose called The Merchants of Cool <insert hyper link> In this study marketing giants gave their impression of their market. The profile of the typical male adolescent was “Mook” who listens to heavy metal or alternative or hip hop music, likes sports and drinks beer. The typical female was Midriff, (so named for a flat bare belly) best typified by Britney Spears, interested in pop music, shopping, and fashion. The stereotypes portrayed become educational for youth. The media giants do not claim to *shape* pop culture but to *portray it* honestly.

## **Sexuality and Society**

Cultural anthropologists characterizes societies views on sexuality three ways:

**Restrictive:** Discontinuous sexual development. In restrictive cultures, sexuality is best expressed in marriage. Other expressions of sexuality are not only discouraged but punished. *Premarital* ( a word that is quickly being removed from most discussions of sexuality) sexual behavior is illegal and subject to harsh punishment and public disgrace. The Law for God’s people would be considered *restrictive*. Placing a high value on chastity and fidelity. God’s restrictions make sense sociologically and biologically. The prohibitions in scripture guard against the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and the many social problems or extramarital affairs. Unfortunately, restrictions alone do not create moral behavior. Youth need to internalize the biblical value system.

Another strong sociological reason for restricting sexual behaviour is that studies show that sex before the age of sixteen is associated with “experimentation with

drugs and alcohol, a low level of religious involvement, tolerance of deviant behavior, lower interest in academic achievement and higher orientation toward independence Steinberg 2002.

Lastly in support of a more restrictive stance on sexuality is the high social costs of adolescents sexuality. John Chapin in the a study in Adolescence (winter 2000) reports:

*Health professionals continue to be concerned about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), AIDS in particular, among the adolescent population (Centers for Disease Control, 2000). At the end of 1999, there were over 25,000 cases of HIV infection among Americans between the ages of 20 and 24, and an additional 3,500 cases among those between 13 and 19. People under the age of 25 account for half of the HIV infections in the U.S. (Centers for Disease Control, 2000). Although knowledgeable about the transmission of AIDS and STDs (Chapin, 2000; Fisher & Misovich, 1991), adolescents in general do not take appropriate precautions (Chapin, 2000; DiClemente, 1990). Less than 10% of sexually active adolescents use condoms consistently (Centers for Disease Control, 1998).*

*The United States has the highest rates of teen pregnancy and births in the Western industrialized world, at a cost of at least \$7 billion annually (NCPTP, 1997). More than four out of ten females become pregnant at least once before they reach the age of 20, nearly one million a year. Over 80% of these pregnancies are unplanned and over 80% are to unmarried teens.*

*Rates of syphilis and gonorrhea are highest for adolescents and decrease exponentially with increasing age (Centers for Disease Control, 2000). Currently, an estimated 15% of adolescents have contracted an STD. Such rates are likely underestimated, because random urine analysis of asymptomatic adolescents has revealed that up to 12% have unknowingly contracted, then spread, a venereal disease (Braverman et al., 1996).*

**Semi-restrictive:** North American sexuality is best categorized as semi restrictive. In this culture, formal prohibition/legislation exist but are not typically enforced in the legal sense. Premarital pregnancy is not acceptable and forced marriage is the typical response. It is still not simple to obtain contraception at least not with parental approval. Virginity is a virtue but more for women than it is for men.

**Permissive:** The growth of sexual awareness and activity in a permissive society is described by anthropologists as continuous and begins typically in middle childhood (girls: 6 – 8; boys 10 – 12). Childhood sexual expression involves partner contact and masturbation is encouraged and approved by parents. Margaret Mead found that in Samoa this view of sexuality to be the norm. In some societies sexual play is not only accepted but encouraged. Some researchers have held that this gradual introduction to sexuality helps adolescents adjust more readily.

### **Society in Transition**

One of the fears for the Christian community is that the influence of a semi-restrictive or openly permissive society will affect their young people. Centuries ago the Apostle Paul had to address this problem in the city of Corinth which was known throughout the ancient world for its permissive views. Definitely in this kind of society Christian morality went counter culture. Helping students to understand the reasoning behind scriptural standards and then having them own those standards will help teens adhere to them rather than abandon them. Studies show that just because teens know that their parents disapprove does not stop teens from having sex.

## Sexuality and Spirituality

Sexual development poses new challenges to the growing adolescent. In childhood injunctions against lust, sexual impurity, and maintaining a holy thought life had little relevance. Now, along with sexual identity questions or concerns about the rate timing, and normality of their development, is the spiritual dimension associated with sexual dreams, fantasies, and arousal. Students may question, “If I am a Christian why am I fantasizing about sex?” Boys will have unwanted, spontaneous erections that are both embarrassing and confusing. (Some of these may even occur in an all male setting like a changing room.) Curiosity may get the better of girls who look for answers in teen magazines or novels and experience guilt and isolation unable to share the new thoughts and feelings they are experiencing with their parents teachers or pastors. Many Christian teens will suffer in secrecy and silence.

Considering the changes taking place in students’ bodies and the powerful influence of society then, youth ministries must be committed to helping students develop a healthy, godly sexuality. This involves breaking the awkward silence that surrounds masturbation. Strangely the subject is not mentioned in the scripture when almost all males will have masturbated at least once during their adolescence and many will masturbate regularly. James Dobson, Les Parrot III, and Keith Olson, all indicate that this has been a common counseling issue helping many young men and some women who suffer greatly because of their struggle to gain control of this habit. A posture of grace, love and affirming patient acceptance of young people who feel like failures in this area of their life is absolutely essential.

Developing a healthy sexuality means also that teens need to understand their own male and femaleness. Healthy role models in the family and the church need to be set for young people. Sexism must not be perpetuated in the church. Youth ministries should avoid cross dressing for skits, or encouraging the kind of play that imitates homosexual behavior. An atmosphere of openness to addressing gender issues should also be created. Teens who feel attracted to the same sex will feel that they will be misunderstood and immediately condemned by the church. The message they need to hear is that we want to help.

Healthy sexual attitudes also include understanding the rationale behind God’s prohibitions of sexual activity. Teens need to feel that God is not standing in the way of true love, or acting like a cosmic kill joy but is a loving Father who is trying to protect his children from diseases, hard ship and heart break. Then they need to truly believe that chastity is best and is the best preparation for marriage. Teens must own and value their personal sexual standards. Intellectual assent to parental, or church standards of sexual conduct will not keep students from giving in to temptation when the opportunity is arises.

## Sexuality and Ministry

Throughout this chapter a number of implications for ministry or suggestions for working with teens have been made. Here it would be good to summarize most of these and draw out a few more areas to consider when working with youth who are moving toward adult sexuality. The following are just three suggestions to reduce the risk of adolescent sexual activity.

### ***Communicate***

It is difficult to discuss sexuality in the context of the church but it must be done. Dr. David Elkind has shown in *The Hurried Child*, that kids know too much too soon, and too much for their own good. I had hoped that in our family we were going to have that special sex talk with our oldest daughter when she was about to enter grade

four. That moment was stolen by a boisterous seven year old girl in the school yard at recess during the first month of grade two. Parents may oppose sex education in the church or the school, but it is essential just to discuss the misinformation that little boys and girls are receiving from the play ground and the television set. Helping students understand the beauty and intimacy God intended in sexuality as opposed to the tendency to see it as something dirty is the responsibility of the Christian family and the church.;

Opening lines of communication early before teens retreat into a world of secrecy and silence is also important. Teens learn quickly the “right” answers to give in church but it is more difficult to find out what they really believe about sexual activity before marriage. Helping teens think through their own standards is essential. Expecting that teens will do what the Bible says, or what their Sunday school teacher has said is short sighted and dangerous. The balance includes restrictions and loving supportive trust. One way to describe the situation is freedom within limits

### ***Exert Positive Peer Influence:***

Of all the risk factors involving sexuality; the influence of friends, to drink, to date, and to have sex is probably the most powerful. Steinberg points out that

*“several studies show that sexual activity spreads within a community of adolescents much like an epidemic, with sexually experienced adolescents initiating their less experienced partners into increasingly more advanced sex. Once they become sexually experienced previously inexperienced adolescents then infect other adolescents in turn. Over time, then, the percentage of sexually experienced adolescents within a community grows and grows.” P. 361*

.As the scripture says, “Bad company corrupts good morals,” Conversely, if teens are part of a group of friends who have committed themselves to chastity, that fellowship offers excellent protection from giving in to temptation. Also, studies show that regular church attendance *does* make a difference. (Bibby, 2000) Youth ministries have a special role in the lives of teens to connect them with like minded youth who will not conform to typical sexual practices of their peers. Promoting friendships within the group and helping them along is essential. These teens also need to know that 50% of teens do *not* have sex during high school. Teens normally assume that over 80% of their school population is sexually active. The media promotes the myth that most teens are sexually active. Recent movies like “American Pie” and TV shows like Dawson’s Creek perpetuate the myth. Teens need to hear the truth that not everyone is “doing it!”

### ***Monitor Media***

Studies show that adolescents who watch a lot of sexually oriented television are themselves more likely to be sexually active. Enter MTV and the internet in the equation and you have a sexually charged adolescent. Taking no responsibility for the effects on young people the media continues to bombard teens with harmful sexual messages claiming that it is up to parents to monitor what their kids are watching and discuss its meaning. Media has also promoted homosexuality as an alternate but equal form of sexual expression. Homosexual characters are over represented on TV with “Will and Grace” this year, a show that much of the plot line revolves around two gay men, won the award for best situation comedy.

Parents and the church need to work together to help teens make better entertainments choices in the selection of movies, television shows, music and internet sites visited. Filters, blocked channels, movie reviews are helpful to a point, but teens must determine that they want to avoid damaging content. This does not

suddenly happen and seldom are the choices flawless. Helping students begin to develop a decidedly Christian world view from early adolescence is a prerequisite for making healthy choices in middle and late adolescence.

### ***Delay Steady Dating***

Nothing can be done to delay sexual development but sexual activity can be strongly discouraged by taking some steps that may remove some of the risk factors for adolescent sexuality.

Since studies show that those with a steady boyfriend are more likely to engage in sex. (A recent Canadian study shows that although only 20 percent of teens think “sex on the first date is ok”, this figure rises to almost 40 percent after “just a few dates” and 80 percent of Canadian teens approve of sex “if you love each other.” And since teens who have sex under sixteen experience much more difficulties than those over sixteen, it would be advisable to delay steady dating until at least that age. This needs to be agreed upon and enforced by both the parent and the child. Teens need to be convinced of the value of this rule if they are going to obey it. Group dating and opposite sex friends will help the teen develop social confidence but restrict the possibility of sexual activity.

### ***Limit Unsupervised Time***

In the past, most teens claimed that their first experience with sex was in a car or in a secluded area. Now it would seem that “sex begins in the home,” with most teens reporting losing their virginity in their own bedroom or family room. Teens are often unsupervised from 3 pm to 6 pm each day especially if both parents commute. Although the law allows twelve year olds to be home alone after school, this is not wise. The age of first sexual encounter is dropping in North America. More and more 12-14 year olds are involved in heavy petting and sexual intercourse. Although early teens cannot be monitored constantly, extended periods of time at home alone without parents, after school, or on weekends with parents going away are not healthy.

Youth ministries would do well to initiate after school programs, sports, or drop in centres to create safe supervised alternatives. Parents should invest in after school care if possible or rearrange work schedules by starting early and returning home early. Strict guidelines should be enforced for after school guests in the home, or going over to a friends house after school. The tension will be that teens will be angry if this communicates lack of trust.

## **Conclusion**

The physical development experienced in puberty confronts the early adolescent with the responsibility to understand their own sexuality. Family and friends, even the community, can observe the physical and social changes associated with this emerging sexuality. As we have seen youth often lack the cognitive, moral development to make wise choices concerning sex. They are also sometimes confused by the messages of their peers and the media concerning gender stereotypes and alternative lifestyles. Some teens are at greatest risk than others and there are many factors involved. Each of these factors must be taken into consideration if teens are going to wait until marriage to have sex. Parents, teachers and youth workers all need to be part of the solution working together to guide and protect teens in a semi-restrictive and sometimes even permissive society.



# Part Two –Cognitive and Social Development

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## Chapter 3 Cognitive Development

### Introduction

The most obvious external evidence of adolescence is physical development, but the growing cognitive abilities of teens become readily apparent over time. Teens don't just know more than children, they think differently organizing evaluating and processing thought in new ways. In this chapter we will examine how thinking changes during adolescence, what theories have been developed to explain these changes and how these changes affect teaching and relating to teens.

### Changes in Thinking

It is not that adolescents think more deeply, more quickly or more accurately that separates them from children. Adolescents can process possibilities, deal with abstract concepts, analyze their own thought processes, see multi-dimensions to situations, and can think in relative instead of exclusively absolute terms. Let's look more closely at these five aspects of adolescent condition.

### Possible

Children have difficulty with if-then kind of thinking. Hypothetical situations, case studies, and possible outcomes can be understood by adolescents more and more they approach adulthood. Children need concrete examples where older teens will be able to think along the lines of what could be, rather than what is. This is easily related to adolescent idealism. As students mature they can see not only how the world is, but they can begin to picture the world as it could be. Developing this new gift, adolescents may appear critical and rebellious. Relationally adolescents will hold high standards for parents and teachers, sometimes unrealistic ideals that cannot be achieved.

### Abstract

Although children can deal with symbols like letters, word and numbers that represent things in the real world, this capacity is greatly enlarged as they begin to deal with concepts and relationship between ideas. Normally students are introduced

to algebra that requires this high level of conceptualization. Other subjects, philosophy, religion, morality, politics and relationships are interesting to students who can now manipulate ideas the way they could move blocks when they were infants.

## Reflective

Adolescents can think about thinking. This process is called meta cognition, it allows the thinker to look at their own thought processes. This is a big step in development because now they are able to analyze strategies that they use to solve problems. They are able to look at themselves from the outside. This has interesting results psychologically.

One of the classic stereotypes of youth is the vanity, ego centrism and preoccupation with self. This is understandable since the ability to see themselves is totally new. Whereas young children can look in a mirror and recognize their reflection, make faces and are fascinated by themselves, adolescents can do this without a mirror. They are able to consider who they are as a person and imagine what others think of them. David Elkind (author of *all grown up and no place to go*) has coined two main phrases that describe important aspects of this new ability to see themselves.

**The Personal Fable** –To some extent we all see ourselves as somewhat unique. Elkind points out that with youth there is the belief that they are so unique that what happens to others will not happen to them. This may explain in part some of the risk taking behaviors associated with youth. Also, this preoccupation with self poses a challenge to ministry that calls teens to be concerned about other.

**The Imaginary Audience** –is Elkind’s explanation for the extreme self consciousness associated with early adolescence. Teens sometime feel that they are constantly being watched. This can be exhibited as pride or shyness which are both over exaggerations of how much others are thinking about them.. If the student is constantly performing to this audience students choices and actions are influenced greatly. This has definite implications for behaviour management of teen in school or at the church.

## Multidimensional-

In a Star Trek Movie, the Wrath of Kahn, a sinister villain is out maneuvered because he moves his space ship in only two dimensions. He fails to think of moving the ship up or down . This concept was appropriate for the teen audience who now have the capacity to think in three dimensions, to see problems with more than one solution, and see shades of meaning. Television shows like South Park, or the Simpsons that make use of innuendo, sarcasm, and satire are such favorites with youth because they produce humor that they can “get” while their younger brothers and sisters miss.

## Relative

Christian educators have shown alarm that “youth do not believe in absolute truth.” Fearing that youth have bought in wholesale to the post modern moral relativism, books have been published that help teens make moral choices. Part of the reason that teens may see morality as relative is the new capacity to see shades of meaning. Rather than lock into a definite response. “Maybe” works better with teens. Fewer issues are seen as black or white. This is due in part to the capacity to see the multi-dimensions of an issue or to imagine possible reasons for people’s actions. When asked the question about a moral issue, such as abortion, students may respond that it

depends on how the person became pregnant. (84% approve of abortion if the woman was raped and 55% of teens approve of abortion for any reason in Canada – Bibby 2000)

## Why the Changes?

The changes in cognition have a biological and social component. Theories have been developed to explain how teenagers think and why it is different from childhood. The two main theories to be considered before looking at the biological basis for cognitive development are the cognitive development view proposed by Piaget and the Information Processing View.

## Piaget's View

Although Piaget theorized that cognitive development can be used to explain adolescent behaviour overall, the core of this theory is that cognitive development moves forward in a stage or step like fashion. The four stages proposed are sensorimotor (0-2 years) preoperational (2-7 years) concrete operations (7-11 years) and formal operations (11 and up) (By operations –mental actions that allow the individual to do mentally what was done before physically)

In adolescence, I explained, that students think more abstractly and idealistically, but Piaget also observed that they think more logically using hypothetical deductive reasoning rather than the trial and error approach used by children. In formal operations the teen will develop a “best guess” or *hypothesis* to solve a problem then they systematically *deduce* the best way to solve the problem.

One of the problems with Piaget's theory is that there are huge variations of the timing and the extend to which adolescents use formal operational thinking. A review of formal operational thought investigations revealed that only one of three grade eight students is a formal operational thinker and that many college student ( as few as 17% of college students were using formal operational thought consistently!) Santrock 2002.

## Information Processing

The huge variations and individual differences observed in the cognitive development view has caused researchers to look at the various processes included in cognition separately. The basic components of cognition are attention, working memory, processing speed, organization, and meta cognition(thinking about thinking). After childhood the early adolescent begins to develop better strategies for managing information and storing it. Specifically students are more able to use selective and divided attention and develop a greater capacity for working and long term memory. They process information faster and more efficiently organizing the information and understanding these thinking processes better.

## Biological Basis for Change

It may be valuable to understand what is happening developmentally to the early adolescents brain to determine “what is going on in their head.” Physiologically the brain goes through a process of change during adolescence that involves changes to synapses, neurotransmitters, and the prefrontal cortex. Certain synapses in the prefrontal cortex seem to be shut down limiting the amount of connections and possible increasing the efficiency of thought. This happens through a process of

myelination where a sheath that grows around nerves to insulate them. The significance of this is that it takes place in the prefrontal cortex, the area of the brain that controls planning, decision making and reflective thought. Levels of dopamine and serotonin change at this time resulting in a change in emotional behaviour.

## Cognition and Interaction

Santrock points out three main ways that the emerging thinking affects the youth socially. These are: Thinking about people, social relationships, and social institutions. More specifically Santrock focuses on the areas of social cognition, he addresses impression formation, social perspective taking and concepts of morality or social conventions

## Forming Impressions

Now that adolescents can see themselves in respect to others they are able to consider others personalities. In general, the impressions youth form are the basis of an *implicit personality theory*, which is the theory that we develop to explain why people are the way they are. Children do form impressions but not at the level of complexity of adolescents. Characteristically, teens impressions are more differentiated and detailed, less egocentric, more abstract, more dependent on the use of inference and more highly organized.

Impression formation has serious implications for working with youth. Not all of their assessments are accurate when forming impressions of others. Faulty personality theories can cause them to form overly positive or negative assessments of teachers, peers, or youth leaders. Youth for Christ is credited with the phrase “Earn the right to be heard” this is so very true as teens begin to evaluate personalities. It also underscores the importance of authenticity. Teens despise hypocrisy and may be very quick to use that label when leaders do not fit the personality profile a teen believes fits a “Christian.”

## Taking Perspectives

Parents can be frustrated asking children in a dispute to see their adversaries point of view. In adolescence the ability to see things from another perspective begins to emerge slowly. A mid way point toward truly taking the perspective of another involves mutual role taking where teens take an objective stance as a third party. This growing capacity will be necessary in adulthood to truly empathize with others or to understand differing view points.

One of the challenges of ministry in affluent north America is to help students develop compassion for less fortunate people on the planet. Youth ministers have found that talking about the need and showing pictures is not as effective as bringing student to a country and allowing them to live among people who are less fortunate. Ultimately the goal is the students would be able to see things from another perspective without having to make a trip but developmentally this will take place toward the adolescent transition period.

## Conforming to Conventions

For the first time in his or her life, the adolescent can reflect upon society. As children they saw society as governed by rules set by authorities. Now these social conventions are seen as, expectations to conform to social norms placed upon people

by society. Although most adolescents conform to social norms by and large, there is always an element of non conformity that attracts youth.

To some degree adolescents agree with the bumper sticker that says “Question authority” Higher order thinking allows them to question “Why?” A typical question from Christian teens is “If God is everywhere why do I have to go to church?” Other teens may question rules like the drinking age, mandatory seat belt laws, or parents view on premarital sex.

## **Implications for Ministry**

The connections between intellect and ministry are not as simple as expecting that teens will understand more. Cognitive development translates into challenges at home, among friends and at the church. Ministry must be concerned with all areas of a students life and not just what happens at church.

## **Challenges at Home.**

“Because I said so!” was never a great response to the question “why?” but has been consistently favorite in a battle of wits at the kitchen table. With their burgeoning cognitive prowess teens will take every opportunity to use it, sometimes just for the sake of exercising their intellect. Parents normally gush when their babies take their first steps. They do not normally gush when there adolescent sons or daughters take their first steps into logical argumentation.

Families need to encourage young people to develop reasoning. This may mean becoming more democratic as a family. It definitely means more listening, hearing the feelings as well as the content from teens. Parents don’t need to feel that they have to give in to teens all the time though. As much as teens feel intellectually superior to their parents, they lack the wisdom that comes with life experience. Parents should not assume that early adolescents will be able to understand or appreciate all rules. Helping them to believe in and value the rules of the house through dialogue (not only when a rule has been broken!) is a must.

Helping early adolescents make good choices will continue to require parental involvement. Teens may not be able to apply principles from one situation to another all of the time and may need concrete examples. Another way that parents can help, suggests Keith Olson, is they can provide positive alternatives for teens to choose from.

## **Challenges with Friends**

New found abilities to think deeply about relationships, and about ones own role in a group occupy the early adolescent’s mind. The Imaginary audience will play a role in their social behavior. Acting for the crowd that they believe is so concerned about what they wear, what they do and who they hang out with affects every relationship. Teens can be mystified with the behavior of their friends when it does not fit nicely into their implicit personality theory.

For some teens the pressure of the imaginary audience can be overwhelming. For some youth withdrawal is how they cope. This behavior is further reinforced when they are shunned by their peers.

## **Challenges at Church**

In grade seven I became a devout evolutionist. I remember participating in ridiculing two Jehovah's witness girls who were doing a presentation on creation in our class. My devotion to science and evolution at that age caused me to doubt the existence of God. In my adolescent mind I hypothesized that since my parents had lied to me about the Easter Bunny and Santa Clause likely they were also lying about Jesus Christ. At the same time I was enrolled in confirmation classes and would weekly try to stump the minister with questions about God's goodness, God's inability to stop evil in the world, and the hypocrisy in the members of our own congregation. I was so naïve yet thought myself so intellectually sophisticated.

The church has never excelled at integrating faith and reason. The catechism that I was confronted with in the confirmation class required the memorization of the commandments and no critical thinking. There was no real dialogue, or not enough for my liking. I went through the motions hoping there was a God and hoping to appease him by performing the ritual.

How do we respond when some teens give no thought to matters of faith while others are grappling for the first time with these concepts. Here are a few suggestions.

### ***Discipleship***

Since there is such great individual cognitive differences, mentoring or very small groups are needed to find out just what is getting through to adolescents. The idea that a large program with a lot of noise will nurture teens is near sighted. The large group may meet some social needs but falls far short of the cognitive needs of teens. Relational ministry that uses mentors or sponsor spending significant times with teens each week are more effective in transmitting faith to teen (Senter and Dunn 1997)

### ***Discussion***

To determine what teens are thinking and what they are learning, discussion is essential. Creative ways to get youth talking are part of the stock and trade of the effective youth worker. Youth specialties has produced books called tension getters that create a paradox for students to resolve. This kind of approach that involves teens in the learning process is may be more time consuming than preaching but in the long term it makes a greater difference.

### ***Discernment***

Teach teens to think critically. Formal operations allows students to begin to weigh two sides to an issue. In one junior high class I had the students debate the question, "While Jesus was with us on earth was he more God or more Man" –For some students this debate was huge stretch while for others it was stimulating. In general the school system and church does not demand or encourage critical thinking but they should. The same critical skills that will help them forge their faith will help defend it and protect it later on.

### ***Devotions***

Somewhere in my spiritual journey I discovered Christian literature (grade nine) My faith was bolstered by reading C.S. Lewis, A .W. Tozer, and Hudson Taylor. Most importantly though, I rediscovered the Bible. Teens normally find the Bible boring, irrelevant, and confusing. Fortunately new easy to read versions are available along with Teen Bibles that help students make the connection between the ancient words and contemporary pop culture. Youth ministries that expect little from the youth and

do little in the way of equipping adolescents to read for themselves rob their minds. It is much more time consuming to help teens learn to do inductive Bible studies but the fruit is worth it. By giving them the skills to understand the Bible teens are not just being fed, they are learning to feed themselves.

### ***Discovery Learning***

Santrock points out that there is a gap between *competence and performance*. In other words, students were able to use formal operations on questions that were relevant to them but were not able to on questions that seemed to have no bearing on their every day life. When students are involved in the learning process and the chapters are tailored to the students in the class students learn. Great effort should be expended on making the connection between the Biblical truth and the day to day experience of teens. Larry Richards, in *Creative Bible Teaching* has developed a simple approach that connects with four different types of learners. The stages in the lesson, HOOK, BOOK, LOOK, AND TOOK , take very seriously the need to have students discover truths in the bible and apply them to their lives. Most good curriculum has elements of this kind of approach.

### **Conclusion**

With the arrival of new cognitive abilities adolescents think more deeply and broadly about rules, religion and relationships. The newly formed awareness of themselves tends to make them seem egotistical or self centered as they perform for an unseen audience. The new ability to reason may cause them to seem argumentative, even rebellious. They may no longer accept at face value the social conventions posed by society and because of developing a personal fable about their uniqueness they may feel they are above the law. At the same time the teenager is capable of abstract thought and sometimes wonderful creative idealism. This change poses challenges to friendship, the home and the church but all are necessary for proper development.

### **Reflection Questions**

- In about one page describe the physical changes that take place in the brain during adolescence and how these affect teenage thinking patterns.
- Describe the changes in thinking ability that emerge during adolescence .
- Explain why adolescents are more capable of creating and managing their own thoughts than are children
- Ashleigh, age 14, has begun to write a journal about growing up in Ireland. In her journal she describes her experiences as one-of-a-kind and very special. She declares that nobody else in the country could possibly have had such experiences before. When Ashleigh is with her family and friends she feels that she is constantly “on stage” and is sure that everyone can see her every flaw. Ashleigh’s parents are concerned that their daughter is abnormal. According to David Elkind, what explains Ashleigh’s behavior? Should her parents be concerned?
- How are the cognitive and information processing views the same? In what ways do they differ?

- What are the physical changes in the brain that are thought to affect cognitive ability?
- In the study guide we examined challenges at church. Discuss effective ways churches can respond to the cognitive needs of youth.
- A parent is frustrated with arguing with their teen. What would you say to help that parent?

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# Chapter Four – Identity and Social Development

## Introduction

With the new ability to think about thinking and to reflect on their own thoughts, the adolescent is now able to see their role in relationships and consider what others may think about them. Socially they are much more concerned about the opinion of their peers and now, maybe more than ever they are considering how they are evaluated by the opposite gender. Questions like, “Who am I? Or Who likes me? Become essential. Youth will experiment with different roles and evaluate the effect these have in their social hemisphere. In this chapter we will consider some of the dynamics of these changes and the implications this will have for those who teach, mentor, and minister to teens.

## Roles and Status

Globally as children transition to adulthood their role and status in the community change. In some societies that enforce strict rites of passage this transition is clear and pronounced. Among some indigenous North American peoples young men will pursue a vision quest. In the Côte D’ Ivoire, young men will be separated from their people for a time and learn a secret language as part of the initiation rites into adulthood. In many societies adolescence is not recognized at all. Today you are a girl and tomorrow, after the initiation rites, you are a woman.

For some theorists, adolescence is therefore a social invention. In most western cultures this social redefinition has meant imposing a certain age of majority where the adolescent is viewed as an adult. This may vary from State to State, province to province, or country to country. Ages are imposed legal drinking, voting, or driving age. These may not even occur at the same time. As the lines become obscured so do the roles of and status of young people.

In *All Grown Up and No Place to Go*, David Elkind explains that this blurring of boundaries creates stress in the lives of young people. While on the one hand they are thrust into quasi adult roles with sophisticated knowledge of their world, they continue to have the status of teenagers. The results range from poor social adjustment, early pregnancy, or school drop out to severe chronic depression. Studies also show that those at greatest risk are from impoverished neighborhoods without the presence of successful role models. Don Posterski, author of *Teen Trends*, worries that with prolonging the education process, North Americans have lengthened adolescence into the late twenties. His studies show the values and interests of 25 year olds are almost identical to 15 year olds. One visible indication of this is found in the video arcades. No longer are they the exclusive domain of the teenage 13-19 year male but are also populated by men in their 20’s! Also recent studies estimate that 45% of Canadian men age 25 are still living at home.

Incorporating some ways that other societies have marked the transition into adulthood may be helpful for our culture. The key seems to be a clearer social redefinition. In general, social redefinition involves three processes. The first is a real or symbolic separation of the young person from his or her parents. The second is a heightening of the physical and social differences between males and females, and the third is the passing on of cultural, historical and practical information. To what extent do you find these processes present in your culture? To some degree they are evident in North America. Separation from parents and adherence to the peer group is one of the fundamental aspects of growing up in Canada and the USA. Clothing, marketing and movies accentuate the differences between male and female

adolescents to a fault. The transmission of cultural, historical, and practical information is left to the media, and the educational system.

In a satire of rites of passage MTV produced an advertisement that depicted an African American girl's initiation to adulthood. "Today you become a woman" her parents explain, "You are getting your own TV. Not just any TV –MTV!" While obtaining one's drivers license, acceptance to university or college, or getting one first car may be milestones in the life of a young adult most of the markers in our society have been removed or obscured. It may be interesting to incorporate or create meaningful markers, or initiation rites for contemporary cultures. Bar Mitzvah, Bat Mitzvah, and confirmation are examples of religious ways to mark milestones on the way to adulthood.

## **Clarity and Continuity**

Across cultures the role of the teenager varies greatly in clarity. When does this stage of life begin? When does it end? Where do they fit in the social order? You may have had a clearer picture of this before this book began than you now have when you take into consideration the physical, cognitive and social development of teens! This is not a new problem arising from the 50's. Over 100 years ago it was even less clear where young people placed in society.

Another variance in cultures is with regards to the continuity of the process of development. Where the passage is seen as continuous the adolescent develops adult roles bit by bit and is trained for the new status and responsibility that adult brings. This is more characteristic of traditional cultures while contemporary cultures is more discontinuous with the sudden expectation that teens adopt adult roles with little or no preparation. In the past society did more to prepare youth for adult roles, tending the farm, being a home maker whereas today teens are expected to make adult choices at earlier and earlier ages with choices about sexuality and vocation especially.

## **Social Transitions and the Church**

Entering the church one Sunday I saw an elder rudely demand that two young adults carry a black board down some stairs. The two young professionals (one a recent grad from a dentistry program and the other an interning physio therapist) ended their conversation and complied. Socially, it was obvious that these young men were not considered adults. This attitude was prevalent in my church.

Churches communicate their opinion of the role and status of young people by the privileges and the responsibilities they extend. Offering meaningful involvement, as well as accepting youth and young adults contribution in worship is essential to communicating respect. The recent trend to develop youth churches, or separate services for younger people skirts this issue.

Churches can affirm young people in stages in their life through baptism, membership, graduation ceremonies, and the like to create important milestones in the life of the young person in the context of the life of the community. If these events are also met with greater responsibility and privilege the young person will feel more accepted and affirmed.

## **Identity and Self-Conceptions**

In this chapter so far we have examined how society views the young person and what impact that has on development. When it comes to identity, the issue is what the individual thinks of him or herself. While identity development is an issue

throughout life adolescents has usually been considered the most important stage in the process. For the first time the young person is able to conceive of “self” and begin to take a third person view of their life. Self conceptions become more abstract, more differentiated, and better organized in adolescence. At this stage adolescents are able distinguish between their actual and their imagined selves and between their authentic and false selves. In general teens are more genuine around their friends and more false in romantic situations.

## Identity and Self Esteem

Research shows that during adolescence the individual will experience the lowest levels of self esteem, highest levels of self consciousness and the weakest image stability. Santrock points out that it is very important to distinguish between barometric self esteem (which fluctuates based on circumstances) and base line self esteem (which is more consistent over time.) Studies indicate that students with poor self esteem are at greatest risk of early pregnancy, promiscuity, substance abuse, and dropping out of school.

Developing a positive self concept is crucial for the young person and helping them to move in this direction is a critical responsibility of those who work with them. Simple guidelines like; never criticizing a student publicly or teasing them about their physical appearance is just a start. Creating a positive supportive community among peers and parents is a strong foundation for a healthy self concept for youth. James Dobson encourages parents to help their child find one thing that they can be very good at as an anchor for self esteem. Youth groups need to have rules that protect every students’ self esteem and reject activities that make students feel like losers. Teasing and bullying must be dealt with immediately and sensitively. Some groups take a strong stand against the physical evaluations of girls and boys as potential dates. Creating a non dating atmosphere, i.e. all events are non dating events and physical displays of affection are inappropriate, is also standard for many youth groups. This is because the dating caste system can be incredibly cruel and destructive to a teens self esteem.

## Identity vs. Identity Diffusion

An especially important perspective on the development of a sense of identity comes from the work of Eric Erikson who believes that individuals move through a series of eight psychosocial crises throughout the life cycle, and that each builds upon the previous one. Positive resolution of this conflict results in a healthy self concepts. Failure to resolve the conflict of negative resolution can result in unhealthy self concept or maladjustment to life. Elkind underscores the importance of this:

*“By encouraging teenagers to choose growth by substitution and the development of a patchwork self, contemporary society has rendered teenagers more vulnerable to stress and denied them the full development of their personality and character” (p. 17) David Elkind all grown up and no place to grow.*

As we continue with this chapter and as you read from the text book consider these questions:

- How do we help Adolescents develop and integrated self concept?
- In what ways are we contributing to the push to have teens grow by substitution?

First lets deal with some of the terminology:

By adjustment Erikson means -experimentation with different roles resulting in a new sense of self. Maladjustment then would be the - withdrawal from peers and family or loss of identity in the crowd Experimentation is necessary as a deliberate exploration of conflicting roles, attitudes, patterns of behavior -to find out where they fit in the world.

## **Stages of Identity Formation**

Two fundamental concepts in Erikson's theory are Crisis and Commitment What is meant by crisis is choosing from among meaningful alternatives (exploration is another term of this) By Commitment, Erikson means that there is a -a personal investment in what they are going to do. The other possibilities are not as healthy. The young person experiencing Diffusion has not yet experienced a crisis has made no commitments. (Keith Olson says -chronic identity diffusion results in -problems with intimacy, time, and industry -problems with concentration. This young person will develop a negative identity, or withdrawal --Counseling Teenagers).

Foreclosure is another negative adjustment to the this stage. The student experiencing foreclosure has: prematurely locked into commitments without crisis. Moratorium is another possibility. This individual is in the midst of crisis but no solid commitments have been made. The individual experiencing Achievement has successful resolution of a crisis arriving ;at a commitment. Those who have successfully negotiated this crisis have an integrated sense of self. Those who are diffused have what Elkind calls a Patchwork Self.

## **Patchwork Self**

Those who have a well integrated self concept are the same person in separate situations. We differentiate between a wide variety of social circumstances to develop an understanding of who we are. We develop a well integrated sense of self. (eg people who can not be broken in the concentration camps) These people are internally motivated , are self directed and able to postpone immediate gratification to achieve long range goals. Conversely, those with a Patchwork Self: have no clear definition of self, are easily swayed and influenced by others, more vulnerable to stress, because they have not developed an inner core of consistency and stability that allows them to deal with new situations in terms of past experiences. Those with a patchwork self, are less able to postpone immediate gratification, they are present oriented and other directed-- easily influenced by others.

This may explain why it seems students compartmentalize their faith. Some parents have complained about schizophrenic behaviour in their teenage children because of the Jekyll and Hyde behavior exhibited at home and church. By adding on faith to everything else in their personality rather than fully integrating faith in the core of their identity, Jesus Christ becomes just one more fragment of the loosely connected patches on the quilt. Teens summon up Christian responses when it seems appropriate or beneficial for the context and can easily ignore the aspect of their life with no cognitive dissonance. Contradictory behaviour results in little guilt because there is no integrated identity to contradict.

## **Gender and Ethnicity**

Two important aspects of identity development are gender development and ethnic identity development. As mentioned earlier in the this book, gender development is largely a function of social expectations of traits that are traditionally accepted as

male of female. More than ever students today have questions concerning their gender and sexual identity. No longer is it automatically assumed that because one is born female she will date males. Helping teens develop a positive identity with regards to maleness and femaleness is essential. Those who work directly with teens and not just those who are professional counselors should expect to be faced with questions along these lines from young people.

Ethnic youth, second generation immigrants, and recent immigrants face particular problems that challenge the process of adjustment. Some of the options available to them through this crisis are assimilation, marginality, biculturalism, or separation. Santrock points out that students who are able to select between the norms of their family culture and society based on the situation are better adjusted. While ethnic teens who are not faced with a language barrier often find close friends from other ethnic backgrounds, when it comes to adulthood and marriage they more often choose companionship from their own ethnic group.

The church has a role to play both in the healthy development of sexual identity and ethnicity. Rather than obscuring gender roles the church can help young men and women appreciate the uniqueness of their gender and develop respect for the other gender. Paul instructs Timothy, "Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters with absolute purity." 1Tim 5:1 This flies in the face of the hedonistic MTV philosophy, and rightly so. Where society would reduce men, and more so women, to sexual objects whose esteem is based mostly on their sex appeal the church has the opportunity to challenge this warped perspective.

While racism continues to threaten society, the youth group has the unique position of being able to embrace ethnic diversity and celebrate various cultures. Each individual should feel affirmed in their cultural heritage. This should be especially true in North America where we are only a few generations removed from being immigrants ourselves.

## **Identity and the Faith Community**

For the Christian, our identity is found in Christ. Interestingly Erikson points out the need for crisis and commitment that is often part of Christian experience. The Christian young person may not be able to delineate all of the ramifications of identifying with Christ or have developed a fully Christian worldview but they have the opportunity to build an identity on a solid foundation. Later we will discuss the dynamics of faith development but for now it is important to consider what commitment to Christ can do for a young person's identity.

First, identity is not developed in isolation. The Christian community becomes a frame of reference for a young person. As a young person it was clear to me that even before being a male, a Canadian, a Montrealer, and a boy scout, I was a Christian. For me that was a conscious decision. For those who faced neither crisis or commitment this kind of statement would have little meaning. Much of youth work today involves seeing teens move from intellectual assent with Christian doctrine to authentic commitment. In essence it means trading in the patch work for the whole new sheet.

The second area that the faith community helps develop a positive identity in youth is with respect to self esteem. In Christ my life has significance and meaning. My value does not come from my grade point, my income, or my waist size. I am ultimately valuable because of the ultimate price that was paid for my salvation. To the young person looking into a mirror this is a nice fairy tale but has no bearing on the real world though.

I once counseled a lonely 15 year old teen, who was in anguish because she had never been on a date. “But Jesus loves you” I told her. “Who cares, she cried, “I want a real boyfriend!” For those teens, particularly the older ones who are able to find their identity in Christ and consolation through the Holy Spirit there is a great sense of wholeness that is a defense against the cruelty of youth culture.

Another defense beside individual faith is the positive peer group who has also committed to a Christ and a godly lifestyle. A loving supportive group is a wonderful buffer against the constant assault of demeaning and demoralizing advertisements scientifically structured to make teens desperate for their products and services. It is also a buffer against the high school caste system that creates so few winners and so many casualties. How devastatingly sad it is when the youth group is a carbon copy of the school yard and perpetuates rather than confronts the sick value system that shreds the self esteem of most teens. Youth groups must first and foremost be loving accepting groups where everyone matters.

## **Conclusion**

How teens are viewed and how they view themselves sometimes come in conflict. In some ways they are thrust into adult roles and while on the other they are not considered adults. Much of societal values and pressures put teens at risk. Fortunately most teens survive the pilgrimage through adolescents adapting fairly well to the new social proscribed roles and responsibilities. Others who have suffered identity diffusion will go on through life looking for the pieces of a fragmented self . Youth workers, teachers and parents can take a supportive role in this processes, always affirming young people and bolstering their self esteem against the ravages of pop culture.

# Part Three Moral/ Faith Development

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## Chapter Five- Moral/ Faith Development

### Introduction

Piaget's theory of cognitive development has prompted researchers to examine the process by which moral reasoning develops. The assumption, from a scientific point of view, is that as the mental capacity to think about situations increases so does the capacity to judge the moral implications of each situation. This however does not take into consideration the spiritual dimension of morality brought about by conversion and nurtured by the Holy Spirit.

In this chapter we will first deal with the standard psychological approach to moral reasoning and then progress to the subject of faith development. Finally we will explore ways in which the home and church can play a fundamental role in nurturing faith and helping teens establish a biblical morality.

### Moral Development (Lawrence Kohlberg)

To determine the level of moral reasoning used by an individual, Lawrence Kohlberg had research subjects respond to various stories that contained hypothetical moral dilemmas. Kohlberg was not as concerned with the conclusions the subject arrived at as the reasoning that got them there. Here is one of his most famous dilemmas. Read it carefully and write down your response on a separate piece of paper before you proceed.

*A woman was near death from a unique kind of cancer. There is a drug that might save her. The drug costs \$4,000 per dosage. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money and tried every legal means, but he could only get together about \$2,000. He asked the doctor scientist who discovered the drug for a discount or let him pay later. But the doctor scientist refused.*

*Should Heinz break into the laboratory to steal the drug for his wife? Why or why not?*

From the different responses Kohlberg was able to categorize them into stage of moral reasoning. Younger children are normally found in stages one and two, adolescents in stages three and four, and adults in stages 5 and 6. According to Kohlberg very few adults operate consistently at level six.

The following is a brief overview of the various stages with examples of the reasoning involved. Pay particular attention to levels three and four. Consider how this may explain some of the attitudes and actions of adolescents.

## **Pre- Conventional Reasoning**

At this stage there is no internal motivation. The child is motivated by external rewards and punishments.

### ***Stage 1: Punishment and Obedience Orientation***

Fear of punishment These children obey only because they were told to. The concern is for self is paramount "Will I get into trouble for doing (or not doing) it?" Good behaviour is associated with avoiding punishment.

Possible Stage 1 responses to Heinz Dilemma:

Heinz should not steal the drug because he might be caught and sent to jail.

Heinz should steal the drug because if he doesn't then his wife might scold him.

### ***Stage 2: Individualism and Purpose***

Rewards and self interest The child tries to determine if it is in their best interest to obey. There is evidence of some internal motivation -but the standards are those of others not values that the child owns personally. The concern is "What's in it for me?" Still egocentric in outlook but with a growing ability to see things from another person's perspective, the action is judged right if it helps in satisfying one's needs or involves a fair exchange.

Possible Stage 2 responses to Heinz Dilemma:

It is right for Heinz to steal the drug because it can cure his wife and then she can cook for him.

The doctor scientist had spent lots of money and many years of his life to develop the cure so it's not fair to him if Heinz stole the drug.

## **Conventional Reasoning**

### ***Stage 3: Interpersonal Norms***

Trust, caring, and loyalty. Adolescents at this stage continue to consider parents values "good boy/girl" The concern is "What will people think of me?" and the desire is for group approval. Right action is one that would please or impress others. This often involves self-sacrifice but it provides the psychological pleasure of 'approval of others.' Actions are also judged in relation to their intention.

For the young person then, morality can be very situational. Telling a lie is not wrong if the outcome is favorable.

Possible Stage 3 responses to Heinz Dilemma:

Yes, Heinz should steal the drug. He probably will go to jail for a short time for stealing but his in-laws will think he is a good husband.

### ***Stage 4: Social Systems Morality***

Law, order, justice, and duty motivate the individual at this stage. Ability to see beyond oneself in late adolescence allows the individual to see the situation from a societal position. They obey because the law protects community. "I will stop at a red light because traffic lights maintain order and safety. The concern now goes beyond one's immediate group(s) to the larger society ... to the maintenance of law and order. One's obligation to the law overrides one's obligations of loyalty to one's family, friends and groups. To put it simply, no one or group is above the law. An example of Stage 4 reasoning in a school setting would be a prefect who found his best friend who is also the head prefect breaking a school rule. The prefect said he was sorry that he had to book him (his best friend) as he could not make any exceptions. The law is the same for everybody.

At this stage the late adolescent has begun to develop a personal moral code, that is becoming completely internalized. The value system of parents may be adopted or discarded but the end result is that the individual owns the value system at the end of the process.

This can be a frightening time for parents who have brought their children up and promoted certain values that the young person rejects. The process of rejection is often necessary for the young man or woman to develop a person sense of morality.

Possible Stage 4 responses to Heinz Dilemma:

As her husband, Heinz has a duty to save his wife's life so he should steal the drug. But it's wrong to steal, so Heinz should be prepared to accept the penalty for breaking the law.

## **Post Conventional Reasoning**

### ***Stage 5: Community Rights vs. Individual Rights***

Those who operate with post conventional reasoning recognize that laws are relative and laws can be changed. For them, the concern is social utility or public interest. While rules are needed to maintain social order, they should not be blindly obeyed but should be set up (even changed) by social contract for the greater good of society. Right action is one that protects the rights of the individual according to rules agreed upon by the whole society.

The Civil Rights movement whose greatest proponent was an African American scholar and clergyman Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Junior recognized that the unfair treatment of African Americans was immoral even though law supported it. Nelson Mandela opposed apartheid even though it was the law. Early Christians would not offer incense to Caesar because they subscribed to a higher moral law.

Possible Stage 5 responses to Heinz Dilemma:

Heinz should steal the drug because everyone has the right to life regardless of the law against stealing. Should Heinz be caught and prosecuted for stealing then the law (against stealing) needs to be reinterpreted because a person's life is at stake.

### ***Stage 6: Universal Ethical Principles***

Standard based on universal human rights-law vs. conscience. The concern is for moral principles an action is judged right if it is consistent with self-chosen ethical principles. These principles are not concrete moral rules but are universal principles of justice, reciprocity, equality and human dignity.

Possible Stage 6 response to Heinz Dilemma: Heinz should steal the drug to save his wife because preserving human life is a higher moral obligation than preserving property.

## **Kohlberg Reconsidered**

Kohlberg's theory has come under fire from a few different directions. Gilligan, has pointed out that there may be a male bias to the questions and to the process of determining moral reasoning. (Gilligan, 1979) The concept of justice pervades Kohlberg's dilemmas and does not adequately address concern, compassion and caring. Studies have also shown that morality varies across cultures and there is a socio cultural bias to the scale. The scale focuses on reasoning based on issues that are often unrelated to lives of children and adolescents. The concerns for teens are loyalty, faithfulness, and interpersonal relationships. Finally, Kohlberg is concerned with moral *reasoning* not moral *behavior*. The gap between moral thinking and moral action is often very broad. Quite often young people will contradict what they know is right. Morality become situational and pragmatic.

## **Moral Behavior**

The area of morality is crucial for those who work with youth. The discrepancy between faith and action reflects very poorly on the Christian community. Jesus poses the question "Why do you call me Lord, Lord and not do what I say?" Part of the reason may be that, as we have seen, young people may have a poorly integrated self concept and forget their Christian morality in many situations. The other reason may be the level of moral reasoning and the ability to translate reason into action. It is so important during this time of transition to help teens to see more than the rules of Christianity but to understand the principles behind these rules. Then as a greater understanding is developed teens will need to learn to apply these principles to various situations. This requires up close interaction with parents and students. What is required, is what Stephen Jones has called "faith shaping."

## **Faith Shaping - Stephen Jones**

From a Christian perspective it should be understood that humanity is incapable of moral purity without God. There is ample scriptural evidence to support the view that humanity is enslaved to sin. Human kind is capable of some moral behavior but at our best we fall far short of God's perfect standard. We are in need of savior. But even after conversion moral perfection is not guaranteed. Faith must grow and attitudes, actions, and ambitions must gradually be conformed to the image of Christ. The gradual develop is a work of the holy spirit both in the individual and through the faith community. But how does it progress? What stages does a teen go through towards maturity in the faith? Jones points out that it involves both "faith and ambiguity."

## **Faith and Ambiguity**

The faith of a child is different from the faith of an adolescent or adult. In childhood there a sense of wonder and discovery of new ideas accompanied by a simplicity of acceptance of what is heard. The child trusts and rarely probes the assumptions that life is inherently fair, the good guy wins.

The faith of a teen-ager is a "journey in search" The adolescent questions the childhood beliefs/assumptions Why is this so? Who says so? Why doesn't this make more sense? Who can be trusted? –All are common thoughts in the adolescent mind.

## **Ambiguity**

As a child approaches adolescence, cracks begin to appear in the child's wall of trust and confidence. Jones explains that the problem of ambiguity begins to set in. Ambiguity is the state of being uncertain, perplexing, mysterious, a dilemma, a situation that can be interpreted in more than one way. Life contains much ambiguity for the emerging adolescent, life can be paradoxical and problems don't have easy answers. The young person begins to discover that people and situations are often beyond our control - Failure cannot always be avoided. The faith of adults is one that lives with ambiguity. Jones explains that when adolescents face ambiguity in considerable measure, there are a number of possible responses: doubt, cynicism, denial, rebellion, anger, alcohol, drug addiction, even suicide.

## **Faith**

Faith is not a doctrine or belief but a stance that is necessitated because human experience is inherently ambiguous. Little or no faith is needed if you are sure or certain, more faith is required with uncertainty (ambiguity). We have faith in that which we cannot see, which we cannot know, which we cannot prove. (Heb. 1:1) According to Jones, adolescence is the important moment in one's life span to shape a personal faith because it is typically the first time to encounter fully, life's ambiguities (uncertainties). Faith shaping refers to the intensity during adolescent years of forming a faith stance in response to one's early encounters with life's ambiguities. Elkind strikes this same cord when he addresses teenage stress. He explains that there is a kind of stress that is result of things we cannot see or predict. Students living in the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon don't know when or how the next disaster will strike, but they fear that it will. Elkind points out that faith is the best buffer against this kind of uncertainty.

Helping students develop faith is one of the key roles that the youth ministry plays in the life of a youth. Faith nurturing (shaping) is needed because although outward manifestations of faith are obvious, the inward motivations (convictions) are not so obvious. Faith must be lifted up and advocated in order to be seen and understood. Many children of Christian parents grow up unaware of the depth of meaning of their parent's faith. It is imperative that adolescents be surrounded by adults who take seriously the call to nurture faith.

## **Nurture and Transformation**

While conversion is a work of God, and growing in grace a work of the Holy Spirit this is achieved through the nurturing work of the church. Jones proposes however, that although we "become" Christians by a radical transformation/conversion of our lives; these turnaround experiences must not happen just once but many times. It is not an end but a beginning. "Decisions" are ours to make (our part) but God alone is the transforming power in the universe. Transformation involves the change from old form to new form, from an "old me" to a "new me". According to Jones the transformational (conversion) process is the process whereby we experience God's transforming presence throughout our lives (again and again). A one-time decision of faith has mistakenly led many youth to feel they have "arrived". God seeks to fully transform the 'old' to the 'new'. Evangelism is not a call to a one-time decision but to a first-time decision of faith that leads to many more decisions of faith. All young people need to be evangelized until they can claim with Paul, "...it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me". Jones explains "As evangelists, we should be sensitively extending the call time and time again, to youth and to ourselves, to be ready and open for the transformations God has in mind for us." Merton Strommen explains it this way: "We are not converted (transformed) only once in our lives but

many times; and this endless series of large and small conversions (transformations), inner revolutions, leads to our fuller (total) transformation in Christ.”

Jones proposes many cycles of transforming experiences that happen throughout one's life time that involve interaction between nurture, encounter, and decision. This cycle is repeated again and again and spiritual formation occurs.

## How Youth Acquire Faith

But how do youth develop their own faith apart from that of their parents? Jones proposes three major aspects of faith development:

- I. Stages of Faith: Childhood, Adolescence & Adult
- II. Seven Faith Shaping Tasks
- III. Readiness for Faith Experiences

Each of these aspects of faith acquisition must be seen in conjunction with the others. Look at the following aspects reflectively. Try to consider your own faith development process.

### *I. Stages Of Faith*

James Fowler (1981) proposed a theory of religious development that focuses on the motivation to discover meaning in life either within or outside of organized religion. His work is based on Erikson's, Piaget's and Kohlberg's theories. Jones proposes only three stages of faith that focus on childhood adolescence and adulthood.

**A. Childhood: Affiliating with faith.** Parents exhibit faith and values - children tend to identify with what parents practice and prize.

**B. Adolescence: Personalizing faith** Most adolescence personalize the faith of their parents, creating of this faith something of their own. Personalizing is a gradual process. For some it is marked by alienation, hostility, rebellion and sporadic growth. For others, it is calm, reasoned and cautious. Personalizing is the young person's attempt to claim ownership of his/her own faith in relation to the faith that has surrounded him/her in the formative years. (Other theorists, Kohlberg, Fowler place this ownership of values or faith at the far end of adolescence, normally when a young adult moves out and has great autonomy.)

**C. Adult: Integrating faith** Integration is the ability to take the good things from one's past and mold them together into a solid foundation for the facing of the future.

### *II. The Seven Faith-Shaping Tasks*

For the young person to become firmly grounded in their faith, Jones suggests that seven essential tasks must be completed. It should be understood that as these are part of the transformation process they too are cyclical. The adolescent does not complete a task to never return to it again.

Task #1. Experiencing

Providing a reservoir of spiritual experiences is integral to all faith shaping that will occur.

Task #2. Categorizing

Sorting out and consolidating one's religious experiences; making sense of the experiences in understandable terms.

#### Task #3. Choosing

Deciding what is true and important. After a new idea or experience is comprehended, the teenager chooses it, or believes it.

#### Task #4. Claiming

An act of commitment: conversion: giving one's life to something. Claiming happens when the young person decides what and to whom she/he will be true.

#### Task #5. Deepening

The task of growing in the faith - the deepening of a conviction, commitment and understanding. When some of the newness wears off, and new questions arise, deepening is the task that confronts the person.

#### Task #6. Separating

Pulling away from earlier convictions and decisions, giving oneself space for reflection and consolidation. This task is characteristic of older adolescents and young adults. Commitments may be set aside temporarily - even other alternatives are considered.

#### Task #7. Responding

Gaining a sense of one's life calling; discovering one's own giftedness. Sometimes people call this a "second conversion", or a "rebirth". It is a renewed commitment at a much deeper level. One feels the need to respond with one's life.

It would be valuable to pause for a moment before going on to the next aspect of faith develop and consider for a moment, How do we work with a group of youth who are all developing at a widely varied number of faith stages? Part of the key to effective youth ministry as will repeated often in the next part of this book is mentoring. Relational ministry through sponsors, chaperones, small group leaders, even peer ministry allow individuals to receive personalized ministry. Studies of effective youth groups have shown that the hours per week of person care is the strongest indicator of effective long term ministry.

### ***III. Readiness For Faith Experiences***

The third aspect of faith development in Jones structure, is readiness. Religious readiness has to do with the level of faith a person is ready to grasp. It is our own readiness that motivates and determines our growth. Jones explains, that readiness growth comes when: we are aware of limitations and inadequacies, our lives get out of balance, we are restless and dissatisfied, we enter into a crisis or when we strive for something difficult to attain.

Although the growth of faith in youth can be traced to their level of readiness Human faith development is really God's timing. The stirrings and proddings within us are divinely created and inspired.

Mike Yaconelli, veteran youth minister and founder of Youth Specialties, calls these "teachable moments." There are times when teens are ready to learn and almost out of the blue develop a spiritual inquisitiveness. This can also be circumstantial. Sensitive leaders will know when it is time to teach and time to be silent and let the youth continue to search. Caution needs to be exercised so as not to mistake learning readiness with emotional experiences. Wise youth leaders will discern when it is appropriate to teach when to just listen. It is not ethical to exploit the emotions of

youth in various circumstances and manipulate them into to decisions that they will later reject.

## **Fostering Faith**

To nurture children in faith is to help them develop proper handles, tools and memories so that when they actively engage as adolescents in faith shaping, they will have the needed ingredients to develop a mature faith.

### ***The Contexts***

In the same way that seeds require the correct environmental conditions for growth, soil, water, warmth, air nurturing faith requires the correct context or conditions. One of the most fundamental aspects of the Son Life strategy of youth ministry is creating the right environment for growth. More recently Christian Schwartz, director of the Natural Church Development institute has proven that there are eight essential characteristics of healthy churches. Each of these have more to do with the context than with any gimmicks. Pastors concerned about nurturing faith with youth can shape an "intentional bias" (supportive, instructive Christian climate) in several important contexts of their lives. For youth, the settings that best offer themselves as contexts for intentional faith nurture include the home, church, and peer group.

1. Home: Parents can present the Christian faith in nearness and directness in the home. Group magazine has determined that the influence of the parents far out weighs the influence of the youth pastor or youth worker. Excellent youth ministry puts parents central in the process of communicating faith.
2. Church: the church community can assist the adolescent in faith shaping. Unfortunately, the church community can do the opposite. Youth work in dysfunctional churches is frustrating and discouraging. Each of the attitudes the youth ministry seeks to instill in youth can be contradicted by the values, attitudes, and behaviors of the rest of the congregation.
3. Peers in the church the peer group(youth group) can assist with faith shaping. Psychological studies have shown how subjects would submit to authority pressure, and peer pressure when they had to stand alone. If aligned with another dissenter 8/10 the subjects would oppose the authority or the crowd. When Jesus began his public ministry he chose a group not a individual. The dynamics of the group are valuable to foster and maintain faith.

### ***The Culture***

We will not do justice to adolescents unless we help them consider the shape of their emerging faith in relation to their culture. According to Jones, youth are persons-in-culture (a distinct high-school world) and their faith will be more integrative if we enable them to work it out within their culture. Young people should be helped to position themselves in their culture in positive ways:

- to befriend the lonely and ridiculed
- to build relationships across racial or ethnic differences.
- to instigate reconciliation
- to represent honesty and truthfulness
- to exhibit Christian vocation (life style)

We can help Christian youth to participate in their peer culture to be part of it, to claim it and to transform it.

## **The Skills**

Jones suggests that adults who pastor youth, faith nurture them in two ways: clarification and advocacy.

**clarification** - means attempting to help youth recognize, admit and answer their faith questions. Adult faith-nurturers are also faith clarifiers. Faith clarifiers raise questions that can point the young person toward his/her own answers. -Who open up choices for the youth and involves the young person in identifying the problem and exploring the alternatives and offering support and resources as he/she responds.

**advocacy** means attempting to bring the faith nearly or directly to young people. "Nearness," in Jones theory, is bringing faith-building activities and traditions near to youth. "Directness" is presenting the claims of faith directly in an open and appealing way.

The two ways to advocate faith with youth are -

1. **nearness** There must be nearness (closeness) to the faithful community and its traditions, rituals, and doctrines. Jones explains that faith is *near* to youth when:

- a) adults live out their faith in natural, expressive ways before youth.
- b) when the young person feels he/she is an integral part of the church.
- c) when the young person is allowed to develop deep relationships with adult Christian models
- d) when families are not embarrassed to express faith and when parents verbalize their commitments.
- e) when families develop and practice faithful traditions and rituals in the home.
- f) when youth see how much faith is prized by the significant adults around them.

2. **directness:** There must be specific times when the issues of faith are presented directly to youth. Directness is presenting the desire of God to transform a young person. Jones suggests that directness –

- a) occurs when we intentionally assist young people in writing new chapters in their faith stories.
- b) occurs when we share our own faith story and faith convictions
- c) implies searching discussions with youth about the meaning of their personal faith.
- d) includes occasions when worship is intimate, when prayer touches reality and when servant hood is suddenly eye-opening.
- e) happens when we help youth address their own questions of faith
- f) occurs whenever we give shape and focus to those moments when youth appear ready to open themselves more fully to God.

## ***The Memories***

It has always been my contention that great youth ministries create memories that endure a lifetime. Part of the fun of Junior high ministry is seeing those youth people experience so many firsts in their lives: retreats, worship leading, skits, decisions for Christ. Many of these memories will exist in their hearts and minds even if they decide to later choose to reject Christ and the church. Memories are the specific recollections of experiences in one's life. One primary way to nurture children and youth is by offering positive memorable experiences. Faith shaping must be particularly interested in the memories of youth and children.

If young people have not important memories of the faith, of the church, of an experience of God, of worship, or of spiritual feelings, they will find themselves in a faith vacuum as young adults. Jones asserts that young people should have acquired solid memories related to the following five areas.

- a) recognizing oneself as a valued and gifted person.
- b) love in the active setting of the church and the home.
- c) acceptance of self as they are
- d) traditions that point to God and faith
- e) trust in self, in others, and in God's will.

The danger is that the impression left of much of this generation, if they have any recollection of church is less than memorable. Jones says memories of boring, mundane or destructive experiences are faith-defeating.

We need to as Christian leaders intentionally provide memorable experiences. Specifically here are some things Jones says we should be doing:

1. We should be celebrating the Christian seasons in our homes and churches with imagination, with tradition and with significance.
2. We should be creating devotional traditions in our homes and personal lives that really matter.
3. We should plan for large scale church events beamed at children and youth.
4. We should live our faith inter-generationally with potency.
5. We should intentionally encourage strong adult models and create long-lasting relationships.

As we will consider in our Philosophy of youth ministry later on, retreats, camps, trips, conventions, musical or dramatic productions, active missions undertakings, in-depth relationships, significant opportunities for participation in the local church --- all are important because of the memorable experiences they make possible.

The church that would establish faith shaping as the most serious ingredient of its ministry with youth must be dedicated to the goal of providing its youth with the best environment for positive memorable experiences.

## **Conclusion**

Moral development is essential but it does not go far enough. The goal of Christian youth work is to introduce youth to Christ and to disciple them in their faith toward maturity. The process described quite clearly by Jones involves various stages at different ages, faith shaping tasks, and readiness. The process works best as it is strengthened in the home, church and peer group. The role the church has to play involves mentoring, creating an environment conducive to growth, and crafting memories that will last a lifetime.

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## Final Thoughts

Understanding Adolescent Development could be a life time pursuit. There is so much to know and so much being discovered all of the time. Yet it has been my hope that through the organized formal study of this important topic you will have a greater ability to work with youth and to continue to study adolescent behavior.

In this book we were able to briefly examine the concept of adolescence and what is involved with this study. We then examined the physical and sexual development of students and explored some of the implications arising from growth in these areas. Next we were able to explore the cognitive development of teens highlighting the challenges these changes pose in the home and the church. This was followed by a study of identity and social development, each of which hold opportunity and difficulty during puberty. The last areas we examined were moral and faith development, which in some ways are tied the changes in identity and cognitive ability. From a very practical perspective we examined how to take all we know about adolescence to apply this to faith development and apply this to helping students grow in their commitment to Christ.

At the end of the book may I gently urge you to use this knowledge in a compassionate way and be a nurturing person in the life of at least one young person? As we know, teens face many challenges as they approach adulthood. The journey is a long one, sometimes fraught with loneliness, and depression, self doubt, and anxiety. What a difference a caring adult can make in the life of a young person armed with an understanding of the metamorphosis that the young person is enduring! I hope that you will be able to be such a person in someone's life this year.



# THE YOUTH MINISTRY LAY INSTITUTE

Other Books in this Self Study Series by Ron Powell

Each of these books represents a core subject in most Bible College Youth Ministry programs in the USA and in Canada. Each book has been compiled from actual youth ministry lectures.

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## FOUNDATIONS OF YOUTH MINISTRY

This book begins by working through a very detailed Philosophy of Youth Ministry that involves the theological and philosophical basis for a specific strategy of youth ministry. One-to-one ministry, junior high ministry, parent ministry, and student leadership are just some of the topics addressed in the various chapters. The book also gets behind the scenes to discuss various aspects of managing a ministry while balancing your life, leading a team of volunteers, as well as establishing a vision, goals and programs for a ministry.

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## LEADING A DISCIPLE MAKING YOUTH MINISTRY

This book attempts to prepare the reader to nurture faith development in young people. Beginning from a biblical perspective on discipleship in general, the focus will move to the call and character of the youth worker. From here we will examine the challenge of ministering in a post modern pop dominated culture. From here we will examine discipleship as it relates to the church and the outworking of a philosophy of discipling youth ministry.

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## UNDERSTANDING ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT FOR GREATER EFFECTIVENESS IN YOUTH MINISTRY

This book attempts to introduce you to two very important interrelated subjects; the study of adolescent development and the application of that knowledge to relating to youth. Obviously, each of these subjects requires much more study. This information will whet your appetite for further study while preparing a foundation for effective interaction with youth today.

The latest research on youth has been investigated while preparing this book so that the material is current and reliable. At the same time, the study of adolescence is constantly changing as youth and youth culture continue to change. Note also that there is a purpose to studying the biological, cognitive, psycho-social, and spiritual development of contemporary youth. The intention is that by understanding how teens think and feel, that the Christian teacher, sponsor, or minister can more effectively connect with youth.

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## YOUTH MINISTRY ISSUES

This book is designed to prepare the lay and professional youth workers for the complexities of youth ministry today by analyzing approaches to dealing with key issues and solutions to typical problems faced by teens. The chapters presented in this book are a compilation of lectures and notes on a number of important youth issues. Some of the material has been researched by students and edited in my office. In general this book should be used as a starting place to further study or a quick reference for ideas when helping a teen.

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