



Adolescence

A Paradoxical Period

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CHILD & FAMILY HEALTH



Recognition

- Much of the format and content of this presentation was adapted from

Martin & Volkmar. (2007). *Lewis's Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. Philadelphia: Lipincott Williams & Wilkins

Overview

- Ecological Perspective
- Physical Changes
- Cognitive Changes
- Psychological Tasks
- Mood Difficulties and Perceived Stress
- Optimizing Adolescent Development
- Impact of Divorce or Separation
- The “End” of Adolescence
- Other Topics of Interest



No Teen is an Island

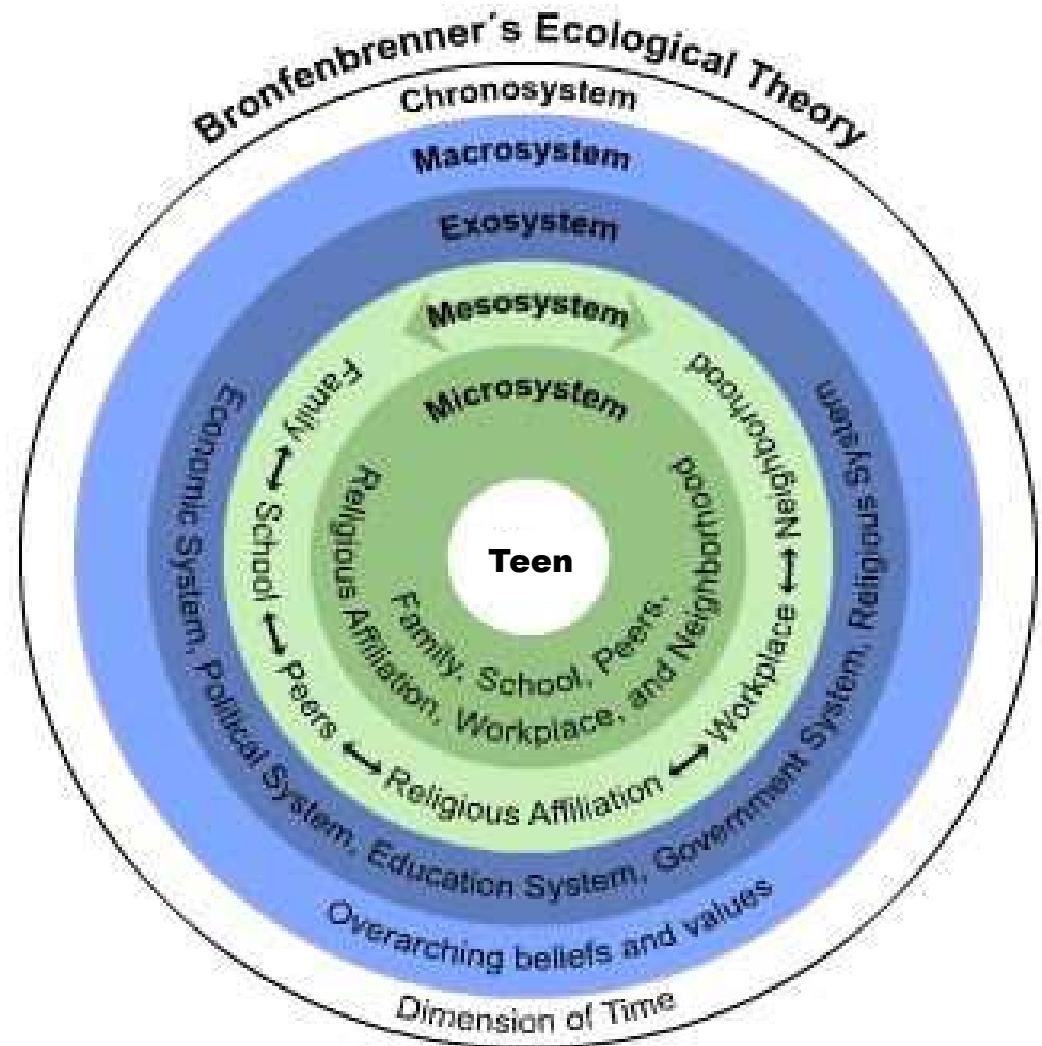


Community
Friends
Internet
Family Church Sports
School History
Culture
Neighborhood

Ecological Perspective

“...much of contemporary developmental psychology research is the science of the strange behavior of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible period of time.”

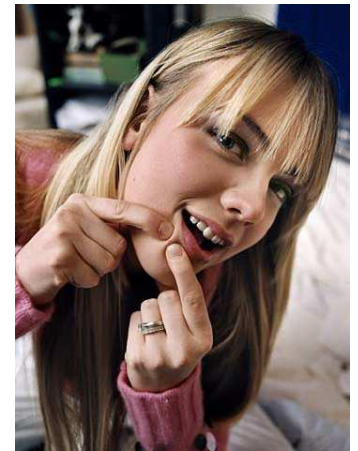
- Urie Bronfenbrenner



Physical Changes:

Hormonally Mediated Changes

- Development of sexual characteristics
- Growth in stature, muscle mass, and strength
- Increase in sebaceous gland activity
- Puberty takes 4-5 years
 - Girls begin at 9 to 11 years
 - Boys begin at 11 to 13 years
- Impact of early maturation in boys and girls
(“Helping Girls Through Early Puberty,” All Things Considered, NPR, Aug 9, 2010)



Physical Changes:

Hormonally Mediated Changes

Question:

Are hormones to blame for adolescents' mood swings, anxiety, self-consciousness, and fights with families?

Answer:

Maybe a little.

Zits by Jerry Scott and Jim Bergman

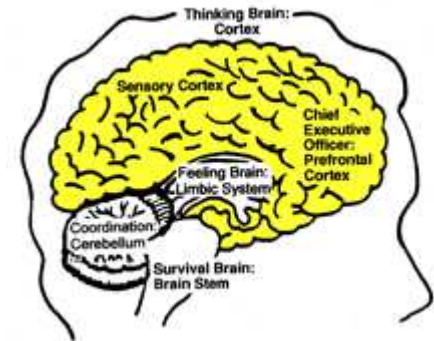


Physical Changes:

Neurobiological Changes

- Prefrontal cortex

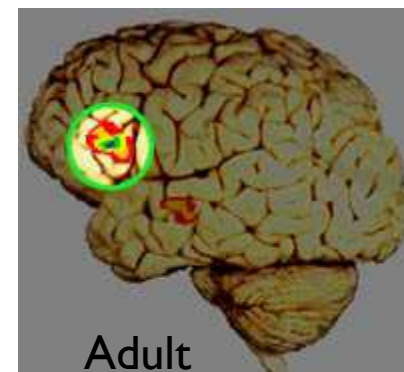
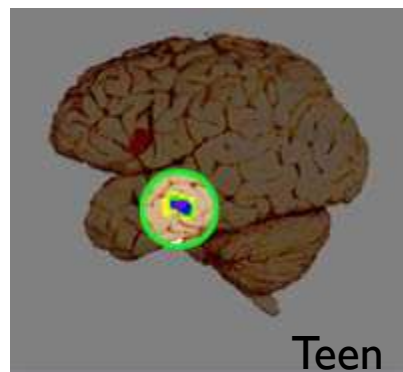
- Grows again just before puberty
- Acts as the “CEO” of the brain - controls planning, working memory, organization, and modulating mood
- As it matures, teenagers reason better, develop more control over impulses, and make judgments better. (Keeps maturing until mid 20s.)
- Pruning
 - Loss of up to 30,000 synapses per second
 - White matter (myelin) wraps around other connections to strengthen and stabilize them
 - “Use it or lose it” principle



Physical Changes: Neurobiological Changes

- **Amygdala**

- Guides instinctual or “gut” reactions
- Used by teens to process what they’re feeling
- As teens get older, center of activity shifts more toward frontal cortex
- Study of adolescent vs. adult perception of emotion
 - Adults correctly identified emotion as fear
 - Teens misinterpreted it as shock, surprise, or anger

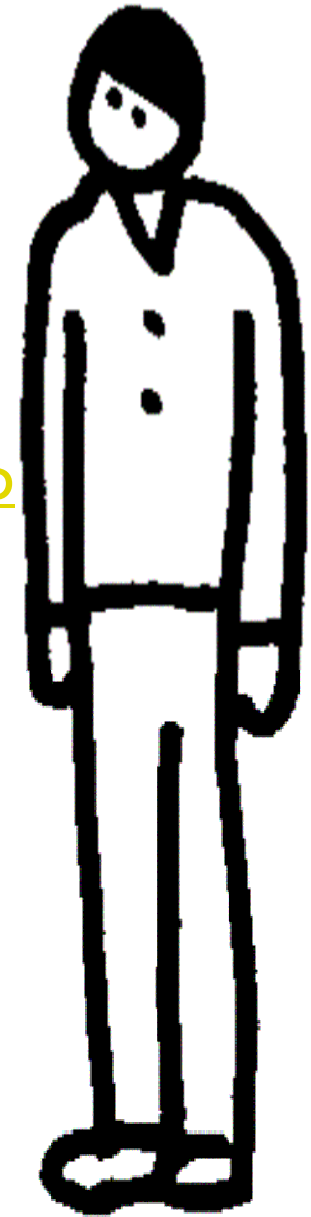


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Physical Changes:

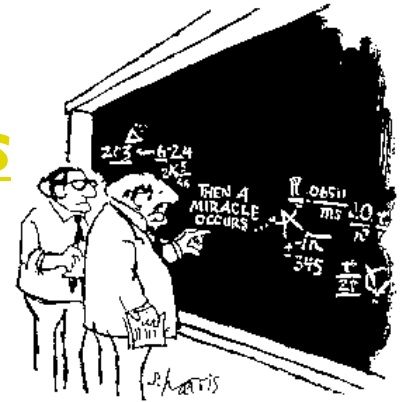
Other Biological Changes

- Growth spurt
- Shift in sleep patterns
 - Tendency to fall asleep later and wake up later (“Helping Teens Make Peace with Sleep,” Morning Edition, NPR, Jan. 17, 2007)
 - Later night-onset and later morning-termination of melatonin secretion
 - Psychosocial component
 - Adolescents given greater autonomy in determining bedtimes
 - Expansion of social contacts outside the home and increased social stimulation keep teenagers up later



Cognitive Changes

- Piaget's stage of **formal operations**
 - Increased problem-solving ability
 - Meta-cognition
 - Hypothetical thinking
- How do these new skills impact a teen's social cognition and moral development?
 - Growth in social perspective-taking
 - Decline in childhood egocentrism
 - Moral reasoning expands to include maintenance of social order, notions of social contract and general rights, and universal ethical principles



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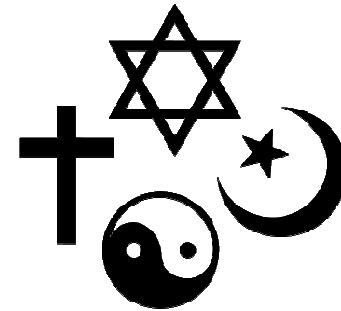


Cognitive Changes

If B is not as bad as C, and C is not as good as A, then who is worst?

Cognitive Changes

- Other practical changes
 - More mature time sense
 - Greater awareness of the finality of death
 - Wider knowledge of the outside world
 - May include intensified interest in politics, ideology, and religion
 - May bring about a sense of moral confusion
 - *Frameworklessness*



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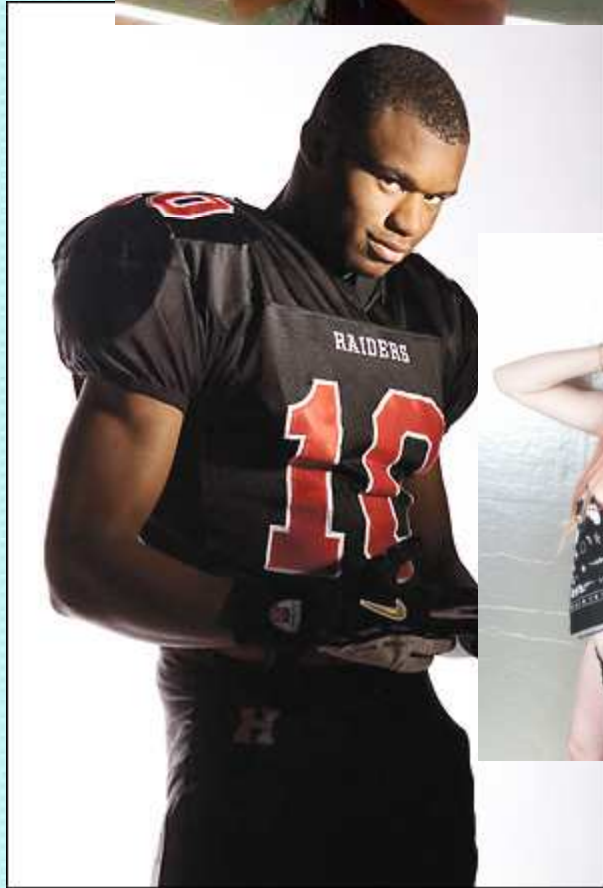
Psychological Tasks:

Coping with a Changing Body Image

- Comparison of development with peers
- Girls' satisfaction with their bodies declines as they pass through adolescence
- Pathologic eating behaviors
- Body as representation of self
- Self-injurious behavior

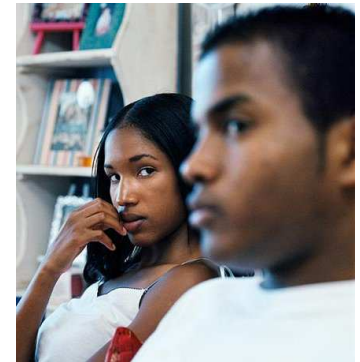


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Psychological Tasks: Changing Relations with Parents

- Loosening ties with parents
 - Decrease in time spent with family
 - Shift in adolescent's view of parents
 - Parents de-idealized
 - Teen alternates between wishes for autonomy and wishes to be taken care of
 - Feelings of dependency warded off with disparagement, indifference, oppositionality



Martin & Volkmar. (2007). *Lewis's Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. Philadelphia: Lipincott Williams & Wilkins

Psychological Tasks: Changing Relations with Parents



- Conflict with parents (“Experiencing Teen Drama Overload? Blame Biology,” Morning Edition, NPR, July 15, 2011)
 - Early adolescence - conflicts surround chores, cleaning, bedtime, diet, friends
 - Later adolescence - conflicts surround dating and curfews
 - Decrease in conflict in middle-adolescence
 - “Trivial” conflicts usually reflect vital issues for parents and teens
 - Impact of *authoritative parenting*



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Psychological Tasks: Transitioning to Self-Care



- Developing satisfying relationships outside the family
 - Turn to peers for companionship, advice, support, intimacy
 - Relentless “hanging out” driven by need to **relate, compare, and try out** aspects of developing self
 - Strategic choice of friends
 - Shifts during adolescence in friends’ gender and group size



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Psychological Tasks: Transitioning to Self-Care

- Sexual and aggressive drives
 - Feelings of sexual awareness occur before puberty
 - Early adolescence - sexual interests occur independently of liking, intimacy, or wish for emotional closeness
 - Girls intensely interested in romantic relationships of their peers
 - Resurgence of overt sexual activity
 - Importance of falling in love
 - Teen parenting



Mood Difficulties and Perceived Stress

- Adolescence – a time of rising incidence for major depression
- Importance of sleep
- Girls especially prone to negative moods
- Increase in number of “negative life events”
- Most fluctuations in mood reflect daily hassles – homework, tests, fights with friends





Optimizing Adolescent Development

- Basic inputs
- Resilience factors
- Parenting styles and other parental influences
- Peer influences
- Sibling relationships
- Neighborhood, community, and extra-curricular activities

Short List of Resilience Factors

Resilience Factors	Human Adaptive Systems
Positive attachment bonds w/ caregivers	Attachment
Positive relationships with other adults	Attachment
Intellectual skills	Human brain
Self-regulation skills	Human brain
Positive self-perceptions	Mastery motivation system
Faith, hope, sense of meaning in life	Meaning-making system
Supportive, pro-social friends & partners	Attachment
Bonds with effective schools or other organizations	Socio-cultural systems
Communities that support families & children	Socio-cultural systems
Cultures with positive standards, rituals, supports	Socio-cultural systems

Masten, A. (2009). Ordinary magic: Lessons from research on resilience in human development. *Education Canada*, 49(3), 28-32.

Impact of Divorce or Separation

- Research suggests teens more likely to
 - Have problems in school
 - Be more sexually active
 - Be more aggressive
 - Be more anxious, withdrawn, and depressed
 - Be more likely to abuse substances and participate in delinquent acts
- Divorce may threaten move toward becoming an individual



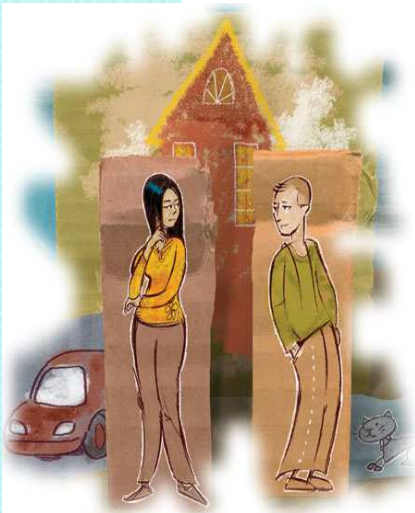
Impact of Divorce or Separation



- Teens may experience
 - Profound sense of loss and anger
 - Conflicts in loyalty toward one or both parents
- However, teens may also
 - Develop maturity and moral growth
 - Understand finances more realistically
 - Experience new family roles and responsibilities

Impact of Divorce or Separation

- What helps teens going through divorce?
 - Feeling of closeness to the residential parent
 - Effective parental monitoring
 - Low parent-child conflict
 - Low-conflict co-parenting relationship
 - Reserving adult conversations for adults
 - Maintaining consistency as much as possible
 - Family structure



Impact of Divorce or Separation

- Interesting new research
 - Divorce may not be the cause of documented problem behaviors
 - Divorce as a series of transitions
 - Residential relocation / mobility
 - Teens “problematic behavior” may represent attempt at managing relationships with parents
 - Desire to control information
 - Desire to control contact with one parent or the other





Tips for Parents: Talking to Teens

- Go to:
<http://www.aahealth.org/pdf/talking-together.pdf>
- Or Google: “Talking to Teens – Tips for Parents” Anne Arundel County



Tips for Judges: Talking to Teens

Go to: <http://www.njdc.info/pdf/maca2.pdf>

Or Google:

“Talking to Teens in the Justice System”

The “End” of Adolescence

- Formerly marked by event such as marriage, full-time employment, or military service
- *Emerging adulthood* – period from late teens through the 20s
 - Prolonged period of quasi-autonomy and continued identity and vocational exploration



Arnett. (2004). *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties*. New York: Oxford University Press

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