Adolescent Development and Family Disruption

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Forensic Psychiatry Service Goals

- Develop multidisciplinary team
- Train students in ethical and procedural considerations
- Offer relatively low cost evaluations for legal purposes
Types of Cases

- Child Custody Evaluations
- Parental Competency Evaluations
- Psychiatric/Psychological Evaluations
- Personal Injury Cases
- Adoption cases
- Psychiatric/psychological second opinions
Physical Development

- **Females**
  - **Growth Spurt**
    - At 10 years
  - **Sequence of Changes**
    - Breast development
    - Pubic/underarm hair
    - Onset of menses

- **Males**
  - **Growth Spurt**
    - At 12 years
  - **Sequence of Changes**
    - Testes enlarge
    - Pubic hair
    - Penis enlarges
    - Sperm production begins
Brain Development

- At birth – majority of cells are in adult locations
- Inter-cellular connection density varies during development
- Myelination continues until early adulthood
Gray matter (neurons) increases then decreases during first three years of life

2nd increase in gray matter prior to adolescence and during adolescence

Frontal lobes – areas of prefrontal cortex are particularly late to reach adult level of thickness in certain regions
Prefrontal Cortex

FUNCTION
- Planning/execution of sequences of action
- Maintenance of information “on-line” during short temporal delays
- Inhibition of response sets appropriate in one context but not another
Prefrontal Cortex

- DEVELOPMENT
  - Connections with other regions not all myelinated until end of puberty
  - Synaptic density changes proceed into teenage years
  - Increasing thickness of gray matter through puberty
Piaget’s Theory - Four Stages
- Sensorimotor: 0 – 2 Years
- Preoperational: 2 – 7 Years
- Concrete Operational: 7 – 11 Years
- Formal Operational: 11 and up
Preoperational stage (2-7)

- **FEATURES**
  - Increase in representational ability
  - Pretend play
  - Egocentrism
Concrete Operational (7-11)

- FEATURES
  - Reasoning more flexible/logical/organized
  - Manipulation of mental representations possible
  - Unable to perform these operations with abstract ideas
Formal operational (11 up)

- FEATURES
  - Reasoning with abstract possibilities
  - Hypothetical deductive reasoning
  - Propositional thought
  - Meta-cognition
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FREUD</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>ERIKSON</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anal</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phallic</td>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latency Stage</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>Industry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Genital Stage</td>
<td>12+</td>
<td>Identity</td>
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Identity

- Sense of own values, beliefs, goals, expect.
- Autonomy in relationships
- Establish intimacy
- Establish comfort with own sexuality
- Achievement
The 4 Questions

- Who am I?
- Am I normal?
- Am I competent?
- Am I lovable and loving?
Adolescent Needs

- Warmth and mutual respect
- Serious and lasting interest of their parents and other adults
- Parental and adult attention to their changes
- Clear standards regarding discipline and close supervision
Needs, continued

- Communication of high expectations for achievement and ethical behavior
- Democratic and helpful ways of dealing with conflict
Today’s teens - death

Mortality
- Age 10-14 = 21.5 per 100K
- Age 15-19 = 69.5 per 100K
- Age 20-24 = 92.7 per 100K

- Motor vehicle crashes
- Homicide
- Suicide
Today’s teens - substances

- Tobacco use by 9<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> graders = 40%

- Age 12-17
  - 8.3% past month use of mj
  - 7.7% past month episode of binge drinking
Today’s teens - sex

- Age 15-17 68 pregnancies per 1000
- Age 13-24 16K new HIV diagnoses
- Chlamydia infections in STD clinic
  - Females 15-24 12.2%
  - Males 15-24 15.7%
Marital Conflict and Child Adjustment

- Threshold for effect not clear
- Strong association with child adjustment
- Frequency of conflict
- Intensity of conflict
- Violence
- Content of conflict
- Resolution
Divorce and Child Adjustment
"Your wife's also asking that you rot in hell for eternity, but I think that's negotiable."
First 2 Years: “Crisis Period or “Diminished Parenting”

- Domestic chaos
- Economic hardship
- Emotional changes
- Social relationship changes
- Vulnerability to illness
- Changing concept of self
Stressors of Divorce

- Lack of information about separation
- Parent conflict
- Diminished parenting
- Loss of relationships
- Economic change
- Step-parenting, blended families
Common Age Related Reactions to Divorce

- Preschoolers - regression, anxiety
- Latency age - immobilization, sadness
- Adolescents - acting out, anger
Research on Effects of Divorce and Children

- Increasing sophistication
- Matched samples of non-divorced and divorced children
- National survey studies which control for background
- Few families with father as primary custodian
Most Common Post Divorce Adjustment Patterns

- 3/4 of children within normal range
- Competent - opportunist
- Competent - caring
- Competent at a cost
- Good enough ~ 50%
- Aggressive - insecure
Post Divorce Factors and Child Adjustment

- Adjustment of the custodial parent
- Parenting of custodial parent
- Parentification
- High conflict divorce
- Access to non-residential parent
- Sibling relationships
- Relationships outside family
- Individual factors
- Pre-divorce parental conflict level
Divorce and Child Outcomes

- Much overlap between divorced and non-divorced children
- Increased aggressiveness, impulsiveness, and antisocial behaviors
- Increased risk for depression
- Increased rates of alcohol and drug abuse
- Higher teen pregnancy rates (2x in one study)
- Lower academic achievement
## High Conflict Divorce

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Task</th>
<th>Impact on Development</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschool Initiative</td>
<td>Issues with guilt, failure and punishment</td>
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<td>School-age Industry</td>
<td>Poor peer relations, gender identity disrupted</td>
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<td>Splitting of self and parents</td>
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<td>Low self-esteem</td>
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<td>Poor achievement</td>
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High Conflict Divorce

- Developmental Task
- Adolescence Identity

- Impact on Development
  - Identity confusion
  - Depressed/withdrawn or acting out behaviors
# High Conflict Divorce

## Developmental Task
- Young Adult: Intimacy
- Adult: Generativity

## Impact on Development
- Adolescence protracted
- Lower rate of marriage
- Higher divorce rate
- Passivity
- Decision not to have children
- Less protective of children if divorced
- Less care of aging parents

Table by Helen T. Brantley
Custodial Arrangements

- Definitions
- Trends
- Arguments for and against
- Meta-analysis (Bauserman 2002)
Considerations in Plans for Adolescents

- Extracurricular activities
- Social relationships
- Work
- Adolescent preferences
Interventions for Divorcing Families

- Court ordered in some cases or jurisdictions
- Divorce education programs
- Mediation for custodial issues
- Divorce groups in schools for children
- Civil guardian ad litem
- Parent coordinator or special master
- Child custody evaluation
Bibliography


Bibliography

- For better or for worse Divorce Reconsidered, E. M. Hetherington & John Kelly, 2002


Improving the Health of Adolescents and Young Adults: A Guide for States and Communities, US Dept of Health and Human Services, 2004
Bibliography


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