

Growth and Development, Ages 18 and Over—What You Need to Know

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Most young adults aged 18 and over will:

- Complete the process of physical maturation, usually attaining full adult height

Late adolescence is the second phase of physical growth for adolescents and leads them into emerging adulthood. As we have seen, many of the most rapid physical changes have already occurred. During this stage, the body begins to fill out and complete the process. As the adolescent body approaches its adult size, growth changes decrease quickly.

Height changes are nearly completed by around age 16 for girls and around age 17 for boys (Tanner, 1990). Muscle continues to develop at a more dramatic rate and in a much different pattern than fat during adolescence. Boys develop larger skeletal muscles, and greater heart and lung capacity. Boys also have an increase in red blood cells that allows them to carry more oxygen from the lungs to the muscles than those of girls, which helps them gain more muscle strength. It also explains gender differences in motor development throughout the teenage years.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Continued brain development.

Recent research suggests that teens' brains are not completely developed until late in adolescence. Specifically, studies suggest that the connections between neurons affecting emotional, physical and mental abilities are incomplete. This could explain why some teens seem to be inconsistent in controlling their emotions, impulses, and judgments.

Most young adults aged 18 and over will:

- Move into adult roles and responsibilities and may learn a trade, work, and/or pursue higher education
- Fully understand abstract concepts and be aware of consequences and personal limitations
- Identify career goals and prepare to achieve them
- Secure their autonomy and build and test their decision making skills
- Develop new skills, hobbies, and adult interests
- Increased independent functioning
- Firmer and more cohesive sense of identity
- Examination of inner experiences
- Ability to think ideas through

- Conflict with parents begins to decrease
- Increased ability for delayed gratification and compromise
- Increased emotional stability
- Increased concern for others
- Increased self-reliance
- Peer relationships remain important and take an appropriate place among other interests
- More developed sense of humor
- Greater emotional stability
- Ability to compromise

Future Interests and Cognitive Changes

- Work habits become more defined
- Increased concern for the future
- More importance is placed on one's role in life

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Most young adults aged 18 and over will:

- Move into adult relationships with their parents
- See the peer group as less important as a determinant of behavior
- Feel empathetic
- Have greater intimacy skills
- Complete their values framework
- Carry some feelings of invincibility
- Establish their body image

Preparing for marriage and family life.

- Achievement of this developmental task is difficult because adolescents often confuse sexual feelings with genuine intimacy. Indeed, this developmental task is usually not achieved until late adolescence or early adulthood.

Morals, Values, and Self-Direction

- Greater capacity for setting goals
- Interest in moral reasoning
- Capacity to use insight
- Increased emphasis on personal dignity and self-esteem
- Social and cultural traditions regain some of their previous importance

SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

Most young adults aged 18 and over will:

- Understand sexuality as connected to commitment and planning for the future

Many will incorrectly use sexual intimacy as the precursor to relationship intimacy

- Shift their emphasis from self to others
- Feelings of love and passion
- Development of more serious relationships
- Increased capacity for tender love

Karen S. Headlee, M.S.
FCS Extension Agent, Lee County
University Of Florida, IFAS Extension
kheadlee@leegov.com

