

Early Adolescence (12–14 years)



Social development

What is happening?	How can I tell?	How can I help?
DEVELOPMENT OF IDENTITY		
Development of personal identity begins	May be aware of having choices to make about identity, and may begin exploring those choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep an open mind while youth are exploring different selves and avoid passing judgement without first talking with the youth about the reasons behind their choices Provide support, warmth, encouragement and companionship as youth begin to explore their identity Encourage youth to consider options that make them happy, rather than trying to satisfy others
Social group identity begins to emerge	<p>May begin to identify with one or more social groups they belong to (for example, a sports team, cultural groups and communities, gangs)</p> <p>Placing more importance on “fitting in” or acceptance into their own social groups</p> <p>Increasing social group-esteem (showing pride in belonging to a social group)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support young people’s exploration of cultural traditions to help them develop their sense of cultural social group identity and social group-esteem. This could include participating in local cultural events (for example, pow-wows, town fairs) or larger events (for example, local Caribbean Carnival) Consider opportunities for young people to socialize and learn from those of similar heritage, ethnicity, race, language or sexual orientation Ensure that youth have opportunities to learn about important social group customs, cultural practices and history (for example, Aboriginal children and youth can learn about the clan system through the telling of stories)
Gender identity and roles become more important	<p>Gender identity becoming more important and stereotypes about gender roles are intensifying</p> <p>May begin to conform to activities and behaviours considered typical for their identified gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage and create open communication that allows youth to ask questions Don’t make assumptions about gender identity Be aware of using gender stereotypes
Spiritual identity may begin to emerge	May adopt the spiritual traditions of their community, or explore alternative spiritual traditions, and begin to see this as a part of their own personal identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support young people’s exploration of spiritual and religious traditions to help them develop their sense of spiritual identity (for example, smudging ceremony, charitable activity, trip to the Holy Land) Acknowledge and show sensitivity to a young person’s spiritual side as you interact or develop supports for them
Self-concepts become more abstract	<p>Becoming less likely to describe themselves in concrete terms (I live in Canada, I have a dog)</p> <p>Becoming more likely to think of themselves in abstract terms (I am a leader, I am ambitious, I am friendly)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage youth in reflection about self-identity and motivate youth to think about “who they are” and “who they want to be”
Self-appraisal skills improve	Able to use outcomes and feedback more accurately to gauge their ability levels (for example, setting aside enough time to study to get a good grade on a test or eating well, resting and training to do well in a race)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide encouragement and advice to youth before they undertake a challenging task to better prepare them and to help them manage their expectations Highlight a young person’s personal strengths (for example, “<i>You are a very caring friend</i>” or “<i>You have always been a very creative person</i>”) Support youth to reflect on their abilities by asking questions, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “<i>What did you learn about your abilities?</i>” “<i>What is one thing you would do the same or change the next time around?</i>”
Self-efficacy decreases	May become less certain of their ability to achieve goals (especially among girls)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide guidance, support and advice to keep youth motivated and on task Provide academic guidance and opportunities to explore interests and identify talents Model a confident understanding of your own skills and capabilities—youth learn to be self-efficacious from the role models in their lives Provide realistic challenges for youth to tackle, and provide support and counselling through these challenges Help youth set goals and support their attempts to reach those goals (for example, helping them take it “one step at a time”)
Self-esteem declines and becomes less stable	<p>Beginning to display less self-confidence and have more negative thoughts about themselves</p> <p>May easily have self-esteem disrupted by events that appear to be minor</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer assistance if you feel the young person is becoming distraught, upset, or fatigued—ensure that the young person maintains their sense of leadership in working through the task to encourage a sense of completion and self-efficacy Remember that peer-led initiatives (such as peer mentoring and peer mediation) can and improve levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy Demonstrate confidence in youth’s abilities and provide support (for example, by including them in decision making, by giving them more responsibility)

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Social development (cont'd)

What is happening?	How can I tell?	How can I help?
DEVELOPMENT OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEERS, ROMANTIC PARTNERS AND FAMILY		
Perspective-taking emerges	<p>Able to understand that other people have different points of view</p> <p>Able to imagine situations from someone else's perspective</p> <p>Able to step outside of situations and imagine an observer's perspective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce diverse perspectives, concepts, and lifestyles through movies, books, biographies, case studies and music
Input from peers becomes more important	<p>Beginning to compare themselves (their abilities, attractiveness, intelligence, popularity) with peers</p> <p>May become more self-conscious, especially in the presence of peers</p> <p>May become more vulnerable to peer pressure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage participation in positive opportunities for identity formation such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - community organizations - mentoring programs - youth groups - neighbourhood associations - physical activities - volunteer opportunities
Peer relationships become more important	<p>The peer group is expanding and becoming more important</p> <p>Spending more time with friends</p> <p>Contacting friends frequently through phone calls, texting, emailing and chatting online</p> <p>Friendships are focusing on common activities and sharing of confidences</p> <p>May begin to expect loyalty and trust in friendships</p> <p>Less competition and more sharing with friends than in childhood</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the participation of young people in organized events, clubs and teams so that they can identify their talents and potential career paths, and develop skills and moral reasoning Encourage participation in a variety of social activities including new and less direct forms of social interaction (for example, blogging)
Romantic relationships may emerge	<p>Interest in romantic relationships is emerging</p> <p>Early awareness of sexual orientation emerging, but often remains private</p> <p>Beginning to form mixed-gender friendship groups and engaging in mixed-gender social activities outside of school</p> <p>LGBTQ youth may begin early same-sex interest and may feel some apprehension or anxiety regarding same-sex attractions (due to social stigma)</p> <p>Closeness achieved by spending time with romantically attractive peers together in a group setting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide or connect youth to sources of information (for example, workshops held by public health clinics or government/health agency websites) Facilitate participation in supervised, mixed gender activities (for example, a teen dance, a pool party). Parents and caregivers indirectly influence their children's early romantic development by channelling their social activities in age-appropriate ways Provide opportunities for discussion about relationships and sexuality that is open and non-judgmental. In the absence of accurate biological information about how the body works, youth often create their own explanations or consult their friends
Family relationships begin to evolve	<p>Interest in independence from the family is emerging</p> <p>Conflicts over minor matters may become more frequent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support youth involvement in structured settings outside of the family to provide an opportunity for self-concepts and identity to emerge through the association of like-minded peer groups and their supporting influence Maintain family connections by establishing routines that bring the family together (such as family meals, participating in activities together)
Moral reasoning is based on social approval	<p>Makes moral decisions on the basis of a desire to win social approval so others will think well of them (I will do the right thing so that other people will think I'm a good person)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be conscientious of your own moral stances—youth replicate styles of moral reasoning in role models Encourage peer interactions (for example, challenging conversations about relevant issues, in which conflicting views are raised and resolved) to stimulate the development of higher forms of moral reasoning Discuss moral dilemmas (for example, discrimination against minorities and social class bias) Provide opportunities for youth to actively participate in deciding between conflicting alternatives or moral dilemmas