# Developmental Tasks of Adolescence
# Developmental Timeline Activity

This activity was designed by SAHRC specifically for State and Adolescent Health Coordinators (SAHCs) and MCH professionals to lead small groups through an exploration of the stages of adolescent development and apply it to their work. First envisioned in 2013 for use in a SAHC orientation training, this activity has been used extensively and adapted many times to fit the needs of SAHCs.

This is a participatory activity that requires all participants to gather around a timeline hung up on a wall. Participants post timeline event cards underneath this timeline. The timeline activity is facilitated with all participants standing around the timeline.

These instructions are designed for in an in-person activity, however SAHRC adapted a version of this to fit a one-hour virtual activity in 2020.

For assistance with this activity, or ideas for adapting to your setting and needs, contact Lynn Bretl at the State Adolescent Health Resource Center.

## This overview includes:

- Facilitator Instructions and tips (for in-person activity)
- Developmental Tasks Checklist (event cards included in activity)
- Resources for learning more about adolescent development

## Accompanying Tools for this activity (click to download):

- Timeline Age Cards (for in-person activity)
- Timeline Event Cards (for in-person activity)

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## Facilitator Instructions

| | |
|---|---|
| Time: | 60 minutes |
| Participant Size: | This activity is best suited for 15-25 participants. If you have more than 25 participants, it's better to split the group into 2 smaller groups and conduct 2 simultaneous timeline activities. |
| Space: | This is a participatory activity that requires all participants to gather around a timeline hung up on a wall. Participants post timeline event cards underneath this timeline. The timeline activity is facilitated with all participants standing around the timeline.<br>Therefore, you need adequate space for people to gather (not encumbered by tables and chairs) and a wall large enough to hang the timeline cards. The wall needs to be as continuous as possible (if possible, avoid walls with many windows or hanging pictures, etc.) and offer a good surface upon which to tape materials. Use of blue painters tape, which is safe for walls, is encouraged. Have a few chairs available for participants who are challenged by extended standing.<br>If your space is limited, the timeline cards can be put on the floor or on a series of tables. This is more challenging but still possible. |
| Materials: | 1. Timeline "age" cards (print on white paper except for ages 10, 15 and 20; print these ages on a color paper; laminate if possible)<br>2. Timeline "stage" cards (print on bold color paper – different color for each stage: early, middle, late/young adult)<br>3. Timeline "event" cards (50 total cards, 4 are duplicates; print on white paper and cut apart)<br>4. Tape (blue painters tape works best)<br>5. Flipchart and marker |
| Set-up: | 1. Tape the Timeline "age" cards in chronological order on a wall to mimic a timeline.<br>2. Tape the Timeline "stage" cards above or below the "age" cards: "Early Adolescence" at age 10; "Middle Adolescence" at age 15; "Late Adolescence/Young Adulthood" at age 18 or so.<br>3. Be sure that participants have easy access to this timeline for this activity.<br>4. Hang small pieces of tape on the wall near the timeline. Participants will use this tape to attach their timeline event cards to the timeline.<br>5. Place the flipchart easel or hang a flipchart page near the timeline. |

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## Facilitator Instructions

## Opening – 15 minutes

**Greeting, welcome, personal connection.**

- Thank you all for choosing to spend this session with us. We appreciate the investment of your time.
- Our focus today is adolescent development and it's intersection with adolescent and young adult sexual health.

**Brief self-introduction.**

- Who you are, your expertise in this area.

**Overview of the session.**

Overall review of the session:

1. Review/remind ourselves about the stages and tasks of adolescent development.
2. Analyze the impact of the adolescent's **world** on their development and the impact of their development on how they interact with **their world.**

**Goals for the session.**

Explore the developmental process across the lifespan, with a specific focus on adolescence and young adulthood, adolescent development and sexual health. Goals for this session:

1. Participants will define three stages of adolescent/young adult development.
2. Participants will identify developmental events and how they impact sexual health.
3. Investigate how factors external to young people impact their development and sexual health.

**Purpose for the session.**

When we remind ourselves about what's going on in an adolescent/young adult's life as they grow and develop,

- We're better able to understand their sexual health needs and better able to support their optimal sexual health.
- We can also help others who influence or have an impact on young people do this better too.

How might this activity be helpful to you?

1. Fun way to remind ourselves about what we already know about adolescents/young adults and their development – to take a few moments out of our day to remember what we know.
2. Sets the stage to think more purposefully how well we respond to who young people are, how they're living out their lives, how and why they're responding to the world in the ways they do. To give us ways to figure out how to apply this knowledge to our professional work and day-to-day lives.

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**Introductions and icebreaker.**

Since you all have knowledge, expertise and experience, this activity is designed to be very participatory. It depends on us working well as a big group.

Since we're all going to be working together, let's do a brief round of meet and greet:

- Name
- Where you're from (state, organization)
- Response to the word "adolescent" (first word that comes to your mind). Don't think about this. Just tell me your most immediate response. Facilitator writes these answers on the flipchart. At the end of introductions, briefly talk through the types of responses made and make a connection back to the training.

## Activity – 10 minutes

**Instructions.**

This is an activity that will get us thinking developmentally. As you can see, there's a timeline on the wall behind me. I can't help but put myself up there and think about what I've been through and what's left.

I'm going to give each of you a few life events cards to post on the timeline. Look at your life events and decide where on the timeline they should go. (*Note to facilitator: participants will ask for clarification about these directions. Don't give them anything else than to repeat that they should place the cards on the wall where they think the cards should go. This is not to frustrate participants but because there are so many ways to think about where the cards should go – this leads to a fruitful discussion*).

Give each participant 2-3 timeline "event" cards (depending on the # of participants).
Show them where the tape is hanging.

- Tape your life event cards on the timeline.
- Tape them where you think they should go.
- Stay standing up by the timeline so we can all see it and discuss.

## Discussion – 30 minutes

### Review ground rules

**Stick around, get comfortable, we'll be standing** (pull up chair if needed).

- *I'm going to ask you all to stay up here near the timeline so we can see it and discuss it so get comfortable – if you need a chair, please grab one.*

**Respect others' opinions.**

- *Everyone has different opinions about these things. I intentionally told you to put the cards where you think they should go so folks would interpret the cards differently. So as we talk about the cards:*

**Really no right answer.**

- *Know that most of the time there is no right answer*

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**Typical is NOT normal.**

- *When we say "typical" that doesn't mean the same thing as "normal" since there isn't one normal*

**Don't have to claim or defend your card.**

- *You are under no obligation to speak to why you placed a card where you did, even if I ask.*

## Look at timeline holistically and recognize how much happens

**General reaction.**

- Do you have any reaction to seeing the timeline with all these events?
- How might young people react to this?
- How is it the same and different from our experience?

## Establish the stages and ages of adolescence/young adulthood

- Adolescence has different stages (we've highlighted these stages on the Timeline).
- We use these ages to describe the stages; many different perspectives and these are not absolutes.

| Early | Middle | Late/Young Adult |
|---|---|---|
| Ages: 10 - 14<br>Grades: 5 - 9 | Ages: 15 - 17<br>Grades: 9 - 12 | Ages: 18 - 24<br>Post high school |

**Look at all of the events between ages 10-24.**

- Lots happening – change.
- Teen years as easy sailing? *We typically think of the teen years as simpler, busy but not so crazy. But look at all the changes their going through on top of all the changes we see (school, activities, increased expectations for independence*).

**Reactions to looking at entire timeline.**

- Cards that just pop out at you?
- Surprises?

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**Review by life stage.** To get a quick feel for where the cards are, look at the cards in relation to what's happening in the various life stages. *Focus most time on adolescence and young adulthood.*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Childhood** | |
| **Early adolescence** | **Time when everything is new**, not much in their control.<br>• Changing bodies, brains, how they think, how they perceive themselves, relationships, school, expectations, responsibilities |
| **Middle adolescence** | **Time of testing and refinement**<br>• Weathered all the "news" – now figuring out what these new bodies, brains, identities, ability to think abstractly, responsibilities, etc. mean for them. Test them out, try them out, see what they can do, how they can handle them, how others respond to them. |
| **Late adolescence/ Young adulthood** | **Time of feeling in-between**<br>• Everything that was "normal" often no longer is. School, where they live, who they live with, what they do, who they interact with daily (used to be primarily their peers, now is often a mix of adults, peers, etc.).<br>• Feel neither like an adult nor a youth.<br>• Lack rites of passage to say when they're "made it" to adulthood – how do they know? |
| **Adulthood** | |

## *Look at events that are biological*

**A few cards are about physical or biological changes**. Let's take a look at these and see where they land.

- Do these look right to you?

**Lots of ranges and variation.** Also seems like lots of these are about sexual development.

- How does being at the beginning or end of these ranges affect other parts of their development?
- What happens when a young person is out of sync with the peers in some area of development?

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## Development is interconnected, interrelated and uneven.

**Talk about the impact or interconnectedness of these changes.** Change in one area of development has an impact on and is impacted by change in another area.

- Starting puberty early, looking older than your biological age – what is the impact in other areas of life?
- Starting late and looking younger – impact?

**Example related to sexual development**: **"pathway" to serious romantic relationship.**

- Sense of self as a sexual being (*sense of identity*)
- Awareness of attraction to opposite, same or both sexes
- Able to see someone else's perspective *(abstract thought)*
- Fully grasps the concept of love (*abstract thought*)
- First serious romantic relationship

**Development is uneven and oftentimes slow process**.

- The developmental changes that underlie many of these life events don't always happen neatly. Do kids, or humans in general, grow in a nice steady progress? No, it's often a 2 steps forward, 1 step back, 3 steps forward, 1 step back… process.
- Where do we see this with teens (anything related to abstract thought, identity)?

**Youth need support to grow and develop.**

Example - developmental change in early childhood: walking.

- There is a lot of developmental change that goes into learning how to walk – understanding that you can control your body, physical growth, balance, etc.
- And once kids start this process, do they typically just stand up and walk perfectly one day? No, it takes lots of practice, assistance and support.
- We do this for babies because we think of them developmentally.

What about adolescents and young adults? What developmental changes take time, growth, and practice?

## External factors that influence development

**Ask about duplicate cards:**

Where did they go? Notice the different/similar placements.

Many of these life events are impacted by external factors, entirely outside the control of a young person.

1. First kiss
2. First intercourse
3. End of schooling
4. First time living independently

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**Cards you might want to move or put some place different.** Focus on a card that is clearly impacted by an external factor

- Why might this fit at a different time? ? Anyone want to defend? Any reason this is a good place for it? Why?

**Cards you might put in different times for different youth** (youth with disability, youth living in poverty, immigrant youth, youth in foster care, GLBTQ youth, youth from various ethnic or cultural backgrounds, youth living in urban/suburban/rural area, etc.).

- What impacts when/whether it happens? Provoke discussion of external factors.

**Identify factors that influence/impact adolescent/young adult development.**

| | |
|---|---|
| • **Make list**. As factors are identified – write them down on flipchart. **Brainstorm** and expand list - add to flipchart.<br>• **Pick 1 or 2 factors** and ask folks to call out cards that they think are highly affected by them. Ask them to explain how.<br>• Try to get to **people's tendency to apply personal standards**; force personal reflection.<br>• Note that external impacts are HUGE and frequently un-considered | **External Factors**<br>• Culture/Race<br>• Socioeconomic status<br>• Geographic<br>• Foster care/Homeless<br>• Faith<br>• Ableness (physical or developmental)<br>• Gender<br>• Sexual orientation |
| It's interesting how our instinct is to judge developmental behaviors based on personal standards, while at the same time knowing that huge factors, many of which are external to young people, are at work. | |

## Summary – 5 minutes

Ask for participants' reactions to the activity. What did you get from this? How might this help us…

- Grounds us, sets expectations.
- Reminds us about all the changes that adolescents and young adults are going through.
- Helps us know what comes next so that we can be attentive to the needs of young people.
- Guides us in how to best support our youth and young adults.

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## Developmental Event Cards Checklist

These are life event cards that can be used in the Developmental Timeline activity. Events on this checklist are included in the Timeline Event Cards for in-person activities. Choose 40-50 for use in this activity. You need a good mixture of events that span the lifespan, focus on adolescent and young adult development and provide events that are influenced by external factors. For an in-person activity, distribute cards among the attendees (each person has different cards except for the few duplicates). The goal is that each participant has at least 2 event cards to post on the timeline. Social Determinants of Health related topics have been added to bring in discussion of broad factors and influences on adolescent health and well-being.

**Biological**

- ☐ Walks for the first time
- ☐ Puberty starts
- ☐ Pubic hair
- ☐ First wet dream
- ☐ Growth spurt
- ☐ Looks awkward
- ☐ Menopause
- ☐ Dies

**Parent/ Family Relationships**

- ☐ Change in relationship with parents
- ☐ Lives outside of home for the first time
- ☐ Questions parent's authority
- ☐ First grandchild
- ☐ Takes care of parent

**Sexuality, Gender, Relationships**

- ☐ Sense of self as a sexual being
- ☐ Treated/viewed as sexual being
- ☐ Sense of being male or female –aware of gender identity
- ☐ Curious about body differences
- ☐ Aware of attraction to opposite, same or both sexes
- ☐ First exposure to sexuality education
- ☐ Calls someone their girl/boyfriend
- ☐ First serious romantic relationship
- ☐ Fully grasps concept of love
- ☐ Buys first condom
- ☐ First "break up"
- ☐ First pregnancy
- ☐ First time living with romantic partner
- ☐ Gets married

**Duplicates (2 of the same card)**

- ☐ First intercourse
- ☐ First kiss
- ☐ Expected to learn independently
- ☐ End of schooling
- ☐ First time living independently
- ☐ Takes interest in how they look

**School and Work**

- ☐ Starts school
- ☐ Experiences school transition
- ☐ Makes own decisions about education
- ☐ First job
- ☐ First career
- ☐ Enters the military
- ☐ Retires

**Social earmarks**

- ☐ First experience with law enforcement
- ☐ First experience of racism
- ☐ Recognizes that they are treated differently because of their appearance
- ☐ First bra purchase
- ☐ Worries "Am I normal?"
- ☐ First time feels independent
- ☐ Able to think about thinking
- ☐ Able to see another's perspective
- ☐ Can see many right answers to a problem
- ☐ Argues a lot
- ☐ Tries a new role
- ☐ First friend
- ☐ Friendships are very important
- ☐ First sleepover
- ☐ Wants privacy
- ☐ Self focused
- ☐ Spends time alone with friends (w/o parents)
- ☐ First drink of alcohol
- ☐ Manages own transportation
- ☐ First credit card
- ☐ Financially independent
- ☐ Translates between two worlds
- ☐ Takes on (primary role in) family responsibilities
- ☐ Manages finances
- ☐ First "paycheck"
- ☐ First roommate
- ☐ Buys first house
- ☐ Rents first apartment
- ☐ First cell phone
- ☐ First vote
- ☐ Manages their own healthcare
- ☐ Experiences death for first time

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## Resources to Learn More About Adolescent Development

### Developmental Stages of Adolescence - Fact Sheets

Brief and concise research syntheses on the developmental stages and tasks of adolescence. Spanish adaptations available thanks to the Colorado Department of Health and Environment's Title V/Maternal and Child Health Program.

Early Adolescence 10-14 English Spanish
Middle Adolescence 15-17 English Spanish
Late Adolescence 18-24 English Spanish

### Understanding Adolescence, SAHRC YouTube Video Series

1. The Basics (21.03 minutes)
2. Development Tasks (Body) (25.04 minutes)
3. Developmental Tasks (Sense of Self, Relationships) (32.56 minutes)
4. Understanding Adolescence (Now What?)

### Young Adults & MCH - SAHRC YouTube Series

Young Adult Development and the Role of MCH Programs (14:10 min)
10 Things MCH Should Know About Young Adults (18:49 min)

### Development Milestones for kids and teens

Johns Hopkins Medicine

### Adolescent Growth and Development Training Modules and Citations

Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine

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