



Parenting - Knowing What to Expect in Your Child's Development Starting With Adolescence

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled "All Psyched Up" for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of "Life is An Adventure...every step of the way" and "Open for Business Success" is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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Last time we studied Erik Erikson's four stages for adolescents and adults.

Adolescence: 12 to 18 Years (Identity vs Role Confusion) is confusing in that the person is neither a child nor an adult. Rather than "what is done to us" it is primarily about "what we do". Life is more complex as the child attempts to find identity, struggles with social interactions and grapples with moral issues. The task is to discover who the person is in wider society, separate from family of origin. Success results in devotion and fidelity whereas problem in this stage can result in role confusion and upheaval. It is no surprise that the most significant relationships are with peer groups. Strong devotion to friends and causes is usually evident in the adolescent's life.

Young Adulthood: 18 to 35 Years (Intimacy and Solidarity vs Isolation) is a stage in which a person tends to seek one or more companions and love primarily through marriage, children and friendship. Significant relationships are therefore with marital partners or friends and if this stage is negotiated successfully, intimacy on a deep level can result with strengths in affiliation and love. On the other hand, isolation and distance from others may occur and one's world begins to shrink if the person has problems creating satisfying relationships.

Middle Adulthood: 35 to 55 or 65 Years (Generativity vs Self-absorption or Stagnation) is a stage where work is the most crucial element. We tend to be occupied with creative and meaningful careers and issues surrounding family. Often we are expected to "be in charge", perpetuate culture and transmit values through the family while working to establish a stable environment. Significant relationships are in the workplace, community and family. Production and care are the basic strengths so we may fear inactivity or meaninglessness. As children leave home, major life changes occur. New relationships and goals may be necessary. How we negotiate the tasks will result in outcomes of either generativity or self-absorption and stagnation.

Late Adulthood: 55 or 65 Years to Death (Integrity vs Despair) is a stage in which we can look back on our life to determine the meaning. The significant relationship is with all of mankind. If we have a feeling of happiness and contentment knowing that we have made a contribution to life, we experience what Erikson calls integrity. Strength comes from wisdom and accepting death as the completion of life. If individuals reach this stage struggling to find purpose or perceiving their life as one of failure they may fear death and experience despair.

Each of Erickson's stages consists of tasks for the person to negotiate and results in one of two outcomes. This theory helps psychologists and clients to understand and treat problems based on what happened in each stage.

If you or your loved ones are struggling in any development stage, I recommend that you seek help from a professional with expertise in that area.

Just ask - I think you will be glad you did!