

# Surviving Adolescence...

a Brief Guide for parents and other caregivers...

part 3

In Part 1 of this series, we adolescence as a way of developing emotional maturity, and sexual and a social identity.

In Part 2, we took a closer look at some of the tasks of adolescence.

In this, Part 3, I will give you an overview of the development of a sexual identity of an adolescent.

But first a brief re-cap:

Remember that an important part of adolescence is the movement from the stage of Dependence to the stage of Independence – this is where the young person emotionally, psychologically, and physically moves away from the family to become a part of the wider world.

Independence is essential for the young person to feel comfortable and safe, and effective, in society. It is a vital step on the way to the stage of Interdependence... more on that in a later Blog.



Let's get started on the uncertain and sometimes perilous journey of  
.....Sexual Identity Development!

This is indeed an area of much complexity...the purpose of this blog is to give you a broad understanding of what occurs for the adolescent at this point in life...

So, what do I mean by 'Sexual Development'?

For the purpose of this blog, sexual development is about the adolescent becoming a sexual person. This is the stage during young people are learning about themselves sexually, and what it means to be physically and romantically attracted to others.

Adolescents go through many emotional and physical changes during their teen years. These 'changes' are due to internal, physiological hormonal changes getting the adolescent ready for adulthood. Up to this point, there generally isn't that much difference between the sexes...It's during the stage of adolescence that these differences become much more pronounced.

These significant and rapid changes in the adolescent and frequently results in considerable inner turmoil and confusion for the young person...and of course for the parent / caregiver!

Let's try to unravel this...just a little...to look at a couple of important aspects.....

Sexual Identity includes:

### **Gender identity**

This refers to the gender that the young person identifies with. This is not the same as 'sexual orientation' (see next). Gender identity refers to the degree to which the person considers themselves to be masculine, feminine or a combination. This is an aspect of the overall individual identity of the person – it will be an important determinant of the person's social and interpersonal roles in the world.



Traditionally, boys and girls were encouraged to adopt socially stereotypical activities...rough'n'tumble sports and masculine bravado for boys, and dainty and femine activities for girls, were common. But in the words of a famous song... the times they are a changing... Or perhaps have already changed. And while we have a long way to go, these days there is a greater push for Equality (or perhaps Equity, fairness, is a better term), giving equal opportunities to all genders, masculine, feminine, or transgender.

## **Sexual Orientation:**

This refers to the sexual, emotional, romantic and physical attraction of the young person to others. For most people, this attraction is to the opposite gender...or heterosexual. For others, it can be attraction to the same gender (homosexual – Gay, Lesbian); or Bi-sexual, attraction to both genders. These days, Sexologists and Psychologists consider that Sexual Orientation occurs along a continuum, with some people only heterosexual, some only homosexual, with bi-sexuality somewhere in the middle.



Confusion...!

Because adolescents are finding their place in the world, they need also to navigate the path of Sexual Identity! There has been much written on this, but for now, just know that this aspect of development can be...and usually is, very confusing for young people.

Some will know from an early age their 'identity', while others will find themselves attracted to boys...and then girls...and then...

A great resource here is:

<https://www.mentalhelp.net/articles/the-development-of-gender-identity/>

The key for parents and caregivers at this point is to remain non-judgemental... acceptance, and being open-minded is vital for the healthy development of the adolescent as she or he moves through this stage of investigation and sometimes experimentation.

In the next part to this series, I'll give you some ideas how to connect, be with and encourage a healthy and positive relationship with your young person.

want to know more?

If you're a parent or caregiver of an adolescent, and would like some support concerning your young person, contact us through our website.

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