

Preparing
for a
Lifetime
It's Everyone's Responsibility

GRANDPARENT

TOOLKIT





Emotional Development

During adolescence, youth are learning to perceive, assess, and manage their emotions.

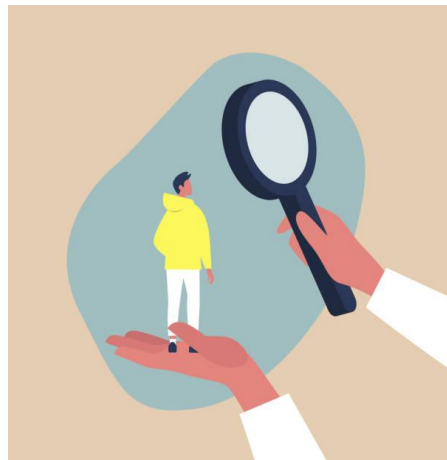
Healthy emotional development can provide youth the opportunity to build and/or improve their skills, learn more about themselves and others, and develop strengths for optimal well-being.

Benefits of Emotional Growth

Building social and emotional skills



Discovering unique qualities



Developing strengths for optimal health



Key Impacts on Emotional Development

Emotional development is greatly influenced by a combination of:

Internal factors

- hormones
- cognitive development
- physical development

External factors

- peer relationships
- school and family context
- environment



Hormones & Emotional Development

Dopamine - motivation & reward

- happiness, excitement, and thrill associated with risk-taking/reward-seeking behavior
- high levels can lead to competitive and aggressive behavior, anxiety, and stress

Serotonin - mood stabilizer

- happiness, well-being, and overall emotional balance
- low levels are associated with emotions like anger, sadness, or depression

Cortisol - stress

- fight/flight/freeze response
- high levels are associated with anxiety, irritability, difficulty coping, and mood disorders like depression

Oxytocin - love

- relaxation, attachment, trust, safety and other emotional connections
- low levels may impact empathy, affection and self esteem; may also be associated with anxiety, fear, and irritability

External Factors & Emotional Development

Relationships

- Skills for empathy, emotional support, collaboration, problem-solving
- Bullying, exclusion, and social stressors can impact self-esteem, emotional regulation, resilience, happiness, and overall well-being

Family & School

- Families provide a model for expressing and managing emotions, communicating, and coping skills
- Schools can prioritize safe environments, wellness, policies that protect students, and using a holistic approach

Environment

- Surroundings that feel safe, are clean and free of clutter, and are bright and welcoming have a positive impact on well-being
- Being around people with the same culture and values can boost feelings of connectedness

Common Challenges Youth May Face

Identity
Formation

Stress

Identity Formation

Exploring and forming identity is an ongoing process that can change over time:

- culture
- beliefs and values
- gender and sexuality
- interests
- talents

Youth begin to seek more independence to explore more freely and understand how/where they fit in.

This search for identity can be challenging, especially when new ideas and qualities that youth are exploring do not align with family or community culture.



Struggles with Identity

- Experience disruptions to mood
- Have higher levels of stress/anxiety
- Feel lost/disconnected from family, friends, and society
- Have low self-esteem
- Feel a lack of purpose and motivation
- Participate in risky and/or self-destructive behavior

Strong Sense of Identity

- Deep sense of self-awareness
- Direction and motivation for life plans and goal-setting
- Form meaningful connections with others
- Helps center oneself
- Improves decision-making
- Fosters pride

Stress

Adolescents live, play, and learn in a variety of environments and are exposed to many positive and stressors.

Constant exposure to negative stress can:

- weaken the immune system
- potentially lead to depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders
- affect ability to regulate emotions
- lead to risky behavior



Supporting Healthy Emotional Development

- Prioritize your own emotional well-being
- Practice healthy goal setting
- Value unique identities
- Model respectful conflict resolution
- Teach healthy stress management skills
- Nurture self-regulation skills



Resources

tryingtogether.org/dap/difficult-emotions

healthychildren.org



Grandparents Raising Grandkids

Oklahoma.gov/health/grandparenttoolkit

Grandparent@health.ok.gov

Acknowledgement

Some of this content was derived and adapted from the Office of Population Affairs' *Adolescent Development Explained Guide*.