

What Do I Need to Know about Youth Today?

Keeping up-to-date on youth issues and trends can be a full time job. Our goal in this section is to give you some of the basics in understanding young people—things to be aware of as you work with them, things to watch and listen for, things that are normal for this age group. Knowing what to expect goes a long way to making us feel comfortable with youth. The following charts outline the most important developmental needs of young adolescents (aged 10-14/15) and older adolescents (aged 14/15-18/19). It is important to remember that both sets of needs are present in the high school youth population. Understanding each set of needs helps us work more effectively with young people.

Developmental Needs of Young Adolescents

- **Opportunities for Self-Definition:** to better understand, define, and accept who they are as growing adolescents.
- **Competence and Achievement:** opportunities to find out what they are good at doing and to know what they do is valued by others whom they respect.
- **Positive Social Interaction with Adults and Peers:** opportunities to develop interpersonal skills and form positive peer relationships, adult relationships, and new ways of relating to their parents as adolescents.
- **Meaningful Participation in Families, Schools, Churches and Community:** opportunities to participate in making decisions about activities that shape their lives *and* to contribute to the success of those activities as leaders or participants.
- **Physical Activity:** opportunities to utilize their energy and growing bodies through activities that require physical movement or expression.
- **Creative Expression:** opportunities to express to the external world who they are on the inside (feelings, interests, abilities, thoughts) through a variety of activities.
- **Personal Religious Experience:** opportunities to explore "the big questions" in life within the context of faith; opportunities for a deeper and more personal relationship with God.
- **Structure and Clear Limits:** provision of structure and guidance that helps young adolescents make decisions about their behavior, and helps them feel safe in their activities.

Developmental Needs of Older Adolescents

- **Exploration and Experimentation:** opportunities to experiment with a wide array of behaviors, roles, attitudes, relationships, ideas, and activities as they develop their own identity and faith identity
- **Adult Sexuality:** opportunities to understand their sexual growth and integrate their sexuality into their personalities in a holistic way; opportunities to develop healthy values and attitudes regarding their own sexuality.
- **Interpersonal Relationships:** opportunities to form positive relationships and experiences with peers in a comfortable and secure environment and to develop friendship-making and -maintaining skills
- **Meaningful Roles in the Community and Society:** opportunities to participate as full members and leaders in the community, society and church; opportunities for service, locally and globally.
- **Preparing for the Future:** opportunities to acquire the competencies necessary for adult roles, such as goal setting, problem solving, time management, and decision making; opportunities to explore life options and plan their futures (education, career) and to help them acquire the skills, knowledge and experience for their chosen fields
- **Personal Value System and Decision-Making Skills:** opportunities to discuss conflicting values and formulate their own value system; opportunities to gain knowledge and experience in making decisions and to apply Christian moral values in making moral judgments
- **Personal Faith:** opportunities to explore and question the faith they have been given by family and the faith community and develop their own faith identity; opportunities to explore what it means to be and live as a person of faith today and develop a more personal relationship with Jesus Christ
- **Adult Mentors:** opportunities to develop relationships with adult Christians who affirm their journey and struggles, explore sensitive issues with them, listen to their stories and questions, share their own faith journey, and ask questions that encourage critical thinking and reflection