

# Youth Development

Understanding youth development helps mentors:

- Create realistic expectations of the mentoring relationship
- Predict and understand mentee needs and behavior
- Be better prepared in deciding how to approach the mentoring relationship
- Be better equipped to handle sensitive issues
- Determine age-appropriate activities to do with mentees



## Reflection

Imagine yourself as an elementary school student. What was most important to you at that time? What memories stick out in your mind from this time period?

Now, imagine yourself as a middle school student. What was most important to you then? How did it change from elementary school?

Lastly, imagine yourself in high school. What new attitudes, behaviors, and needs emerged?

Many mentors notice that students change in behaviors and attitudes from the beginning of the school year to the end. For instance, mentors have reported that many of their 5th or 6th grade students begin to pull away from them toward the end of the school year. Students at this age begin to care more about what peers and friends think about them. Suddenly, they may be concerned that having a mentor makes them "uncool" or "weird". Have a discussion with your mentee if you notice any shifts in behavior or attitudes toward your mentoring relationship. Allowing the student to find solutions of how to address the mentoring relationship as their needs shift and change is a great way to encourage problem solving and social emotional skills.

# Early Elementary: Ages 6-8

## Social & Emotional Development

- Moving from self-centeredness to greater ability to share and interact with others.
- Want approval from adults in their lives.
- Girls and boys often play separately.
- Like to play games, sometimes making up their own games.
- Primarily dependent on parents/adults for a sense of security.
- Bullying behavior begins to appear. May fight with friends but make up quickly.
- Primarily dependent on parents/adults for sense of security.
- Just beginning to understand the finality of death.

## Intellectual Development

- Learning to read can be either a source of great pleasure or frustration.
- Short attention spans.
- Thinking is very concrete, relying on their own senses.
- Like projects to work on, but might not care about finishing them.
- By age 6, most children can count to 100. By age 9, they are beginning to learn how to multiply.
- Beginning to master use of computers and electronic devices for games.

## Physical Development

- Like to move and be active. Many become restless and wiggle if they sit for too long.
- Large-muscle skills are stronger than small-muscle skills.
- Students start to enjoy using new physical skills and challenging themselves in learn.

# Implications for Mentors: Ages 6-8

- Mentees will respond better to doing things together than "just talking".
- Keep activities short, and switch activities when needed to maintain mentee's interest. Don't insist on finishing things— like a game or a book.
- Use simple and concrete language and concepts.
- Relate what you are talking about to things in mentee' immediate world.
- Build in opportunities for physical activities, or take breaks. Even if you're just stretching during mentoring sessions.
- Play games that will challenge mentees' thinking abilities.
- Encourage mentees to explore new ways of looking at the world and people through reading.
- Positively reinforce mentees' good qualities and new skills— praise goes a long way!
- Encourage mentees to like school and reading by doing activities to reinforce learning (read together, offer to assist with spelling lists or homework, talk about what they like about school).
- Talk with mentees about bullying, asking if they ever see it happen.

# Middle Grades: Ages 10-12

## Social & Emotional Development

- Growing sense of independence from parents/adults but still want parent/adult approval.
- Friendship groups are forming and re-forming.
- Depend on both adult & peer approval.
- Bullying behaviors strongly influenced by peer groups. Social bullying emerges.
- Growing sense of self-consciousness and very concerned about what others think about them.
- Feelings can be easily hurt.
- Crushes may emerge.

## Mental Development

- Abstract thinking emerges but still tend toward "black & white" thinking.
- Develop strong interests and curiosities.
- Enjoy learning for the sake of learning & like to solve problems.
- Become interested in setting goals and making plans to achieve them.
- Growing awareness of the larger world around them and its risks and problems; more attention to news media.
- Moral thinking emerges with strong sense of right & wrong/fair & unfair.
- Growing ability to understand someone else's point of view and feelings.
- Hero worship of music, sports, TV, movie, and video game characters.

## Physical Developments

- Body changes are slow at the beginning of this stage, but accelerate with the approach of puberty.
- Puberty brings significant physical and emotional changes, including feeling "out of control" of their body and out of sync with their peers.
- Physical coordination continues to improve with greater small-muscle development.
- Eye problems may appear as vision problems or eyestrain from using electronics.

*Gail Manza & Susan K. Patrick (2012). The Mentor's Field Guide, Search Institute Press, Minneapolis, MN*

# Implications for Mentors:

## Ages 9-12

- Let mentees guide your choice of activities.
- Talk with mentees in simple, concrete language, and introduce abstract concepts with increasing frequency as they get older.
- Engage mentees in problem-solving games and activities, and talk about how they are solving the problems.
- Ask mentees for opinions on what is happening in the world, at school, or in their peer group.
- Use open-ended questions to encourage mentees to talk about their life, school, likes, dislikes, frustrations, and challenges.
- Help your mentee develop skills and strategies to solve problems and cope with challenges.
- Help your mentee develop a strong sense of empathy and concern for others; do activities that will benefit others.
- Positively reinforce new skills and achievements with praise.

## Adolescence: Ages 13-18

### Social & Emotional Development

- Growing independence and pulling away from parent/adult influences.
- Becoming more critical of parents and other adults, rejecting their values and views.
- Hyperaware of appearance and self-conscious about anything that makes them stand out from peers; feeling of being "on stage".
- Susceptible to praise and recognition, even though they may act like they don't care.
- Want to feel autonomous and be trusted and validated for their decisions.
- Searching for intimacy in relationships.
- May experience emotional ups and downs and mood swings.
- Mental illness such as depression and bipolar disorder may emerge during teens.
- Learning to cover up and mask insecurities.

### Mental Development

- Growth of abstract thinking and reasoning.
- Like to set goals and work toward them.
- Developing internal values and beliefs.
- Growing ability to understand their world and its problems and challenges.
- Strong feels and beliefs about social, national, and international issues.
- May be quite idealistic and interested in helping others, solving social problems.
- Ready to accept increasing levels of responsibility and accountability.
- Able to understand that their actions have consequences.

## Physical Development

- Major physical changes with onset of puberty; adult height achieved by mid-teens. Being out of sync physically with peers can be cause for anxiety.
- Growing physical strength, coordination, and abilities.
- Sexual activity often begins, or at least thought/talked about.
- Brain development still incomplete and forming (until mid-twenties) and highly vulnerable to long-term effects of alcohol and drug use.

# Implications for Mentors: Ages 13-18

- Encourage mentees to have a bigger role in defining your relationship and activities while maintaining appropriate structure and boundaries. Talk to mentees as you would to a friend, seeking and respecting their opinions.
- Encourage mentees to turn to you for emotional support and guidance in solving problems and life challenges.
- Be prepared to handle sensitive issues and problems mentees may face, such as drugs, sex, bullying, and depression.
- Listen, don't lecture.
- Support mentees learning from their mistakes.
- Encourage mentees to set post-high school goals and plans, and support them to achieve them.
- Be an advocate for mentees, especially when helping them set and work toward goals.
- Be a good role model for what you want your mentee to be. Be willing to learn from your mentee.

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