

Key Developmental Needs of Adolescence

Research into adolescent development points to core developmental needs during our adolescent years. These key developmental needs of adolescence include:



Explore the World and Test Out New Ideas and Experiences

Heightened activity in the “reward center” of our brain during adolescence increases our motivation to try new things and explore the world, which help us discover who we are, expand our skills, and ultimately leave the familiarity of home. **Policies and programs that provide opportunities for healthy risk taking help youth explore in ways that support positive development.**



Developing Meaning and Purpose Through Contribution

During adolescence, we’re increasingly able to support others in deeper, more meaningful ways than when we were younger. Experiences in which we make a positive difference help us develop a sense of meaning and purpose, which support wellbeing, academic success, and resilience. **Policies and programs should ensure all youth have opportunities to contribute.**



Build Decision Making and Emotional Regulation Skills

Our cognitive and emotional abilities mature during adolescence in ways that help us develop new skills for making good decisions and navigating our emotions. We continue to build these skills through real-world situations with support to make and learn from mistakes. **Supportive adults should provide youth with opportunities for increasing agency in decisions that impact their lives.**



Support from Parents & Other Caring Adults

Secure and supportive relationships with caring adults when we’re adolescents are essential to our physical and mental health, helping us build resilience, develop a positive sense of self, and form a positive racial and ethnic identity. **Programs and policies can help prioritize strong family bonds and provide mentors for youth.**



Developing Values, Goals, & Identity

During adolescence, our relationships, experiences, and the messages we receive about our racial, gender, and other identities help us form a healthy sense of identity and belonging. **Policies and programs that provide opportunities to explore roles and activities can help youth discover who they are, what they value, and who they want to become.**



Find a Respected Role Among Peers and Adults

Changes in our brain and our social settings during adolescence increase our social awareness and motivate us to learn the skills we need for the more complex social demands of adulthood. These changes can also amplify the impact of experiences of discrimination. **Policies and programs can ensure that all young people have ample positive pathways to gain respect.**



Get Sufficient Sleep to Support Mental and Physical Well-Being

Extensive research shows that healthy development, learning, and positive mental health during our adolescent years all require healthy, restful sleep. **Schools, employers, youth-serving programs, and youth-focused residential settings should prioritize providing young people with schedules and conditions that promote quality sleep.**