DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

Adolescence (12 years – 21 Years)

**Puberty**: Puberty often begins earlier than parents think. Breast budding in girls – their first sign of puberty – starts at age 10 on average, with some girls starting as early as eight and others not starting until 13. The peak growth period (in height, weight, muscle mass and the like) in girls occurs about one year after puberty has begun. Menstruation usually starts about two years after the onset of puberty; on average, the first menses occurs just before girls turn 13.

Boys enter puberty about one year later than girls. The first sign is enlargement of the testes and a thinning and reddening of the scrotum, which happens at an average age of 11, but may occur anytime between nine and 14 years. For boys, the peak growth period occurs about two years after the beginning of puberty. Puberty is made up of a clear sequence of stages, affecting the skeletal, muscular, reproductive, and nearly all other bodily systems.

Although boys and girls are generally of similar height during middle childhood, that changes with the beginning of puberty. Particularly in junior high school, girls are often taller than their male classmates, but within a year or two, boys catch up and usually surpass their female classmates. About 25 percent of human growth in height occurs during puberty. (American Academy of Pediatrics)

**Physical Development**

**Early & Middle Adolescence**: rapid gains in height and weight: boys – 4 inches in one yr., girls – 3.5 inches in one year; weight – boys (muscles), girls (body fat); develop secondary sex characteristics: boys (pubic hair, voice changes, facial hair, increased sweat, acne), girls (pubic hair, underarm hair, breasts, increased sweat, acne); need 9.5 hours sleep; can be clumsy; significant brain changes occurring

**Late Adolescence**: sexually mature; generally have reached adult height & weight; final sculpting of the brain

**Cognitive Development**

**Early & Middle Adolescence**: developing advanced reasoning skills – hypothetical, “what if”; developing abstract thinking skills – consequences, things that cannot be seen, heard, or touched (trust, beliefs, spirituality); able to demonstrate higher level thinking skills in situations of “cold cognition” (little or no emotional connotation or context, i.e., classroom), less able to do so in emotional situations (risk-laden circumstances &/or with peers)

**Late Adolescence** (18-21): more likely to display affect regulation – understand consequences of behaviors & act appropriately even in emotionally-laden situations; however, for many, this is still a developing capacity

**Social Development**

**Early Adolescence** (12-14): distancing from parents; identification with peers and peer standards; social status related to group membership; acceptance important

**Middle Adolescence** (14-17): more one-to-one relationships – same & opposite sex;
intimate relationships (deep sharing – loyalty, understanding); sexual experimentation; may espouse moral beliefs, but behave in a contrary fashion

Late Adolescence: more likely to re-establish relationships with adults; able to share thoughts on same level; adults again are considered to be reliable sources of ideas, opinions; better able to control behaviors to coincide with personal values

**Emotional Development**

Adolescent behavior is largely driven by emotions, especially in situations of high emotional intensity and in the presence of peers. In situations of high emotional intensity, cognitive development hasn’t proceeded to the point where adolescents are in full control of their behaviors. The recent US Supreme Court ruling that forbids the death penalty for those 17 and younger reflects the knowledge that brain development hasn’t matured to the point where adolescents can always make reasoned decisions.

**Early Adolescence:** most emotionally labile time during development; engage in risk-taking activities that provide emotional intensity; volatile; mood swings; lack judgment in high intensity situations

**Middle Adolescence:** may become very skeptical of previously accepted values; pursuing their own “truth”; still engaging in risk-taking activities; struggling with personal identity and values

**Late Adolescence:** self-image, self-identity (negative or positive) is largely formed based on experience & perception of one’s “place”

**Adolescence (12 years – 21 years)**

1. rapid physical growth and progression from puberty to sexual maturation (physical)
2. brain maturation moves the individual from emotionlly-driven behaviors to affect regulation: the ability to consider consequences and act in manner that allows attainment of long-term goals even during highly emotional and challenging situations (cognitive)
3. progression from peer-dominated relationships to relationships characterized by interpersonal intimacy that include an understanding of self & the other and communication of feelings & thoughts (social)
4. establishing
   a. personal identity (who am I?),
   b. autonomy (make & follow-through on decisions, establish own principles of right & wrong, become less emotionally dependent on others)
   c. intimacy in relationship(s)
   d. comfort with one’s own sexuality
   e. sense of accomplishment through using one’s own individual talents and abilities (emotional)