

# Adolescent Development of Girls

## Most girls...

	<b>Pre-Adolescence (9-11)</b> <b>Where they are coming from...</b>	<b>Early Adolescence (12-14)</b>	<b>Middle Adolescence (15-18)</b> <b>Where they are headed to...</b>
<b>Physical</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical growth varies widely during this time!</li> <li>Experience a growth spurt that starts approximately two years before the onset of menarche</li> <li>During each of those two years, (usually ages 11/12 to-13/14) they can gain up to 13 pounds and grow four to five inches</li> <li>At this age, girls tend to be taller than boys</li> <li>Continue to have high levels of physical energy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experience a great deal of physical change including a growth spurt</li> <li>Expedient physical changes may cause awkward physical coordination</li> <li>Continue to improve their motor development and coordination skills, may go through stages of awkward physical coordination</li> <li>Continue to need opportunities for physical activity</li> <li>Begin or continue to experience physical changes of puberty (menarche: 12.5)</li> <li>Rates of physical and cognitive change do not necessarily correspond</li> <li>Pubic hair, arm hair and leg hair reach adult patterns at 13-14</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most young women have a slowing of physical development in this age range, although some continue to experience physical changes of puberty.</li> <li>Most girls have completed their physical development during this age range.</li> <li>May be awkward or skilled, depending on pace of physical development and previous skill level</li> <li>Common to have markedly different athletic and physical skill levels</li> <li>Breasts fully develop between 12-18.</li> <li>Growth spurt of puberty slows and ends around 16</li> </ul>
<b>Cognitive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Able to take responsibility for materials and possessions, organizationally</li> <li>They are usually able to take responsibility for their personal hygiene</li> <li>Sustain prolonged attention and interest; make plans and start projects independently</li> <li>See similarities between two things that share observable features or abstract attributes</li> <li>Distinguish the possible from the unlikely</li> <li>Apply logical thought to practical situations</li> <li>Begin to understand the relationship between cause and effect</li> <li>Still function at the level of concrete operation</li> <li>Understand the concept of time</li> <li>Use language to exchange ideas; spend considerable time in discussion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May continue to think in categorical terms; tend to be authoritarian and see things as "one way or the other."</li> <li>Gradually increasing ability to engage in formal, systematic thought</li> <li>Can consider possibilities and frame hypotheses; is aware that situations and people can change</li> <li>Has ability to think abstractly, may need help to develop appropriate strategies for abstract thought</li> <li>Tend to focus primarily on the present with only a vague sense of the future</li> <li>Can cognitively plan for their future</li> <li>Learning to use abstract words, think independently/critically/deductively and apply logic when solving problems</li> <li>Able to consider alternative solutions when working on problems</li> <li>Learning to perceive the risks that accompany certain behaviors</li> <li>Growth of insight</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasingly able to consider the hypothetical, future, and the remote</li> <li>Increase capacity for logical thought and planning</li> <li>Consider long-range purposes</li> <li>Formulate and test hypothesis to consider multiple options in problem solving</li> <li>Have a clearer sense of risk and consequences</li> <li>Improved ability to verbalize ideas</li> <li>Better Able to appreciate alternatives</li> </ul>

<b>Social</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use language to exchange ideas; spend considerable time in discussion</li> <li>• Begin to seek independence</li> <li>• As they spend more time outside of the home, they become increasingly influenced by peers in their choices of activities and styles of relating</li> <li>• Renegotiate their peer group</li> <li>• Earlier friendships may be disrupted due to differing rates of maturation or other factors</li> <li>• Small cliques form at this stage, in those groups, they share knowledge, beliefs, misconceptions about their changing bodies, fears and other intimate feelings.</li> <li>• Physically affectionate with one another, but may also use relational aggression to control group membership</li> <li>• Continue to be, or now become, interested in sexuality, (depending on their physical development)</li> <li>• May already be facing decisions about sexual activity and drugs.</li> <li>• Girls may use computers for the purpose of social networking or online-characters/avatars, boys tend to play games that involve the use of hand-eye coordination and problem-solving</li> <li>• Girls continue to segregate themselves from boys</li> <li>• Girls who display an interest in socialized male activities are usually well liked by boys until puberty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Believe their appearance and actions are always watched and judged by others</li> <li>• Learn to develop and maintain close, mutually supportive peer relationships</li> <li>• Conform to peer group norms and behaviors, especially those related to dress, music, hairstyle, recreation, and interests</li> <li>• Behaviors and perception of consequences influenced by peers</li> <li>• Peer groups may try to dress alike, act alike, or create secret codes or rituals</li> <li>• Continually redefining gender roles, based on messages they receive from society and their peers.</li> <li>• May be egocentric; focused on self</li> <li>• Some begin seek psychological separation from parents/guardians and family, strive toward self-reliance</li> <li>• Seek the company of adults other than parents who can serve as role models and provide support and guidance</li> <li>• May start to face important decisions like the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.</li> <li>• Believe that other people's attention is constantly centered on their appearance or actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can continue to be egocentric, though diminishes in this age range</li> <li>• Actively seek independence from parental authority</li> <li>• Become disillusioned with their parents; identify shortcomings</li> <li>• Use hypocritical behavior toward disagreement or the unknown</li> <li>• May demonstrate independence by openly rejecting parents or societal norms</li> <li>• May experiment with behaviors of drinking, drug use, driving, have sexual relationships</li> <li>• High influence of close peer group/intimate friends</li> <li>• Need and want for intimate community and relationships</li> <li>• May be able to create intimate relationships without feeling worried or inhibited</li> <li>• Peer groups become a safe haven where new ideas are tested</li> </ul>
<b>Emotional</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early-developing girls may feel particularly self-conscious and concerned about body image</li> <li>• Seek more privacy and often become more modest</li> <li>• Girls of this age experience increased pressure to conform to stereotyped gender roles. They may avoid academic achievement, for example, preferring to base their popularity on appearance, personality, or possessions.</li> <li>• Body image/physical appearance is important to girls' self-esteem. Girls tend to feel less attractive at this age than do boys.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate increased ability to understand others' feelings</li> <li>• Self-conscious, sensitive and worried about body changes, make comparisons to peers</li> <li>• Are especially vulnerable to bouts of low self-esteem, moodiness and intense emotionalism</li> <li>• Some adolescents are at risk of depression and suicide ideation, pay attention to anti-social behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wrestle with emotional attachment feelings toward parents, may flip flop between feeling close to parents and alienating them.</li> <li>• Need for intimacy and belonging, confusion of who or where fulfills that</li> <li>• Feeling of invincibility, "it will never happen to me"</li> <li>• Many adolescents at increased risk of depression and suicide attempts because of dependence on and norms within peer groups</li> </ul>

<b>Sexual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin to use sexual language and have romantic and sexual fantasies</li> <li>• Become more aware of sexual feelings and may masturbate to orgasm</li> <li>• May develop romantic crushes on close girlfriends, on boys their age, or on older boys, women or men</li> <li>• </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face important decisions in such areas as dating, sexual behavior</li> <li>• Further define their own sexual identity, including gender role and sexual orientation</li> <li>• Have more awareness of sexual feelings and attractions; possibly engage in some form of sexual behavior with others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to establish sexual identity</li> <li>• Will seek to feel comfortable with sexual feelings</li> <li>• Interested in body changes of self and others and sexual topics</li> </ul>
<b>Intellectual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have developed a social conscience around such issues as hunger, poverty, the environment and different types of discrimination; are interested in contributing to the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is formulating their own identity, sense of purpose, and value system</li> <li>• Deal more effectively with ambiguity</li> <li>• Make short-term, yet intense commitments to people, ideals, and projects</li> <li>• May still believe that consequences of risk taking behavior "won't happen to me."</li> <li>• Aware of moral philosophies, rights and privileges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will often consider different points of view to define their own position</li> <li>• Continue to develop ideals, goals and values</li> <li>• Continue to develop and refine moral rights and privileges</li> <li>• Question old values without losing identity</li> <li>• Usually can identify a more mature sense of purpose</li> <li>• May not yet have good decision making skills around safety and consequences</li> <li>• Power struggles occur when being right is at issue</li> <li>• Tend to hesitate toward appropriate risks in academic and career pursuits</li> </ul>

**References:**

- **"Infants, Children, and Adolescents"** by Laura E. Berk, PhD
- **Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh**
- **Girls Inc. Program Planning Guide**
- **University of Maryland Medical Center**