****

**MODULE FIVE**

**Adolescence and the   
issues facing young people**

**Contents**

* Defining adolescence
* The stages of adolescent development
* Reflecting on adolescence
* Young people today
* Common issues of adolescence
* Engaging with young people

**Overview**

This module will give participants an understanding of adolescent development and the role of adolescence in the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Participants are encouraged to reflect on how the lives of today’s young people might differ from their own experiences.

**Duration**

This module is designed to be completed in 65 to 85 minutes.

**Learning outcomes**

By the end of this session participants will have a greater understanding of adolescent development, the issues facing young people today, and how these might affect the way they approach their relationships with young people.

**Resources**

* Handout 5.1 – The stages of adolescent development
* Handout 5.2 – Young people today
* Handout 5.3 – Common issues of adolescence
* Handout 5.4 – Ideas for engaging young people

**Running sheet**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Topic** | **Activity** | **Duration (approx.)** |
| **Overview** | *This module will give participants an understanding of adolescent development and the role of adolescence in the transition from childhood to adulthood.*  *Participants are encouraged to reflect on how the lives of young people today might differ from their own experiences.* | 2 mins |
| **Defining adolescence** | ***Activity: Defining adolescence***  Divide participants into two groups. Separately give each group instructions. Ask one group to quickly brainstorm ideas for ‘An adolescent is a person who…’ and the other ‘An adult is a person who…’  Ask participants to talk about their responses and note that most of the characteristics of adults and adolescents are interchangeable.  ***[Optional] Activity: My adolescence***  In pairs ask participants to reflect on their own adolescence.  Ask each participant to use one word to describe to the group what their adolescence was like for them. | 10 mins  *[10 mins]* |
| **The stages of adolescent development** | * Provide an overview of the stages of adolescent development (Handout 5.1) * Ask participants how a young person might be feeling as they experience these changes | 10 mins |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Reflecting on adolescence** | ***Activity: Reflecting on adolescence***  This activity aims to take participants back to their youth to reflect on their own experiences growing up.  Ask paired-up participants to discuss what they were like as young people. Questions could include:   * What influenced you? * What pressures did you experience? * What did you enjoy? * What were your needs?   Participants share one key word that describes their adolescence with the group. | 10 mins |
| **Young people today** | * Review the influences on young people today compared to other generations (Handout 5.2)   ***[Optional] Activity: Generation scenario***  This activity aims to enable participants to explore how they might respond to generational differences.  Divide participants into two groups to discuss the following scenario before having them share their ideas with the whole group.  **Scenario:** *Matt is 16 years old and loves his new iPhone. When he catches up with Bill (mentor, 48 years old), he is often distracted by his new gadget, receiving SMS messages from friends and showing Bill music clips.*  *Bill has always thought he was pretty tech-savvy. In fact, the pair was matched because Bill used to be a web designer and the Mentor Co-ordinator thought they’d have something in common.*  *Bill feels a bit out of his depth as he doesn’t know how to approach Matt’s obsession.*  *What advice would you give Bill?* | 5 mins  [20 mins] |
| **Common issues of adolescence** | * **Brainstorm session:** What issues might young people face today? * Highlight issues from ‘The most common issues of adolescence’ (Handout 5.3) | 10 mins |
| **Engaging with young people** | ***Activity: Engaging young people***  This activity aims to encourage participants to use what they’ve learnt so far to develop strategies for engaging with young people.  Divide participants into two groups. Put these questions to the groups.  **Group 1:** *Considering what you’ve learnt about communicating with young people so far, what might be some particular ways you could best talk with a young person?*  **Group 2:** *Considering what you’ve learnt about communicating with young people so far, list some of the worst things you could do when talking to a young person.*  Ask participants to provide feedback to the group.   * Highlight any additional ‘Ideas for engaging young people’ (Handout 5.4)   ***[Optional] Activity: Role playing engagement***  This activity provides an opportunity for participants to role play how to best engage with a young person.  In pairs ask participants role play a first meeting with a young person. Each participant takes it in turns to play the young person and then the mentor role.  Ask participants to provide feedback to each other. Then ask for general observations from the group.  ***[Optional] Activity: Word Up***  Provide participants with the glossary of generation Y and Z terms found at:  [www.wordup.net.au/pub/wordup1.pdf](http://www.wordup.net.au/pub/wordup1.pdf)  Ask participants to circle terms they have heard before.  In pairs ask participants to discuss the article and how they might respond if a young person uses a term they do not understand. Participants can then share with the group how they would respond to ‘unknown’ terminology in a way that is authentic to them. | 20 mins  *[20 mins]*  *[20 mins]* |

HANDOUT 5.1  
The stages of adolescent   
development

‘Adolescence is a rollercoaster ride, and no one gets off before it’s over.’

(Anonymous)

Adolescence is the transition from childhood to adulthood. It can begin as young as eight years old and can end as late as 26 years, but is most commonly seen in ages 11 to 21.

The developmental changes adolescents undergo – physical, cognitive and social-emotional – are dramatic, which makes it one of the most confusing and stressful times of life.

Erik Erikson’s model of human development, The Eight Ages of Man, describes adolescence as the period of ‘identity versus role confusion’. It is marked by early, middle and late stages, and poses three big questions: Who am I? Am I normal? What is my place in the world?

To become an adult adolescents must complete the ‘tasks of adolescence’. These are to:

* form a secure and positive identity
* achieve independence from adult carers and parents
* establish ‘love’ objects outside the family
* find a place in the world by establishing a career direction and economic independence.

The changes adolescents undergo are intense, demanding and frightening, and largely out of their control. They can’t see the light at the end of the tunnel and often have no idea what’s coming at them next.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Stage** | **Physical** | **Cognitive** | **Social-emotional[[1]](#footnote-1)** |
| **Early**  **~ 11–13 years** | * Puberty: grow body hair, increased oil production in hair and skin * Girls: breast and hip development, menarche * Boys: growth in testicles and penis, wet dreams, deepening of voice * Tremendous physical growth: height increase and weight gain * Greater sexual interest | * Growing capacity for abstract thought * Mostly interested in present with limited thought of the future * Intellectual interests expand and become more important * Deeper moral thinking | * Shift from top position in primary school to being less powerful in secondary * Struggle with sense of identity * Feel awkward about self and body; worry about being normal * Realise parents are imperfect; greater conflict * Increased influence of peer group * Desire for independence and privacy * Return to ‘childish’ behaviour, particularly when stressed * Rule and limit testing |
| **Middle**  **~14–18 years** | * Puberty is completed * The average age for sexual maturation is 10.5 years for girls and 12.5 years for boys * Physical growth slows for girls, continues for boys | * Even greater capacity for abstract thought * Increased general knowledge applied to new tasks * Interest in learning life skills like cooking, fixing things, driving * Greater ability to set goals * Interest in moral reasoning * Thinking about meaning of life | * Deep self-involvement, changing between high expectations and poor self-concept * Adjustment to changing body, worries about being normal * A sense of ego and personal uniqueness, and thinking no one can understand them * Distance selves from parents, drive for independence * Driven to make friends and develop greater reliance on them; popularity can be an important issue * Feelings of love and passion |
| **Late**  **~ 19–21 years** | * Young women, typically, are fully developed * Young men continue to gain height, weight, muscle mass and body hair | * Ability to think ideas through * Ability to delay gratification * Increased contemplation * Increased concern for future * Continued interest in moral reasoning | * Firmer sense of identity * Increased emotional stability, independence and self-reliance * Increased concern for others * Peer relationships remain important * Development of more serious relationships * Social and cultural traditions regain some importance |

HANDOUT 5.2

Young people today

*‘People resemble their times more than they resemble their parents.’*   
(Old Proverb)

**Generation Z**

Generation Z are people born from 1995 to the end of 2009. They are also called the ‘silent generation’, ‘iGeneration’, ‘generation quiet’ and ‘net generation’.

* Make up nearly 18 percent of the world’s population.
* Are typically the children of Generation X, however their parents also include younger Baby Boomers and the older members of Generation Y.
* Are ‘digital natives’. Most of their communication takes place on the internet and they can show very little verbal communication skills.
* Can be impatient as they are used to instant action and satisfaction due to internet technology.
* May struggle with interaction with others and may contact with others as intrusion of space.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Generation Y**

Generation Y is often defined as those born between 1978 and 1995. By 2012 Gen Y will comprise 40 per cent of the Australian working population.

* There are over 4 million Gen Y Australians.
* One in three is of an ethnic background other than Caucasian.
* One in four grew up in a single-parent household.
* Of current high-school students, almost 80 per cent will complete Year 12. The majority of these will go on to post-secondary education.
* There are more careers on offer today than ever before. In Australia today there is an estimated shortage of over 20,000 skilled-trade workers.
* In 1960 employees spent an average of 15 years with each employer. Today, this figure has dropped to four years.
* Of the total workforce, 30 per cent is employed on a casual basis. For Generation Y this figure is over 40 per cent.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Seminal influences on different generations**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Baby Boomers** | **Generation X** | **Generation Y[[4]](#footnote-4)** | **Generation Z** |
| **Prime Ministers** | William McMahon  Gough Whitlam  Malcolm Fraser | Bob Hawke  Paul Keating | John Howard | Kevin Rudd  Julia Gillard |
| **Iconic technology** | TV, 1956  Audio cassette, 1962  Colour TV, 1975 | VCR, 1976  Walkman, 1979  IBM PC, 1981 | Internet, e-mail  mobile phones  DVD, 1995  Play Station | Internet  iPhones  Facebook  Twitter |
| **Music** | Elvis  Beatles  Rolling Stones | INXS  Nirvana  Madonna | Eminem  Britney Spears  50 Cent | Megan Washington  50 cent  Alicia Keys |
| **TV & movies** | *Easy Rider*  *The Graduate*  *Jaws* | *ET*  *Hey Hey it's Saturday*  *MTV* | *Lord of the Rings*  *The Simpsons*  Reality TV | *MasterChef*  *The Incredibles*  *Twilight* |
| **Popular culture** | Flared jeans  Mini skirts  Barbie, frisbee | Rollerblades  Hyper colour  Grunge | Body piercing  Baseball caps  Metrosexuality | Tattoos  ‘Emo’ style  Slim fit jeans |
| **Landmark events** | Decimal currency, 1966  Neil Armstrong, 1969  Vietnam War, 1965-73  Cyclone Tracy, 1974  Advance Australia Fai, 1974 | Challenger explodes, 1986  Haley's comet, 1986  Stockmarket crash, 1987  Berlin Wall down, 1989  Newcastle earthquake,  1989 | Columbine shootings, 1999  New millennium, 2000  September 11th 2001  Bali bombings, 2002  Iraq War, 2003+ | SARS epidemic (2003)  Boxing Day Tsunami (2004)  Barack Obama US president (2008)  Global financial crisis (2008) |
| **Aspirational figures** | John F Kennedy  Audrey Hepburn  Muhammed Ali | Bono (U2)  Princess Diana  Andre Agassi | Richard Branson | Paris Hilton |



HANDOUT 5.3

Common issues of  
adolescence

Young people face issues that relate to the ‘developmental tasks’ of adolescence, which revolve around identity, independence, love, sex and money. Some adolescents have the resilience to overcome these struggles, while others simply get stuck.

**Family issues**

Adolescence is a time for breaking away from family and becoming independent, yet many young people have complex family situations that make this process even more tumultuous. Single parents, parents with drug and alcohol or mental health issues and siblings with disabilities are just some of the struggles young people might face.

**Alcohol, tobacco and other drug misuse**

Binge drinking and favourable attitudes to alcohol misuse are a great concern for adolescents, whose physical and mental development is at significant risk from intoxication.

**Difficult behaviour**

Socially unacceptable behaviour is often highly visible during adolescence. Some of this behaviour is a way of separating from parents, some is a challenge to parental and societal values, and some is misplaced anger.

**Adolescent pregnancy**

The need to be loved and be the centre of attention is high during adolescence, and it coincides with sexual maturation and extreme hormonal activity. Alcohol is a major factor in sexual activity, unwanted sexual attention, and pregnancy.

**Depression and suicide**

Adolescents are susceptible depression and even suicide. Girls are more susceptible to depression, but boys are catching up. Boys complete suicide attempts more often – they use more lethal means – but girls aren’t far behind.

High levels of stress or anxiety, loss of a boyfriend or girlfriend, poor school performance, unwanted pregnancy, and family instability and unhappiness are causes of depression and triggers for suicidal ideation.

**Eating disorders**

Once an issue confined to young females, eating disorders in males are on the increase. The teenager pursues thinness through starvation with anorexia nervosa, while bulimia is a binge-and-purge sequence.

**Cultural issues**

Many young people in our community come from diverse cultural backgrounds with different understandings and approaches to their lives. These differences provide rich experiences, but can also mean misunderstandings can occur through assumptions about the way things ‘should’ be done.

**Cyberspace and technology**

New technologies have meant that young people can be constantly connected to friends, family and even complete strangers through mobile phones and the internet. These technologies have deeply influenced the way young people engage with others and have even opened them up to dangerous situations such as cyber-bullying.

[**Coping with peer pressure**](http://www.iloveindia.com/parenting/parenting-teenagers/coping-up-with-peer-pressure.html) **and peer influence**

Peer pressure is not always bad, however teenagers can sometimes get involved in negative activities simply because their friends think it’s a good idea. Mostly, being with friends reinforces rather than undermines family values.

Young people themselves reject the notion of peer pressure. But peer influence – who they spend their time with – can’t be underestimated.

***[Program co-ordinators should insert information about issues faced by the program’s particular cohort of young people here.]***

HANDOUT 5.4

Ideas for engaging  
young people

* Stay patient and positive.
* Being non-judgmental will assist in a young person speaking up more.
* Be curious – enquire about what they’re saying.
* Use encouraging language.
* Talking and listening should ideally be about 50–50.
* Listening is good. Silence is fine.
* Use body language and encouraging sounds to show that you are listening.
* Beam quality attention at them.
* Give them a compliment. For example, ‘I know it must have been hard to tell me. I admire your courage.’
* Ask questions rather than telling them what you think is best. For example, ‘What do you think are the consequences of not putting in the work at school?’ Or, ‘Do you have some ideas about how to solve that problem?’
* Try to understand their point of view and check back to see if you understood properly. For example, in order to reflect the young person’s feelings, you could say, ‘It seems like you were really embarrassed’ or, ‘It seems like you felt hurt’. In order to check that you understood the message the way it was intended, you could say, ‘It sounds like what you’re saying is ….’
* Use open-ended questions. For example, ‘How was school today?’ will probably get a one-word answer, whereas asking, ‘What did you do at school?’ is more likely to get a longer response.
* Use question words such as ‘where’, ‘when’, ‘why’, ‘who’ and ‘what’.[[5]](#footnote-5)

1. Adapted from *MOIRA Mentor Training Manual*, Moorabbin, Victoria: South Directions Youth Service. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Adapted from www.babyboomercaretaker.com/baby-boomer/generation-z and www.generationz.com.au* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Huntley, R., 2006. The World According to Y, St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Adapted from McCrindle, M. and Hooper, D., 2006. *Generation Y: Attracting, Engaging and Leading a New Generation at Work*, Hobart: Drake International. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Adapted from *Mentor One on One Volunteers Manual* (MOOOV), Collingwood, Victoria: Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)