

Joanne Austin
Area Extension Faculty
WSU Cooperative Extension
360-428-4270

ACTIVITIES INFLUENCE ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

Do you have a child that is 10 to 15 years of age? What activities is he or she involved in? Do these activities provide the variety to meet the developmental needs of adolescents?

To evaluate your child's activities consider the list developed by the Center for Early Adolescence, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Positive social interactions with adults and peers. Young adolescents identify with their peer groups' values and desperately want to belong. They require opportunities to form positive relationships with their friends. Although they may not often admit it, they have a similar need for caring relationships with adults who like and respect them.

Structure and clear limits. Clear expectations are crucial to young people. Explicit boundaries help define the areas in which they may seek freedom to explore. In their search for independence, they often feel immune to risks and dangers. They require structure and guidance in setting clear limits that involve them in the process of decision-making.

Physical activity. Young adolescents experience very rapid and uneven physical development. They have a tremendous amount of energy; therefore they need a great deal of physical activity and time for having fun, as well as time for relaxation.

Creative expression. This age group also needs a chance to express to the world who they are on the inside. This might be shown through music, writing, sports, drama, art, cooking, or even making up games for younger children to play.

Meaningful participation in families, schools, and communities. Young adolescents are intensely curious about the world around them. They require exposure to situations in which they can use their skills to solve real-life problems. There is a need to participate in activities that shape their lives.

Opportunities for self-definition. This is a uniquely vulnerable time for youth. They require time to reflect on the reactions they receive from others and to construct a consistent self-image from the many different mirrors in which they view themselves. Adults can help in this process by posing questions that help them think through how they feel, as well as understanding the feeling of those around them.

Does your child's activities provide this assortment of opportunities? If not, consider additional activities in the community, at school, and at home.