



Amachi
PITTSBURGH
Hands of Faith in Action

Child Development

And what it means for your mentee

Infancy

During this stage babies are developing their vision, hearing, taste, smell and touch. From a social perspective, babies in the infancy stage also begin to form attachments to their parents or caretakers. Developing healthy attachments is critical to further development of cognitive and emotional skills later in life. The human body grows and develops more rapidly in infancy than in any other life stage.

Early Childhood

In this stage children begin communicating verbally and developing their own sense of self within the larger context of their family. They learn mostly by imitation and play, and begin to test boundaries to learn the difference between right and wrong. Children also begin to self-regulate their behavior more, learning from situations in which they get in trouble or make a mistake.

Middle Childhood

Important benchmarks are made in the development of self esteem during this developmental stage. Building friendships and relationships are critical to ensure strong social networks are built. Children start to learn how to solve their own problems independently of their parents and they develop their own moral code. Children in this stage begin to experience peer pressure and begin to be exposed to bullying on a more substantial level.

Adolescence

Rapid changes occur biologically, psychologically, cognitively and socioculturally during the adolescence stage. A key development aspect of adolescence is becoming completely self-aware. Experiences are no longer random but fit within the adolescent's interpersonal context. Adolescents make important decisions about their identity. They seek independence from their parents/caregivers and want to be a part of any decision-making that affects them. Teens are more likely to engage in risky behaviors.



BUZZ WORDS

- ❖ **Attachment** – Infants who develop healthy attachments to their parent or caregiver are given a safe space and opportunity to explore life. Developing healthy attachments in the infancy stage is critical to continued emotional development and the sustainability of relationships into adulthood.
- ❖ **Biopsychosocial** – the alignment of physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual health and well-being. Developing a strong sense of self as a child is a key part of psychosocial health.
- ❖ **Defense Mechanisms** – unconscious reactions that strive to protect a person from unwanted emotions like anxiety and guilt.
- ❖ **Social constructs** – cultural norms that are not based on biology or science, but instead are learned based on our interactions with others and expectations created within a society

Other considerations...

Race and Ethnicity – children are forced to develop their own racial identity during their adolescence. Children are most likely to be subjected to racism and discrimination during the adolescent stage and it is common for children to try to express their identity in different ways as they navigate through their own cultural or household norms and those of the broader society.

Gender – gender development is socialized from an early age. Children begin to understand the perceived differences between boys and girls when they begin pre-school.

Spirituality – developing a healthy spiritual bond can be incredibly valuable for children and adults. Spirituality can be sought through organized religion, but on a more basic level means having something to believe in and trust that is larger than yourself.

Depression – depression and anxiety develop most acutely in adolescence. Suicide is the third leading cause for death among teenagers. Be aware of risk factors and know your children and mentees well enough to recognize your teen might be displaying symptoms of depression.

Disabilities – having a disability can be a challenge for children. As we grow, we want to assert our own independence and begin to navigate our own lives. Giving your child the opportunity to grow and be independent (while safe) is important.

Bullying – a significant problem pervasive across age groups (and into adulthood). Bullying can have a severe impact on a child's sense of self and overall self esteem. Reinforcing your child/mentee's strengths at home can help to reduce the effects of bullying.