

# Adolescence

## As They Enter Adolescence

Adolescence is that dynamic flurry of activity, development and decision-making that transforms the child and lays the groundwork for the adults we become.

Beyond YouTube and super-sized fries, it is a known fact that boys and girls of this generation are developing at a more accelerated pace than any other generation. With increased access to social media, radio, cable and network TV and the vast resources of the Internet, they have immediate, almost uncensored influence and information.

*The fast pace, priorities, lifestyles and configurations of families today add an extra layer of vulnerability as youth strive to find the confidence and personal integrity needed to filter the myriad of realities they encounter.*

They have more opportunities, spending money and material possessions than ever before. And, thanks to the onset of earlier puberty (due to an increased awareness of peer and media influence, good nutrition and physical exercise), hormones are "hitting the fan" at an average age of 10-1/2 for girls and 11-1/2 to 12 for boys!

The fast pace, priorities, lifestyles and configurations of families today add an extra layer of vulnerability as youth strive to find the confidence and personal integrity needed to filter the myriad of realities they encounter. In the midst of our ongoing programs for children, youth and families, our challenge becomes one of relaying more than just another kind of information or inspiration. Are we providing ministries that nurture their most basic needs for faith and identity in community? Here are some ideas:

- Engage youth in defining their personal identity.
- Ask them! Decide to make it a priority to get to know them. Discover their individual strengths, challenges and needs for ministry and plan programs and events accordingly.
- Be proactive! Provide age appropriate ways for children to address issues they will inevitably face in daily life. Teach and model skills that nurture the power within them to be stronger and more discerning than the world around them. Nurture their identity as a "Child of God" to be a relevant and meaningful part of their lives.
- Consider using the 40 Developmental Assets identified by Search Institute as a framework for becoming more intentional about nurturing faith from a more holistic perspective. To learn more, visit the [Search Institute Web site](#).

- Engage youth in defining their own personal identity, social and moral perspectives as you invite them to interpret faith for daily life? Ask the ol' Lutheran question, "So...what does THIS mean?" as you plan intriguing lessons and events.
- Introduce the significance of "talk" as the four-letter word most associated with healthy relationships. Teach skills for effective communication, conflict resolution and healthy friendships.
- Promote practical reasons for youth to gather and support one another such as after school to do homework or hangout after athletic events.
- Establish a program for peer ministry. Invite youth to nurture, mentor and support each other.
- Vibrant Faith Ministries provides resources for youth and adult training. They also have a wealth of other resources for equipping parents to nurture children and youth. Visit [Vibrant Faith](#) for more information.
- Provide opportunities for youth and adults to build relationships and mentor one another in faith and life.
- Maximize your potential for ministry. Combine opportunities for learning and service with other groups, e.g. link a youth car wash with oil changes for elderly or single parents sponsored by a men's group. You might also invite the evangelism committee to provide cookies and information about the church. Be sure to begin and end the events with shared prayer.

This article was originally published in [Seeds for the Parish](#), a bimonthly resource paper for leaders of ELCA congregations. It has been edited and updated.