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Adolescent development is characterized by significant biological, cognitive, and psychosocial changes. Physical changes associated with puberty are triggered by hormones and changes in the brain in which reward-processing centers develop more rapidly than cognitive control systems, making adolescents more sensitive to rewards than to possible negative consequences. Cognitive changes include improvements in complex and abstract thought and moral reasoning. Psychosocial changes are particularly notable as adolescents become more autonomous from their parents, spend more time with peers, and begin exploring romantic relationships and sexuality.

Adjustment during adolescence is reflected in identity formation, which often involves a period of exploration followed by commitments to particular identities. Adolescents' relationships with parents go through a period of redefinition in which adolescents become more autonomous, and aspects of parenting, such as monitoring and psychological control, become more salient. Peer relationships are important sources of support and companionship during adolescence, yet can also promote problem behaviors. Same-sex peer groups evolve into mixed-sex peer groups, and adolescents' romantic relationships tend to emerge from these groups. Identity formation occurs as adolescents explore and commit to different roles and ideological positions. Despite these generalizations, factors such as country of residence, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation shape development in ways that lead to diversity of experiences across adolescence.

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