



The Core Story of Adolescence

The Core Story of Adolescence is a set of connected ideas that are key to understanding adolescent development. It communicates evidence-based information from the Center for the Developing Adolescent, placing current scientific understanding of adolescent development in a narrative form and applying the framing recommendations to the story they collectively tell. It also extends this information to explicitly talk about structural inequities.

We should use this Core Story as often as possible in all public facing materials. It includes all of the well-framed information people need to understand, to support and even to demand policies that would improve the lives of all adolescents.

Adolescence is a time of remarkable opportunity and growth.

From around age 10 to about 25, we discover, learn from, and adapt to the world around us. We forge our sense of who we are and who we aspire to be. We learn to make decisions, manage our emotions, and create deeper connections with peers and others in our communities.

We also build resilience, and develop interests, passions, and meaningful goals that shape our adult lives. Our developing brains are well suited to these tasks, but too often the systems that serve us are not. Adults working to support young people must transform dysfunctional and discriminatory systems to ensure that ALL of us have the support we need to explore, discover, and become a force for good in our communities and society, during adolescence and as we transition to adulthood.

- Always name an age range or stage in life since people have a fuzzy understanding of when adolescence occurs.
- Use discovery metaphors to explain how they benefit from exploration.
- Always point out that adolescents are building stronger communities.
- Focus on future benefits.

Along with this script, you can download a set of slides that you can use at the beginning of presentations that will help you tell this Core Story as often as possible.



Extended Core Story of Adolescence

Adolescence is a time of remarkable opportunity and growth. From around age 10 to about 25, we discover, learn from and adapt to the world around us. We forge our sense of who we are and who we aspire to be. We learn to make decisions, manage our emotions, and create deeper connections with peers, romantic partners and others in our communities. We also build resilience, and develop interests, passions, and meaningful goals that shape our adult lives.

Our developing brains are well suited to these tasks. During adolescence, we are rapidly learning and adapting in ways that naturally take advantage of supportive relationships, environments, and experiences that promote positive growth and development. This makes adolescence a key window for learning and discovery,* as well as a time to address the effects of earlier adversity.** Experiences that encourage autonomy and healthy risk-taking such as tackling challenging school projects, forming relationships with new people, and engaging in community activities can lead to this positive cognitive development. **All adolescents need supportive social environments, stimulating learning experiences, and diverse extracurricular activities in our communities to thrive.**

• Always name an age range or stage in life since people have a fuzzy understanding of when adolescence occurs.

• Use discovery metaphors to explain how they benefit from exploration.

* Crone, E.A., & Dahl, R.E. (2012). Understanding adolescence as a period of social-affective engagement and goal flexibility. *Nature*, 13, 636–650. doi:10.1038/nrn3313

** Guyer, A. E., Silk, J. S., & Nelson, E. E. (2016). The neurobiology of the emotional adolescent: From the inside out. *Neuroscience and biobehavioral reviews*, 70, 74–85. doi:10.1016/j.neubiorev.2016.07.037



Unfortunately, the social systems that serve us during this developmentally sensitive period are often not structured to provide optimal support for learning and positive adaptation, and some young people have fewer opportunities than others. Structural barriers to successful development—such as poverty, discrimination, and marginalization—can reinforce inequities and amplify risks for negative outcomes. Adults working to support youth must transform dysfunctional and discriminatory systems to ensure that ALL of us have the support we need during adolescence to explore, discover, and become engaged in our communities and society, now and as we transition to adulthood.

Clearly link inequities to the structural factors that cause them.

Always point out that adolescents are building stronger communities.

Focus on future benefits.

We need to make that all young people can access the opportunities of adolescence. We need to put in place policies and programs that meet the unique and evolving developmental needs of this period. In addition to food, housing, and resources for a quality academic education, these needs include:

- Safe and satisfying ways to explore the world and test out new ideas and experiences
- Real-world scenarios in which to build problem-solving and decision-making skills
- Avenues to develop a sense of meaning, identity, and purpose by contributing to friends, families, and communities
- Spaces to safely try, fail, and try again
- Opportunities to cooperate and collaborate across racial, economic, and cultural differences
- Warmth and support from parents and other caring adults to navigate strong emotions and learn to handle stress

During adolescence we are primed to learn from and give back to our environments in ways that benefit our whole society. When the policies, programs, and people that serve adolescents are aligned to meet the developmental needs of this period, we ensure opportunities for today that will benefit our communities in the future.

