**Adolescence**

**Adolescence** is described as the transition period from childhood to adulthood, extending from puberty to independence.

* Due to improved nutrition and possibly hormones in foodstuffs, sexual maturation occurs earlier nowadays.
* Psychologists note that adolescence is often marked by mood swings.
* It Begins with **puberty**: the period of sexual maturation marked by a surge of hormones, during which one first becomes capable of reproducing; 2-year period of rapid development usually beginning in girls at age 11 and in boys at age 13.

**Associated terms:**

**Primary sex characteristics:** body structures (ovaries, testes, and external genitalia) that make sexual reproduction possible.

**Secondary sex characteristics:** non-reproductive sexual characteristics female breasts and hips, male voice quality and body hair.

**Landmarks of puberty:** for boys are first ejaculation at about 14 and first menstrual period for girls at about 13 (**Menarche**: The time of a womans first menstrual period).

*Note:*

Although variation in the timing of growth spurt has little effect on ones eventual height, there are psychological consequences.

Early maturation is good for boys stronger, more athletic, and tend to be more popular, self-assured, and independent.

Early maturation for girls is stressful; but later when peers catch up it tends to allow them to enjoy greater prestige and self-confidence.

Reasoning is often self-focused pubescent adolescents may believe private experiences are unique and that no one understands the feelings.

**Kohlbergs Moral Ladder**

Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) attempted to describe how we developed morals. He suggested that we pass through six stages of moral reasoning clustered into three basic levels:

1. **Preconventional morality**(before age 9)  
   Children obey to either avoid punishment or to gain concrete rewards;*If you do the dishes, you can have dessert.*
2. **Conventional morality**(by early adolescence)  
   Morality evolves to a more conventional level that upholds laws simply because they are laws and rules; since they are now able to see others perspectives, they follow actions that gain social approval or maintain social order; *if you steal, everyone will think that you are a thief and untrustworthy.*
3. **Postconventional morality**(may develop from adolescence on)  
   Those who develop abstract reasoning of formal operational thought follow what affirms peoples rights or what one personally perceives as basic ethical principles*; Stealing is wrong but Robin Hood is a hero because he stole from the rich for the poor.*

As our thinking matures, behavior becomes less selfish and more caring. To refine their sense of identity, adolescents in western cultures try out different "selves" which are gradually reshaped to form their own identity. According to Erik Erikson, the adolescents task is to solidify a sense of self by testing and integrating various roles.

Identity searching continues past the teen years; as it becomes clearer, self-esteem increases. Erikson believes that after the identity stage one is best able to develop the capacity for **intimacy** (the ability to form close, loving relationships), the primary developmental task in late adolescence and early adulthood. As identity is formed, separation from parents occurs.