

Unit 3

Understanding personal development and relationships

This unit covers:

- + stages and patterns of human growth and development
- + factors that can affect human growth and development
- + the development of self-concept and personal relationships
- + major life changes and how people deal with them
- + the role of relationships in personal development

You need to learn:

- + how individuals grow and develop during each life stage
- + what factors affect human growth and development and how these can influence an individual's health, well-being and life opportunities
- + what effect relationships have on personal development
- + what factors influence the development of a person's self-concept
- + how life events can affect personal development

Human growth and development

When we grow we get bigger. Our body cells divide repeatedly to produce new cells. These are organised into specialised tissues and organs. Our height increases and we gain body mass to increase our weight. At the same time we develop our skills, abilities and emotions. As we are all different, we grow and develop in slightly different ways and at slightly different rates. However, we all follow more or less the same pattern of growth and development through the five main **life stages**.

We can look at these typical growth and development patterns using the **PIES (physical, intellectual, emotional and social)** aspects of health and well-being.



Life stages

Infancy

Physical growth and development

Infants grow and develop very quickly physically. Between birth and age 3 years, infants gain strength as muscles grow. The first teeth develop. These are called **milk teeth**. Newborn babies have very little movement, but by 3–4 months most can control their head movements and lift their chests when placed on their stomachs. Body movement develops so that infants can roll over, then sit, crawl, walk, run, jump and climb. These full body movements are called **gross motor skills**.

Infants also develop **fine motor skills**. These are smaller, more precise movements. Handling skills develop, so a pencil or crayon can be held for



scribbling or drawing, zips and buttons can be done up and undone, scissors can be used to cut paper and towers can be built using bricks.

Infants in their first year grow approximately 25–30 millimetres each month. By 12 months of age their weight will have tripled. Growth is slower in the second year of life.

Intellectual growth and development

When a baby is born, its brain contains 100 billion nerve cells. During the first 2 years of life the brain changes dramatically by developing connections between these nerve cells. This enables the development of language. From basic cries and cooing noises, the infant learns simple words and starts to talk in sentences. Infants become aware of people and objects and are able to follow simple instructions. They learn their name and age, can answer questions, count up to three and recognise different colours. They remember more and more as their memory develops. Parents can encourage language development by talking to their children often and by reading to them daily.

Learning to ride a tricycle is a skill that most infants learn at the age of 2–3 years; riding a bicycle usually comes a little later



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Emotional growth and development

Infants bond with their parents or carers early in life. This bond is a strong emotional attachment. Infants develop trust with their parents or carers. When separated from parents or carers, they become anxious and distressed. When unhappy, they can be comforted by the parents. Infants are able to show affection with kisses and cuddles. Around 2 years of age, they can have temper tantrums when frustrated, but these generally lessen by the age of 3 years. Their **self-concept** develops from the first year of life. As they develop, they become able to express their own feelings.

Social growth and development

Social development in infants begins with the immediate family. Infants interact with parents, brothers and sisters. For example, they begin to smile when talked to or held. From around 1 year of age, infants begin to learn what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. Later in infancy, the social circle widens and infants enjoy the company of others. They develop from playing on their own to playing with others. They learn to share, and develop basic social skills such as eating with a fork and spoon and going to the toilet. They imitate what others do and say.

Social development in children often begins at nursery school



Visit a playgroup or nursery and observe infant play. Look for interactions with other infants and with carers.

Childhood

Physical growth and development

Children grow taller and generally look slimmer than infants. Their motor skills develop with increasing strength, balance and coordination. This means they can do more than infants. Children can skip, ride a bicycle and run further and faster than before. Growth in children is rapid but not generally as fast as in infancy.



Permanent teeth generally begin to replace milk teeth from about 6 years of age. By this time, most children have full **bladder control** both during the day and at night.

Intellectual growth and development

Generally, children can use adult speech at the start of childhood and their vocabulary quickly increases. They can read and write and develop further counting and other number skills throughout this stage. Their concentration and memory span also increase. They will have learnt certain routines – for example, how to tie their shoe laces and how to brush their teeth. They can solve complex puzzles and problems using logical thought, provided they can ‘see’ what the problem is. This might involve asking questions using pictures of the problem.

Emotional growth and development

During childhood, individuals experience a wide range of emotions and become able to express their feelings well. Self-concept and self-confidence

Older children learn to play together



develop further as they become more independent (less dependent on parents and carers). Other emotional links are made – for example, when forming relationships with friends. Children who feel safe and secure generally have the confidence to form relationships with others. They begin to be more responsible individuals.

Social growth and development

Children form friendship groups during the childhood years. These tend to be with children of the same gender. The groups are large at first but they get smaller. Eventually, one ‘best’ friend may be established. Children support each other and play together. Generally, their social circle widens when they attend junior school and meet new people. They interact with adults who are not part of their immediate family, such as teachers.

Children learn how to behave in different situations – for example, when at school or visiting relatives. Their behaviour changes as they learn more about what they can and cannot do. Routines such as the school day become established behaviour.



How have you changed since childhood?

Adolescence

Physical growth and development

Adolescence is the life stage when puberty occurs. This means that adolescence is a transitional stage as young people move from childhood to adulthood. Girls generally enter puberty earlier than boys. Both boys and girls experience a growth spurt. This increases their height and weight, so much so that body mass can double. Although they start puberty later, boys generally grow bigger than girls.

Sex hormones are produced as adolescents become able to reproduce. The effects caused by the sex hormones are called secondary sexual characteristics.

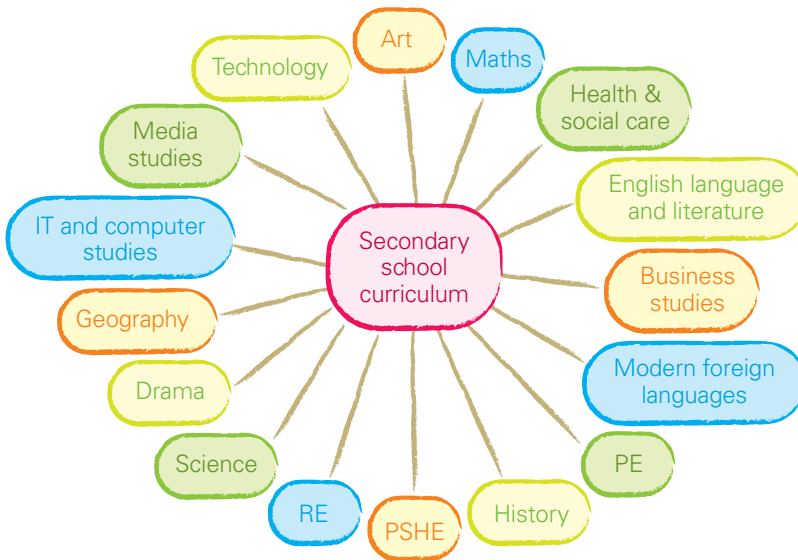
Table 10
Changes that occur in puberty

Boys	Girls
Sperm produced by testicles	Eggs produced by ovaries
The penis and testicles get bigger	Breasts develop and nipples get bigger
Body hair grows on face, underarms and in pubic area (groin)	Body hair grows on underarms and in pubic area (groin)
Body muscles develop and body gets broader, especially at the shoulders	Body shape becomes curvier as breasts develop and hips widen
The voice ‘breaks’ (becomes deeper)	Periods start (menstruation)



Intellectual growth and development

During adolescence, individuals attend secondary school and study a wider and more detailed curriculum than in junior school. This develops knowledge, understanding and skills in preparation for adult life.



A typical secondary school curriculum

How is secondary school different from junior school? What have been the major learning differences for you?



During adolescence, individuals' memory improves and they are able to solve more complex problems. This involves thinking logically and often in an abstract way. It means solving a problem by thinking it through, step by step, without having to do it practically. To do this, adolescents have to use their imagination and develop powers of reasoning. It means trying out ideas in their head to find the answer. Often, adolescents will make guesses to start working it out. To think in this way, a person has to be able to think about the future, often about things they have not done or seen before. This is something that children and infants are not able to do.

Devise a memory test game for younger children of different ages.



Emotional growth and development

Emotionally, adolescence can be a difficult and stressful time. Hormonal changes in the body create rapid mood swings. One minute the individual might be happy, the next minute, moody and sad. This can have a great effect on adolescent social behaviour and relationships. This is often very obvious in the way adolescents and their parents get along. Adolescents' search for identity may make them appear rebellious. Arguments are common, often about wanting the freedom to act as an adult!



Adolescents often adopt hairstyles to fit in with their peers

While self-concept continues to develop, it is quite common for adolescents to become self-critical and easily embarrassed. They become highly conscious about the way they look and dress. It is also a time when they become more independent than ever before.

Social growth and development

Adolescence is also the time when individuals first become interested in finding a sexual partner. As physical attraction for a sexual partner develops, adolescents test out new relationships. Close, intimate relationships are formed as individuals ‘fall in love’ and explore their sexuality.

The influence of parents decreases as the influence of peer groups grows. It is common for adolescents to wear clothes and have hairstyles that make them acceptable to their peer group. This gives a sense of group identity. Hairstyle, or dressing in a particular way, makes a statement about the person. This is often very different from the way parents dress.

Each adolescent develops his/her individual personality. Both emotional and social developments prepare adolescents for adult life and the roles and responsibilities that come with it.

Adulthood

For most people, adulthood is the longest life stage. Changes occur as adults age. Young adults aged 20–30 years are at the height of their physical powers. As they grow older and become middle aged (40 years plus) the signs of ageing start to appear.

Physical growth and development

By early adulthood, individuals are fully grown and have reached physical maturity. Their strength and stamina are at a peak. Body systems such as



By early adulthood individuals are physically mature and their strength and stamina are at a peak

the respiratory system and circulation system are at maximum efficiency. The maintenance of physical ability depends very much on the lifestyle adopted. Adults who eat an unbalanced diet, smoke, drink alcohol to excess and do not exercise lose physical capability quickly. They also put themselves at risk of certain diseases, such as heart disease and high blood pressure.

Adults are also at the height of their reproductive powers. Males usually remain fertile throughout adulthood, but females do not. Generally, between the ages of 45 and 55 years, a female's ability to produce eggs stops. This is called the **menopause**. The woman's ovaries gradually become less active and produce smaller amounts of sex hormones. This usually happens over 1–2 years. The first signs of the menopause are irregular periods and heavier menstrual bleeding. Eventually, periods stop altogether.

Other physical symptoms commonly associated with the menopause are:

- + 'hot flushes', where the upper body becomes red and the woman feels hot for a few minutes or longer
- + heavy sweating, often at night
- + dryness of the skin, which can lead to wrinkles forming

In the mid-adult years, around 40 years of age, the ability to repair body tissues begins to decrease. For example, the same broken bone will usually take longer to heal in a 50 year old than it would in a 25 year old.

Some physical signs of ageing appear at this time, such as skin wrinkles and hair loss. These tend to be more obvious and further developed in the later adulthood stage. Eyesight also changes and individuals with previously normal eyesight tend to become long sighted. This often requires reading glasses to be worn.



Physical signs of ageing in middle adulthood include changes in eyesight

Respiratory and circulatory system performance decreases gradually. If an individual exercises regularly, however, these changes can be slowed down. Unfortunately, they cannot be stopped altogether.

All these physical changes during adulthood are perfectly natural and normal.

Intellectual growth and development

Intellectual growth and development continues during adulthood. Individuals carry on learning even though they may no longer be at school,



college or university. Everyday life activities provide opportunities to continue learning. Adults develop knowledge and skills at work, just by doing the job and undergoing training. They add to their knowledge and understanding by reading newspapers, surfing the web, watching television, talking to other people and taking part in leisure activities. This is sometimes called gaining **wisdom**. The experiences an adult has can help when facing new problems or when having to make decisions.

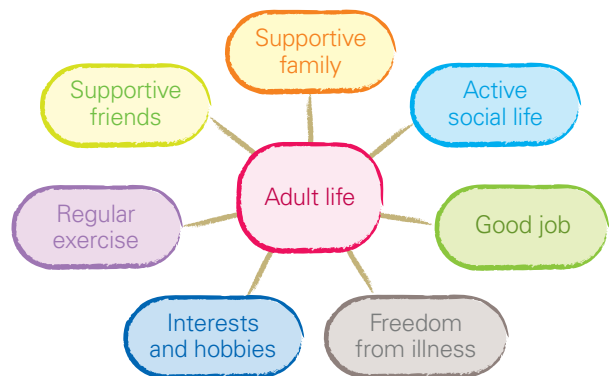
Emotional growth and development

By the time people reach adulthood, they will have experienced a wide range of emotions and learned how to cope with them. After the emotional upheavals of adolescence, adulthood is a more stable period. Self-concept continues to develop. Individuals vary naturally – some are confident and others less so. In general, adults are more confident in their middle adulthood years than when they were younger.

Emotional development, as in any life stage, is closely linked to social development. Having one permanent partner or not, having the support of family and friendship groups or not, and the level of stress at home or at work all have an effect.

The menopause may cause females to become irritable and depressed due to hormonal changes. Various treatments are available to help with this. For example, **hormone replacement therapy** (HRT) can help by replacing the hormones no longer produced naturally by the body.

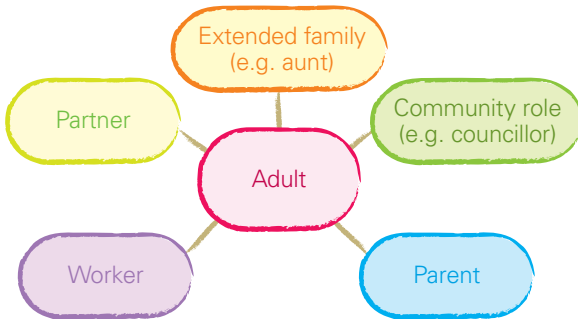
Emotional feelings in adult life become complex. Adults understand and learn to deal with, or tolerate, different opinions and viewpoints. Where adults have a full and meaningful life, a sense of satisfaction and achievement is developed.



Factors that improve emotional well-being in adult life

Social growth and development

Adulthood is often thought of as a settling down stage. Having learned the necessary social skills, adults generally know how to behave appropriately. Individuals have sexual relationships and continue to develop friendships. Interactions with family and friends, and with work and leisure colleagues build the person's social circle.



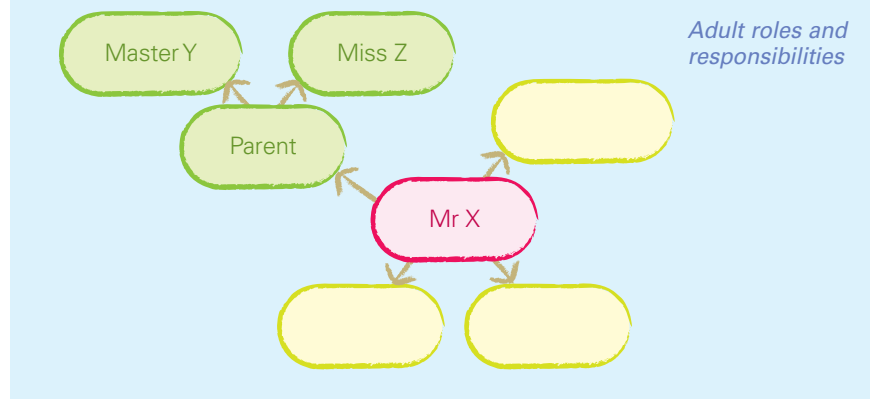
Typical adult roles

While some individuals choose to live alone, most form partnerships of an intimate nature and live together. These relationships may lead to marriage and/or parenthood. Later, individuals may take care of parents or other elderly relatives. Adults therefore take on many different responsibilities and play a number of different roles throughout this life stage.

Each of these roles may compete for time in an adult's life. Balancing the roles can be difficult and stressful.



Create a bubble diagram to show roles and responsibilities of an adult you know well. Part of one (in this case for 'Mr X') is shown below to give you some ideas. Remember to maintain the anonymity of the selected person.



Later adulthood

Physical growth and development

As we enter later adulthood, some of the physical changes that started during adulthood become more obvious. These include the following:

- + The skin wrinkles as it becomes thinner and less elastic. Brown 'liver' spots may appear on the skin. These have nothing to do with the liver, however. They are sometimes called age spots and are harmless and painless. The skin bruises more easily after knocks.
- + Hair thinning and loss occurs; any remaining hair may turn grey or white.



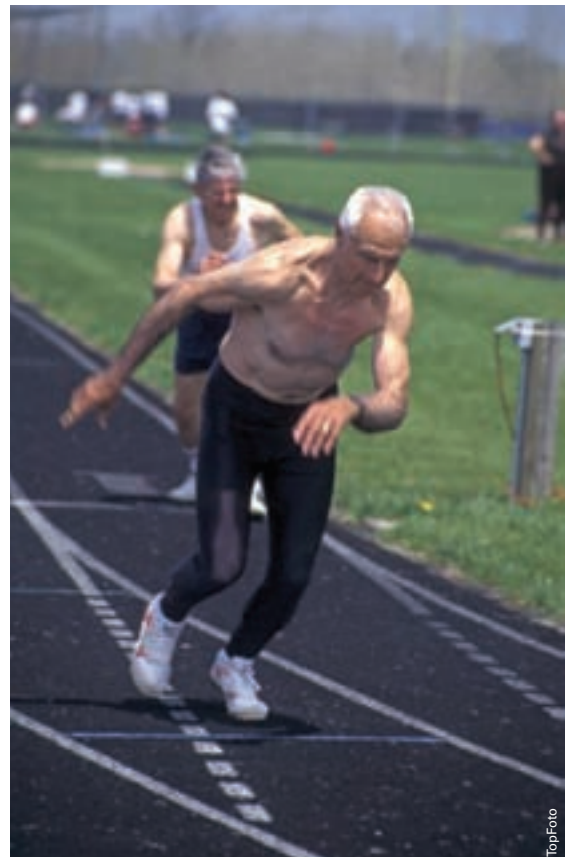
- + Height loss and often some body mass loss occurs; in general, men aged 70 will have lost about 3 cm from their height, while women of the same age will have lost about 5 cm.
- + Bones become more brittle and more likely to break if the person falls, particularly in post-menopausal women; the bones lose both mass and density as calcium and other minerals are lost.
- + Eyesight deteriorates and individuals become more long sighted.
- + Hearing loss, especially of high pitched sounds, occurs.
- + The immune system becomes weaker and infections take hold more easily; wounds take longer to heal.
- + There is an increased risk of heart and circulatory disease, cancer and stroke.
- + Blood pressure at rest increases as the walls of the arteries become less elastic.
- + Sense of smell and taste deteriorate and appetite decreases.
- + Tooth loss, often caused by gum disease, occurs; the gums tend to shrink.
- + Strength, stamina and suppleness decrease as the person becomes less mobile and loses sense of balance; generally, muscle mass is lost as people age.
- + Reactions become slower; individuals in later adulthood tend to take longer to respond than younger people.
- + The heart and lungs become less efficient at pumping blood and exchanging gases from the air.

Elderly people who continue to exercise regularly can delay the onset of numerous signs of ageing

Most of these changes take place slowly and gradually.

When elderly people continue to exercise regularly, many of these changes can be slowed down. Many elderly people are active even at a great age.

Try the skin test with a cooperative elderly person. Gently pinch the back of your hand and then let go. Watch how quickly the skin goes back into shape. Compare how quickly your skin goes back with that of the elderly person.



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Intellectual growth and development

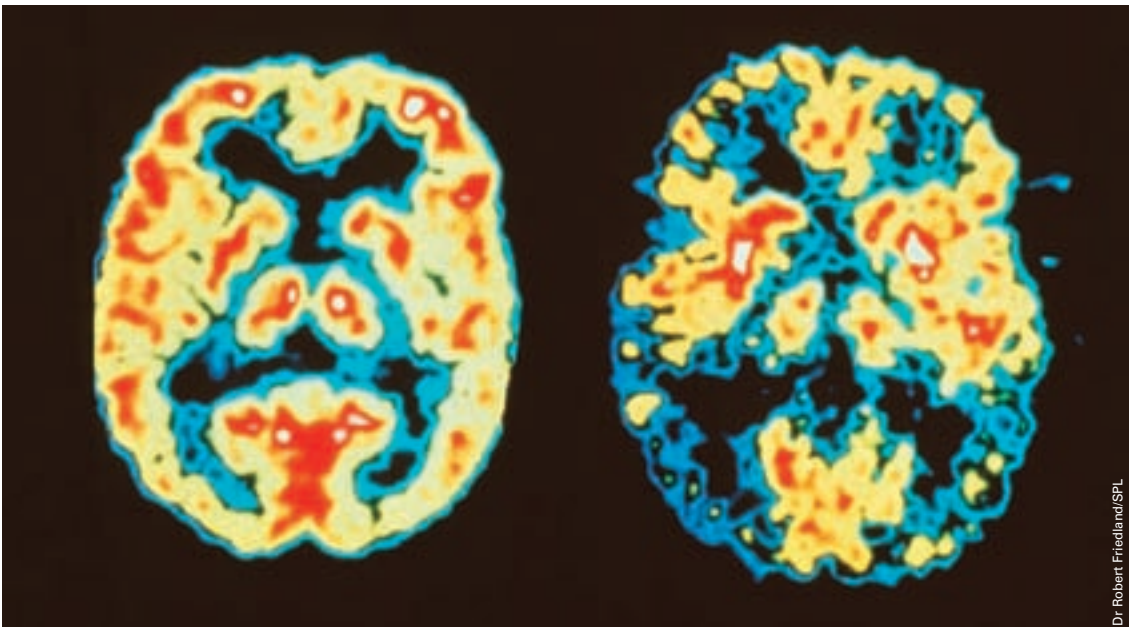
Learning continues throughout this final life stage. Many elderly people take up classes and courses, leading to new skills and qualifications, including degrees. Individuals in later adulthood may take longer than younger people to take in information about something that is new and different. However, they do have a lifetime's experiences to help them. This wisdom, built up over time, helps them avoid mistakes that younger, less experienced people may make.

Many elderly individuals suffer **short-term memory** loss. This means they may struggle to remember something that has happened recently, such as what they had for lunch that day. This is sometimes called having a 'senior moment'.

Long-term memory tends not to be affected. Many elderly people have excellent memories of events that happened when they were young. As with physical exercise, those who continue to exercise their minds, for example with regular crosswords and puzzles, slow down the rate of change. Illness or disease sometimes speeds up the intellectual decline.

Dementia is a disorder that causes increased memory loss and confusion. It affects about one person in ten in later adulthood. One cause of dementia is **Alzheimer's disease** where brain cells break down gradually. Dementia is a progressive decline, that is, it becomes worse over time. It affects memory, attention, language and problem-solving, and sufferers become

Coloured PET scan of the brain of a normal person (left) and a person with Alzheimer's disease (right). Red and yellow show high brain activity; blue and black show low activity (notice how the normal brain on the left has more areas of high levels of activity).



Dr Robert Friedland/SPL



disorientated. Dementia affects not only the sufferers, but also the people around them.

Emotional growth and development

Many elderly people maintain the emotional stability achieved in adulthood throughout their later adulthood. The decline in physical and intellectual abilities, however, can cause some loss of self-confidence and self-esteem. Social changes, such as the loss of a partner, can also make the individual feel vulnerable. It is often difficult for the surviving partner, who may have relied on the deceased for certain everyday tasks such as cooking or driving. The person may become worried and depressed under these circumstances. Professional carers can help in these situations, giving advice and practical support. This enables the individual to maintain his/her independence.

Maintaining an active social life can also help support the person emotionally. This helps to combat loneliness and feelings of isolation as the individual interacts with others.



Older adults often find themselves with a new role as grandparents.

Social growth and development

Later adulthood is a period of great social change. People often retire from work at 65 years of age. This means they miss out on the daily interactions with work colleagues but have more time to spend with family and friends. They have more time for hobbies and interests and may make new friends. Retirement often means a reduced income – living on a **pension** rather than a **wage** or **salary**. All these factors can contribute to the emotional changes mentioned above. The change of role from worker to pensioner may make these individuals feel as though they have lost status. Others may be affected by the family changes that occur. Sons and daughters have usually grown up and left the family home. They may have families of their own, which provides a new role for the elderly as grandparents.

Definition

Pension is money paid regularly to a person as an income after retirement.

Salary is a payment received periodically (e.g. weekly or monthly) as agreed in an employment contract; it is generally a fixed amount for each period.

Wage is a payment received for a specific amount of work; it varies according to the amount of work done.

Find out what social opportunities there are for elderly people in your local area.

