"Adolescence: The Last Step Before Becoming An Adult"

Children must pass through several stages, or take specific steps, on their road to becoming adults. For most people, there are four or five such stages of growth where they learn certain things: infancy (birth to age two), early childhood (ages three to eight years), later childhood (ages nine to 12) and adolescence (ages 13 to 18). Persons 18 and over are considered adults in our society. Of course, there are some who will try to act older than their years. But, for the most part, almost everybody grows in this same pattern.

Parents can easily learn much about taking care of their babies and young children. At the hospital or with the doctor, you might pick up information about what to feed them or how long they should sleep. Later, school staff may remind you about the importance of talking and reading to your young children. You can also see how your friends or relatives treat their kids. You cannot say the same thing about learning to talk with teenagers (adolescents). It seems like everyone, even teachers and neighbors, have problems understanding them. Giving up, you might turn to doing and saying the same things your parents did with you. But those were other times!

You can begin to understand this age group if you look at its place on the growth sequence. Notice how it's right next to the adult stage, the last step before being an adult. This is a time for adolescents to decide about their future line of work and think about starting their own families in a few years. One of the first things they must do is to start making their own decisions. For example adolescents begin to decide what to buy with their own money or who their friends will be. To do this they must put a little distance between themselves and their parents. This does not mean that you can't continue to "look after them" or help them when needed. You should, as much as possible, let them learn from the results of their actions. Adolescents also need to be around other adults, both male and female. These can be relatives, neighbors, or teachers. Of course, these adults should be positive role models. Your teenagers can learn from them about things like how to fix the car, how to get along with others, or get ideas for future jobs. Finally, don't worry if they want to spend time alone. Adolescents can "spend hours" day-dreaming about their future life. They might be planning the things they can do or will buy "when they grow up." Remember, to travel far, one begins with the first few steps!

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Models of Adolescent Transition
by William A. Borgen and Norman E. Amundson
Overview
Adolescents face a range of developmental issues. Havighurst (1952) suggested that two important areas included work and relationships. Levinson (1978) focused on changing relationships and on exploration, while Erikson (1968) commented on intimacy and commitment to goals. Super (1963) indicated that exploring and crystallizing vocational choice are important to older adolescents and young adults. What seems evident is that older adolescents and young adults enter transitions with the goal of becoming independently functioning adults, as they strive to meet evolving personal and career related needs. Rapid and escalating changes in labor market and post-secondary educational opportunities mean that adolescents now are confronted with the challenge of meeting their personal and career needs when neither can offer certainty or a sense of personal control.

Transition from High School
A longitudinal study by Amundson, Borgen, and Tench (in press) found that young people left high school unprepared for current career realities and that both the career and personal areas of their lives were in a state of change and uncertainty. At the end of their final year of high school, young people in the study expressed optimism about entering the career area of their choice and they expected to be successful workers in challenging jobs which offered personal satisfaction. About half the respondents indicated some concern about meeting post-secondary entrance standards. Approximately 9 and 18 months following graduation, depression, self-esteem, and anxiety were correlated with a range of perceived problems, including money, lack of support from family and friends, internal attribution of general transition problems, external attribution of career/employment difficulties, and lack of job satisfaction.

At the end of the study, some of the young people were interviewed. They were asked about factors that helped or hindered their post-highschool transition. Positive factors included supportive family and friends, making money, satisfying leisure activities, personal achievements, and educational success. Negative factors included relationship problems, career confusion, financial difficulties, unemployment, lack of satisfying work, lack of post-secondary educational opportunities, and difficulty in adjusting to post-secondary educational demands.

Developmentally, the young people were trying to meet personal and career-related needs, which were in a state of flux and uncertainty. It was apparent that a lack of progress in one area could have a negative influence on the other (e.g., an inability to gain post-secondary educational admission or paid work could drastically alter one’s ability to move from being a dependent adolescent to an independent adult).

An Expanded View of Career Counseling: Engendering Competence
The above study suggests a need for a broader view of career counseling; counseling which recognizes the developmental needs of young people, the influence of social and economic changes, and the importance of basing intervention strategies on personal and career competence, all within a context of diminished and changing opportunities for choice. In order to address this broader range of issues, we have employed a competence model with eight main areas (Amundson, Borgen & Tench, in press): purpose, problem solving, communication skills, theoretical knowledge, applied knowledge, organizational adaptability, human-relations skills, and self-confidence. We also have developed a number of counseling
strategies that facilitate a smoother transition:

1. *Developing Multiple Plans.* Many young people leave high school with a narrow plan of action and with few alternatives. They fully expect to be successful with the plan and are not prepared to face any barriers. Developing flexibility in career planning requires a sense of purpose, problem-solving skills, and several plans. Helpful strategies include visualization, lateral thinking, assessing options, and decision-making in a context of uncertainty (Gelatt, 1989).

2. *Self-Advocacy and Marketing.* As young people move towards further education, or into the labor market, it is critical for them to market and advocate for themselves. With scarce opportunities and confusing bureaucracies, there is a need to develop communication skills, self-confidence, organizational adaptability, and effectiveness in human relations. This requires activities such as mentoring; role-played practice; and ongoing economic, emotional, and informational support.

3. *Managing Changing Relationships.* The emotional and social changes adolescents experience can challenge young people as they try to cope with barriers in the education system and labor market. Friends provide emotional support, but this is a time when friendship patterns are changing. Parents are needed for emotional, material, and information support, but, at the same time, they need to allow young people sufficient room to develop their own sense of identity. Coping with relationship issues can be facilitated through communication, human relationship training, and problem solving, which blurs most of the traditional distinction between career and personal counseling.

4. *Meeting Basic Needs.* Young people have a strong need for community. Other central needs include having a sense of meaning in life, physical and emotional security, and basic structure in relationships and living. As young people move beyond high school, many of these basic needs require revaluation. In addition to changing relationships, questions emerge as to how to make a living, how to plan meaningful activities, and how to effectively manage time. To facilitate these changes, young people need to establish a sense of purpose and understand how they are meeting their current and future needs. Counselors can help clarify these issues. Without this type of developmental assistance, young people often lack the resilience to maneuver within increasingly competitive educational and labor market environments.

5. *Coping with Stress.* Adolescence is a period of considerable stress. While much stress can be minimized through support, persistence, and active decision making and planning, there still will be times when young people find themselves in difficult situations. Coping with stress is associated with various competencies such as organizational adaptability, human relations, problem-solving, and self-confidence. Particular strategies for stress management include relaxation techniques, managing 'self talk,' focusing, and using support systems.

6. *Coping with Loss.* We were surprised at the extent to which young people were influenced by various personal losses. These losses involved death in the family (usually grandparents) and the experience of parental separation and divorce. The
impact of these losses upon career events was considerable, suggesting a definite need for youth to develop competence in handling loss and grieving. Counseling in this domain blurs many of the traditional distinctions between the personal and career areas.

7. **Bridging Programs.** Many young people lack "hands-on" experience as they attempt to enter the world of work. Many also are unfamiliar with, and fearful of, moving into post-secondary education. To address this concern, counselors need to develop work experience and co-op education programs to help young people acquire the necessary experience. Post-secondary education entry programs can also play an important role in easing transition difficulties.

8. **Information and Information Access.** The challenge in the information age is not only how to gather information, but how to turn information into personally relevant knowledge. Young people need up-to-date information on careers, education programs, and market trends. They must also develop skills to assess the relevance of information. Acquiring these skills involves both theoretical and applied knowledge. Counseling strategies within this domain include helping young people develop research, interviewing, and critical analysis skills.

**Conclusions**

The above components suggests that:

1. Career counseling needs to encompass a greater range of issues.
2. Personal and career issues are inextricably intertwined for young people.
3. The ways in which young people handle some of their transition experiences greatly influence their psychological well-being.
4. Families and friends form a strong base for support in the transition period.