

# Adolescent Development

(Adapted from the New York State Core Advocate Training Manual)

## Key Issues:

- ✓ **Formal Operational Thought** – according to Piaget, a developmental psychologist, this is the hallmark of adolescent development. During adolescents, young people begin to critically examine their own thoughts, start to plan ahead and begin to understand the effect that one variable has on another. A key point to understand here is the process by which adolescents develop a sense of self-worth.
- ✓ **Growth and Body Size** – a young person's rate of growth in adolescents is important. Many children experience a dramatic increase in size, shape and form.
- ✓ **Sexual Maturation** – Many of the sexual hormones that have been dormant for years begin to develop during adolescents.
- ✓ **Reasoning and Morality** – while adolescents search for a personal identity, they begin to give increased attention to values and moral ideals.
- ✓ **Values and Ideology** – many of us question the “rebellion against authority” within children reaching adolescents. It is important to remember that during this developmental time an adolescent's improved intellectual abilities begin to give them the ability to question traditional thought.
- ✓ **Social Roles** – adolescents is a time when old roles are reexamined as a part of their search for an independent identity. As a child's reference group changes from family to friends, their social roles change as well. This is good section of the training to introduce one of the major issues that the families we work with face. Children and families referred to our programs often have very distorted views of social and familial roles. Provide your group with some explanations.

## Adolescent Mental Health Issues

YAP workers may encounter a variety of common mental health disorders when working in the community with young people and families. It is not the YAP worker's job to diagnose any young person or family member.

The following material is provided with the intention to inform YAP workers about these common challenges and their treatments. Common mental health disorders include:

**ADD** - (Other names: attention deficit hyperactive disorder; childhood hyper kinesis; ADHD; A.D.D.): A condition characterized by an attention span that is less than expected for the age of the person; there is often also age-inappropriate hyperactivity and impulsive behavior.

**Adolescent Depression** – describe depression as a temporary state of psychological disturbance characterized by low self-esteem, decreased motivation, sadness and a general decline in pleasurable activities.

**Oppositional Defiant Disorder** - A pattern of negativistic, hostile and defiant behavior towards an authority figure. There is an absence of understanding the violation of social norms.

**Adjustment Disorder** - A reaction to an identifiable stressor or multiple stressors that occurs within 3 months of the onset of the stressor(s). This reaction results in some impairment of functioning or in symptoms that are in excess of a normal or expected reaction to the stressor(s).

**Alcohol and Drug, Abuse, Dependency** – The impulsive and compulsive use of alcohol and/or other drugs.

**Conduct Disorder** - A pattern of repetitive behavior where the rights of others or the social norms are violated.

**Bi-Polar Disorder** - (Other names: bipolar disorder; manic depressive illness; affective bipolar disorder): A mood disorder characterized by mood swings from mania (exaggerated feeling of well-being) to depression.

**Borderline Personality Disorder** - An individual trait that reflects ingrained, inflexible, and maladaptive patterns of behavior characterized by impulsive and unpredictable actions, mood instability, and unstable interpersonal relationships.

**Post Traumatic Stress Disorder** - PTSD): A severe anxiety reaction to a traumatic event that occurs outside the range of usual human experience.

**Autism** - A condition occurring in young children before the age of 3 years characterized by unresponsiveness to human contact, deficits in language development, and bizarre responses to environmental stimuli.

**Anorexia Nervosa** - An eating disorder associated with a distorted body image that may be caused by a mental disorder. Inadequate calorie intake results in severe weight loss

**Bulimia** - Bulimia is an illness characterized by uncontrolled episodes of overeating usually followed by self-induced vomiting (see also anorexia nervosa).

## ***Treatment Approaches***

When young people are experiencing mental health issues, professionals use a variety of treatment approaches to help improve or resolve the situation. Treatment approaches include:

**Individual Therapy** – Person sees a therapist (i.e., social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist, etc.) individually on a regular basis (i.e., weekly, bi-weekly, monthly) for support and guidance.

**Group Therapy/Class** – Person attends a structured group or class with other people who are experiencing a similar issue. Groups are usually facilitated by a therapist or helping professional.

**Self-Help Groups** – Person attends a group which is self governed and focuses on a particular issue or topic (i.e., Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Alanon, etc.)

**Medication** – Person is prescribed a specific medication by a qualified doctor for the relief or elimination of symptoms of mental health issues