

development. **Puberty** refers to the maturational, hormonal, and growth process that occurs when the reproductive organs begin to function and the secondary sex characteristics develop. This process is sometimes divided into three stages: **prepubescence**, the period of about 2 years immediately before puberty when the child is developing preliminary physical changes that herald sexual maturity; **puberty**, the point at which sexual maturity is achieved, marked by the first menstrual flow in girls but by less obvious indications in boys; and **postpubescence**, a 1- to 2-year period after puberty during which skeletal growth is completed and reproductive functions become fairly well established.

Adolescence, which literally means “to grow into maturity,” is generally regarded as the psychological, social, and maturational process initiated by the pubertal changes. It involves three distinct subphases: **early adolescence** (ages 11 to 14), **middle adolescence** (ages 15 to 17), and **late adolescence** (ages 18 to 20). The term **teenage years** is used synonymously with *adolescence* to describe ages 13 through 19 years old. The changes that occur during the early, middle, and late phases of adolescence are summarized in [Table 15-1](#).

TABLE 15-1
Growth and Development During Adolescence

Early Adolescence (11 to 14 Years Old)	Middle Adolescence (15 to 17 Years Old)	Late Adolescence (18 to 20 Years Old)
Growth		
Rapidly accelerating growth Reaches peak velocity Secondary sex characteristics appear	Growth decelerating in girls Stature reaches 95% of adult height Secondary sex characteristics well advanced	Physically mature Structure and reproductive growth almost complete
Cognition		
Explores newfound ability for limited abstract thought Clumsy groping for new values and energies Comparison of “normality” with peers of same sex	Developing capacity for abstract thinking Enjoys intellectual powers, often in idealistic terms Concern with philosophic, political, and social problems	Established abstract thought Can perceive and act on long-range options Able to view problems comprehensively Intellectual and functional identity established
Identity		
Preoccupied with rapid body changes Trying out various roles	Modifies body image Self-centered; increased narcissism	Body image and gender role definition nearly secured