Stepping Stones
A Resource on Youth Development

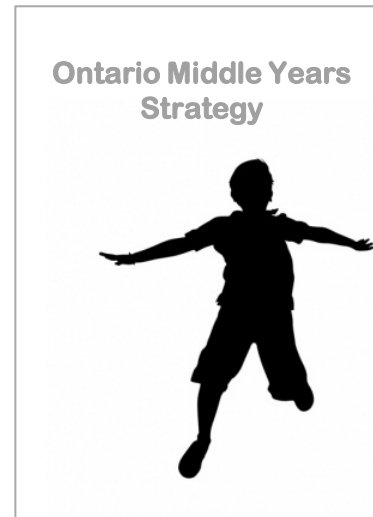Ministry of Children and Youth Services

2017 OARTY Conference
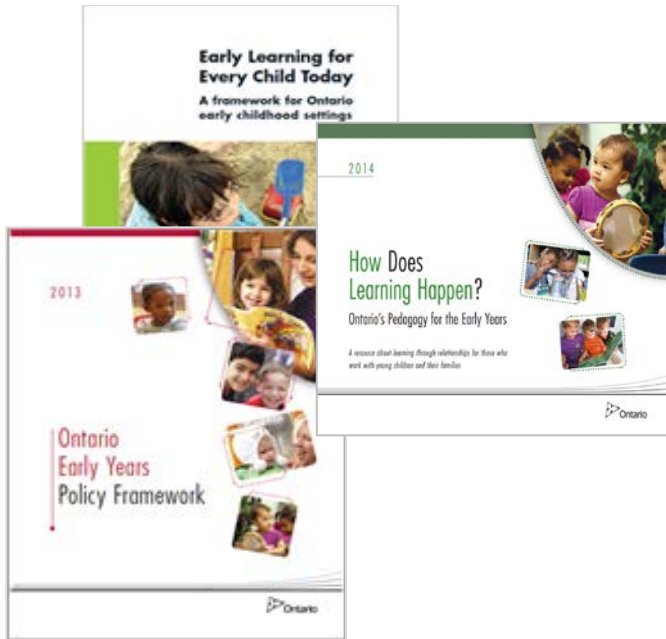June 9, 2017

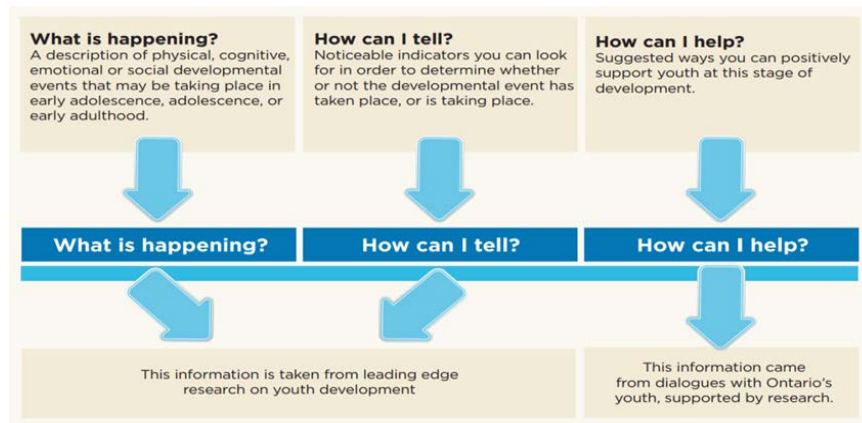# Supporting Positive Development from Birth to 25

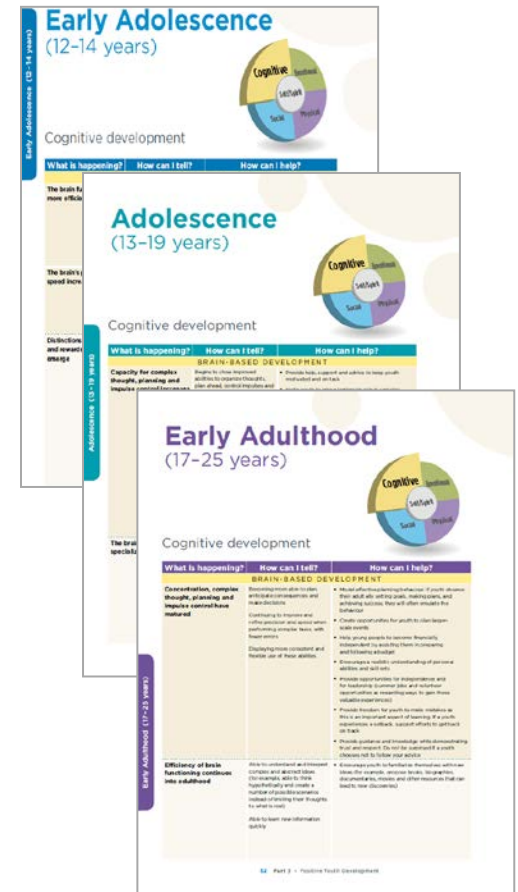**Early Years
(0-8)**

**Middle Years
(6-12)**

**Youth
(12-25)**

Ontario Middle Years
Strategy

Stepping Stones:
A Resource on Youth Development (2012)

- Maps youth development across five domains: **Self & Spirit**, **Cognitive**, **Emotional, Social, and Physical.**

- Covers three phases of youth development: early adolescents (12-14yrs), adolescents (13-19yrs) and young adults (17-25yrs).

- Grounded in a <u>strengths-based</u> approach.

- For those directly supporting/ caring for youth (e.g. parents, caregivers, teachers, service providers), as well as planners and policy makers.

- Explains how development is interconnected and interrelated and that development in one domain impacts development in others.

- Acknowledges the role of context and environment in shaping development and developmental opportunities.

Self and Spirit

What's Happening?	How do I Tell?	How Can I Help?
Sense of self and identity are forming and will carry into adulthood. **Aspects of identity include culture, race, gender, sexual orientation, as well as personal and spiritual beliefs, values, key interests / hobbies, and social group identity.**	• As they mature, most youth will actively explore various identity options. After a long period of exploring, adolescents and young adults usually begin committing to an identity that includes a core sense of self, roles, values, beliefs and goals.	-Support participation in art, cultural traditions, ceremonies and events. -Encourage community involvement—local, cultural, or communities that organize around social identity. -Support the opportunity to explore and participate in clubs, teams, etc. so that youth can start to identify their talents and potential career / life paths.
	• Spiritual identity begins to shift during adolescence and youth may explore and question their beliefs. Young adults may integrate their spiritual beliefs into their larger identity or in other cases certain religious/spiritual beliefs may be abandoned.	-Support their exploration of belief systems. -Support participation in religious and spiritual traditions to help them develop their sense of spiritual identity. -Engage youth about their beliefs—be open to discussion.
Identity development also includes the formation of self-concepts, self-efficacy, and self-esteem.	• Youth who have a high degree of self-efficacy will often take on more difficult tasks, stick with them longer and be motivated by challenges.	-Provide realistic challenges for youth to tackle. -Help youth set goals and support attempts to reach these goals to enhance self-efficacy.

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Cognitive Development

What's Happening?	How do I Tell?	How Can I Help?
The brain continues to adapt and change well beyond the early years	• The greatest area of change after puberty is in the prefrontal cortex – the area of the brain responsible for executive functioning. This includes monitoring, organizing, planning, decision making, impulse control and delay of gratification. • The maturation of this area takes place throughout adolescence and early adulthood and depends to a great degree on experience. • In adolescence, youth become able to engage in mutual perspective taking.	-Provide opportunities for independence and leadership (summer jobs, volunteer opportunities). -Provide guidance and access to tools to help them learn and be prepared. -Set expectations for behaviour and allow them to solve things independently.
The brain becomes more specialized and more efficient	• Learning strategies improve throughout adolescence and into adulthood. •	-Encourage exercises that allow youth to organize abstract ideas and draw reasoned conclusions (e.g. a "pros and cons" list). -Encourage youth to familiarize themselves with new ideas (biographies, documentaries, movies that can lead to new discoveries).

Emotional development

What's Happening?	How do I Tell?	How Can I Help?
Emotional self-regulation and decision making are key developmental tasks for youth	• Adolescents are not as able as adults to curb their desire for pleasure which can lead to increased risk taking behaviour. -Although this is often associated with negative outcomes, the curiosity and desire for novel experiences presents opportunities for exploration, learning & development.	-Promote opportunities for youth to redirect their energy into something productive (such as exercising or helping to organize an event). -Reinforce strategies for effective self-regulation (E.g. encourage them to stop and think before making a decision or taking part in something risky).
Empathy continues to develop but does not become fully developed until early adulthood	• Mature empathy involves the ability to make a cognitive evaluation of the other person's emotional response.	-Reinforce empathetic behaviour (i.e. giving up a seat on the bus). -Encourage youth to spend time focusing on other people and topics (volunteering in the community for example).
Motivation is further internalized	• Motivation shifts from extrinsic to intrinsic; youth begin to engage in activities because they are interested in and realize the benefits of the activity. The internalization of motivation continues to develop as behaviour becomes more self-regulated.	-If a youth is struggling, offer to help them get started but don't complete the whole task for them. -Encourage them but allow the freedom to set and achieve goals on their own.

Social Development

What's Happening?	How do I Tell?	How Can I Help?
Changes in perspective taking allow for more intimate relationships with peers and romantic partners	• Romantic relationships are shifting from fun/companionship to increasing physical & emotional intimacy. • Awareness of sexual orientation may be forming and LGBTTQ youth may disclose their orientation to a trusted person in mid-adolescence .	-Provide support and help guide decisions with romantic partners rather than trying to decide on behalf of youth. -Be aware of factors that influence decisions about relationships (such as religion, media, past experiences) when seeing to understand the choices made by youth. -Stay connected and approachable and provide opportunities for questions and help when needed.
Family relationships are evolving	• Frequency of day-to-day conflicts with parents is most frequent in early to mid-adolescence but generally declines afterwards.	-Allow space and time to reflect about disagreements. -Dedicate certain times as "family times" such as specific meals or a chosen day of the week.
Self-sufficiency increases	• Desire for independence in decisions about relationships and activities. • Starts to gain financial independence through employment.	-Provide advice and share personal experiences about gaining independence. -Remember that many adults move in and out of the family home before making a final transition to independence.

Physical Development

What's Happening?	How do I Tell?	How Can I Help?
Participation in physical activity is changing.	• There is a general decline in physical activity from age 13 to adulthood. • Young people will often give up sports previously enjoyed and focus on those in which they excel.	-Provide opportunities that allow youth to feel comfortable trying new things. -Encourage participation in whatever physical activities appeal to youth.
Hormones influence the sleep cycle	• Puberty brings about changes in sleep patterns that cause adolescents to stay awake later at night and have difficulty waking in the morning – starts to reverse in early adulthood. • Sleep deprivation can lead to irritability and difficulties with cognitive processing and emotional regulation.	-Support youth to maintain a healthy sleep routine, including turning screens off on hour before bed and not sleeping with screens in / near bed.
Development of body image is ongoing	• During adolescence and early adulthood, youth are more apt to make social comparisons about body type and opinions about clothing and appearance are more important.	-Encourage youth to focus on the parts of their bodies that they like and can feel confident about. -Lead by example – avoid making critical comments about your own body.

Emerging Evidence:
Development in the Middle Years (6-12yrs)

Physical Development:

- Health Literacy: Children gain skills and knowledge needed to make good life decisions and promote, maintain and improve their own health.
- Connection with nature, the land, outdoor play is a dynamic developmental opportunity
- Increased risk that girls drop out of organized sports and fitness.

Emotional Development:

- Exposure to toxic stress (parent / caregiver and child) can threaten emotional development and can negatively affect how the brain is wired, e.g. development of memory, concentration, filtering of information, processing of emotions and regulation of behaviour.
- Connecting to culture, community, spirituality or faith supports positive identity formation and wellbeing.
- There is concern that screen time can decrease empathy, lead to poor behaviour, and limit ability to identify and describe one's feelings and the ability to read emotions.

Emerging Evidence: Development in the Middle Years (6-12yrs)

Social Development:

- While children are forming new relationships outside the home, they still need the stability and familiarity of their families.
- Social wellbeing is linked to family, extended family and includes the wellbeing of communities - social connectedness is central.
- Secure, trusting relationships with peers in the middle years are associated with later success with romantic partners and long-term committed relationships in adulthood.

Cognitive Development:

- Between the ages of approximately 5 to 9, a child's brain is primed for learning – they have greater adaptability and "plasticity".
- Multi-tasking (such as using multiple digital media during learning and while doing homework) makes memory formations much less accessible for recall. The most beneficial way for children at this age to learn and to remember is through mono-tasking

Emerging Evidence: Development in the Middle Years (6-12yrs)

Language and Communication:

- Learning a second language is beneficial to children - they tend to have longer attention spans and more cognitive flexibility.
- Language acquisition includes signing, body language.
- Non-verbal communication includes ceremony, dance, music.
- Children come to understand how language can change depending on the nature of the relationship between the people conversing, and how tone and body language support words that are spoken.
- They also begin learning how to read social cues, understand social practices related to being polite / respectful, and use their language skills to negotiate in situations where there is conflict.
- Development of communication skills can vary considerably, e.g. among children on the autism spectrum.

Discussion / Questions

Find Stepping Stones at:

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