CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG ADOLESCENTS

Intellectual Characteristics

• enjoy both intellectual and manipulative activities
• prefer active involvement in learning
• learning most interesting when related to their immediate goals and interests
• argue to clarify own thinking and to convince others
• vivid imaginations
• exhibit independent, critical thinking
• minds so preoccupied with other issues they forget
• see relationships among similar concepts, ideas, and experiences and make inferences
• seek to find causal and correlative relationships
• begin to understand abstract ideas, but research indicates many remain in concrete operations stage
• personal-social concerns have priority over academic matters
• like to discuss experiences with adults
• intensely curious
• wide range of individual intellectual development
• intellectually curious about the world and themselves
• intellectually at-risk

Physical Characteristics

• girls are often taller and more physically advanced than boys in the earlier stages of adolescence
• incommensurate growth of heart and body weight may result in functional heart murmurs
• uneven bone-muscle growth and/or disproportionate changes in weight and muscle development result in awkwardness
• ossification of cartilage in specific areas of the skeleton
• sexual maturation is occurring
• alternating periods of extreme restlessness and fatigue
• extremely sensitive about physical appearance and personal body development
• question whether they are normal as related to their physical appearance and development
• chemical and hormonal imbalances often occur
• experience rapid growth resulting in increased nutritional demands
• frequent opportunities for physical movement, rest, and change of activity
• self-esteem and self-concept relate to degree of physical development
Social Characteristics

- desire to make personal choices
- strong desire for social acceptance
- conformity to group norms
- heterosexual relations grow, but same sex friends dominate
- strive to define sex role characteristics
- vacillate between desire for regulation and direction and their desire for independence
- want identification with adults but not always willing to accept their suggestions
- concern for oppressed groups
- willing to work and sacrifice for social rewards
- test limits of acceptable behaviors
- need frequent reinforcement that significant adults including parents care
- family allegiances diminish and peer allegiances become stronger; however, still strongly dependent upon parental values
- are often confused and frightened by new settings including school
- time has almost no steady meaning
- like fads, especially those shunned by adults
- need moderate amounts of time alone, in order to regroup and reflect on daily experiences
- socially vulnerable

Emotional Characteristics

- begin to deal with and understand “shades of gray”
- many conflicts within
- tend to make exaggerated responses to anything with sexual implications
- trying to sort fact from folklore in regards to sexual development
- desires attention, sometimes without regard to how it is secured
- rapid shifts and variations of moods
- can become rebellious toward adults
- easily offended, sensitive to criticism
- believe adults do not understand
- may be inconsiderate of others
- basically optimistic, hopeful
- emerging sense of humor
- value direct experience in participatory democracy
- quick to see flaws in others but slow to acknowledge their own faults
- believe personal problems, experiences, and feeling unique to self
- searching for the answer to “Who am I?”

Adapted from This We Believe (NMSA,2003), Caught in the Middle (California State Department of Education, 1987), and The Exemplary Middle School (W.M. Alexander and P.S. George, 1993)