



Sexual Issues of Life Stages

Generalizations about sexual development are not intended to be ideal norms and they may not apply to each individual. Some experiences, like puberty, are common to all, but the specifics of adolescent sexual stress are dependent on culture and individual circumstance. The following chronology of sexual life span concerns can help counselors to inquire into possibly relevant areas, and to help the client prepare for future experiences (Schepp, 1986).

INFANCY (0-3)

- Discovery and enjoyment of genitals
- Sensual feelings, touching
- Beginnings of language, sense of self
- Sex role identity forming
- Trust-mistrust and awareness of others developing

CHILDHOOD (3-10)

- Experience with self pleasuring
- Possible sex play with others
- Interest in reproduction
- Expanding language for sex
- Observance of adult behavior and sex roles
- Experience in varied relationships
- Questions about sexuality raised by media and peers

PUBERTY (10-14)

- Serious need to understand changing physical self
- Body image and self worth developing curiosity about intercourse and masturbation
- Concerns about menstruation and ejaculation
- Peer competition and intense relationships

ADOLESCENCE (14-18)

- Formation of identity which includes sexual self
- Confusion about appropriate sexual behavior
- Peer social comparison
- Sexual experience and/or experimentation with peers, self, others
- Questions about contraception
- Important relationships

Adapted from:

Carter, B. & McGoldrick, M. (1998). *The expanded family life cycle: individual, family, & social perspectives*, Boston: Allyn
Schepp, K.F. (1986), *Sexuality counseling: A training program*, Muncie, IN: Accelerated Development.

YOUNG ADULT (18-25)

- On-going development of sexual identity
- Adequacy, skill in sexuality stressed
- Partner choice, intimacy explored
- Experimentation with sexual life styles
- Questioning traditional sex roles and values
- Concerns about STDs
- Avoidance of unwanted pregnancy
- Negotiation of intimacy vs. independence

ADULT (25-40)

- Sexual values continue to develop
- Cultural expectations related to norms for partnering & procreation
- Choices about fertility and pregnancy
- Integration of sexuality into adult life style
- Negotiation of sexual preferences with partner(s)
- Potential changes in desire related to parenting responsibilities
- Increased expectations for sexual pleasure
- Experimentation with wider sexual expression

MID-LIFE (40-65)

- Evaluation of sexual satisfactions
- Adaptations stemming from menopause & mid-life sexual changes
- Awareness of relationships between stress & sex
- Balance of self and partner(s) considered
- Life style changes may be urgent

RETIREMENT (65-75)

- Health issues important
- Adequacy issues again questioned
- Interest in sexuality may diminish or gain new meaning
- Loss of partner may require adaptation

ELDERS (75-100)

- Acceptance of change in frequency, sexual interest
- Sexuality often denied by significant others
- New goals for sex (non-performance oriented)

The major pitfall when a counselor looks at a client from a sexual development viewpoint is the possibility of jumping to unwarranted conclusions. For instance, not all men and women at mid-life will be dismayed at gradual changes in sexual performance. One can think of the needs and concerns usually associated with various life stages as a broad stencil, and use this knowledge to illuminate possible reasons for a client's sexual problems (Schepp, 1986)

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