

PREADOLESCENT GIRLS' GROUP:
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND PROGRAM PROPOSAL

by

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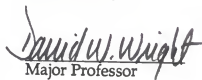
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Preadolescent Girls' Group:

Theoretical Background and Program Proposal

Adolescence is a time of transition from childhood to adulthood (Hopkins, 1983) that consists of many physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes (Gullotta, 1983). These changes make adolescents more adult-like and, therefore, contribute to the development of a new self-identity (Erikson, 1968). Adolescent change and development, however, can precipitate a great deal of stress (Kidwell, Fischer, Dunham, & Baranowski, 1983). Such stress may lead to emotional crises (Tierno, 1983) that vary among individuals in timing (Berzonsky and Lombardo, 1983) and intensity (Berzonsky, 1982). Adjustment to adolescence is maximized when these developmental changes are incorporated into a new identity with a minimum amount of stress.

Many factors affecting the developmental process of adolescents intermingle with each other and are played out in various aspects of their lives. For example, physical changes affect adolescents' relationships with others (Berzonsky and Lombardo, 1983; Brooks-Gunn, 1984; Jones and Mussen, 1959). This influence occurs because physical changes affect both how adolescents view themselves and how others view them. In addition, cognitive changes affect adolescents' ability to make decisions. This has repercussions in their relationships with authority figures (Kidwell et al., 1983; Muus, 1982), although these repercussions stimulate growth by challenging adolescents' ability for higher-level thinking. Adolescence can be a time of turmoil, then, because many factors interact with each other on individual, family and social levels (Youniss and Smollar, 1985).

This paper describes a program designed to ease preadolescents into adolescence through the use of education and group discussion. It includes group peer support and some involvement of the parents. This group is designed specifically for females because certain issues of development, such as physical change, are gender-specific, although a similar program could be developed for males with the same basic structure.

Literature Review

After discussion of a theoretical framework, this review will detail the major changes of adolescence. Before examining these changes, however, it is important to distinguish between adolescence and preadolescence.

Preadolescence is the first stage of adolescence. It occurs between the approximate ages of 10 and 13 when the individual emerges from childhood and looks toward his or her future as a teenager (Jurich, 1987). Adolescence continues until the individual resolves major life decisions, such as in family and career life. This resolution occurs at any age between the late teens to early twenties, and in some cases, even later (Duvall and Miller, 1985). The following discussion will focus on the development that occurs between preadolescence and the resolution of major life choices.

Theoretical Background

The central task of adolescence is development of a self-identity. A theory useful for conceptualizing this development is that of Erik Erikson (1968). Common to the development of humans in all societies, Erikson holds, is a stage he refers to as "psychological moratorium". It is a period of time when adolescents observe and experiment with various roles in order to find their individual identity. This moratorium is characterized by a sense of

"crisis", a term Erikson uses to denote a normative transition, where adolescents experience an impetus to explore major alternatives for their lives. The crisis is resolved when the individual makes a "personal, ideological commitment" (Adams and Montemayor, 1983, pg. 194), a decision to incorporate certain beliefs and/or ideals after experimentation. According to Erikson's theory, this psychological moratorium is essential for the resolution of one's identity.

Adams and Montemayor (1983) claim that, while several operationalizations of Erikson's theory have been made, those of Marcia (1966) are the most influential. Marcia divides Erikson's identity formation into four types: identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement. An adolescent can be categorized according to one of these types at a given point in their development. However, as the adolescent develops, he or she may also develop from one type to another.

Identity diffusion characterizes the individual who has no motivation to explore and experiment with different roles and ideologies (Marcia, 1966). Individuals with this status are described as the "least developmentally sophisticated" (Archer and Waterman, 1983, pg. 204), because they exhibit no commitments, nor do they express a desire to develop them.

In contrast, the adolescent who makes commitments without exploring alternatives is referred to as being in identity foreclosure. This person adapts too early to the commitments others have made without searching for his or her uniqueness and preferences. Individuals of this type are different from those in identity diffusion because they have at least adopted some

commitments. They may, for instance, strongly support their parents' political views, albeit without having an adequate understanding of them.

Moratorium describes the individual who is in the process of exploring alternatives for his or her identity, but who has not yet discovered it; this person is still in the experimental stage. For example, he or she may belong to a conservative peer group for a certain amount of time and then change to a contrasting, more liberal one. Adolescents in moratorium are different from those who are in identity diffusion because they are willing to at least explore alternative role identities and make some level of commitment to them. In addition, they are different from those in identity foreclosure in that they are open to alternatives and will change their commitments from one role identity to another.

Finally, identity achievement refers to the individual who has experienced the moratorium and has identified and adopted personal ideological commitments. This person has achieved an identity based on a decision made after a period of exploration and experimentation. Identity achievement is, in the end, most conducive to a person's adjustment and well-being (Juhasz, 1982; Marcia, 1983; Newman and Murray, 1983).

Marcia (1983) suggests certain precursors during preadolescence lead to an achieved identity formation in later adolescence. Specifically, he proposes that confidence in parental support, a sense of industry, and a self-reflective approach to one's future are important for the adolescent to achieve identity formation. Knowing that parental support is available provides the preadolescent with a base from which he or she feels secure enough to explore alternatives. A sense of industry is needed for the preadolescent to

feel motivated to try new directions. Finally, a self-reflective approach helps the preadolescent contemplate alternatives and envision him or herself in a future context. With this theoretical framework as a foundation, specific factors in development will now be described.

Factors of Adolescent Development

As mentioned, the process of adolescent development consists of physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes. Adolescents must incorporate changes in each of these areas into their developing self-identity. It is important to remember, however, that the rate of development varies across individuals and that changes in one area influence the others. Therefore, each individual will experience a unique and continual process of change that involves all of these areas of development. For the sake of clarity, however, each area will be described separately. Also, the following discussion on physical change will address issues of female development because this program is designed specifically for females.

Physical Changes. Pubescence, the process of physical maturation, occurs in preadolescence. It is marked by the onset of secondary sex characteristics and the development of the primary sex organs (Muus, 1982). This growth occurs with relative rapidity and uncertainty, resulting in adolescents' increased concern about changing physiques (Hamburg, 1974). Young adolescents whose bodies are rapidly changing in new and different ways are much more conscious of their bodies, as well as of the attention they receive from others (Clausen, 1975).

Research findings indicate that the time of physical maturity has significant implications for adolescents' social relationships (Berzonsky and

Lombardo, 1983; Brooks-Gunn, 1984). First of all, there is evidence that females generally mature earlier than males (McCandless and Coop, 1979; Rice, 1981). This affects cross-sex relationships and creates differences in the types of stress females endure at certain points in time as compared with males.

Among females, Jones and Mussen (1959) found early maturers were not among the most popular of the peer group, did not exhibit much prestige or leadership, and were lacking in poise. In comparison, late-maturing females were found to be more outgoing, more confident and assured, and they exhibited greater leadership ability. These differences can be accounted for by the fact that the early-maturer often feels more self-conscious and more embarrassed since she stands out taller and bigger and, therefore, more awkward in comparison to her peers (Jensen, 1985; Stolz and Stolz, 1944). Also, our society associates a thin, petite body type with physical attractiveness, which is more characteristic of the female who has not yet matured.

One thing that can facilitate females' adjustment to physical change is to be prepared for it. For instance, Brooks-Gunn (1984) notes that being unprepared for menarche results in negative personal reactions, including increased self-consciousness and more negative menarcheal symptoms and attitudes that continue in later life. Part of what contributes to these reactions is the challenge of coming to terms with oneself as a sexual being, since menarche and the development of secondary sex characteristics are evidence of one's capacity for reproduction. Along with this physical capacity for sexual reproduction, however, is an emotional dimension. The adolescent

female must come to terms with herself as a woman and integrate femininity into her identity (Brooks-Gunn, 1984). This includes such things as how she behaves in relationships with males and females, and whether she pursues a career, marriage, or both.

As an adolescent begins to look more like an adult, he or she experiences social pressure to behave like one (Hopkins, 1983). Thus, expectations develop in the adolescent and others that an individual who looks like an adult should take on more responsibilities and act according to adult social rules and norms. However, adolescents do not have the cognitive or emotional skills to adequately fulfill those expectations. Thus, they struggle with the pressure to be an adult while being unprepared to cope with such a status.

Cognitive Changes. Adolescent cognitive development involves movement from concrete to formal operational thought (Piaget, 1972), where they develop the ability to leave the world of objective reality and contemplate the world of possibility (Muus, 1982). Adolescents become able to contemplate more options and choices for themselves and for their future. They also become able, in this period of development, to ponder the consequences and ramifications of certain "givens", for example, principles, rules and concepts (Kidwell et al., 1983; Muus, 1982).

Some effects of this cognitive development are witnessed in the adolescents' preoccupation with their future role identity, for example, what kind of job and family life they would like to have. Often, however, these ideations are unrealistic and have a "fantasy-like" nature (Piaget, 1974). Cognitive development is also witnessed in adolescents' questioning of

authority. As part of a very dependent relationship, children look to their parents to teach them about the world and how to interact in that world (Youniss and Smollar, 1985). Adolescents, on the other hand, are more able to think for themselves and to consider options. For instance, adolescents, unless they are in identity foreclosure, are less likely to mimic their parents' ideas, feelings and beliefs as during their childhood. They will propose alternatives and possibly argue the "rightness" of their parents' ways of thinking. In contrast, if they are in identity foreclosure, they may commit to their parents' values and beliefs without understanding or questioning them. The consideration of alternatives that is characteristic of moratorium, however, can cause a strain on the parent-adolescent relationship. Whereas the child's dependence on the parents and the imitation of their thoughts and beliefs puts the parents in a secure position of authority, increased autonomy and questioning of parents erodes that security (Kidwell et al., 1983). Parents may respond to this by becoming more strict in their discipline to gain reassurance of their power and authority.

Cognitive development also affects the adolescents' moral development (Jurich and Kadel, 1976). Part of this development includes an abstract way of thinking about concepts such as "right" and "wrong" and an ability to see one's self and others objectively enough to pass moral judgement (Muus, 1982). Some early adolescents (ages 12-14) function on a more basic level of moral development where self-interest is the primary determinant of their behavior and decision-making. Most early adolescents, however, are able to consider the moral/ethical ramifications of certain actions, decisions, and beliefs from many perspectives other than their own,

and therefore, think more about society's definitions of right and wrong (Jurich and Kadel, 1976).

Peer Relationships. Adolescence is also a time when individuals begin to turn to their peers for self-definition and self-direction (Gullotta, 1983). Parental values still influence decisions in areas such as education and career options, but peers influence decisions in areas such as style of dress, dating, and sexual behavior (Hopkins, 1983; Youniss and Smollar, 1985). The influence of the peer group on these decisions arises from the adolescents' need to be accepted by their peers and is based on similarity of interests between them (Hopkins, 1983).

Not only do adolescents need to be accepted, they are also more accepting of their peers, as exemplified in their friendships. One thing that facilitates these friendships is adolescents' level of cognitive development. Specifically, their ability to take the perspective of others is necessary for the sharing of personal thoughts and feelings. This cognitive ability increases through adolescence, along with their ability to develop and maintain friendships (Cooper and Ayers-Lopez, 1985).

This ability to develop close friendships begins in preadolescence (Bukowski and Newcomb, 1983). One of the characteristics of preadolescent friendships is a high level of intimacy (Berndt, 1982). Not only do preadolescents disclose their personal thoughts and feelings, but they also have a significant amount of knowledge about their friends' personal thoughts and feelings. In addition, Berndt (1982) states that friendships among preadolescents are characterized by a high level of responsiveness. They are very sensitive to each other's needs and wants and attempt to

maximize each others' happiness. The importance of such relationships can be seen as arising out of their need to have care, support, and a sense of belonging. These needs become especially important as they become less dependent on their families.

Parent-Adolescent Relationships. As the adolescent becomes more focused on the peer group, the family remains an important resource, but becomes less influential than during the earlier childhood years (Hopkins, 1983). Just as adolescents experience numerous changes, so do their families. These changes in the family system are due to the onset of puberty (Boxer and Petersen, 1986), desire for increased autonomy (Grotevant, 1983), or a combination of the influence of the adolescent, parents, other family members, and their interactive effects (Newman and Murray, 1983). Much of this family change occurs in the adolescent's relationships with his or her parents.

First of all, the adolescent's physical development affects parents' and adolescent's responses to each other. Physical, sexual maturation is an indication that the adolescent is changing from a child to a more independent and sexual person, and therefore, demands a different relationship. In particular, the mother of a female adolescent may feel competitive with her daughter, because she may perceive her daughter as more attractive. Also, the daughter is just beginning to experience her sexuality, and the mother may feel jealous because of her increasing age. Also, fathers of adolescent females may begin to view their daughters as physically attractive. This can cause awkwardness in their relationship because fathers are uncertain about how to parent a child to whom they feel attracted. Some anxiety may then

result in the relationship between the parents if the mother feels envious of her daughter and the father feels attracted to her. For example, the mother may become more dependent on her husband for affirmation, while the father may be confused about his feelings for his child, and therefore, unable to adequately affirm his wife. In addition, both parents may be concerned that others will sexually violate their daughter, causing them to be more protective, while their daughters interpret that protectiveness as a threat to their independence.

As children grow into adolescents, they begin to move from an asymmetrical relationship with their parents to a more peer-like relationship (Hill, 1980). They begin to see their parents as individuals who have lived their own lives and they seek to relate to their parents more like friends. Developing a friendship, however, requires responsibility and commitment to the other person. The adolescent may not be capable or willing to take on that responsibility, even though a more peer-like relationship is what they ideally would like. Furthermore, adolescents often view their parents as inadequate because they begin to consider and evaluate alternative decisions to the ones made by parents. In actuality, part of what adolescents are reacting against are their own images of themselves as children that are represented by their parents (Jurich, 1987). Therefore, the asymmetrical relationship between parent and child may reverse as the child becomes an adolescent. This reversed asymmetrical relationship occurs before a more peer-like relationship can be achieved.

Parents may also feel threatened because their adolescent's newly-acquired cognitive abilities allow them to consider alternative styles of

parenting (Hill and Palmquist, 1978). Adolescents may observe their friends' parents, for instance, and make comparison judgements on their own parents' style of parenting. They may disagree with some of their parents' rules and regulations or argue the effectiveness of their practices. This may cause the parents to question and re-evaluate their role as disciplinarian and care-taker. In response to that challenge, they may become more strict in their discipline in an attempt to prove their competence. Furthermore, even though the adolescent is in need of parenting, the parents may have difficulty finding a way to discipline someone who often thinks and behaves like an adult.

Parental reactions to their child's development partially depend on where they are in their own adult development (Hill, 1980). They may have never before been parents of adolescents, and this new role may be frightening (Boxer and Petersen, 1982). It is also possible they had a traumatic adolescence and want to protect their child from similar experiences. Also, parents may be envious of the numerous opportunities their children have. In that case, they may push their adolescents to do the things they wish they could do, or discourage them because of their own lack of opportunities.

All of these dynamics constitute a struggle for both parents and adolescents. For the adolescent, the struggle is between fleeing the childhood image parents seem to hold for them and wanting to relate to their parents in a more peer-like fashion. For parents, the struggle is between letting their child live his or her own life and make his or her own decisions as opposed to needing their child to maintain the stability that existed in the family before becoming an adolescent. As a child, the adolescent gave their parents a

secure role. Not only are they losing that role of being the primary caretaker, but they are also being challenged on a number of levels by their own offspring (Newman and Murray, 1983).

Summary

Adolescent development is a complex process because of the different changes that occur, the repercussions of those changes, and the differences among adolescents in developmental timing. Also, as the adolescent experiences these changes, he or she experiences the "crisis" of psychological moratorium, or experimentation, with different role identities. This experimentation is necessary to reach identity achievement, the most desirable outcome of psychological moratorium.

During adolescence these developmental changes affect the types of role experimentation the adolescent will experience. For example, a physically mature adolescent may begin to behave more as an adult than someone less mature. Another adolescent's peer group may influence him or her to experiment in different ways, such as being delinquent or sexually active. And a third may continue to follow the beliefs and values of his or her family, or rebel by making different choices.

Even though role experimentation is critical to identity achievement, all of the possibilities and changes can be overwhelming to the adolescent. Not only do these changes create stress for the adolescent, but they may influence the adolescent to make decisions that are detrimental to their adjustment and overall development. For instance, they may decide to rebel by running away from home, or they may experiment with drugs to escape the pressure they feel to behave like an adult. This is why it is important to

prepare the individual for the transition to adolescence. A number of things can facilitate adaptation to this transition. First of all, education about the developmental changes that occur in adolescence prepares the individual for what to expect and has stress-reducing effects. Secondly, the individual can be encouraged to use his or her cognitive and social skills to explore identity and to adequately deal with the stress-producing changes. Finally, the ability to share experiences with others gives support during this time of uncertainty.

Preadolescence is an effective time to begin this preparation for a number of reasons. First of all, some adolescent changes have already begun to take place in preadolescence, but commitment to a particular role identity occurs later. Preadolescents are therefore more flexible than older adolescents in finding ways to integrate these changes into their self-identity. Also, preadolescents have the cognitive ability to consider options, whereas children of a younger age are not able to think as realistically about their future. Consequently, preadolescents are able to project themselves into the future while adapting to the changes they are beginning to experience.

It is important to prepare preadolescents for these changes in groups of the same sex because the dynamics of cross-sex relationships would inhibit the discussion of certain critical issues. For example, preadolescents would be less likely to discuss physical development and self-consciousness in the presence of the opposite sex. The program described below deals with issues specific to preadolescent females. The same basic program structure could be used for preadolescent males, as long as issues particular to male development are incorporated.

A Program for Preadolescents

Program Description

This section describes a program to prepare preadolescents for adolescence so that adjustment can occur with a minimum amount of stress for both adolescents and their families. Four main components address this goal: (a) education; (b) group discussion; (c) exploration of various role identities; and (d) enhancement of relationships with parents. The format consists of six one-hour sessions (Appendix). In order to maximize group participation, group size is limited to 6 to 8 preadolescent members. Parents are to attend with preadolescents for the first and last sessions. The second through fifth sessions are for preadolescents only.

Session I: What Does It Mean to Me to Be a Teen? The first session serves as an introductory session and requires the participation of parents and preadolescents. The purpose of this session is twofold: (a) to increase awareness of what adolescence will be like and; (b) to open lines of communication between parents and preadolescents.

To increase awareness of what adolescence will be like, the group leader delivers a lecture about adolescence. This lecture covers the changes that occur in adolescence, and the repercussions of those changes within family relationships. Normalizing--i.e., reducing anxiety through understanding an experience as normal--occurs through discussion of the difficulties all families with adolescents experience in the midst of so many changes.

Secondly, lines of communication are opened between parents and preadolescents by encouraging parents to discuss aspects of their adolescence

within the group. There are many advantages to having parents share their experiences. First of all, the girls learn about adolescence by listening to their parents. In addition, it enhances the parent-preadolescent relationship as it becomes evident to preadolescents that their parents' lives included struggles similar to their own. The realization by both groups that their struggles are similar "closes the gap" between parents and preadolescents and increases their chances of sharing with each other. Finally, knowing that parents had the same experiences has normalizing effects and, therefore, increases the preadolescents' comfort with their own fears and concerns.

Also for the first session, it is important for the group to begin developing its own identity through group interaction. If the members feel a sense of belonging to the group, they will share and contribute more, which increases its effectiveness (Levine, 1979). One way to encourage this interaction is through group exercises.

An exercise for this first session is to make a large cardboard puzzle that requires each member's contribution. Each person draws a picture that represents adolescence to them. Each parent, for example, draws on his or her own piece of the puzzle what he or she remembers about adolescence, and preadolescents draw on their own piece of the puzzle what they hope adolescence will be like. Then, one by one, until it is complete, each member adds their piece to the puzzle and discusses what they drew.

To conclude the first session, the group leader gives an overview of what the following sessions will entail. Also, to facilitate the parents' support and participation, time is devoted to answering any questions or concerns they have about the program.

Session II: Who Am I Becoming? Due to the numerous changes that occur in adolescence and the role experimentation that coincides with psychological moratorium, preadolescence can be a time of identity confusion. The objectives of this session, therefore, are: (a) to normalize feelings of identity confusion; (b) to generate options for identity development, and; (c) to set goals for the future.

Identity confusion is normalized by the group leader talking about how the changes that are occurring normally cause uncertainty and doubt about one's self, including feelings of low self-esteem. Also, the preadolescents' interests expand because of the influence of their peer group and because of their cognitive ability to consider alternatives and their consequences. Their expanding interests may be witnessed in areas such as their hobbies and extra-curricular activities. Discussion about these interests and identity is encouraged by two group exercises. In one exercise, preadolescents are instructed to complete the sentence, "When I am 16, I want...". Giving the group members a specific age to focus on makes the future seem more realistic to them. Group members are encouraged to respond at random and without reservation. This "brainstorming" facilitates their options for various role identities.

Goal-setting is the second activity. It helps preadolescents think more clearly about what they want for themselves in adolescence. In this activity, group members make a list of characteristics they would like to have in 5 years. Responses include personality characteristics, relationships, and personal achievements. Afterwards, discussion about what they need to do to achieve these goals helps group members think rationally about their

future and encourages them to take responsibility for establishing their identity.

In this session, group members should be reminded that their goals are likely to, and in fact, should change throughout adolescence. This is to discourage them from making commitments too early, i.e., identity foreclosure. Instead, preadolescents should be encouraged to engage in role experimentation and to think realistically about the consequences of that experimentation. With this encouragement, they will be more likely to reach identity achievement.

Session III: What Will Others Think of Me? Feelings of self-consciousness and peer pressure are a critical part of the preadolescent's exploration of various role identities. As acceptance by peers becomes more important, preadolescents will be more likely to conform to the standards of their peer group. Also, increased feelings of self-consciousness lead preadolescents to turn to their peers with the hope of finding a positive self-identity. Consequently, the objectives of this session are: (a) to normalize feelings of self-consciousness and; (b) to explore the impact of peer pressure and ways to deal with it.

Normalizing is accomplished by having the group members share how important it is to be similar to others, and what it feels like to be different. The group leader reminds them that it is normal to feel self-conscious because they are undergoing rapid changes and experiencing identity confusion, as discussed in the previous session.

Peer pressure is explored by discussion of how others influence the decisions they make, and in what circumstances that influence is positive or

negative. For example, a preadolescent may feel pressure from peers to dress for school in a style that is against the school's regulations. Such an example would be discussed as negative peer pressure. To further illustrate the power of peer pressure, the leader guides the group through an exercise where chairs are placed in groups of two, and members are instructed to choose a seat. After everyone is seated, group members discuss what influenced their decisions, and how they are similar to the person with whom they chose to sit.

Throughout this exercise, it is important for the group leader to be sensitive to the members' feelings of exclusion. For instance, a member may feel rejected if she is not asked to sit with someone she likes. The leader should then discuss the similarities of all group members and commend them for their ability to include everyone as part of the group. This exercise, therefore, also serves to strengthen the group's identity and the members' sense of belonging to the group.

Session IV. Who Will I Be Around the Guys? Sex-role identity is an important issue for preadolescents because of their physical, sexual development and their increasing interest in members of the opposite sex. At the same time, the awkwardness caused by their physical development, and the newness of opposite-sex relationships cause feelings of uncertainty for preadolescents. Therefore, the goals of this session are: (a) to normalize feelings of awkwardness, and; (b) to explore different ways of relating to members of the opposite sex.

The group leader discusses the differences in physical and emotional maturation between boys and girls and how that affects their relationships. It

should be pointed out that it is normal for the girls to feel self-conscious and awkward with boys because physical and emotional changes cause the girls to be more aware of how others perceive them. Also, boys' perceptions of them are especially important because their interest in boys is increasing, although the same is true of increasing interest and awkwardness among boys toward girls.

It is best to discuss different types of opposite-sex relationships by encouraging the group members to share their experiences. Their experiences probably represent a variety of relationships including friendships and dating relationships. There may also be one or more members who are not interested in relationships with boys. Regardless of how group members perceive these relationships, the leader should validate each member's views and experiences as normal and acceptable.

The leader also encourages discussion about gender role identity by asking members how they think females should behave in relationships. They may also discuss whether or not they would like to marry in the future, and if so, what kind of marriage they would like to have.

To conclude this session, the group leader talks about how each person has a choice as to how to relate to others. Members should understand that they have a right to not compromise themselves for the sake of a relationship, such as engaging in a discomforting sexual relationship. The previous discussion on peer pressure is made relevant in terms of the pressure the girls feel to be liked by boys and the importance of being able to make their own choices. The group leader reminds them that relating to boys in ways that are

similar to how their friends relate to them seems important, but the ultimate decision is for the individual to make.

Session V: Can I Still Get Along With Mom and Dad? Preadolescents' relationships with their parents are often conflictual because the preadolescent gains autonomy, but is still in need of parenting and support. Therefore, the objectives of this session are: (a) to increase understanding of parent-adolescent relationships, and; (b) to explore ways of dealing with parent-adolescent conflict.

In this session, discussion is focused on how the parent- preadolescent relationship is changing and on factors that make that relationship difficult. For example, the preadolescents' increasing ability and desire for autonomy makes them less dependent on their parents. On the other hand, the fear and uncertainty they are experiencing about the changes, as well as their need for security and guidance, create some ambivalence about their desire for independence.

It is also important for preadolescents to understand their parents' feelings in order to enhance their relationship and their ability to communicate with one another. The group leader poses hypothetical reactions of their parents concerning their daughters' becoming adolescents. For example, they may feel proud of their daughters' level of maturity, but regret being less involved in their lives. They may also be uncertain about how to talk with their daughters because they are no longer children, but are able to think more for themselves. This new way of relating is awkward for parents because it is different from the way they related to them as children.

Group members should be aware that conflict with parents is a normal part of the growing process. What causes conflict for preadolescents is the need to be different from the way they were as children. It is especially important to them that parents treat them differently because they know it is parents who tend to think of them as children. Therefore, the rules that parents set down for preadolescents may trigger rebellion from them because of their fear of not being treated as adults.

Role play is an exercise that allows group members to understand that conflict with parents is normal, but does not have to be detrimental to the relationship. In this exercise, members act out a scenario in which parent and preadolescent experience conflict, but maintain an understanding of what the other is experiencing. In fact, role reversal--i.e., taking the role of the parents--helps the preadolescent to understand the position of the parents and the difficulty in parenting a preadolescent.

Time should be given at the end of this session for group members to share their difficulties and concerns regarding their relationships with their parents. Reactions to the group exercise may facilitate such a discussion. It would be helpful for them to understand that others have similar difficulties and that neither they nor their parents are entirely responsible for their relationship problems. With that understanding, preadolescents will be less likely to blame themselves or their parents and, therefore, more likely to work toward resolving their problems.

Session VI: Families - On Your Mark, Get Set...Go! The final session again addresses the enhancement of parent- preadolescent relationships and includes the parents' participation. This goal of relationship enhancement is

addressed through: (a) understanding the other's position in the relationship, and; (b) learning effective communication skills.

At the beginning of the session, the group leader makes parents feel welcome by giving an overview of the previous sessions. Areas of conflict discussed as being normal for this transitional phase include conflict over whether or not the daughter should attend an unchaperoned party or who her friends should be. As discussed in the previous session, this type of conflict comes from needing to parent a preadolescent who is becoming more of an adult.

Communication skills are an important part of maintaining an effective relationship. The group leader presents guidelines for parents in dealing with their daughters. Parents are encouraged to discuss what their needs are at this time of change, what they would like to receive from their daughters, and what they are willing to give. It is helpful for them to talk with their daughters at various times about what it was like when they were the same age as their daughter. This type of dialogue increases the preadolescents' understanding of their parents and helps to elevate their relationship to more of a peer level.

Once again, discussion is facilitated by an exercise. In this instance, the group leader gives an example of something that typically causes conflict between parent and preadolescent, such as arguing over what time the preadolescent needs to be home from a party. Each family separates into their own group and acts out the scenario as they would ideally like to handle it. Then, the group reassembles and talks about the feelings and frustrations they experienced, and what conclusions can be drawn from it.

The session ends with parents and daughters drawing up a verbal contract with each other addressing what they will do for each other to make the adolescent years less conflictual. For example, parents may agree to express their appreciation for their daughters more often, and daughters may agree to be more direct about their own needs and feelings. It would be helpful to share this information in the large group context so that each family realizes they are not unique in their struggles and so they can learn from each other.

For this last session, it is important for group members to have time to talk with each other about their experiences in the group and what they appreciate about the other members. This is done first by structuring such discussion into the format of the session. Secondly, the chance for informal conversation between members is facilitated by a casual social setting. Therefore, it is helpful to host a social for parents and preadolescents to allow for informal sharing between families and group leader.

Issues and Concerns

There are a number of things to be considered in planning and implementing a program like the one described in this paper. First of all, as previously discussed, individuals develop at different times and at different rates. Therefore, it is unlikely that all members of the group will be at the same stage of development. One of the implications of this is that some members may not benefit from the content of the sessions because they are not at a stage of development where they are prepared to deal with the issues presented. In this instance, the group leader should be prepared to make the content relevant to all members. It may be helpful, for example, to encourage

those who have not had certain experiences to think about what it would be like and to learn from other members' experiences. Secondly, the differences in the group members' development may inhibit the relationships between them. For instance, they may not obtain as much emotional support from the members if they cannot understand the other's experiences. The group leader should then point out similarities among all members and emphasize the importance of each person's participation in the group.

It is also important to remember that preadolescents have a lower tolerance than do adults for emotionally-laden subjects (Levine, 1979). Therefore, the group leader cannot expect the girls to openly and easily communicate deep feelings, especially when they are overly-concerned about what their peers think of them. The group leader should, therefore, be attuned to the verbal and non-verbal cues the girls give to indicate that the discussion is too intense. They may, for instance, whisper among themselves or pass notes to each other when they feel uncomfortable with the content. To discourage this from happening, the group leader should structure a group "fun activity" at some point during each session so the girls know that their attention is not expected for the full hour and to release some of their anxiety.

A major consideration is who the group leader should be. First of all, the dynamics of the group will be most productive for the girls if the leader is female. With a female leader, the girls will be less self-conscious and, therefore, more willing to share than if the leader is male (Levine, 1979). They will feel freer to discuss issues such as self-consciousness and concern for physical attractiveness, for example. Also, the girls will be able to look to

a female leader as a role model. The normalizing of the experience of preadolescence will be more effective if the leader herself is willing to share her own experience.

Furthermore, the leader should be someone other than the parent of any of the preadolescent group members. Having a parent perform the role of leader would inhibit their daughter's participation and therefore decrease the effectiveness of the group for her. Also, parent and daughter would not be able to benefit from the first and last sessions as much as others if the parent is also focused on facilitating the group. Therefore, it is helpful for school counselors, church employees, and other professionals to assume the role of leader.

In addition, the group leader should avoid looking for results that will make her feel satisfied about her efforts for the group. Levine (1979) reports that leaders of preadolescent groups are least likely to feel they have done any good or supplied any help for their group, even though the effects of the group have often been reported as beneficial. This feeling of not being helpful is reflective of the emotional experience of preadolescents. That is, because preadolescents are overwhelmed with a variety of emotions, they often resort to denial and flight when they feel threatened by more emotional intensity (Levine, 1979).

In general, this group is not intended to be a highly-structured, intensely-focused group. Instead, it will be necessary to have topic areas and specific issues to address, but it will be most helpful for the girls to have the opportunity to develop relationships among their peers within the group and to share with each other what is most important to them at that time.

Conclusion

Adolescence is a difficult time of transition that involves the incorporation of many changes into the individual's self-identity. Due to the number and variety of these changes, identity confusion results and can cause a great deal of stress. The changes affect the adolescents' own thoughts, feelings, and behavior, as well as their relationships. For example, peers become more important to adolescents and relationships with parents often become more conflictual.

Preparing preadolescents for these changes can facilitate their adjustment to this transition and ultimately lead to identity achievement. This is the purpose of the program described in this paper. One way this preparation is addressed is through education about the changes of adolescence and how those changes will affect them. In addition, preadolescents are encouraged to use their cognitive and social skills to explore various role identities. Exploration of role identities occurs through group discussion and structured exercises. Group support aids this process because it gives preadolescents the security needed to ponder and, perhaps, experiment with alternatives. It also helps fill their need for more intimate contact with peers. Finally, since relationships with parents often become conflictual at this stage, preparation also involves the enhancement of parent-preadolescent relationships. This is important because adolescents are still in need of some parenting, but are more independent than they were in childhood.

While there are many advantages to implementing a program like the one described in this paper, some limitations should also be considered. First

of all, program effectiveness is difficult to measure because the ideal outcome of identity achievement normally occurs much later in adolescent development. It is possible, however, to take a pre- and post-test measure of adjustment before and after the group. In the case of identity development, adjustment would consist of measures of self-acceptance or self-esteem. How satisfied one is with one's self is reflective of how well they have adjusted to their current developmental stage. It will be difficult to determine, however, if program effectiveness contributes to adjustment, or if adjustment is due to some other variable, such as differences in individual development. To control for such extraneous variables, a control group should be included in the pre- and post-test measures.

In addition, there is a need for follow-up, since adolescent development continues beyond the stage of preadolescence, and, therefore, so does the need for adjustment. Programs of a similar nature can be implemented for different phases of adolescence. Such programs should not occur too close in succession so that time is allowed for processing information and for exploring different role identities.

Every individual experiences adolescence in a unique way. The amount of stress and the method of adjustment will vary from one individual to another. Regardless of individual differences, this time of transition can be facilitated through addressing issues in preadolescence that are critical to adolescent development. It is important to deliver this program to preadolescents because they have not progressed enough in their development to have reached identity achievement, but are more likely experiencing moratorium. Dealing with these issues in moratorium will

increase the likelihood that identity achievement will be reached in later adolescence. This paper has described a program that promotes adjustment by addressing issues of identity confusion that result from adolescent change. At the same time, it uses group peer support and communication with parents to give preadolescents the security needed to incorporate these changes into their developing identities. The resolution of these issues in adolescence will positively influence the remainder of the individual's adult development.

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APPENDIX

Appendix

Program Outline

SESSION I: What Does It Mean to Me to be a Teen? (For parents and preadolescents)

I. Objectives

- A. to increase awareness of changes during adolescence
- B. to open lines of communication between parents and preadolescents

II. Strategy

A. General discussion

- 1. changes during adolescence
 - a. physical
 - b. cognitive
 - c. social
- 2. effects of changes
 - a. for parent
 - b. for preadolescent
- 3. parents' experience of adolescence

B. Group exercise - puzzle: "The Teen Years"

III. Conclusion

SESSION II: Who Am I Becoming? (For preadolescents only)

I. Objectives

- A. to normalize feelings of identity confusion
- B. to generate options for identity development
- C. to set goals for future

II. Strategy

A. General discussion

1. adolescent identity confusion
 - a. changing identity
 - b. broadening of interests

B. Group exercises

1. "When I am 16, I want...."
2. goal-setting

III. Conclusion: A look into the future

SESSION III: What Will Others Think of Me? (For preadolescents only)

I. Objectives

- A. to normalize feelings of self-consciousness and peer group pressure
- B. to explore the impact of peer pressure and ways of dealing with it

II. Strategy

A. General discussion

1. self-consciousness
2. peer pressure
 - a. what it is like to be different
 - b. how to cope with being different

B. Group exercise: choosing groups

C. Discussion: reactions to exercise

III. Conclusion

SESSION IV: Who Will I Be Around the Guys?
(For preadolescents only)

I. Objectives

- A. to normalize feelings of awkwardness when relating to members of the opposite sex
- B. to explore ways of relating with members of the opposite sex

II. Strategy

A. General discussion

- 1. awkwardness of relating with boys
 - a. differences in physical growth
 - b. differences in emotional maturity
- 2. various ways of relating with boys
 - a. friends
 - b. dates
 - c. partners (school, sports, etc.)

III. Conclusion

SESSION V: Can I Still Get Along With Mom and Dad?
(For preadolescents only)

I. Objective

- A. to increase understanding of preadolescents' and parents' struggles during the phase of adolescence

II. Strategy

A. General discussion

- 1. preadolescent-parent relationships
- 2. conflict with parents

B. Group exercise: role play

III. Conclusion: Ways to a healthy relationship

SESSION VI: Families - On Your Mark, Get Set...Go!
(For parents and preadolescents)

I. Objectives

A. to enhance parent-preadolescent relationships by:

1. learning effective communication skills
2. understanding other's position in relationship

II. Strategy

A. General discussion

1. overview of previous sessions
2. areas of conflict between parents and adolescents
3. communication techniques

B. Group exercise

1. role play and discussion

III. Conclusion

IV. Social activity

PREADOLESCENT GIRLS' GROUP:
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND PROGRAM PROPOSAL

by

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Abstract

Adolescence is a period of transition that is often stressful because it requires adjustment to many physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes. Adjustment to these changes is important for the development of the individual's identity. One way to facilitate adjustment is to be prepared for the changes of adolescence and the effects they have on the individual's life. This paper describes a program that prepares preadolescents for adolescence through education, group support, and enhancement of relationships with parents. It addresses issues of identity confusion that result from the numerous changes experienced in this stage of development. A literature review and theoretical background provide the basis for the program.