**Development in Early & Middle Adulthood**

**Adulthood** has no signpost to announce its onset (as adolescence is announced by puberty). In technologically advanced nations, the life span is more than 70 years.

**Social clocks** indicate the typical life events, behaviors, and issues for a particular age. Each culture and historical period has a specific social clock. A middle-class white woman living in contemporary U.S. culture may be “off time” for motherhood if she had her first child at age fifteen. In another cultural context or another historical period, however, motherhood at age fifteen may have been “on time.”

**Early adulthood: (20-40).** In **early adulthood**, an individual is concerned with developing the ability to share intimacy, seeking to form relationships and find intimate love. Long-term relationships are formed, and often marriage and children result. The young adult is also faced with career decisions.

-Choices concerning **marriage** and **family** are often made during this period. The two most common long‐term relationships of adulthood are cohabitation and marriage**. Cohabitors** are unmarried people who live and have sex together. Of the more than 3 million Americans who cohabitate, most are between the ages of 25 and 45. Many individuals claim they cohabitate as a test for marital compatibility, but no solid evidence supports the idea that cohabitation increases later marital satisfaction. In contrast, some research suggests a relationship between premarital cohabitation and increased divorce rates. Other individuals claim that they cohabitate as an alternative to marriage, not as a trial marriage.

The long‐term relationship most preferred by Americans is marriage. Over 90 percent of Americans will marry at least once, with the average age for first‐time marriage being 24 for females and 26 for males. Marriage can be advantageous. Married people tend to be healthier and happier than their never‐married, divorced, and widowed counterparts. On average, married males also live longer than single males. Marriages seem to be happiest in the early years, although marital satisfaction increases again in the later years once parental responsibilities have ended and finances have stabilized. Marriage can also be disadvantageous. Numerous problems and conflicts arise in long‐term relationships. Unrealistic expectations about marriage, as well as differences over sex, finances, household responsibilities, and parenting are only a few potential problem areas.

About 50 percent of all marriages in the United States end in divorce, with the average duration of these marriages being about 7 years.

Both the process and aftermath of divorce are very stressful on both partners. Research shows that divorce is more likely among people who marry during adolescence, those whose parents were divorced, and those who are dissimilar in age, intelligence, personality, or attractiveness. Separation is also more frequent among those who do not have children. Most people who have divorced remarry; about 75%, children may experience more than one set of parents.

Today, many people are choosing singlehood, or remaining single, over marriage or other long‐term committed relationships. Many singles clearly lead satisfying and rewarding lives, whatever their reasons for not marrying.

**-Work/career choice** affects not only socioeconomic status but also friends, political values, residence location, child care, job stress, and many other aspects of life. And while income is important in both career selection and career longevity, so are achievement, recognition, satisfaction, security, and challenge. In the modern cultures of many nations, the careers of both spouses or partners frequently must be considered in making job choices. More and more adults are switching vocations, not just changing jobs within a field.

-**Physical abilities** peak in early adulthood; world-class sprinters and swimmers peak in their teens or early twenties; but decline of abilities not noticed till later in life. Death rates during young adulthood are lower than during any other period of the life span. Except for HIV and AIDS in males and malignancies in females, the leading cause of death during the 20s and 30s is accidents. Death rates, however, double during each decade after age 35.

**Middle adulthood: (40-65) In middle adulthood**, an important challenge is to develop a genuine concern for the welfare of future generations and to contribute to the world through family and work. Erik Erikson refers to the problem posed at this stage as **generativity vs. stagnation.**

Robert Havighurst lists seven **major tasks** in the middle years.

* accepting and adjusting to physiological changes, such as menopause -reaching and maintaining satisfaction in one's occupation
* adjusting to and possibly caring for aging parents -helping teenage children to become responsible adults
* achieving adult social and civic responsibility -relating to one's spouse as a person
* developing leisure-time activities

While a **midlife crisis** is *not regarded as a universal phenomenon that happens to most people*, during one's 40s and 50s comes the recognition that more than half of one's life is gone. That recognition may prompt some to feel that the clock is ticking and that they must make sudden, drastic changes in order to achieve their goals, while others focus on finding satisfaction with the present course of their lives.

The **empty nest** refers to the time in parents’ lives when their children have grown up and left home. Parents who have other roles in addition to parenting usually find this period less difficult. The empty nest is for most people a happy place and they report greater happiness and enjoyment of marriage. Many couples also experience a **post-launch honeymoon** where they have a renewed focus on romance once their children leave home.

What is a sure predictor of a loving relationship's potential for growing or wilting? Long‐term relationships share several factors, including both partners regarding the relationship as a long‐term commitment; both verbally and physically expressing appreciation, admiration, and love; both offering emotional support to each other; and both considering the other as a best friend.

Essential to preserving a quality relationship is the couple's decision to practice effective communication. Communication is the means by which intimacy is established and nurtured within a relationship; it helps partners better relate to and understand each other. Communication helps them feel close, connected, and loved.

Although no longer at the peak level of their young adult years, middle‐aged adults still report good health and physical functioning, However, as a result of the passage of time, middle adults undergo various physical changes. Decades of exposure and use take their toll on the body as wrinkles develop, organs no longer function as efficiently as they once did, and lung and heart capacities decrease. Other changes include decreases in strength, coordination, reaction time, sensation (sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch), and fine motor skills. Also common among middle adults are the conditions of presbyopia (farsightedness or difficulty reading) and presbycusis (difficulty hearing high‐pitched sounds). **Menopause** is the gradual, permanent cessation of menstruation and usually begins between ages forty-five and fifty-five. Though many women suffer uncomfortable physical symptoms during menopause, such as hot flashes, emotional reactions to menopause are far from universal. Though men don’t experience menopause, they do experience a gradual decline in testosterone production and sperm count as they age. Because of society's emphasis on youthfulness and physical appearances, middle‐aged men and women may sometimes suffer from diminished self‐esteem. Women, for instance, experience the American double standard of aging: Men who are graying are perceived as distinguished, mature, and sexy, while women who are graying are viewed as being over the hill or past their prime

**Development in Late Adulthood- Late adulthood** (old age) is generally considered to begin at about age 65. Erik Erikson suggests that at this time it is important to find meaning and satisfaction in life rather than to become bitter and disillusioned, that is, to resolve the conflict of **integrity vs. despair**. It has been estimated that by the year 2030, Americans over 65 will make up 20% of the population. Despite the problems associated with longevity, studies of people in their 70s have shown that growing old is not necessarily synonymous with substantial mental or physical deterioration. Many older people are happy and engaged in a variety of activities and most have an increase in their over-all sense of well-being

**Ageism. Ageism** may be defined as the prejudice or discrimination that occurs on the basis of age. Although it can be used against people of all ages, older people are most frequently its target and it may often result in forced retirement. Stereotyping of the elderly is also an aspect of ageism, as seen in such a statement as “He drives like a little old lady.”

**Physical changes.** In later adulthood, a variety of physiological changes may occur, including some degree of atrophy of the brain and a decrease in the rate of neural processes. Bone mass diminishes, especially among women, leading to bone density disorders such as osteoporosis. Muscles become weaker unless exercise programs are followed. The skin dries and becomes less flexible. Hair loss occurs in both sexes. There is also decreased sensitivity in all of the senses, including smell, taste, touch, hearing, and vision. Disease-fighting immune system weakens so you’re more susceptible to life-threatening disease; but due to  lifetime collection of antibodies, less suffering of short-term ailments like colds and viruses. Chronic health problems such as arthritis, rheumatism, and hypertension increasingly interfere with the quality of life of most individuals as they age.

**Cognitive changes.** The study of cognitive changes in the older population is complex. Response speeds (neural and motor) have been reported to decline; some researchers believe that age-related decrease in working memory is the crucial factor underlying poorer performance by the elderly on cognitive tasks. Since early adulthood, small, gradual loss of neurons, but can be compensated by active growth of neural connections in people who remain active, and until late in life, intelligence remains stable

* **Intellectual changes** in late adulthood do not always result in reduction of ability. While **fluid intelligence** (general ability to think abstractly, and solve problems quickly) does decline in later years, **crystallized intelligence** (accumulated knowledge and facts) has been shown to rise slightly over the entire life span.
* **Dementias** are usually responsible for cognitive defects seen in older people. These disorders, however, occur only in about 15% of people over 65. The leading cause of dementia in the United States is **Alzheimer's disease**, a progressive, eventually fatal disease that begins with confusion and memory lapses and ends with the loss of ability to care for oneself. It has been associated with the neurotransmitter **acetylcholine.**

**Retirement** at age 65 is the conventional choice for many people, although some work until much later. People have been found to be happier in retirement if they are not forced to retire before they are ready and if they have enough income to maintain an adequate living standard.

**Widowhood.** Women tend to marry men older than they are and, on average, live 5 to 7 years longer than men. One study found ten times as many widows as widowers. Widowhood is particularly stressful if the death of the spouse occurs early in life; close support of friends, particularly other widows, can be very helpful.

**Death and dying.** Death and dying has been studied extensively by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, who suggested that terminally ill patients display the following five basic reactions. Though many other psychologists disagree, and don’t believe that there are common stages for dying.

* **Denial**, an attempt to deny the reality and to isolate oneself from the event, is frequently the first reaction.
* **Anger** frequently follows, as the person envies the living and asks, “Why should I be the one to die?”
* **Bargaining** may occur; the person pleads to God or others for more time.
* As the end nears, recognition that death is inevitable and that separation from family will occur leads to feelings of exhaustion, futility, and deep **depression**
* **Acceptance** often follows if death is not sudden, and the person finds peace with the inevitable.

Many dying patients do not fit this pattern

Dying people may be forced into and through these stages instead of letting them face death their own way.