



ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT: Identity Formation Implications for Mentoring

Q: Developmentally, what is happening during adolescence?

A: From a developmental perspective, adolescents need to achieve one milestone before becoming an adult: forming a solid identity. This will be at the core of what every Starfish scholar is trying to achieve during high school. Most will not really commit to an identity until their early twenties, but hopefully their teen years will be the most intense time of questioning and self-discovery.

Q: What does it mean to form an identity?

A: Forming an identity involves committing to who you want to be in this lifetime – deciding what your “self” will be. Adolescence is the time to create our own soul-defining authenticity that drives both who we see in the mirror and who the outside world sees. This is the time we really begin to exercise control over who we become in this lifetime.

Q: How can I tell if my mentee is where he/she should be in forming an identity?

A: Every teenager will take their own path, in their own time, towards forming an identity. The best thing for youth is to ultimately go through an identity crisis. An identity crisis is actually a healthy thing (for teenagers, anyway). It means they are actively searching for options and answers to the big life questions. Before they move into this stage, many youth will either 1) just “hang out” and show no interest in their identity or 2) “prematurely” commit to an identity they have taken on without exploring any other options. The longer an older teenager takes to get to the identity crisis, the more risk he/she faces of depression, hopelessness or suicidality.

**** Q: WHAT CAN I DO, AS A MENTOR, TO HELP MY YOUTH FORM A HEALTHY IDENTITY?***

A: This is at the heart of why you are involved with Starfish. The sole purpose you are in your scholar’s life is to help his/her true voice, strength, dreams and IDENTITY to take hold. You are here to help them realize their vision of success. You want to **inspire** them to actively seek out who they want to be and **nurture** and **guide** them on their journey to discovering it.

In a scholar’s identity formation, the mentor serves as a life/dreams/identity coach. As a COACH, you are both a:

Motivator: Ignite and sustain your scholar’s desire to become who they want to be.

Trainer: Help them develop the tools and skills they will need in order to achieve their dreams.

Q: When we talk about identity, what are we really talking about? What is identity?

A: Identity is defined differently depending on who you talk to. It is basically the person that both we and the outside world understand us to be. The four cornerstones of identity are these areas of our lives:

1. Soul: Passions, values, spiritual beliefs

2. Self: Mind (intrinsic gifts/challenges), body, personality, gender and culture

3. Relationships: Family, friends, peers, romantic

4. Place in This World: Definition of success, life work/ career, giving back, ideologies around current events, politics, society, war, race, etc...