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# Developmental Implications for Ministry

## Ministry with Younger Adolescents (Ages 12–15)

**Physical activity:** Because of the rapid changes in their bodies with the onset of puberty, young teens have trouble sitting still for long periods of time. Learning experiences that involve physical movement will enjoy better success.

**Concreteness:** Early adolescents need examples and stories; they learn well through experiential, inductive methods.

**Self-awareness:** Young teens can be awkwardly self-conscious—too concerned with their own perceived flaws. They need positive feedback to build healthy self-esteem. They also need chances to explore who they are and opportunities to become aware of their uniqueness.

**Sexuality:** Teens need basic, accurate information about their bodies. It is important for them to explore what it means to be a man or a woman. Young teens are beginning to form their values in the area of sexual morality. It is a big step if they can become comfortable discussing sexual issues honestly with their parents and other trusted adults, within a faith context.

**Peers:** Younger teens are looking for help in learning how to make and keep friends. Because friends are so important, it is wise to use a group approach for service projects and other learning activities.

**Personal faith:** Many early adolescents are questioning their childhood faith and struggling to make it their own. They need to experience faith in Jesus as a lived, personal reality. They want to experience a vital Christian community. It is a good time to introduce them to a variety of prayer forms. Adults can help young teens “think through” their faith experiences and lead them to see that the Christian story is not just a fable for children.

**Faith models:** Adults who are committed Christians can have a strong, positive influence on young teens. Early adolescents often have heroes who shape their values, ideals, and goals.

**Responsibility:** Because they are no longer children, early adolescents should be encouraged to take increasing responsibility. This includes accepting the consequences of their actions, contributing in real ways to their schools and parishes, and being given opportunities to develop and use their talents.

**Decision-making:** Younger adolescents need help learning to make decisions that are not based on external influences, such as their peers. They need guidance with early exploration of career and vocation choices. At this stage, they are forming their conscience and establishing moral criteria.

**Wider world:** Younger adolescents discover a world outside their family. They should be encouraged not just to experience peers, but also to explore the wider world of other cultures, races, and living standards. Young adolescents need to be exposed to the richness of the traditions of other cultures. Through service projects and other experiences, young people have a chance to learn about social justice at a concrete level.