

# Psychological Features of Self-Awareness in Early Adolescence

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the importance of self-awareness and self-knowledge in early adolescence. In the article the writer highlighted types of self-awareness and ways of developing self-awareness in adolescence.

**Key words:** Teens, identities, Self-awareness, strong self-awareness, poor self-awareness, nonverbal, benefit, caregivers, self-talk, Self-knowledge.

Early adolescence is a unique developmental stage where they are no longer young children, but they are not yet adults. They are seeking their own identities apart from their families. Whether they recognize it or not, teens are often asking themselves questions such as, “Who am I?” “What makes me special?” and “What do I want to do with my life?” Self-awareness in teens helps them answer these questions and apply their skills and strengths in a variety of contexts. It helps them evaluate themselves and their behaviors within a context, like recognizing if they’re talking too loudly in a library. It helps teens academically as they learn to internalize their thoughts and make inferences and connections to the real world in academics. Self-awareness even helps when teens make mistakes. Teens with strong self-awareness skills learn to check for mistakes, recognize them, and then

Teens with strong self-awareness skills are able to use those skills to succeed on a personal level as well as to help others. They can evaluate their own thoughts, feelings, and actions and understand how their behavior affects others. This level of self-awareness requires teens to understand their unique strengths and weakness accurately. Teens with strong self-awareness skills recognize the needs of others and take actions to meet the needs of both themselves and those around them. Teens with poor self-awareness skills do not simply appear as opposites of those with strong self-awareness skills. Instead, they exhibit specific behaviors that illustrate skills deficits. These may include a lack of appropriate nonverbal cues and body posture, inaccurate assessments of self, and difficulty expressing feelings or prioritizing what is most important. Additionally, teens with poor self-awareness often fail to recognize their own needs or wants in relation to their own or others’ perspectives.

The lack of self-awareness skills in these teens causes significant difficulties in making decisions and dealing with conflict. Since these teens cannot accurately identify their own feelings, they may respond inappropriately and have additional problems in communicating them to others. This leaves teens with poor self-awareness feeling alone and misunderstood. In classrooms, teens with poor self-awareness skills often provide ineffective leadership, fail to recognize their mistakes and struggle to learn from mistakes made known to them.

Schools are in a unique position to help teens improve their self-awareness skills. Intentionally designed activities and assignments can directly teens in this area. For example, students may write journals or autobiographies, helping them to reflect on themselves more objectively. Teachers may work with teens to help them connect academic content to their real lives. Reflective activities help teens develop an awareness of their strengths, character traits, including personality and abilities, and how they use those traits to accomplish goals in their everyday lives. Perhaps most importantly, reflective activities help teens develop the self-awareness skills needed to accurately understand and talk about their thoughts, feelings, and actions. This helps them to become more adept at identifying what stresses them out and what they can do to calm themselves down effectively and efficiently.

Teachers, parents, and other caregivers can also have a significant impact on teens’ self-awareness in the way they interact with teens. Encourage them to talk about their thoughts and feelings and help them

label feelings accurately to expand their emotional vocabulary. Point out a teen's positive traits and discourage comparisons as much as possible. Offering constructive feedback, both positive and negative, can help teens with poor self-awareness skills develop more accurate views of themselves. All these interactions should occur in natural contexts but not become overwhelming or overbearing. In order to develop stronger self-awareness skills, teens need to have their self-awareness encouraged and have opportunities to practice without making them feel self-conscious.

As a teen becomes more attuned to their self-awareness skills, there are specific things they may choose to do to refine these skills further. Set priorities. Name feelings and emotions, recognizing them for what they are and not do pass judgment on yourself. Pay attention to self-talk, making a note of overly negative self-talk and reframing that in more accurate wording. Again, reflection is key to improving self-awareness in teens. Teens need instruction and practice to help them accurately identify how they feel and when they feel that particular emotion. Encourage teens to talk or reflect on what they think about and how they act when they feel that way.

Self-knowledge is a central issue in adolescent development. Self-knowledge can be considered as a personal theory (or theories) that a person construes based on his/her experience, so as to be able to anticipate the events of his/her world, to inspire him/her with appropriate (adaptive) actions in each moment, as well as to maximize psychological well-being. The transformations of adolescence, like body changes, new social contexts and expectations and cognitive advances in adolescent lives press for changes in both the content and structure of self-knowledge. Thus, adolescents can count on new guides to make sense of a diversity of events and inspire adaptive and autonomous behaviors in a multitude of situations. Many constructs have been proposed to describe the structure and organization of self-knowledge in the context of adolescence by approaching, in different ways, the issues of differentiation, integration, and/or, less often, internal conflicts. This research line has provided important evidence and theoretical advances, but it still faces some challenges. First, studies that include several of these constructs of self-structure are scarce. Second, the constructs utilized across the literature vary greatly, making them difficult to compare to each other, thus challenging or hampering researchers and practitioners' efforts to obtain a comprehensive understanding of their role in the organization of self-knowledge. Third, some authors defend the superiority of idiographic data to assess self-structure, but measures based on (self-) descriptions provided by researchers prevail. Finally, certain variables considered central in theory have been underrepresented in research, as it is the case of internal conflicts.

The self is thus the pole of a "self-no-self" bipolar construct (or, even better, a "self-others" construct), "which in turn is construed". Therefore, self-knowledge can be defined as a system of personal constructs conceived by the person from the similarities and differences they perceive between other people and themselves, and that is useful for the person to anticipate events and guide successful action in the interpersonal world. Thus, in this theory, knowledge about the self is entangled with knowledge about significant others, as proposed by other theories of the self, which has also been supported by cognitive neuroscience. Furthermore, people construe a multiplicity of selves or a community of selves. In addition to the Actual Self, people construe, for instance, an Ideal Self, selves as perceived by various others, or selves in particular contexts, relationships, or roles.

An influential and comprehensive perspective on the development of the self in adolescence is offered by S. Harter. According to her perspective, important cognitive changes occur in adolescence that, combined with new social contexts, promote reorganizations of self-knowledge. S. Harter describes a detailed developmental trajectory comprising three phases across adolescence. During early adolescence, childhood self-representations give place to an increasing number of single self-descriptive abstractions. Adolescents' personal characteristics increasingly differentiate in terms of relational contexts. Similarly, early adolescents distinguish their competence in an increasing number of different life domains. At the same time, self-esteem becomes more differentiated according to different social contexts. By middle adolescence, adolescents perceive contradictions among the differentiated personal characteristics; thus, they experience psychological conflicts and preoccupations about the existence of false selves and the identification of their true self. The results of the global differentiation of self-knowledge suggest that younger and older adolescents do not differ significantly in the amount of dimensions of meaning available to make sense of themselves and others.

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In summary, different developmental approaches suggest an increase of self-knowledge differentiation across adolescence, with very few studies highlighting a peak of self-perceived conflicts within self-knowledge by middle to late adolescence. These conflicts could possibly be reorganized in a more coherent, integrative way by late adolescence or emerging adulthood since adolescents are provided with support. In addition, intrapersonal conflicts seem to be understudied despite the numerous theories addressing its role in development and psychological adaptation

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