

IDENTITY ISSUES

Identity Issues are very common among adolescents as their bodies kick into overdrive and they can become moody, secretive and sarcastic...Under attack by all of these fiery hormones, the bewildered adolescent may begin to ask “Who am I?”

Achieving a positive sense of identity is one of the major challenging tasks of adolescents. Somewhere between childhood and adulthood, there is an acceleration of physical and emotional growth, and in turn, the adolescent becomes a stranger to themselves as well as those around them. It is very important that the adolescent gains a sense of control by knowing who they are that allows them to navigate successfully through the rest of life.

The quest for identity is scary and can bring with it many issues. Uncertain which of their mixed emotions are really their true feelings; they are pushed to make up their minds. Their confusion is complicated further when they begin to guess what others, people- whose opinions they care about, want them to be.

A number of personality traits and environmental factors also influence the struggling adolescent’s coping style

TAKE NOTICE

Many adolescents cope with difficulties by keeping them to themselves. This repression or pushing thoughts, feelings impulses, desires, or memories out of the mind, is very common.

Some adolescents may regress into a childish state and avoid having to make decisions on confusing issues. Other adolescents express their confusion through premature commitments and impulsive actions. It is really difficult to predict exactly how a specific

adolescent will attempt to manage his or her problems. The most common ways young people contend with their struggles is usually by repressing them, acting them out, or working them through. “Acting out,” expressing their feelings through impulsive actions to reduce tension, is yet another coping mechanism which can cause other issues.

By holding their struggles in, or acting them out, adolescents are actually avoiding having to confront them head-on. As they begin their quests for identity there are some common ways in which they may demonstrate their struggles with identity:

- By using status symbols: Adolescents try to establish themselves through prestige, by wearing the “right” clothes, having the right possessions, from stereos to sunglasses. These symbols help form teen identities by expressing affiliation with specific groups.
- Acting out forbidden behaviors: To an adolescent it may seem that appearing mature will bring recognition and acceptance. They begin engaging in practices they associate with adulthood—tabooed pleasures—such as smoking, drinking, drugs and sexual activity.
- Rebellious activity: Rebellion will always demonstrate separation. Adolescents can show that they differentiate themselves from parents and authority figures, while maintaining the acceptance of their peers
- Idolization: Celebrities may become someone to “model” themselves after for teens who are looking for a way of experimenting with different roles. They may identify with a known figure, trying to become like that person, and in effect, losing hold of their own identities. This identification with a well-known personality gives teens a sense of belonging.
- Using cliques and exclusion: Adolescents can be intolerant in their exclusion of their peers. Since they are constantly trying to define and redefine themselves in relation to others, they do not want to be associated with anyone having “unacceptable”, un-cool or unattractive characteristics. They try to strengthen their own identities by excluding those who are not like themselves.
- Lastly, it’s important to touch upon Gender Identity Disorder which is becoming more mainstream. It identifies itself in adolescents as a disturbance which is manifested by symptoms such as a stated desire to be the other sex, frequent passing as the other sex, desire to live or be treated

as the other sex, or the conviction that he or she has the typical feelings and reactions of the other sex. There are many specific ways in coping with and handling these transitions in a healthy way.

HOW PACIFIC QUEST CAN HELP ADOLESCENTS WITH IDENTITY ISSUES

Based on experience, Pacific Quest recommends the Sustainable Growth Wilderness Therapy Model for the most comprehensive approach to adolescent developmental issues and related problems. Wilderness therapy is an emerging intervention and treatment for mental health practices that helps adolescents overcome emotional, adjustment, addiction, and psychological problems. The wilderness therapy process is designed to address problem behaviors and foster personal and social responsibility and emotional growth of our students. The innovative approach of the Pacific Quest wilderness therapy program places the main focus on the student and how they can work to address their individual struggles.

Counselors work with our students in an attempt to help them resolve their problems and find effective ways to cope with various stressors in their lives. They help them to learn and adapt to positive behavior patterns. The focus is on instilling healthy lifestyle habits and encouraging the students to reach out and accept personal challenges and learn the lessons that each one holds.

This model incorporates many of the treatment options to help adolescents achieve lasting change in terms of both behavior and overall physical and emotional well-being. Multi-sensory treatments are critical in maximizing growth, balance, and learning potential, that's why Pacific Quest's whole-person, nature-based model works so well. Pacific Quest actually harnesses the power of nature and practices complete wellness, with qualified staff working together on every aspect. Pacific Quest works because it is an individualized, comprehensive and neuro-developmentally informed approach. At Pacific Quest, we can design strategies that reach our students and move them through a deep and lasting change process.

