



Stepping Stones

A RESOURCE FOR EDUCATORS
WORKING WITH YOUTH
AGED 12 TO 25

An Introduction

Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development has been created to serve as a tool to guide the development and delivery of high quality services and supports for youth across the province. It was created by the Ontario government in broad consultation with researchers, youth, community leaders and service providers.

Stepping Stones can support and enhance the work of educators working with youth by presenting a shared understanding of how youth develop. The information is presented in a clear and cohesive way through “developmental maps” that show key developmental events for early adolescents, adolescents and young adults. While every person is unique, the stages of development between childhood and adulthood are consistent across populations and generations. Today’s youth face a complex and constantly evolving world, and in order to support them, it’s more important than ever to understand the stages and dimensions of their development.

Youth development presented through four dimensions

How the maps are organized

For each domain—cognitive, emotional, social and physical—the maps are consistently organized across three columns, and are designed to answer three corresponding key questions you may have about key developmental events:

What is happening?

A description of

- physical
- cognitive
- emotional
- social developmental events that may be taking place in early adolescence, adolescence, or early adulthood.

How can I tell?

Noticeable indicators you can look for in order to determine whether or not the developmental event has taken place, or is taking place.

The information in “*What is Happening?*” and “*How can I tell?*” are taken from leading edge research on youth development.

How can I help?

Suggested ways you can positively support youth at this stage of development. This information came from discussions with Ontario’s youth, supported by research.

Tips for Implementation: Five Key Themes

1. **Be supportive: Guide, don’t dictate.** Youth want information so they can make their own decisions. You don’t need to provide all the answers – ask thought-provoking questions and support students to develop their own answers.
2. **Be patient and available.** Don’t be discouraged if your first offer of support is turned down as youth will often come around when they feel up to it and the time is right. Offers of support in class and outside of class can make a difference.
3. **Be open.** When they come to you, listen, listen, listen! Listen to what they say and to what they may not be saying.
4. **Be understanding.** Youth learn and grow through failure and mistakes—the important issue is how youth and their support systems respond to setbacks. Remember that, as an educator, you are part of a very important support system for youth.
5. **Be empathetic.** Don’t belittle the feelings of youth or be patronizing—“my feelings are real and important, even if whatever I’m going through doesn’t seem like a big deal to you, it is to me right now.” As an educator, you can help youth build awareness of their feelings and the skills to respond.

Every interaction with youth provides an opportunity to support their development. Whether it’s through intentional lesson and unit planning or those unplanned, quick conversations in the hall, every interaction is an opportunity. It’s about what we do every day.

Learn more:

- Read the full version of Stepping Stones at www.ontario.ca/steppingstones
- Adolescent Literacy Guide www.edugains.ca/newsite/literacy2/index.html
- Find out more about [the Ontario curriculum K-12](#)