

Aligning Mental Health Treatments with the Developmental Stage and Needs of Late Adolescents and Young Adults



Brian Skehan, MD, PhD^{*}, Maryann Davis, PhD

KEYWORDS

• Transitional age youth • Emerging adult • Engagement

KEY POINTS

- Transitional age youth (TAY) with serious mental health conditions require a variety of developmentally appropriate options for care to achieve autonomy in mature adulthood.
- Treatment options for TAY need to incorporate educational, vocational, mental health, and medical care to facilitate transition to mature adulthood.
- Further evidence is needed to operationalize the current theories regarding best practices for engagement and treatment of TAY with serious mental health conditions.

INTRODUCTION

Navigating the pathway to adulthood for late adolescents and young adults is a complicated journey that consists of self-discovery and learning through multiple stages of developmental growth. Despite legal definitions, sociocultural norms, and historical precedence, the definition of mature adulthood is less defined by chronologic age and more appropriately defined by developmental milestones. Thus, transitional age youth (TAY) are perhaps best described as individuals in the developmental period between adolescence and mature adulthood. Acceleration in the transition to mature adulthood begins as early as 14 and can extend through age 25 or 30.^{1,2} Psychologically, during the early ages of transition, youth continue to progress through cognitive, social, moral, and social-sexual development that began earlier in childhood, with a particular focus on identity formation, typically under the supervision of

The authors have nothing to disclose.

Department of Psychiatry, University of Massachusetts Medical School, 55 Lake Avenue North, Worcester, MA 01655, USA

^{*} Corresponding author.

E-mail address: Brian.Skehan@umassmemorial.org

Child Adolesc Psychiatric Clin N Am 26 (2017) 177–190

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chc.2016.12.003>

1056-4993/17/© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

childpsych.theclinics.com

Abbreviations

SMHC	Serious mental health condition
TAY	Transitional age youth

parents or parental figures, and social institutions, such as schools. This psychosocial development continues into young adulthood, and underlies their abilities to achieve adult goals such as long-term employment, financial independence, stable romantic relationships, and raising children.¹ The transition years are also a time that coincides with the onset of many mental health conditions.³ Among those who develop psychiatric disorders, their onset occurs before age 25 in approximately 75%, and the typical age of onset of the most serious mental health conditions occurs during the transition years.^{4,5} Results from the National Comorbidity Survey–Replication, an epidemiologic study of psychiatric disorders in the United States, found that 1 in every 4 to 5 youth will have a serious mental illness with severe impairment during adolescence.⁶ We refer to TAY with either serious emotional disturbance or serious mental illness as having a serious mental health condition (SMHC).⁷ Youth with SMHC have significant delays in their psychosocial development that can impair their functional capacities as they enter adulthood.⁸ The combination of critical developmental milestones and risk of mental health conditions makes the transition years particularly important for intervening quickly when mental health needs arise.

TYPICAL PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Typically developing TAY develop increasing cognitive abilities related to abstract thinking, including anticipating the consequences of their choices and actions, engaging in complex strategic planning, and gaining increasing insight. They also develop better behavior and cognitive control toward emotional or distracting stimuli.^{9–11} Social development during this stage comprises complex friendships involving intimacy and loyalty, a peak then reduction in the influence of peer networks on decision making,¹² and subsequent development of smaller, more intimate social networks. Concurrently, psychosexual development involves new forms of emotional intimacy, negotiation of sexual relationships, and resolution of sexual orientation and gender identity. Identity formation and moral development at this stage lead to increased empathic responses, the ability to sacrifice for the greater good, and exploration of boundaries to seek answers about their own identity.

Numerous studies have shown that brain development during the early transition age stage is not yet complete. In fact, it is unclear at what point during the 20s that brain development appears as in fully mature adults.¹³ The prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for executive functioning and cognitive control, is the last region to develop fully.^{14,15} Impaired judgment and executive functioning during this period are particularly challenging for youth who have increasing reliance on peers and rejection of authority to guide their decision making. Studies have shown that youth are more willing to accept risk than older adults and that the presence of peers during the decision making process can lead to a greater emphasis on the potential benefits and increased acceptance of risk than if they were confronted with a similar decision alone.¹⁶ Further complicating matters is the high prevalence of substance abuse in this age range. Emerging adulthood is the peak age for developing a substance use disorder and approximately 36% of young adults with mental health conditions have comorbid substance abuse.¹⁷ TAY also have a unique role within families. Typically, they use family resources for financial and emotional support, particularly during the early years of the transition stage, while at the same time attempting to achieve greater

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5717747>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5717747>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)