

The Intersection of Adolescent Development and Anti-Black Racism

Council Report 1 from the

The National Scientific Council on Adolescence

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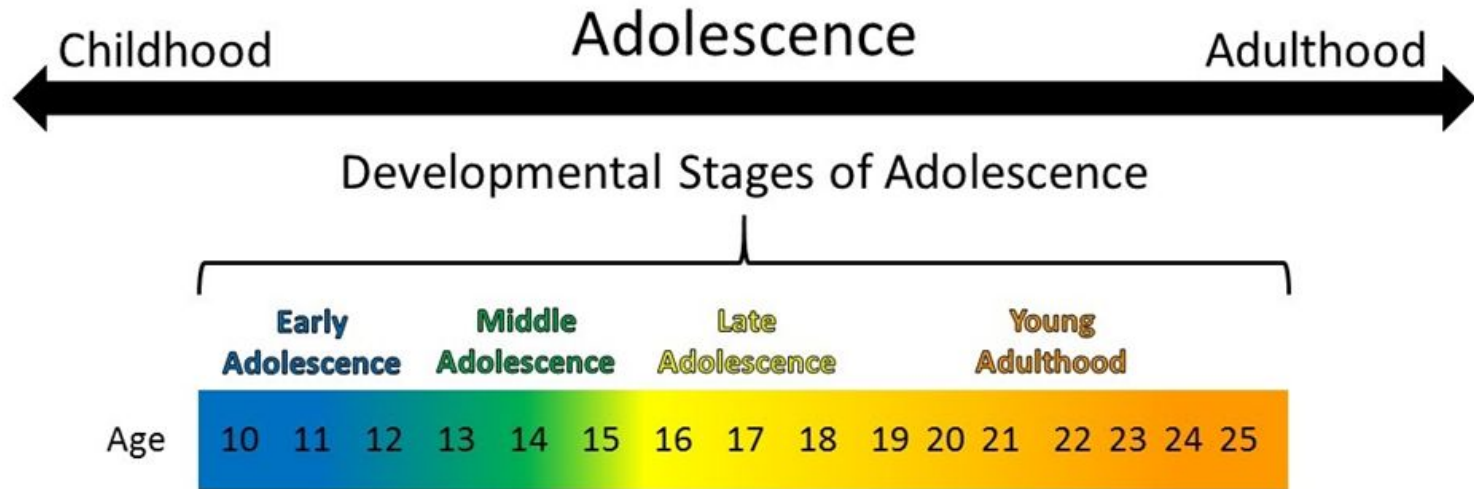
Housed at the Center for the Developing Adolescent at UCLA, the NSCA integrates and disseminates scientific knowledge about the rapidly growing science of adolescent development.

The goal of the NSCA is to drive implementation and innovation in youth-serving systems in order to improve all young people's trajectories.

What is Adolescence?

A Period of Growth

Adolescence is a period of **experience** and **opportunity** during which we identify who we are, who we want to be, and where we belong.



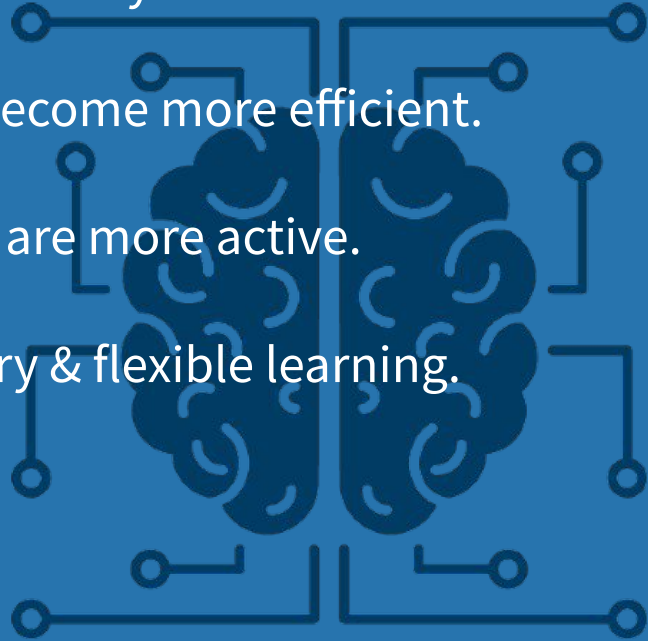
Adolescence is also a period of change and discovery

- We experience a range of physical, social, emotional and behavioral changes.
- Our relationships expand to include new people.
- We learn to make decisions and develop autonomy.
- We explore our identities and become more fully engaged with our communities.



How does our brain react to these changes?

- More plasticity means increased sensitivity to our environment.
- Our neural connections refine and become more efficient.
- Our motivation and reward systems are more active.
- We are uniquely skilled at exploratory & flexible learning.



Social and cultural factors also play a role

- Social structures and systems facilitate or impede adolescent development.
- Diverse youth and communities have unique cultural strengths.
- Poverty, discrimination, and marginalization disrupt healthy development.



Key developmental needs of adolescents

Developmental needs

- 1 *Safe and satisfying ways to take healthy risks and explore the world*
- 2 *Real-world scenarios in which to build emotional regulation, problem-solving, and decision-making skills*
- 3 *Avenues to develop a sense of meaning, identity, and purpose by contributing to peers, families, and communities*

Developmental needs

4 *Positive, attainable ways to earn respect and social status*

5 *Support to develop values, goals, and personal and group identities*

6 *Warmth and support from parents and other caring adults*

Intro to the Report

Adolescent Development and Anti-Black Racism

Healthy development & experiences with racism intersect within the contexts and spaces where we develop, **creating different experiences along racial lines.**

Rapid growth and learning means interventions and anti-racist approaches can make a real difference during these years.



A Focus on Black Adolescents

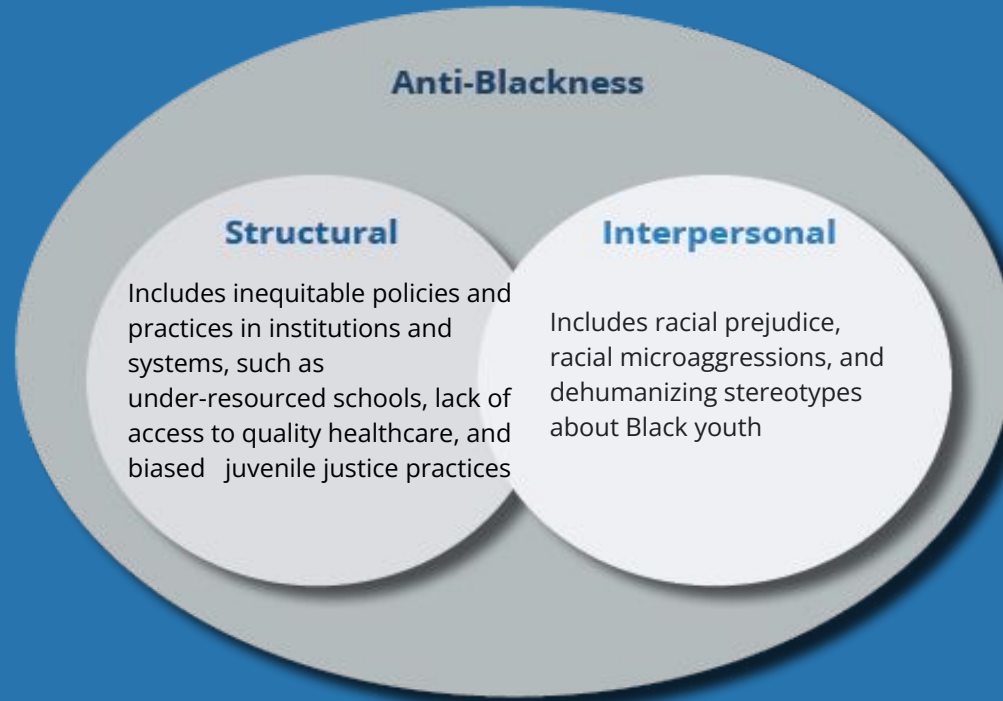
We focus on Black adolescents for the following reasons:

- The unique shared experience among Black adolescents
- Renewed attention to systemic anti-Black racism and related injustices in the U.S.
- The majority of adolescent research on racism focuses on Black youth



Types of Racism

Racism in Multiple Layers



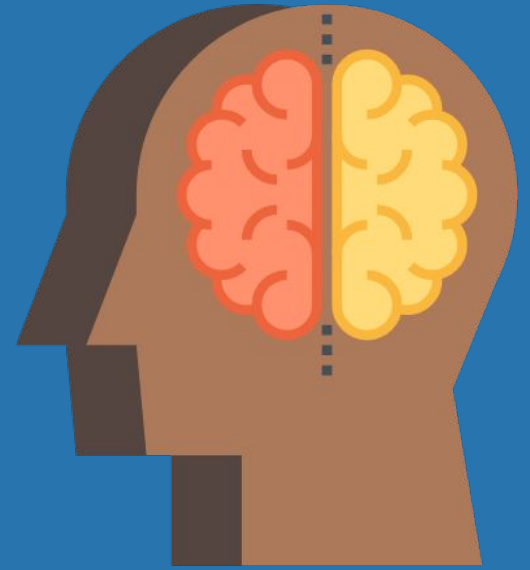
Anti-Blackness describes the systemic marginalization of Black people. It operates through both interpersonal racism and structural racism.

Key Developmental Milestones

Identity and Belonging

- Increasing cognitive abilities → ↑ understanding of social interactions & more complex understanding of developing identities.
- A positive racial identity can help ameliorate some negative impacts of discrimination and other forms of racism.

To support identity & belonging, adults must ensure culturally sensitive support for Black youth to form positive, multidimensional identities.



Agency and Exploration

- Agency = the ability (and opportunity) to make decisions and assume responsibility in the world
- Increasing opportunities to safely explore and experiment → confidence to take on adult responsibilities.
- Racism impacts these opportunities
 - Structural racism creates opportunity gaps for positive exploration
 - Consequences of mistakes for Black youth = suspension, expulsion, arrest, incarceration

To support agency and exploration, adults must provide youth safe opportunities to explore, learn from mistakes, and exercise agency.

Racism and Resilience in Key Contexts of Adolescence

FOUR KEY SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF ADOLESCENCE

PEERS AND
SOCIAL MEDIA



FAMILY



SCHOOLS



COMMUNITY



Context: Peers and Social Media

Peer groups provide a crucial support system for Black youth.

Social media brings peer interactions into online spaces.

- **Positives:** Opportunities to explore, advocate, connect, and seek support
- **Negatives:** Exposure to online racism.



Context: Peers and Social Media

Suggestions for supporting Black youth with peers & on social media:

- **Schools & Community-based Organizations:** Provide space & resources for social groups that increase belonging & support positive identity.
- **Parents & Other Caring Adults:** Talk with adolescents about what they see, hear, and are exposed to online.
- **Media & Researchers:** Build connections between researchers, media producers, and youth, to improve content for Black adolescents.
- **Youth:** Create, advocate for, and participate in affinity groups and other affirming social spaces.

Context: Family

Supportive relationships with family can buffer against racism and promote positive identity formation (even as peers increase in importance).

Black families face unique challenges as they work to support positive development while protecting young people from threats.



Context: Family

Suggestions for supporting Black youth & their families:

- **Policymakers:** Identify & remediate disparate impacts of existing federal and state-level health and social policies on Black families.
- **Funders:** Fund expansion of evidence-based, strengths-focused programs and development of new programs that support Black families with adolescents.
- **Parents & Other Caring Adults:** Talk with adolescents about race and racism, acknowledge your own emotions, and build capacity to support adolescents' social and emotional needs.
- **Youth:** Share your views of race and racism with your family and learn about different experiences and perspectives as you develop your own ideas.

Context: Schools

As the largest institution serving youth in our country, schools have great potential to promote anti-racism and facilitate positive development for Black youth.

We need to reduce pushout and affirm the identities of Black adolescents in middle and high schools.

Increasing critical consciousness as a part of education can ↑ civic engagement & ↓ impact of structural racism within schools.



Context: Schools

Suggestions for supporting Black youth in schools:

- **Schools:** Identify & remediate disproportionate access to advanced & enrichment programs & disparate impacts of discipline policies on Black adolescents.
- **Schools:** Allocate resources for culturally responsive social-emotional learning programs and assess the implementation and benefits for Black adolescents.
- **Schools & Universities:** Provide training & professional development for anti-racist teaching methods & curricula.
- **Funders:** Fund expansion & development of evidence-based best practices for promoting anti-racist & equitable school settings.
- **Youth:** Create, advocate for, and participate in opportunities to build racial equity in your school community & encourage adults to take action.

Context: Community

Adolescent involvement in activism:

- Promotes key adolescent milestones of identity formation & belonging and increasing agency & exploration
- Furthers Black youths' capacity to advocate on behalf of themselves as well as their communities
- Fosters positive, mutually beneficial relationships between adolescents and adults



Context: Community

Suggestions for supporting Black youth in the community:

- **Funders:** ↑ resources for community orgs & activities that create space for Black adolescents to cultivate their sense of purpose and contribute.
- **Community-based Organizations:** Build staff capacity through training and support to reduce turnover & increase sustainable adult-youth relationships.
- **Community-based Organizations & Universities:** Train and support youth development program staff in evidence-based best practices to meet the needs of Black adolescents.
- **Youth:** Engage in community-based programs that support your capacity for social action & take advantage of social media platforms to communicate your message and involve others.

Conclusion

Healthy youth development depends on:

- Recognizing how anti-Black racism intersects with core needs and opportunities of adolescence
- Supporting Black adolescents
- Addressing root causes of racial inequity through the mitigation and elimination of anti-Black policies, practices, and attitudes

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Read the full report at
developingadolescent.org/adolescence-and-anti-black-racism

Visit our website at www.developingadolescent.org