

Addiction In Adolescents

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One of the biggest struggles for adolescents today is addiction. The dictionary defines an addiction as “the state of being compulsively committed to a habit or practice or to something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming” (dictionary.com). As a future counselor, it is my job to learn more about addictions in adolescents so that I may be able to help guide them through their struggles.

Two of the biggest addictions plaguing our youth today are drugs and alcohol. Drugs in particular are more in use in my area than alcohol. While searching my local news channels I came across this new article of a boy in Greenville South Carolina who was arrested for drugs in his house. The drug offender's name is Nathan Dean Martinko. Nathan was only 24 years old when he was arrested. When the police and other law-enforcement agencies arrived at Nathan's house, they found over twenty-grand in cash, lots of guns, and roughly two-hundred pounds of marijuana. He had been selling to dozens of people all around his neighborhood. When the authorities asked Nathan why he was selling so much marijuana he commented saying, “he had no legitimate source of income and relied on drug trafficking to support his lifestyle” (Laundenslager, 2021). This news story came as a shock to me, but it gave me a new insight into those who use and sell drugs. After reading this news article I realized that there are some late adolescences like Nathan, who get into drugs not necessarily for consumption but for survival. Like Nathan, most late adolescences struggle to ask for help. Their brains are not fully developed yet, and they are trying to survive on their own. This alone causes stress which may, in turn, cause them to make poor decisions like getting involved in drugs rather than seeking out help. Had Nathan chosen to seek out support from family or friends or even a religious group, he could have avoided the horrible situations he is now facing. There is hope for those struggling with drug addictions and it starts by simply asking for help. An article written by Laurie Martin talks about how there are new ways to help those who are involved with drugs. She has worked with medical teams to help provide medical and mental assistance for those with drug addictions. In Laurie's (2021) article she goes on to say that families who want to find help in their local area can go to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. There is help for those who need it. All they have to do is ask.

The second major addiction struggle for adolescents today is alcohol. Those who have a lifelong struggle with alcohol addiction usually start drinking as an early adolescent. Society today uses the platforms of social media and advertisements to sell alcohol through sports. It says that to enjoy watching a sports event one should first get drunk. This line of thinking has led to what is known today as pregaming. “Pregaming is the act of consuming significant amounts of alcohol in a short span of time before even arriving at the main event” (Wong, 2015). Younger adolescents want to be just like the “sports heroes” they see on tv and believe the lie that alcohol will make them happier. They try obtaining this happiness through the consumption of alcohol. Even though the legal drinking age in the United States is twenty-one, minors as young as sixteen have been known to consume alcohol. They will either steal it or trick an adult into buying it for them. This mindset leads to addictions. Once an adolescent is consumed by the need to have alcohol all the time, it is hard for them to seek out help. They get so caught up in the drama and risky behaviors that come with the consumption of alcohol that they don't know where to go even if they wanted to, but there is help for them yet. An article was written by Ellen Lynch discussing the harm done to adolescents by drinking alcohol. She along with a team of educational psychologists talked to young teens about the dangers of drinking and encouraged them to talk about their negative experiences. In Lynch's (2019) article she gives the youth a

chance to talk for themselves. She goes on to talk about how her program helped many adolescents. She also indicated that although the program was successful, there was still plenty of room for growth in the battle of alcohol addiction.

For the world offers only a craving for the physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever (New living translation Bible, 2015, 1 John 2:16-17). The world of science has finally caught up to the truth of the Bible. This world may cause pain and suffering but there is hope through Jesus Christ.

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My Life Development

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I was born in the year 1994. However, before I was born my mother had a miscarriage during her previous pregnancy. The baby did not make it to full term. My mother was only pregnant for a few short weeks before her baby passed. That pregnancy was a very traumatic experience for her. She Experienced maternal stress during her previous pregnancy. Maternal stress is a “factor that directly impacts fetal development” (Wong et al, 2015). This is the biggest of my life development.

As my mother continued her pregnancy with me, she had another traumatic event. She was seven months pregnant with me when she was in a dangerous car accident. Her car was side-swiped from the back and thrown off the road. She was terrified for her life and mine. she was so afraid that she was going to lose me like her previous baby. After going to the hospital and finding that everything was ok with her health and mine, she began to relax. What she did not know at the time was how her traumatic events would shape the way I would develop.

I soon entered into my infancy years. At the age of two, I started to develop breathing problems. I had a continuous cough and chest pains. My parents decided to take me to a doctor to find out what was causing me so much trouble. Shortly after my doctor's visit, I was diagnosed with asthma. Asthma is a defect in a person's lungs. A person who has asthma has lungs that are too small or too weak to properly produce oxygen throughout the body. Scientists today are still studying the cause and effects of asthma. Scientists believe that asthma can be caused by either genetics or by the environment in which one lives. They also believe that it can be brought about by a mother who had a traumatic experience during her pregnancy. Children born to mothers who had a traumatic pregnancy may start to have coughing and wheezing problems as early as the first year of their lives. They may continue to experience wheezing and coughing through the

age of seven (Ramratnam et al., 2021). I do not know if my asthma is from my genetics or my mother's pregnancy with me but, I do know that my asthma plays an important role in my life.

Toddler years are sometimes referred to as the terrible twos. These are the years of overlap between the ages of one and three. For me, my toddler years were very destructive. I was known as a wild child! It was hard for my parents to get me to sit in one place for very long. I was always wanting to run around and explore the places around me. Erikson's stage of psychosocial development puts this stage of life as Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (Wong et al, 2015). He talks about positive and negative outcomes specifically concerning toilet training. One of my earliest memories is learning how to use the toilet. My home at the time had an unfinished basement. The basement was used as the kid's playroom. My brother and I would do everything down there from running around playing tag, to building forts. The basement was also used as a potty-training area. My parents had set up a small corner of the room with a tiny portable toilet. The toilet had a blue base with a red seat. I remember how it used to scare me. I did not know what it was so I would run away from it in fear. My parents and older sibling helped to teach me what it was and how to use it properly. Since I am the second child in my family, I also learned how to use the toilet by watching my older brother. I would observe how he sat on the toilet and how it didn't scare him. I learned that the toilet was not something to fear but something to use. Even though it has been many years since I first learned how to use the toilet properly, I was taught in a similar many laid out by Kimberly Burkhart. In her journal article *Expectations and recommendations for toileting*, she talks through positive steps to help a child during potty training. She goes on to say that potty training should start around the age of three. The first goal should be for the child to use the potty for urinating. After the child masters that then he or she

can move on to having a bowel movement. Once this is established the last part for a child to work on is sitting for greater lengths at a time (Burkhart et al, 2020).

Erikson describes early school age as preschool. The age range for this grouping is four- to six-year-olds. This age holds some of my happiest memories. As I began this stage of life, I entered into what Erikson would call Initiative vs. Guilt. In initiative meaning that I was gaining self-confidence in my actions and guilt meaning that if I failed in action my failure may bring about disapproval from others (Wong et al, 2015). This concept rang true as I started in school. As I have mentioned previously, I was a wild child, so I had to learn how to tame my wild energy. I remember having a teacher named Mrs. Mellor, who had great patience with me. She would reward her students for good behaviors in the classroom. She had a box full of toys and at the end of the week, if we had had good behavior, we would be allowed to pick out a toy to keep. This helped me to focus on my self-confidence in the classroom. When I failed to obey or misbehaved it lead me to feel the disapproval and guilt of my negative actions. I learned to positively navigate my way through this stage of life. I would also attribute most of my positive change and self-confidence to Jesus Christ. When I was five years old, I was introduced to the Bible. I was taught about God and how he created man. I learned about the great fall of humanity and how we as a human race need redemption because we sinned against the almighty God. He provided us with this saving grace through the death and resurrection of His son Jesus Christ. This is my belief that I call salvation. What I call salvation others may call it spirituality or religion. According to Patrick Love, these two terms may be used separately or together. In his journal article *Spirituality and Student Development: Theoretical Connections*, he talks about how he believes there is a distinction between religion and spirituality. He says that religion is more of a shared system of beliefs in the form of worshiping a greater power outside one's self

whereas, spirituality is searching for the meaning of life (Love, 2001). I choose to define my spirituality as religion. I believe there is a greater being outside of myself and his name is El Shaddai which means Lord God Almighty. Even as a five-year-old I knew that I was a sinner who needed to be redeemed. I remember talking with my parents and asking them how I could be saved. They walked me through the steps of what is my salvation today. My God is the one who helped me grow through my preschool years and into my middle childhood years.

Middle childhood or school-aged years are categorized by the ages of seven to twelve. This point in my life was one of great struggle. I was Finishing kindergarten and about to enter the first grade when my teachers noticed a gap in my learning capabilities. They noticed that I was learning things at a slower pace than the rest of my class. They suggested to my parents that I have a professional educator test me to see what was causing the speed gap in my learning. They did just that. I was taken to a specialist who tested children who were struggling in school. To this day I can still remember the tests that were given to me. I remember using special blocks to help form a picture. I was also asked to take a test using a pencil with no eraser so I could not go back and fix any mistakes. The final test I was given was on what is called a scantron. A scantron is a special paper used to help teachers grade papers. It had many tiny little bubbles that had to be filled in with a pencil. Once all the tests were done, I was diagnosed with a mild processing disorder. The tests showed that I would take in information and processing it more slowly than the average students my age. It also showed that my eyes have a hard time following lines and filling in small bubbles. This led me to some very difficult struggles throughout my academic career. Once again Erikson hits the nail on the head. He would describe my struggle as Industry vs. Inferiority. Industry meaning to have the strength and competency to do a job well. Inferiority meaning the opposite, failure to find one's strength needed to accomplish a task.

Inferiority can also lead to a negative attitude to do nothing (Wong et al, 2015). That is exactly how I felt growing up. I learned at a much slower pace than my classmates and it made me feel inferior to them. The shame and embarrassment led me to become angry and alone. I struggled for a long time with this issue. There were times that I just felt like giving up and doing nothing, but by the grace of God, I overcame my struggles. Arthur Dean understood this struggle. He is one of the first scientists to ever write about children with Inferiority struggles. In his journal article *The Child's Inferiority Complex*, he talks about the suffering of those who have learning disabilities. He describes one's struggles like that of a boulder sitting on top of a mountain. It is easy to push it over and let gravity take it down and away but, it is nearly impossible to get that bolder moving back up the mountain to its original starting point (Dean, 1930).

The next developmental phase of my life is the one that most adults would rather not remember, adolescence. This phase can be broken into two parts: Early Adolescence and Late Adolescence. The difference between the two is the ages in which they are categorized. Early adolescence is between thirteen and eighteen and late adolescence is nineteen to twenty-five. Early adolescence is when puberty begins to take place. Puberty is the time when the body of a child starts to transform into that of an adult. Modern research has shown us that children are being to hit puberty sooner than children of the past. Boys are now starting to begin this process at the age of nine, while girls are beginning around the age of fourteen (Wong et al, 2015). I hit puberty early on in my adolescent years. My generation of growth and development was different from that of today. I hit puberty around the age of twelve, which was considered early at that time. One of the most noticeable outward changes was that my voice got deeper, and I had a lot of facial hair. I was in the seventh grade and already had a five o'clock shadow. By the time I was fourteen, I could grow an actual beard! Like most adolescents who hit puberty early, I

struggled with awkwardness. My social life started to change as well. I was heavier and hairier than most of the boys in my class and my voice was deeper than theirs too. This leads to ridicule and bullying. I was made fun of for having so much facial hair and my classmates got their laughs by making fun of my deep voice. In addition to hitting puberty early, I also had to deal with mild forms of racism. I am Hispanic so I naturally have darker skin. I attended a school of predominantly white students. Out of a school congregation of four-hundred students, I was one out of the four Hispanics that attend our school. My classmates liked to bring that up often in conversations. This just added to the struggles and pressures of my early adolescent growth. The sad truth is that these kinds of struggles are still very common in our schools today. Young boys and girls who go through puberty early will face many struggles. These struggles if not dealt with properly may cause significant problems in their future. One significant problem is peer rejection. No one likes to be rejected, especially by those who would be considered one's peers. Authors Jennifer Pfeifer and Nicholas Allen write about peer rejection and how it can cause mental health problems in early adolescence. In their journal article *Puberty initiates Cascading Relationships*, they say that peer rejection can lead to having no friends and even bullying (Pfeifer & Allen, 2021). I was very fortunate to come through my early adolescence years without any major mental problems.

Late adolescence, though it is similar to that of early adolescence, it is unique in its own way. People who are between the ages of nineteen and twenty-five fit into this category. Late adolescence comes with a whole new set of struggles. Erickson identified two of these major struggles. He called them Intimacy vs. Isolation. Intimacy is the ability to form healthy deep friendships with others. This list includes but is not limited to friend's families, co-workers, and partners. Isolation is just the opposite (Wong et al, 2015). Intimacy is light and uplifting,

whereas isolation is bringing darkness, pain, and suffering. I remember going through both of those struggles during my late adolescent years. I had a great friend who helped to guide me during that part of my life. His name was Jonathan David Torres. He went by the nickname Jona and he was my best friend in high school. He was the kind of friend that Erickson would consider as intimate. He was someone that I looked up to. He was the kind of person who was a true leader and not a follower. He was an overall amazing person. I talk about Jona in the past tense because he has passed away. He died at the age of fourteen due to a rare type of bone cancer. I tell his story because it is intertwined with mine. I met Jona in the seventh grade and we became great friends almost at once. When he was first diagnosed with cancer my whole world started to fall apart. I could not process how or why this was happening to him. Jona was one of the nicest people in the world and did not deserve cancer. I struggled to grasp the horrible reality of the situation. My best friend was dying of cancer. Jona was a Christian like I am so when this trial came his way, he ran to our God for help. Jona found an inner peace that can only come from having a relationship with God. When Jona passed away I was paralyzed by fear and shock. I had experienced isolation. For many years I struggled to connect with others. My relationships with family, friends, and peers all seemed to fade away. I was all alone. It was by the grace of God that I found my way back out of the darkness and into the light. I continued into my early twenties using the lessons I learned from my friend Jona. Late adolescents today may go through the same struggles that I have. I plan to use my experience as a positive tool to help guide the next generation after me. In a journal article titled the *Negative school Experience in early adolescents*, the authors Ruth Liu and Zeng-Yin Chen talk about you kids in their adolescent years may have bad experiences in school. They go on to say that those negative experiences

may cause mental problems leading to adulthood (Liu and Chen, 2020). Since I have lived through those struggles, I know I can be a positive guide for those to come.

The study of early adulthood is a fairly new concept. Up until recently scientists and researchers would only study and counsel adults who were in their early twenties. Early adults are categorized by people who are the ages between twenty-six and thirty-five. This is my current state of life, as I will soon be twenty-seven. The longer I live the wiser I become. This study has caused me to reflect on my lifespan. I have looked to my deep long past and even my more recent past but, now I am looking into my present state of life. Studying one's past is very helpful to guide one's future. In her journal article *Self and Emotional development in Adulthood and Later Life*, Author Gisela Labouvie-Vief talks about this very matter. She discusses how it is very important for people who are in the phase of early adulthood to talk about their life span. She recommends that you start at the beginning (your birth) and work your way until you hit the present. This will help you to build relationships and give you a better understanding of yourself (Labouvie-Vief, 2015). Having just done this I can say that the expectance has been eye-opening. I have learned more about myself than ever before. I have come to realization that I have entered into a phase of isolation. The world is currently going through a pandemic and I have not dealt with it well. I have let my fears and anxieties run my life for too long. I realized that if I continue down this path into my older years of life, I will end up angry and alone. I want to change how I live now so that I will have a better future. Since studying the views of Erickson and applying them to my life, I have seen how far I have come in my journey. I have also seen my life through the lens of Christianity. I have seen how my God has protected me even before I was born. God has blessed me with a good life for which I am grateful. As He continues to mold and shape me, I look forward to seeing what he has in store for my future. As a Christian counselor and

educator, I plan to continue to be a lifelong learner. I will use the journey of my life to better myself and others.

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Ecological Systems theory

Ecological theories highlight the environment in which a person grows up during his or her lifetime. One man who is accredited with helping to create the ecological systems is Urie Bronfenbrenner. Urie was a Russian-American scientist who lived from 1917-2005. His system has five parts of one's environment to help understand human growth, they are microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Wong et al., 2015).

The first system in Bronfenbrenner's theory is Microsystem. This system talks about the direct place where a person lives and other things that are around them. This includes immediate family, friends, and teachers. People who are in this system are not just passing through it but are contributing to help build it through their social interactions. The second system is Mesosystem. Mesosystem could be considered a subset of the microsystem. It goes hand in hand with microsystem in that it helps to point you back the places and experience a person has while in their place of living. An example of this would be a student who has a positive experience with his or her family that leads to a positive experience with his or her peers. The opposite this can also be true. A mesosystem could form the results of a negative interaction. A hypothetical of this would be a child who has parents that don't love him or her the way that they should. This could lead the child having a much harder time developing friendship (Wong et al., 2015).

Exosystem is the third system. This system goes back, and touches bases with both the microsystem and microsystems. Exosystem extends ones thinking farther by adding in factors of people, places, and other locations that a growing child may go to but not on a daily basis. These factors can still have a big impact on a child's development. An example of this could be a father who receives a promotion at work that causes him to travel more, which could cause him to have conflicts with his spouse and his child (Wong et al., 2015). The fourth system is the Macrosystem. This focuses on things that influence an individual but, that individual has no power on the things that are affecting them. Items in the macrosystem may include but are not limited to cultural values, the economy, social status, poverty, and even one's race.

The final system is Chronosystem. This system talks about worldly events and negative actions that happen throughout the life of an individual. An example of this would be the suffering a child receives due the divorce of his or her parents.

As I read *Defining Spiritual Development: A Missing Consideration for Student Affairs*, my line of thinking was challenged. In the article they talk about how Christian educators shy away from talking about "spiritual views". (Love & Talbot, 2009 says "... to foreclose on matters of spirituality". As Christians we can talk about spiritual views by using stories. Jesus did this in Matthew 13:3-9. He uses a story about planting seeds to tell others about himself. Jesus talked about the environment to help people grow, just like Bronfenbrenner. I also believe that as a Christian counselor I too can learn from the environment around me.

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