

Introduction

Hello, my name is Georgia Le Brocq and I am presenting to you today on Exploring the Adolescent Experience where I will be discussing the adolescent transitions and pressures young people face during this whilst detailing the role of a youth worker during this period. I will also be looking at a case study from the Netflix Series Adolescence and what steps a youth worker may take in working with this young person.

What is Youth Work?

Youth work is building trusted voluntary relationships with young people to enable informal education and providing them with opportunities to develop on their social and personal skills. Youth work is flexible and meets young people where they are at with sessions being led by them and what challenges they are facing.

What is psychological wellbeing?

Psychological wellbeing is what is referred to as a person's mental and emotional health. It includes a person's ability to maintain positive relationships, how someone copes with life challenges and having a sense of purpose and fulfilment.

Adolescent transitions

Adolescence is when a young person transitions from childhood to adulthood it involves physical, cognitive and social changes. During this period a young person will go through changes such as puberty, exploration of romantic relationships, their brain developing and the change from dependence on their family to independence.

Common Pressures in Adolescence

Young people face many pressures when going through adolescence which can have an impact on their development and experiences through this period.

Identity – During adolescence young people are starting to figure out their own identity and discovering what their values and beliefs are, they go through periods of self expression where some may experience an “identity crisis” whilst they are trying to figure this out.

School – A young person moves from primary school to secondary school which brings its own challenges of a new environment and being surrounded by new peers and teachers, there are more academic pressures moving to secondary school which would create more stress, there are unfamiliar social circles where they need to figure out where they belong and make new friends.

Family – Young people may feel that their parents have high expectations of them in regards to their behaviour and performance in school which can lead to conflict and anxiety within the family home, there can also be conflicts around boundaries the parents set and challenges within the family home due to strains in the parents life or other siblings.

Peer relationships – During this time peer relationships can cause a lot of pressures for young people, they may go through periods of struggling to fit in with others which can cause isolation, they may experience conflict amongst friends causing them to be unsure with how to manage this, there is building pressure of maintaining and building new friendships which whilst experiencing physical changes can be challenging.

Independence – In adolescence young people start gaining more independence where previously they will have spent most of their time with their parents they will now start wanting to spend more time with their friends and going out and socialising. This can create pressures for them as they may struggle with the boundaries their parents set or they may experience peer pressure from others to take part in activities that they have previously not done before.

Social Media – The transitions that a young person goes through during adolescence can be challenging enough but young people today have the added pressure of social media, the constant access to the online world can create a whole range of challenges for young people who are trying to figure out their identity and experiencing changes with their body. It creates unrealistic views of body image and can lead people to compare popularity through likes, this could lead to issues with self-esteem. It also creates more opportunities for a young person to experience bullying and not be able to escape it when they leave school.

The Role of a Youth Worker

Youth workers play a vital role during this transitional period of adolescence.

Listening – They are there to listen to young people without judgement and provide them with a safe space to understand and validate their thoughts, feelings and experiences, their role is to pay attention to what is being said and picking up on small details from conversations to allow them to delve deeper into the how and why.

Building Trust – It is a youth workers role to build positive trusting relationships with young people as this is a fundamental part of youth work which enables the young people to open up and feel comfortable to push themselves out of their comfort zones.

Signposting – From building trusting relationships and listening to young people, youth workers will have an understanding of what support they are able to provide to young people and in instances where they are not able to support they will signpost them to other services or resources where required for instance if a young person has disclosed they are struggling with their mental health a youth worker will signpost them to support services such as counselling.

Empowerment and advocacy – A youth workers role is to empower young people through building their confidence and developing skills to aid them in their transition into adulthood and advocating for them by speaking up for them if they face unfair treatment or if their rights are not upheld, ensure young people know how to challenge this for themselves.

Early Intervention – Youth workers provide early intervention which is usually done by identifying changes in a young person's behaviour or demeanour, by providing early intervention it can help to prevent negative outcomes and support a more stable development.

Guidance and support – This involves ensuring that young people have access to resources and information of other services that may be of benefit to them. It is also about providing them with emotional support and checking in on them providing them with a place they can come to.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory describes the different systems surrounding a person;

The microsystem is the immediate environment surrounding a person, this has the most direct impact on their environment such as family, friends, teachers and youth workers.

The mesosystem is how the microsystem interacts with each other for example if a parent regularly attends school meetings and has a good relationship with their child's teachers they may perform better in school.

The exosystem is settings which a young person is not directly involved in but would still have an impact on their development for example a parents working environment may have an impact on the family dynamics if they are experiencing stress.

The macrosystem is the influences that a young person may experience through cultural and societal impact like religious views, poverty and government laws.

The chronosystem is experiences that a young person faces during their development for example the Covid 19 pandemic would have had a major impact on a young person's educational experience and their ability to socialise with peers and families.

Bronfenbrenner's theory demonstrates how a young person's development is not solely determined by their genetics and how other influences can play a role. If a young person has positive influences in their microsystem such as a youth worker it can aid their development and help them understand and navigate the outer systems such as the societal influences and historical life events.

Policy / Further Reading

What policies or guidance has Jersey got in place to support young people through adolescence? I have picked out two guidance documents that Jersey has created that we use as professionals when working with young people in Jersey.

The All-Ages mental health strategy from 2026 to 2030 which has replaced the previous plan of Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy (2022-2025).

This strategy has been created to ensure there is a clear pathway for supporting residents with their mental health and wellbeing.

This would support young people through adolescence as it identifies specific issues relating to young people ensuring that they get the support they need with professionals working together effectively, as this plan now also covers adults of all ages it will ensure that the young people's parents needs are also met which in turn should have a positive outcome on their family life and home.

The Children and Young People's Plan 2024 to 2027 's aim is to ensure that all professionals working with young people are working together efficiently to provide them with the best life possible. The framework provides clear outcomes called the 'Big Picture Outcomes' these are that all children and young people in Jersey:

- Are healthy and happy
- Can learn and achieve
- Enjoy a standard of living
- Are safe and loved
- Are included, respected and valued

These outcomes will all support young people who are going through adolescence transitions ensuring that all young people have access to the right support.

Case Study

I have undertaken a case study on Jamie from the Netflix series Adolescence, it is clear from watching this series that Jamie struggled with school pressures and trying to fit in with others and experienced bullying from other students at school.

Some key observations that I made from the series were that Jamie initially displays as a timid boy who achieves well but has displayed a change in behaviour over the last year. He often seeks validation from his father and is concerned of how he views him after his arrest. He shows as experiencing aggressive outbursts when questioned or challenged by the psychologists and struggles with insecurities as he calls himself ugly. There is a need for emotional support and guidance with Jamie.

If a youth worker was working with Jamie their response would firstly to be to build a positive trusting relationship taking the time to get to know him to provide him with a safe space to talk. They would identify the risk and success factors in Jamie's life. After the relationship has been built, they would provide one to one sessions giving informal education on coping strategies for managing his anger and undertake strength-based work with him to build his confidence whilst trying to understand and challenge any oppressive views. It would also be beneficial to Jamie to facilitate some group activities to give him opportunities to build positive friendships. They may also make referrals to other agencies with the consent of Jamie and his family, for example a

family support working to try to rebuild the relationship between the family.

Conclusion

Adolescence is a critical period of transition for young people which is filled with many pressures like school expectations, social changes and figuring out their identity. Psychological wellbeing is essential when young people are navigating these changes.

By providing young people with safe spaces, guidance and opportunities during this time youth workers play a vital role in supporting young people through adolescence by building their confidence and resilience to aid them through this transition.

As highlighted earlier when discussing Bronfenbrenner's Ecological theory a young person's development is influenced by their environment and the people around them which demonstrates the importance of having a positive role model like a youth worker in their lives.