

Teen Development: Five Core Tasks of Adolescence

Read the article first. This worksheet accompanies *Five Core Tasks of Adolescent Development* at ThoughtsFromATherapist.com, which walks through the dialectic, the paradox, the neurobiology, the predictable fear, and the modeled intervention for each task. Search “five core tasks” on the site to find it.

Five capacities are under construction in adolescence: regulation, identity, foresight, relationship, and agency. Adulthood begins when they move from being borrowed and situational to being internally accessible most of the time. Teens learn them through exposure more than explanation, by tracking how adults carry tension, make choices, and stay grounded. So most of this worksheet is about what we model. The first fill-in page notices where each capacity already belongs to our teen and where it is still borrowed. That is information for us, not a report card. A few words per space is enough.

TASK ONE Regulation

Recognizing activation and returning to steadiness without fight, freeze, or flight. Built through repeated experiences of being regulated by others.

| *Can I feel this much and remain in line with my intentions?*

TASK TWO Identity

A sense of self that tolerates complexity, contradiction, and context. Stability through variability.

| *How am I consistent, yet different in different contexts?*

TASK THREE Foresight

Simulating short- and mid-range cause and effect. Strengthened through near-term, physically grounded planning.

| *If I do this, what happens next?*

TASK FOUR Relationship

Empathy, boundaries, reciprocity, and repair. Belonging through boundaries.

| *Can I be myself and still stay connected?*

TASK FIVE Agency

Choosing actions with ownership and values, rather than from impulse, pressure, or emotional discharge.

| *How do I feel pleasure without compromising my values?*

A WORKED EXAMPLE: REGULATION, MODELED

THE MOMENT	A teenager breaks curfew.
THOUGHT	“They don’t respect me.” “I’m losing control.”
EMOTION	Anger and fear.
IN THE BODY	Tight chest, clenched jaw, held breath.
DIFFERENTIATION	“This is a thought. This is fear. This is tension.”
BODY FIRST	Slowing the breath, softening posture, and steadying the voice before engaging.
WHAT THE TEEN LEARNS	Difficult conversations are survivable, and emotional intensity is workable rather than shameful. When we miss, repair is part of what they learn.

Where each capacity lives now

By context, not by verdict. Most teens have a capacity in one place and borrow it in another.

TASK ONE Regulation

Where can my teen feel a lot and come back to steady? Where does steadiness still come from someone else?

WHERE IT IS THEIRS ALREADY

WHERE IT IS STILL BORROWED

ONE RECENT MOMENT

TASK TWO Identity

Where can my teen be different across contexts and still feel like one person? Where does one correct version take over?

WHERE IT IS THEIRS ALREADY

WHERE IT IS STILL BORROWED

ONE RECENT MOMENT

TASK THREE Foresight

Where does my teen think in steps? Where is the future still opaque?

WHERE IT IS THEIRS ALREADY

WHERE IT IS STILL BORROWED

ONE RECENT MOMENT

TASK FOUR Relationship

Where can my teen hold their own needs and someone else's at once? Where does it tip into fusion or withdrawal?

WHERE IT IS THEIRS ALREADY

WHERE IT IS STILL BORROWED

ONE RECENT MOMENT

TASK FIVE Agency

Where does my teen choose from values? Where does the loudest signal choose?

WHERE IT IS THEIRS ALREADY

WHERE IT IS STILL BORROWED

ONE RECENT MOMENT

Borrowed is not a failure. Self-regulation is built through repeated experiences of being regulated by others. What appears to be reliance is also the training ground for independence.

What I model: regulation and identity

Teens learn these by watching how we carry them, so the prompts are about us.

TASK ONE

Regulation

A recent tense moment with my teen. Separate the layers instead of being overtaken by them.

THE MOMENT

THIS IS A THOUGHT:

THIS IS A FEELING:

THIS IS TENSION, AND WHERE:

WHAT I DID WITH MY BODY FIRST, OR COULD HAVE:

IF I MISSED, THE REPAIR:

TASK TWO

Identity

Adults model a differentiated identity through their own lived examples. "I'm confident at work and awkward at large parties."

THREE WAYS I AM CONSISTENT YET DIFFERENT IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

PERSPECTIVE REVERSAL

My teen argues one position, then switches sides to argue the opposite. I take my teen's original position and argue it as well.

THE DISAGREEMENT:

MY TEEN'S POSITION, AS I WOULD ARGUE IT:

WHAT SHIFTED FOR EACH OF US:

What I model: foresight, relationship, and agency

TASK THREE

Foresight

A near-term, physically grounded plan we could carry out together: a meal, a one-day trip, a school week, something built step by step. I narrate the sequence aloud.

THE PLAN

FIRST WE DO THIS:

THEN THIS NEEDS TO HAPPEN:

IF THIS CHANGES, HERE'S THE ADJUSTMENT:

WHERE MY TEEN HAS RESPONSIBILITY WITH CLEAR CAUSE AND EFFECT, OR COULD HAVE IT:

TASK FOUR

Relationship

Hold both truths aloud, without collapsing into control or avoidance. "You want freedom, and a safety plan is still needed."

A TENSION BETWEEN US NOW

YOU ..., AND ...

TASK FIVE

Agency

A recent choice of mine, narrated from inside so my teen can hear choice still exists inside impulse and emotion.

PART OF ME WANTS TO REACT IMMEDIATELY BY...

PART OF ME FEELS...

AND PART OF ME IS CHOOSING...

ONE THING I WILL MODEL THIS WEEK

Pick one task. Exposure works through repetition, and our misses count when we repair them.

THE TASK, AND WHAT I WILL DO:

HOW I WILL REPAIR IF I MISS:
