

# What Integration looks like in Adolescence

## INTEGRATION

The process a youth goes through of using the perspectives obtained in the clarification phase to come to terms with ruptured relationships, focus on building or strengthening relationships, and making peace with how various relationships can or will exist in ones' life.

### What does integration look like in adolescence? What will we see and hear?

The exploration that has occurred in the clarification phase moves toward giving meaning to the relationships in their lives. Many youth in the integration phase will vacillate among feelings associated with loss (disappointment, abandonment, sadness, anger, guilt) and a willingness to explore and accept relationships with others.

Youth in integration may verbalize a willingness to be part of a family. This may sound like using specific comments about being or feeling part of a family, or look like the use of relational connections to process/support uncomfortable or vulnerable emotions. The latter will be a signal of trust, and one to notice if a youth has moved into this task.

With regard to the family of origin and birth parents, youth in this phase tend to have an understanding that parental love and capacity are not the same thing. Blame and ownership for the removal tend to decline, and youth begin to signal that they are interested in ongoing relationships with both their family of origin and parental caregivers that are currently in their life.



### What practices support or interfere with actualization?

**Relationships all exist along a continuum of intimacy.** Events and experiences move individual relationships closer in intimacy, or further away. How close or distant we feel from people shifts and evolves over time. That is, relationships do not exist in a binary - and it takes work to determine the shade of gray. Consider helping a youth explore the gray area and challenge tendencies to turn relationships "on" or "off".

**No one can make meaning out of "my" relationships.** What we each choose to tolerate and how we interpret the relationships in our lives is through our own individual lenses - the same will apply to our youth. Be cautious in trying to convince teens why they should avoid "so-and-so", why "that" relationship is unhealthy or toxic - that is their meaning to assign. A healthy relationship can exist with an unhealthy person - support your youth in coming to this place.

**It's Their Work to Do.** Support youth in making decisions about their own relationships. Our opinions about their relationships mean very little. The activity within this tip sheet will assist in helping them make these decisions. Keep in mind that youth today are part of Generation Z. Meet them where they are and use technology, social media, music to help them in this task. These tools will likely help youth reach out, initiate relationships, and express themselves in ways that face to face intimacy may stifle.

**Loyalty is a challenge for youth, and adults.** Youth may feel that they need to choose between families. Support the adults in the youth's life to understand that there is room for all that the youth sees as valuable - relationship dynamics between adults that may make the youth feel as though they cannot have both families in their life must be examined and processed with the adults. Adults have their own clarification and integration needs that you may need to explore, as the relationship they have with the youth may not look like what they anticipated.

**Pregnant/Parenting experiences of teens will impact these tasks.** As youth explore the role of extended family in their own child's life, and support for them as parents, clarification and integration needs may peak. Family that disappointed or hurt them may show up in ways for their child that they did not for the youth - this could reignite clarification questions. As this is a new developmental experience, anticipate that the youth may need to spiral back to previous experiences.



# Activity

# Concentric Circles

## PURPOSE

- To assist youth in deepening their understanding that relationships are not binary, have the power to change, and can coexist with one another to differing levels of intimacy

## MATERIALS

Paper and  
Writing utensils



## SET UP

Define types of relationships that fit within each circle:

- Innermost circle is where people whom you would tell your deepest, darkest secrets to - the people that have seen your most joyful and excruciating moments.
- Next circle out are those you are close to, you spend time with, you trust, but not with everything.
- Next are those whom you see on a regular basis, but there are many intimate things they don't know about you.
- Continue defining circles as you move farther away from the youth, who is represented in the center of the diagram.

## FACILITATING THE ACTIVITY

Discuss if there are people in outer circles they used to hold in inner circles or vice versa. Ask: How did people move? How do they feel about the fact that people have moved? Is there grief, disappointment, etc. (i.e. my mother "should" be in my innermost circle, but she's not)?

Explore what they youth believes is most important in building a relationship with someone (common answers are loyalty and trust). Ask: How do you know if someone is loyal? Trustworthy? What would you need to see?

Create with the youth a list of behaviors that signify their values. Help them examine if particular relationships demonstrate those behaviors - and what they think about the fact that they do or do not.

Suggest how all relationships either feed our energy or deplete it. Ask: Have you ever noticed how you feel after spending time with "so-and-so"? Are you more energized, peaceful, stressed, annoyed? What do you think about that?

## WRAP IT UP

We do not have to make choices about whether or not to have a relationship - our choice is more as to where people fit within our lives, and that can change over time as our experiences with them continue.

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## TASKS

- Clarification
- Integration
- Actualization

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## QUESTIONS

- Who am I?
- What happened to me?
- Where am I going?
- How will I get there?
- When will I know I belong?

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## SKILLS

- RECOGNIZING and ACCEPTING that current BEHAVIORS reflect GRIEF RESPONSES
- BEING PRESENT to the individual
- Providing OPPORTUNITIES to EXPLORE feelings and life events
- AFFIRMING perceptions and feelings
- LISTENING to the stories
- BRIEFLY SPEAKING in response to questions, comments, and reactions of individual
- Establishing the perception of SAFETY