

Adolescent Development Case Studies

AP Psychology / Psychology

STUDENT SECTION

Read each case study carefully. These scenarios describe real-life situations that many adolescents and families experience. For each case, analyze the developmental issues involved and explain what you believe the parents should do. There are no single correct answers. Your responses should be grounded in psychological concepts related to adolescent development, identity formation, peer influence, emotional regulation, and mental health.

Sally

Sally is a 15 year old freshman; she recently began to go out with a 17 year old senior. Her mother is concerned because Sally's grades have begun to drop, and she seems to have lost interest in her local church youth group, which she had been an active member of for years. Sally has been fighting with her mother about the situation. The family has planned a weekend family night; however, Sally has informed her parents she is not going to go and that she has a date with her boyfriend.

John

John is a 14 year old 8th grader. While cleaning John's room, his mother finds a pack of condoms and discovers that he has been visiting hard core porn sites on his electronic devices. She is determined to ignore this behavior; however, the neighbor calls and says that John has been making inappropriate comments to her 13 year old daughter, and that she has recently caught John peeking through her daughter's window while she changes.

Mary

Mary is a 17 year old senior at the local school; she is an honor student. However, Mary has never really dated; in fact she hasn't really ever been on a date. Mary's parents can tell that this lack of a social life is bothering her. Mary has been increasingly depressed and has expressed how she believes there is something wrong with her.

Luke

Luke, a 16 year old high school sophomore, has changed drastically since he entered high school. He has dropped all of his old friends and is now hanging out with a crowd of gothic teenagers. He wears all black and has asked his parents to let him get several piercings and a tattoo. Luke listens to heavy metal music with lyrics that are violent, dark, and often reference suicide. One of Luke's new friends was recently expelled from school for drugs.

Amanda

Amanda is an 11 year old girl who has experienced early-onset puberty. She has begun menstruation and has fully developed breasts. Several older boys have begun showing extra attention to her, and girls in her class make fun of her. Amanda feels like a freak and has started faking illnesses so she does not have to go to school.

Billy

Billy is a 16 year old high school sophomore. He has not entered puberty and is physically smaller than most boys his age. Billy is extremely self-conscious and feels awkward. His doctor tells his parents that while delayed puberty at 16 is not unusual, hormone treatment could be used to trigger puberty, though it may cause side effects such as severe acne and other complications.

TEACHER SECTION

This lesson is designed for use in Psychology and AP Psychology courses to help students apply developmental psychology principles to realistic adolescent scenarios. The purpose is analytical, not prescriptive, and emphasizes evidence-based reasoning rather than moral judgment. Teachers should reinforce respectful discussion norms and redirect students to psychological concepts when conversations drift into opinion or personal anecdote.

Content Advisory (For Syllabus or Administrative Use)

This lesson includes non-graphic, educational references to adolescent development topics including puberty timing, dating, exposure to sexual content, bullying, depression, and risk behaviors. All content is presented in a clinical, academic context aligned with standard Psychology and AP Psychology curricula and is intended for instructional analysis and prevention-focused discussion.

Key Vocabulary

Adolescence; Puberty; Early-Onset Puberty; Delayed Puberty; Identity vs. Role Confusion (Erikson); Peer Influence; Risk-Taking Behavior; Emotional Regulation; Social Development; Authoritative Parenting; Parental Monitoring; Consent; Boundary Setting; Mental Health Warning Signs; Self-Esteem

Case Study Guidance (Teacher Reference Only)

Sally

No-Nos: Forbidding relationships without discussion; ignoring academic decline; power struggles. **Suggested Responses:** Authoritative parenting, balance autonomy with accountability, monitor academics and emotional health.

John

No-Nos: Ignoring behavior; minimizing boundary violations; relying on punishment alone. **Suggested Responses:** Immediate intervention, education on consent, possible counseling referral.

Mary

No-Nos: Pressuring dating; dismissing distress; peer comparison. **Suggested Responses:** Validate emotions, encourage low-pressure socialization, monitor for depression.

Luke

No-Nos: Assuming appearance equals pathology; ignoring suicidal themes. **Suggested Responses:** Distinguish identity exploration from risk, monitor peers, assess mental health risk.

Amanda

No-Nos: Minimizing bullying; blaming the child; ignoring school avoidance. **Suggested Responses:** School advocacy, normalize development, emotional support.

Billy

No-Nos: Pressuring treatment; dismissing distress; violating privacy. **Suggested Responses:** Shared decision-making, weigh medical/psychological factors, support self-esteem.

AP Psychology Alignment

This lesson aligns with the College Board AP Psychology framework, including: • Unit 4: Social Psychology (peer influence, social identity) • Unit 5: Developmental Psychology (puberty, adolescence, identity development) • Skill Category 2: Data Analysis and Application of Psychological Concepts • Skill Category 3: Evidence-Based Argumentation

Instructional & Administrative Rationale

This lesson reflects widely accepted instructional practices in secondary psychology education. All scenarios are fictional, non-graphic, and framed to discourage harm while promoting psychological understanding, prevention, and appropriate adult intervention. The lesson supports social-emotional learning, critical thinking, and student safety while remaining consistent with district policies, state standards, and College Board expectations.