

ACA Practice Briefs

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Counseling Emerging Adults

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DESCRIPTION OF EMERGING ADULthood

Emerging adulthood is a term coined by Arnett (2000, 2015) that describes the stage of development between adolescence and young adulthood for individuals between the ages of 18-25 years in industrialized countries worldwide. Described as a “process rather than an event or string of social transitions” (Tanner, Arnett, & Leis, 2009, p. 38), emerging adulthood is a developmental stage that exhibits the following five dimensions: increased *possibilities/optimism* as emerging adults focus on hope and transformation; *identity exploration* in order to explore the question, “Who am I?”; *feeling in-between* as they no longer readily identify with adolescents nor with adults; *instability* with regard to relationships, vocation, and place of residence; and *self-focus* as emerging adults experience limited obligations of time and commitments to others as compared to other life stages (Arnett, 2015). Although these characteristics exist in other life stages, they are noted to be most distinctive during emerging adulthood (Milevsky, Thudium & Guldin, 2014).

While an age range has been identified for emerging adults, the end point of this developmental stage is variable since the transition to adulthood is task-related. The transition from emerging adulthood into adulthood is generally noted to occur once individuals reach developmental markers such as committing to relationship through marriage/partnership, raising children, and/or entering more stable careers (Arnett, 2015). Emerging adulthood can be a time of optimism as individuals experience hope for the future and increased wellbeing (Arnett & Schwab, 2012). However, emerging adulthood can also be a time of increased emotional distress due to increased focus on identity exploration and a desire to understand one’s place in society and the world at large, which may contribute to feelings of anxiety and depression (Arnett, 2015; Arnett & Schwab, 2012).

Resources:

Description of emerging adulthood: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fv8KpQY0m6o>

2015 Clark University Emerging Adult data:

<https://www2.clarku.edu/clark-poll-emerging-adults/pdfs/2015-clark-poll-report.pdf>

IDENTIFICATION/ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

Assessment for emerging adults is an important component that can be used to understand the perceived needs and experiences of emerging adult clients. Counselors can use instruments to assess the degree to which individuals experience specific dimensions of emerging adulthood (Baggio, Iglesias, Studer & Gmel, 2015; Faas et al., 2018). In so doing, counselors can understand the specific developmental aspects that seem to be affecting their clients so that these aspects are directly addressed in treatment with emerging adult clients, both in terms of bolstering client strengths and addressing areas of clinical concern.

Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood-Revised (IDEA-R)

The Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood - Revised (IDEA-R; Lisha et al., 2014) is a

21-item self-report measure that is a revised version of the Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA; Reifman, Arnette, & Colwell, 2007). The IDEA-R assesses three characteristics of emerging adulthood: Identity Exploration, which combined elements of Identity Exploration and Feeling In-between from the IDEA; Experimentation/Possibilities, which basically remained unchanged from the IDEA; and the new subscale Independence, which combined elements from Identity Exploration with Feeling In-between from the IDEA (Lisha et al., 2014).

The IDEA-R is an effective self-report measure for “at-risk” emerging adults, which describes a sub-population of emerging adults who experience drug and/or alcohol abuse and those who attend alternative high schools and are at risk for not graduating from high school. The IDEA-R also works well with culturally diverse populations (Allem, Sussman, & Unger, 2017; Lisha et al., 2014). According to Lisha et al. (2014), the overall mean on the IDEA-R ($M = 3.04$, $SD = .89$) suggests that participants were indeed experiencing the developmental stage of emerging adulthood. Further, construct validity was established by ordinary and logistic regression analysis between the full IDEA-R and the subscales when exploring other variables.

Cronbach’s α for the IDEA-R overall was .93; regarding subscales, Cronbach’s α was .89 for Identity Exploration, .85 for Experimentation/Possibilities, and .64 for Independence (Lisha et al., 2014). Resource: For more information, visit <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0163278712452664>

Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood-Short Form (IDEA-8)

The Inventory of the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood - Short Form (IDEA-8; Baggio et al., 2015) is an 8-item, self-report measure used to assess four characteristics of emerging adulthood: Experimentation, Negativity, Identity Exploration, and Feeling In-between. This abbreviated version has yielded valid scores and was created to accurately assess emerging adulthood features while being incorporated into larger surveys due to its shortened length (Faas et al., 2018). Cronbach’s α for the IDEA-8 was .72; however, the internal consistency of each of the four subscales fell between .32 and .56. The conventional benchmarks for internal consistency on each of these should not be expected since there were only two variables per subscale. The correlation between the IDEA and the IDEA-8 was .91 ($p < .001$). The IDEA-8 showed significant negative correlations with all adulthood markers including financial independence, stable relationship, pregnancy (self or partner) or were a parent, job attainment, and age, which suggested that adult responsibilities were negatively correlated with achieving adulthood (Baggio et al., 2015).

Resource:

For more information, visit <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0163278714540681>

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Interventions for emerging adults include a variety of theoretical approaches and modalities. The transition to independence model (TIP; Dresser, Clark, & Deschenes, 2015) is an evidence-based approach to working with emerging adult clients. Counselors can also use a variety of theoretical approaches and paradigms when assisting emerging adults. Each of these intervention strategies can be meaningfully implemented to assist emerging adult clients.

TIP Model

The transition to independence (TIP) model is an evidence-supported practice that assists emerging adults who experience emotional and/or behavioral difficulties in their transition to adulthood (Dresser et al., 2015). The TIP model can be used to assist emerging adult clients by focusing on interests and future aspirations related to five transition domains: (a) education including educational pursuits and/

or career-track training; (b) employment and career including work experience, supported employment, and/or transitional employment; (c) living situation including exploration of current living situation and aspirations for the future living environment; (d) community-life functioning including daily activities, leisure activities, and community participation; and (e) personal effectiveness and wellbeing including exploration of interpersonal relationships such as family, friends and mentors; emotional and behavioral wellbeing; self-determination; physical health and wellbeing; and parenting (Clark & Hart, 2009). Seven TIP model principles or guidelines exist which inform the implementation of the model:

1. Engage young people through relationship development, person-centered planning, and a focus on their futures.
2. Tailor services and supports to be accessible, coordinated, appealing, non-stigmatizing, trauma informed, and developmentally appropriate—building on strengths to enable the young people to pursue their goals across relevant transition domains.
3. Acknowledge and develop personal choice and social responsibility with young people, e.g., by encouraging and developing problem solving and decision making skills, and evaluation of the possible impact on self and others.
4. Ensure a safety-net of support by involving a young person’s parents, family members, and other informal and formal key players as relevant.
5. Enhance young persons’ competencies to assist them in achieving greater self-sufficiency and confidence, e.g., teaching the young person meaningful skills.
6. Maintain an outcome focus in the TIP system at the young person, program and community levels, e.g., by focusing on the young person’s own goals and tracking his or her progress.
7. Involve young people, parents, and other community partners in the TIP system at the practice, program, and community levels (Clark & Hart, 2009; Dresser et al., 2015).

The TIP model has been noted to be effective, both in terms of broad consensus among professionals who work with emerging adults (Walker & Gowen, 2011) and through research conducted in multiple settings with several distinct populations that included individuals between the ages of 14-25 years. According to Clark, Jaouich, and Baker (2015) the National Network on Youth Transition (NNYT) research team conducted a variety of studies on the TIP model, and others have also conducted research exploring the TIP model and its impact on emerging adults with emotional and/or behavioral difficulties. The results of one study yielded positive outcomes that demonstrated increased independence among those receiving TIP-informed services: 21 out of 34 participants discontinued receiving food stamps, and 100% of those receiving social security income (SSI) either discontinued receiving it completely (3 out of 13 participants) or decreased the amount of SSI being received (10 out of 13 participants) (Clark, Pschorr, Wells, Curtis, & Tighe, 2004). In another study, participants experienced significant progress from pre-test to post-test including increased employment (from 0% to 21%), school attendance or GED program attendance (from 24% to 52%), increased living in a family home or independent setting (from 42% to 79%), and decreased probation rates (from 52% to 44%) (Dresser et al., 2015). Statistically better outcomes have been demonstrated for individuals with emotional and/or behavioral difficulties who received TIP-informed services, particularly in the areas of education/vocation training (28% of those who received TIP-informed services were enrolled in post-secondary education versus 9% who did not receive TIP-informed services) and probation/incarceration rates (3% of those who received TIP-informed services were on probation/incarcerated versus 12% of those who did not receive TIP-informed services), which further demonstrates the effectiveness of the TIP model (Kapur, Clark, Caproni & Sterner, 2005). While TIP is itself a treatment modality, other treatment approaches and interventions can be used in conjunction with the TIP model.

Resources:

For more information and support resources, visit <http://www.tipstars.org/OverviewofTIPModel.aspx>

Therapeutic Approaches

A variety of theoretical approaches have been used to assist emerging adults in counseling. Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) helps emerging adult clients to reframe experiences during this stage of development and is particularly beneficial to emerging adult clients who experience anxiety (Hoffman, Guerry, & Albano, 2018) and ADHD (Knouse & Fleming, 2016). Psychodynamic approaches assist emerging adults to navigate romantic relationships and career adaptability (Atzil-Slonim, Reshef, Berman, Peri, & Shulman, 2016). A relationship education curriculum can be used to assist emerging adults in decreasing relational distress (Vennum, Monk, Pasley, & Fincham, 2017).

Resources:

The language of “emerging adulthood” and its usefulness with

CBT: <https://www.allkindsoftherapy.com/blog/emerging-adulthood-is-a-safer-approach>

Career counseling: <https://arlenehirsch.com/reflections-from-the-front-lines-a-career-counselors-perspective-on-emerging-adulthood/>

How parents can support emerging adults: <https://www.family-institute.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/csi-emerging-adults-relationships-with-parents.pdf>

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