LEARNING FOCUS
By reading this chapter and working with many of the activities, you will:
- Explore and reflect on the changes associated with adolescence by identifying what changes have already occurred and what changes (physical, social and emotional) you can expect to experience.
- Explore ways of dealing with change, especially the social and emotional aspects of transition from primary to secondary school.

STANDARDS
By reading this chapter and working with many of the activities, you should be able to demonstrate that you can:
- Describe the physical, emotional and social changes that occur as a result of the adolescent stage of the lifespan.
- Describe the factors that influence your development.
3.1 Growing up

From the day we are conceived, each and every one of us follows a life cycle. The human life cycle can be divided into stages such as baby, child, adolescent, young adult, adult and old age. Each stage has certain characteristics, the most obvious being age. At this stage in your life, you probably think that adulthood is a million years away but in fact it is a few short years.

If you think about it, the changes that you have gone through over the past 12 or so years are incredible. In such a short time you have gone from a tiny baby to a young person. The human life cycle is an amazing journey.

We begin our life journey when a sperm from our father unites with an egg from our mother. This cell then rapidly divides into more and more cells and eventually into a human foetus. Our mother provides a watery environment within her uterus and provides the nutrients that we need to grow during the nine months of pregnancy.

After birth, babies grow at a very fast rate. They need to be cared for and nurtured and are totally dependent on someone else for their survival. As babies grow into toddlers, they develop skills such as crawling, walking, speech and finer hand manipulation of objects. There is constant input of information from the world around them that stimulates their growth and development.

As they reach childhood, girls and boys can look very similar. It is not until puberty that obvious male and female characteristics become evident. This is a time of rapid growth — physically, emotionally, cognitively and socially. Young people’s ability to make mature decisions and think on different levels continues to improve as they get older, and they become emotionally more mature, being able to understand and control their emotions.

As young adults, our bodies stop growing between ages 18–25; however, the brain may take until 23 years of age to fully develop. Our abilities to solve problems, organise, make decisions and positively deal with our emotions continue to improve. We become more independent in many ways — moving away from parents, earning a living, starting a career and other interests.

As adults, we are completely independent. This is the time when we start our own family. As we move to old age we may need the help of family and friends to care for us and thus the cycle of life ends with dependence on others.

The start of life’s journey is when sperm meets egg. We grow more rapidly in the first six months of life. Babies often double their weight and grow by up to 30 centimetres in their first year.
Adolescence

Adolescence is the time during which we mature from childhood to adulthood. This is a time of significant physical, emotional and social change. The beginning of adolescence is signalled by the onset of puberty.

Puberty — a time of change

Puberty is the time during which our bodies change physically. Our reproductive organs mature so our bodies are capable of reproducing — that is, having babies. Puberty is triggered by a change in hormone levels in our bodies. Hormones are substances that affect how our bodies work and grow. They are produced by glands.

Puberty begins at about 10 years of age but, because the changes that occur at the beginning of puberty happen inside us, we can’t tell. It is not until we see the outward physical changes that we can tell puberty has begun. These outward changes usually occur at about 11–14 years of age for girls and 13–16 years of age for boys. Puberty begins at different times for all of us. Some people will begin puberty much earlier and some will begin much later. This is no cause for concern — it is another sign that we are all unique.

Hormones and puberty

The pituitary gland is located in the brain. During puberty, it secretes — that is, it releases — increased amounts of growth hormone, which causes a rapid growth spurt. This growth spurt usually occurs earlier among girls. Together with a rapid growth in height, body parts such as the hands, feet and head mature to their full adult size. Internal organs also grow in size during puberty — for example, the heart and lungs increase in size. This accounts for our increased physical capacity for endurance and strength as we mature to adults.

The pituitary gland triggers the secretion of the female reproductive hormone, oestrogen, and the male reproductive hormone, testosterone. Estrogen is secreted by the ovaries in girls, and testosterone is secreted by the testes in boys.
Sexual development occurs during puberty. Both boys and girls experience enlargement and maturity of their primary sex organs. For boys, this means their penis and testes grow bigger and their testes start to produce sperm. Girls start to release mature ova (eggs) from their ovaries. The production of sperm in boys and mature ova in girls is referred to as a primary sex characteristic.

The release of the female and male reproductive hormones in greater amounts during puberty leads to the development of secondary sex characteristics. Table 3.1 outlines the secondary sex characteristics that develop during puberty for both girls and boys.

### Table 3.1: Secondary sex characteristics that develop at puberty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Pubic hair develops.</td>
<td>2. Pubic hair develops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The body grows taller.</td>
<td>3. The body grows taller and curvier, and the hips widen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The penis grows.</td>
<td>4. Hair develops under the arms and on the arms and legs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The voice deepens.</td>
<td>5. Oil glands in the skin produce more oil, which can lead to pimples and acne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Hair develops under the arms and on the face, body, arms and legs.</td>
<td>6. Menstruation begins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Oil glands in the skin produce more oil, which can lead to pimples and acne.</td>
<td>7. Sweat production increases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Muscle growth occurs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Sweat production increases.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![FIGURE 3.2](image) Physical changes that occur during puberty
Puberty and girls

Puberty is a time when a girl’s body changes so she can reproduce — that is, so she can have a baby. Few adolescent girls choose to reproduce at such a young age. The ability to care for a baby is an enormous responsibility. Often, adolescent girls do not have the maturity, knowledge, time or money to raise a baby.

The development of breasts, menstruation and ovulation are important changes for girls during puberty.

Menstruation

Menstruation is also known as a girl’s period. Girls start to menstruate (or get their periods) during puberty. It usually happens around 12 months after the first physical signs of puberty. As puberty starts at different times, the age at which a girl gets her period will vary. It normally begins at 10–14 years of age.

The menstrual cycle

A menstrual cycle is about 28 days in length, although the length of a cycle is different for each girl. It is controlled by the release of different hormones that regulate what happens in the cycle. The first day of a girl’s period signals the start of her menstrual cycle. A ‘period’ is the shedding of the uterus lining, which is called the endometrium. The lining comes out as blood through the vagina. Once the period is finished — that is, the bleeding stops — hormones direct the body to start building up the endometrium again. The endometrium builds up or thickens to house the egg if it is fertilised by a male’s sperm.

A period usually lasts three to seven days. The length and heaviness of a period are different for each girl. Periods are irregular for most girls in the first year, but then settle into a fairly regular cycle. Some girls may experience abdominal pain and/or backache when they get their period or in the few days before, while others may experience only minor discomfort.
**Hormones and the menstrual cycle**

The menstrual cycle is controlled by the release of different types of hormones. Each hormone has a specific role to play. The menstrual cycle has four phases:
1. the menstruation phase
2. the follicular phase
3. the ovulation phase
4. the luteal phase.

During the menstrual phase, the thickened lining (endometrium) of the uterus, blood and the unfertilised egg flow from the uterus through the vagina as a period.

The follicular phase is the time between the first day of menstruation (period) and when ovulation occurs. During this phase, the pituitary gland releases follicle stimulating hormone (FSH). This hormone stimulates the ovary to produce a number of follicles (approximately 5–20). In most cases, only one of these follicles will mature into an egg.

Also at this time, the lining of the uterus begins to thicken again in preparation for possible fertilisation of an ovum and the resulting pregnancy. There is also a rise in levels of the female sex hormone oestrogen.

The **ovulation** phase is when the mature egg is released from the follicle on the surface of the ovary. Ovulation usually occurs in the middle of the menstrual cycle, that is, about day 14 of a 28-day menstrual cycle. As oestrogen levels rise during the follicular phase, the brain triggers the release of gonadotrophin-releasing hormone (GnRH). This hormone prompts the pituitary gland to produce higher levels of luteinising hormone (LH) and FSH. Ovulation is triggered by high levels of LH. The egg moves from the follicle on the surface of the ovary down through the fallopian tube to the uterus.

[ A single female egg is called an ovum. A number of eggs are called ova. ]

[ Ovulation is the process of the ovary releasing an ovum (egg). ]

**HEALTH FACT**

The life span of the egg is around 24 hours, and unless it meets a sperm during this time, it will die.
The luteal phase is approximately two weeks in length. During this time, the ruptured follicle on the surface of the ovary changes into a structure called the corpus luteum. The corpus luteum starts to release the sex hormone \textit{progesterone} and small amounts of oestrogen. These two hormones maintain the thickened lining of the uterus. If the ovum is not fertilised by \textit{sperm} to create a pregnancy, the corpus luteum will die. This occurs around day 22 of a 28-day cycle. This causes the levels of progesterone and oestrogen to fall and the lining of the uterus to come away and flow with blood from the uterus through the vagina as a menstrual period.

\textbf{Conception}

When an ovum (egg) and sperm unite, \textit{conception} occurs — the start of a new life. The lining of the uterus provides nourishment to the foetus in the first stage of its life.

\begin{quote}
Dear doctor . . .

Read the questions below from Tina and Rafael. In small groups, share your responses with other group members. Discuss and determine what would be the best advice to give Tina and Rafael.

\textit{Dear doctor}

I am 13 years old and am worried about my period. I started getting my period seven months ago. My first period was light and lasted three days, the next happened two weeks later and was the same, then I didn’t get it for three months. I am also getting a lot of stomach and back pain at these times. Is there something wrong with me?

Thanks, Tina

\textit{Dear doctor}

I am 14 years old and much smaller than all my classmates. Sometimes, I get hassled at school because I am not as big and muscular as the other boys in my year. I am starting to get pimples and just don’t feel happy with my body image. Can you please give me some advice.

Thanks, Rafael
\end{quote}

\textbf{Puberty and boys}

Just as girls’ bodies get ready to reproduce, boys experience physical changes that give them the ability to reproduce. The most obvious of these physical changes are an increase in size of the testes, scrotum and penis. It is during puberty that the male starts to produce sperm which, when mature, are capable of fertilising the female’s ovum (egg) for conception.

\textbf{Ejaculation}

During puberty, boys experience their first \textit{ejaculation}, which is a release of \textit{semen} from the penis. Ejaculation usually occurs when a boy
When a male ejaculates, sperm move from the testes into the epididymis. The epididymis is located at the back of the testes. It collects immature sperm from the testes. When the sperm mature, they are released into a tube called the vas deferens. The sperm travel up the vas deferens, where they mix with semen released by glands lining the vas deferens. They then travel through another tube called the urethra, which runs through the penis.

As boys and girls experience physical changes during puberty, they become more sexually aware of their bodies. They may masturbate, which means touching or playing with the sexual organs. It can be a pleasurable thing to do, and it allows boys and girls to become familiar with their own bodies.

Worksheet 3.4: Puberty — how our body changes!

1. Describe what happens during the menstrual cycle.
2. Identify secondary sex characteristics that both boys and girls experience.
3. Explain the process of puberty for boys and girls.
4. What advice would you give a friend struggling with the physical changes of adolescence? Provide at least four strategies to help your friend cope.
CHAPTER 3: ADOLESCENCE — CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

Parents and family are important supports to guide young people as they mature into adults.

Changing relationships

Adolescence is also a time of social change. It is when we develop from a dependent person to an independent person. The way in which we interact with others changes as we mature. We start to make decisions for ourselves and plan for the future. Adolescence is also a time when we start to develop a range of relationships that can be quite meaningful and long lasting.

As we go through adolescence, we increasingly spend more time with our friends and less with our family. Parents and family still play an important role in most young people’s lives by providing love, support and guidance as young people find their way to adulthood.

Forming a close group of friends who make you feel connected and supported can contribute to a positive sense of self. This group of friends is your peer group. Many young people want to be like their friends and want to be popular within their peer group. Sometimes, your peer group can put pressure on you to do certain things. This pressure may be negative — such as the pressure to smoke — or positive — such as encouragement to play sport. If you are being pressured to do something you don’t feel comfortable doing, it is a good idea to talk to someone (such as your parent or a teacher) about it and try to work out some strategies to deal with the
issue. Just as our family influences us during childhood, our peer group plays a big role in helping to define who we are during adolescence.

During adolescence, there are times when we feel like, and want to be treated as, an adult; at other times, we feel like a child and want the security that our family gives us. Conflict with parents can occur when we want to do things independently. Parents worry because they know that young people sometimes take risks when they are out with friends. Try to work things out with your parents when a conflict arises. Listen to what they have to say, then talk to them about what you need. Share your ideas about what you can do to keep safe.

During adolescence, we start to become more aware of our sexuality, and we can develop a desire or sexual attraction for another person. That other person can be someone of the opposite sex or someone of the same sex. We may form a relationship with that person. In early adolescence, these relationships usually last for a short period. In late adolescence, relationships usually last longer and become more significant.

HEALTH FACT
During adolescence, having a close friend or group of friends is a protective factor for young people.

Worksheet 3.5: Negotiating a win–win

becoming independent

Read the scenario below and answer the questions that follow.

Sandra is 14 years old. She is going out with Serge, who is 17 years old. Serge has asked Sandra to an 18th birthday party on Friday night at his friend’s place. Serge says he will pick her up at 8.00 pm because he has his Mum's car for the night.

Sandra is excited about going to the party and asks her parents if she can go. They are worried about her going in the car and will allow the date only if they drop her off at the party themselves and pick her up at 10.30 pm.

Sandra thinks her parents don’t trust her, so she yells at them and they get into an argument. Her parents ground her for her disrespectful attitude. Sandra sneaks out of the house and goes to the party anyway.

1. Explain why young people and their parents have more conflicts during adolescence.
2. Explain why Sandra’s parents are worried.
3. Do you think Sandra made a good decision or a bad decision? Explain your answer.
4. Identify strategies that Sandra and her parents could have used to reach a better outcome.
5. Using worksheet 3.2, work through the process outlined to reach a positive decision.

In later adolescence, it is common for parents, family and teachers to start to increase their expectations of you. Your parents will expect you to take more responsibility for the freedom that you want, including making decisions for yourself. Some of these decisions will be value based, such as what’s right and what’s wrong. People will expect you to take responsibility for your thoughts, feelings and actions. This responsibility includes making decisions and accepting the consequences of those decisions.
FIGURE 3.6 As you become older, you will be expected to make decisions about your life and take responsibility for those decisions by accepting the consequences.

Social change is about making new relationships that are independent of family, making decisions for yourself and taking responsibility for those decisions. These experiences help you develop a better understanding of yourself and will influence the path you choose in life.

check & CHALLENGE

1. Identify two important relationships in your life and explain why they are important.
2. Explain how your parents’ and teachers’ expectations of you have changed as you have grown from childhood into adolescence.

Handling your emotions

During adolescence, we start to think independently of our parents and family, we form our own ideas, attitudes and values. We start discovering the world for ourselves; through our day-to-day experiences, we learn more about ourselves and have thoughts about who we are and what our place is in the world. As we grow and experience life, our views and beliefs change. We start developing our own identity as individuals.

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Personal beliefs and attitudes

Our beliefs, attitudes and values form a part of our sense of self. In small groups, discuss one of the following issues:

• Homework should be mandatory for all high school students.
• Junk food should be banned from school canteens.
• Girls are more mature than boys.

1. What were the main views expressed by the group?
2. What factors influenced your own view of these issues?
3. How does your view influence your behaviours or actions?
As our bodies change in size and shape, what we think about our body also changes. For some young people, the rapid growth of their body can be embarrassing. They can become very self-conscious, particularly if their body is growing and changing ahead of the bodies of their friends. The increase in the release of hormones not only affects our physical growth but can also heighten the emotions we experience. It is common for adolescents to start to feel extremes in their emotions that sometimes feel difficult to manage. When you are finding it difficult to manage your emotions, it is a good idea to try to calm down before you react.

Developing an understanding of emotions and feelings is part of the emotional change that happens during puberty. Children often do not understand their feelings and can act out feelings in negative ways, such as by starting fights and arguments. As we grow and mature emotionally, we become better at understanding and managing our feelings and thus our behaviours.

Some changes that show us we are maturing emotionally include:
- knowing what our feelings are
- using feelings to make good decisions
- managing stressful moods
- controlling impulses
- being motivated and optimistic
- bouncing back after a difficult time
- managing our emotions in a positive way
- communicating with others in a respectful way
- expressing our self appropriately
- planning future goals
- solving problems rather than avoiding them
- resolving conflicts in non-violent ways.

Achieving all the changes listed above takes time and work. This means you need to think about what you are feeling rather than just reacting, and you need to work out positive ways in which to deal with challenges and cope with difficult situations. Talking to people who you trust and who can help you is a good start to helping you understand and manage your emotions.
What does it mean to be ‘mature’?

The rate at which we mature physically and emotionally is different for all of us. As indicated earlier, girls in most cases start to mature physically before boys, and they tend to reach physical maturity before boys. Some young people who physically mature early may be put in situations in which they are expected to be more emotionally mature than they actually are. Remember, just because a person is physically mature, we cannot assume they are emotionally mature. And just because a person is emotionally mature, we cannot assume they are physically mature.

HEALTH FACT
Most girls stop growing in height around the age of 18 years, whereas boys can continue to grow until they are around 20 years old.

skillBOOSTER problem solving and communicating

I’m just 12!

Andrea is a 12-year-old girl who has physically matured into a young woman. A boy in year 11 who is 17 years old starts to give her lots of attention and lets her know he is sexually attracted to her. He is treating her as being much older than she is. She has never experienced this situation before and doesn’t know what to do.

Divide into small groups and discuss the following questions:
1. What might Andrea be feeling?
2. What might Andrea do or say to manage this situation?
3. Brainstorm why a relationship between a 12-year-old girl and a 17-year-old boy is not a good idea.

Emotional maturity can vary significantly among adolescents of the same age. The rate at which a person matures emotionally depends on a range of factors, including how they are treated by their parents and family, their personality, their relationships with other people (including their peers) and the expectations of them. Look around at the people in your year at school. You can probably identify those who are more mature by the respectful way in which they treat others and the positive way in which they deal with their emotions.

FIGURE 3.7 Physical maturity does not always equal emotional maturity.
Your developing brain

You might be surprised to know that during puberty not only is your body physically and emotionally maturing but so is your brain. Research evidence has proved that the belief that a young person’s brain is mature at puberty is incorrect. In fact, the brain does not fully mature until we are in our early 20s.

The effect this has on young people is that their ability to judge things, plan, organise, make decisions and control their emotions is not fully developed. This might account for the moodiness, outbursts, tantrums, rude behaviours or uncontrolled sobbing that some adolescents display. Don’t worry, as your brain matures you will improve your ability to make decisions and to analyse situations. This will help you better monitor your emotional reactions.

Dealing with puberty

You are now in your early years of adolescence, probably experiencing some or most of the physical changes of puberty. It may be an exciting time when you look forward to the changes ahead, or an uneasy time when you become self-conscious and overly concerned about what other people think of your looks and personality.

Try to remember when things are difficult that every adult in the world has experienced the period of change that you are experiencing now. All your friends are going through the same thing.

The following are useful tips to remember when you are dealing with the changes of puberty:

• Read and learn about the physical, emotional and social changes of puberty so you have a better idea of what to expect.
• Talk to your doctor or another health professional if you are worried about aspects of your development or do not understand some of the changes in your body.
• Be patient with your parents. Remember, they are trying to do the best for you. If there are disagreements, listen to what your parents have to say and then let them know your view.
• Try to negotiate with your parents. You need to show them that you are responsible by making good decisions, letting them know your plans and compromising in some situations.
• Remember that you will mature at your own pace because you are a unique person.

**HEALTH FACT**

Most adolescents will come into conflict with their families at some stage. It is also a time of change for parents. Parents will be learning different ways to be a parent, as well as discovering different ways of relating to you now you are no longer a child.

Worksheet 3.6: Puberty publications

1. Explain what is meant by ‘managing your emotions in a positive way’. Give at least one example to support your explanation.
2. Identify positive strategies to help you manage stress.
3. List acceptable ways of expressing your thoughts, feelings and opinions.
4. Identify ways in which you can resolve conflict without the use of force or violence.
The process of physical, emotional and social change that we experience during adolescence brings with it many challenges. Think about people’s expectations of you now that you are in high school compared with when you were a child in primary school — are they different? The answer is most certainly yes — your parents, family and teachers will be expecting more from you. They will expect you to behave in a more mature way, to be more responsible, to help out more at home and to study more and achieve at school. These are just some of the changes that you will experience as you grow older. Learning how to respond to and cope with challenges in a positive way is important.

Adolescence is like an apprenticeship — it is the time when you learn how to be an adult. This learning process will involve new situations and challenges that you have not previously experienced. Dealing with these changes is part of the apprenticeship, and learning to make good decisions and knowing where to find support will help you cope with the challenges ahead. Here are some examples of the changes and challenges that most young people face during adolescence:

- dealing with the physical changes that are happening to their bodies during puberty
- managing the heightened emotions that young people experience during puberty
- going to a new school
- making new friends and trying to fit into a peer group
- studying even more and being under pressure to achieve your VCE, VET or VCAL
- having more responsibility at home, such as doing more chores, looking after younger brothers or sisters
- making decisions about future study and work
- dealing with negative peer pressure
- experiencing relationship breakdown
- experiencing conflict with their parents.

For some young people, the challenges can be even greater, such as:

- caring for a sick parent or family member
- becoming a young parent
- moving from another country and adapting to a new culture and a different language
- experiencing family breakdown, parents divorcing and living between two households
- coping with significant health problems.
Changes that we face

Conduct a survey of at least five adults. Include adults of various ages and both genders, and ask them the following questions:

1. What were the major changes and challenges for you when you were a teenager?
2. What are the challenges that you face now?
3. What is one positive thing you do to help yourself when you are faced with a challenge?
4. What sort of negative things do people do when they face challenges?

As a whole class, share answers to your survey and compile a list of positive strategies that people have identified. From this list, identify the strategies that would be most helpful for you.

Fears and feelings

As you experience one or more of the challenges listed on page 93, you will be faced with a range of feelings and have fears about meeting these challenges — this is quite normal. It may be you are feeling scared or feeling that you do not fit in, that you cannot cope with the situation you are faced with, or you may be afraid of failing. These are common fears and feelings. It is important that when you are faced with a challenge, you recognise what you are capable of, what things you need to do to help you cope and whom you can go to for support and advice.

Dealing with change and conflicting demands

Do you sometimes feel overwhelmed by the demands on you? Do you feel you are not coping and you do not know what to do about it? These feelings are not uncommon, especially when you have lots of things to deal with at once, such as starting a new school, doing homework, doing chores at home, meeting sport commitments and fitting in social time with friends.

When faced with changes that are challenging, it is best to have a range of strategies to help you cope. It is important to be aware that a strategy may be useful in one situation but not in another, so think about which one will be most helpful to you. Here are some ideas that can help you to cope with the challenges of adolescence:

We all experience mixed feelings and fears when faced with new challenges.
HEALTH FACT
Developing a range of coping strategies and developing a support network helps you to deal with change in a positive way.

- Talk to your parents or teachers about your concerns and ask them to help you devise strategies to manage them.
- Plan the outcome you want rather than letting it happen.
- Prioritise things — look at what is important, what needs to be done straight away and what you can do over a period of time.
- Ask others for advice.
- Talk to a counsellor.
- Think positively about how the situation will turn out.
- Do things you like, such as playing on the computer, going for a bike ride, going shopping, walking the dog, drawing, painting, writing or listening to music.
- Be realistic in what you can and cannot manage, and set goals.
- Manage your stress in a positive way.
- Make sure you look after your health — eat nutritious foods, exercise regularly and get enough sleep.
- Ask for help if you need it.

The challenge of changing schools
Your body starts changing, your emotions seem to be extreme at times, you start becoming very conscious of yourself and what others think of you and then, on top of this mix of reactions to puberty, you have to start a new school.

The beginning of puberty is becoming a reality for you and you now have to leave one of the most stable and secure environments you have known, your primary school, with the one familiar teacher day in day out, and go to secondary school.

It’s a totally new environment in most cases with much more to remember, new peers to relate to, much older and bigger students and many more teachers expecting things from you. You’re a little fish in a big pond!
This transition from primary school to high school can have a significant effect on you both emotionally and socially. Some young people can feel a little lost and unconnected, they may find it difficult to make new friends or feel isolated as their friends have started another school.

Fortunately, most secondary schools have transition programs that help new students become familiar with, and connected to, their new learning environment. You will have one teacher designated to support you and your peers in year 7. This teacher can help you adjust to secondary school so, if you need help, or are feeling a little lost, ask them for help.

Look at this change as a positive thing in your life — an opportunity to make new friends and experience new things. And remember it won’t be long until you’re the big fish in the pond!

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### decision making

**Dealing with negative peer pressure**

Read the scenario below and answer the questions that follow.

Alexandra has just started a new school. Most of her friends have gone to a different secondary college. On Alexandra’s first day she is put into a class where she doesn’t know anyone. Her teacher buddies up Alexandra with Rachel. Alexandra starts hanging out with Rachel and her group of friends. Rachel is very popular and most of the girls want to be in her peer group. Alexandra is really happy that she is accepted into the group.

Things are going well until one Saturday the group meets at the mall to go shopping. Alexandra realises that some of the girls are shoplifting. Rachel tells Alexandra that she must steal some make-up for her and that it is okay because they do it all the time and never get caught. Alexandra thinks stealing is wrong and doesn’t want to do it, but she doesn’t want to lose her place in the group either.

1. What are Alexandra’s choices in this situation?
2. What information is important to consider when making this decision? (It is illegal to shoplift, for example.)
3. For each choice identified, outline the possible consequences.
4. After considering all the information, what should Alexandra do?
5. As a class, evaluate the decision and determine whether it is a good decision.

**Future challenges**

As you go through adolescence and mature into a young adult, the challenges you face will change. You will be expected to make important decisions and take more and more responsibility for your life. As a senior student, you will be faced with decisions and challenges related to your health and future, such as:

- choosing VCE subjects
- balancing social time with study time
- choosing a career path
- studying further at a tertiary institution

**HEALTH FACT**

Planning for your future by setting goals, identifying potential barriers and strategies to overcome them can assist you to deal with future challenges.
• choosing whether or not to be sexually active
• being physically active
• learning to drive.
As a young adult, the challenges will be different again, such as:
• moving out of home
• committing to a partner
• coping with further study
• earning a wage to pay the rent, bills and so on
• choosing whether to have children
• buying and maintaining a car.

**Worksheet 3.8: Dealing with future challenges**

**Figure 3.10** The decisions you make in the future may provide even greater challenges.

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**Predicting future challenges**

Undertake the following tasks in pairs:
1. Predict future challenges you may face as a young adult. Compile a list of these future challenges and share them with another pair.
2. Identify strategies that you could adopt to help you prepare for the future challenges in your life.
3. Use desktop publishing to create a poster or brochure of advice for people about to face new challenges.
Loss and grief

As we experience change in our lives, we may encounter loss. Loss is losing touch with, temporarily or permanently, someone we care about or something we value or that is important to us. The death of someone we love or care for is a major loss in our lives. Other losses that many people experience in their lives include:

- the end of a close relationship
- moving away from friends or family
- parents’ getting divorced
- finding out someone we love is seriously ill
- moving to another country
- moving schools
- losing something that is very important to us, such as our job
- the death of a pet.

A natural response to loss is grief. Grief is the response we have to a significant loss in our lives. How we experience grief will be different for everyone. Grieving is about coming to terms with changes that are happening in our lives and learning to cope with the gaps that the loss has created.

Grieving is a process that happens over a period of time. The length of this time will be different for each of us according to individual characteristics, the extent, nature and significance of the loss, and what support we have around us. It is important to understand that not all losses result in negative effects. Moving to a new school, for example, may provide more opportunities, such as better sports facilities, more choice in the school curriculum, a chance to be closer to home and new friendships.

Responding to loss and grief

People can experience a range of emotions as they grieve, such as sadness, disbelief, relief, anger or anguish. Although we will all grieve in our own way, there is a general pattern to the grieving process. At first, you may feel disbelief, shock or confusion, and you may struggle with accepting the loss.

What can I do?

- Talk to my parents
- Listen to my music
- Exercise
- Write about what I’m feeling and thinking
- See the school counsellor
- Talk to a friend

Strategies to help you cope with loss
When we experience a major loss, such as when a loved one dies, it may take quite some time for it to sink in. Some people feel at their lowest point three to four months after the loss and struggle to cope. This is a time when they need their friends and family to support them and help them get through the pain and confusion. As time passes, the feelings of grief will begin to lessen. There will be good and bad days, but gradually the healing process will start and life will seem much better.

How we respond to loss is often different for boys compared with girls. Cultural differences and gender stereotypes impact on boys’ and girls’ behaviours. Boys are stereotyped into believing that ‘real’ men don’t cry or show their emotions, whereas girls are stereotyped to be emotional.

Many people think it is okay for girls to cry and talk about their feelings whereas it is not okay for boys to do the same. As a result, boys sometimes get into conflicts, fail to talk about their feelings or become involved in risk-taking behaviours such as abusing alcohol or drugs. This is very unhealthy and destructive for boys. Boys need to be able to express their feelings as much as girls do, without being judged.

Table 3.2 outlines some of the reactions to grief that people may experience. Experiencing a response to grief is normal. It is healthy to allow yourself to grieve because it is the first step in moving on.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>Thoughts</th>
<th>Behaviours</th>
<th>Physical signs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Confusion; can’t think clearly</td>
<td>Can’t sleep</td>
<td>Headaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Disbelief</td>
<td>Less talkative</td>
<td>Lack of energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Lack of focus</td>
<td>Forgetful</td>
<td>Feeling of weakness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopelessness</td>
<td>Inability to concentrate</td>
<td>Don’t feel like eating</td>
<td>Sickness in the stomach (nausea)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>May believe it’s their own fault</td>
<td>Want to be alone</td>
<td>Sensitivity to noise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling sorry for themselves</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cry a lot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>Think about the loss a lot</td>
<td>Dream about the loss</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despair</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increase risk-taking behaviours such as alcohol abuse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td></td>
<td>Performance suffers, such as a drop in grades or work performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Worksheet 3.9: Understanding loss and grief

Understanding grief reactions
1. In a group of four, discuss how it would feel and how you might react if:
   - your favourite pet dies
   - you and your family emigrate to a different country where they speak a different language
   - your closest friend moves away.

2. As a group, devise a list of positive strategies that would help you cope in the above situations.
3. As a whole class, draw up a mind map to present all the positive strategies and discuss why they would be helpful for someone experiencing loss.
4. Discuss differences between the ways boys and girls react to loss. Identify reasons why such differences exist.
Helping yourself

Grieving can be a very painful process. It is important to be patient and gentle with yourself. Remember, it is okay to grieve. The following points are helpful in coping with grief:

- Spend time with people who care about you.
- Let others help you.
- Let your emotions out — crying is a great release.
- Talk to your parents or other family members whom you can trust and who can help you.
- Talk to a caring friend.
- Talk to a counsellor.
- Record your thoughts and feelings in a journal.
- Keep a regular daily routine whereby you get up at a set time; ensure you have regular meals.
- Eat a nutritious balanced diet.
- Exercise to relieve stress — go for walks, play team sports, swim.
- Set time aside to relax — listen to music, read a book or magazine, meditate.
- Avoid using alcohol and drugs to relieve your stress.
- See your doctor if you need further support.

Helping others

Support from friends and family is very important in the process of grieving. When a person you care about experiences a significant loss, you can support them in a range of ways, such as:

- listening to them
- accepting that they will have a range of emotions. They may cry, scream, be quiet or be angry — this is part of their grieving process.
- maintaining contact with them even if they do not want to do things. Call them or send a message.
- encouraging them to do positive things such as writing down their feelings and thoughts, reading or exercising
- encouraging them to talk to someone they can trust, such as a family member, teacher or school counsellor
- offering to go with them to get help or support. Remember, the grieving process takes time, so you will need to be supportive and patient. Let your friend do things at their own pace; encourage them to do positive things but don’t pressure them.

check & CHALLENGE

1. Identify the challenges young people face when they go from primary school to high school. Describe how you would respond to and cope with these challenges.
2. Predict and describe at least five challenges that you will face as a young adult.
3. Explain the types of experience that can lead to a grief reaction.
4. Identify three positive strategies that you could adopt to help you cope with loss.
5. Identify three positive strategies that you could adopt to support and assist others to cope with loss.