Here we are in early adulthood. This is the period of life when we are in our 20s and 30s.  
  
First, a look at physical development.  
  
  
If you are in your early 20s, you are enjoying your physiological peak. You may have more energy, endurance, and reproductive ability than at any other time in your life. Enjoy!  
In our 30s, we experience a slow, gradual decline in some abilities.   
One of the first noticeable signs of this is a loss of lung reserve capacity. If you exert yourself, you may notice that it takes longer to reach your normal breathing and heart rate than before.  
Most of this decline is due to a lack of exercise rather than aging alone, however. Busy lives in early adulthood sometimes means less time for working on physical fitness.  
  
Men may reach their peak of sexual responsiveness in their late teens and early 20s. They can achieve an erection more easily at this period of life.  
Women may become more sexually responsive as they move through early adulthood. This may be because they become less self-conscious or more confident or comfortable than before.  
  
  
About 10 to 15 percent of people who are of reproductive age experience infertility.  
Half of the time this may be due to the male having a low sperm count or not producing enough healthy sperm with enough motility to reach the egg.  
Half of the time the reason for infertility is because the female doesn’t ovulate or has pelvic inflammatory disease or some other blockage in the reproductive tract.  
About a third of couples conceive eventually without treatment.  
Treatment helps couples conceive about half of the time.   
  
Most fertility treatment is the use of drugs to stimulate ovulation.  
Five percent of fertility treatment involves in vitro fertilization where sperm cells fertilize the egg outside the body and the zygote is transferred to the uterus. In vitro fertilization has about a 5 to 30 percent success rate.  
The more closely the procedure can mimic normal fertilization, the higher the success rate.   
Gamete intra-fallopian transfer involves transferring sperm and egg into the fallopian tube where conception typically occurs.  
A small percentage of couples use zygote intra-fallopian transfer in which the fertilized egg is transferred to the fallopian tube to continue its journey to the uterus.  
  
Even though early adulthood is a peak for physiological condition, it’s also a time vulnerable to societal risks.  
Drug abuse peaks between 19 and 22 as people transition into adulthood. Rates fall after these years.  
However, the use of intoxicants is associated with acquaintance rape and contracting sexually transmitted infections.  
It also increases the risk of death due to homicide, motor vehicle accidents, and suicide.  
  
  
Here are some comparisons of violent deaths by sex and ethnic category taken from the National Center for Health Statistics.  
We can see first that risk is higher for males than for females in all ethnic categories.  
Homicide rates are particularly high for black males and suicide rates are particularly high for Native American males.  
  
The brain continues to develop during early adulthood. How does thinking change in this period?   
  
  
Have you ever heard a conversation between a 14 year old and someone in their mid-thirties? If it’s a parent and child, you may have heard the 14 year old enthusiastically describe a plan of action while the 35 year old was quick to explain why the plan was unreasonable.  
This practical, realistic approach is the hallmark of postformal thinking.  
Postformal thinking is abstract, realistic, and personal. In early adulthood, we become less concerned with what our peers think and experience reveals what is likely to happen. Not just what is possible.  
  
  
Dialectical thought is another feature of adult thought.  
While an adolescent may tend to think in either/or categories, the adult may begin to understand that there are strengths and weaknesses in both sides of an argument.   
Being able to take what is salient from both sides of opposing viewpoints and to synthesize the two into a personalized view is referred to as dialectical thought.  
Education promotes this when it entails exploring various positions on a topic.   
In our personal life, dialectical thought may result in greater tolerance of others with the recognition that no one is perfect.  
  
One concern over higher education is its relationship to the workplace.   
Derek Bok, former president of Harvard University, suggests that colleges and the workplace should be more closely aligned.   
The workplace needs people who are aware of global issues, who have effective communicative skills, and who have a sense of integrity or moral reasoning to offer the workplace. Universities and colleges need to address these issues.  
Higher education has also been criticized for graduating students who do not have critical thinking skills or adequate writing skills.   
  
  
Now we take a look at the social world of early adulthood.  
  
  
Havighurst provides a list of developmental tasks in early adulthood.   
These include achieving a sense of independence or learning how to be on one’s own, achieving a sense of identity, emotional stability, beginning a career, engaging in intimate relationships, learning how to participate in the community, establishing one’s own residence, and perhaps becoming parents.  
If you are in this age group and you find you days quite busy or even exhausting, it’s certainly understandable!  
  
  
One reason for engaging in such busy demands is because we feel that in the future, all will pay off. Many of our decisions are designed to show benefits later in adulthood.   
Young adults hope to be taken seriously as mature individuals and therefore may emphasize how old or experienced they are.  
They may also make decisions in order to earn the respect of others and to be viewed as adults.  
  
  
Daniel Levinson offered one of the first studies of adult transitions. In the late 1970s, he published his work entitled Seasons of a Man’s Life in which he described the transitions men faced as they launched as young adults and moved through midlife.  
The early 20s was a time of adult transition and making plans for the future.  
These plans were implemented for the duration of the 20s, but were reevaluated as they approached their 30s. Some revisions might occur during this transition and carried out through a settling down period that followed.  
At midlife, these men compared what they thought their lives would be like, referred to as the dream, and how it really was. During the midlife transition, further adjustments such as career changes or changes in personal relationships could be made as well.  
  
Erikson views early adulthood as a time of focusing on intimate relationships. Intimacy versus isolation.  
  
  
Friendships can be one source of intimacy.  
Teens often have collections of friends of both sexes. But having opposite sexed friends becomes a bit more problematic once an intimate relationship has been established.   
As a result, males and females tend to have same-sex friendships.   
It’s been suggested that the friendships that males share are focused on information sharing, debate, and problem-solving. But females are more likely to discuss personal problems and relationship issues.   
Do you think this is true in all cultures?  
  
Cohabitation refers to partners living together in an intimate relationship without being married.  
It’s estimated that there are about 7.5 million cohabiting couples in the United States. This reflects a 10 fold increase in the last 40 years.  
Of those, just under 800,000 are same-sex couples.   
In general, cohabiting relationships do not last as long as marriages. Cohabitation is a more permanent relationship in Europe. And with the decrease in remarriage rates and increase in cohabitation rates, the U. S. may become more similar to Europe in this regard.  
Younger partners tend to have shorter cohabiting relationships.  
Cohabitation continues to increase in the United States.  
  
  
Why do people cohabit?  
Many cohabiting relationships are considered to be a temporary arrangement prior to marriage. These premarital cohabiting couples do intend to marry, but are living together prior to marriage for practical or emotional reasons.  
Dating cohabitation does not last very long. This cohabiting relationship is more like a long date where partners continue to spend time together as long as it is enjoyable.  
The trial marriage pattern is one in which partners try out a marital type of relationship by moving in together. They’re not really evaluating a particular partner; rather they are trying out the relationship of marriage.  
Some couple substitute cohabitation for marriage and have no intentions of marrying. Cohabitation is their preference, perhaps because they’ve had failed marriages in the past, are philosophically opposed to marriage, or do not want to marry for other practical or financial reasons. These relationships tend to last longer.  
  
Same-sex couples can legally marry in Spain, Canada, Belgium, Argentina, Norway, Iceland, the Netherlands, South Africa, and Denmark.   
They can also legally marry in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, New Hampshire, and the District of Columbia.  
The issues facing same-sex couples tend to be similar to those of heterosexual couples: concerns about money, household chores, leisure time, sex, and children. But they do have to face additional stressors of stigma from others.  
Same-sex partners tend to have a more equal distribution of power within the relationship than in heterosexual couples.  
And when couples break up, there is a greater likelihood of still having contact with the ex because of a closer same-sex community of friends.  
  
  
Let’s explore mate selection.   
Although the age at first marriage has been steadily increasing in the United States, 25 for females and 27 for males, many do still marry while in early adulthood.  
One way to look at the mate selection process is to think of the marriage market as a place where social currency is exchanged. You bring with you a certain amount of social currency or qualities that make you a good potential make. And these are weighed against those things that might make you a less than ideal partner. This is taken into account when looking for a partner.   
Most of us do not want a “good deal” when making the exchange. Rather, we look for a fair exchange. This is because in relationships, the person with the least interest in the relationship has the most power. So if you want an equal distribution of power, you want both parties to need the relationship equally.  
The majority of marriages are homogamous with respect to social class, race, age, and religion. This similarity of social characteristics is referred to as homogamy.   
This selection is guided by social rules of endogamy (the expectation that you will marry within certain groups such as race and class), exogamy (the expectation that you will marry outside of other groups such as your sex), and propinquity or nearness. We tend to marry those who are near because those are the people we meet and with whom we socialize.  
  
  
Let’s explore a few theories of love.   
Sternberg offers a triangular approach to love.   
Love has three elements, intimacy or psychological closeness, passion or physical attraction, and commitment or the conscious decision to stay together.  
Most of the problems people have in love relationships are about either intimacy, “We don’t talk.” passion, “We never hold each other anymore.” or commitment, “I can’t count on my partner to stay with me.”  
  
  
We can analyze love relationships as having one or more of these elements.  
Liking is intimacy only. Infatuation is a relationship based on passion alone.   
Empty love is based solely on commitment.  
Romantic love includes both intimacy and passion.  
Companionate love is based on commitment and intimacy.  
Fatuous love is characterized by passion and commitment, but no intimacy.  
What do we want? The ideal in the west is consummate love. We want passion, commitment, and intimacy.  
  
John Lee explored types of love or love styles found in literature. You can look at your own style by taking the questionnaire at the end of this lesson.  
  
  
Pragma is practical love based on sensible qualities.  
Agape is a selfless love that has the other’s best interest at heart.  
Mania is possessive and insecure.  
  
  
Eros is erotic love in which a person feels consumed.  
Ludus is carefree, nonpossessive, and based on seduction.  
Storge is based on friendship.  
What’s your love style?  
  
Another way to look at relationships is to examine the extent to which partners are dependent or independent of one another.  
In the A frame relationship, partners lean on one another and there is little room for growth or change.  
  
  
The H frame relationship finds partners quite independent of one another. Their lives are parallel and there is little connection between the two.  
  
The M frame relationship is marked by interdependence. Partners have a close couple connection, but also a sense of self or individuality.  
  
  
Ira Reiss suggests that love is not stagnant. Rather, it depends on continuous interaction and renewal to be sustained.  
As a relationship begins, partners find out about one another and their common interests as they establish rapport.   
This is deepened with mutual sharing of more personal information through self-revelation.  
The relationship progresses as partners become more dependent on one another in day to day life.  
Eventually, the partners begin to rely on one another to fulfill their needs.  
But it doesn’t stop there. For love to continue, partners need to repeat the cycle and continue to establish rapport, engage in self-revelation, and be part of one another’s lives. When partners break up, the wheel begins to turn in the other direction. Partners talk less and gradually become disengaged.  
  
  
Kirsten looks at the process of disaffection or the psychological experience of breaking up.  
Before breaking up, couples may engage in “little fictions” or in maintaining little lies about one another in order to help the person feel good about themselves and the relationship. Flaws are seen as endearing. We’re often quite forgiving and positive about our partners in the beginning. And what could be better than having someone love your flaws!  
But when undergoing the process of disaffection, partners become disenchanted with one another. Or perhaps, only one partner is becoming disappointed.   
In the beginning phase, this partner may begin to pull away psychologically or start to try to change the partner’s flaws. There may still be optimism about the future of the relationship . . . as long as the partner makes corrections.  
But in the middle phase, disappointment builds and there’s less optimism about the future of the relationship.  
In the end, a sense of hopelessness creeps in and the disappointed partner may begin to plan their departure.  
In our next lesson, we will look at middle adulthood and expand upon adult relationships.