

ADOLESCENT COUNSELING
James R. Koch, MA
Prague, Czech Republic, October 2000

I. ESTABLISHING THE DOMINION MODEL (dynamic illustration of biblical truth)

As parents we need to allow, encourage, and prepare our children to grow up into a responsible exercising of dominion in their own domains. We need to remind them that their dominion is a gift from God, to be fully enjoyed with a deep sense of personal responsibility to God, our Creator.

II. INDIVIDUATION PROCESS:

A. Definition: The individuation process is the journey by which a person establishes one's own unique identity (as a child of God), separate from the limited assessment or pre-determined labeling which may come from one's family-of-origin (most often from parents) or one's extended family culture.

B. This process has been a God-intended part of human development since creation. Although this process unfolds over the entire course of one's adult life, the adolescent years create an especially volatile and chaotic season of individuation from one's parents.

C. Biblical acknowledgment of this process:

1. Gen. 2:24. *"Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother, and cleave unto his wife, and the two shall become one."*

► Each generation is intended by God to leave, cleave, and start over on their own.

2. Gen 37:1-10. Joseph, a young man of seventeen...had two dreams.

"When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him...but his father kept the matter in mind."

► Joseph's vision of his future differed from his father's view of that future.

3. Ezek. 18:2 *"What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel:*

The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? '..."

v. 4 *"For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son--both alike belong to me. The soul that sins is the one that will die."*

v. 14 *"But suppose this son has a son who sees all the sins that his father commits, and though he sees them, he does not do such things."*

- ▶ God holds each generation accountable to Him. He would not allow the people of Israel to fuse the generations together.

4. Lk. 2:41-49: Jesus at the temple as a 12-year-old boy.

“Didn’t you know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

5. Lk. 15:11 Parable of the (younger) lost son.

- ▶ Jesus used a story of a young son leaving his father to illustrate a greater truth about the Kingdom of God. The use of such a story acknowledged the reality that each generation is inclined to seek its own path (even if that path is an unhealthy or unholy one).

III. THE ADOLESCENT “PERIOD”

A. Definition: The “Adolescent period” is an awkward season of life that involves a greater rate of individuation and change than any other season of development. It is a season which has been profoundly influenced by industrialization and modernization (particularly over the past two centuries).

In today’s modern world, the adolescent develops physically, mentally, and sexually to the level where he/she is basically equipped to function as an adult (by age 13-16), but is discouraged from doing so in any meaningful way until much later (maybe not until age 25-27).

- ▶ This “period” is the by-product of several major economic and life-style shifts that have taken place over the past two centuries.
- ▶ Industrial “revolution”: from manual labor to machinery
- ▶ Urbanization: migration from the farm to the city
- ▶ Child labor laws: protection from abuses of child labor
- ▶ Public education: intended to instruct and prepare each new generation for a better life with more opportunities. The unforeseen result was that children would be removed from the fabric of daily survival. They would be placed in a “temporary holding pattern” and told to prepare for their more important “adult” life in the future.

B. The modernization and interconnectedness of countries around the world has created a variation of this “adolescent period” in virtually every industrialized nation.

- ▶ For the adolescent there has been a loss of rites-of-passage for young men and women moving toward adulthood.

- For the adolescent, there has also been a loss of meaningful participation in the fabric of life. They are often left to create their own sense of meaning and purpose, as well as their own sense of urgency.

C. Discussion: In what ways has this become the reality for adolescents in the Czech Republic or your country of origin?

IV. JOURNEY FROM ATTACHMENT TO INDIVIDUATION TO MATURE PERSONHOOD

A. Healthy parent-child relationships always center around a journey from attachment to individuation to mature personhood.

- Attachment involves the sense of bonding, of belonging, and coming to know that you really matter to your parents (primary care-givers) and family
- Individuation involved the identification of oneself as separate from and different from one's mother and father.
- Mature Personhood involves the realization that one can maintain or come back into a relationship with one's parents--by choice--after having established the reality of one's own identity and relationships.

V. THE "DYNAMIC FAMILY" MODEL: Illustrating attachment and individuation.

A. The family experiences significant changes over the course of time. The following is a life-span model of the dynamic family and can be used both for instruction and for diagnosis. (See the diagrams that follow, illustrating the seven basic stages of parenting):

1. Creating One Flesh: the couple creates and nurtures intimacy.
 2. Becoming a Family: the child interrupts the one-flesh intimacy.
 3. Expanding the Family: the parents create a sense of belonging for all members (while children continue to grow and differentiate).
 4. Moving towards Autonomy: the parents allow more diversity and separate thinking (while sharing their children with others).
 5. Establishing Autonomous Decision-Making: the children initiate more and more decision-making and push for greater individuation.
 6. Establishing Autonomous Headquarters: leaving home.
 7. Becoming a Mature Person: the adult children return--by choice-- to a different type of relationship with their parents.
- Throughout these dynamic stages, the family has a primary task: to prepare the children to eventually leave home and relate directly to God (and others) as a new generation.