

## 15.12: Adulthood emergent: The bridge between adolescence and adulthood

The next stage of development is **emerging adulthood** and is characterized by a time in between in which the exploration of identity is centered on work and love, which occurs from approximately 18 years old to the middle and end of the 20s.

¿When does a person become an adult? There are many ways to answer this question. In the United States, legally it is considered an adult at 18 years old, but other definitions of adulthood vary widely; In sociology, for example, a person can be considered an adult when they become self-sufficient, choose a career, get married or start a family. The ages at which we reach these markers vary from person to person, as well as from culture to culture. For example, 50 years ago, a young adult with a high school diploma could immediately enter the workforce and ascend the corporate ladder. That is no longer the case, a bachelor's degree and even graduate degrees are required more and more, even for entry-level jobs (Arnett, 2000). Additionally, many students take longer (five or six years) to complete a university degree while working and attending school at the same time. After graduation, many young adults return home because they have difficulties finding work.



Figure 15.32: Emerging adulthood. (The image by [año de ciudad](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#))

This is a relatively new period of development in life, Jeffrey Arnett (2000) explains that emerging adulthood is neither adolescence nor young adulthood. People in this period of age have left behind the relative dependence of childhood and adolescence, but they have not yet assumed the responsibilities of adulthood. "Emerging adulthood is a period of life in which many different directions continue to be possible, when one decides with some certainty about the future, when the scope of independent exploration of life possibilities is greater for the majority of people than in any other period of the life course" (Arnett, 2000, p. 469).<sup>75</sup>

### Contributors and attributions

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