



328en13



## 13

# ADOLESCENCE

**E**ach one of us passes through a particular stage in life when we are caught unaware by the sudden changes in our body or when our elders do not let off go a single change to say that you're grown up but not grown enough to take decisions. This statement must be quite familiar to you. The period of growing up to an adult from a child is known as adolescence.

Adolescence is one of the important stages in the life span of a human being. It is the phase when very rapid changes take place both physically as well as psychologically. The literal meaning of adolescence is to 'grow up'. This means accomplishing a number of developmental tasks. An adolescent has to adjust to the changes taking place in his/her body and behaviour. He/She realizes that he/she is no longer a child but has not become an adult. What does the growing adolescents experience and feel? How does he/she cope with the bodily changes? Why does she/he behave the way she/he does? What are some of the psychological characteristics of adolescents? These are some of the questions this lesson will help you to understand.



## OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- describe the importance of adolescence;
- explain the psychological characteristics of adolescents;
- describe physical and psychological changes during adolescence;
- enumerate secondary sex characteristics of boys and girls;



- list the developmental tasks faced by adolescents; and
- enumerate the problems faced by adolescents related to body and self
- indicate the relationship between risk taking characteristics of adolescents and substance abuse, STD, HIV/AIDS and premarital pregnancy.

### **13.1 WHAT IS ADOLESCENCE?**

The stage of adolescence is one of the significant stages of development in human beings which helps in the transition from childhood to adulthood. It starts from about twelve years of age and continues through eighteen years. This period is marked by rapid and significant physical and psychological transformation of the child like maturation of the sex organs and increase in the height and weight. Let us study about them.

#### **Physical changes during adolescence: Puberty and Transition**

During adolescence significant increment is noted in the following five areas of physical growth:

- i) Height
- ii) Weight
- iii) Shoulder width
- iv) Hip width
- v) Muscle strength

The changes during puberty are dramatic. Within a few years the school going child is transformed into a full grown adult. These changes can be classified as.

- (1) Harmonal changes
- (2) Changes in body size and proportions
- (3) Muscle fat make up and other internal changes
- (4) Sexual maturation

Increase in height and weight is associated with redistribution of fat in the body and an increase in the proportion of bone and muscle tissues. The growth spurt in boys generally begins about two years later than it does in girls, but, continues for a longer period. There are also changes in body proportion. Girls generally broaden in the hips and the boys mostly in the shoulders. The waist line proportionately drops.

There are also major changes in the secretion of hormones by the endocrine glands in the body. The gonads, or the sex gland, begins to function bringing about sexual

development. Both boys and girls develop sex characteristics, which are broadly classified as

- (i) Primary and
- (ii) Secondary

  
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Primary sex characteristics in boys refer to the growth of the male sex organs which include the penis, scrotum and testes. For girls the primary sex characteristics refer to the growth of sex organs like uterus, fallopian tube and breasts. Ovulation and menstruation among the girls and production of semen among the boys are primary sexual developments directly related to reproductive capacity. There are many secondary changes associated with the development of primary sexual characteristics. Development of breasts among the girls, beard among the boys and growth of pubic and underarm hair and changes in voice are some secondary sex characteristics. These sex characteristics are acquired over a span of time. The period of sexual maturity and reproductive capacity is called puberty.

## 13.2 DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS DURING ADOLESCENCE

The adolescent has to attain particular attitudes, habits and skills if he or she has to function effectively as an adult. These are called the developmental tasks of adolescents.

During infancy and childhood, for example, the developmental tasks consist of learning to take solid food, to achieve physiological stability, and to form simple concepts of social and physical reality. During middle childhood, the tasks are to learn physical skills necessary for games and to learn appropriate sex roles. You have already read about these developmental demands in the previous lessons.

A developmental task is a task which pertains to a certain period in the life of the individual. Successful performance of the developmental tasks leads to happiness and success in later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by the society and difficulty in handling later tasks.

The main developmental tasks for adolescents are listed below.

- Accepting one's physique as it is and using the body effectively.
- Achieving new and more mature relationship with agemates of both sexes.
- Achieving a masculine or feminine social role.
- Achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults.



- Preparing oneself to have economic independence through an enjoyable and productive career.
- Preparing for marriage and family life.
- Desiring and achieving socially responsible behaviour.
- Acquiring a set of values and ethical system and developing an ideology as a guide to behaviour.

Thus an adolescent has to develop and acquire a wide range of skills and abilities. These relate to all aspects of development: physical, emotional, social, moral and cognitive. A supportive environment at home and school can greatly facilitate the accomplishment of these developmental tasks.

### **13.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ADOLESCENTS**

In the previous section, you learnt about the physical (bodily) changes which take place during adolescence. In this section you will learn about the psychological changes that take place among adolescents. These psychological changes appear in the areas of emotional, social, cognitive, and moral development. Let us now examine them in detail.

#### **13.3.1 Emotional Development**

During adolescence, the individual faces a wide range and variety of emotions. These include both positive as well as negative emotions. Happiness is experienced as joy, exuberance, exhilaration, etc. and sadness is experienced as depression, unhappiness, anxiety, fear, etc. In addition, feelings of anger, rebellion and protest also emerge. Interestingly, emotions of loyalty, patriotism and sacrifice for the nation also develop during adolescence.

Each of the above emotions is felt very intensely. In fact the strength and intensity of adolescent emotions is one of their prominent characteristics. Adolescents tend to express everything in an exaggerated form. It is common to hear adolescents who express their liking for food as love-such as “I love Ice-cream”, “I love cakes”, etc. Similarly, dislike is expressed as ‘hatred – “I hate that person” or “I hate eating fruits” etc.

Mood swings also occur quite frequently. This is another prominent feature among the adolescents. Sometimes they are happy, sometimes sad. Sometimes they have a high degree of patriotic zeal, but a few minutes later they become disillusioned or

angry. This makes their behaviour somewhat unpredictable. Sex related emotional experiences like ‘crushes’ and ‘infatuation’ also begin to surface during this period.

### 13.3.2 Social Development

  
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In the social sphere, adolescents undergo a lot of changes in their interpersonal relationships and they also begin to understand society and its diverse influences. The dependence on parents noted during childhood gets transformed into dependence on friends and peers. In fact, friendship becomes very important for the adolescents and most of them like to spend more time with their friends than with family. Being recognized as a popular member of a peer group is an important adolescent need. The adolescents often get into argument with their parents and elders since they want to break away from their control.

Attraction towards members of the opposite sex is another prominent characteristic of the adolescent. This is natural and occurs mainly because of the sexual maturity taking place among the adolescents.

The adolescents also begin to acquire beliefs, opinions, attitudes and stereotypes about society based upon their own understanding. Media becomes a very powerful source of influence in this stage, especially music and television. These provide adolescents with role models like film heroes, great athletes, etc., whom they try to emulate. Such models help the adolescents realize their fantasies and dreams.

Body image becomes a very important concern for the adolescents. Having an appropriate figure in fact, is almost a teenage obsession. In addition, fashion and glamour reflected in the style of dressing, sporting, make-up, having the right hairstyle etc. become very important in their lives. These are associated with the social roles that the adolescents want to develop and to experiment with.

### 13.3.3 Cognitive Development

The thinking and reasoning skills of adolescents expand substantially. They become more competent especially compared to the earlier stage of late childhood. The adolescents enter the stage of Piaget’s “formal operations” which means that they can now understand abstract concepts and think in terms of probabilities as well.

They develop the capacity to think both inductively and deductively. They can also reflect, analyse, judge, hypothesize and discuss various points of views. Adolescents' own opinion about an issue becomes very important to them. This often gets the adolescents into hot arguments with parents, teachers and friends.



Adolescents begin to question every thing like an experimenter. They draw conclusions only when they are convinced. They also tend to defend their point of view very rigidly. There is a noticeable increment in their vocabulary. Adolescents can attend to several intellectual tasks simultaneously making this a very promising stage of intellectual development.

### **13.3.4 Moral Development**

In the moral sphere, too, the adolescents, undergo very significant changes. They now develop a firm ethical sense or an understanding of what is right and wrong. The ideas are based not only on what the parents and elders have taught but on adolescents' own experience. They begin to question the social and moral codes prevalent in society and accept only those which they are convinced of.

The eagerness to be a nice-boy/nice girl and to please others ceases to be important now. It gets replaced by a questioning mind and conviction about adolescents own stand on the issues.

During this stage, adolescence begin to understand the importance of law in maintaining order in the society. Further, they begin to evolve a set of personal values which become guiding principles in life. According to Gilligan (1982), Kohlberg's formulation of morality emphasized justice, while ignoring or underplaying the role of feeling and care in moral decision-making. Gilligan herself, and other theorists, argue that moral choices are more flexible and complex than kohlberg's work implies, and that morality may be simultaneously guided by several sets of considerations.

To sum up, it may be said that adolescence is the stage of identity crisis, when the individual is neither a child nor an adult. With the bodily changes and corresponding psychological changes which take place, the individual is forced to reflect on the question, "who am I?". The answer to this question is not easy to find and it often remains a pre-occupation throughout adolescence. Towards the end of adolescence, however, the person emerges with a sense of identity.



### **INTEXT QUESTION 13.1**

- a. Fill in the blanks with appropriate words:

1. During adolescence emotions are felt very \_\_\_\_\_.

2. During adolescence there is movement away from parents towards \_\_\_\_\_.

3. The adolescent is cognitively in Piaget's stage of \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Frequent \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ lead to the unpredictability of adolescent emotions.
5. In the area of moral development adolescents begin to develop a set of \_\_\_\_\_.
- b. Name the area in which psychological changes appear?
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### 13.4 ADJUSTMENT AND COPING WITH ADOLESCENT PROBLEMS

The physical and psychological characteristics of adolescents and the nature of the developmental tasks which they are expected to face often lead to crisis in development. Basically adolescents face problems related to their home, school and society. Table 13.1 lists some common problems faced by adolescents relating to their own self, family, school and society.

**Table 13.1: Common Adolescent Problem**

Problems related to body and self	Problems related to family	Problems related to school	Problems related to society
Body image	Authoritative parenting	Strict Teachers	Gender bias
Pimples	Poor rapport with parents	Partial treatment	Caste related
Complexion	Lack of communication	Closed school	problems
Eating disorders	Low socio-economic background	Atmosphere	Generation gap
Body changes		Not acceptable by Classmates	Orthodox practices
Moodiness	Non conducive atmosphere		
Touchiness	Space constraint	Poor marks	Repressive
Anger	Comparison with others	Too much homework	Over expectation
Hypersensitivity			Lack of friends
Feelings of rebellion		No co-curricular participation	
Crushes			
Infatuation		Long school hours	
Day dreams			



The problems listed above represent only some common examples. Each individual adolescent may have specific combination of similar and other problems. The more serious problems include drug addiction, alcoholism, smoking, truancy, sexual obsessions, etc. These problems may not appear in all the individuals.

### 13.5 SOME CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS FACED BY ADOLESCENTS

By now, we know that the experiences of adolescents are products of both biological and social factors. The biological changes are universal. The social expectations from children about the way of behaving, developing new interpersonal relationships often give rise to moments of uncertainty and self doubt.

Up till now you have studied about how adolescence is a major transition period for an individual. Adolescence is a phase which makes a person enter into the adult world. Growing up into adulthood makes one experience problems in various domains of life including personal, social and educational.

Stereotypes and misconceptions related to adolescence period has given rise to various problems among the adolescents. Some of the critical issues include substance abuse, teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease and AIDS. Let us try to understand these issues in detail.

- a) **Substance Abuse :** Teenage substance abuse often has lifelong consequences. Dependence on alcohol and hard drugs to deal with daily stresses reduce their responsible decision making skills. They also increase serious adjustment problems including depression and antisocial behaviour. To avoid this problem proper guidance and creating conducive environment to channelize energy of adolescents are needed so that they can cope up with stress.
- b) **Sexually Transmitted Disease :** Another widespread problem, recently observed throughout the world is Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD). Teenagers are in greatest danger of getting affected by STD. They are the ones who engage in irresponsible sexual behaviour. Adolescents should be helped in removing their false beliefs about sex which put them at higher risk. The adolescents should be provided proper sex education in an effective manner.
- c) **Teenage Pregnancy:** Becoming a responsible parent is a challenging and stressful experience. It is especially difficult for adolescents. Child rearing imposes lasting hardships on both the mother and the child. It also builds stress. After going through so many problems of adolescents let us see the

reasons related to these problems are: Lack of proper guidance from teachers and parents, inappropriate effect of media, wrong association in peer groups, and nervousness towards physical changes, faulty perceptions towards sex instincts and mood swings. The society and family can provide young people with good reasons to postpone early childbearing by expanding their educational, vocational and employment opportunities. Society and family should provide proper guidance to adolescents regarding teenage pregnancy and its problems.

Through guidance and counseling process, adolescents can be helped to solve these problems. In particular, career counseling and vocational guidance can make them aware of various career opportunities and educational choices. Personal and social counselling can help adolescents in solving their problems. The family also plays a crucial role in solving these problems. Parents, elders and peers can come as useful help for the growing adolescents.



### WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- Adolescence is an important stage in human development. It is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood.
- This period is marked by rapid physical and psychological transformation.
- Major changes in body functioning are introduced by the secretion of hormones by the various glands. Reproductive capacity and sex characteristics also develop during this phase.
- The period during which the bodily changes occur to bring about sexual maturity is called puberty. The puberty can be divided into three stages — prepubescent, pubescent, post pubescent.
- Some of the developmental tasks of adolescents are achieving new and mature relations with classmates, achieving appropriate masculine/feminine social role and achieving emotional independence etc.
- Other than the physical changes, some psychological changes like emotional development, cognitive and moral development, also take place.
- Some common problems of adolescents occur in relation to adjustment in respect of home and family, self, school and society.
- Development of several life skills and guidance and counseling can help the adolescents for a smooth transition to adulthood.

  
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### **TERMINAL EXERCISE**

1. How do adolescents express their emotions? Give illustrative examples.
2. What are the prominent social characteristics shown by the adolescents.
3. How do adolescents differ from children in their cognition?
4. List some developmental tasks of the adolescents?



### **ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS**

#### **13.1**

- a. 1. intensely  
2. peers  
3. formal operations  
4. mood swings  
5. personal values
- b. The area of psychological changes are emotional, social cognitive and moral.

### **HINTS TO TERMINAL EXERCISE**

1. Refer section 13.3.1
2. Refer section 13.3.2
3. Refer section 13.3.3
4. Refer section 13.2