

LESSON 13

ADOLESCENCE

SUMMARY

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.

What is Adolescence?

Adolescence is a significant time period as it bridges the transition from childhood to adulthood. This period spans from 12 to 18 years of age.

Physical Changes during adolescence – Puberty and Transition

Physical growth is observed in the following areas- Height, weight, shoulder width, Hip width, Muscle strength.

The changes that occur in adolescence – Hormonal changes, changes in body proportions, muscle fat make-up and other internal changes, sexual maturation.

The growth spurt in boys generally begins about two years later than it does in girls, but, continues for a longer period. Both boys and girls

develop sex characteristics, which are broadly classified as-

Primary sex characteristics

- In Males - growth of the male sex organs (penis, scrotum and testes), production of semen.
- In Females - growth of sex organs like uterus, fallopian tube and breasts, Ovulation and menstruation.

Secondary sex characteristics –

- involve development of breasts among the girls, beard among the boys and growth of pubic and underarm hair and changes in voice
- These sex characteristics are acquired over a span of time.

The period of sexual maturity and reproductive capacity is called **puberty**.

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. 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.

Psychological characteristics of Adolescents

Psychological changes appear in the areas of emotional, social, cognitive, and moral development. Let's have a look at the different aspects of psychological development of adolescence.

Emotional Development

During adolescence, the individual faces a wide range and variety of emotions. These include both positive (happiness, joy) as well as negative (sad, anxiety) emotions. Each of the above emotions is felt very intensely. Mood swings also occur quite frequently. Sex related emotional experiences like 'crushes

and infatuation' also begin to surface during this period.

Social Development

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.

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.

The adolescents also begin to acquire beliefs, opinions, attitudes and stereotypes about society based upon their own understanding.

Body image becomes a very important concern for the adolescents.

Cognitive Development

The thinking and reasoning skills of adolescents expand substantially. The adolescents enter the stage of Piaget's "formal operations". They develop the capacity to think both inductively and deductively.

Moral Development

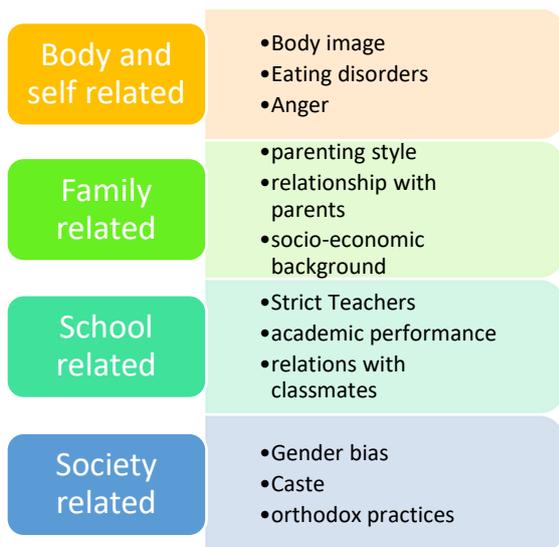
They now develop a firm ethical sense or an understanding of what is right and wrong. The ideas are

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.

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.

Common adolescent problems



The more serious problems include drug addiction, alcoholism, smoking, truancy, sexual obsessions, etc.

Some Contemporary problems faced by Adolescents

The social expectations from children about the way of behaving, developing new interpersonal relationships often

give rise to moments of uncertainty and self-doubt.

Some of the critical issues include-

- **Substance abuse** - dependence on alcohol and hard drugs to deal with daily stresses reduce their responsible decision-making skills.
- **Sexually transmitted diseases** - Teenagers are in greatest danger of getting affected by STD. They are the ones who engage in irresponsible sexual behaviour.
- **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.

Through guidance and counselling process, adolescents can be helped to solve these problems. In particular, career counselling 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.

Evaluate yourself

1. Discuss the psychological characteristics of adolescent development.
2. What are the common adjustment problems in adolescent?
3. How can we help an adolescent in overcoming the critical problems like – substance abuse, STDs?