



Notes

ADOLESCENCE AND YOUNG ADULTHOOD

I am Mahika. I am a 16 year old girl. I have many interests and I want to do so many things. But I am very confused about who I am and what I can do. I have grown tall but I am told that I am still young to discuss family matters. My primary task is to study all the time but I cannot decide what I want to become. My brother is 14 years old. He is also confused about himself. My father keeps telling him that he should rather grow up to be ‘macho’. But my mother and grandmother still consider him the ‘younger baby’ of the family. I am his elder sister but sometimes he is expected to be my ‘protector’. With our growing age, our capacities have changed and so have our responsibilities.

As children we want to grow up soon believing that grown ups have certain privileges and rights which we don’t seem to have as children. But soon we realize that childhood (at least of middle and higher socio-economic status group) was rather carefree as compared to adolescence and young adulthood. Maturity brings with it a set of privileges as well as challenges of all sorts, responsibilities and concerns. Although there is no definite age for the beginning of adolescence and young adulthood yet adolescence is seen to begin by age 12 years and young adulthood is considered to begin by 18 years of age. Young adulthood may extend up to early to mid 30s. In this chapter we will read about different life changes and challenges as one enters the stage of adolescence and moves through young adulthood.

Human Development

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

After studying this lesson, learner :

- explain the key characteristics that take place during adolescence and young adulthood; and
- reflect on various issues like problems in relationships, family issues, body image problems and the influence of media on adolescents.



Notes

14.1 PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT DURING ADOLESCENCE AND YOUNG ADULTHOOD

Adolescence is a period of rapid physical maturation. This is first time in life, when obvious differences between boys and girls appear, which involves several bodily changes and hormonal upsurge. Features and proportions of the body undergo changes. This is also the period when an individual becomes capable of reproducing. It is marked by puberty.

Adolescent girls experience menarche, which is the first menstruation. The age for menarche is around 9-15 years. Girls also experience growth in height, widening of hips, appearance of hair in armpits and pubic area, breast enlargement and so forth.

Adolescent boys experience increase in height, size of penis and testicles, growth of hair over different parts of the body such as face and armpits, changes in voice and widening of shoulders.

The growth spurt begins about 2 two years earlier for girls than boys but it lasts longer for boys. For Indian girls, growth spurt occurs at approximately between 10 and 13 years of age and for Indian boys, it occurs between 12 to 17 years of age (Sharma, 1999). It is important to note that the most significant factors that influence puberty among boys and girls are heredity, hormones, weight and body fat.

As adolescent years end, a person enters the new stage of life that is called young adulthood. Generally by this stage one witnesses the completion of physical and sexual maturity. Individuals at this stage have gained their adult height. They continue to gain weight over the coming years. They are at the peak of their physical strength. They are able to undertake strenuous tasks for long hours. Young men and women also become more comfortable and in-control of their sexual development.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 14.1

Match the following in column A with Column B-

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| a. Adolescent boys | (i) Widening of hips |
| b. Beginning of growth spurt for boys | (ii) Widening of shoulders |
| c. Adolescent girls | (iii) 12 to 17 years of age |
| d. Beginning of growth spurt for girls | (iv) First menstruation |
| e. Menarche | (v) 10 and 13 years of age |

14.2 COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT DURING ADOLESCENCE AND YOUNG ADULTHOOD

You have already studied the first three stages of cognitive development as proposed by Piaget. The fourth stage of this theory is called formal operations. It begins from 11 years of age. This coincides with adolescence. In this stage, individuals are able to move beyond concrete experiences. They begin to think in abstract and more logical ways. They become more systematic in solving problems. Some of the cognitive attainments of adolescents are as under-

- **Hypothetical deductive reasoning:** Adolescents think more like scientists. They think of all possible solutions of a problem and systematically test those solutions. In other words, they develop hypothesis and systematically try out those options and choose the best possible option. For example, when given the task of seeing what affects the speed of the pendulum, they test like scientists varying the mass of the bob tied to the string, the length of the string, from how far we swing the pendulum, the height at which the pendulum is and so forth. They consider all explicit and implicit factors in arriving at the solution of the problem.
- **Propositional thought:** Formal operational thinkers can solve problems merely through verbal presentation of the problems. They understand relations between objects by making logical inferences mentally. They do not need to see the related concrete elements. Consider the statements given below-
 - ❖ Elephants are smaller than dogs



Notes

Human Development



Notes

- ❖ Dogs are smaller than mice.
- ❖ Then which are the largest animals?

Formal operational thinkers are likely to focus only on the verbal logic of the statements; detaching them from the actual real-life situations where elephant is the largest of the three animals.

- **Idealistic thinking:** Adolescents might think what ideal standards are and they might compare themselves and others against those standards. Here, the adolescents will compare themselves with their role models and try to become like them if they think they are already not like them; or as good as they are. They will also think about an ideal society that they would like to make around them.
- **Adolescent egocentrism:** Adolescents are at times self-conscious. This is reflected in their belief that others are always interested in and following what they are doing. They think they are unique and hence that are always under the watchful eyes of others. They believe that they are ‘on-stage’ and everyone is always looking at them. This makes them conscious, sometimes of the way they look or appear and at other times, of what they do. This aspect of adolescent egocentrism that involves attention-getting behaviour is called *imaginary audience*. In addition to this, they develop *personal fable* which often shows in their feeling of being unique and indestructible.

During young adulthood, one reaches rational and logical adult cognition. Their thoughts become organized. They are now able to understand multiple perspectives of a situation and how different persons may perceive the same problem differently. Their competence in making decisions increases manifolds as they become better at generating options. They become more spontaneous in their use of strategies such as planning, monitoring and considering options. Other than that, their ability for critical thinking improves. They become better equipped in putting forth their points of view more sensibly. In fact their meta-cognition i.e. their ability to think about their own thinking improves and they are able to manage their thoughts more efficiently. This helps them to deliberately focus their attention and concentrate better on their tasks at hand.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 14.2

Fill in the blanks-

1. Thinking of adolescents is and
2. The ability of adolescents to think of all possible solutions of a problem and systematically test those solutions is called.....
3. Imaginary audience and personal fable in adolescents is a feature of
4. Ability of young adults to think about their own thinking is termed as

14.3 SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT DURING ADOLESCENCE AND YOUNG ADULTHOOD

Transition from childhood to adolescence brings with it an upheaval of emotions and social expectations. As children start with growth spurt, expectations from their parents, older persons in family, neighbourhood, teachers and peers towards them start changing. The question of 'Who am I' comes up every now and then. This becomes the major cause of role confusion among adolescent boys and girls. Read the case studies given below to understand the issue of self and identity of adolescents' better—

Case Studies Sushma- Sushma is 13 years old. She has grown taller enough to reach her mother's height. Physically she looks mature but she is very uncomfortable with her growing body. She does not understand why her mother and grandmother make a fuss about the 'right clothing' that she is now supposed to wear. In her family there are certain restrictions on her food and movement inside and outside home while she is menstruating which makes her feel pulled down. She fails to understand why when she feels absolutely fine to run around and play like any other days in the ground, still she is asked to abstain from rough-housing. **Samaira-** Samaira feels that everyone at home expects her to behave like older people as she has grown up but unlike grown ups she has no privacy of her own. She cannot choose for how long she can talk over phone and whom she can be friends with. Moreover, she feels confused and sometimes annoyed why she cannot voice her opinions over matters of concern in her family. Whenever she makes a comment about any of their relatives, she is quickly dismissed by her parents and grandparents on account of being too young to speak up in 'adult' matters. It makes her wonder, on the one hand she keeps questioning her place and



Notes

Human Development



Notes

role in the larger society and how she can play a key role in making the world around her a better place and on the other hand here at her own home she is still treated 'like a child'. **Mandeep**- Mandeep is a 16 year old boy who likes to drive a scooty. He is often asked by his mother to go to the market on his scooty and buy household items. He also goes to drop and pick his sister who is one year older to him to the tuition centre (as her mother considers it is not safe for her to go alone, especially during late evening). Mandeep likes to spend time with his friends in the evening and his father does not like this. His father often scolds him for wasting his precious time with '*useless boys who have no goals in life and will never do anything in life*'. Mandeep feels bad at his father's opinion about his friends who are important to him. He argues that he is old enough to decide who his friends will be and what will be his interaction with them.

In the three case studies mentioned above, the challenges faced when one transitions from childhood to adolescence are clearly evident. Adolescents feel overwhelmed by the fact that at times they are expected to be grown ups and behave like ones with regard to clothing, mannerisms, actions, responsibilities and tasks one can contribute in and at other times they are told to keep quite in matters of adult concerns. Likewise, they feel they are often denied their right to their privacy and choice; they have to face uninvited and unnecessary surveillance by parents, grandparents, neighbours, teachers and other adult members of the larger community.

Issues such as these are related to adolescents' confusion of their role. At one instance they are considered to be 'old enough' and at other instances, they are expected to behave as 'children'. They get conflicting messages from the various social agents such as parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents, teachers and so on in their environment. This makes it difficult for them to always behave appropriately in different social situations. They are already struggling with the physical, cognitive and socio-emotional changes occurring within themselves and conflicting information from the social environment around them makes it even more difficult for them to deal with such huge changes both within and outside.

Emotionally, adolescent boys and girls experience unusual swings of emotions. Sometimes they feel very good and show heights of love and affection and at other times they show loneliness, sadness and disinterest. Changes in hormones at this stage may be held responsible for such extreme emotional reactions of adolescents. You can also see these in the case studies mentioned in the box above. Unlike younger children, adolescents are capable of reacting strongly to what they perceive as unjustified treatment; hence, conflicts between them and their parents and other figures of authority

can occur frequently.

During the stage of young adulthood, young men and women become apt at identifying and managing their emotions. They are no more slaves of mood swings. They are better at expressing their emotions in socially appropriate ways. They have most often resolved the confusions about their role and are more comfortable with their sense of self and identity. Young adult's interactions with others around them become more responsible. Unlike adolescents who may some days behave responsibly and at other days may become totally irresponsible, young adult's behaviour with others becomes more coherent and predictable.



Notes



INTEXT QUESTIONS 14.3

1. What challenges does adolescents face while growing up from childhood to adolescence?



ACTIVITY

Ask four adolescent boys and girls to answer the following questions-

- Who am I?
- What are my qualities that make me unique and different from others
- What is the goal of my life?

Compare their responses with each other.

14.4 ISSUES AND CONCERNS DURING ADOLESCENCE

There are a number of concerns that adolescents have to deal with in their everyday lives. These revolve around their career choices, body image, early and late maturation, substance use and drugs, engagement with media and technology and so on. These are discussed at length below.

14.4.1 Career Choices

Adolescence is the period of life when one is expected to decide about the future occupation that one may settle in. As adolescents are struggling with their quest for identity, they may one day declare to 'become something' and the next day they would declare to become something completely different; and this goes on until they finally

Human Development



Notes

resolve this confusion and settle down on any one path. Gender differences are observed in adolescents' decisions regarding career. Boys are pushed more by their parents to settle down in their careers. For girls, settling into income generating occupations is more a matter of personal choice. Moreover, girls in the lower socio-economic group and in rural areas, despite laws setting age limits for marriage, are pushed into early marriage.

14.4.2 Body Image

Have you observed how much time adolescents spend looking into the mirror examining the minutest details about their bodies, especially their face. This is one of the psychological aspects of the physical changes that take place in adolescents. Their over pre-occupation and consciousness about their bodies heightens during puberty and continues until late adolescence. Adolescents are trying to understand and accept the changes occurring in their bodies and this makes them over-conscious of the way they look.

At times, adolescent boys and girls compare their bodies and the overall way they look with popular models. When dissatisfied with their bodies, they develop a negative body image of themselves. To achieve 'near perfect' bodies, they put themselves to extreme dietary restrictions and exercise regimes. Girls often get over-concerned especially with their weights. This may lead to unhealthy eating and excessive dieting. Anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder where adolescents nearly starve themselves in order to control their weight and remain thin. Another eating disorder involves adolescents to first eat lavishly and later self-induce vomiting.

14.4.3 Early and Late Maturation

Did you enter puberty around the same time as your friends did? Or was it earlier or later than them? Did your friends who entered puberty early or late perceived themselves any differently?

Early maturing boys often perceive themselves more positively and develop positive peer relations as against early maturing girls. This is so because early maturation in girls increases their vulnerability to a number of social problems. These girls face issues related to independence, dietary restrictions as per their culture and early sexual experiences. Although these girls begin to attain physical maturity but socially and cognitively they remain immature and this makes them susceptible to problems. They find it difficult to anticipate the long term problems accompanied by early independence and experimentation.

14.4.4 Substance Use and Drugs

You might have seen young boys buying cigarettes and other forbidden substances from unscrupulous vendors outside schools and other public places. Although government has put strict restrictions on selling of such harmful products to children and adolescents yet the above mentioned sight is not uncommon. Adolescents often get into the trap of trying these substances 'once' to either 'show off' to their friends and others or sometimes under extreme peer pressure to consume these and later become habitual to them. At times, they start drinking alcohol, caffeine and smoke cigarettes as a way to cope with adolescence related stresses. Later, these drugs themselves become responsible for impeding and interfering with healthy coping mechanisms. Once habituated, adolescents find it difficult to leave these drugs. They fail to acknowledge that substance use and drugs have detrimental long term physical, socio and psychological effects on adolescents. These pose special health hazards to their development.

Some of the Symptoms of Drug Addiction

- Feeling that one has to take the drug regularly
- Having intense urge for the drug
- Over time, needing more and more quantities of drug
- Keeping a constant supply of drug so that one is not short of it
- Arranging for money by unfair means to buy drugs
- Continuing to take drugs even after knowing its harmful effects

14.4.5 Engagement with Media and Technology

In the contemporary times, adolescents have exposure to all types of media, it may be print or electronic. They have access to newspapers, television, Internet in phones, laptops, cyber cafes and so forth. This opens doors of unfiltered information to them. Some of them may discuss about this information with their friends, who have only as much understanding to deal with such information as they themselves have. Sometimes, adolescents' ability to deal with such information, which may be related to health, nutrition, sexuality, relationships, career and so forth, may be limited. This may make them vulnerable and susceptible to make 'wrong' choices.

At times, they may construct an entire virtual self-image where they interact with people on the internet with a disguised identity. They may post pictures and information about



Notes

Human Development



Notes

themselves that is so untrue and mismatched with what they truly are in reality. By doing so, they try to live a fantasy life which seems unthreatening. Their engagement with media may sometimes turn compulsive and they cannot stop themselves from always being 'online'; posting about every little aspect and event of their lives; and checking their and other persons 'status'.

14.4.6 Role of Peers, Parents and Teachers

With the advent of adolescence, relationship with significant members undergoes changes. Peers become more important and influence significantly the adolescents' lives. Adolescents like to confide in their friends on matters that are important to them. These may include issues pertaining to career choices, body image, clothes, desires, attraction towards members of the opposite sex, fears and so on. It may be noted that peers sometimes can be helpful in solving problems of their adolescent friends; however, they may also sometimes pressurize them for substance use, consumption of alcohol, cigarettes and drugs, conform to certain kind of clothing, hairstyle, language and so on.

Relationship of adolescents with their parents may undergo drastic changes. Parents of adolescents may start feeling that their children are no more sharing their heart out with them. Adolescents on the other hand may start believing that their parents do not understand their newly emerging concerns. They perceive their parents as rather outdated and inflexible. This is not to say that parents become unimportant. Parents continue to monitor and keep adolescents on track. Many parents talk to their adolescent children about the changes during adolescence and deal with issues of adolescents sensitively.

Teacher of adolescents are expected to be particularly sensitive to dealing with the above mentioned adolescent concerns. One of their key jobs is to guide adolescent boys and girls of the possible career choices. Along with that they are expected to give space to the adolescents in solving their problems and making decisions for themselves. Teachers become the anchors that adolescents can approach in need of advice and care.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 14.4

State whether the statements given below are True or False.

1. Adolescents are often satisfied with their bodies and overall appearance.

2. Early maturing boys often think positively about themselves and develop healthy peer relations.
3. Adolescent boys sometimes start drinking alcohol, caffeine and smoke cigarettes to 'show off' to their friends.
4. Excessive exposure to media is detrimental for healthy development.



ACTIVITY

In a diary, write how you have engaged with different forms of media over a period of one week.

Reflect and write some of the advantages and disadvantages of media in the light of how much time you have spent in engagement with media. In particular, how it has affected your physical, mental and emotional well-being.

14.5 ISSUES AND CONCERNS DURING YOUNG ADULTHOOD

Young adulthood brings with it certain issues and concerns related to relationships and vocational and career choices. Let us discuss this below.

14.5.1 Relationships during Young Adulthood

In Erikson's (1950) theory of psycho-social development, the crisis of young adulthood is 'intimacy versus isolation'. He proposed that for young adults finding a mate and having a loving relationship with that partner fulfils the need for intimacy. Those who are able to establish and maintain caring and affectionate relationships with partners of the opposite sex feel positive and fulfilled at this stage of life. On the contrary, those who fail to establish such relationships feel a sense of emptiness and isolation.

It is significant to note that many Indian girls become wives and mothers before they reach their twentieth year as they have been married early in life. And there are others who continue to get educated and delay settling down with a life-partner either through marriage or otherwise until mid 30s. Although this is a rather recent trend and limited to urban metropolitan cities, but it no longer remains uncommon to identify such young men and women.

With marriage, partners of both the genders learn to adjust their ways of living to adjust to their life-partner. The nature and degree of these adjustments may vary but both the partners face these settlement issues. They also face the question of starting a



Notes

Human Development



Notes

family and subsequently raising children. Managing homes and social obligations that are part and parcel of getting married are other important issues in marriages.

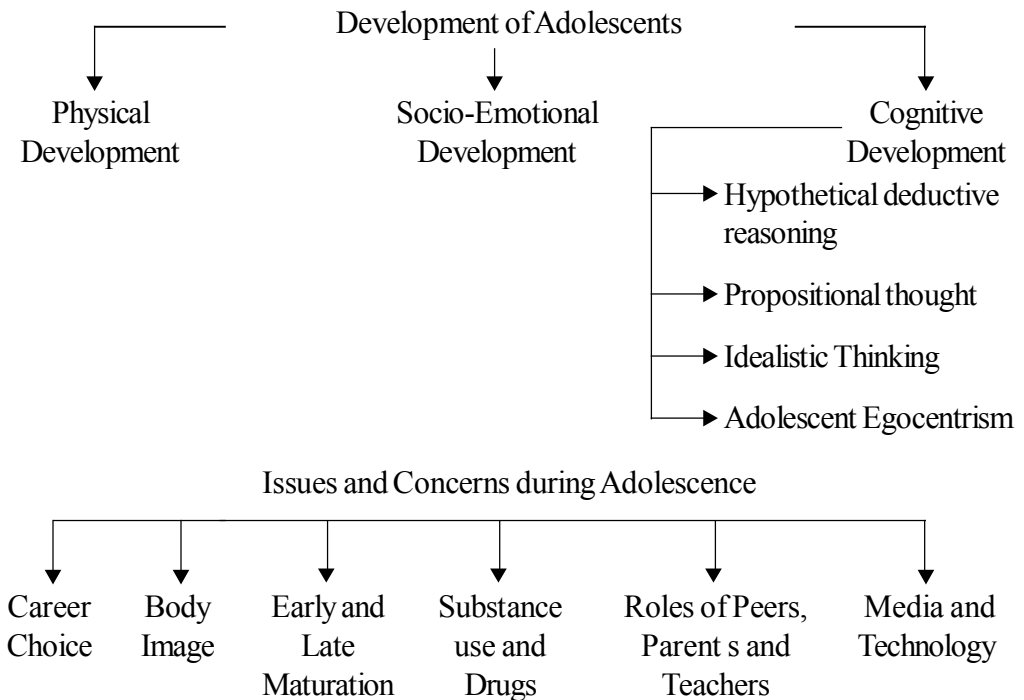
14.5.2 Settling into Vocational or Career Choices

Another significant concern of young adulthood is completing higher studies and eventually becoming financially self-supporting. By young adulthood, most men are expected to settle down in their vocational choices. They no longer remain dependent on their parents to generate finances for them. Young adulthood is also seen as a time to work hard and establish oneself in one's chosen profession.

Gender differences are observed in identifying and working towards life goals. While the priority task for men is taking up a job, for girls whether to enter an income generating profession is a matter of personal choice. Young women may either choose to work outside home or to get married and settle into the role of a wife and eventually a mother. In recent times due to availability of educational opportunity, India has seen a encouraging number of women entering into the work force.



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT



**TERMINAL QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss physical development in adolescent boys and girls.
2. Discuss the cognitive attainments of those in formal operational stage.
3. State the challenges of transitions from childhood to adolescence.
4. Elaborate differences in growing up as a male and female during adolescence and young adulthood.
5. Discuss adolescents' engagement with media and issues of self-image.
6. Describe the role of peers and parents in the lives of adolescents.
7. Comment on the issues and concerns during young adulthood.
8. What are the issues and concerns related to substance use drugs?
9. Describe the different symptoms of drugs and substance addiction.
10. During the stage of young adulthood, how young men and women become apt at identifying and managing their emotions?

**ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS****14.1**

- a. ii
- b. iii
- c. i
- d. v
- e. iv

14.2

1. Abstract and logical
2. Hypothetical deductive reasoning
3. Adolescent egocentrism

**Notes**

Human Development



Notes

4. Meta-cognition

14.3

There are different challenges adolescents face when one goes through the transition from childhood to adolescence, and it is clearly evident as well. They get overwhelmed by the fact that at times they are expected to be grown ups and behave like ones with regard to clothing, mannerisms, actions, responsibilities and tasks one can contribute in and at other times they are told to keep quite in matters of adult concerns. Likewise, they feel they are often denied their right to their privacy and choice; they have to face uninvited and unnecessary surveillance by parents, grandparents, neighbours, teachers and other adult members of the larger community.

14.4

1. False
2. True
3. True
4. True