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## ADOLESCENCE AND ITS CHALLENGES

Human life completes its journey through various stages and one of the most vital stages is adolescence. Adolescence is the period of transition from childhood to adulthood and plays a decisive role in the formation of prosocial/antisocial adult. All of us undergo this stage which poses many challenges and is full of excitement. At the same time it demands adjustment on many fronts.

When we come to this world we are completely dependent upon others and learn gradually to be independent. In India, the adolescents do most of the work themselves but the final decision regarding various domains of life is taken by their parents. For example, an adolescent wishes to enjoy movies but parents may force him/her to complete study first. Parents claim that they have more practical knowledge and experience and tend to treat adolescents like children.

This lesson shall help you understand the nature of adolescence and its challenges and major tasks faced by the adolescents, the influences that shape their personality and some of the important problems faced by the adolescents.



### OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain the nature of adolescence as a developmental stage;
- enlist the developmental tasks encountered during adolescence;
- explain the physical development during adolescenc; and
- discuss gender roles and describe the phenomenon of generation gap.



Notes

## 11.1 CONCEPT OF ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence is a period of transition when the individual changes- physically and psychologically-from a child to an adult. It is a period when rapid physiological and psychological changes demand for new social roles to take place. The adolescents, due to these changes often face a number of crises and dilemmas. It is the period when the child moves from dependency to autonomy. It demands significant adjustment to the physical and social changes.

The adolescence period in the **Indian** social system comes under **Brahmacharya (apprenticeship)**. This is the first *ashram* (stage of life) of development stages. In this stage, the child learns the basic skills in relation to his future role as a responsible adult.

It is a fact that all living beings pass through specific stages or phases of development. Erikson believed that each stage of life is marked by a specific crisis or conflict between competing tendencies. Only if individuals negotiate each of these hurdles successfully they can develop in a normal and healthy manner. During this phase adolescents must integrate various roles into a consistent self- identity. If they fail to do so, they may experience confusion over who they are.

## 11.2 THE ADOLESCENT TRANSITION PERIOD

Indeed adolescence represents one of the greatest of these periods of crisis. In fact it is the stage of stress, strain and storm. It brings many ambiguities in life. During this phase one really does not know where he or she stands. It is believed that this uncertainty about one's role causes many conflicts.

It is a well-known fact that delinquency rates soar during the period of adolescence, that suicides become increasingly prevalent, that drug and alcohol addiction may have their beginning, and that much general happiness exists. Adolescence is also a period when satisfactory heterosexual adjustments are facilitated or hindered, when career is planned and philosophies of life are molded.

## 11.3 ADOLESCENCE : BIOLOGICAL OR SOCIAL?

Adolescence is both **biological** and **social** in nature. The beginning of adolescence is marked by biological changes in girls and boys. As a matter of fact, just before puberty there occurs what is known as pre-adolescent growth spurt. It takes place in girls mostly during the age of nine to twelve years, and in boys between eleven and fourteen years of age. During this period, and following shortly thereafter, the **secondary sexual characteristics** emerge. In girls there is typically rounding out of the hips, breast development, appearance of pubic hair, and menstruation. In boys, some of the secondary sexual characteristics that mark the beginning of adolescence



are appearance of pubic hair, facial hair, and change of voice. These changes are biologically induced.

Adolescence for both girls and boys is marked largely by social changes. Such factors as when an adolescent leaves home, gets a job and can vote determine when his or her transition from childhood to adulthood is accomplished. The length of this period is thus primarily a social phenomenon.

The problems adolescents face during the long period of growing up have both biological and social roots. Physical changes and deviation can create many problems. Society also creates problems for adolescents. Adolescents in western societies behave differently than adolescents in eastern societies owing to varying social norms expectations and family structure.

### Activity 1

#### Learning by doing

List some issues on which you and your friends feel uneasy because you are not free to do your job independently due to your parents' interference. Discuss with elders whether we can manage some negotiations to minimize the conflict with parents.

## 11.4 FACTORS DETERMINING THE PATTERN OF TRANSITION

Optimal development in adolescence depends on successful accomplishment of the developmental tasks in infancy and childhood. How easy it will be for the adolescent to make the transition into adulthood will depend partly upon the individual, partly on environmental aids or obstructions, and partly on their experiences. Let us examine some of these factors:

**Speed of transition:** The changes during adolescence take place at very fast pace. During no other period does the individual undergo such a sudden and drastic change in such a short time period and at no other age is he less prepared to cope with the problems that this change brings.

**Length of transition:** Those who mature rapidly (in term of physical growth), find adjustment especially difficult. They are expected to behave like adults simply because they look like adults. On the other hand, a prolonged adolescence also brings problems. The adolescent gets into the habit of being dependent, and this, is difficult to overcome later.

**Discontinuities in training:** Much of the stress and strain during adolescence is due to the discontinuities in training. For example, the assumption of responsibility during adolescence is difficult because the child has so far been trained to be dependent and submissive.



**Degree of dependency:** How dependent the young adolescent will be is determined mainly by the kind of training he/she received during childhood. Parents often foster dependency because they feel that adolescents are not ready to assume responsibility for their own behaviours.

**Ambiguous status:** In the societies like India, a child is expected to follow the footsteps of his/her parents. This gives him/her a pattern of behaviour to imitate. In open society, by contrast, it is assumed that every individual should be free to choose his/her own course of self- development.

**Conflicting demands:** The adolescent is often confronted with conflicting demands from parents, teachers, peers and the community.

**Degree of realism:** When the adolescent begins to look like an adult, (s)he is permitted an added degree of freedom. If (s)he feels is not ready, either physically or psychologically, to play the adult role, (s)he feels dissatisfied.

**Motivation:** The adolescent goes through a period of wondering how he or she will meet the new problems the life presents. He or she would like to grow up but being unsure of the ability to cope with the challenges of adulthood. So long as this feeling of insecurity exists, there will be little motivation to make the transition in adulthood.

As the barriers to growing up are lowered or removed by parents, teachers, and society, the adolescent can move smoothly in the direction of reaching the goal of adulthood, and motivation to make the transition is normally increased.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.1

1. Explain the factors that determine pattern of adolescent transition.  
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2. Define adolescence. Identify the various challenges faced by an adolescent.  
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### 11.5 DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

The term “developmental task”, refers to those problems that individuals typically face at different periods during their life. An infant or a small child must master the complexities of learning to walk, learning to talk, and controlling the elimination of waste products of the body. In middle childhood such skills as learning to play games and learning to read become of major importance.

So for as adolescents are concerned, the developmental tasks present the vital



problems which must be met and solved during the transition from childhood to adulthood. These problems are not entirely unique to the adolescent period, but they are ones upon which the adolescent must work if he eventually expects to achieve a successful adult role.

### Developmental Tasks for Adolescents

Havinghurst has listed the following tasks.

- Achieving new and more mature relations with age mates of both sexes.
- Achieving a masculine or feminine social role.
- Accepting one's physique and using the body effectively.
- Achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults.
- Achieving assurance of economic independence.
- Selecting and preparing for an occupation.
- Preparing for marriage and family life.
- Developing intellectual skills and concepts necessary for civic competence.
- Desiring and achieving socially responsible behaviour.
- Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behaviour.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.2

1. Developmental tasks of adolescent's include:
  - a. preparing for marriage and family
  - b. crawling and creeping
  - c. reflecting childish behaviours
  - d. None of the above
2. How many developmental tasks were described by Robert Havinghurst?
  - a. 10
  - b. 6
  - c. 9
  - d. 8

Adolescence is a long period, and many young adolescents have little motivation to master the developmental tasks for their age. In the later period, however, they realise that adulthood is rapidly approaching. This provides them the necessary motivation



to prepare for their new status. As a result, they make greater strides toward the goal of maturity than they did during early adolescence.

Successful achievement of the developmental tasks for one period in life leads to success with later tasks, while failure leads not only to personal unhappiness and disappointment but also to difficulties with later tasks.

Regardless of whether the adolescent has successfully mastered the developmental tasks of adolescence, he/she is, in most “advanced” cultures, automatically given the status of adult when he/she reaches the age of legal maturity. This is in direct contrast to more simple cultures where young people must demonstrate adult status to their elders, in “puberty rites,” privileges, and the responsibilities.

## 11.6 PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Adolescence is fundamentally a period of physical and physiological changes. The young person’s reactions to physical changes may range from pride and pleasant expectation to bewilderment and fear. When adolescents evaluate each other, especially when they consider qualities they like in a manner of the opposite sex, “good looks” are often mentioned. In particular they dominate in descriptions of girls than of boys but other physical characteristics such as body build, height and the like are often noted when boys are being “sized up”.

One of the most characteristic features of adolescence is the increase in size i.e. in height and weight. However, the beginning of adolescence, known as pubescence, brings with it abrupt and psychologically significant physical changes. While many of these physical changes, such as growth in height and deepening of the voices are obvious and commonly known, others are hidden or less obvious but nonetheless significant.

### Surge in Growth

Toward the end of childhood, usually girls at about ten or eleven and boys at twelve or thirteen, show a period of rapid growth in height and weight (general bodily growth). This acceleration of growth is closely linked to the increased hormonal output of the pituitary gland, which serves not only as the catalyst to produce growth but also as the controller of other glands (i.e. adrenals, gonads, and thyroid) that determine both tissue growth and function.

The rapid growth continues for a period of about three or four years, with the greatest increment in growth coming at an average age of 12.6 years for girls and 14.8 years for boys. During this period it is not uncommon for a child to grow as much as six to eight inches in height and to gain 18 to 22 kilograms in a year’s time.



For a variety of reasons, physical development in this period is characterized by asynchronization that brings concerns to adolescents and their parents and teachers. Skeletal and muscular development is more rapid than learning required for making use of the new muscle mass and motor habits. The body requires new learning. Bodily proportions also undergo changes. The facial features alter, because the growth of the lower part of the face lags behind the growth of the upper part. Legs, proportionally, usually grow more rapidly than the body stem, and hands and feet anticipate by several years the total body size of their owners.

General bodily growth is paralleled by physiological changes such as cardiovascular and respiratory growth and changes in metabolism and in general movement toward the adult states.

**Skeletal Muscles:** Muscles attached to bones, which bring about various types of body movement like the limb movements.

### Puberty and Sexual Development

Following closely on the heels of accelerated growth, the pituitary gland directs the adrenal cortex and the gonads into more activity. Prior to this time, virtually equal amount of androgenic (male) and estrogenic (female) hormones are produced for both sexes by the adrenal cortex on the direction of anterior pituitary gland. Now an increased amount of hormonal production differentiates the sexes; the males producing more androgens, the females more estrogens.

**Sex Hormones** are substances secreted by the gonads for reproductive functions and determination of secondary sex characteristics; e.g. estrogen in the female and testosterone in male. Testosterone is the male sex hormone responsible for the development of the male secondary sexual characteristics as they become sexually mature, while in the female body, this role is played by estrogen.

Moreover, the genital and sex-appropriate tissues become more sensitive to these sex specific hormones. The dawn of these changes is reflected in boys by beginning of the enlargement of the testes. There follows in each sex a series of physical changes whose appearance is highly predictable and whose sequence is unalterable. In girls the enlargement of breast is followed by the growth of pubic hair, the menarche and axillary hair. In boys, after the initial enlargement of the testes, there occurs pubic hair, axillary hair, voice changes, and beard, in that order.

Thus, by observing adolescents, it is fairly easy to determine the point in pubescence that they have reached. The observable secondary sex characteristics, such as development of axillary hair and voice change are secondary to the primary sex changes. Primary sex characteristics include reproductive organs whose maturity is signaled by the menarche in the girl and by the first ejaculation in the boy.



## Notes

**Strength, Skill and Fitness**

Physical development as mentioned above presents only the gross picture of the changes that occur in adolescence. Even more significant, perhaps, are the growth patterns of strength and skills. The post-pubescent boy, even though he may be of the same chronological age as his friends who have not yet entered pubescence, will almost certainly be stronger and will likely have greater agility, motor coordination, and bodily skills. He will, of course, rapidly overtake girls, whose strength already has increased about a year earlier and who briefly challenged him. You would like to know what forces account for this development. First, it is clear that the accelerated production of male hormone (androgens) brings with it added muscular strength. Second, the nature of skeletal growth, increased shoulder breadth, bigger chest cavity, and finally, the greater lung size, heart size, and increased blood pressure are all favourable conditions for greater physical strength.

While many of these same changes occur among girls, their physical strength increases at a slower rate, and, of course, never equals that of males. There are two reasons for this superiority: (a) biologically, the male is favoured by larger shoulder breadth, a bigger chest cavity, and better leg leverage; (b) culturally, girls receive little encouragement for the development of strength. In fact they are encouraged in the opposite direction—to be weak and dependent, or at least to pretend that they are.

Along with increases in strength come the development of motor coordination, reaction speed, and perceptual-motor skills. In an appraisal of physical development, one important consideration has to do with what is optimal. Height-weight charts are based on the average, but may, when a large segment of youth is overweight, lead to faulty conclusions. What is average is certainly not optimal.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.3**

1. Explain how adolescence is a period of rapid physical growth and sexual development.

**11.7 GENDER ROLES**

Gender is a much more complex term. It relates to a given society's beliefs about the traits and behaviours supposedly characteristic of males and females. '**Gender roles**' refer to the expectations concerning the roles males and females should perform and the ways they should behave. Such expectations come into play as soon as a child is born.



The beliefs about gender roles continue to influence us and our behaviour throughout life. Children's recognition that they belong to one sex or the other called '**gender identity**' is established quite early in one's life by the age of three or four. At this time, however, they are uncertain as to whether they will always be a boy or a girl. It is not until they are about six or seven that children acquire '**gender consistency**'—the understanding that even if they adopted the clothing, hair style, and behaviour associated with the other sex they would still retain their current sexual identity.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.4

1. Explain the meaning of gender role.

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### WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- Adolescence is the period of transition between childhood to adulthood and it plays a decisive role in relation to the formation of prosocial/antisocial adult.
- Optimal development in adolescence depends on successful accomplishment of the developmental tasks in infancy and childhood.
- Adolescence is fundamentally a period of physical and physiological change. The most important single feature of adolescent development consists of the changes that take place in the young person's body.
- Toward the end of childhood, girls at about ten or eleven and boys at twelve or thirteen begin a period of rapid growth in height and weight.
- Gender role refers to expectations concerning the roles male and females should adopt and the ways they should behave.



### TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What are the primary and secondary characteristics during adolescence?
2. What are the developmental tasks of adolescents?
3. Give a detailed account of major challenges faced during adolescence.

**Notes****ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS****11.1**

1. Period of transition, rapid physical and psychological changes, New social roles, independence, faces conflicts.

**11.2**

1. d
2. a

**11.3**

1. Speed and length of transition, training, dependency, status, demands, degree of realism, motivation.
2. Surge in growth, height and weight, skeletal and muscular growth, sex hormones, sexual development, sex hormones, strength and skill.

**11.4**

1. Society's beliefs about behaviours characteristic of males and females. Gender consistency and behaviour of males and females.

**Hints for Terminal Questions**

1. Refer to section 11.3
2. Refer to section 11.6
3. Refer to section 11.5