

# LESSON 11

## ADOLESCENCE AND ITS CHALLENGES

### SUMMARY

Adolescence is the period of transition from childhood to adulthood and plays a decisive role in the formation of pro-social/antisocial adult.

In India, the adolescents do most of the work themselves but the final decision regarding various domains of life is taken by their parents. Parents claim that they have more practical knowledge and experience and tend to treat adolescents like children.

### Concept of Adolescence

**Concept of Development** - Adolescence is a period of transition. Individual changes-physically and psychologically-from a child to an adult. The child moves from dependency to autonomy.

The adolescence period in the Indian social system comes under **Brahmacharya** (apprenticeship). The child learns the basic skills in relation to his future role as a responsible adult.

According to Erikson, each stage of life is marked by a specific crisis or conflict. Only if individuals negotiate each of these hurdles successfully, they can develop in a normal manner. During adolescence, individuals must integrate various roles into a

consistent self-identity. If they fail to do so, they may experience confusion over who they are.

### The Adolescent Transition period

Adolescence is referred as the stage of stress and storm. It is believed that this uncertainty about one's role causes many conflicts.

Delinquency rates soar during the period of adolescence, suicides become increasingly prevalent, drug and alcohol addiction may have their beginning, and not 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 moulded.

### Adolescence: Biological or Social?

It is both biological and social in nature. The beginning of adolescence is marked by biological changes in girls and boys.

**Pre-adolescent growth spurt**- it takes place in girls at age of nine to twelve years, and in boys between eleven and fourteen years of age. Secondary sexual characteristics emerge during this period. In girls there is typically

rounding out of the hips, breast development, appearance of pubic hair, and menstruation. In boys, these 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. Factors such as - leaving home, getting a job and voting determine when the transition from childhood to adulthood is accomplished. The length of this period is thus primarily a social phenomenon.

### **Factors determining the pattern of transition**

**Speed of transition:** The changes during adolescence take place at very fast pace.

**Length of transition:** Those who mature rapidly (in term of physical growth), find adjustment difficult because they are expected to behave like adults. On the other hand, a prolonged adolescent gets into the habit of being dependent, and it becomes difficult to overcome later.

**Discontinuities in training:** The assumption of responsibility during adolescence is difficult because the child has so far been trained to be dependent and submissive and this training is stopped suddenly.

**Degree of dependency:** How dependent the young adolescent will be is determined mainly by the

kind of training they received during childhood.

**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, 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.

## Developmental Tasks

The term “developmental task”, refers to those problems that individuals typically face at different periods during their life.

### Task list by Havinghurst

- 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
- Selecting and preparing for an occupation.
- Preparing for marriage and family life
- Developing intellectual skills and concepts necessary for civic competence
- Achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults
- Achieving assurance of economic independence
- Desiring and achieving socially responsible behaviour
- Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behaviour.

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.

## Physical Development

**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.

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.

### Puberty and sexual development

- The pituitary gland directs the adrenal cortex and the gonads into more activity. Amount of androgenic (male) and estrogenic (female) hormones is increased and this production differentiates the sexes; the males producing more androgens (testosterone), the females more oestrogens. Sex Hormones are substances secreted by the gonads for reproductive functions and determination of secondary sex characteristics. 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. 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, changes occur in pubic hair, axillary hair, voice changes, and beard, in that order.

Primary sex characteristics include reproductive organs whose maturity is signalled by the menarche in the girl and by the first ejaculation in the boy.

**Strength, Skill and Fitness** - The post-pubescent boy, will 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. Girls' 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.

## Gender roles

Gender 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.

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.

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.

## Evaluate yourself

1. Justify the statement "adolescence is both biological and social in nature".
2. Explain the physical development that takes place in adolescence.
3. List the task given by Havinghurst for adolescence.