

11

ADOLESCENCE

11.1 Introduction

"You are not a child anymore, let the younger ones play, you come and help me."

"There is no need for you to sit here amongst adults, go out and play."

Do you remember the time when these kind of remarks were made at you? Yes, you are right, we are talking about the time when you were not considered a child and yet were not even a part of the adult world. This period between childhood and adulthood is called adolescence. What happens during this period that makes you belong nowhere? What are some of the special characteristics of this stage? What are the strengths and weakness of this period? In this lesson, we are going to talk about adolescence and all the changes that take place during this period.

11.2 Objectives

After reading this lesson you would be able to the following :

- define the term "Adolescence";
- describe the physical changes that take place during adolescence;
- discuss the consequences of sexual maturation and the role of sex education;
- discuss the role of parents, peers and school on the-development of the adolescent;
- outline the language and cognitive abilities of an adolescent;
- enumerate the developmental tasks of adolescence;

- discuss the typical characteristics of adolescents;
- describe the problems faced by adolescents.

11.3 Defining Adolescence

Let us first define the term adolescence, "*Adolescence is the period of development between childhood and adulthood*".

A boy or girl enters adolescence as a child and emerges as a man or woman, expected to be ready to assume an adult role in the society. For everybody, the years 11 to 18 are the most eventful. During these years there is rapid physical and sexual growth and maturation.

It is very difficult to say exactly when adolescence starts. However, onset of puberty is generally accepted as the beginning of adolescence.

What is puberty? Let us find out. The period around 11 or 12 years of age is the onset of puberty which usually lasts 2 years. During these years there is a spurt in physical growth and appearance of sex characteristics. The first sign of puberty in girls is menstruation and in boys, nocturnal emission (ejaculation of semen during sleep).

The physical changes that take place during adolescence are as follows :

Girls

1. A girl gains about 8 cms between 11 to 13½ years of age.
2. Develop more fatty and subcutaneous tissue giving rise to rounded contours.
3. The shoulders are slender while hips become broader and rounded.
4. Hair growth in the arm-pits and pubic area.
5. The voice becomes more shrill and high pitched.
6. Appearance of the breast-bud.
7. Onset of menarche or 1st Menstrual cycle. Early cycles may be irregular and sometimes painful.

Boys

1. On an average, boys grow about 20 cms in height between 13 to 15 years of age.
2. Develop a lot of muscles, enabling them to do heavy physical work.
3. Boys develop broader and stronger shoulders while their hips remain slender.
4. Hair on the body becomes darker and curlier. Hair appears in the arm-pits and pubic area. Facial hair appears at side of the mouth, lips, cheeks and then the sides of the face.
5. The voice breaks, i.e., becomes squeaky and matures. This happens because the larynx enlarges and vocal cord lengthens. Adam's apple becomes prominent.
6. Increase in the size of the penis.
7. First nocturnal emission occurs nearly a year after the penis starts growing. The seminal fluid may not contain sperms at puberty.

Although the overall sequence of physical and sexual growth and maturity are comparable for boys and girls, girls attain their adult height, weight and ability to bear children, two years earlier than boys.

11.1 INTEXT QUESTION 11.1

- i) Select the most appropriate answer.
- (i) Adolescence is the period between :
- birth and childhood.
 - childhood and adulthood.
 - adulthood and old age.
 - childhood and old age.
- ii) Adolescence begins and ends between :
- 11 and 18 years of age.
 - 12 and 16 years of age.
 - 13 and 18 years of age.
 - 15 and 18 years of age.
- iii) The first sign of puberty amongst girls is :
- growth of pubic hair
 - appearance of breast-bud
 - onset of menstruation
 - nocturnal emission
- iv) The first sign of puberty amongst the boys is :
- facial hair growth
 - nocturnal-emission
 - breaking of voice
 - appearance of pubic hair
2. Fill in the blanks with appropriate terms :
- During adolescence there is rapid _____ and maturation.
 - In this period, boys grow about _____ and girls _____ centimeters.
 - Onset of _____ is generally accepted as beginning of adolescence.
 - Girls attain their adult height and weight _____ years earlier than boys.
 - Adam's apple becomes _____ in boys.

11.4 Early and Late Maturation

Some adolescents undergo the physical changes described above, earlier than others. This has a specific influence on the psychological aspects of their development.

It is generally seen that the *early maturing girls* feel very conscious and odd about their bodies and they think why it is happening to them ? Since they look grown up, adults expect them to behave more responsibly. *Late maturing girls* look younger and are not expected to measure up to adult standards of behaviour. Therefore they are more relaxed. However, they do not get attention from boys.

Early maturing boys are more confident as compared to girls. Because of their greater physical strength and well developed bodies they are chosen leaders. They are satisfied with themselves. At the same time, adult expectations from them are high. *Late maturing boys* feel inferior because of lack of physical growth and they keep thinking whether they will ever become big and strong like their friends.

Usually these feelings are temporary and as adolescents grow they get over these feelings as well. Parents need to talk to adolescents and explain to them the physical changes taking place. They should also give them sex-education.

11.5 Role of Sex-education

You already know that by the end of adolescence the adolescent is sexually mature and should be prepared for marriage and family life. Therefore, the adolescent needs to be educated about his/her sexual development and needs to adjust to these changes. The adult sexual behaviour of an adolescent will be determined by the attitudes he/she acquires about sex. The parents and school environment can play a very important role in the acquisition of these attitudes.

During this time, the adolescent's pre-occupation with sex is very natural. He/she depends on information from the peer group and from printed material. The kind of information the peer group gives is not always correct and contains a lot of misconceptions and fallacies. Similarly, the printed material if available is not always of good quality and can be very misleading. It can confuse the adolescents rather than doing any good. Therefore, home can play the role of informed adult who can handle question about sex. Majority of parents feel very awkward and do not know how to handle their children's questions casually. It is important that parents develop a wholesome relationship with their children so that the child may not feel any hesitation in asking questions and the parents should not hesitate in giving the right answer to the question asked.

INTEXT QUESTION 11.2

1. Select the most appropriate answer :

(i) Early maturing girls feel

- (a) good and confident
- (b) conscious and odd
- (c) carefree and good
- (d) conscious and confident

(ii) Which of the following do not get attention from the boys ?

- (a) Late maturing girls
- (b) Early maturing girls
- (c) None of the above
- (d) Both the above

- (ii) Amongst boys, the chosen leaders are :
- Late maturing boys
 - Early maturing boys
 - Mature boys
 - Immature boys
- (iv) Adolescents usually rely for information about sex on :
- peers
 - printed material
 - both (a) and (b)
 - grand parents

11.6 Role of Parents

During this period, the adolescents want independence from their parents and yet they are dependent on them for their needs. They do not like to be told "Do this" and "Don't do this". Parents still want to control them while the adolescents want freedom and this leads to a tussle between the parents and adolescents. Here, the parents have to decide how much control they should exercise on their adolescent boy or girl, how much freedom is to be given, in which area they can let the adolescent have their say and in which they need to put their foot down. In short, the parents have to work out a congenial and workable disciplinary technique.

Let us discuss some parenting styles and their influence:

- Parents who give more freedom to the adolescent as he or she grows and at the same time take interest and responsibility for adolescent's decisions, encourage the adolescent to become more independent and responsible.
- Parents who are very strict and who play the role of an authority figure, i.e., who do not let the adolescent take any decision on her own, seriously hamper the adolescent's ability to be independent.
- On the other hand if parents are indifferent, i.e., who leave the adolescents with their problems and do not interact with them, their children also grow up with indifferent attitudes.

Parents who encourage the adolescent to participate in family matters, value their opinion and take more interest in their activities, have children who are more confident. Thus, we can say that the *parent-adolescent relationship should be based on mutual respect and love*. Examine your relationship with your parents. Do you face any problems? How do you and your parents solve them?

Also remember, just as the parents understand their adolescent, the adolescent should also understand parent's point of view and take their advice - parents have years of experience behind them. Most often between the ages of 14 to 16, there is a gradual shift from parents to peer group (same age-mates). The changing family structure i.e.

11.7 Role of Peers

During adolescence, most often between the ages of 14 to 16, there is a gradual shift from parents to peer group (same age-mates). The changing family structure i.e.

extended family (grandparents, parents and children) breaking and giving rise to nuclear family, makes the peer group very important. In nuclear families, the adolescents do not have anybody to talk to about their problems. This is because the parents are too busy earning a living.

As you already know, even as children we are influenced by peers and today, also, the peer group plays the same role i.e. learning to interact with age-mates, developing age-relevant skills and interests and sharing problems and feelings.

During adolescence the peer group becomes more important because of the following reasons :

- (i) Everybody is going through the same conflicts and problems.
- (ii) The general feeling is that the peers understand them more than their parents.
- (iii) It is during adolescence, that the individual learns how to interact with members of the opposite sex. The peer group provides this opportunity for interaction.
- (iv) All adolescents feel it is very important to talk, walk, speak, dress and generally behave like their peer group does. This is often called the "Peer culture". Can you give an example ? Yes, one example could be wearing of one earring by the boys. Another could be cutting hair too close or growing them too long.

Many people feel that "peer culture" is a way for the adolescents to feel different from their parents.

It is important that the parents let the adolescent be a member of the peer group, but they need to keep an eye on their activities, as these activities unknowingly might be anti-social in nature, for example, forming of gangs and indulging in street violence.

However, it is not always true that parents and peer group are absolutely opposite to each other. Many a time, peer group can reinforce parental values, if it is of the same socio-economic status and educational level as the adolescent's family.

Peers can have harmful effects as well. A boy or girl who is laughed at or rejected while forming heterosexual relationship may develop a lot of anxiety. Also, the adolescent may be pressurized by the group to indulge in activities against their own judgment which they might later regret, e.g., pressurising the adolescent to try drugs or to lift things from shops, etc.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.3

1. Complete the statements in column A by matching them with those in column B.

Column A

Column B

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| (a) When parents allow freedom and take interest in adolescent's activities | (i) Adolescent becomes dependent. |
| (b) When parents are very strict and authoritative. | (ii) Adolescent becomes independent. |
-

- (c) When parents leave adolescents on their own (iii) Adolescent becomes independent and responsible.
- (iv) Adolescent becomes confident but indifferent.
2. Select the most appropriate answer :
- (i) During adolescence there is a gradual shift from parents to
- (a) relatives
 - (b) peer group
 - (c) siblings
 - (d) neighbours
- (ii) During adolescence, the peer group helps in learning to
- (a) interact with age-mates
 - (b) share problems and feelings
 - (c) interact with opposite sex
 - (d) all of the above
- (iii) The word 'peer culture' means-
- (a) behaving like peers
 - (b) studying like peers
 - (c) eating like peers
 - (d) none of the above

11.8 SCHOOL AND TEACHERS

School is a major institution, other than the family, which is responsible for teaching a number of social as well as academic skills to the adolescence. Whether or not an adolescent does well in studies depends to a large extent on the school environment and teachers.

If the school discipline is not very harsh and the student's point of view is respected, the adolescent is more likely to enjoy academic work. When the teachers are properly trained and are warm and enthusiastic and recognize the hidden talents of the students, they bring out the best in the adolescent which makes them feel very good about themselves.

On the other hand, poorly trained, incompetent teachers with large classes, a lot of work load, rigid curriculum and regulations, can have a negative impact on the students. This does not give enough opportunity to the adolescents to solve the questions and thoughts that come to their mind. As a result, they may lose all interest in studies and are not motivated enough to do well. Many of them may even drop out of school.

Parent's active interest and their feelings and attitudes about the school and teachers can also influence how the adolescents feel about school and teachers. The adolescents may regard the school and teachers the way the parents do.

Apart from playing the important role of teaching academic skills and social skills, the school can play a very important role in bridging the "generation gap" between the parents and the adolescents. The teacher occupies a central position between the two, if the teacher is liked by the students, they are more likely to listen to the teacher than their parents. The teacher can use this opportunity to explain to the adolescents the parents', or rather the adult's point of view in a friendly manner.

Peers in school can play another important role, as far as academics or studies are concerned. Since it is very important for the adolescents to be a part of the peer group, if the peer group lays a lot of stress on studies, the adolescent would also study hard to be a part of her/his group.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.4

1. Fill in the blanks with the most appropriate words :

- (i) Adolescents enjoy academic work if school discipline is not _____.
 - (ii) Adolescents look for teachers who are warm and _____.
 - (iii) Attitudes and beliefs can influence how the adolescent feels _____ the school.
 - (iv) The school can bridge the between adolescents and their _____.
 - (v) Study habits of adolescents are influenced more by _____ than by parents.
-

11.9 LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

You know that by the end of middle childhood the child has a vocabulary of about 4000 to 5000 words. With greater use of the vocabulary already learnt, the adolescents' language becomes fluent and complex. They are able to use so many words and complex sentences. In fact, it is impossible to count the number of words an adolescent knows. With the increase in vocabulary, the adolescent is able to express herself very well now.

A characteristic feature of the language development during adolescence is the use of 'slang' and 'short-forms' for words. Slang can be called a word used to represent a set of words or an idea. For example, chicks is a slang word for pretty young girls. Can you think of some slang words ?

Another feature is the beginning of the use of short-forms or abbreviations e.g. Connaught Place becomes C.P. and Greater-Kailash becomes G.K. For many people these characteristic features of the language continue in their adult lives as well.

11.10 Cognitive Development

Before a child enters adolescence, she needs to see things to be able to understand the relationship between them. During adolescence all that changes. The adolescent's *thinking becomes abstract*. The adolescent can imagine situations and events. For example

on being told that A is bigger than B, and B is bigger than C, a 15 year old can draw the conclusion that A is bigger than C. A child who has not entered adolescence, would have to see the objects A, B and C before she can come to a conclusion.

The adolescent is able to think of *contrary to fact ideas*. For example, if an adolescent is asked to tell the advantages of "if we all could fly", the adolescent can think of answers like- "There would be no need for vehicles". Can you think of some more advantages? With this imaginary and contrary to fact ideas, the adolescent is able to understand similies, abstract jokes with meanings which have to be inferred. These abilities enable the adolescent to take decisions by thinking of all the possible solutions to a problem. Thus we can say that the adolescent's thinking becomes more mature and systematic.

11.11 Developmental Tasks During Adolescence

Till now we have talked about development in different areas that occur during adolescence. This development has an important impact on the emotional development of the adolescent. These are called the *developmental tasks*. Let us list them down.

- (1) The first most important task is to accept one's physique or body and using it effectively.
- (2) Achieve new and more mature relationships with age mates of both sexes.
- (3) Achieve a masculine or feminine social/ sex role, i.e., ability to become a responsible male or female adult member of society.
- (4) Achieve emotional independence from parents and other adults.
- (5) Achieve a set of values, i.e., ideology.
- (6) Prepare for economic career.
- (7) Prepare for marriage and family life.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.5

1. Fill in the blanks with appropriate words-
 - (i) _____ and _____ are two characteristic features of an adolescent's languages.
 - (ii) Before adolescence, the child's thinking is _____, now it becomes _____.
 - (iii) Adolescents are able to think of contrary to _____ ideas.
 - (iv) Achieving a masculine or feminine social sex-role means becoming a responsible member of _____.
 - (v) The first most important task of adolescence is to accept one's _____ and using it effectively.
-

11.12 Typical Characteristics

After reading extensively about the adolescence period, can you think of some characteristics or behavior which are typical of adolescence and which make the adolescent so different from adults and children ? Let us discuss these.

- The first is the adolescent's **pre occupation with their looks and their bodies**. All adolescents feel that these changes are unique and everybody is looking at them. Some psychologists describe it as feeling "on stage all the time". All adolescents worry a lot about their looks and have a lot of anxiety about developing pimples, about getting/not getting a beard, etc.
- All adolescents love to follow the '**peer group culture**'. This group develops a peculiar way of talking, walking and behavior which seems very strange to adults.
- During this period, adolescents also experience "**crushes**", i.e. intense feeling of love towards a much older member of the opposite sex. Peers of opposite sex might seem too immature and childish during that period.
- Another characteristic of adolescents is their "**idealism**". Adolescents have passionate ideas about how good people should be, how they should behave and they generally believe in an idealistic world where everything is good, clean and just.
- All adolescents experience **feelings of rebellion** at one time or another. They feel the parents and adults do not understand them and they do not want to conform to adults' ideas. They also take a lot of pleasure in doing things which the parents disapprove of, e.g., wearing different kinds of clothes, or having tattoos on their bodies or listening to music at a loud volume. Almost all adolescents feel the 'Generation gap' between the parents and their generation.
- All adolescents, at one time or another, experience extreme "**mood swings**". Do you know what are 'mood swings' ? If something happens which the adolescent does not like, he/she will feel very depressed. For example, if a friend does not visit or telephone, it is reason enough to feel depressed. Do you experience such mood swings ? How do you come out of these moods ?

Adolescents are, as yet, not fully mature emotionally. They get easily influenced by what the others tell them. If somebody talks to them and tries to win their confidence, they easily confide in that person. This is because adolescents accept people on the basis of what they are saying rather than their motive.

11.13 Adolescents, too, have Problems

During adolescence, physical changes take place very fast. Development takes place in other areas as well. The expectations of parents and other adults change. All this confuses the adolescent very much. With parents and peer support most of the adolescents emerge out of this period as mature individuals but some may develop disorders in their behavior. Let us talk about them in brief.

(1) Eating Disorders

Some early maturing adolescents may feel that they are becoming too fat and may stop eating required quantities of food. Others may think that nobody loves them and in

order to get attention they start over eating and grow fat. Some other become very sensitive and they vomit when they are scolded or when they are tense.

(2) Suicidal tendencies

Many adolescents are unable to form friendships with their peer group. They do not have friends to talk to about their problems. They might not be able to talk to their parents either. In such situations, they might feel very lonely and think nobody loves them. This can lead to suicidal tendencies, which might be just to get attention or may be serious attempts.

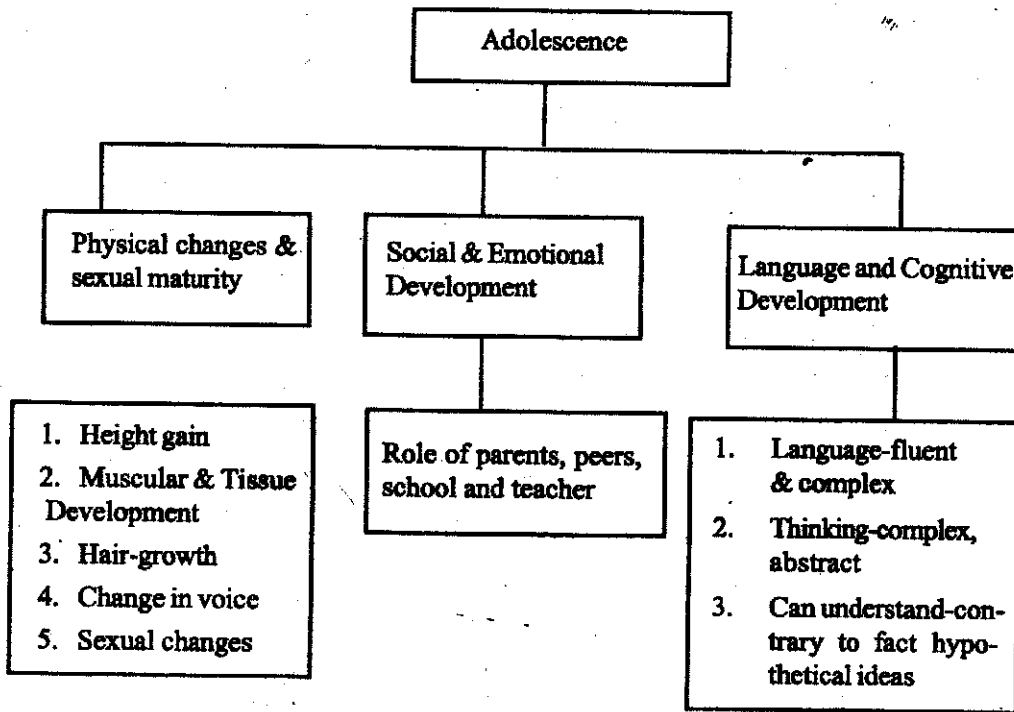
(3) Peer Pressure

To prove to their friends that they are 'macho' (strong and grown up), the adolescents may indulge in alcoholism, smoking and may even take drugs under peer pressure. All these problems usually occur because the adolescent or 'young adult' is very sensitive during this period and the slightest neglect from friends and family is perceived as a dire situation. These problems can easily be handled by understanding parents and caring friends.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.6

1. Given below is a list of characteristics, select the ones you will associate with adolescence.
 - (a) feeling of being on stage
 - (b) ego-centrism
 - (c) stranger anxiety
 - (d) peer group culture
 - (e) crushes
 - (f) concrete thinking
 - (g) idealism
 - (h) rebellion
 - (i) work ethics
 - (j) generation-gap
 - (k) sibling-rivalry
 - (l) abstract thinking
 - (m) mood-swings
 - (n) mature thinking
 - (o) easily influenced
-

11.14 What have you Learnt



11.15 Terminal Exercise

1. Define the term adolescence.
2. Tabulate the physical changes that take place in girls and boys during adolescence.
3. Discuss the effect of early and late maturation on adolescents.
4. What role can the parents play in imparting sex-education to their children ?
5. Discuss the various ways by which the parents discipline their children during adolescence. Which technique according to you is the best ?
6. Discuss the role played by the peer group during adolescence.
7. "Good school environment and trained teachers are most important for motivating adolescents to do well in schools". Do you agree with this statement ? Support your answer with example.
8. What are the characteristics of the cognitive development during adolescence ? Discuss.
9. Enumerate the important development tasks of adolescence.
10. List the typical characteristics as well as problems of adolescence.

11.16 ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

- 11.1** 1. (i) (b) (ii) (a)
(iii) (c) (iv) (b)
2. (i) growth (ii) 20cms, 8cms.
(iii) puberty (iv) two
(v) prominent
- 11.2** 1. (i) (b) (ii) (a)
(iii) (b) (iv) (c)
- 11.3** 1. (a) (iii) (b) (i) (c) (ii)
2. (i) (b) (ii) (c) (iii) (a)
- 11.4** 1. (i) harsh (ii) trained (iii) parental
(iv) Generation-gap (v) Peer-Group
- 11.5** 1. (i) slang, short-forms (ii) concrete, abstract (iii) fact
(iv) society (v) body
- 11.6** 1. a, d, c, g, h, j, l, m, o.
-