

Adolescence in Indian Context - Characteristics and Problems of Adolescents; Their Needs and Aspirations

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The transitional stage of life during which a person experiences typical physical and psychological changes has been referred to as adolescence. Physical growth and development are followed with sexual maturation. Adolescence is usually associated with the teenage years, but its physical, psychological or cultural expressions may begin earlier or end later. Additionally, during this time, an individual's ability for abstract and critical thinking grows.

Adolescence can be broken into three stages: early adolescence, middle adolescence, and late adolescence. Each stage has its own characteristics. Let's take a look at each stage in more detail below.

Early Adolescence (10 to 13 years)

- Puberty begins in this stage.
- Children experience considerable physical growth and increased sexual interest.
- Body changes such as hair growth under the arms and near the genitals, breast development in females and enlargement of the testicles in males, starts to occur.
- These changes can start as early as age 8 for females and age nine for males.
- Girls may start their period around age 12.
- Body changes can cause both curiosity and anxiety.

- Children may question their gender identity during this stage, and it can be a challenging time for transgender children
- Cognitive development at this stage.
- Adolescents at this stage tend to have concrete, black-and-white, all-or-nothing thinking and a limited capacity for abstract thought.
- Thinking may be egocentric, and children this age may be self-conscious about their appearance and apprehensive about being judged by their peers.
- Intellectual interests expand, and early adolescents develop deeper moral thinking.
- Pre-teens also feel an increased need for privacy.
- They explore how to be independent from their family and may push boundaries and react strongly when limits are enforced

Middle Adolescence (14 to 17 years)

- Puberty changes for both males and females continue.
- Males may have a growth spurt and some voice cracking as their voices lower.
- Physical growth for females slows and most have regular menstrual periods by this time.
- Interest in romantic and sexual relationships may start and teens may question and explore their sexual identity; masturbation may be a part of this sexual exploration and getting to know their body.
- Arguments with parents may increase as teens strive for more independence and friends.

- The brain continues to mature and there is a growing capacity for abstract thought, though emotions often drive decision-making and they may act on impulse without thinking things through.
- During this stage, children may start to set long-term goals and become interested in the meaning of life and moral reasoning.

Late adolescence/young adulthood (18 to 21 years and beyond)

- This phase usually encompasses less physical development and more cognitive developments.
- Most have grown to their full adult height.
- In this stage, young people become able to think about ideas rationally, have impulse control and can delay gratification, and plan for the future.
- They have a stronger sense of identity and individuality and can identify their own values.
- They also experience increased independence, emotional stability, stability in friendships and romantic relationships, and may also establish an “adult relationship” with parents, looking to them less as authority figures and more as peers.

According to **WHO**: Adolescence is the phase of life between childhood and adulthood; from ages 10 to 19. It is a unique stage of human development and is an important time for laying the foundations of good health.

Furthermore, due to the numerous changes and activities which are particular to this stage alone, adolescence is regarded as a multidimensional stage.

Characteristics

1. Physical Development

- Girls experience growth spurts earlier (10 - 14 years, while it is 12 - 16 in boys).

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- Experience a shift in dependence on family to dependence on peers.
- Able to critically compare parents with others.
- Experience increased interest in opposite sex, though may often feel uncomfortable and awkward with the other sex.

4. Cognitive Development

- Develop ability to think abstractly, but many still think in literal terms.
- Develop critical thinking skills.
- Exhibit increased communication skills.
- Become argumentative and demonstrate an intense need to be 'right'.
- Show intense focus on a new interest but lack discipline to sustain it.
- Develop decision making skills and wants a voice in their choices.

PROBLEMS OF ADOLESCENCE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIAN CONTEXT

Any stage of development is likely to be fraught with complications. Adolescence is a transitional period from childhood to adulthood that implies numerous developmental changes and problems. Some of the problems of our adolescence are as follows:

a. Uncertainty regarding somatic variation:

Every adolescent faces the more or less difficult task of adjusting to somatic changes associated with puberty. Teens are less informed about the physical changes that occurs during the puberty. Due to a lack of knowledge about sex hygiene, they are content with crude and perverted knowledge about sex related matters. It eventually leads to the development of a guilt-like feeling in the minds of the children which makes them secretive.

b. Problems associated with increased sex-consciousness:

Due to the sudden awakening of their sex instincts during adolescence they become curious about sex related topics. In India, parents are hesitant to discuss sex issues with their children, so adolescents resort to socially unacceptable means to quench their curiosity.

c. Problems with adjustment:

During this period, adolescents have a strong sense of independence which is frequently thwarted by parental opposition. Conflicts between parental norms of behaviour and peer group relationships often cause friction in the relationship and adolescents find it difficult to adjust to the needs and demands of parents which eventually leads to the development of a revolting tendency.

d. Conflicts between childhood and adulthood:

In our society, the adolescent are classified as neither children nor adults. For their physical and emotional needs, they have to rely on their parents and elders. But at the same time, they wish to express their own thoughts and opinions like an adult. Parents and teachers frequently treat them in an ambiguous manner. They expect them to act like an adult at times and treat them like a child at others. Adolescents caught between the roles of children and adults, which causes them to be conflicted.

e. Difficulties adjusting to the community:

The changing society makes anticipating and planning for adolescent life difficult. They have difficulty in adapting their capacities as per the needs of the community. Most adolescents respond at this point by withdrawing into a non-demanding and non-working world of pleasure and satisfaction.

Needs and Aspirations of Adolescence

Every adolescent has certain needs, and meeting those needs is critical to their continued physical and other aspects of growth and

development. A need is a tension within an organism that must be satisfied for the wellbeing of the organism. When a need is met, the tension is released and the individual feels satisfied. The needs and desires can be broadly classified into primary and secondary.

Primary Needs and Aspirations: Primary needs are unavoidable because they are concerned with an individual's very existence. The important primary needs are the need for oxygen, need for water and food, need for rest and sleep, need for sex gratification, and so on.

Secondary Needs and Aspirations: Secondary needs are those that are associated with an individual's socio-cultural environment. They are acquired through social learning and their satisfaction is required for an individual's psychological wellbeing. Some of the important secondary needs and desires/aspirations are as follows:

a. Need for Love:

Adolescents have a high need for affection and a want to be liked. One of adolescents' most fundamental psychological needs is love. An individual's sense of security will rise with proper affection.

b. Need for Security:

Adolescents need emotional, social, and financial security in addition to their physical security. Teenagers who don't feel secure may develop maladaptive behaviours.

c. Desire for Freedom:

Adolescents want the freedom to express their thoughts, sentiments, and emotions at this time. They grow agitated and unpleasant when limitations are placed on them.

d. Desire For Self-expression:

Each person is born with the desire to express himself or herself and realise his or her full potential. Adolescents are content when they seize their opportunity, but they are sad and dissatisfied when they don't.

Most people find their adolescence to be a difficult time. They have to make judgements regarding their work, lifestyle. Normally a person deals a lot of pressure to be "a guy" according to what society expects of him. Planning one's life's course might be particularly challenging if a person lacks the skills necessary to handle the challenges he or she will encounter.

One must be able to make decisions and set goals if he or she wants to enjoy adolescence free of crises and grow into a responsible adult. One can do that with the aid of the following advice:

- **Have Strong Morals:** People's values are the beliefs they have about the things they believe to be good or bad, and the things that are most important to them. The choices a person makes will be influenced by his or her values. Parents, family, friends, faith, and many other people influence values.
- **Make a Plan for Life:** A lot of successful people set goals and objectives for themselves. One must have a plan for what he or she wants and how he or she will get it.
- **Personality Development:** One's dreams will always stay only dreams if they don't develop them personally. Stories of successful people tell how they overcame adversity by reading books on a variety of topics. Reading habit helps a person to expand his or her horizons, in other terms.
- **Make Decisions:** The toughest decisions one faces as a teen usually include job, relationships with other people. Before choosing, one should learn as much as it is possible about each option, carefully analyse the benefits and drawbacks, and consult parents or another reliable adult about the choices.

Over everything else, one should have faith in themselves. The self-assurance of many successful people has helped a number of people to get where they are today. Positive self-talk and thought processes speed up goal achievement. Everyone should consider

themselves capable of overcoming every challenging circumstance and succeeding in it. One should not allow others' criticism to hold back. Making decisions, some good and some poor, is the essence of growing up.

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