

7. UNDERSTANDING ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

7.1. THE PROCESS OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

7.1.1. Development is a continuous process

Human development refers to the sequences of changes occurring over the entire life span of the individual, continuously from the moment of conception to the moment of death. Intertwined with the biology of development is the concept of maturation. Maturation is the ‘coming to fruition’ or ‘developing to full capacity’ of an in-born biological trait. Developing reproductive capability is an example of biological maturation during adolescence.

Human development goes beyond mere biological maturation. Development in its totality means progressive changes leading to higher levels of functioning and the acquisition of competencies at the physical, emotional, cognitive and social levels.

7.1.2. Human development occurs in steps and stages

Human development progresses through clearly definable steps and stages, called developmental stages. Each developmental stage is characterised by certain developmental tasks. Mastery over each set of tasks is considered essential for success in the next stage.

Some examples of developmental tasks

- Early Childhood: separation from mother.
- Middle Childhood: reading and writing skills.
- Adolescence: identity formation; career choice.
- Early Adulthood: marriage, entry into a career.
- Middle Adulthood: child care; higher levels of career development.
- Late Adulthood: career culmination; coping with retirement.

Each stage of development culminates with a crisis and successful resolution of this crisis paves the way for entry into the next developmental stage.

7.2. Adolescence

7.2.1. The second decade

Adolescence is a developmental stage that occurs in the second decade of life. No longer a child, but not yet an adult, the adolescent straddles the period between childhood and adulthood. Sometimes adolescents behave like the children they were and at other times we see glimpses of the adults they will become. As maturation progresses, we see a decreasing affinity with childhood and a greater identification with adulthood.

7.2.2. The fires of puberty

While the age range of adolescence is not exact, it begins more or less around 13 years of age and culminates around 20 years of age.

The onset of puberty signals the commencement of adolescence. Increases in hormonal and other bio-chemical activity triggers massive physical changes in the adolescent. One of the earliest effects of puberty are menarche (the first occurrence of menstruation) for girls and nocturnal emissions (wet dreams) for boys. This signals the maturation of the individual's sexual and reproductive system.

7.2.3. Physical development

Significant changes are seen at the physical level during adolescence. The size ratio between body parts undergoes a dramatic change. The shape of the body changes (e.g. broadening of shoulders for boys and hips for girls). Increases in body size are also marked. 4 to 6 inches are gained in height, 10 to 30 pounds are gained in weight.

It must be noted that the rate of growth varies. Individuals can show different levels of changes in size, shape and proportion, although they are the same age.

7.2.4. Sexual Characteristics

Primary sex organs that have been present from birth begin to enlarge and become functional during adolescence. Testes begin to function for boys and ovaries become active for girls.

Secondary sexual characteristics are physical features that distinguish male from female and contribute to attractiveness to the opposite sex. Some of these characteristics are changes in voice, muscular development, broadening of hips and shoulders, body hair, appearance of breasts and changes in skin texture.

7.2.5. Consequences of physical changes

The pattern of life established for the last 10 to 12 years is disturbed. The individual has almost become a stranger to him / herself. This causes dramatic fluctuations in behaviour and attitude. Adolescents experience intense uncertainty, insecurity and confusion. Their behaviour is unpredictable and may go against social conventions. Some of the ways in which this tension is expressed outwardly are:

- restlessness.
- withdrawal.
- assertion of independence.
- Moodiness / irritability.

As the tempo of physical growth decreases and bodily changes are completed, attitudes and behaviour become more equable.

7.2.6. The mind of the adolescent - cognitive changes

Compared to those who are younger, the thinking process becomes more conscious and rational during the adolescent years. The adolescent is aware of his / her thoughts. The adolescent can distinguish between what is rational and irrational and between fact and fiction.

Information processing is more complex. The adolescent is capable of processing more information and manipulating a wider range of concepts.

The orientation to time becomes more real. The adolescent is able to perceive the passage of time and see links between the past, the present and the future. Most importantly the adolescent becomes aware that present actions can cause changes in the future.

7.2.7. Consequences of cognitive development

With the ongoing maturation of cognitive functions, the adolescent:

- is unwilling to accept what he / she cannot understand.
- is unable to tolerate inconsistencies and perceives them as hypocrisy.
- tends to be cynical and critical.
- becomes outspoken and dismissive.
- comes to conclusions but often fails to verify the validity of these conclusions.

Adolescents respond vigorously to what is rational and logically sound. As a result adolescents:

- respond to facts and figures.
- enjoy debates and discussions.
- respond when pushed to think.

Adolescents also develop a sensitivity to morality and tend to:

- question established value structures (religion, right and wrong).
- begin to develop a personal value structure.

7.2.8. The adolescent and others - social development

New roles emerge along with new social expectations. In addition to the roles of family member, student and peer group member, the adolescent experiences new expectations from new roles such as worker, religious believer, political participant and sexual partner.

7.2.9. The consequences of social development

When social development progresses normally, the adolescent gains acceptance. He or she is liked by others and is comfortable in the group. Some adolescents are perceived as the star of the group. They are admired because of some outstanding quality and everyone in the group want the star as a friend. Difficulties with social development lead to the individual becoming a fringer. This adolescent is shy, withdrawn and nondescript. The fringer is on the borderline of acceptance. Severe difficulties with social development lead to isolation. The isolate has no (or very few) friends among peers. The voluntary isolate shows a lack of interest in group membership, while the involuntary isolate has been rejected by group members.

Assignment

The final step to complete your self-learning of this unit is to submit a simple assignment.

- Click on the link below. You will be taken to the assignment.
- Click on the **Submit** button at the end of the assignment. Your responses will be sent to us automatically.
- You will receive the evaluation from us.

Link: <https://forms.gle/hfJZoS6YPCdwsFTC9>

Important: You must submit all 7 assignments before the face-to-face virtual training session.