



CHALLENGES

FACED BY CHILDREN

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Adolescence... the charm and the challenge

What is adolescence? ... A time in a life span when children realize who they are and what they would like to be. It is a time to forge an identity, career choices to be made, meaningful relationships to be formed and sustained, technological advances tackled, attitudes and roles chiseled. Isn't this process of transition fraught with trials and tribulations? Information overload, mixed messages from media, press, teachers, family and society at large add to the complexity and confusion already present in young boastful minds. It is the charm and challenge and a subtle chaos too.

A vital stage of growth and development marks the period of transition from childhood to adulthood. Adolescence is also the stage when young people extend their relationships beyond parents and family and are intensely influenced by their peers and the outside world in general.

Adolescents, the generation that belongs to the 10-19 years age group, account for one-fifth of the world's population and nearly a quarter of India's population. They have very special and distinct needs, which can no longer be overlooked. By addressing their needs one would not only be contributing to the socio-economic development of the country but also in other societal concerns like social harmony, gender justice and population stabilization.

The Period of Storm and Stress

These are truly the years of creativity, idealism, buoyancy and a spirit of adventure. But these are also the years of experimentation and risk-taking, of giving in to negative peer pressure, of taking uninformed decisions on crucial issues, especially relating to their bodies and their sexuality. How adolescents cope with these challenges is determined largely by their environment. Adolescence is thus a turning point in one's life, a period of increased potential but also one of greater vulnerability.

Train up a child in a way he should go -- and walk there yourself once in a while. ~ Josh Billings

One's changing body size and configuration evoke a new set of reactions and expectations from parents, peers, and society. Hormonal fluctuations precipitate new feelings and emotional responses, and may take the adolescent by surprise, giving rise to doubts about normalcy, self-discipline, or social acceptability. Societal and intrapersonal pressures to individuate from parents are counterbalanced by recognition of vulnerability. The rights of adulthood are enticing, but the responsibilities may seem oppressive. There is a need to be recognized as a unique individual, yet a fear of being 'different' exists too. Forcing oneself to sit down and study is difficult when there are so many new urges, interests, options, and potentials to explore.

Adolescents want to taste and test the world, often coming into conflict with parents, teachers, or societal rules that attempt to curb their impulsivity or remind them of consequences.

Tackling Adolescents

Parents should be concerned and worried about what their children are up to, what kind of education, guidance and how much freedom they need. Parents need to understand, guide and deal with them tactfully. Excessive freedom may spoil the child whereas no freedom may also prove equally harmful. While rules are essential, their implementation should not make the teenager feel like an outcast amongst his friends. Therefore, parents need to handle them with care.

Many changes and adjustments are required to be made in their relationships with parents, friends and themselves. Patience, openness, and an understanding attitude on the part of parents can make this phase less confusing.

Parents need to tackle children in a much more efficient manner today. It calls for a thorough understanding of the transition a child goes through during this period, exercising utmost restraint, guiding and advising in a friendly manner, not being overambitious or pressurizing the child too much on the part of parents.

Various factors have conspired collectively to designate adolescence as a discrete age stage. First, children inevitably became more separated from adults as society moved from a rural to an urban environment. Second, as a culture became more complex, the stages became increasingly refined, with a definite step-like transition from infancy to adulthood. While some societies ritualize the shift from youth to maturity, those lacking such rites have instead, a youth culture or institutionalized adolescence. Against this background, various stage theories have evolved, all commonly portraying childhood, adolescence, and adulthood as relatively distinct stages that can be identified sociologically, physiologically, and psychologically.

Hope and Vision

For teenagers, coping with stress in a changing world is an uphill task. Any help for many or majority of challenging or distressing states should not be denied or condemned within the family or social context.

Development stress, emotional distress, academic pressures, physical stress, economic stress or social distress—where do we begin? Is there time left for us to hold our little ones by their hand and straddle them through the 21st century as happy and responsible citizens? The tasks are many but the bottom line is that we should be able to reconcile and accommodate different realities—for the young are indeed the role models of tomorrow.



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