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Course : Two / Adolescence

**I.Definition of Adolescence**

The World Health Organization (WHO) has defined adolescence as a transition period between childhood and adulthood, from immaturity to maturity (puberty), the development of mental processes and adult identity; the period in life when an individual is no longer a child, but not yet a young adult. It is a period in which the individual undergoes enormous physical and psychological changes. In addition, it is a transition from total socio-economic dependence to relative independence. Physical growth is accompanied by sexual maturation or reproductive maturity. In African countries, for example, adolescence starts with the age of 11 and ends around18 to 20. It starts with rapid physical changes, including gains in weight and height. The adolescents’ thinking becomes more abstract, logical and idealistic.

**Puberty**

Puberty is a period of time that any adolescent human being undergoes. It involves a predictable sequence of hormonal and physical changes, including both sexual maturation and physical growth. This pubertal development takes place during the early adolescent years between 10 -13. The physical maturation and timing affect the general adolescent adjustment, and such effects are different for boys and girls.

**Hormonal changes**

Physical changes accompany changes in hypothalamic-pituity-gonadol (HPG) axis and occur in an orderly sequence over a definite time during normal puberty (Becker, 2001). Puberty is triggered by hormonal influences and is controlled by the anterior pituity gland in response to a stimulus from the hypothalamus.

The production of gonadotropin-releasing hormone, follicle stimulating hormone, luteinizing hormone and sex steroids(known as estrogens, androgens, progestrone and testesterone) affect the biological changes of adolescents and initiate the beginning of puberty.

**Major physical changes**

The adolescent’s skin becomes oily, the hair increases on male’s legs, underarms and in pubic area. For female, the hair increases on legs, chest, face, underarms and in pubic area, too. The breasts grow, hips broden, shoulders and chest broaden with a clear increase in weight and height for both sexes. Sweat increases and body odor may appear. The voice deepens slightly for girls and boys but may crack for male as it suddenly goes from high to low and from low to high. This cracking can be embarrassing at times. In time, it will stop. Menstruation begins and there is vaginal discharge, quite normal to increase in mid-cycle and before the period. On the other hand, erections and wet dreams occur and are completely normal because of the penis and testicles’ enlargement.

**Adolescent delayed puberty: Male and female adolescents**

Puberty is accompanied by physical, psychological and emotional changes adapted to ensure reproductive and parenting success. According to Patton (2009), the effects of puberty on health and wellbeing were profound and paradoxical. He further stated that physical maturation leads an individual into a life phase of strength, speed and fitness but new problems may immerge. It marks a transition in risks for depression, mental disorders, eating disorders and antisocial behaviours due to substances abuse. Thus it is the role of caring and accompanying adults to be there to help the adolescents pass safely through this critical period in life. However, the psychological and social effects usually increase the feeling of consciousness and isolation if the parents do not seriously support their adolescents victims of loneliness and bad peers.

**Adolescent emotional changes**

-Struggling with a sense of identity and questions about oneself serious risky behaviours.

-Moodiness, anger and depression.

-Need for more independence and privacy.

-Relationship with friends and opinions of others become more important.

-More concerned or worried about appearance and body.

-Worry about future (School, family, job).

-New ‘‘ crushes’’ on movie stars, pop artists.

-Curiosity about sexual organs.

-Feeling sexually attracted to people.

All these feelings and emotions are normal and there is no need to feel anxious or guilty about growing. Talking to parents and trusted adults is often helpful for adolescents in a personal phase of development, where they have to establish their own beliefs, values, and what they want to accomplish out of life. The self-evaluation process leads to emotional and social independence, and the making of a mature adult.

**How do these changes affect teens?**

-Teens frequently sleep longer. More sleep allow their bodies to conduct the internal work required for such rapid growth. On average, they need about nine hours and half of sleep a night (Straugh, 2003)

-Teens may be much clumsy (maladroit) because of growth which may seem sudden and rapid in his/her perception. Teens can appear uncoordinated.

-Teenage girls may become overly sensitive about their weight. Some even try to lose weight. Others develop severe eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa or bulimia. Anorexia nervosa refers to starvation; bulimia refers to binge or extreme eating and vomiting.

-Teens may be concerned because they are not physically developing at the same rate as their peers. Teens may be more developed than their peers (‘‘early maturers’’) or less developed than their peers (‘‘ late-maturers’’). Being out of developmental ‘‘step’’ with peers is concerning to adolescents because most just want to fit in. Research suggests that early maturing boys tend to be more popular with peers and hold more leadership positions. However, early maturing girls are more likely to experience pressure to become involved in dating relationships with older boys before they are emotionally ready. These tend to suffer more from depression, eating disorders, and anxiety.

-Teens may ask more direct questions about methods of birth and protection from sexually transmitted diseases.

**Ten major tasks of adolescents**

1.Adjust to sexually maturing bodies and feelings.

2.Develop and apply abstract thinking skills.

3.Develop and apply a more complex level of perspective taking.

4.Develop and apply new coping skills in areas such as decision making, problem solving and conflict resolution.

5.Identify meaningful moral standards, values and beliefs system.

6.Understand more complex emotional experiences in family.

7.Form close and supportive friends.

8.Establish key aspects of identity.

9.Meet the demands of increasingly mature roles and responsibilities.

10.Renegotiate relationships with adults and parenting roles.

**What can we do?**

Knowledge about what changes are behaviours during adolescence are normal. Adults can go a long way in helping teens manage the transition successfully. There are some specific things adults can do to be supportive:

-Don’t criticize or compare the teens to others. Teens are already acutely self-conscious about the way they look. They don’t need you to point it out.

-Encourage teens to get enough sleep. Try to understand when teens want to sleep or get out of bed for school.

-Encourage and model healthy eating habits. Keep plenty of nutrition food in the house. Remember that teens need to take in more calories to fuel their growth. Monitor eating habits accordingly.

-Encourage and model physical activity. Exercise help teens burn excess energy, strengthen developing muscles, and sleep better at night. It may help teens become more comfortable in their changing bodies.

-Provide honest answers to teens about methods of birth. If adults do not provide accurate information, teens with rely on their peers or other inaccurate sources. Unfortunately, such enormous information is often to blame when teens make poor decisions.

-Be understanding of their need for physical space. Do not force your teens to kiss relatives or family friends; Maintain communication and respect teens’ need to withdraw.

-Be patient with excessive grooming habits. They often spend large time taking care of themselves: skin, hair, etc. This behaviour reflects teens’ attempt to maintain some control over their rapid changing bodies.

**II. Cognitive Development**

What is it?

Adults believe that teens have better thinking skills than younger youth. These advances in thinking are divided into several areas

*Developing advanced reasoning skills:* They include the ability to think about multiple options and possibilities. It includes a more logical thought process and the ability to think about things hypothetically. It answers the question of ‘‘what if...?’’

*Developing abstract thinking skills:* Abstract thinking means thinking about things that cannot be seen, heard or touched. Examples of this are faith, beliefs, trust, and spirituality.

*Developing the ability to think in a process known as ‘*‘meta-cognition’’. Meta-cognition is the ability to think how one is perceived by others (thoughts and feelings) and develop strategies for improving learning.

**How do these changes affect teens?**

**-**Teens show a high level of self-consciousness. They tend to believe everyone is watching them. This leads teens to believe that they have an ‘‘ imaginary audience’’.

-Teens tend to believe no one else has ever experience similar feelings and emotions. They are overly dramatic and upset. They may say things like ‘‘You’ll never understand ’’ or ‘‘My life is ruined !’’

-Teens tend to exhibit themselves. They take risks like drinking, driving, having illegal relations (‘‘I can’t possibly get pragnant’’), or smoking (‘‘I can’t possibly get cancer’’).

-Teens tend to exhibit a ‘‘ justice’’ orientation. They often point out to adults that their actions are totally right. They see little room for error.

**What can be done?**

-Don’t be angry when teens discount your experience. Try to listen to their concerns. Invite an elder sibling or friend to give good advice to the teen if needed.

-Get teens involved in discussing their behaviour and how they should develop it in realistic consequences. Listen to their ideas!

-Provide opportunities for teens to participate in controlled risky behaviour such as sport, climbing, etc.

-Provide opportunities for teens to get involved in community service such as being in a scout movement.

-Open doors to listen to teens’ views and discuss your own. Ask them about their political and spiritual beliefs. Give them a nonthreatening forum for discussion.

-Try to build a relationship with teens. Talk about your experiences. Try to understand their feelings and express yours as a adult to be understood.

**III. Psychosocial development**

What is it?

These are five psychosocial issues (Steingerg, 2007) :

-Establishing an identity and an answer to ‘‘ Who am I ’’. Teens with secure identities know where they fit in the world.

-Establishing autonomy and the need to become independent and self-sufficient in the world.

-Establishing intimacy with close friends of the same sex. They will learn how to begin, maintain, and end relationship; and practice social skills.

-Becoming comfortable with one’s puberty and develop a healthy sexual identity.

-Encourage achievement. Teens see the relationship between their current abilities and future plans vocational aspiration.

**How do these changes affect teens?**

-Teens begin to spend more time with peers than families to develop and practice social skills. They still tend to conform to parental ideals such as values, education and long-term plans.

-Teens may begin to lock their doors to establish privacy. Nothing to worry about as long as they act with the family.

-Let space free for teens to be involved in multiple hobbies or sport. They attempt to see what they are good at.

-Teens may begin to interact with parents as people. They may attempt to interact with adult more as equals.

**What can you do?**

-Encourage involvement in multiple groups or activities, both within school and after school. They try to gain a sense of achievement.

-Praise teens for their efforts as well as their abilities to reach success.

-Help teens explore career goals and options. Ask them about their future career goals.

-Give teens an opportunity to demonstrate responsibility for their own behaviour. Allow them participate in family with suggestions.

-Be aware of who your teens’ friends are and what they are doing. Make sure you know their friends.

-Continue to provide teens with a sense of safety environment which they need to deal effectively with all the psychological tasks of adolescents.

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