

Challenging Behaviours in Adolescents: Should we intervene?

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Adolescence

- A transitional period of maturation between childhood and adulthood.
- Many changes-Physical & Cognitive maturation
 - Peer relationships deepen,
 - autonomy in decision making
 - Intellectual pursuits & social belonging is sought
- Adolescents are “works in progress

- The conceptualization of adolescence as a continuous struggle has no scientific basis.
- Up to 75% of Adolescents display a successful adaptation to the changes and continue with their previous functioning.

Challenging behaviours

- Alcohol - most commonly abused & co existent with many high risk behaviours.

Adolescent Alcohol use is linked with future anti social behaviour and depression. Even lower use predict similar problems. **Preventive interventions needed for those teens even with less serious drinking.**

- Illicit substances -youth crimes and violence



- Aggression- physical/verbal
- Self harm /suicidal behaviour
- Unsafe sexual behaviour
- Reckless driving
- Disobedient/defiant behaviour
- Disinterest in studies
- “Bad friends”
- “Too much FB/Twitter”

Vulnerable Adolescents

- Inadequate parental supervision
- Low level of investment in academic pursuits
- Little involvement in structured extra curricular activities.

Understanding normal adolescence

- Erik Erikson - *EGO IDENTITY*,
Childhood talents, experiences and strengths applied into their evolving selves and change without losing the sense of “who they are”
- Idol adoration- explore various aspects of their psychological selves by becoming fans of famous figures in varying degrees.



- Acceptance by peer group
- Involvement in a variety of activities
 - less likely to become consumed by an adoration of an Idol.
- Socially isolated
- (feel) socially rejected and
- overly identified with an Idol to the exclusion of all other activities are at risk of serious emotional problems and an intervention is needed.

Early Adolescence – 12-14 yrs

- Criticise/question family habits/values
- Insist on being with peers
- Withdrawn emotionally in family setting
- Greater interest in looks and fashion
- New awareness of sexuality – opposite sex
- May show their growing desire for autonomy sometimes with challenging behaviours toward authority figures.

Middle Adolescence - 14-16yrs

- Achieve more independence
Sexual behaviour intensifies- romantic relationships more complicated.
- Identifying with a peer group - highly influential on decision making.
- Underestimate the risks associated with some recreational activities – This with their drive to be autonomous clashes with some parental expectations and requests frequently.

Late adolescence - 17-19yrs

- A greater definition of self and a sense of belonging to a certain group or subculture in the mainstream society- Gradually moves toward a solid “identity formation”



Cognitive development

- One of the most important cognitive tasks in Adolescents is identifying and gravitating towards those pursuits that match their cognitive strengths. Cognitive adaptation is profoundly influenced by **social relationships and dialogue between adolescent and peers.**

Social development

- For early adolescent being accepted and rated as competent by peers is of central importance to the sense of well being and good self esteem. **Belonging to a peer group is a sign of adaptation and a developmentally appropriate step in separating from parents.**
- Often seek out a peer group offering acceptance regardless of negative behaviours associated with that group.

- Social cognition as explored by Robert Selman – Children are fair weather friends.
- As adolescence ensues friendships become more individualized and personal secrets are likely shared with a friend rather than a family member. A comfort level is achieved within the group and they “stick together”



Moral development

Early - the moral reasoning - decided on what is perceived as fair and reciprocal -“an eye for an eye” and a “Tooth for a tooth”

Mid –there is a right and a wrong determined by the society. The extenuating or mitigating circumstances are not considered.

Late - and early adulthood- Interpret complex moral dilemmas More flexible in right and wrong allowing exceptions to ordinary rules

Sexual behaviour

- Sexual interests and experimentation are critical components of adolescence.
- Sexual experimentation often begins with fantasy and masturbation in early adolescent.
- The balance between healthy adolescence sexual experimentation and emotionally and physically unsafe sexual practices have been a major challenge.

- Reasonable risk taking - a necessary endeavour leading to confidence in forming new relationships and competence in sports and in social situations.
- However high risk behaviours are associated with serious negative consequences.



Internet

- Likely to influence the intellectual and social development
 - accessing academic info / knowledge on broad range of topics
 - recreational activities to psychological concerns, corresponding with peers through messages chat rooms and games

- Not always easy to separate out the normal experimentation behaviours and high risk behaviours.
- When there is evidence to prove frequent high risk behaviours- urgent psychosocial interventions
- In less obvious cases - on going academic difficulties, do not participate in any extra curricular activities and are socially isolated may also be in need of psychiatric evaluation.

Take home message- Strike a Balance



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