

## Information for Parents on Management of Behavioral Problems among Adolescents

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### Abstract

Children, adolescents and youth today face many social and cultural problems. For some youth, pressures include poverty, violence, parental problems, and gangs. Adolescents may also be concerned about significant issues such as religion, gender roles, values, or ethnicity. Some children are having difficulty dealing with past traumas they have experienced, like abuse. Parents and their teenagers are struggling between the youth's wanting independence while still needing parental guidance. These conflicts may result in behavioral problems in children and adolescents. Behavioral issues in adolescents can have serious consequences for the adolescents. A sizeable population of our adolescents needs support in coping with emotional and behavioural problems. Though many children of families with problems may be normal, knowledge of the family environment and problems in the adolescents identifies the adolescent-family dyad that may need attention. It indicates towards the need for a multi-prolonged intervention to prevent these problems in adolescents.

**Keywords:** Adolescence; Behavioural Problems; Disruptive; Peer Influence; Aggression.

### Introduction

After years of neglect, research and clinical practice in regard to problems of adolescence have been

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expanding at a rapid pace. We now know that adolescence is a period in which the central nervous system, especially brain functions, continue to unfold. This ongoing development is sometimes associated with emotional and behavioural changes that would be considered normal during this particular age period. However, some of these changes in physical and psychological development are associated with adjustment problems and disorders that represent a shift in developmental course from earlier childhood. Parents need to develop a practical and realistic outlook towards parenting as they are the primary source of the information as well as support for these restless minds of adolescents.

Most parents understand that adolescence defines a new era in the evolution of the family. Parents expect occasional mood swings, disobedience of rules as well as drifting away from the family towards peers. However, parents become concerned when certain behaviours seem more intense or frequent than that they see in their friends' children.

Adolescence may be defined as the period within the life span when most of a person's biological, cognitive, psychological and social characteristics are changing from what is typically considered child like to what is considered adult like. Adolescence is typically defined by chronological age (10-19 years), although physical, social, and cognitive development is often taken into account as well the period of adolescence is most closely associated with the teenage years [1].

Adolescents have varying degree of behavioral problems ranging from violent behaviors, substance use and misuse, and sexual behaviors to bullying. Each of these problems is not without its repercussions. For instance, it has been noted that adolescents who misuse drugs such as marijuana develop psychiatric

manifestations such as panic states, flashbacks, drug psychosis, homicides, suicidal thoughts, and drug dependence [2]. The behavioral problems in adolescents can have serious consequences for the adolescents, their family and friends, their schools, and society. It has been frequently reported that behavioral problems are the most common reason why adolescents consult psychologist and pediatric psychiatrist [3-4].

### Growth and Development during Adolescence

During adolescence physical, psychological and sexual development takes place. Girls are developing earlier than boys (by about 2 years) and also complete the process earlier. Puberty is a period of several years in which rapid physical growth and psychological changes occur, culminating in sexual maturity. The average onset of puberty is at 10 or 11 for girls and age 12 or 13 for boys. Every person's individual timetable for puberty is influenced primarily by heredity, although environmental factors, such as diet and exercise, also exert some influence. That is, if father or mother developed late in their adolescence their children may also show late development. There is wide variation in amount and duration of growth and development. Do not expect that the changes in their body would occur exactly in the same way as compared to friends of his/her age [5].

### Changes that Occur During Adolescence

#### a) Physical Changes during Adolescence

During adolescence many changes take place in the body. These changes may occur in the following sequence, but not at a constant pace and you may not see all these changes together at one particular stage of development.

As a parent, we should discuss with the adolescents, about these changes occurring in their body, be a constant help to the adolescents who are worried and anxious about these changes and tell them not to compare themselves with the friends of their age.

#### b) Behavioural Changes

There are frequent changes in the behaviour of the adolescents that appear suddenly, suggesting they are physiological in origin rather than fostered by the environment. The common behavioural changes are:

- Daydreaming
- Lack of self confidence
- Highly sensitive
- Irritable
- Resentment towards family
- Desire for isolation
- Boredom
- Opposition to work
- Restlessness

#### c) Emotional Changes

Number of common cause gives rise to feelings of insecurity and uncertainty on the part of the adolescents, which predisposes him/her to heightened emotionality or as we call 'emotional outburst'.

*Factors that lead adolescents to react with intense emotionality are*

- Unfavourable relationship of adolescent with his family.
- Restraints occurring from parental supervision.
- Obstacles that prevent adolescents from doing what he desires.
- Situation in which adolescent feels self-inadequacy.
- Social expectation of more mature behaviour.

#### Common Emotional Patterns of Adolescents

- Fear of social relationship
- Worry

Girls	Boys
Growth spurt increases in height. Widening of hips (pelvis) Deposition of fat and development of body curves. Increases in size of breasts. Appearance of hair on groin and arm pits	Growth spurt increases in height Widening of shoulder Muscular development Protrusion of larynx and cracking of voice. Appearance of hair on groin and arm pits, chest and face (moustache and beard)
Enlargement of size of genitals. Excessive sweating and pimples Beginning of menstrual periods	Enlargement in testes and length of penis Excessive sweating and pimples Emission of semen

- Frustration
- Annoyance
- Jealousy, Envy
- Joy
- Anger
- Fear of social embarrassment

#### *d) Psychosocial features of adolescents*

- Adolescents are not like children who are dependent on parents for all their needs. They gradually gain emotional independence from parents and other adults.
- The adolescents would be keen to take their own decisions and organize their life independently, while we, as parent may think that the adolescent is not taking interest in the activities leading to conflict with parents. This could be avoided by talking and having a discussion to find a way out. As parents we can speak our experiences and extend help.
- The adolescents become more dependent on friends as a source of comfort. They start forming groups with persons having common interest and references.
- Early adolescence peer contact is primarily with same sex and during middle adolescence there is increased involvement with opposite sex.
- As parents, we sometime would not be sure of our adolescent's behaviour and this can lead to resentment from adolescents. This needs to be discussed with adolescents. For example, you can invite the friends of your adolescents to home and spend some time with them to clear your apprehensions as well as to keep in touch with the adolescent peer group [5].

#### **Behavioral Problems**

Any behaviour that disrupts the learning process disturbs the adolescents' group interaction or which disrupts the adolescents' ability to function adequately and which is perceived by parents as deviant will constitute a behavioural problem. Adolescent behavioral problems can be outward symptoms of greater struggles; the child is dealing with. Many adolescents today have problems and are getting into trouble. After all, there are a lot of pressures for adolescents to deal with. For some youth, pressures include poverty, violence, parental problems, and gangs. They may also be concerned about significant issues such as religion, gender roles, values, or

ethnicity. Some children are having difficulty dealing with past traumas they have experienced, like abuse. Parents and their teenagers are struggling between the youth's wanting independence while still needing parental guidance. Sometimes, these conflicts result in behavioural problems.

A number of isolated behavioral problems of adolescent are delinquency, shoplifting, truancy, lying, a fight in school, drug or alcohol ingestion. Sometimes, they can't easily explain why they act the way they do. They may be just as confused about it as the adults, or they simply see delinquent behaviours as appropriate ways to deal with what they experience. Parents and loved ones may feel scared, angry, frustrated, or hopeless. They may feel guilty and wonder where they went wrong. All these feelings are normal, but it is important to understand that there is help available for troubled adolescents and their families [6-7].

#### **Serious Behavioural Problems**

The normal changes (i.e., the emotional and behavioral) in adolescences become a matter of concern, when the adolescent is exposed to various factors. These factors are:

- Peer pressure
- Influence of mass media
- Curiosity of adolescents
- Experimentation with new things
- Feeling neglected
- Lack of knowledge about harmful behaviour

The adolescents get influenced by these factors. They move away from parents and become more close to friends and indulge in various risk taking activities and develop behavioral problems, which are listed down:

- Substance abuse
- Injury & self harm
- Inadequate physical activity
- Inadequate nutrition
- Sexual behaviour
- Impaired school performance
- Running away from home/ school
- Argumentative
- Disobedience
- Fighting, stealing, cheating, lying

- Temper tantrum
- Staying out late
- Poor concentration
- Failure to finish task
- Having undesirable friends
- Juvenile delinquency
- Risky driving, rule breaking
- Lack of self confidence

Many adolescents' behaviour can be disruptive and difficult at times. As part of learning, how to behave appropriately adolescents may test adult rules at home, school or in the community. Often such behaviour is a reaction to stress or frustration. For some adolescents' serious behaviour problems develop into a pattern that can include acting impulsively, reacting with aggression, refusing to follow reasonable directions and defying adult authority. Adolescents who behave in this way usually have trouble with making and keeping friends. They may be the target of bullying because they over react. Yet they may also bully others to try and get their own way. They are often in trouble with teachers for not following the rules. These patterns of behaviour interfere with their

social and academic development. They often lead to social isolation and to disciplinary consequences, such as school suspension that interrupts learning. Children with serious behaviour problems often do not feel connected at school. They are more likely to experience low self esteem and depression [6-7].

Adolescents with severe behavioural problems often trigger hostile responses from others. Once adolescents come to expect critical or punitive responses, they are less likely to admit failures or problems. They may try to maintain a sense of power or control by distancing themselves from adults and using threat, coercion and aggression to manage social situations. They often try to avoid punishment by denial or lying. They may have strong feelings of anger and resentment. Anger gives a sense of power, but also drives others away, while resentment and mistrust tend to block and distort emotional communication. Many of these adolescents hide feelings of helplessness, low self-esteem, and a need for affection.

Adolescents with serious behavioural problems are difficult to parent. Parenting practices that are very effective with other children in the family may not work for these adolescents. Parents may find it hard to provide the extra structure and support that these

#### *Contributing Factors in the Development of Serious Behavioural Problems*

<b>Factor</b>	<b>What that means</b>
<b>Inherited factors</b>	Some temperament characteristics contribute to behaviour problems. These include being easily irritated, having intense reactions and being difficult to soothe.
<b>Ways of thinking</b>	Children with serious behaviour problems often believe others are picking on them. The more they get into trouble the more this negative bias is confirmed.
<b>Neuro-psychological problems</b>	Difficulties with the brain processes that organise memory and control attention may be similar to those of children with ADHD. There may also be difficulties with controlling emotions and understanding what other people are thinking and feeling.
<b>Parenting practices</b>	Over-reaction to the child's behaviour, lack of supervision and inconsistent discipline may contribute to serious behaviour problems.
<b>Adverse social circumstances</b>	Parental unemployment, financial hardship, poor housing and deprivation are common patterns of hardship amongst families of children with serious problem behaviours.
<b>Peer influences</b>	Gang membership or having an older sibling with Conduct Disorder is associated with the development of serious behaviour problems.
<b>School</b>	Feeling alienated at school, school failure and inflexible discipline practices from teaching staff, can lead to worsening of serious behaviour problems.

adolescents need, especially if they are also experiencing a range of social or personal problems themselves. Schools find it difficult to manage repeated rule breaking and aggressive behaviour. As a result of disciplinary problems and failure to be successful at school, children may become disengaged with school, adding to the risk of negative outcomes. When an adolescent engages in dangerous behaviour (for example, impulsive acts, substance abuse or sexual promiscuity), these acts are usually warning signs of larger problems [8].

### How Do You Know When To Seek Help?

What are the signs of trouble? Many adolescents get into trouble sometimes. A big question for parents, though, is how to know when an adolescent is headed for more serious problems.

- The parents have to focus on patterns rather than an isolated event. The patterns signaling the need for help include not only deviant behaviours by the adolescent, but also the presence of other problems in the family or tensions at home. For example, problems in the parents' marriage or frequent fighting or hostility among the family members can also be involved in the youth's behavioural problems.
- Some signs that indicate immediate effective intervention include:
  - Violence against other persons or animals
  - Peers involved in crime, truancy, drugs
- Sometimes parents may have an instinctive feeling that something serious is happening.
- Teachers or caregivers may also be able to provide information about the adolescent's mood or behaviours outside of the home to help assess the severity of the problem [9].

### What Kinds of Treatments Will Work?

- Try to talk to the adolescent and other family members about what is happening, possible reasons, and potential solutions.
- Treatment should involve the adolescent and his or her family; they are family-based and multisystem.
- Treatments that focus on the family can also be useful in helping adults develop their parenting skills, deal with stress, and work on marital relationships.
- Professionals, such as family therapists, are there to help the adolescent and family gain understanding of the relationship dynamics and

background issues that may be influencing the problem, and come up with solutions [10].

### Protective Resources

We, as parents are the biggest help for our adolescents because we act as the protective factors for them. These protective resources [it is a form of resource which helps the adolescent at the time of dilemma to choose the socially acceptable and correct behaviour] can cushion the behavioural problems of adolescents [9-10].

- Schools
- Parents' supervision and discipline
- Government Agencies
- Community Agencies
- Media
- Faith-based Organisation
- Health Care Providers

### Some Tips for Parents

- Both the parents need to be consistent in disciplining their teens.
- Keep realistic expectations from your Teens.
- Do not nag.
- Do not reprimand them publicly.
- Do not compare your adolescent child or children with other children or even your adolescent's sibling/s.
- *Build cooperative relationships:* Maintain positive relationships with children. Disciplinary measures need to be directed towards the behavior and not the child. When adults' behaviour towards them is positive, children are more willing to cooperate.
- *Make relevant rules and restrictions:* Clear rules and consistent, reasonable consequences for misbehaviour are important. The rules need to be clear and fair to everyone. They should be discussed thoroughly and calmly in advance so that the child understands the rules and the reasons for them before any misbehaviour occurs.
- *Understand and explain the importance of physical exercise in adolescents:* Physical exercise not only keeps the body fit but also keeps the mind fresh. Hence, as parents we can guide adolescents to have 30-60 minutes of exercise daily.
- *Educate yourself:* Read books about teenagers. Respect some mood changes in your adolescent child and be prepared for more conflicts as he/she

matures as an individual. Person who knows what's coming up can cope with it better.

- *Do not be too strict or too lenient:* Listen to their view points
- *Educate your adolescent early enough:* Adolescents usually have doubt about bodies, such as the difference between boys and girls and where babies come from, menstruation, wet dreams etc. So, educate them early before they know it from others.
- *Put yourself in your teen's place:* Practice empathy by helping your teen understand that it is normal to be a bit concerned or self-conscious.
- *Don't object and argue about everything:* Allow the adolescents to do whatever is harmless and take objections on things that really harm like tobacco, drugs and alcohol.
- *Give information to your child and stay informed about your teens yourself:* Adolescents like to experiment things and sometimes this leads to risk. So discuss things openly with your children before they are exposed to them. Know your child's friends and know their friends' parents. Parents can help each other keep track of the adolescent's activities without making the child feel that they are being watched.
- *Know the warning signs:* A certain amount of change may be normal during the adolescent years but too drastic or long lasting change in behaviour may signal a real trouble.
- *Respect Teen's Privacy:* Some parents feel that anything their child does is their business. But to help your adolescent become a young adult, you will need to provide him/her some privacy. You should not expect that your adolescent child will share all thoughts or activities with you.
- *Build positive social skills:* Children who engage in disruptive or aggressive behaviour usually have few other strategies for coping with difficulties or getting what they want. Helping them build positive social skills provides other ways for them to respond.
- *Help children to understand and manage their emotions:* Feelings like frustration and anger often trigger problem behaviours. Teaching adolescents how to recognise and manage their emotions is very helpful for developing adolescent children's self-awareness and self-control.
- *Monitor what teen sees and reads:* keep an eye on what your adolescent child watch (especially in T.V. and Internet) and read (magazines and books).
- Be honest and frank with your adolescent children.

## Conclusion

Adolescents may be experiencing a "time out," but it is time that can easily be lost unless they have a clear sense of direction and the help of adults to clarify and achieve realistic goals. So, early and timely intervention produces the best chance of a favorable outcome and improves the prognosis for all childhood emotional and behavioural problems. As parents, your cooperation and commitment are critical to achieve long-lasting results in your teen.

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