POSITIVE HOME ENVIRONMENT AND BEHAVIOUR DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY ADOLESCENTS

By

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ABSTRACT

Early adolescence is a period of transition when the individual changes physically and psychologically from a child to an adult. This transition involves physical, cognitive and socio emotional changes. The developmental changes that occur during this period cause varying degree of disturbance. The changes they undergo sometimes results in behavioural disorders where they exhibit inappropriate types of behaviour even under normal circumstances. In early adolescence as in all other stages of life, behaviour is the result of interaction between the individual and environment. Early adolescence features increased activity, increased aggressiveness, decreased dependence upon the adults and greater scope for social interaction. The journey through this period becomes easier when parents are involved in adolescents' lives. The parental relationship with early adolescents and the type of home in which they grow are main factors in shaping their behaviour development. Positive parenting encourages early adolescents to be independent but still places limits and controls on children's actions. A positive home environment can raise the early adolescents to be more socially competent and emotionally healthy. By providing a warm, supportive and congenial environment parents can help their teenagers acquire normal behaviour in this stage. Schools can help the parents by organizing educational programmes which will help parents handle their children's issues.

Key Words: Positive Home Environment, Authoritative Parenting, Behavioural Disorders, Early Adolescence.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is one of the most fascinating periods of development. Teenage or adolescence generally extends from 12 to 19 years of age and can be broadly categorized into three stages – early adolescence aged between 12 and 14, middle adolescence between 14 and 17 and late adolescence between 17 and 19. With one foot in childhood and the other in adolescence, the early adolescents undergo changes that can be scary and confusing. So many changes occur within a short time. These changes open the door for both positive and negative consequences. This phase of transition from being a child to an adult offers opportunities for growth not only in physical dimensions but also in cognitive and social competence, autonomy, self esteem and intimacy (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2004). Changes take place in the early adolescent's physical appearance and strength, thinking and reasoning, feeling and emotions, and relationships with family and friends.

Early adolescence period is not just marked by growth in height, but involves a whole lot of other physical changes such as development of bones, muscles and organs in the teenagers. Physical changes become a constant source of irritation (Keating, 2004). The biological changes that occur at early adolescence are dramatic. Cognitive development comprises more ability of abstract thinking, increasing reasoning skills, enhancement of decision making abilities (Yadav, 2010), a stronger sense of right and wrong, and better ability to express feelings through talking. Social development blend in more concern about body image, looks, clothes, moodiness, more influence by peer group, lack of confidence, experiencing intense and unstable feelings, feeling nervous and anxious, attraction towards the opposite sex and declination in motivation (Wigner & Wagner, 2005).

Psychosocial Needs and Desires of Early Adolescents

The various psychosocial needs are briefed below

Need for Security

Security is one of the greatest importance to the mental welfare of the growing adolescents. Psychosocial security is rooted in the individual's estimate of himself, his abilities, his intrinsic worth, his social and moral status, his emotional balance and physical integrity. Continuous change of the bodily mechanism during early adolescence is so important to the development of security. Emotional insecurity arises from the conviction of being neglected and unloved. Security favours courage and decisiveness and integrity (Myers, 2009).

Need for Independence

During early adolescence, independence and emancipation become important. They require understanding of their needs and wants as independent human beings. Independent thinking increases with development, and they want to be allowed to explore in the realm of ideas, to develop intellectually. Young adolescents need adults who communicate with them and show a genuine interest in them (Mohanraj & Latha, 2005). They need support from elders to solve their problems. They expect encouragement to develop interests and personal characteristics.

Need for Experience

This is unquestionably one of the most important drives influencing adolescents conduct. The accumulation of experiences is necessary to maturation and adjustment. The interest of games and sports are sources of experience. Problems like truancy, joy riding (at break neck speed), stealing begin as behavioural explorations (Murdock, Hale & Jo Weber, 2002). By providing opportunities for experience through field trips, sports and games the natural urge can be gratified.

Need for Participation

There is a strong tendency to participate and share the experiences and conduct of others. Participation can be a powerful socializing influence and an important step toward social adjustment. It is a time for exploring many areas and doing new things (Bierman, 2010).

Need for Integrity

The need for integrity is manifested more clearly in all individuals. They crave for recognizing their intrinsic worth and acceptance of demands. Ridiculing, criticizing and finding faults with them may have the most serious effect on the development of personality (Sylvia, 2005). The recognition of achievement of recognition and a feeling of worth can contribute significantly to the gratification.

Behavioural Disorders in Early Adolescents

Behaviour is simply what a living organism does. Human behaviour is extraordinarily complex and is influenced by many factors. Any aspect of behaviour can be examined from many perspectives namely cognitive, biological, evolutionary, developmental, psychodynamic and social and cultural factors. Human behaviour is normal if it falls within the range of expected norms and abnormal when it deviates from the set of standards. Erikson suggested that all human beings pass through eight stages of development. The fifth stage is the stage of adolescence where teenagers seek to establish self identity. Adolescents are faced with finding out who they are and what they are all about (Baron, 2001). The formal operational stages which appear between 11 and 15 years of age is the fourth and final Piagetian stage. In this stage individuals are beyond concrete experiences and their reasons are more abstract, idealistic and logical. The Social Cognitive theory by Bandura reveals that behaviour, environment and personal cognition are important factors in development (Santrock, 2007).

Behaviour disorders are nothing but manifestations of improper cognitive and affective functioning. Behavioural problems refer to age inappropriate actions and attitudes that violate family expectations, society's norms and the personal or property right of others. The environments in which early adolescents live are centrally important, as it interacts with characteristics of early adolescents themselves to generate contrasting levels of adjustment. Mash and Dozors (1996) argued that behavioural disorder should be viewed as a person's reactions to environmental circumstances. Parke (1995) suggested that behaviour disorder is highly related to cultural and social stipulations. The needs of early adolescents are dynamic and its frustration may lead to behavioural difficulties. The behavioural problem in early

adolescents includes inability to learn, inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships, inappropriate types of behaviour of feelings and fears (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 2006). Due to cognitive changes early adolescents may be anxious, overly active, pre occupied and irresponsible (Milner, 2006). Adolescents with behavioural problems are said to be sluggish, fixated, verbally abusive, too orderly, self injurious, isolate, shy and frequent lying. Some may be aggressive and withdrawn (Berger, 2008). Research by Susman & Rogol (2004) concluded that hormonal influences are small when they are associated with other factors such as stress and social relationships. Verbal insults, physical actions and frustrations often lead adolescents to reciprocate as counter aggression (Wyatt & Haskett, 2001). All the problems stem from unproductive ways of managing stress or activities.

Positive Home Environment

Parents play a significant role in their children's development both because of the genes they contribute and the environment they provide. It is vital to create an environment that will promote early adolescents to grow up with good qualities, responsibilities and rights. Positive home environment sets routines, traditions, and rituals. It enhances good communication skills inside and outside the home and built self esteem and problem solving skills (Forehand & Long, 2002). Positive home environment supports interaction, mutual respect and admiration among family members thereby creating a welcoming and calm atmosphere at home. Family like a human body is a holistic structure consisting of interrelated parts, each of which affects and is affected by every other part, and each of which contributes to the functioning of the whole (Youniss & Smolllar, 1985). Family is after all a society in miniature, with traditions, codes morals and laws that resemble the large social structure of which it as a part. Characteristics of an ideal home include the following: Minimum amount of friction between parents, and between parents and children; opportunities to utilize the home for expression of legitimate desires; family affection; Minimum amount of strict discipline; opportunities for independence of thought, feelings and

action; confidence in parents, and mutual respect between parents and children; family conferences regarding difficulties; companionship between parents and children, emotional stability of parents, economic adequacy and a wholesome moral and religious environment. While there are many factors that contribute to a positive home environment, these are among the most important; and are likely that if all these criteria were fully met other factors would take care of themselves (Schrieder, 1951).

Parents are the most important influence on the lives of early adolescents. By providing a positive home environment parents can encourage learning and school activities. Parents should communicate with the young adolescents with kindness and respect; spend time with them there by showing their genuine interest (Kumar, 2010). There should be open communication between parents and young teens as among peers. When parents move freely, the adolescents feel free to react verbally and to convey their parents what is there in their minds. By questioning and listening, parents can reveal their respect towards the child's feelings and opinions. The respect and control parents display, will be reflected by the child in some other occasion (Chen & Chin, 2009). Parents and early adolescents belong to separate generation, and any treatment that completely ignore this fact is likely to be in trouble. To develop the ability of solving problems and making good choices, parents should provide opportunities for teens to do harmless activities independently and learn from mistakes. Parents should never fail to praise and encourage the accomplishments. Monitoring their teen's friendship will help adolescents avoid risky and unhealthy behaviour. If there is conflict and tension between the parents, where the parents quarrel frequently, the early teens are affected. The nature of discipline in the home is of importance in the adolescent's development. Parents with most ethical values will be the most effective role model for the child.

Parenting style strongly influences early adolescents' behaviour. Authoritative parenting is likely to be the most effective style over the other three types namely authoritarian, indulgent and neglectful parenting

(Baumrind, 1991). Authoritarian parents encourage children to be independent but still place limits and control on their actions. Extensive verbal give and take is allowed, and parents are warm and nurturing towards the child. Authoritarian parenting is a restrictive, punitive style in which parents exhort the child to follow their directions and to respect their work and effort. Neglected parenting is a style in which parent is much uninvolved in the child's life. In Indulgent parenting, parents are very involved with their children but place few demands or controls on them. Being raised by authoritative parents, early adolescents are more socially competent, emotionally healthy and show fewer behaviour problems than children raised in an authoritarian or permissive manner (http://lifestyle.iloveindia.com/lounge/authoritative-parenting-9698.html). Authoritative parents establish an appropriate balance between control and autonomy, giving opportunities for self-initiative while providing the standards, limits, and guidance that adolescents need (Rueter & Conger, 1995). The warmth and parental involvement provided by authoritative parents make early adolescents more receptive to parental influence (Sim, 2000), and allow early adolescents to express their views (Kuczynski & Lollis, 2002).

Educational Implications

Though children are greatly influenced by teachers, they are influenced mostly by their parents. Early adolescents' need can be most adequately met when home and school environments are brought into a harmonious and supporting relationship. Working with parents can be effectively done both individually and through conferences, meetings and gatherings. Schools should make each parent's contact with the school a pleasant and constructive one. Working together helps both the parents and teachers, and also helps the teen to cope with the problems. Parent teacher conferences will help the parent understand the early teens' potentialities and abilities. Opportunities for parent teacher conference will contribute effectively to the achievement of every adolescent's potential. Successful conferences between parents and school help the child to grow up to be a socially and emotionally mature person (Sharma, 2007).

For socio economically disadvantaged parents the schools become the major agent in preparing their children to earn a living and assume the responsibilities of citizenship. Whatever parents can do for their children is to be encouraged by the school. Encouraging parents and suggesting ways in which they can motivate their children is an important part of work. To work together realistically and objectively, school and parents should keep in communication at all times. There should be some guidance service in each school, in order to provide some strategies for managing the behavioural problems among early teens as well as reducing the problem at this stage.

Conclusion

Early adolescence is a period of transition when the individual undergoes psychological, emotional, social and intellectual changes. The developmental changes that occur during this period cause varying degrees of disturbance in them. Sometimes they become aggressive, self conscious and withdrawn. Negative emotionality is more intense during early adolescence. Adolescence is a time of opportunities and risks. Parenting style strongly influences early adolescents' behaviour. Parents should sense their child's difficulties and perceived helplessness and try to support their children directly by either manipulating their behaviour in assertive and highly directive fashion. Parental over directness will not allow the early adolescent to solve intra and interpersonal problems. A key role of parents is to support their adolescent children as they seek independence or autonomy. Parents should provide a warm, supportive and congenial environment so that the teenagers acquire a normal behaviour in this stage. Parents have to walk a fine line between giving early teens enough independence and protecting them from immature lapses in judgment. There is probably no factor of greater importance in the behavioural development of early adolescents than the parental attitudes, their treatment of the early adolescents, their ideals, practices, emotional reactions and the like.

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