

# 16

## Let us identify challenges in adolescence

The World Health Organization defines adolescence as the "period between 10 and 19 years of age". This is the period of transition from childhood to youth. This transition brings about many changes in adolescents and pose many challenges to them. Knowing how to overcome the physical, social and psychological changes will help you to successfully face the challenges associated with them.

In grade 10, you learned about various challenges you face such as sport injuries, accidents in daily life, disasters and sexual abuse.

In this lesson you will update the knowledge you gained in previous grades on adolescence and learn about the challenges faced during adolescence.

### Why is adolescence an important period in your life?

- It is the period of transition from childhood to adulthood
- It is a period when future citizens are formed
- Adolescents are a resource for the country
- It is a period of rapid physical, mental and social changes occur
- It is a period you are ready to take on responsibilities
- It is a time you are ready to explore and experiment



Figure 16.1

## Physical changes during adolescence

Table 16.1

Changes in males	Changes in females
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in height and weight</li> <li>• Broadening of shoulders</li> <li>• Increase in muscle mass</li> <li>• Reduction of deposition of subcutaneous fat</li> <li>• Growth of hair in the axillary, chest, pubic and limbs</li> <li>• Increase in the size of genitals</li> <li>• Development of acne on the face</li> <li>• Increase perspiration and body odour</li> <li>• Production of sperm</li> <li>• Adam's apple (larynx) becomes prominent</li> <li>• Voice becomes deep</li> <li>• Growth of beard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in height and weight</li> <li>• Development of breasts and skin becomes smooth</li> <li>• Broadening of hips</li> <li>• Increase deposition of fat in subcutaneous tissues</li> <li>• Appearance of axillary and pubic hair</li> <li>• Increase in size of genitalia</li> <li>• Development of acne on the face</li> <li>• Increase perspiration and body odour</li> <li>• Start of menstruation</li> <li>• Production of vaginal secretions</li> </ul>

In addition to physical changes mentioned in the chart above, mental and social changes too occur during this period.

## Mental and social changes during adolescence

1. Interest in one's body
2. Interested in working for the common good
3. Tend to stand up against injustice
4. Desire to experiment
5. Greater creativity
6. Prefers to make independent decisions
7. Desire to display capabilities and be outstanding
8. Interest in the opposite sex



Figure 16.2

9. Interest in forming romantic relationships
10. Development of sexual feelings
11. Prefer company of adults
12. Interested in aesthetic activities

**Do you know the reason for these physical and mental changes ?**

Many of the physical and mental changes in adolescence occur due to the changes in hormones.

Due to production of FSH and LH hormones by the pituitary gland, oestrogen is secreted by the ovaries in females and testosterone is secreted by the testes in males. The action of these hormones cause secondary sexual characteristics in males and females.

An accelerated growth or a growth spurt is seen because of the action of the hormones. Many changes in the reproductive system such as production of sperm and activation of ovaries occur due to these hormones.

This growth spurt occurs between the ages of 9 and 12 years in girls and between 12 and 14 years in boys.



Growth spurt of girls



Growth spurt of boys

Figure 16.3

Your environment too contributes to your mental and social changes.

eg:

Influence of opposite sex

Influence of peers

Influence of advertisements

Behaviour and attitudes of family, relations and friends you associate with

Decisions made during this period tend to be influenced by feelings and with little concern about the outcome. The reason for this is the underdevelopment of the fore-brain. Therefore remember to take advice from elders (parent, teachers) when making decisions.

## Problems and challenges during adolescence

### 1. Problems related to nutrition

Improperly balanced meals, inadequate food, fast food, food made with large amount of wheat flour, oil or sugar may lead to obesity and other illnesses. Malnutrition at this age will have an effect on your next generation as well

### 2. Problems associated with the development of secondary sexual characteristics

Among males, delayed growth of beard, size of the penis, changes in the voice among girls preoccupation with the size of the breasts, irregularities in the menstrual cycle, pain and discomfort during periods are some problems faced by adolescents.



Figure 16.4

Menarche and production of semen depend on various factors such as genetic composition, environment, growth and level of nutrition.

### 3. Problems due to sexuality

- Myths regarding sexuality  
eg: Menstruation being considered a period of uncleanness
- Sexual abuse
- Pregnancy

Pregnancy could occur due to rape or even having sexual intercourse out of ignorance. Getting pregnant leads to many problems as they are mentally and physically not prepared for such.

#### 4. Problems due to peer groups

Peer suggestions and attitudes are important at this stage. Unwillingness to go along with them may cause rejection and isolation from the group. As a result experimenting with illicit drugs, alcohol, smoking and engaging in unsuitable sexual activities at this stage can lead many problems.



Figure 16.5

#### 5. Problems encountered with the media

Misleading advertising and false propaganda may create problems, if you try to experiment with them.

#### 6. Problems due to education and exam pressure

- Difficulties in understanding and remembering school work
- Being scared of the reactions of parents and society due to failure in exams
- Difficulties securing a job due to poor qualifications

#### 7. Problems arising from the use of illicit substances such as alcohol, illicit drugs, tobacco and banned stimulants

- Due to use of illicit drugs, one can be rejected by society, education can be jeopardized, be expelled from school or work place, get involved in theft which can lead to being jailed or sent to probation via the judicial system.
- Using banned stimulants can lead to long term harm to the body or even cause death. In addition one will be banned from taking part in competitive sports, victory declared null and void and lead to shame.

#### 8. Problems due to growth and appearance

Both males and females during this period are concerned about the body, complexion, height, being fat or thin, hair, acne and fungal infections. Boys may want to increase their physical strength, while girls may want to improve their appearance.

### Unwanted pregnancies

Many of the physical, mental and social changes that occur during adolescence prepare girls to bear children in a responsible way in the future. Adolescence is the period where you prepare yourself and continuously grow until about 20 years for this task. Therefore you are not yet ready for it at this point in time. Mental and social preparation is needed to become a parent even if a girl is physically ready

to bear a child. This preparation varies depending on your religion, culture and the country you live in. Getting pregnant is a very responsible task. You should not take that responsibility until you have completed your education, attained economic stability and you are ready to bring up a child according to socially accepted norms.

Some girls have unwanted pregnancies due to their poor sexual education and by acting out their feelings instead of rational thinking. Boys who become fathers due to sexual liaisons at an inappropriate age face psychological and social problems.

Rape is a cause of unwanted pregnancy. Perpetrators of rape can be mentally ill or behave very irresponsible. However irresponsible behaviour of victims too can play a role in some instances.

The following factors can also be reasons for pregnancy in adolescence.

Table 10.1

Physical changes	Psychological changes or social factors
Sex hormones leading to; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexual stimulation</li> <li>• Physical development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attraction towards the opposite sex</li> <li>• Romantic relationships</li> <li>• Desire to be outstanding</li> <li>• Desire adult company</li> <li>• Desire to experiment</li> <li>• Interest in one's body</li> <li>• Ignorance about outcomes of sexual intercourse and pregnancy</li> <li>• Not being concerned about one's safety</li> </ul>

## Problems that arise from unwanted pregnancies

Becoming a parent before you attain physical, mental, social and financial stability can bring about undesired difficulties for you and the offspring.

Some problems can be isolation from society, early termination of education, menial jobs, fear, uncertainty about your and your child's future, early and forced marriages leading to despair, unhappiness and possible divorce.

A baby born under such circumstances might be malnourished and may even die at an early age. The society may consider such children as illegitimate and marginalise them. It has been seen that some people perform abortions to avoid unwanted child birth.

However, abortion is illegal in Sri Lanka. Abortions performed illegally and secretly in non-sterile environments can be hazardous to health and even lead to death of the mother. Such illegal abortions are considered an offence and penalized.

Under no circumstance can teenage pregnancies be approved. However knowingly or unknowingly if one gets pregnant, help should be sought from parents, close relatives as well as social service agencies without delay.

## Good qualities of an adolescent

- Creativity and exploration
- Bravery
- Aesthetic sense
- Generosity
- Dedication to and enjoyment of social service
- Setting an example to peers and young
- Democracy
- Fairness



Figure 16.6

By using these qualities in a positive manner, you will be able to overcome challenges easily.



Figure 16.7



## How to overcome challenges encountered during adolescence

1. Develop skills in thinking:
  - make responsible decisions,
  - think in a creative manner,
  - develop analytical thinking,
  - develop logical thinking.
2. Get involved in aesthetic activities such as dancing, arts, journalism or singing
3. Seek an adult's opinion before venturing out to explore, experiment, test and get involved in social responsibility projects such as shramadana
4. Get involve in religious activities
5. Do sports, learn methods of self-protection and improve physical fitness
6. Have a good understanding of reproductive health and functions of the human body by reading relevant educational books.



Figure 16.8

### Summary

Adolescence is a period in life where many physical, psychological and social changes take place.

Hormones of your body and your physical environment have an influence on these changes.

To overcome challenges during adolescence, it is important to use your intelligence in a positive manner and develop good social skills.





### **Exercise**

1. Why is adolescence considered an important period in your life?
2. Write three physical changes that occur in males and females during adolescence.
3. Write five challenges encountered during adolescence
4. Mention three problems that arise from unwanted pregnancies
5. Name five things you can do to overcome challenges encountered during adolescence--