

Adolescents & Youth

The life skills enrichment paradigm

“I have never let my Schooling interfere with my Education”
- Mark Twain

The word ‘education’ means different things to different people. It could mean upgrading one’s skills in the context of performance, strengthening oneself with various qualities, enabling oneself for better decision making and handling conflicts and investing authority through empowering oneself.

So “Education is a **creation of choices, making people aware about those choices and enabling them to make use of those choices**”.

As education systems expand to empower youth, every nation, society and community has to work towards promoting a well being atmosphere. When adolescents acquire knowledge, attitudes, values and life skills, they benefit in a variety of ways. Life skills help adolescents to make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathize with others and cope with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner. Such knowledge and skills can lead to behaviours that prevent disease and injury, foster healthy relationships and enable young people to play leadership roles.

Moreover, the knowledge and life skills education imparted to young ones are likely to be passed on to their own children, thus influencing future generations. We therefore need to effectively address a wide spectrum of issues related to adolescence and youth in a rapidly changing world.

Why is there a need for Life Skills Enrichment?

The host of factors that promote high risk behaviours such as alcoholism, drug abuse aggression, irresponsible sexual behaviours are boredom, rebellion, disorientation, peer pressure and curiosity. The psychological push factors such as the inability to tackle emotional pain, conflicts, frustrations and anxieties about the future are often the driving force for high risk behaviour. Life skills training is an efficacious tool for empowering the youth to act responsibly, take initiative and take control. It is based on the assumption that when young people are able to rise above emotional impasses arising from daily conflicts, entangled relationships and peer pressure, they are less likely to resort to anti social or high risk behaviours and grow up to be Aware, Responsible and empowered individuals and harmonized citizens of a developing nation.

Alvin Toffler in “**The Third Wave**” stated, “The illiterates of 21st century will not those who can not read and write but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn

ADOLESCENCE..... *The Charm & the Challenge*

ADOLESCENCE A time in life span when children realize who they are? What they would like to be? It's time to forge an identity. Career choices to be made, meaningful relationships to be formed and sustained, technological advances tackled, attitudes and roles chiseled. Isn't this process of transition fraught with trials and tribulations? Information overload, mixed messages from media, press, teachers, family and society at large, add to the complexity and confusion already present in the young boastful minds. It is the charm and challenge and a subtle chaos too.

A vital stage of growth and development marks the period of transition from childhood to adulthood. Adolescence is also the stage when young people extend their relationships beyond parents and family and are intensely influenced by their peers and the outside world in general.

Adolescents, the 10 - 19 years age group, account for one fifth of the world's population and nearly a quarter of India's population. They have very special and distinct needs, which can no longer be overlooked. By addressing their needs one would not only be contributing to the socio-economic development of the country but also in other societal concerns like social harmony, gender justice and population stabilization.

These are truly the years of creativity, idealism, buoyancy and a spirit of adventure. But these are also the years of experimentation and risk-taking, of giving in to negative peer pressure, of taking uninformed decisions on crucial issues, especially relating to their bodies and their sexuality. How adolescents cope with these challenges is determined largely by their environment. Adolescence is thus a turning point in one's life, a period of increased potential but also one of greater vulnerability.

One's changing body size and configuration evoke a new set of reaction and expectations from parents, peers, and society. Hormonal fluctuations precipitate new feelings and emotional responses, and may take the adolescent by surprise, giving rise to doubts about normalcy, self-discipline, or social acceptability. Societal and intrapersonal pressures to individuate from parent are counterbalanced by recognition of vulnerability. The rights of adulthood are enticing, but the responsibilities may seem oppressive. There is a need to be recognized as a unique individual, yet a fear of being "different". Forcing oneself to sit down and study is difficult when there are so many new urges, interests, options, and potentials to explore.

Adolescents want to taste and test the world, often coming into conflict with parents, teachers, or societal rules that attempt to curb their impulsivity or remind them of consequences.

Parents should be concerned and be worried about what are the children upto, what kind of education, guidance and how much freedom they need, there are chances of conflict. Parents need to understand, guide and deal with them tactfully. Excessive freedom may spoil the child whereas no freedom may also prove equally harmful. While rules are essential, their implementation should not make the teenager feel like an outcast amongst his friends. Therefore, parents need to handle them with care.

Many changes and adjustments are required to be made in their relationship with parents, friends and themselves. Patience openness and an understanding attitude on the part of parents can make this phase less confusing.

Parents need to tackle children in a much more efficient manner today. It calls for a thorough understanding of the transition a child goes through during this period, exercising utmost restraint, guiding and advising in a friendly manner, not being over ambitious and pressurizing the child too much on the part of parents.

Various factors have conspired collectively to designate adolescence as a discrete age stage. First, children, inevitably become more separated from adults as society moved from a rural to an urban environment. Second, as a culture became more complex, the stages became increasingly refined, with a definite step-like transition from infancy to adulthood. While some societies ritualize the shift from youth to maturity, those lacking such rites have instead a youth culture, or institutionalized adolescence. Against this background various stage theories have evolved, all commonly portraying childhood, adolescence, and adulthood as relatively distinct stages that can be identified sociologically, physiologically, and psychologically.

Hope and Vision

For teenagers, coping with stress in a changing world is an uphill task. Any help for many or majority of challenging or distressing states should not be denied or condemned within the family or social context.

Development stress, emotional distress, academic pressures, physical stress, economic stress or social distress. Where do we begin. Is there time left for us to hold out little ones by their hand and straddle them through the 21st century as happy and responsible citizens.

The tasks are many but the bottom line is to be able to reconcile and accommodate different realities – for the young ones are indeed the role models of tomorrow.