



PUBERTY

*“A child can teach an adult three things:
To be happy for no special reason,
To always be occupied with something
And to know how to demand with all his might what he wants”
Paolo Coelho*

Puberty is the final stage of development, the final phase of a person’s course to maturity. Despite its transitional character, it is a particular developmental period, with specific developmental characteristics and special developmental goals, which differentiate it from any other developmental period.

More specifically, Stanley Hall describes puberty as “the period of internal effervescence and thymic turmoil, the period of tempests and intense internal conflicts”. This intense psychological effervescence is considered to be the result of the changes of puberty as well of the hormonal system of the adolescent. Freud explains these conflicts as “ a constant struggle between biological, instinctive demands of Being and the social restrictions of Hyper ego”.

We consider as starting point of this period the moment in time when the person becomes capable of reproduction and it finishes at the time when the person is ready to undertake the role of the adult. This transition does not take place overnight but it happens gradually over a period of 7-8 years. Indicatively, a girl enters puberty at the age of 12 or 13 while a boy might need a couple more years. In this period, the growing adolescents are not children anymore, however not adults either; some of their characteristics remind of childhood and some others are closer to maturity. That is why this period is called transitional.

The changes in different aspects of a human’s constitution are huge. In the physical domain, they are so abrupt that they give the impression of, as characteristically J.J.Rousseau mentioned, “a second birth”. In the mental domain, the appearance of abstractive mental actions gives a whole new approach to the perception of the world. Adolescents can now grasp, realize and process alternative solutions beyond reality, in the future, or even to something in total contrast to reality. These newly acquired skills cater them with an innovative disposition and lead them to questioning and *the crisis of adolescent originality* (Debesse). In the emotional domain, immense tension and instability of temperament prevail. The emotional life of the adolescent is described as changeable and with fluctuations, amongst contradictory and contrasting moods. This emotional turmoil is considered to be deriving from the biological changes of puberty and mainly the hormone system of the adolescent. In the social domain, the tendency for independence from adults and the compliance to the norms of the peer reach their peak.



This intense tendency of the adolescent to autonomy and self-disposition often becomes a reason for conflicts with the family.

Major developmental goal of this age is “the acquisition of one’s identity” and it goes through “role confusion”, as Erik Erikson characteristically mentions. The adolescent is absorbed by the question: “Who am I?” This period is the crossroads between childhood and adulthood. Adolescents need to establish primary social and professional identities, otherwise they will remain confused and bewildered as to the roles they are asked to play as adults. The social key factor is peer group.

In short, we can conclude by saying that adolescence is a kind of recapitulation of all developmental stages of previous ages.

Bibliography

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