

## Part 2: Theoretical Background and Further Information

Sexuality is influenced by many cultural factors, which are in turn affected by social factors. The traditional purpose of male and female sexuality is to produce offspring, and different societies have different rules governing the moment from which and the conditions under which sexuality may be practiced.

The period of development from a child to an adult is characterised by growth, increases in weight, hormonal changes and the formation of secondary sexual characteristics. Genes and hormones play an important role during the onset of puberty. Development is, however, also largely dependent on environmental influences, healthy food, stress, friends, family and social milieu. Moreover, sexual development is influenced by a variety of cultural factors.

Sexuality is part of the personality of every human being and shows whether he is in harmony with his own body, how he perceives the other gender and his relationship to other people. Sexuality and sex education are of course not just a vital issue in puberty, they play an essential role throughout life. The sexual conduct of an individual is invariably determined by his parents – even if sexuality is treated as taboo – and sexuality is largely determined by experiences in early childhood, and religious ideas, social and cultural background, an individual's own convictions, value systems and views.

The onset of puberty between the age of 11 and 14 alters the psyche and in particular the physical appearance of young people at breakneck speed. Girls and boys experience spurts of growth, increase in weight and a wide range of physical changes. The difficult period of puberty is easiest for adolescents to cope with if the physical changes take place simultaneously. Adolescents are perturbed by any deviations. Boys whose development is retarded are frequently rejected and their self-esteem plummets. In many cases this results in them smoking and drinking alcohol in front of their schoolmates to gain acceptance and attention.

When puberty commences and the body changes, many adolescents do not feel at home in their "new skin". Adolescents often appear to be disoriented. Eating disorders and drug abuse are typical for this age group as well as unpleasant acne. Teenagers often express the problems that they experience in becoming adults in a wide variety of ways: girls react in an overtly "silly" and rebellious manner, boys are slightly aggressive or completely withdrawn.

Boys largely take their cue from male role models. It is very important to them to maintain a cool exterior; they rarely talk to their friends about their first love and feelings, and also prefer to hide them from their parents. It is very important for boys who are in love to be strong and have 'everything under control'. Boys are consequently more insecure than girls as far as their first love is concerned.

Since it is difficult for teenagers to verbalize their feelings and thoughts, to understand the members of the opposite sex better and accept the way they act, schools also need to find ways of dealing with this issue.

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