

# Rejuvenating Adolescents through Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Life Skills

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**Abstract:** Adolescence is one of the most important stages in any individual's life. It is the stage at which the physical and mental changes take place. Children have to adjust with the emotional, psychological and social development depending upon the situation, homely atmosphere and surrounding environment. As next to adolescence period is the stage of maturity or adulthood. This transition period has to be balanced with the support of family, teachers and people in the society protecting them by continuous love, care and guidance. In this advanced and highly competitive world, it is very significant to insure the life of adolescents and help them to attain bright and accomplished future by enhancing their life skills. Due to the absence of traditions and cultures in the present society leading to unnecessary problems or issues and resulting into barriers to problem solving or critical thinking skills in day-to-day routines among children. Life skills are an essential element in the overall development of adolescents in the twenty first century for coping with the challenges and demands in life. Critical thinking can help adolescents in making independent judgement and provides a way to think better to conceptualise, analyse, synthesise and evaluate in everyday life. To help adolescents apply their problem solving skills to many different situations and focusing on development through the habit of thinking in different ways to satisfy their needs and handle frustrations.

**Index terms:** Critical thinking, Problem solving, Life skills, Adolescents.

## Introduction

“World Health Organization (WHO) (1994) defined life skills as the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enables individuals to deal effectively with demands and challenges of everyday life.” “UNICEF defines life skills as a behaviour change or behaviour development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: Knowledge, attitude and skills.” Life skills are the abilities for the optimistic behaviour that allow the individual to encounter the problems effectively as per the requirements of life. Adolescents adjust physically, mentally, emotionally and socially with themselves and people around the world and having flexibility in behaviour of an individual. Thinking skills are one of the most important life skills which include problem solving, creative thinking, decision making and critical thinking skills.

The main focus and emphasis in the present paper is on critical thinking and problem solving which is defined by Jitender Kumar & Asha Chhabra (2014), “Critical thinking: Critical thinking is an ability to analyse, apply, synthesize and evaluate information, and experiences in an objective manner.” Critical thinking can contribute to health by helping us to recognize and assess the factors that influence attitudes and behaviour, such as values, peer pressure and the media. Critical thinking can support and encourage adolescents to be clear, fair, accurate, logical and relevant in decision making. Inquisitiveness concerned to different kind of issues, self-confidence in one's own abilities, flexibility in all circumstances, to be alert for opportunities and open-mindedness can be some of the qualities among adolescents by developing critical

thinking. “Problem solving: Problem solving skills is critical to success in an individual’s life and helps to deal constructively with problems across a variety of situations in our lives.”

Adolescents can be guided to focus on un-stressful situations to avoid frustrations so that they can solve any problem without hesitation. Significant problems of daily life that are left unresolved can cause mental stress and physical strain among adolescents. So to face all challenges effectively and fulfil the needs and desires of life they should be efficient in problem solving. Problems can be short term or long term, so adolescents should act only after understanding or assessing the gravity of the problems. On increasing problem solving skills of adolescents, it is essential for school and society to promote self-determination to implement plans and to achieve self-set plans. Problem solving helps to identify, analyse potential problems, and to execute the solutions of problems among adolescents effectively.

Pedagogy in teaching learning process is necessary for dealing problem solving skills and critical thinking skills. Thinking process takes place simultaneously whenever learning occurs. Jitender Kumar and Asha Chhabra (2014) explained that the “Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) asserts that life skills education has been introduced in class 6th in 2003-04, in class 7th in 2004-05 and subsequently in classes 8th, 9th and 10th.”

“Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) after eight years’ research introduced ‘Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation’ at IX & X class during 2010 with grading system. The CCE is school based evaluation of students that covers all aspects of student’s development. The evaluation and assessment is based on various areas as describe in three parts (CBSE teacher’s manual), where part-2 consists of co-scholastic area in two parts- A-life skills (Thinking skills, social skills and emotional skills) & B-attitudes and values (Towards teacher, school mates, school activities, environment & value system). The CBSE (2012) has presently introduced life skills training programme as part of CCE targeted at the adolescent students between 10- 18 years of age.”

“Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA) has under its agenda life skills training for the upper primary girls along with providing quality elementary education. Adolescence Education Programme Adolescence Education Programme is a joint initiative by ministry of Human Resource development and National Aids Control Organisation (NACO), Government of India, to equip every adolescent with scientific information, knowledge and life skills.” The purpose of the manual is to provide an appropriate objective and knowledge to think about themselves, to reflect on them and to carry them into their personal and social lives resulting in development of decision making skills.

## **Developmental changes of adolescents**

In addition to physical growth, teenagers also have hormonal changes and lack of maturity which portray them as confused, vulnerable and egocentric adversely affecting their problem solving and critical thinking skills. “Research reveals that these pubertal changes affect adolescent’s self -image, mood and interaction with parents and peers (Berk, 2007).” Adolescents can be violent at times as many of them may not be prepared for the changes that take place biologically.

Problem solving and critical thinking skills can enhance the ability to control and adjust with their emotions due to the changes taking place irrespective of physical changes. To avoid adverse effect of these changes resulting into drastic end of life of adolescents, so it is better to take precautionary measures by guiding or making aware of the changes in adolescence by giving education to both boys and girls related to problem solving and critical thinking.

Adolescents should not face any sinful circumstances due to the innocence in the mental development, so it is necessary to impart problem solving and critical thinking skills to develop thinking and reasoning power. The behaviour of an adolescent is unpredictable for everyone who is living together with him/her at every point of time as they may have odd obsessive compulsive behaviour so we have to teach them how to tackle these problems.

“Piaget believed that by adolescence, a person is able to conceptualize about many variables, allowing for the creation of a system of laws or rules for problem solving (Piaget, 1972).” Human development theory and mediator of behaviour of adolescents can enforce critical thinking and problem solving skills to be important components of healthy development which also defines a resilient child. Problem solving and critical thinking can delay the onset of drug use, regulates anger, improve in positive social adjustment. Incorporation of interpersonal problem solving skills can be an effective method in developing positive outward behaviour among adolescents.

### **Role of parents, teachers and friends of adolescents**

Parents, teachers and friends play a significant role in the moulding of a child's behaviour. They are the people who spend most of the time with children and know about their well-being. Pleasant atmosphere at home, school and in society if possible is provided to the child can bring them up as a perfect citizen of the country. Since adolescence is a crucial stage in a child's life, so great care can be taken first and foremost by parents then teachers and by peers as it can inculcate good habits like respect for elders, love for siblings, sharing and caring, calm mind to work sincerely and no distractions.

“Vygotsky, a prominent cognitive theorist, proposed that new levels of understanding begin at an interpersonal level: originally between infant and adult, and then through continuous social interaction. He conceptualized that the distance between the actual and the potential stage of development of a child is determined by his or her problem solving capacity, when working alone vs. collaborating with adults and other, more capable peers (Newman and Newman, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978).” So, social environment can influence strongly the critical and problem solving skills by more extensive and effective high quality structured interactions with others.

Maximum involvement of the adolescents should be in developing physical, mental, emotional and social aspects. Regular exercises, indoor and outdoor games, memory tests, puzzles, riddles etc. mainly children can be involved in the brainstorming activities that can be planned by parents, teachers or peers for overall development. Self-development process can be the priority for the growth of adolescents apart from the role of parents, teachers and peers. Children should be free to express their feelings or be able to communicate about their needs or desires in an accomplished way to parents, teachers or friends to relieve them from any kind of stress. So it is a very challenging job for everyone who is dealing with adolescents. Parents and teachers should be the role model for adolescents to follow their instructions obediently. Parents can spend most of their leisure time with children.

### **Importance of Problem solving skills and Critical thinking skills**

Education in our country mainly encourage rote learning as students spend their most of the time in memorising the curriculum creating rigid ideas rather than focusing on life skills like critical thinking and problem solving. In this modern computerised world, children are lagging in thinking skills as they are provided with all comforts by not allowing or promoting thought provoking activities. Deceptive people and the environment lead them to loneliness and to collapse as there is communication barrier among peer group

or with parents and teachers creating a condition of mental pressure resulting to tension, stress or strain and depression. Increasing offence and violence that are common in recent times among adolescents lead to indiscipline behaviour and poor thinking skills.

Nowadays, children are detached from the family members, friends, relatives and neighbours. All these factors result into usage of drugs, alcohols, cigarette smoking, suicidal cases, also get involved in planned and unintentional sexuality. Low academic performances by children mostly in the age of adolescence are affecting the family relationships. The uncontrollable and awful behaviour like stealing, hurting physically, emotionally, mentally and bullying others are increasing.

The cognitive abilities to deal with the demands and challenges of everyday life are reducing among children. The restless, repulsive and disruptive behaviour is increasing among adolescents. Increase in depressive nature and developing negative attitude, showing disinterest in the daily routine compel us to promote thinking skills among adolescents. Double mindedness can never be brought into consideration in problem solving as well as critical thinking which leads to confusions. Critical thinkers will always have an inquisitive attitude and to know more about any information to conceive in memory. Participative and interactive teaching methodologies such as role play, seminars, open discussions, symposiums, storytelling, analysing situations, group activities, games, debates to some extent can be the reason for actively involving adolescents in their growth process.

### **Positive effects of problem solving skills and critical thinking skills**

The development of thinking skills helps the individual to stabilise their mind, to keep them physically, mentally and emotionally strong, to regularise and improve the health conditions, to have belief in thoughts, to develop self-esteem and confidence, to develop positive attitude and open mindedness, to analyse the situations and act accordingly, to reduce anger, frustration and anxiety, to reduce stress, trauma, strain and loss, to maintain good rapport with others, to develop empathy, to solve the problems effectively, to create new ideas, to come out with alternate solutions to any problems and face challenges, to think objectively and critically, to keep mind active and refresh by brainstorming games or activities, to make relevant and accurate decisions independently, to have the ability to evaluate, analyse and judge the information gathered, to be logical and rational in critical thinking, to reflect to own ideas.

Children would be highly energetic, enthusiastic, and reflective in behaviour. The happiness and joy would flow into the veins and blood of the adolescents keeping or maintaining their constant ever glowing cheerful face and mind. Constructive arguments can take place in a mature way among adolescents for problem solving and critical thinking. Honest and trustworthy decisions would be taken for others by developing empathy for peers. Fruitful growth of intelligence by developing the thinking skills can be observed in adolescents. "Human tendency is to have satisfaction in their work which is highly possible in the development of thinking skills. "Young people need to learn how, not just what to think earlier on (Shure and Healey, 1993)." "In some prevention research that idea is applied to skills that help children to resist peer and media influences by learning how to think critically about messages from peers and the media (Botvin et al., 1998)."

## Conclusion

Studies reveal that nowadays children especially adolescents foster thinking skills only when they are provided with the opportunities. Problem solving and critical thinking skills can be developed in youngsters for the development of nation by globalisation. Technology based teaching learning can be effective for the present generation as they want to avoid the stagnant and stable conditions. Therefore, it is the duty of each and every one to Cooperate with adolescents for the all-round development of personality. To cultivate the old traditions and cultures of our country among adolescents for the positive outlook towards all perspectives is important.

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