# Part 1

# Understanding the Young Person

# 1

# The Nature of Adolescence

There are many professional counsellors who work exclusively with young people and gain success and satisfaction from their work. However, there are many other counsellors who are reluctant to work with them. This may be because they find young people difficult to work with or are discouraged by outcomes. Although some young people are difficult to work with, counselling them can be exciting, challenging and effective, provided that some basic principles are understood and respected. The principles and practices required for counselling young people are not complicated or difficult but are in many ways significantly different from those required for counselling either children or adults. It is only by recognizing the different approach required that satisfaction and success are likely to be achieved.

In order to help young people effectively it is important to understand the nature of their stage in life and the developmental processes that are involved. Once we have this understanding, we can use a counselling approach that is specifically designed to parallel their developmental process and to take account of normal communication processes used by young people. By doing this, there is synchrony between the counselling process and the adolescent's own experiences. This enables the counsellor to join appropriately with the young person to achieve a mutually beneficial working relationship.

In Part 1 of this book we will discuss the developmental processes that occur in young people and will consider the impact of a variety of internal and external stimuli on their development. We will begin the discussion in this chapter by considering the question 'What is the stage called adolescence?'.

This book is not intended to be primarily a theoretical treatise, but a practical guide for counsellors who wish to work with young people. It is a companion book to *Counselling Children: A Practical Introduction* (Geldard and Geldard, 2013). Those readers who wish to review the theory related to the development of young people in more depth may wish to refer to Dacey et al. (2006) who provide discussion of the contributions of a number of important theorists, including G. Stanley Hall, Sigmund Freud, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Albert Bandura, Robert Havighurst, Abraham Maslow, Erik Erikson and Richard Lerner.

**What is adolescence?**

The question 'What is adolescence?' is one of definition, and the precise nature of the definition is likely to vary from culture to culture. In this book we will consider adolescence to be the stage in a person's life between childhood and adulthood. It is the period of human development during which a young person must move from dependency to independence, autonomy and maturity. The young person moves from being part of a family group to being part of a peer group and to standing alone as an adult (Call et al., 2002).

Generally, in Western society, movement from childhood to adulthood involves much more than a linear progression of change. It is multi-dimensional, involving a gradual transformation or metamorphosis of the person as a child into a new person as an adult. It is important to note, however, that the required changes in a young person during adolescence differ with culture. For example, in some cultures some of the roles played by children and adults are similar. Children may be expected to perform work-like tasks for the welfare of the family while quite young. Also, in some cultures the number of years spent in being educated before working is short. In such cultures the transition from childhood to adulthood is likely to be less challenging (Mead, 1975).

> " **Culture influences the way young people develop** "

Adolescence involves a process that extends over a significant period of a person's life. However, there are individual differences, with some young people moving through adolescence much more quickly than others. Adolescence presents many challenges as physiological, biological, psychological and social changes are confronted. Important processes of change need to occur within the young person if these challenges are to be confronted adaptively and with success. When a young person is unable to confront and deal with a developmental challenge successfully there are likely to be unhelpful psychological, emotional and behavioural consequences. It is in dealing with these that counselling may be useful, with the counsellor helping the young person to find new ways to proceed adaptively along the required developmental journey.

As will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6, some young people are more successful than others at confronting and dealing with the challenges they meet; they are more resilient and have better coping strategies. This may be partly related to personality traits and partly to past history and the current environment. The development of young people can be considered in terms of the following challenges that inevitably occur:

- biological challenges
- cognitive challenges
- psychological challenges

- social challenges
- moral and spiritual challenges.

## Biological challenges

Adolescence begins with the well-defined maturation event called *puberty*. Puberty refers to the biological events which surround the first menstruation in girls and the first ejaculation in boys. These events signal the beginning of a process of profound physical change (Colarusso, 1992). Although this is a normal maturation process it can cause difficulties for the individual. This may particularly be the case where a young person is precocious in puberty or if puberty is significantly delayed. In these situations the young person may experience an uncomfortable level of stress. Consequences may be a lowering of self-esteem and self-concept, with the person feeling awkward and lacking self-confidence. The biological changes of adolescence result in physiological changes, sexual changes and emotional changes.

### *Physiological changes*

During adolescence major physiological changes take place. The young person grows in height, weight and strength, develops sexually, and changes in appearance. Girls develop breasts, boys' voices break, body hair grows, and changes occur in sexual organs. These physiological changes occur over a period of time. They happen at different ages and different rates for different young people. Consequently, there may be issues for a young person who may feel embarrassed, self-conscious, awkward and out of step with peers who are developing at a different rate. It is therefore not surprising that many young people become very anxious about their appearance.

> **Each young person is a unique individual**

### *Sexual changes*

Significant and important increases in the production of sexual hormones occur during puberty. These result not only in changes to the body as described above, but also trigger an increase in sexual arousal, desire and urge in both males and females. These changes are likely to cause discomfort for a young person. As sexual drive rises, they are confronted with issues of personal sexuality and sexual identity. These issues will influence their decisions with regard to relationships. In early adolescence, young people tend to form close relationships with friends of the same sex because they feel secure with them (Blos, 1979). Additionally, this is a part of their process of movement away from dependence on their parents and family. During this time, some will

become involved in sexual experimentation with their friends. However, for others the sexual feelings of early adolescence are managed through the use of fantasy and masturbation. The early stage of adolescence typically extends from the age of 11 to 14 years. From this stage the young person gradually moves into the later stage of adolescence, which occurs typically from 15 to 18 years. The early stage and the later stage are distinguished by differences in cognitive, moral and social thinking (Dacey et al., 2006).

By late adolescence, with the acceptance of the new physically and sexually mature body, there is a gradual move, in most young people, toward heterosexual relationships. According to Colarusso (1992), by late adolescence many young people are psychologically ready for an active sexual life, which includes intercourse. Some young people may at this stage begin to explore their sexual orientation and discover an attraction to homosexual relationships. Because many in society tend to be homophobic, such explorations may be a source of anxiety, particularly if the decision is to choose a partner of the same sex (Mabey and Sorensen, 1995).

With regard to sexual development, some young people have difficulty progressing from the early stages of adolescence through to the later stages. This may be because they are unable to separate their own sexuality from their parents'. As a consequence they may engage in unhelpful sexual fantasies that fail to direct them to appropriate non-incestuous partners (Colarusso, 1992). When assessing sexual development it is important to recognize that early sexual experience is not an indicator of rapid developmental progression. Indeed, it may be an indicator of childhood sexual trauma.

### Emotional changes

During adolescence, the rise in sexual hormones may influence the young person's emotional state. It would, however, be a mistake to assume that hormones act in isolation and that they alone are the cause of mood changes. They act in conjunction with other major changes that are impacting on the young person, such as changes in social relationships, changes in beliefs and attitudes, and changes in self-perception.

**❝ Hormonal changes may influence the young person's emotions ❞**

Biological changes clearly present the young person with major challenges. They have to cope with body changes that may be disturbing and worrying, and with the emergence of sexual urges that drive them into the exploration of new relationships which produce new social challenges.

## Cognitive challenges

While biological changes are occurring in the young person, cognitive changes are also taking place. The young person develops a capacity for abstract thinking, discovers how to think about relationship issues, discerns new ways of processing information and learns to think creatively and critically.

### *Development of abstract thinking*

According to Piaget (1948/1966), during early adolescence young people typically make the transition from 'concrete operations' to the 'formal operations' stage. That is, they move from the limitations of concrete thinking to being able to deal cognitively with ideas, concepts and abstract theories. They are able to become passionately interested in abstract concepts and notions and are therefore able to discern what is real from what is ideal.

Flavell and colleagues (2002) suggested a number of ways in which a young person's thinking progresses beyond that of childhood. Included among these were the ability to:

- imagine possible and impossible events
- think of a number of possible outcomes from a single choice
- think of the ramifications of combinations of propositions
- understand information and act on that understanding
- solve problems involving hypothesis and deduction
- problem solve in a wider variety of situations and with greater skill than in childhood.

The young person is challenged both in the development of these cognitive skills and in their use. As confidence is gained in using such skills, it is likely that they will be tried out in new situations, but not always with success.

### *Egocentric thinking*

Young people are egocentric. This trait starts in early adolescence and develops more fully in mid-to late-adolescence. They may have the idea that everyone is watching them as though they were on stage. Sometimes they will deliberately 'parade' themselves in front of others, exhibiting particular poses or behaviours to invite attention to themselves. Young people frequently make up stories about themselves, which Dacey et al. (2006) refer to as *personal fables*. They may have dreams of success and may start to believe that these are true. They may have the idea that they are both unique and invulnerable (Elkind, 1967). They may at times feel omnipotent, all-powerful and that they cannot be hurt. This is all part of the complex process of becoming a separate unique individual on a journey that will lead to adulthood. Unfortunately, these beliefs, and in

particular the sense of uniqueness, make it difficult for young people to believe that anyone else is capable of understanding them or how they are feeling. This has important implications for counsellors.

> ❝ **Young people often believe that no one is capable of understanding them** ❞

### *The ability to think about other people*

Along with the sense of uniqueness or individuation comes the ability to think critically about other people and interpersonal issues. Young people learn how, from their own perspectives, to understand or 'make sense of 'other people. This enables them to make decisions about how to interact with others.

### *New ways of processing information*

During adolescence the ability of young people to perceive, comprehend and retain information seems to improve with age (Knight et al., 1985). Additionally, they progressively develop the ability to make better use of memory strategies and are more able to detect contradictions (Keil and Batterman, 1984). Thus older young people tend to have a greater ability than those who are younger for dealing with complex social and ethical issues. They have a more complex level of information processing. However, this information-processing ability is dependent on intelligence because, as described by Jensen et al. (1989), the ability to process information quickly is directly related to higher levels of intellectual functioning.

### *The ability to think critically*

Young people develop the ability to think logically and to use their capacity for logical thinking to make judgements and decisions for themselves. They are able to recognize and define problems, gather information, form tentative conclusions and evaluate these to make decisions. Of particular importance to counsellors is that several studies suggest that young people can be taught to improve their capacity for critical thinking (Pierce et al., 1988). Thus, part of a counsellor's role may be to help a young person to find ways to do this.

> ❝ **It can be useful to help a young person develop critical thinking** ❞

### *The ability to think creatively*

Creative thinking involves divergent thinking, flexibility, originality, the consideration of remote possibilities and the ability to consider a variety of solutions to the same

problem. During adolescence young people develop the ability to think creatively and are consequently better able to understand and use metaphor (Dacey et al., 2006). This latter ability can be particularly useful in a counselling situation where metaphor can be a powerful tool for producing change.

## Psychological challenges

The biological and cognitive changes that have been described not only present challenges directly, but also have a significant impact on psychological functioning. Additionally, there are major psychological challenges for the young person with regard to a central feature of adolescence which involves the formation of a new identity. The young person is no longer a child; a new person is emerging.

### *Forming a new identity*

Perhaps the most important psychological task for a young person is the formation of a personal identity. Failure to achieve a satisfying personal identity is almost certain to have negative psychological implications. This is supported by Waterman (1992), who conducted an extensive review of research which showed a strong link between ego identity and effective psychological functioning. As discussed by Kroger (2005), major theorists including Erikson, Blos, Kohlberg, Loevinger and Kegan have written about the development of identity in adolescence using terms which are individual to themselves, such as 'self ', 'ego', 'I' and so on. Although they have used individual terms, they all seem to agree that 'personal identity', as we will call it, should be defined in terms of what is taken to be 'self' in contrast to what is considered to be 'other'. The means by which we differentiate ourselves from others is central to our experience of personal identity. A young person has the task of forming a personal identity that is unique and individual. However, during the process in which a conscious sense of individual identity develops there will also be an unconscious striving for continuity of the individual's personal character (Erikson, 1968). As personal identity develops, over time, maturation occurs, moving the young person towards adulthood.

> **❝ Young people strive for a personal identity ❞**

### *Functions of personal identity*

Adams and Marshall (1996), drawing on numerous analyses and studies of the self and identity, suggest the following as the five most commonly recorded functions of personal identity:

1. Providing the structure for understanding who one is.
2. Providing meaning and direction through commitment, values and goals.
3. Providing a sense of personal control and free will.
4. Enabling consistency, coherence and harmony between values, beliefs and commitments.
5. Enabling the recognition of potential through a sense of future possibilities and alternative choices.

Adams and Marshall (1996) believe that the search for identity is a continuing process which is not just restricted to adolescence. They indicate that personal identity can be altered through heightened self-awareness, and that there are sensitive points along the life-cycle, one of which is adolescence, where self-focusing and identity formation are heightened. Even though we agree that the search for identity is a process that continues throughout life, our observations of young people indicate that such self-focusing and identity formation are more pronounced in adolescence and are central characteristics of adolescence.

### Individuation

Whereas a child is joined with parents and family, a young person moves away into a separate space, becoming a separate individual. In other words, *individuation* occurs. The process of individuation involves the development of relative independence from family relationships, the weakening of ties to objects which were previously important to the young person when a child, and an increased capacity to assume a functional role as a member of adult society (Archer, 2005). The processes of establishing a personal identity and achieving individuation have implications socially. The young person can only construct concepts of self within the context of relations with others, yet is also seeking to establish separateness through boundaries. Thus their process of socialization is based on a balance between individuation together with the formation of personal identity, on the one hand, and integration with society on the other (Adams and Marshall, 1996). Unless this balance is achieved, there are likely to be personal crises that may result in the need for counselling. For example, if a young person seeks a very high degree of individuation the consequence may be that relationships with peers are damaged. This may result in them being marginalized. In this situation they will sometimes seek the company of other marginalized peers. Even so, there are likely to be consequences as their sense of being valued by others may be reduced (Schlossberg, 1989).

Rather than seek a high degree of individuation, some young people do the opposite and seek extreme connectedness with others. This can leave young people prone to difficulties in adapting to new circumstances where they need to deal with situations on their own (Josselson, 1987).

### Emotional responses

As young people progress on their journey of self-discovery, they are continually having to adjust to new experiences, encounters and situations, while at the same time adjusting

to biological, cognitive and psychological changes. This is both stressful and anxiety-provoking for them. It is not surprising, therefore, that young people demonstrate a decreased ability to tolerate, assimilate and accommodate change (Shave and Shave, 1989). The developmental stage of adolescence is therefore characterized by emotional reactivity and a high intensity of emotional response. This makes it difficult for young people to control and modulate their behavioural responses, which at times may be inappropriately extreme. Stimuli of relatively minor significance for most adults may result in significant mood swings for a young person who may respond with unexpectedly high levels of emotion, including excitement, anger, sadness, depression and embarrassment. Young people clearly have a difficult time dealing with the heightened intensity of their emotions and reactions.

> **"Young people commonly experience mood swings"**

A major disruptive emotion of early adolescence is shame (Shave and Shave, 1989). Young people frequently experience feelings of ridicule, humiliation and embarrassment, and feel disgusted and ashamed of themselves. It is therefore understandable that they tend to develop strong defence mechanisms that may include disavowal, denial, projection and regression. These defence mechanisms play an important role in the way young people in early adolescence react to situations and interact with others. Inappropriate behaviour may often be a consequence of these internal ego-defending mechanisms.

### Ethnic identity and psychological adjustment

For young people who belong to ethnic minority groups there are special problems with regard to establishing personal identity. An important part of their personal identity is likely to involve their ethnic identity. Waterman (1984) has suggested a model of ethnic identity formation. In the first stage of ethnic identity development, minority young people accept the values and attitudes of the majority culture. This often includes internalizing negative views of their own group. Waterman (1984) believes that this first stage of ethnic identity development continues until individuals have an experience of racism or prejudice which forces them to see themselves as members of a minority group. This awareness then leads them to a personal ethnic identity search. The search involves efforts to learn about their own culture and is often likely to be highly emotional. In this stage, emotions such as anger and outrage may be directed towards the majority society. A satisfactory outcome of this ethnic identity process can then be achieved with individuals developing a deeper sense of belonging to a group.

### Career identity

Another important aspect of personal identity that adolescents are exploring is that of career. Career identity involves the young person exploring work options in order to

develop their identity as a worker and determine what work role might suit them best. Such exploration generally occurs during secondary school as students are already mak- ing decisions regarding their future careers, for example, by the subjects they choose. Working towards a well-developed career identity in adolescence has been found to support well-being and the transition to adulthood (Malanchuk et al., 2010).

## Social challenges

A major challenge for young people is concerned with their need to find their place in society and to gain a sense of fitting in that place. This is a process of socialization involving the young person's integration with society. This process occurs at the same time as the search for personal identity. In fact, the socialization process and the search for personal identity are strongly interrelated and interdependent. Socialization enhances the sense of personal identity, and the development of personal identity helps the young person to deal with society's expectations and standards.

The wider society, parents, families and peer groups all have expectations regard- ing young people. These expectations are based on the appropriate assumption that the maturing individual is now becoming capable of behaving differently. The com- bined expectations of society, parents and peers, together with newly acquired psychological and cognitive changes, challenge young people to make changes in their social behaviour.

### Society's expectations

Society's expectations pose a challenge for young people and are valuable in helping them to progress along the path to adulthood. In communities where adults express consistent values and expectations, young people tend to develop a positive sense of self (Ianni, 1989). In contrast, in communities where family, school and community fail to offer consistent direction and positive goals, young people drift towards undesirable behaviours, tend to become confused and cynical and to experience a generally diffused sense of self.

A young person can only construct a personal identity in the context of relationships with others. Having relationships with others unquestionably involves respecting and responding appropriately to their expectations. Society in general has expectations about how young people should behave and these will often conflict with a young person's expectations. Hence, the need to achieve individuation provides a conflictual challenge for the young person who is striving for personal identity and is, at the same time, exploring new ways of fitting into society. Consequently, there is likely to be marked ambivalence in many young people concerning issues of independence versus dependence, and with regard to expressing attitudinal and behavioural changes while maintaining social relationships (Archer, 2005).

Many of the tasks of adolescence involve strong social expectations. Havighurst (1972) believed that the mastery of the nine developmental tasks listed below were critical to adaptive adolescent adjustment:

1.  Accepting one's physique and sexual role.
2.  Establishing new peer relationships with both sexes.
3.  Achieving emotional independence of parents.
4.  Selecting and preparing for an occupation.
5.  Developing intellectual skills and concepts necessary for civic competence.
6.  Achieving assurance of economic independence.
7.  Acquiring socially responsible behaviour patterns.
8.  Preparing for marriage and family life.
9.  Building conscious values that are harmonious with one's environment.

This list of tasks might seem daunting for many young people. Some will find the challenges overwhelming and will feel alienated from society because they are unable to achieve society's expectations.

> **Young people are commonly pressured by society's expectations**

As young people grow, they start to look like young adults and are able to communicate more maturely and effectively than children. Consequently, it is understandable that many adults expect that the behaviour of young people ought to reflect the norms of adult behaviour. The expectation that they will be responsible and will conscientiously set out to meet the developmental tasks of adolescence is unrealistic. They are in a process of growth and are dealing with new and previously unmet challenges, so are unlikely to stay focused on particular tasks and are sure to make mistakes. Young people who are overwhelmed by society's expectations may revert to anti-social behaviour, becoming involved in behaviours ranging from low-level delinquency to serious crime. Some will find ways of satisfying their needs through membership of delinquent gangs. By being in a gang they may experience the feelings of belonging that they need, along with expectations that they can meet.

The impact of society's stereotypical expectations for young people of both sexes has been clearly identified in the relevant literature (Schrof, 1995). In spite of the influence of feminism, girls may get messages that their primary role in life is to marry, have children and become good wives and mothers. This may play havoc with their selection of long-term goals and be damaging to some girls' self-esteem. Similarly, the ideas that teenage boys have about being an adult male can be psychologically destructive when they try to live up to them. For both girls and boys, problems ranging from addiction to violence may often have their roots in a young person's inability to cope with the demands of the socialization process.

### *Parental expectations*

Most parents do not know what is normal and realistic with regard to their expectations of their children as they progress through adolescence. Many parents become worried, and at times distressed, by behaviours that are normal for young people. Rutter (1995) believes that most young people are not particularly difficult or troublesome but the problem, in Western society, is how parents respond to them. She argues that the parents' response may create negative feelings and catapult the young person into anti-social behaviour. In her discussion of the issues she draws on research by Steinberg (1990).

Steinberg's (1990) hypothesis is that when children reach puberty the combination of the adolescent phase of development and the behaviour and emotions of parents produces tremendous changes in the parents, with parents becoming increasingly distressed. This may often be accompanied by a decline in marital satisfaction, regret for missed childhood opportunities, recognition of the ageing process, emotional rejection and isolation from a young person who is becoming independent, increasing criticism from a challenging teenager, decline in respect for previously accepted authority and guidance, powerlessness, loss of youthful appearance and doubt about their own sexuality. These changes, Steinberg and Steinberg (1994) believe, often result in parents disengaging from their young people at a time when they need continuing guidance and support. It is understandable, although unfortunate, that some parents withdraw from appropriate contact with their children as they progress through adolescence. Young people need to withdraw because becoming independent is central to their role. Unfortunately this does lead to many parents feeling dismayed and abandoning them at a time when they need special care and attention because of the transitions they are making.

Even when there are tensions in family life, the family remains one of the most effective vehicles for promoting values in adolescence, enabling young people to be successful at school and to have confidence in peer relationships. Steinberg and Steinberg (1994) find that the common link between successful young people is that they generally have positive relationships with their parents. Thus an important challenge for young people is to maintain positive relationships with their parents while achieving their developmental goals, one of which, somewhat paradoxically, is to separate and detach from their parents. Clearly, this is hard to achieve.

Most children begin to detach from their parents at an age of about 14. Although this may sometimes be the result of family dysfunction, it must also be recognized as part of the normal process for young people. There are gender differences: boys generally seem to spend less time with their families than girls. Also girls are more likely to talk about personal issues with parents than are boys.

> **❝It can be difficult for parents to adjust to a young person's individuation❞**

Many parents become distressed because in adolescence their children do not want to discuss personal issues with them. However, because young people are seeking

independence they are more likely to talk to parents at a time that suits them rather than responding to parental enquiries at other times. Further, they are more likely to continue talking if they are allowed to take the lead. These traits of young people have significance for counsellors.

### Adolescent expectations

A question of importance for counsellors is what young people themselves believe are their major challenges. Young people believe that their major challenges revolve around relationship issues with peers and others and performance issues within society, school or college (Youniss and Smollar, 1985). There are some differences here with regard to age. School pressures have been identified by young people in early adolescence as being the most problematic, whereas for young people of 14 years and older, parent–adolescent conflicts were identified as being the most problematic.

Issues concerning peer relationships were universally considered to present problems, although more so for the young person in late adolescence (Spirito et al., 1991). Along with forming close relationships and friendships, most young people are interested in belonging to a group whose members share common attitudes and interests. Within these groups they have strong expectations that their friends will be trustworthy and loyal to them. They tend to be intolerant of disrespectful acts, moodiness, stubbornness, conceit, drinking too much and bragging. Such behaviours are most likely to cause conflict (Youniss and Smollar, 1985).

## Moral and spiritual challenges

Important to the processes of social development and the formation of a personal iden-tity are issues relating to moral and spiritual development.

### Moral development

During adolescence the young person is confronted and challenged by a wide range of moral decisions. There are a number of differing views concerning the process of moral development. Important contributors to theory in this field are Kohlberg (1984) and Gilligan (1983). Kohlberg (1968, 1984) suggests a model that outlines stages of moral development based on ways of thinking about moral matters. His stages of moral development are:

- *Stage one*: pre-conventional morality (aged 4–10 years). In this stage the child will do good or avoid wrong with a motive of either avoiding punishment or receiving a reward.
- *Stage two*: conventional morality (aged 10–13 years). During this stage the child or young person learns to conform to the society in which they live. The motives for doing good or avoiding wrong depend on the approval of older people. Additionally, there is an emphasis on conforming with law and order.

- *Stage three*: post-conventional morality (aged 13 years onwards). During this stage the individual develops a sense of human rights and starts to develop a conscience. Being aware of human rights may involve thinking about changes in the law to strive for more acceptable conditions. Additionally, at this stage young people develop clear ideas about what they believe in and what they are prepared to stand up for. No longer does the individual act merely out of fear or the need for approval. Instead, moral principles are integrated within, and owned by, the individual.

Kohlberg (1984) is conscious that not all young people reach stage three. For some young people, morality and motives may be at a stage-one level. For them, morality is tied up with rewards or with not 'getting caught'.

Gilligan (1983) believes that Kohlberg's theory does not truly represent the moral development of females, and it must be acknowledged that much of Kohlberg's research was based on male subjects. Gilligan suggests that there are three distinct levels of female development:

- *Level one*: individual survival is the driving force for moral reasoning. The female is limited strictly by concern for herself.
- *Level two*: the young person moves to a position of self-sacrifice and social conformity.
- *Level three*: moral decisions in this stage are characterized by consideration for the woman's individual needs as well as those of others. There is an emphasis on not hurting others.

> **"Moral development is subject to gender differences"**

Gilligan (1983) believes that women often use the ethic of care in making decisions about their lives. She suggests that the ethic of care comes from the attachment of children to their mothers, and that through their mothers girls learn about the 'give-and-take' nature of relationships in which moral decisions are made. Comparison of Gilligan's and Kohlberg's theories of moral development suggests that there are differences between males and females in the development of moral decision making. The development of moral reasoning may also be heavily influenced by the context in which a young person lives and is largely dependent on intellectual development which also occurs at this time (Lovat, 1991).

### Spiritual development

As young people seek to establish their personal identity, they attempt to find meaning in their lives. They look within themselves to examine thoughts and feelings, and to reason about them. This leads many young people to seek answers to questions of a

spiritual nature (Elkind, 1980). Conventional religious beliefs and participation in organized religious practices demonstrate aspects of spirituality. However, adolescent spirituality is often demonstrated in a more fundamental way through the young person's search for meaning in life's daily experiences.

Fowler (1981) believes that spirituality can develop only within the scope of the intellectual and emotional growth of the individual. He sees the spiritual beliefs of children from the ages of 5 and 6 as relying heavily on the verification of facts from authority figures such as parents and teachers. In early adolescence, the emphasis is on symbolism rather than knowing factual truth. Later in adolescence, personal experiences, symbols and rituals may play a major part in the development of spiritual beliefs. At this stage the young person is likely to recognize that other people might have different and equally valid ways of understanding and expressing their spirituality. Some young people find conventional religious systems problematic and inconsistent with their need to achieve some level of separation from their family's traditions and values. Those young people who are struggling with identity formation, and are striving to find their place in society, may be attracted to unorthodox religious cults and practices in order to explore their spiritual beliefs and values. Some young people will look to such cults to provide them with a deeper sense of the meaning of life. Unfortunately, they may then become involved in religious practices that are unacceptable in conventional society. This may lead to a young person being marginalized.

Involvement in Satanism is an example of an unorthodox way in which young people may seek to explore their spirituality. Tucker (1989) suggests that young people are deeply fascinated by the kind of experience found in the practice of Satanism. Unfortunately, Satanism can seem attractive for a number of reasons. It provides a sense of group identity and bonding, the opportunity to develop a self-perceived 'charismatic' personality, power because it engenders fear in others and freedom from the restrictions of conventional belief systems. It also offers the opportunity to reject mainstream religion openly. It is not surprising that some young people are attracted to this belief system.

## In summary

Clearly, adolescence is a time of change and crisis that may be adaptively encountered by some but for others presents the possibility of undesirable psychological, social and emotional consequences. The primary goal of adolescence is to make the transition from childhood to adulthood. Young people need to do this while dealing with biological, psychological and social challenges. Further, reaching adulthood successfully and unscathed will be influenced by the childhood experiences, environmental stresses and environmental hazards discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

**KEY POINTS**

- in adolescence a young person individuates and moves from being part of a family group to being part of a peer group
- young people face biological, cognitive, psychological, social, moral and spiritual challenges during adolescence
- biological challenges experienced by young people relate to physical, sexual and emotional changes
- cognitive challenges include new ways of processing information, and the ability to think critically and creatively
- psychological challenges include individuation, forming a new personal identity, ethnic identity and career identity
- social challenges include parental, family and society's expectations
- as a consequence of moral and spiritual development, young people are confronted by new challenges

**FURTHER RESOURCES**

Further information and resources about the developmental stage of adolescence is available from the 'Child Development Institute'.

- childdevelopmentinfo.com