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Puberty and Its Crisis

Educational Help in Overcoming Difficulties

by

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Foreword

In this article the developmental stages of sexual maturity will be considered in order to awaken the interest and understanding of parents, counselors, and teachers in this decisive period of change. My intention is to challenge them to accompany pre-adolescents in a worthy, helpful, and competent manner. One can always become more aware of the possible crises and significant transition which lead into abnormal processes. This paper will provide methodological assistance to equip us with tools with which to accompany our children actively in times of their crises as they cross the perilous threshold into adolescence and also how to learn, with gratitude, from those crises. With this goal in mind, I will try to present the differing aspects of puberty in boys and girls in order to recognize them as such and, through that, to meet their needs. I write out of many years of experience with educators, school physicians and psychiatrists, and psychologists specializing in adolescence, whose knowledge of developmental psychology and physiology have been enhanced by the anthroposophical study of the human being, medicine, and therapeutic education. This background serves to help us better understand aspects of phenomena relating to the passageway from childhood into adolescence.

Sexual Maturity – Becoming Mature for Encounter – Earthly Maturity

No period in human development shows such noticeable changes as puberty. Puberty means *sexual maturity* but one must broaden this definition if one wishes to understand the phase of development between ages twelve and fourteen in terms of more than just biological (sexual) maturity. We know that sexual maturity is only a partial aspect of this phase of development and that fundamental changes become clear in other areas as well. Without factoring out the biological, one can come to grips with the term Rudolf Steiner calls *earthly maturity*. *Earthly maturity* identifies the possibility of familiarizing oneself with the world: the laws and principles at work on the earth, with other people and how to encounter them thoughtfully, sentiently, and actively. It is also correct to speak of *becoming mature for encounter* because, during this phase of development, the young person will become inwardly prepared for encounters, for love in the widest sense of the word, for love of the *earthly world*. He or she will also gain the ability to meet the world in active way—in a constructive, formative, or even destructive manner.

Love as *sexuality* is a special aspect of becoming mature for encounter and initially plays only a limited role. It is seldom the cause of for crises or pathological development. (Analytical psychology upholds an opposing view that the cause of crises and abnormal development should be sought in sexuality.)

From birth to age twenty or twenty-one childhood and adolescence are distinguished by three significant stages of development:

Early childhood includes the first seven years of life from birth until about the time of the change of teeth.

The second seven years of life, from the change of teeth until sexual maturity, encompass what we refer to as *school-age*.

The third seven year period, from earthly maturity to so-called maturity, includes *adolescence*. (The age of maturity was set back to age eighteen several years ago for political reasons.)

In the last few decades these stages of development which include the move into earthly maturity have been appearing ever earlier in the bodily-biological sense. They also exhibit stronger individual aberrances so that an exact point in time at which puberty occurs today can only be expressed in statistical averages. With girls the data is oriented to the time of the first menstruation. Statistically, this occurs shortly after the twelfth birthday. However, today menstruation often occurs by age ten and also considerably later at age sixteen or seventeen, without either case being considered abnormal. With boys puberty begins with the first ejaculation. This event usually takes place around the end of the thirteenth year. Psychological maturity lags behind significantly for both sexes. Timewise, it cannot be precisely pinpointed but in a legal sense, as far as criminal responsibility is concerned, it is still age fourteen. Often psychological maturity is not reached

by age fourteen, even by so-called normally developed children. The entire bodily and hormonal development from child to adult takes several years, from age eleven to fifteen for girls and from age twelve to sixteen for boys. However, it is possible that the intense, outwardly apparent, and functional changes such as growth spurts, breast development, and voice change, take place within weeks and months (European conditions).

More and more the interval of time between bodily development and the subsequent psychological development is increasing. As far as they can be observed, these circumstances are contingent upon time and lie in the principles governing human development. They indicate that mental/spiritual development is substantially more independent than bodily development. Psychological tensions can grow from these partially very significant differences in development (up to four years for some people) and carry within themselves possibilities for illness. This is certainly one of the reasons why children and adolescents go through more crises during this particular phase of their development and are more prone to mental illness today than just a few decades ago.

For instance, if one encounters a child who is fully developed physically, he or she will likely be addressed as a “mature person,” with implied expectations. Often an adolescent does not feel psychologically capable of meeting these expectations which can easily cause feelings that others are making excessive demands or exposing incapability. Furthermore, on the whole, our present way of life has made it more difficult to meet the challenge of mastering our lives.

Puberty, that is the capacity for encounter, love, or action in connection with the outer world, is the threshold from childhood into adolescence. Preparations have been made during the previous developmental phases and the previous phases are decisive prerequisites for coping, developmentally, with puberty. Likewise, they can be significant root causes of crises and pathological deviations.

1. At the time of the change of teeth a child is ready for *learning*. The senses that are needed for *perception* of the environment, other people, and oneself have been developed.

2. In the relative quiet of the tenth and eleventh years there is a stabilizing and maturing of the rhythmic system, a fixed ratio of breathing to heartbeat: *Respiratory maturity*. At the same time, deep inside, a child gains an ability to differentiate and discriminate between good and evil, truth and untruth, so that now we can speak of *maturity of the mind*.

3. The third stage is *maturity relating to encounter and action* whose outer as well as inner transformations and upsets can not be ignored.

All of these stages are completed within a short period measured by a few years. Here, I am referring to the beginning of this process of maturation.

The Appearance of Earthly Maturity

If one is not paying attention to subtleties, within a few months—“overnight” it seems—a completely new person has appeared. A new person is standing there, amazed, and amazing to others; like Adam, who suddenly realizes he is naked, that his body has changed, and he notices that he is different from Eve. The physical changes allow consciousness of the differences between the sexes to arise. At the same time, a person becomes aware that he or she has something that is missing in the other sex and vice versa. The young person experiences shame, nakedness, guilt; she begins to differentiate between her inner life and her outer life.

As boys turn into young men they become more angular, chiseled, rougher, more massive, and also more churlish and nonchalant. There are new limb proportions because of the growth spurt and new leverage ratios that are not yet mastered. Their voices “brake” down an octave. Their sexual organs become larger. They experience their first ejaculation of sperm. Mentally, boys become more closed or “self-oriented.”

Maturity for girls is more like an unfolding. Their bodies arch and round out at the “remotest places.” Their voice sinks a little, about three tonal steps. They have their first menstruation. Mentally, girls become more open, communicative, and unconstrained, at least with her peers.

Nature exhibits hides, multi-colored pelts, feathers, snouts, claws and other specializations in animals as formative soul forces. But these things are merely suggested in human beings; for example, hair appearing and growing in the oddest places. Also, the cut of the face, physiognomy as an expression of the soul and “character,” are only nominally taking on shape. There is still very little of the personal/individual to be seen. Adolescents orient themselves much more to how “one” is different now, how “one” presents oneself within the group, or how “one” detaches oneself. “One does what is *in*.”

Youth fills in where nature has short-changed them, for instance, with a cloud of smoke, make-up, or perfume (also body odor). One creates one’s own atmosphere. Fashion is important. One dresses a little exotically. Or one “styles” one’s own hair plumage in order to strike an individual note. At the same time, youth are also hiding-out to avoid personally showing themselves. There are mood swings. Silliness goes over to sullenness or strong action to lethargic inaction. Either a person is careful of outward appearances or neglects all outward appearances. The *outward appearance* often becomes the cause of numerous misunderstandings.

Inner Changes

The changes at the root of this enormous transformation play out even more in the innermost regions of the soul. What appear as changes in the body can be understood as pictorial expressions. The mental soul of a person gradually takes shape and receives its own dimensions like a room that has width, height, and depth. It has a certain amount of autonomy but it is in no way wholly, personally, imbued with color. The personal life of soul increasingly cuts itself off from inherited connections such as family and seeks more independence. Something totally new but those going through this development is felt. For them, it is a completely unfamiliar experience and they are often mentally as helpless as a newborn is helpless physically. The entire process can be understood as a pictorial image of the new birth of the “soul body” upon the foundation of the transformed physical body.

This new feeling of independence or self-reliance is multi-layered and contradictory. On one side, freedom is felt that is the result of the loosening of all ties, and on the other side a person has the feeling of having to rely on himself or herself, no longer being supported and led by others. These new experiences in the inner recesses of the soul are often shocking and can be compared to those of a newborn when the umbilical cord is cut and he takes his first breath. Oftentimes, next to an overwhelming desire for freedom, a feeling of isolation becomes apparent. Many times feelings go from one extreme to the other and joyful freedom turns into painful isolation that reels back and forth between enthusiasm and folly. This inner tumult, this catastrophe, is comparable to a thunderstorm, a hailstorm, or a fiery blast of hot air. Whoever has experienced the enormous, fiery energy of a burning hay barn, with its intense heat and destruction, can perhaps empathize with what is taking place in the soul of an adolescent.

What is burning there in the barn? It is stored sun-energy, brought in as hay, enclosed, and held securely. There lies the loveliness of a meadow, its fragrance, people’s labor, the beauty of wildflowers; all these things are found in the barn along with junk, spider webs, and machine parts and tools. All of that which burns away is destroyed and missing in the soul. Will it not perhaps be rebuilt better, more beautiful, and modern than it was?

Such a tearing-down of the old and building-up of the new is a dramatic, crisis-filled, but developmentally par-for-the-course, progression of upheaval—a searching for the limits of experience, a survey of the dimensions of the soul. Either the soul feels drawn towards encounters with other people and the world, or it feels cast away, left to depend upon itself. It is like a breathing oscillation between the gestures of *sympathy* and *antipathy*. These grand motions of the soul are the balancing scale of this developmental step. Both are essential abilities for encounter which are found in every conversation: expression and listening, opinion and reflection, speaking and contemplation. They are essential gestures for encounter. The necessities of

devotion to the world and of retreating into oneself both live in the inner soul. Over the years, adolescents must learn to make use of these important and effective gestures in order to maintain their balance and remain psychologically healthy. We are talking about mental abilities of movement and mental stability. The first real ability for experience has been given. If the development process never enters into the dramatic and the “crisis-aspect” is omitted completely, it can be taken as a red flag and warning of a beginning illness.

There are *dangers*: One danger is the need to give oneself to the world, to “others.” This can lead to a loss of boundaries, a desire to act out one’s feelings of lust or craving of pleasure, even to actual addiction. The other danger consists of withdrawing into newly-gained critical faculties and powers of reflection, thereby depriving oneself of outer encounter and avoiding experiences or, hating oneself, destructively disposing of them. In both cases, the soul experiences a mortification of perceptions. The soul is either completely influenced by its environment or by its own self-generated emotions.

Differing Psychological Constitutions of Boys and Girls

The emotions of sympathy and antipathy are differently accentuated in boys and girls in a typical manner.

Boys’ psychological experiences are often narrower and their emotional expressions more discrete. A boy does not like to display his mind and feelings. Aloofness, reticence, deliberation, and steadiness are hidden virtues. Having said that, there is nothing more vulnerable and sensitive, or more easily hurt, than the feeling soul of an adolescent boy. It can be compared to a crab in its shell. The tendency to withdraw to the point of isolation is always present in boys.

The world of feelings and perceptions unfolds more strongly in *girls*. Typically, their behavior is more self confident and there is a tendency to communicate, be involved, meet the world, challenge to the point of provocation, and lose themselves within the experience of contact. On average, girls’ emotional sensitivity is less than that of boys.

Just by the character of the differing psychological configurations of boys and girls, it can be seen that particular possibilities for crises occur during the time when new-orientation, stabilization, and finding one’s own identity have not been mastered by the ego, the “I,” which gradually creates order.

The Influence of the Temperament

A further developmental component is the psychological constitution; the way in which the mental soul is anchored in the body, in its life forces. We call this the “temperament.” For example, the effect of a melancholic

temperament on the mental soul of an adolescent boy is that it causes the awakening, mental life of the soul to concentrate itself toward the inside and through that, under certain circumstances, a boy's psyche can become endangered and constricted even to the point of total isolation and encapsulation, including a tendency to consider suicide. On the other hand, a sanguine temperament can enhance a person's striving to be psychologically unconstrained. Under certain circumstances, the mental soul of a girl that is inclined to sanguinity can degenerate into complete instability, addiction to change, and an appetite for self-assertion; she can not stand being alone. Her reactions to impulses and stimuli from the outside are exaggerated and unbridled; even to the point of a state of hysteria exhibiting inner discomposure.

Change in "Consciousness"

We must also consider a much deeper, hidden process of earthly maturity: How will this step of development be perceived individually by the budding consciousness of self, the "shadow of the 'I'," so to speak? Encountering the earthly world also means saying good-bye to the spiritual world that was "carried" deep inside during childhood. The child should now experience reliability, continuity and steadiness as principles of the Father-God part of our being: for instance, through his or her parents. The change into earthly maturity causes skepticism of constancy, but it is necessary for development. Everyone feels alone, dependent upon themselves, and "abandoned." This leave-taking is critically described, most often by boys: "I feel isolated, left all alone" or "I don't feel understood" or "It feels like there is a layer of cement on top of me that I can not break through" and "I don't know if life has any meaning."

Encountering the world of appearance and perception also heralds the adolescent's arrival into the realm of things and their management, which calls for experimentation in many aspects. Mechanical, electronic, and chemical tinkering begins. The physical body is rediscovered. Accomplishments such as acrobatic dance, rock and roll music, skateboarding, athletics, and show-quality horseback riding are worked on during play and also according to the person's own ambition. Interactions with peers and authorities that were respected up to that time are put playfully to the test. The unusual and the forbidden become attractive. The joy found in new behaviors, discussions, persistence, and defiance can even go so far as to lead to an addiction to such encounters.

Typical Dangers during Development

Experience that is strongly one-sided such as the loss of supporting religious belief or discovery of the material, manageable world of perception can mask a tendency to illness. Feelings of loss that underscore the prevailing moods of resignation, aggression, or depression can be determining factors

in all further stages of life and can lead to serious clinical patterns, so-called endogenous depression, with a complete loss of initiative and the danger of suicide.

If an adolescent is ruled by feelings of his or her desire to discover new things, a hunger for adventure, or greed for experiences that involve intoxication, then, in the end, this instability can increase until there is a psychotic-loosening which could lead to drug abuse and the resulting schizophrenic psychosis.

During this stage of human development, a person is at the mercy of countless influences from our self-made civilization and societal norms which make reorientation difficult. Models such as Rambo, Batman, Hitler, James “007” Bond, black magic cults, and rock-and-roll culture attest to the psychological hardening lead to egocentricity, selfishness, and lust for power. On the other hand, the proffered substance abuse, comfort, and convenience (for instance as followers of a guru) can cause us to create illusions vis-à-vis the world and the avoidance of challenges.

Both tendencies carry within them the danger of fanaticism and both can push a person into dependence. Precise observation shows that both directly lead away from the true needs of adolescent children. Both can lead to the “I,” the ego, not learning to master the mental soul but rather becoming enmeshed in the swirl of influences with the result that the spiritual-individual self with its formative, health-maintaining ability of balance can not find the strength of the middle ground and can not take on a position of control.

During the course of the adolescent years crisis can be overcome and a breathing, individual balance attained between action and thinking, experimentation and ingrained habits. Oftentimes a riotous, unrestrained, “day-to-day” life “cures” itself later by developing an affinity for a habitual way of life and limited areas of interest. Somewhat later in adolescence, a person can blunder further and further into illnesses resulting from inner doubt (neuroses).

Children often have a dim foreboding of the dangers that await them during development of earthly maturity. Fear of this new stage of development and its resulting increase in burdens can cause a person’s sense of responsibility and incapacity to become so overwhelming that relapses into long-forgotten stages of child development appear which can even go so far that biological development and growth comes to a standstill (for example, so-called adolescent anorexia).

We are also familiar with the opposite case: carefree, pleasurable striding into the future and throwing off all conventions and obligations; searching for absolute freedom and everything natural even to becoming animal-like. We call this extensive degeneration. The one is imprinted with fear, the other with “high-spirited arrogance.”

Often, one or the other extreme does not appear alone, but rather, one psychological state swings into another like a pendulum. A yearning aspiration comes up as a mirage that can never be reached; that tips over into disappointment. Self-perceived afflictions and feeling sorry for oneself arise and awaken new illusions. Neurotic psychological problems appear, doubts in the mental soul which keep the middle ground inaccessible.

A person suffers endless torments from the leavings of their emotional experiential faculty. They perceive the prison of their loneliness, the constraints of life, or superficiality, or lack of soul/spiritual food which calls forth feelings of deep-down emptiness or unbearable tension. The reaction can be an attempt to either break out or to blanket it with sensations and pseudo-experiences.

The deep, inner need is to *identify* with the world and others, to feel in harmony with an ideal, to penetrate the appearance of the world with comprehension, and to learn to act in the world in a sensible manner.

Society's Role in the Adolescent's Stride toward Earthly Maturity

Puberty in itself is no disease. Problems occur because of civilization and mistakes in education.

Whether the child's move into adolescence and its crises will be successfully overcome or decisive foundations for illness created, very much depends upon us as a society and also upon each of us personally as educators and people who influence culture and civilization. Parents, teachers and everyone who takes part in the development of our children in the widest sense, surely can not deny that the crises our children experience are cries for help directed at destiny, society, and individuals. These young people realize they are not independent. They are asking for our experience which we have gathered thus far on this side of life! What we impart to our children, and to all the children of our time, as mental/spiritual food for their future, healthy development, is up to us.

Can we say, as leaders, if the help we have given our children has been beneficial or harmful to their development? Where is the help that we could now be giving? What can we do to continue to be of help? At the present time, our way of life seems to be the background from which some crises of our adolescents will transition into illnesses. Here is the place where we can take on a position of positive influence. We must bring ourselves to the point of feeling such personal concern that we can clearly perceive our responsibility to the children as well as the possibilities to help them. We must not simply appeal to institutions or other people, professionals, to bring our young people out of a crisis or illness.

From the day a child is born, our principles of upbringing are crucial to her development. The mother has a heightened perception of her newborn in the days after birth, a “sixth sense” which she uses to perceive what her child needs: if she is hungry or thirsty, full or tired, if she should let her sleep or pick her up, and so forth. This ability can be cultivated if one consciously pays attention to it and lets it help one build inner confidence. This ability can carry us over many rocky crags during a child’s development and upbringing. It does not protect us from making mistakes, but we will be unafraid of them and can look at our mistakes self-critically in order to gather experience and learn from them. Over anxious shepherding of the child, that might lead to insecurity about his or her perceptions and not developing his or her own psychological gauge, would thus be avoided. Parents can learn to identify and take action against the dangers and possible abnormal developments of their children by positively interacting with them and having confidence in their own childrearing abilities, instead of suppressing their fears.

Parents who practice level-headedness and loving firmness in their decision-making, who make consequential judgments in the first years of their children’s lives, lay a foundation that will help them later to help their children through crises. Their children will regain a new inner order and, consequently, the health of their soul bodies. This is part of a “wholesome world” that children desperately need to experience in their childhood in order to find certainty of soul later, an inner gauge to survive everything, including adverse conditions in life. Even if these requisites are only partially present, there are possibilities still of helping a young person create new, inner orderliness.

Development is a process—crises are the forerunners of development. If someone is surprised by them, then either he or she has not followed the development, or did not recognize it, or wanted to deny it. Here are a few examples showing that where there is continuous one-sidedness present in childrearing, crises and pathological developments can mushroom.

I would like to name one style of childrearing the *explaining* or *intellectualizing* style. Often, the parents are well-educated. They know a lot and they try to spare the children having to experience some things by approaching them through their intellect. They talk about morals with their children and often present abstract concepts (“you do this” and “you do not do that”). Through intelligent explanation a person can level with the child about factual matters and possibly make him or her problematic. Most children who grow up under this influence have great difficulties assessing themselves and life situations. They are uncertain and fearful. Knowledge about context and correlation does not necessarily signify reality. At this time, experiences encountering things must take place. Often, such children are advanced in their ability to express themselves verbally and are sometimes precocious,

but they are unsure of themselves when interacting with others and are fearful when faced with concrete demands. After their move into earthly maturity, they often develop *angst*, or fear of life, they are critical of the “bad other people,” and they can not master the demands of daily life.

A Case Study

R.P. was raised with that kind of anxious, explanatory style of upbringing. He became quite a challenge for his parents because he would only discuss things and was much better at it than his parents. They complained that he did not follow their advice or prohibitions but would threaten them, be impertinent to other people, bully other children, and run away if things became serious. As a consequence, he was threatened by other children and he could not establish relationships with others, not even his classmates. He used his considerable intelligence to explain his situation in life and to justify his behavior to himself. He began to provoke others by writing threatening letters, abusing good friends, and declaring his intention to commit suicide, just so that he could make contact with others. At the same time, he would shun that contact. Finally, his behavior took on terrorist-like characteristics and he was viewed as a criminal in the eyes of society.

Another style of childrearing we can call the *soulless style*, in which often, a raw, masculine-imprinted form of interaction rules within the family. There are rigid standards of behavior that are imposed by the authority (usually) of the father. There is no mutual understanding or listening. Each person is considerate of his or her own advantage. Derogatory judgments, lack of interest culminating in contempt, and an atmosphere of resignation are the norms. A child who grows up in such an environment experiences the disdain of others, numbs his or her perceptions, and suffers from feelings of boredom. After earthly maturity has been reached, these traits transform to inner torpidity, “coolness,” and brutality. A case study: At this point, at age of fourteen, a girl, C.L., became conspicuous. She had completely adopted the role of a boy, and argued that this was the only way possible for her to assert herself. She very coolly audio-taped her parents’ arguments and physical fights and had many outbreaks of rage until, one day, she was criminally charged because she had slashed the tires of several cars in a parking lot with a knife. She explained that she always felt such overwhelming anger inside of herself that she simply had to hit something or find somewhere to let out her “frustration.” She never learned to laugh or cry and she longed to do both. She had already felt something like love but it quickly turned into brutal sex and now she had no more desire for a boyfriend and kept herself to the other girls.

A third style of childrearing I call the *overprotective and preservation style*. It is seen often in families with a high standard of living where there are few outside demands. From the time the child is very young, his or her

every wish is fulfilled and every need is met. People in the family act according to the pleasure principle and become accustomed to having “good fortune.” Perhaps the child lives in a family where he or she is admired by parents and grandparents. Often, it is clear as early as kindergarten that the child has problems integrating into a group of children: The child does not “feel like it.” During the school years it is obvious that the child can not take even the slightest disappointment or the smallest deprivation. Challenges that require effort can not be met. During puberty this transforms into a lack of initiative and loud protests when some important task must be completed. Another case study: Carsten P. grew up in such an environment. He increasingly feels his psychological/emotional shortcomings. He can not pull himself together for anything and is unhappy. He blusters around and seeks to distract himself with hard rock, horror movies, drugs, and pornography. He comes home from school and sees that dinner is not ready. He throws open the refrigerator and kicks the door with his foot because the Coca-Cola is not in its usual place. He can not resist the allure of drugs and he suffers terribly within himself. The family is shocked and nobody sees how to help.

The case studies presented here have certain typical characteristics and show extremes that can lead to the transfer of those characteristics to the mental soul of the adolescents. This can be avoided if parents and educators learn to recognize their own unbalanced behavior! Perhaps they notice something is not right and they suffer from this knowledge without knowing what can be changed. It is not enough to change your “behavior” by bringing more “feeling” into your style of upbringing, or not forbidding anything, or “once really cracking down.” First of all, it is important that parents and educators understand the young person not only as a thinking individual, but also as someone who feels and acts, if you want to give that young person the tools to master his or her life on earth.

How can we acquire an understanding of the inner nature of a child, especially during this time of upheaval on the way to earthly maturity? We observe young people with their particular soul compositions and see that they are like infants that must be nourished but they can not tell us what they need! The first effort we can make must be to try and feel our way into the inner nature of a child even though that nature can be puzzling and volatile. Children expect something from parents, teachers, and educators, even if they loudly, or not so loudly, declare their independence. These expectations are very real and stand in stark contrast to the rejection that we often experience. Trying to “get inside” the mind of a young person, to empathize with what is going on within him or her, requires thorough, in-depth work! It does not require the study of behavior, but rather getting to know the person the way he or she is, and accepting him or her as a spiritual being. The statement of a disappointed father, “My son is the biological result of an unfortunate act of procreation,” is certainly in no way helpful.

In early adolescence, young people need and expect adults to:

1. *Act as guideposts:* They want us to stand there, clearly, articulately, and unalterably pointing toward their destination and the estimated time of arrival: giving advice, pointing out pitfalls, and orientating them, but please, no giving orders, coercing, or moralizing. Often, you will notice that your own goals and expectations must take a back seat and that ambition, power, and striving for prosperity do not nourish the adolescent soul! They are searching for guiding ideas, ideas that will give meaning to their lives.

2. *Listen Empathetically:* We must learn to see through the tumult of the adolescent soul and try to understand! What does a hate-filled argument signify? A challenge! It means, for example: "I have a very intense relationship with you!" Why does that always throw us parents out of balance? It is because our own disappointment, insecurity, pride, or lust for power is bigger than our ability to listen, the relationship gets stuck and the adolescent misunderstood.

3. *Examine our capabilities and actions:* Together we can look at the standards of our actions, the credibility of our motives, the reliability and inner logic of our activities. This could be very empowering for adolescents! Forcefulness, egoistic motives, and untruthfulness are hindrances to our being of help to young people. In action, the consequence must be apparent: One does what one says! Walk the talk!

If we are successful in recognizing and correctly meet these demands of young people appropriately, then we will see that everyone is capable of helping. If young people see us making efforts in this regard, observe that we continue to work on ourselves, then a spark ignites within each young person seeking orientation from us. That is where the nurturing of the mental soul really begins. Hard disappointments and obscurations are in opposition to it: lies, obscurities, unclear thought processes, and inconsequential actions. Those things build up barbed wire for the soul. Children who are improperly attended to will seek out and latch onto pseudo-gratifications and stimulations in their desperate attempts to experience the world. They will easily be at the mercy of all influences, even those that are anonymously directed, including manipulations of awareness that stand in hostile, destructive opposition to a healthy spiritual life. They will be unable to use their own mental stability to differentiate and judge what is good for them and what is harmful. When this happens it is not humanization that progresses forward, but rather dehumanization.

What Can We Do?

Concretely, what can we do to stand by children during times of crisis or illness? We must ask ourselves if we can initiate self-change, starting today? In view of the psychological condition of the large majority of our adolescents there is no time to lose. Even those who have no problems today with their own children or other's children, tomorrow may find them in a position of being able to help. We must not withdraw ourselves from the upcoming generation. We must be there for them!

If we look closely at our own lives, we see that often we exist in a state of ill-humor, reluctance, inherent necessity, lust for power, or vanity. In secret, we can admit this to ourselves. We exhibit the prison in which we are living. As human beings, all of us have something special, something vitally humane that sets us apart from the animals: Freedom in how we comport ourselves in respect to our tasks and the demands made upon us.

We can become either exasperated with our conditions and let ourselves drift and degenerate, or strive for the inner control in self-conquest, effort, practice, and gradually develop a human culture. For instance, we have the freedom to seek help in the anthroposophical study of the human being (Waldorf education), study it, and make practical applications in our lives. Whoever takes these fundamentals to heart will keep in mind that they must not become fanatic about it all, but will ascertain that it requires strength and courage to change something and to answer for being different. Above all, we must become consciously aware of the meaning of our aim.

We have the freedom to take part in initiatives that enlighten us about all possible questions of life, such as active support of anthroposophical healing, farming, and education. Our young people will see that adults are taking part in re-formation, or new formation, of conditions on earth. In this manner conversations, questions, or initiatives can become a family way.

If you have the desire, or are required, to gain the skills necessary for helping our growing children and adolescents, you have to do exercises that can develop capacities within us.

1. First of all, practice *clear, comprehensive thinking*. If you can successfully think of a self-chosen concept in logical associations, pulling out only what is essential, for just one minute every day, with regular practice you can gain the skill to *formulate thoughts clearly*. For example, you could imagine how a book is created, step by step, from printing to the bookshop.

2. Practice the *ability to love* and *to not hold preconceptions* by developing a genuine interest, asking real questions, taking part in what the children do, and listening for what they are experiencing. Practice, in spite of a bad mood, so that you finally are able to give a child two minutes daily of undivided attention. For instance, take the time to be interested in homework, not to correct it or criticize it, but to learn something yourself, discover something.

3. Practice *consequential action*, means to do that which, according to your discernment, lies within your own possibilities. Even if it turns out to be wrong, it is very important that you *practice feeling secure within yourself*. You can gather important experience even from your mistakes. Often fear makes us feel insecure about our actions. For instance, I have to write a letter. I told myself I would do it and so I will write it now even though it could be that I can not say everything I want to say in the way I want to say it and finish it in the amount of time I have allotted.

Even these apparently small efforts are an enormous help for adolescents in crisis. They see that adults are working on themselves through their own initiative. We adults will see that something new can develop from this because we are doing things out of our own freedom that are important and essential in the sense of our being role models without becoming moralizing. It becomes possible to overcome habits, to go without things, and it helps develop a love for what is recognized as meaningful. When I am able, for instance, to overcome a habit, not just want something for myself, I can realize the potential of doing something for another. When I learn to do without things, I will be able to forego some luxuries in life. And when I am successful in developing love for that which is truly meaningful, I will gain the courage to stand up for something! Not only is this a gift for the one practicing these things, but you can sincerely thank your son or daughter for the crisis that became your task and was mastered.

This newly-acquired, inner attitude can open us more to life and to the children. It does not make the task of mastering life easier, but we can continue to gather new experiences. Life has a new, deeper aspect and perhaps we will our understanding of the children on their search. Such inner changes are difficult for parents and educators even though they are outwardly trivial. They loosen our ingrained characteristics and make us insecure, but they are almost the only effective means for actually helping. Do not underestimate them! As many examples prove, changes in relationships are possible within a few weeks.

There are other “psychological” exercises that are important when we encounter our adolescents. Perhaps we do not like many things about their behavior and we notice that we become angry and that our anger increases the difficulties in our relationships with young people. We have long known that this is a point of contention. Again and again we have these same kinds of destructive disputes because we have not learned to maintain our composure. We should practice retentive observation of everything that our young people show us and address our welling-up feelings very consciously. We could look back on the situation in the evening, recalling the encounter in every detail, without making judgments. Perhaps we would discover something amazing that might allow our interest in the adolescent to increase,

even if it is only making the astounding observation that we have neglected our child, without being judgmental about that observation. We can even go a step further to look at the special way in which the young person presents himself and dresses as something deserving of wonder; even if it is only being in awe of the fact that Claudia or Daniel worked on their hair for two solid hours.

A further step seems important: Open yourself up for the “unbelievable” and let it affect you without reacting. Gather information with a lively, inner interest and allow yourself to be “taught.” Humor is an essential tool; not irony or sarcasm, but an inner smile. It prevents us from immediately feeling existentially threatened by the otherness of our children. In this way our relationship can be loosened out of its tense rigidity and a new breeze of change and new impulses to come inside. Psychologically, it is not possible to proceed according to rigid rules. Flexibility, ideas, strength, and compliance are all necessary elements in the essence of the soul’s constitution.

One very decisive, apparently “very easy,” but really very difficult exercise should never be missing from our repertoire: I call it the “evening exercise.” It lasts only a few minutes and requires deliberate focusing on another: Every night, before bed, try to call to mind, precisely and clinically, a visible part of the body of your son, daughter, or student. It is not necessary in this step to have sympathy or antipathy for the form of an ear or an eyebrow. This concerns a methodical, scientific process. You will be shocked to realize how little you know your own child with whom you are perhaps so engaged on a daily basis and for whom you are so concerned. At the very least, try to visualize the form of an earlobe, for example, and then, the next day, discreetly study its actual structure. It will take about three weeks of study before you are so familiar with the form of an earlobe that you can draw it. Once that is accomplished, a hand or an eye or the mouth can be studied. It is clear that your relationship will change very quickly if you are successful in overcoming perturbing feelings and forming the relationship on a new level, that is to say, an “objective” level. Something completely new comes about from your daily renewed interest in your child and your evening efforts, a relating from “I” to “I” that opens up the essence of the other without regard for his or her behavior. If there are not negative circumstances that have existed for years to act as obstructions, then, soon the child will feel supported, understood, and also seen-through, without ever having to speak with the child about these questions. You will notice that you interact with your child differently regarding matters of upbringing and education and that you are more secure and act in a more humane manner. Instead of money and possessions, you have lovingly, carefully, and with understanding, directed your intensity of will toward the other without your own emotions and drives having clouded the relationship. Your pedagogical skills will grow because you are able to put yourself in the child’s situation and develop pedagogical ideas for how

to handle the situation. You will stay away from away from instigating hearings taking harsh, corrective actions. As you continue to view the child in a worthier manner, you are more relaxed, and interaction with the child will bring you joy in the sense of “the art of education and upbringing.”

In this way you can say goodbye to moralizing and intellectual criticism. You will turn away from accepting only that which is visible in behavior, which has always been a hindrance to your having understanding attitude towards our children and others. The help that our adolescents need in order to find themselves is our interest in the incomprehensible part of their budding individuality.

What is to be done when there is psychological illness, when long-time, chronic, behavioral disturbances occur? Very often one notices that even though the relationships are very close, they have taken on a double nature, like love/hate, for instance. A love/hate relationship is tortuous; one feels constantly misunderstood but maintains a wistful desire for the relationship even though all efforts and discussions bring about no solutions. Almost always in cases of this nature, the only help is in the form of a separation. Under certain circumstances that would mean in a clinic, a boarding school, or even a foster family where efforts to heal the long-festering wounds are handled with understanding and finesse.

Crises can also occur because of long-time, excessive demands made upon the child, in school, for example. The adolescent becomes increasingly aware of his or her weaknesses and may experience feelings of inadequacy, uselessness, and the meaninglessness of life. Usually a person tries to compensate for inadequacy by strengthening his efforts in learning the difficult subjects, but it hardly ever works. Therefore, it is most important to track down the causes of such difficulties so that the appropriate help can be given.

Interferences with movement which, today, have been traced to so-called “functional brain damage,” are often the background of such crises. Balance will not be achieved again through conversations or tricks. There must be significant relief and reliance upon other resources that usually involves separation from familiar educators or parents.

Psychological illnesses, which often gradually become more distinct during adolescence, can occur independently from any outside catalyst. They are often triggered by minor mental or physical stresses, and it requires special experience and schooling to recognize the tendency to these illnesses already years before adolescence. The real causes are often not found in the child’s development and possibly stem from before birth and conception, perhaps heredity or a particular structure of the organizing, individual essence of the child’s being. It is inevitable that medical help is required in these situations. If crises can not be overcome during adolescence, then psychological illnesses are usually determining factors in the person’s ensuing biography. Very often, it depends upon the prudent, sometimes painful, decisions of parents and

educators to seek timely advice and to take action to prevent pathological developments.

Conclusion

Development to earthly maturity can be viewed as encountering the conditions on earth. However, it simultaneously signifies the birth of the independent soul and a departure from being supported by the spiritual/religious and often also by familial bonds. The physical, mental and spiritual cataclysms that are connected with this development bring a person's entire being into a state of openness to positive as well as negative influences with all their life-determining possibilities and dangers. As a breathing process, the psychological aspect of a human being must re-order itself during this time. During this process of reorganization it experiences crisis whose root causes lie in this developmental step, the child's own biography, and in the effects of civilization and education. The tendencies toward isolation or scattering oneself to the world create the pathological deviations which can lead to crisis or illnesses.

Attempts to point out crisis tendencies that can be triggered or prefaced by particular attitudes on upbringing and education have been made by school physicians and psychiatrists specializing in adolescence. Help that can be given by parents and teachers has been discussed and exercises and advice presented on gaining capacities in education and upbringing in connection with adolescence. Often, these are determining factors in helping adolescents orient themselves. Above all, concrete and effective exercises have been offered to help mitigate acute crisis situations. Comprehensive experience is required to determine if a particular situation is in association with a crisis or the beginning of a psychological illness. The appropriate help depends on that determination. Looking at crises as a knot in development and overcoming them is an urgent task today which everyone must take on through self-education. That, alone, is the genuine, natural remedy for mastering such life challenges as raising and educating our children.

In every case, parents and teachers who immerse themselves in these problems of puberty are the best "therapists" because they are living and working on a daily basis. Let us take small, loving, careful steps toward our adolescents, our children. We can have a healing effect on the courses of their lives.