UNIT 1   INTRODUCTION TO SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN

Structure

1.1   Introduction

1.2   Objectives

1.3   A Profile of the Child at Late Childhood

1.4   Developmental Needs at Late Childhood

1.5   Socio-cultural Factors in Problems of Children

1.6   Principles of Dealing with Social and Emotional Problems

1.7   Let Us Sum Up

1.8   Unit-end Exercises

1.1   INTRODUCTION

Recall Unit 8 **"Socio-Emotional and Moral Development"** in Course ES-101 **Understanding the Elementary School Child** in which social, emotional and moral development of elementary school children were dealt with. By now, you know what changes take place in the social and emotional responses of children as they grow. You also know the kind of reactions that reflect an integrated personality as indicated in Unit 1 **Development of an Integrated Personality** of the Course ES-102 **Facilitating Growth and Development**. In this Unit let us understand more about the difficulties experienced by children because of their emotional blocks in dealing with people or social situations. Let us see what the developmental needs of children are, how the problems of development emerge, and discuss the broad guidelines for dealing with the socio-emotional problems of children.

Case 1

For the sake of illustration here, let us take Ganga's case. She was ten years old when her father moved from a small town to Bangalore. Earlier she used to get the first rank in class and took part in all other activities. Her family was proud of her and she got along well with her parents. But in Bangalore Ganga became a loner. She lost interest in studies and often misbehaved with her mother. Her classmates said that she was a bully and they avoided her. She was often involved in fights with others.

What has happened to Ganga? How can she be helped? How do we expect her to behave? These are some of the questions that need to be answered in order to understand Ganga's problem.

1.2   OBJECTIVES

This Unit is designed to give a general picture of elementary school children and their needs. After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

● recognise the general characteristics of children during late childhood;

● identify the developmental needs of these children; and

● understand some of the alternative ways of dealing with the social and emotional problems of these children.

1.3 A PROFILE OF THE CHILD IN LATE CHILDHOOD

During the years from six to twelve, the child's growth moves at a leisurely pace. The growth in the preschool period is rapid, and the onset of adolescence would also trigger off a growth spurt.

A number of studies show that the following characteristics are usually found in children during late childhood:

1. At this age the children become **less dependent on adults and develop friendships with peers.** They are very active physically and enjoy playing pranks, some of which become the cause of punishment to them.

2. An important characteristic of this **age is same-sex identification.** Sharp sex differentiation emerges particularly after eight years. Girls choose to be exclusively with girls and boys with boys. If someone puts a question like "who is the most troublesome person in your class." girls invariably write the name of a boy and vice-versa. Similarly the characteristics attributed to boys and girls will be different.

    By and large, **girls develop at a faster pace than boys at this age.** The skills children pursue also differ with sex. Socio-cultural factors are responsible for most of these differences. However, children at this age show interest in the activities expected of them as girls or boys. Their sensitivity to their sex role increases.

3. Generally these children **seek facts and knowledge about the physical and social world.** They seek information about people and events from the larger environment. Curiosity about sex is common. Children of this age are interested in mechanics, invention, science, life and activities of communities around the world, life and nature, etc. Children of this age normally distinguish work and play, work is associated with routine and play with recreation.

4. **The activities and interests of this age group are closely linked with the objectives of broader socialization and socio-emotional development.** For example, if children are able to run, climb, jump, or ride a bicycle, they can develop the confidence of learning motor skills required to take care of self and others. They can learn the motor skills involved in different occupations. They feel happy with this and they can also help elders in carrying out certain routine activities. Similarly, if children can go out and buy things they require, prepare a toy model or play and work with other children, they feel happy and they will have the confidence of participating in larger functions of the society later in life.

These interests and tasks which arise almost naturally at or around a certain period in the life of the individual are known as **developmental tasks.** Successful **achievement** of these tasks is useful for later development whereas failure leads to unhappiness. It may lead to difficulty in dealing with later tasks.

By late childhood most children acquire the skills necessary for self-reliance in various spheres. They are able to:

1. **achieve an appropriate dependence - independence pattern;** children learn to do many things independent of adults such as take care of their belongings, choose their clothes and play with their peers.

2. **develop an appropriate giving-receiving pattern of affection;** children recognise friendship expectations and respond to the same appropriately;

3. **relate to changing social group and develop a sense of belonging;**

4. **learn more about rules and morality;**

5. **learn about their psycho-social and biological sex-roles and show gender role identification;**

6. **gain from physical and motor changes and learn new and refined motor skills;** for example, the gross motor skills may be climbing a tree or riding a bicycle and fine skills may be like playing on string instruments, sewing, etc;

7. **learn more about understanding and controlling the physical world;**

8. **develop appropriate language and symbol systems to communicate and to interact with others;**

9. **develop social cognition;** children at this age begin to appreciate others' point of view and reflect on their own activities;

10. **look at things objectively and develop scientific approach;** logical reasoning emerges by the end of late childhood and they begin to understand simple scientific experiments.

The accomplishments listed above are manifested in the general behaviour of children. For example, Rajan now has many friends. They come to meet him and Rajan goes over to their homes. Rajan knows how to make a kite and they fly it together. They often have fights.

Can you think of some behaviours of children at this stage to show that they have learnt more about rules. These may be rules of behaviour or play.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Write your answers in the space given below.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Block.

1. Three characteristics of developmental task at late childhood are:

   i) ....

   ii) ....

   iii) ....

2. Mention three skills that a child acquires for self-reliance:

   i) ....

   ii) ....

   iii) ....

3. Match the following:
   i) Ganga's loss of interest in studies   a) Motor skills
   ii) Boys play with Boys   b) Loneliness
   iii) Information about people and events   c) Sex-differentiation
   iv) Run, jump, climb   d) Curiosity about environment

1.4   DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS AT LATE CHILDHOOD

What motivates children to behave the way they do? Take the case of Ganga. When her parent moved from a small town to a large city, she was very happy. But soon the happiness began to disappear. She found that the children in her new neighbourhood were not friendly, they made fun of her and refused to include her in their play.

Ganga felt at a loss without any friends. She wanted to play with her age mates, not always with her brother who was much younger. Home began to appear different to Ganga. Ganga expressed her frustration by misbehaving at home and in school.

Well, coming back to Ganga, she had some difficulty in making friends. Girls whom she met were not very warm. They did not show interest in talking to her. She had lost her best friends by moving to the city. She was not able to relate to her classmates. Her demanding approach was a handicap. Added to this was the initial bias of rural-urban differences. Girls in her class were not attracted towards those from a different background. Socio-cultural differences and biases of various kinds acting as sources of stress to aggravate a problem have also been discussed later in this Course in Unit 8 **Play and Other Activities as Remedial Measures.**

Ganga's Problems

Typical of girls of her age, there was a shift in Ganga's interests. Athletics and sports do not interest girls of her age although the interest is likely to be revived later. Further, in her case she was not encouraged by people around to pursue athletics. She was not able to engage in alternative activities because of the conditions at home and school. She felt rejected and was unhappy. This was the cause of her irritation and aggression. You will come across an account of similar problems and the ways of handling these situations in the Units on aggression, anxieties, play and other activities later in this Course in Units 2, 3, 4, and 7. It is not only the temperamental or social factors that create problems for children. Their social and emotional development is also affected by communication difficulties or their physical impairment (weakening) as you will see later in Units 5 and 6.

Now, identify and write the factors which made life difficult for Ganga.

- ....
- ....
- ....
- ....

Let us see the 'threats' that Ganga has experienced and which made her aggressive. A basic component is the threat to Ganga's immediate need for acceptance, recognition, belonging, affection, security and control. Children experience a number of socio-emotional needs and new dimensions are added to these needs as they grow.

In late childhood, specific stage-related needs arise that must be attended to so that children's development is supported.

Need for acceptance: By the beginning of late childhood, that is 7 years, children have a general idea about their own characteristics, weakness and strengths. They form a view about themselves based on their interpersonal experiences and perceptions of other's view of them. This is referred to as **self-concept.** Further, a boy might believe, " I am good because my father likes me". Another one might think, " I am no good because nobody wants to be my friend". This evaluative aspect of the self-concept is **self-esteem.** It is formed by the judgements we make about our own worth and feelings associate with these judgements.

At the stage when their self-worth is being formed children have a strong need to be accepted as they are - their weak points included. In fact, it is comments such as , " You are not good enough in studies", that produce a sense of inferiority in the child. The remarks by parents, teachers and important peers have a significant impact on the sense of belonging of the school age children. If they experience acceptance as individuals, they strive towards fulfilling others expectations of them quite eagerly, otherwise there is a sense of dejection leading to maladjustment and behaviour problems.

Need for competence and mastery

You would have noticed that school age children often spend time making and dismantling things with their own hands, e.g. opening up a toy that has a whistle hidden inside it, and then trying to screw it back. They derive a sense of achievement by doing things that they could not do earlier. A girl might spend a long time in covering her notebook with brown paper, a task earlier done by her father. It may not look perfectly done, but the child experiences a feeling of competence by mastering skills that are challenging. This is an important need of the late childhood stage and requires the parents' and teachers' encouragement.

Need to relate with peers

A significant change in the children's socio-emotional orientation at this stage is in relation to peers. The child is no more content being with parents and siblings. Spending time with friends, playing and fighting with them, is an emerging need. Peers provide a mirror to the child, because they judge him honestly- as he may be referred to as "fatty", "brainy", "sissy" or "skinny". Popularity and acceptance among peers are sought by children, and not being able to gain these traits is often linked with negative characteristics that the children may try and change in themselves. Friendships are generally formed with same sex peers at this stage. Friends share many confidences, an experience quite important for emotional development.

Dependence vs. Independence

A conflict between dependency needs and a need for autonomy is experienced during late childhood. When initial efforts of children to control their own body responses, like the bowel control, are met with parental disapproval it can cause a sense of shame. These parental prohibitions are internalized as children identify with adults and the parents messages begin to control them as they grow up.

Another source of self-direction emerges when parents expect the children to take responsibility for their own behaviour. In the earlier stages, behaviour of children has been directed by external control. They often say 'Mummy asked me to do this', 'teacher told me so', and the like. Then they hear parents saying 'don't you have common sense? "why did you copy him?, 'can't you do it on your own?' and so on. With this, children feel they ought to be different and independent. They begin to give importance to their own opinion and to that of their peers, which may clash with parental views.

During this phase, children like to make some decisions of their own but are not sure of the consequences; they wish to belong to the peer group, but cannot move away from their parents. As a result, they may experience confusion and conflict. For example, Madhav, who is 10 years old and very good in football, is asked by his friends to come to the playground to play a match. The play ground is 2 kilometres away from his house and Madhav's mother tells him that it is too far away for him to go alone. This angers Madhav, but he is reluctant to defy his mother. He is in a state of conflict and feels miserable because he wants to play football, his favourite game, with his friends. Yet he knows that his mother will be upset with him if he argues with her.

Reciprocal needs

Children being children, are always at the receiving end. They receive affection as well as reprimand. The earlier unconditional love turns out to be conditional and will be shown only when they show desired behaviour expected of them. Affection is now shown by parents only when he/she learns to get it through his/her behaviour like being quiet, making requests, being obedient, etc.

Slowly children learn to reciprocate affection and are able to give affection to friends, siblings and parents. A need to give or receive affection emerges and children learn the means of meeting their needs as a result of which friendship bonds emerge. All the social interactions are now motivated by the reciprocal needs of affection, affiliation and control. Problems of adjustment appear with imbalances. For example, two children with equally strong need for control cannot get along well. For social compatibility, when one member of the pair has a stronger need to control, the other should have a stronger need to comply.

Social conformity

With expanding social relationships, the school age children begin to differentiate between different social groups whose norms they have to conform to. They relate with the home, neighbourhood, classroom, peers and others, taking on different roles such as that of a son or daughter, playmate, friend and a student. Children who have a positive sense of self-worth neither lose their individuality in conforming to the various roles, nor do they remain rigid in sticking to their own style. They learn to conform to the expectations of different roles as they grow. For example, a girl who is seen as a lovable daughter also falls into the role of a reliable friend, an enthusiastic playmate, a serious student and perhaps a responsible class monitor. However, it is not necessary that all children would conform to the expected roles.

Depending upon their emerging personality types, there are a few who are non-conformists, different and unpopular. The social groups, like peers, often communicate their disapproval of extreme behaviours directly to the child by actions such as boycotting interactions or teasing. These serve to bring about self correction in the child, if the problem is not acute. However, it may also heighten the child's sense of alienation and thus require professional intervention.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Write your answers in the space given.

     b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Block.

4. In the example of Madhav given in the foregoing section on Dependence vs. Independence, how can Madhav satisfy his need to be with friends without upsetting his mother? Write in about 25 words.

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....

5. School age children need to be with peers because - (write True or False)

- They share many traits in common with them.

- Peers serve as a mirror of own characteristics.

- Peers make the child popular.

- They do not get along with their parents.

6. Match the following:
   i)   Need for affection   1. Peer friendships
   ii) Physical need   2. Choosing own clothes
   iii) Need for belonging   3. Appetite
   iv) Need for independence   4   Repairing a broken pen
   v)   Need for mastery   5. Attachment with parents

1.5 SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS IN PROBLEMS OF CHILDREN

Certain social and cultural practices in our society fail to take care of the general characteristics and needs of children and create problems of adjustments for them. Let us see how some of these factors inhibit or hinder development.

Encouragement of dependency

Sometimes, there is a tendency among parents to do everything for their children even after they are old enough to take responsibility. Many of them tend to be overprotective in their attempt to show concern. They restrict the activities of children and impose authority even when it is not necessary. Children are not allowed to explore their environment, this is more so when parents have one or two children. Prolonged study hours or monotonous indoor play fail to gratify the

growing need of the child for vigorous physical activity and interaction with the physical world.

Parent as models

Children identify with parents. **Identification is a process in which a child feels one with another person and internalizes the thoughts, beliefs and actions of the other person.** In that sense parents act as models that demonstrate behaviour patterns which children like to follow. Socialization is facilitated with adult role models and children imitate models in their immediate environment. If identification is with a parent who is an inappropriate model, the child may develop undesirable behaviours. For example, if a boy identifies with an abusive father, his behaviour would have undesirable elements. Because culturally there is acceptance of male dominance, mothers are usually models of compliance and fathers are models of power.

Integrity in adults

In late childhood children are sensitive to the thoughts and actions of others. If they come across a discrepancy in what the adults at home and school do and what they preach, children become confused. The uncertainties that then arise may lead to different kinds of behaviour problems, some of which will be dealt with in the Units that follow.
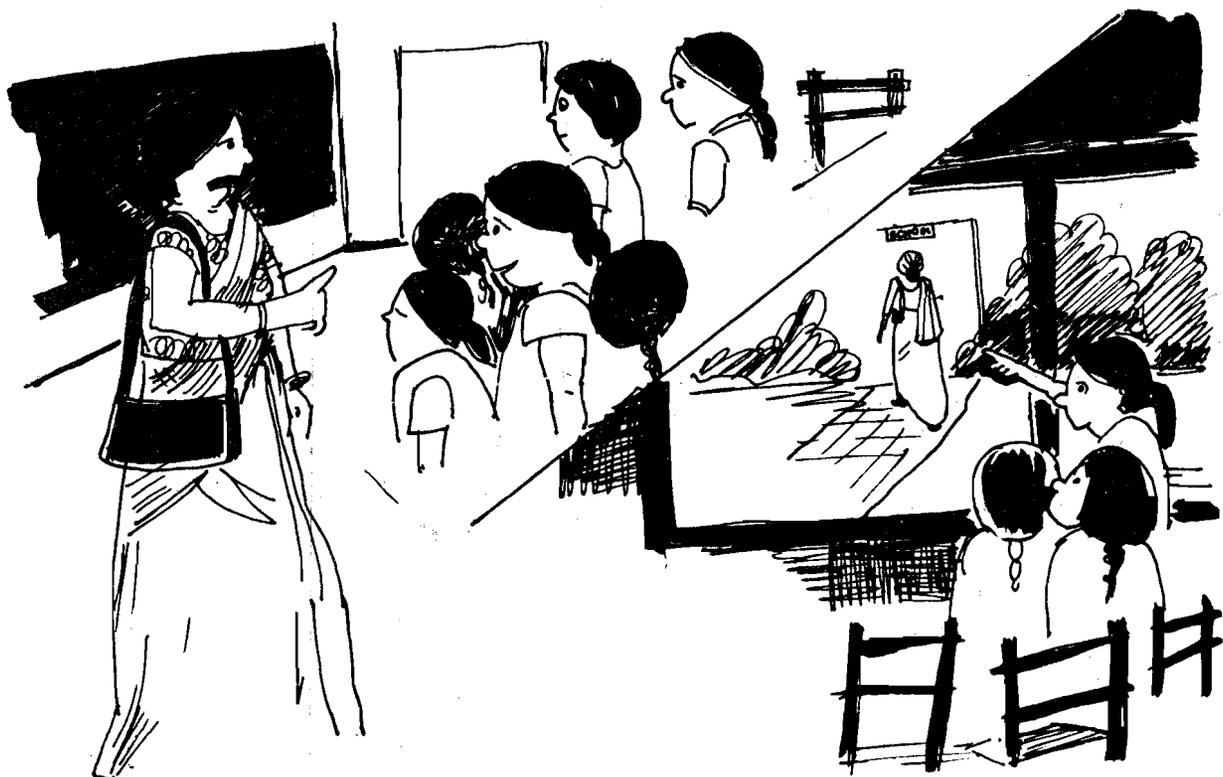
Communication of adult anxieties

When parents, teachers and other significant adults experience tensions at various levels they communicate these to children in different forms. Change of school or teachers and other unexpected life events are likely to affect the mental health of children. For example, take the case of Vikram. His father owns a weaving unit and

was the secretary of weavers' co-operative society. Recently his father lost in the elections and now somebody else is the secretary in place of Vikram's father. There is also a rumour that one of the leading marketing agencies which used to buy the products of the weavers' society is likely to be closed. These uncertainties have made Vikram's father very irritable. The situation is always being discussed at home. Due to the tensed atmosphere Vikram wants to be away from home most of the time and wishes that he could do something about it. He skips classes often and has become irregular in his studies.

Social Class

The social class structure of the society also influences children's behaviour. The school provides more sources of stress to lower class children. Normally teachers are from the middle class and their expectations of child behaviour are more appropriate to children from the middle class. For example, when a child is unable to understand concepts that are unfamiliar in his or her environment, he or she may be punished or ridiculed. The uncertainties of outcome may make a child withdraw or feel ashamed. Even being regular or neatly dressed may not be in the child's hands. In general children from low income families are at a disadvantage and many of their problems are of deprivation.

Adult pressure for putting forth best effort and parental expectations of a high level of performance of their children are normally seen in the middle class families. This may lead to different forms of resistance and also to anxiety or aggression. Some of these forms of behaviour and causes are discussed in the later Units of this Course.

Among upper class children there are problems that arise out of affluence apart from causes associated with development and pathology. Some of the deviations of children and their behaviour problems may be overcome with the intervention of an enlightened adult. While children wish to experience enormous freedom, they also need adult care and guidance.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a)   Write your answers in the space given.

b)   Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Block.

7. Mention any three factors which can create adjustment difficulties for children.

i) ....

ii) ....

iii) ....

8. Match the following:
   i)   Adult anxieties   1. Models
   ii) Disadvantage   2. Poor adjustment in child
   iii) High parental expectation   3. Lower class
   iv) Identification   4. Middle class

1.6 PRINCIPLES OF DEALING WITH SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

Behaviour problems are common during childhood. Most of the children show difficulties in coping with these problems at some stage of development or the other. Some of these difficulties disappear naturally as children grow older. They learn to adapt to the situation and get over the hurdles in due course.

However, nearly twelve out of every hundred children need some suitable intervention to cope with the situation. Otherwise the condition may lead to a disorder. A few guidelines given in this section and the intervention techniques suggested in this course may help a parent or teacher to cope with the situation and to guide the child. However, in some cases consulting a child guidance personnel is more beneficial. The needed intervention to help a child may be carried out under their supervision.

The general guidelines to respond to the behaviour of children are given below:

1. When children act like children, adults should act like adults. Children with emotional difficulty go back to earlier modes of reaction. They may sulk, express anger or show defiance. In these situations, adults need to maintain composure and be relaxed. Self- instructions like 'let me be calm', 'let me see what the child needs', 'let me take charge of the situation', etc., are helpful. An empathetic handling by parents gives assurance to the child that he/she is important to others.

2. Children in late childhood need to be treated and respected as individuals in their own right, not as babies, nor as adults. One need not expect them to be dependent all the time nor should they be required to rise to adult standards of excellence.

3. The occasions for discussion, restraint or punishment should be selected judiciously. Children may show behaviour that is unacceptable to adults. A gradation of this behaviour and situation under which it occurs may be made either to overlook, discuss or to punish the given behaviour.

4. Adults need to take time and trouble to provide opportunity for natural outlets in activity, preferably in group activity. Arranging group picnics, involving them in community activities, providing outlets for self-expression and assigning responsibility in a group activity go a long way in helping children grow smoothly.

5. Expression of faith in children and confidence in their growing independence is essential. Invite participation of children in planning group activities, in taking decision about some family affairs or in designing learning activities. Help them and correct them providing reassurance of their ability to make independent decisions.

6. Act fairly and consistently without betraying lack of faith and emotional instability. Try to understand the motives of behaviour and refrain from getting annoyed. This may lead to a discussion where the child may be logically convinced of a desired behaviour in a given situation.

7. Children who do not cause trouble also need adult attention so that general behaviour is rewarded.

8. Generalization and comparisons are not needed. On the contrary they should be avoided.

9. Recognise that peer associations are important for the child.

10. Keep in view the growing needs and the changing characteristics of the child and provide opportunities for their expression.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Write your answers in the space given.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the Block.

9. Which of the following statements are true?

i) Professional help necessary to deal with all behaviour problems of children. (T/F)

ii) Teachers/parents can help children overcome all types of behaviour problems. (T/F)

iii) Giving self-instructions help to cope with the behaviour of children. (T/F)

iv) A mother must expect daughter to be perfect in whatever she does. (T/F)

v) An elder must not punish a child every time he/she makes a mistake. (T/F)

vi) A father can involve his son in arranging a picnic. (T/F)

vii) A mother can scream at her daughter when she ignores her request. (T/F)

viii) All children need adult attention. (T/F)

ix) We can make a boy study well by showing him how his sister works. (T/F)

x) A boy must always seek the opinion of his parents before deciding whether he should stay out or stay indoors. (T/F)

10. Assume that you have a child like Ganga at home/school. What could be some other factors, in your opinion, responsible for the child's behaviour?

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11. What can be done to revive such children's interest?

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12. Suggest what a teacher should do to help such children in school.

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1.7   LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we studied the general characteristics of late childhood, how to identify the developmental needs and ways of dealing with socio-emotional problems. We have, in a nutshell, learnt the following.

● Late childhood is a period when children develop at a slower pace and learn gender appropriate behaviour.

● At this age friendship bonds are strong and peers also become socialising agents.

● Children of elementary school years seek knowledge about the physical and social world.

● The developmental tasks of this age include - achieving appropriate dependence-independence pattern, reciprocating affection, relating to changing groups and learning rules and understanding morality.

● As social thinking develops at this age, children become sensitive to others' point of view and can look at things objectively.

● Socio-emotional needs are prominent at this age, the stronger needs being the need for belonging and self-esteem.

● Socio-cultural factors like encouragement of dependency, types of models for identification, inconsistencies in adult behaviour, and social class may also create adjustment difficulties for children during late childhood.

● Adult concern and recognition of the needs of children go a long way in handling the behavioural problems noticed among them.

1.8   UNIT-END EXERCISES

1. Make a series of observations in classrooms or of children in your neighbourhood and identify the characteristics that are discussed in this unit but are not noticed among the children you have observed.

2. Narrate the case of a child with a behaviour problem you have noticed in your class/ neighbourhood.

3. Identify the probable cause(s) of the problem and suggest the response that adults should give to help the child.