## Approaches to Adolescents Guidance and Counseling

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## Abstract

*Approaches to counseling and guidance of adolescents are scientific methods that seek to sort out facts about adolescents' development using particular strategies to obtain information. Adolescent's development is a complex and multifaceted stage. This makes it hard to use one particular theory when offering guidance and counseling to adolescents. When one theory seems to be comprehensive enough in tackling that problem, the problem may take another dimension and so make a counselor to adopt another theory. This paper will highlight on five major approaches which can be used in adolescents' guidance and counseling and these are psychoanalytic, cognitive and behavioural, social learning and ecological theories. All the above outlined theories are complimentary in handling adolescents behaviours although they may differ at some extend. Each of the theory has contributed a great deal in all aspects of adolescents' development as it will be highlighted in the discussion of each of them below.*

**Key words**: *Adolescents, guidance, counseling and theories*

**Introduction**

Adolescence is a transitional stage of physical and psychological human development generally occurring between puberty and legal adulthood (Brown, 2004). The period of adolescence is most closely associated with the teenage years, although its physical, psychological and cultural expressions can begin earlier and end later. Although puberty has been historically associated with the onset of adolescent development, it now typically begins prior to the teenage years and there have been a normative shift of it occurring in pre-adolescence, particularly in females (Brown, 2004).  Physical growth which is so rapid during this stage, as distinct from puberty and cognitive development generally seen in adolescence, can also extend into the early twenties depending on developmental level of each adolescent. This is the stage which is accompanied with so many challenges which in most cases call for guidance and counseling approaches. These approaches help in getting accurate information by using four steps; conceptualization of the problem, forming hypotheses, collecting data of that particular problem, analyzing and making conclusion and finally revising conclusion and theory (Santrock, 2001).

**Approaches in Adolescents' Guidance and Counseling**

The challenges facing adolescents can be handled using one or a combination of any of the following approaches;

**Psychoanalytic Theory**

The first proponent of this theory is Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and there are many neo-Freudians who have come up to compliment Frued's theory. Psychoanalysts believed that development is based on unconscious part of the mind which is beyond the conscious part of the mind. This unconscious part of the mind is heavily loaded with emotions and behaviour is controlled by what is in the unconscious part of the mind.  In order to understand the behaviour of an adolescent, it is important to highlight three major areas of psychoanalytic theory;

*Personality Structure:*

Sigmund Freud (1917) believed that personality is divided into three parts;

*Id;* Freud described this structure as a structure of personality that consists of instincts, which are an individual's reserviour of psychic energy. This structure is totally unconscious, primitive and not in touch with reality. This structure is mainly the part of mind used by murderers, rapists and thieves. When handling a problem of rapists or murderers, it is good to take into consideration this part of personality. Any individual who has some disorders are operating under id personality structure. Id may decide that I will be having sex more often since it is pleasurable and can go ahead to rape.

*Ego;* this is an executive branch of personality that operates on reality. This structure of the mind makes rational decision. An individual who is operating under ego make good decisions and is very judgmental. Ego may decide that I will have sex occasionally since I might get pregnant and the baby will interfere with my career.

*Super Ego***;** this is the conscious moral branch of personality which deals with moral judgment when making decision whether the action is right or wrong. Super ego may decide that I will not have sex because it will make me have guilty conscience.

*Defense Mechanism:*

Defense mechanisms are unconscious methods used by the ego to distort reality and protect itself from anxiety (Saltrock, 2001). Id and superego are in constant conflict and so the ego will stand as executive branch that will resolve those conflicts. According to Freud, conflicts between id and superego produce anxiety in an individual. This is the state of restlessness and it is common in adolescents because it is a stage of confusion.  When id is set to cause problem, ego blocks it by producing anxiety. This anxiety alerts the ego to resolve id impulses by use of defense mechanisms like repression. Repression is one of the powerful defense mechanism that pushes unacceptable id impulses out of awareness and back into unconscious mind (Blos, 1989). This repression is the foundation of all other defense mechanisms because all the defense mechanisms aimed at repressing or pushing the threatening impulses out of awareness into the unconscious part of the mind.

Psychoanalysts believe that the adolescents may try to engage themselves in self-destructive activities as directed by the id but the superego tries to constraint it. Ego tries to balance the two conflicting parts by producing defense mechanisms. Anna Freud (1966) believes that defense mechanisms help in getting insight into adolescents' development. She believes that the problems of adolescents are to be unlocked by understanding the 'love objects' which are developed during genital stage of development during childhood stage. The sexual urges are reawakening during adolescence stage. Defense mechanisms should not be used in excess until they dominates the behaviour and prevent us in facing the demands of reality. The counselor should be very keen to establish some of the defense mechanisms that are brought by the adolescents to the counseling sessions. Some of them are too defensive and are not willing to let go some of their perceived ideas.

**Cognitive Theories**

The proponent of this cognitive theory is Jean Piaget (1896-1980), a famous Swiss Psychologist. The cognitive psychologists believe on conscious thought, they stress that adolescents' actively construct their own cognitive worlds and that information is not just poured into their minds from the environment (Santrock, 2001). In order to achieve quality guidance and counseling of adolescents, it is good for a counselor to understand the four stages of cognitive development as discussed below;

*Sensory Stage (0- 2 years);* this is the stage that infants construct an understanding of the world by coordinating sensory experiences like touching, seeing, hearing with physical and motor actions. They start with reflexive, instinctual action at birth to the beginning of symbolic thought towards the end of 2 years. This is a crucial stage of development because it determines the way an individual will adapt to new environment in future.

*Preoperational Stage (2-7 years);* this is the stage where children begin perceive the world with words, images and drawings. This is the stage when children begin to internalize what they previously did physically. The words and images reflect increased symbolic thinking and go beyond the connection of sensory information and physical actions like driving cars. This dictates the way an adolescent will be able to internalize issues that they will come across in life as they grow.

*Concrete Operational Stage (7-11 years);* this is the stage where children can perform operations and logical reasoning replaces intuitive thought as long as reasoning can be applied to specific or concrete examples. They think logically and are able to classify objects into different sets.

*Formal Operational Stage (11-15 years);* this is the stage where an individual moves beyond concrete experiences and think in abstract and more logical terms. The adolescent develops images of ideal circumstances. They begin to think about what they would want to be in the future and begin to work on it. This is the stage of confusion because the adolescent want to fantasize of an ideal self but cannot get good role models. The counselor has to intervene at this stage of development to help in restructuring their decisions. This is the stage where adolescents begin to speculate on their ideal self and that of others. They have fantasies about their future and so they may be impatient about how to achieve those fantasies. Santrock (2001) asserted that at this stage, adolescents think more abstractly, idealistically and logically like scientists. They engage themselves in hypothetical-deductive reasoning where they device a plan to solve a problem and test several hypotheses to solve that problem. Piaget (1952) believed that formal operational thought is the best description of how adolescents think. Experiences and many practices make adolescent to build an elaborate knowledge at formal operation stage.

**Behavioural Theories**

The proponent of this theory is B.F. Skinner (1904-1990). The behaviourists believe that development is behaviour. They believe in observable behaviour in response to environmental determinants. Skinner believes that rewards and punishments are ways of shaping individual behaviour. Development is learnt and it changes according to environmental experiences. This means that an individual's behaviour is determined by the kind of environment where he/she lives. The counselor should know the environment where an adolescent comes from before offering guidance or counseling to that adolescent. Unbecoming behaviour can be unlearned as long as the individual is ready to learn. Behaviourists believe that behaviour can be changed through modification and the same behaviour needs appropriate reinforcement.

Skinner (1971) became a staunch advocate for the use of positive consequences to manage behaviour. Positive reinforcement increases the frequency of response because it is followed by a stimulus. This means that when an adolescent is positively appreciated by the parents for good performance, then that individual is likely to improve even better than before. Parents are encouraged to compliment their children when they do something good. Since adolescents are looking for recognition at adolescence stage, complimenting them will boost their self-esteem and make them more receptive to listen to pieces of advice given to them. Negative reinforcement on the other is a way of reducing stimulus (Santrock, 2001). Parents who keep on nagging or ridiculing the children will end up raising children who are rude with low self-esteem. The children need positive compliment and occasional criticism to help minimize unbecoming behaviour. Withdrawing presents from children without proper explanations on why that action was taken, will make them feel deprived of what usually motivate them and this might make them to do poorly in their academics or behaviour in general. Any action taken by parents should be geared towards improving the performance and building the children's self-esteem.

Punishment on the other hand is another way of modifying behaviour. For punishment to be effective, it needs to be immediate, consistent and severe enough to alter the targeted behaviour (Solomon, 1964).

Some parents are not consistent in the way they are punishing their children when they do mistakes. This inconsistency may make behaviour to persist and it will be difficult to control it in later life. For instance, a child who is aggressive need constant and severe punishment to alter that behaviour but if the punishment is not consistent, then the behaviour may persist and so during adolescent it may become so severe and hard to control. Skinner believed that negative punishment may make an individual to suppress the behaviour or stop him/her from engaging in any other form of behaviour. For instance, if a child is slapped after going out to play with other children, that child may stop interacting with peers and may suppress the feelings of falling in love during adolescence stage. This kind of behaviour may make adolescent anti-social and lonely. Skinner (1990) advocate that positive punishment should be used so that the undesired behaviour may be eliminated and a good one may be enhanced. He believed that immediate reinforcement of behaviour is effective in shaping that behaviour. He argues that behaviour modification through reinforcement is a learning principle to change maladaptive behaviour.

**Social Cognitive Theory**

This theory states that behaviour, environment and cognitive factors are the main determinants of development and they interact in a reciprocal manner (Bandura, 2000). This can be illustrated in the following model;

Behaviour

Cognitive factors → Environment
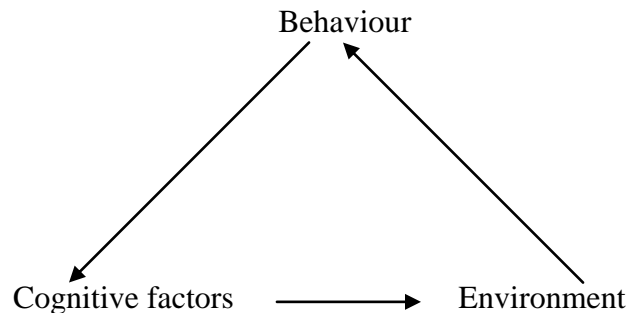
From the above model, it can be deduced that an individual' behaviour can be shaped by the environment and that individual can also act to change the environment. This means that adolescents who come from a warm and friendly environment will end up cultivating that friendliness with other people as compared to those who come from unfriendly environment. Behaviour can change cognitive factors and cognitive factors can influence a person's behaviour. What adolescents are able to store in their memory can have impact in their lives. As they grow, their memory also expands and can be able to reason out things in a more logical manner. They will not continue reasoning like the way they used to when they were young children and their behaviour begins to change as their memory expands. They also begin to be very observant in the environment where they live and can make deductive reasoning out of what they observed. Bandura believes that through observation, one can learn behaviour by forming ideas about that behaviour. For instance, an adolescent who come from aggressive environment will interact with his peers in a very aggressive manner showing the aggressive behaviour which he observed from his environment. He believes that cognitive factors like self-efficacy (a belief that one can master a situation and produce positive outcome), plans and thinking skills can influence person's behaviour and vice versa.

Bandura argues that observational learning consists of four main processes: attention, retention, motor reproduction and reinforcement. Adolescents are good in paying attention and they have high retention of information in their memory. They also like rehearsing the learned information and when they get positive reinforcement that learned behaviour is likely to be retained for a life time. They also like imitating their role models. So adults are encouraged to be good role models so that the adolescents may copy their behaviour. Adults also act as mentors who help the adolescents to become successful and to master many concepts in life. They help them on career choice, give them ways of overcoming life's challenging issues and are able to achieve their dreams in life. During counseling session, the counselor can ask the adolescent to state his/her role model and mentor. This will help in suggesting to them to involve the role models and mentors in the process of counseling.

**Ecological Theory**

This theory was proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1986 and it consists of five environmental systems, ranging from the fine-grained inputs of direct interaction with social agents to the broad-based inputs of culture. These systems are discussed below;

*Microsystem; this* is the system in which an individual lives. This includes the family, peers, school and neighbourhood (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). This is a system where the individual has direct interactions with family members, peers, teachers and neighbours. An adolescent who grows up in a healthy family with good neighbourhood will be a good person because of healthy social interactions. But when the family is dysfunctional as well as the society, the adolescent may grow up with behaviour disorder learnt from the family or the society. It is good for a counselor to understand the background of adolescents who come for guidance or counseling so that she/he can help them accordingly. Most of the problems which affect the adolescents usually originate from home and so for counseling session to be effective, the counselor should explore the kind of families where theses adolescents come from.

*Mesosystem;* this is the relation between microsystem and exosystem. For instance, the relation between the family experiences and school experiences and work place experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). For instance an adolescent who come from abusive parents will never know how to act in a modest manner in school or work place. For a counselor to understand the behaviour of an adolescent, it is advisable to consider all settings like family, school, peers and workplace. Sometimes the administration of schools and work place are too strict and so they subject the adolescents to a lot of pressure. These in turn can make them suppress their self-expression for the sake of status quo but at the long run, the individual will experience a lot of stress.

*Exosystem;* this involves experiences in another social setting such as family friends, mass media, neighbours, social welfare and legal services. This is a setting where an individual has a passive role but his/her behaviour can be influenced by such setting.

For instance, in work place a promotion given to a man may affect his relationship at home because of lack of time to be with the family. Adolescents may not get enough time to interact with their parents and this will affect their development at adolescence stage. They will lack parental guidance and so the counselor should be keen to mark those loop-holes in order to assists the client accordingly.

*Macrosystem;* this involves the culture where an individual comes from. Culture refers to behaviour patterns, beliefs and all other products of a group of people that are passed on from one generation to generation (Santrock, 2001). The way an adolescent develop is influenced by culture where he/she comes from. When a counselor is giving guidance or counseling to an adolescent, he/she should take into considerations cultural differences. Some cultural practices like circumcision for girls or early marriages usually pose a lot of stress to adolescents. It is however necessary for the counselor to be knowledgeable in handling clients from different cultures.

*Chronosystem;* this involves the patterning of environmental events and transitions over the life course and sociohistorical circumstances. For instance, with incidence of divorce, the negative reaction of the children was so severe in the first year than in the second year (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). It has been discovered that the career development among girls is increasing as it was 20 years ago. This means that chronosystem has a powerful impact in bringing change in the life of an adolescent. Counselors need to be open to signs of time and be able to update themselves in the dynamics of life and society at large. The society keeps on changing and so the behaviour of people also changes. The way of live of people 20 years ago is not the same as the way it is now. The adolescents usually conform to the signs of time and they embrace new changes so easily. Sometimes the parents and other elders want them to behave the way they used to behave during their times when they were at the same stage.

**Conclusion**

Based on the above discussions, approaches are scientific methods that seek to sort out facts about adolescents' development using particular strategies to obtain information. Counselors should be well equipped with all the five approaches so as to use them to try to understand adolescents' behaviour and be able to help them accordingly. Adolescent's development is a complex and multifaceted stage and this makes it hard to use one particular theory when offering guidance and counseling to adolescents. There is no one theory or approach which can be used to understand adolescents' behaviour. Five major approaches have been highlighted above which can be used in adolescents' guidance and counseling.

Each approach has a role to play in trying to explain any kind of adolescents' behaviour so that generalization can be avoided. For guidance and counseling to be successful, the counselors must understand all those approaches and be able to apply them during counseling.

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