CHAPTER 1

1.0 INTRODUCTION

"The pursuit of knowledge (*Jnana), wisdom (Pragyā), and truth (Satya) was always considered in Indian thought and philosophy as the highest human goal. The aim of education in ancient India was not just the acquisition of knowledge as preparation for life in this world, or life beyond schooling, but for the complete realization and liberation of the self"* (NEP, 2020).

The right perception, processing of information, and understanding it correctly are signs of good cognitive health. Perception and understanding are flawed due to underlying cognitive errors in thinking. Correcting these mental processes at an early stage paves the way for healthy mental development. Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage characterized by significant physical, emotional, and social transformations (Scott & Saginak, 2016). During this period, individuals engage in identity formation and become increasingly aware of societal expectations (Pfeifer et al., 2018). In India, adolescents encounter further challenges, including family pressures and academic demands, which can negatively impact their psycho-social well-being, hindering the ability to maintain a balanced state of mental, emotional, and social health (Balamuruguan et al., 2024). Research indicates a high prevalence of mental health issues among Indian adolescents and Malhotra and Patra (2014) have reported that 23.33% of school children face mental health challenges, and the National Mental Health Survey (2016) reveals a 7.3% prevalence of mental disorders, particularly in urban populations (Murthy, 2017).

One of the root causes of Mental Health issues are emotional turmoil, poor decision making and errors in thinking also termed as Cognitive distortions. (Sharma & Tripathy 2018). Cognitive distortions are irrational thought patterns that lead to negative interpretations of reality, causing psychological distress (Wang et al., 2023). These distorted ways of thinking contribute to cognitive dissonance and affect emotional well-being. Common types of

cognitive distortions include mind reading, where individuals assume others' thoughts without evidence; personalization, which involves taking things personally even when external factors are at play; and catastrophizing, the tendency to expect the worst outcomes (Barriga et al., 2000). These irrational thought patterns can escalate internal conflicts and misunderstandings, leading individuals to experience persistent negative emotions. The continued engagement in such mental habits fosters feelings of inadequacy, emotional distress, and psychological exhaustion. Over time, this can contribute to the development of mental health concerns, such as anxiety, stress, and depression (Scott & Saginak, 2016). Beck's Cognitive Theory links these distortions to the onset of depression, emphasizing adolescents' vulnerability to mental health disorders (Beck & Flemming, 2021). Moreover, cultural stigmas surrounding mental health and insufficient access to services in India often force adolescents to cope with their distress in isolation (Malhotra & Patra, 2014).

To address this growing crisis, holistic interventions focusing on both psycho-social and cognitive aspects of adolescent development are essential, such interventions should equip adolescents with skills for emotional regulation, self-awareness, and adaptive coping strategies (Shafran et al., 2017). The following section discusses characteristics of adolescence and the theories utilized for contemporary psychological counselling.

1.2 ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence and early youth are critical phases in personality development, often referred to as the "period of storm and strain" due to the psychological, emotional, and social challenges adolescents face (Agarwal et al., 2020). This stage is marked by a blend of confusion, dilemmas, and tensions as young individuals navigate the process of self-discovery and identity formation (Erikson, 1968). Along with this, there is a period of growth and aspiration where dreams and ambitions shape their journey, even as they balance these with

the realities of life. While some adolescents adapt flexibly, others may exhibit defiance and non-conformity, this transition stage is often as challenging for parents and elders, who may struggle with the changes in behavior and attitudes of their children (Pathak et al.,2011). The formative adolescent years are crucial for determining higher education prospects, which can significantly contribute to a country's skilled human resources, knowledge capital, and socio-economic growth (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2012).

Adolescence, spanning the ages of 13 to 20, bridges the gap between childhood and adulthood. During this time, individuals undergo significant psycho-physical development, attaining maturity both biologically and psychologically (Scott & Saginak, 2016). These changes are accompanied by shifts in social roles, responsibilities, and relationships. Adolescents and young adults strive for independence, moving away from the family unit and working toward self-reliance. This period of personality reorganization is marked by profound changes in self-perception, attitudes towards parents and peers, and the development of new social roles. Adolescence is characterized by significant changes in cognitive abilities, intellectual growth, and social status, with alterations in behavior and psychological functioning (Shek et al., 2025). Morover, the rate of these changes is far greater in the pre than post-adolescent years (Zainafree & Maharani, 2024). Despite the potential for growth, adolescents often face unique challenges that may require specialized support, such as counseling, to navigate successfully.

While some adapt well, others may show defiance or struggle with non-conformity (Del et al., 2019) and these changes can be equally challenging for parents, who must cope with shifts in behavior and attitudes. This phase also involves significant psycho-social development, including cognitive and intellectual growth, as well as changes in social roles and relationships (Martin & Pollitt, 2025). Adolescents and young adults strive for

independence, seeking self-reliance and distancing themselves from their families. These transitions involve a reorganization of personality and self-perception, with profound changes in attitudes towards peers, parents, and societal norms (Beck & Weishaar, 2000).

Adolescents represent a significant asset to any country, forming a large portion of the population. In India, there were 253 million adolescents in 2011 (Government of India Census 2011), and with an annual growth rate of 1.76%, the youth population is estimated to reach around 323 million by 2025. Given this large number, it is crucial to focus on the mental health of these adolescents, as they are key to the country's growth and development. The world increasingly looks towards the Indian youth, making it essential to prioritize their well-being and ensure they are equipped to contribute positively to society. This phase is also a period of intense transformation, where adolescents experience emotional and cognitive changes that shape their identities. During this time, they begin to see the world in a new light, engage in abstract thinking, and make hypotheses about various life situations (Berk, 2013; Rosenfield, 2004). This developmental stage is crucial, as adolescents navigate transitions in physical, psychological, and cognitive domains and also start forming social connections beyond the family. Piaget's theory describes adolescence as a period marked by abstract thought and hypothetical reasoning, essential for identity development (Berk, 2013; Rosenfield, 2004).

Adolescents critically question their beliefs, often influenced by their parents, peers, and media and hence the role of parents is critical and crucial in supporting their children's development in this phase (Kuriakose, 2019). The confluence of these factors during early adolescence is also intricately linked to personal development and academic outcomes (Nina Hongell-Ekholm & Fagerlund, 2024; Suutela et al., 2022). It is seen that negative experiences during this transition can yield lasting adverse effects on adolescents (Maurya & Maurya, 2023), impacting their health, emotional well-being, and academic performance (Bundy et al.,

2018; Yeager et al., 2022). A meta-analysis by Mertens et al. (2020) showed that interventions focusing on problem-solving through active learning approaches can improve mental health. Additionally, the study identified interventions aimed at improving emotional regulation and cognitive coping through self-control methods, group discussions, and insight-building procedures. Adolescents in countries like India often lack access to standard interventions, which may contribute to the increasing prevalence of issues such as substance abuse and suicide during late adolescence (Patra, 2025).

1.3 PSYCHOLOGICAL GROWTH OF ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence is a critical stage of psychological development, as described by Erikson's theory, particularly in the phases of *Industry vs. Inferiority* and *Identity vs. Role Confusion* (Erikson, 1968). During the *Industry vs. Inferiority* stage, which typically occurs between the ages of 10 and 14, children strive to develop a sense of competence and mastery in tasks that are valued by society, such as academic achievements, social skills, or physical abilities. If successful in mastering these tasks, they develop a sense of competence, which fosters self-confidence and prepares them for the subsequent stage. However, failure to develop these competencies may lead to feelings of inferiority, where the child perceives themselves as inadequate compared to their peers or societal standards. The positive resolution of this stage sets the foundation for the next developmental conflict: *Identity vs. Role Confusion* during adolescence.

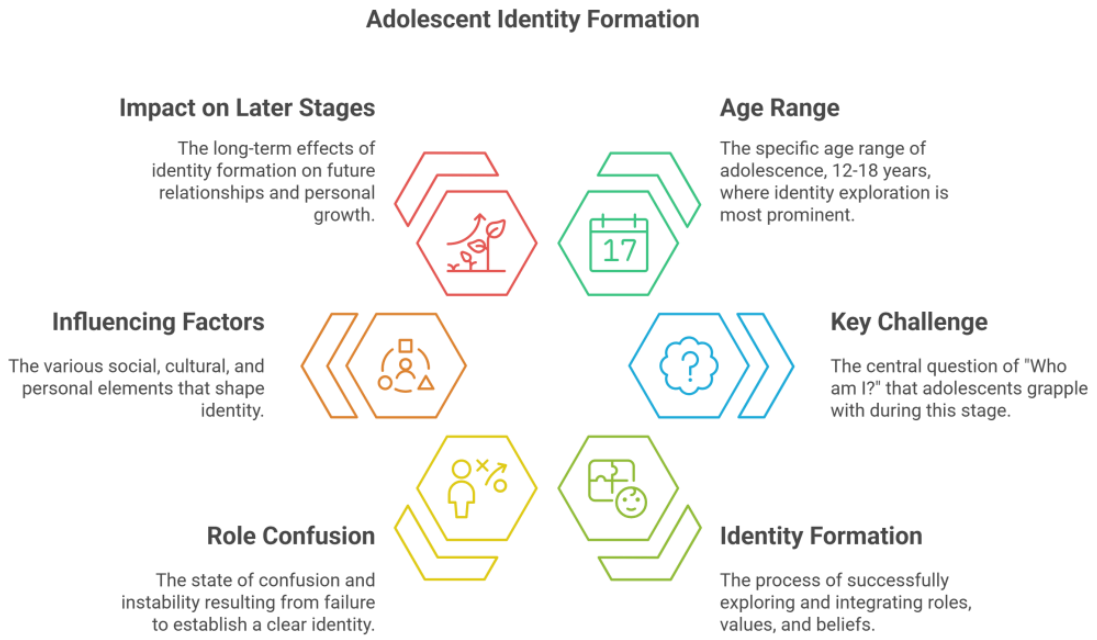


Figure 1- Adolescent Identity Formation

As adolescents enter the stage of *Identity vs. Role Confusion*, they face the challenge of exploring who they are, their roles in society, and their future selves. During this period which sees intense discovery of the self among adolescents. During this phase they are ready to analyze the values they have, the beliefs that are built and the goals they have to set for themselves. Once this is understood, they are on the path of finding a sense of identity for self and missing these results in confusion of thoughts that also lead to not understanding the true role they would like to pursue. Sense of belonging and understanding takes lead during this phase which is often influences by parents, peers and society (Mullis et al., 2025). From the perspective of cognitive and moral development, this phase represents a shift in their thinking that leads to their better future enhancing social interactions, academic results and choices they make in life (Celia et al., 2023). It is also seen that adolescents end up facing moral dilemmas, situations of complex decision making. Kohleberg's theory of moral development mentions this transition of adolescents from being self-centered to change perception and integrate into

societal norms (Kurtines & Greif, 1974). The individual moves from id (selfish impulses) to the superego (moral conscience), as put forth by Freud's in his psychoanalytic theory. This moral upliftment phase increases abstract thinking allowing oneself to question beliefs and understand what is right and what is wrong (Hatice, 2021).

1.3.1 THE 3 ES- EDUCATION, ENVIRONMENT, AND EXPERIENCE

The 3 E concept, Education, Environment, and Experience, provides a holistic framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of personal growth during adolescence. This concept allows an individual to determine his beliefs, skills, and the way he sees life. This also serves as a tool for educators, caregivers and policymakers, advising them to instill holistic development in adolescents (Diamond, 2010; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Education provides the basic skill set that is essential for an individual's life, which helps them carve their path for the future. During this phase of learning from schooling shapes the understanding of the surrounding world (Pepping & Davis, 2013). Further, this enables adolescents to learn critical thinking, be creative, and encourages them to set up their goals. Research has shown that one learns diverse areas of knowledge and the skills that enable them to be success-oriented in the future, including career opportunities and personal fulfilment (Noone, Bunting, & Hogan, 2016). Furthermore, schools play a critical role in promoting social and emotional learning, which helps adolescents develop life skills such as effective communication, teamwork, and resilience (Weare & Nind, 2011). Empowering students through change in mental process allows students to embrace challenges, adapt to failures, and develop for lifelong passion for learning (Dweck, 2006). This also helps them to understand their emotions better and manage them.

The second "E," Environment revolves around the domains of physical, societal, and cultural domain the individual lives in or spends his time with (Lee & Jeon, 2025). Adolescents

find themselves entangled in these influences and find it difficult to establish their identity to navigate in social dynamics (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). Environment impacts beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours that shape the self-concept and effect the social interactions of an individual. In order to develop a supportive environment that foster positivity towards holistic development one need focus on what is happening around to correct toxic surroundings that can have effect on emotional and psychological well-being of adolescents (Pepping et al., 2013). Research has shown that young adolescents raised in nurturing families and communities have exhibited a higher self-esteem quotient and better social competence (Brown & Ryan, 2003), while those exposed to adverse conditions such as poverty, neglect, or discrimination often face significant barriers to emotional and psychological development (Diamond, 2010).

By creating an environment that helps in fostering a safe space and promoting respect is essential for the development of adolescents. It is essential for schools and communities to prioritize creating spaces where adolescents feel a sense of belonging and acceptance, allowing them to thrive (Weare & Nind, 2011). By emphasizing social responsibility, cultural awareness, and community engagement through program will help enrich the adolescent's experience which reinforces positive societal values and promotes interpersonal relationships (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The third "E," Experience, captures the essence of personal experiences, those unique events and interactions that help individuals learn about self (Ghorbani et al., 2014). Adolescents learn critical life lessons through their experiences, often involving trial and error (Lin et al., 2022). Experiential learning, including internships, volunteer work, and extracurricular activities, enables young people to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts (Tarrasch, Berman, & Friedmann, 2016). Journaling and interactions with mentors

may help one understand self-better (Eccles & Wigfield, 2013) which allows increase in emotional thinking and skill set that leads to improved decision making (Pepping et al., 2013).

Education, Environment, and Experience go hand in hand in building the individual's confidence, leading to self-development, reshaping societal attitudes, and influencing the environments in which young people live (Kostova et al., 2019). Positive experiences reinforce educational goals and foster a constructive environment (Dweck, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Enhanced resilience better emotional regulation and cognitive development prepares adolescents to be better in this developing world (Diamond, 2010; Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007).

This Framework of 3 E (Education, Environment, and Experience) creates better understanding of adolescent and their development. The society can foster where the yound minds have prioritised their education, cultivate supportive environment for self-growth and live life with the value of personal experiences. The society can then be growth-oriented with resilient, competent, and well-rounded individuals. These insights by the researcher need deeper look in order to be implemented in policy for reforms.Focusing on these dimensions will nurture personal growth and create a vibrant, adaptive new generation capable of facing the challenges of the future (Weare & Nind, 2011; Tarrasch, Berman, & Friedmann, 2016).Experience reflects and reinforces both Education and Environment domain of growth, creating a cycle of growth that strengthens resilience, emotional intelligence, and social competence in adolescents.



Figure2- 3 E Model Adolescents' Growth conceptualized by the researcher

1.4 HOW BEHAVIOUR GETS INFLUENCED

In the earlier chapter we have explored how human behavior is deeply shaped by an intricate interplay of emotions, environment, and lived experiences, the 3Es that form the core of psychological and social development and when these elements are not acknowledged or nurtured, they create fertile ground for cognitive distortions, irrational, exaggerated, or biased ways of thinking that distort perception and decision-making.

Left unaddressed, these distortions cloud judgment and reshape negative behavior in subtle ways. For instance, a young person repeatedly experiencing rejection (Experience) in an unsupportive environment (Environment), without tools to regulate internal reactions (Emotion) may develop maladaptive beliefs like "I'm not good enough" or "People will always let me down." Over time, these beliefs may manifest as social withdrawal, aggression, self-sabotage, or risk-avoidant behaviors. The psychological factors, when filtered through uncorrected thinking patters often called cognitive distortions, can significantly alter behavior hamper relationships. Recognizing and addressing these influences is essential for fostering

healthy behavioral patterns, especially in adolescents, where identity and emotional development are essential. Hence it is important to understand about what cognitive distortions are and the next section gives introduction to cognitive distortions:

1.5 UNDERSTANDING COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Cognitive distortions are biased ways of thinking that individuals use to interpret and respond to situations, often leading to negative emotions and maladaptive behaviors (Yalcin et al., 2018). The emotional and cognitive challenges that adolescents face can be difficult to manage, and these distortions often create obstacles in their lives. CDs are seen as contributing to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and conduct disorders (Rnic et al., 2016). One useful model to understand certain CDs is the HIT (How I Think Questionnaire), which identifies a set of distorted thought patterns that are particularly relevant in the context of adolescent behavior and has been used in this study, developed by Barriga, Gibbs 1996, Gibbs, Barriga & Potter in 2001.

How I Think questionnaire analyses the behaviour of adolescents to see how they see their own behaviours, actions, avoid or face conflicts, and face emotions. The domains of HIT are: Self-Centered Thinking, Blaming Others, Minimizing/Mislabeling, Assuming the Worst, Opposition Defiance, Physical aggression, lying, and stealing. Below, we will explore the cognitive distortions and their impact on adolescents' development and social functioning.

SELF-CENTERED THINKING

Self-centered thinking happens when an individual sees the world through the eyes of selfishness, their own point of view. He disregards the thoughts, feelings, and needs of others while engaging his own needs first. This leads to situations where an empathetic view for others is lost, and one ends up annoying others with their disrespectful behaviour.

BLAMING OTHERS

When one fails to take responsibility for self and self-actions, they end up finding faults with others. This behaviour of an individual ends up as blaming others for one's own mistakes. One starts attributing negative outcomes to external sources, which can be other people around them. Such individuals often avoid being responsible. This pattern of thinking can foster a victim mentality, making it difficult for adolescents to learn problem-solving skills or develop resilience (Beck, 2011). The tendency to externalize blame can also prevent them from taking accountability for their own actions, leading to chronic interpersonal conflicts and inability to resolve disputes effectively.

MINIMIZING & MISLABELING

Minimizing and mislabeling involve downplaying the significance of harmful actions or using derogatory terms to label others. Such individuals view their behaviour as harmless, and often antisocial or aggressive behaviour is overlooked. Such individuals are seen with low self-esteem and have poor relationships with others. Such a cognitive distortion can contribute to antisocial behavior, as adolescents may not fully appreciate the impact of their actions on others (Perry, 2012). The normalization of harmful behavior or the use of belittling labels can also perpetuate bullying and foster a negative social environment, making it harder for adolescents to develop empathy and positive social connections.

ASSUMING THE WORST

Assuming the worst involves assuming that others harbor hostile intentions or that the worst possible outcome will occur in a given situation. Misinterpreting neutral actions, intentional insults, and seeking interactions as threats results in individuals becoming anxious and aggressive in nature. This distortion impacts the social life of individuals and causes them

to withdraw and become defensive by escalate conflicts unnecessarily (Dobson & Dozois, 2019). One of the leading causes of mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression, is attributed to assuming the worst.

BEHAVIORAL RESTRAINTS IN HIT

The HIT also includes a category of behavioral restraints, which are often linked to cognitive distortions. These behaviors represent external manifestations of distorted thinking patterns that impact the social life of individuals.

OPPOSITIONAL DEFIANCE

Often seen as showing resistance to authority and behaving as a rebel by challenging all rules. Individuals are seen as arguers with everyone and fuels distorted thinking, such as self-centered thinking or blaming others, which leads them to feel misunderstood or unfairly treated (Frick et al., 2014).

PHYSICAL AGGRESSION

Physical aggression, including fighting or temper tantrums, arises from cognitive distortions like assuming the worst (assuming someone intends to harm them) or minimizing the consequences of aggression. This behavior may lead to social alienation, academic issues, or legal problems.

LYING

To avoid pain, adolescents may lie to avoid punishment or project a false image to manipulate situations. Lying is associated with cognitive distortions discussed earlier whichare blaming others and minimizing one's responsibility for actions. These behaviors can damage trust and relationships over time.

STEALING

Stealing may be the result of distorted thinking, where adolescents believe they are entitled to something they haven't earned or minimize the harm caused by taking something without permission.

SUMMARIZING THE DOMAINS

Emotional regulation plays a key role in shaping responsible citizens and good social behaviors. Distortions like self-centered thinking, blaming others, minimizing/mislabeling, and assuming the worst can lead to negative behaviors such as defiance, aggression, lying, and stealing. These behaviors can make it harder for adolescents to build healthy relationships and handle the challenges they face. Understanding these thought patterns can help mental health professionals create interventions that support healthier development during this important time.

1.6 MENTAL HEALTH

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as a state of well-being where an individual is aware of their own abilities, can handle the typical stresses of life, works productively, and is able to contribute to their community (World Health Organization, 2004). Mental health is not merely the absence of mental disorders but involves the overall well-being of an individual, including emotional, psychological, and social aspects. It highlights the capacity to deal with everyday challenges, work effectively, and contribute to society, underscoring that mental health is integral to overall health. According to the World Health Organization 2017, approximately one in four people worldwide will be affected by mental or neurological disorders at some point in their lives. These disorders, which include depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder, not only impair individuals' well-being but also result in substantial economic and social costs. Mental health disorders are now recognized as one of the leading causes of disability globally, with depression being the primary contributor.

The National Mental Health Survey of India (2015-16), conducted by NIMHANS, further emphasizes the importance of addressing mental health issues, revealing that 14% of the Indian population suffers from some form of mental disorder.

The World Economic Forum (2020) also highlighted the growing crisis of mental health globally, predicting that by 2030, mental health disorders will be the leading cause of disability worldwide, surpassing both cardiovascular diseases and cancers. The economic cost of mental health conditions is immense, with a significant impact on workplace productivity and national economies.

This section explores the prevalence of mental health disorders both globally and in India, drawing upon key findings from the WHO Mental Health Atlas (2017), the National Mental Health Survey of India (2015-16), and the World Economic Forum report (2020).

GLOBAL PREVALENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

The WHO Mental Health Atlas (2017) provides an overview of the global mental health burden, estimating that 1 billion people worldwide have some form of mental health issue. Around 264 million people suffer from depression, and about 3.6% experience anxiety. The World Economic Forum's 2020 report predicts that depression will be the leading cause of disability by 2030, with 10-20% of young adults, children, and adolescents facing mental health disorders. These issues often lead to poor academic performance, social isolation, and further mental health problems in later years.

1.7 PREVALENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS IN INDIA

The National Mental Health Survey of India (2015-16), conducted by NIMHANS, found that 14% of the Indian population suffers from mental health disorders with 7.5%

experiencing severe mental disorders like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. This survey, the first comprehensive study on mental health in India, also highlighted significant urban-rural disparities, with the prevalence of mental disorders being higher in urban areas (16.06%) compared to rural areas (13.2%). In India, depression and anxiety are the top mental health issues and around 5% of populations suffer from depression and about 3-4 % experience anxiety disorder. 1 in 7 children in India suffers from some form of mental disorder. Depression, and conduct disorders are the most prevalent among mental health issues and suicide is the prime concerning issue. Women seem likely to suffer more than men with social stigma, cultural expectations with gender based violence. Men end up with substance issues, violent conduct behaviour due to mental health issues not being attended at early teens.

The COVID-19 pandemic and during the national lockdown, there was a significant increase in mental distress, including anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. A survey conducted by the Indian Psychiatry Society in 2020 found that 40% of the Indian population reported experiencing some form of mental distress during the lockdown period. The impact was also seen among young adults, frontline workers, and those with pre-existing mental health conditions.

1.8 UNDERSTANDING COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

Counseling psychology focuses on building a supportive relationship between the counselor and client, aiming to promote well-being and personal growth, rather than just addressing psychological disorders (Bhargav et al., 2021). Its main goal is to help individuals develop self-awareness, coping skills, and personal growth throughout life.

Counseling psychology evolved from a subfield of general psychology to a separate discipline. In 1982, the British Psychological Society (BPS) officially recognized it as its own field, and

this was further supported with the creation of a specialized group in 1988. This shift reflects how psychological principles and research are used to guide clients through important life stages.

Various definitions of counseling highlight its role in helping people understand their situations and solve personal problems. Jones (1970) saw counseling as helping people make decisions, while Williams (1973) focused on building trust and addressing emotional barriers. The National Association for Mental Health (1970) and the British Association for Counseling (1989) emphasized counseling as a relationship that encourages self-knowledge and personal growth through a supportive counselor-client connection.

In schools, counseling often involves one-on-one sessions for stress management, study skills, and emotional support, while group counseling helps with issues like exam anxiety and assertiveness. Counselors also work with teachers to ensure emotional well-being is a part of the school environment. Confidentiality is important in student counseling, though counselors may work with school staff when students give consent.

Adolescence is a key stage in development, bringing changes in physical, emotional, and social areas. Adolescents often face challenges like mood swings, peer pressure, and figuring out their identity. Counselors support them by promoting self-awareness, teaching coping strategies, and helping with emotional struggles. Adolescents may also deal with issues like depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts, and counseling can help build emotional resilience.

In India, counselors often work alone, missing the bigger picture of how family and social environments impact a child's well-being. This highlights the need for approaches that consider the unique needs of children and adolescents. Counselors should undergo specialized

training and use a holistic approach to understand and support children better. Understanding family and social factors is crucial for effective support and positive outcomes. When used preventively, counseling can greatly improve overall well-being.