

# The Family Adjustment and Parental Guidance of Adolescents

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**Abstract:** The phase of human development termed “adolescence” has attracted high attention from contemporary researchers and psychologists due to the immense the physical, social, and cognitive changes that occur during this phase of development. This article summarizes and reviews these changes and how parents may adjust to support their child throughout this transition.

## 1. Introduction

Adolescence has mainly been discussed and defined as a crucial period in one’s life due to the immense changes that occur both mentally and physically, such as the rapid development of brain functions and social-behavioral and emotional development, which ultimately sets the stage for behavioral development and personality construction in adulthood<sup>[1]</sup>. However, many dangers may arise during this time that put adolescents under high risk of exposure to physical injuries, traffic accidents, drug abuse, and sexual intercourse<sup>[13]</sup>. A safe environment for the adolescent to grow and explore is thus essential for their long-term wellbeing. An adolescent may also experience a high amount of pressure to rebuild their worldview and comprehend their emotions, which compose of an embodiment of self-charm and increasing attention to the opposite sex<sup>[26]</sup>.

Unfortunately, adolescents do not possess the abilities to handle these challenges on their own, as their bodies and minds are at an imbalance and must reach the same level of maturity. Having the support of an experienced and supportive adult figure, especially in these early years, can provide the adolescent with the proper guidance needed to navigate the changes they are experiencing. The easiest time for adolescents to go astray is when parents are not aware or responsive to their child, which may be due to limited knowledge, customary parenthood habits, or a lack of awareness about adolescence<sup>[14;20;25]</sup>. Extreme focus and orientation towards peers consequently arise, particularly when adolescents perceive no comfort from their family or are given overwhelming restrictions from parents, which can cause serious problems<sup>[14;20;25]</sup>. Furthermore, the attachment pattern formed in infancy between the caregiver and child may have lasting effects and persist into adulthood, as a crucial cognitive characteristic which establishes interaction models, marriage tendency, and children caring<sup>[14;20;25]</sup>. Therefore, the behavior or the caregivers, particularly during this phase of development, should be studied and emphasized as much as the behavior of the adolescent themselves.

The main aim of this article is to review the changes that occur during adolescence and provide advice for parents about how to communicate with their child properly. Based on previous studies and research, this article provides a discussion from the different perspectives of adolescents and parents, touching on the following: a review of the behaviors that often arise as a result of the mental, physical, and cognitive changes in adolescence, and finally, healthy parental contact and guidance with adolescents.

## 2. Physical Changes and Mental Adjustments of Adolescents

Adolescents experience unprecedented and rather abrupt growth of both their body and their social-emotional development<sup>[2;11;13]</sup>. Physical changes in appearance begin to occur, which is most evident when adolescents notice changes in height and weight and may become concerned about these rapid changes<sup>[1]</sup>. During adolescence, the body actively excretes various types of hormones,

such as adrenal, growth, and gonadal hormones, which are transported throughout the body and facilitate the growth of organs and brain structures<sup>[1]</sup>. The growth of muscles all over the body along with increased lung capacity leads to improvements athletic ability<sup>[1]</sup>. A growing body goes through a series of phases, where appetite can increase drastically to match the need for nutrition and vitamins needed for growth. Amount of sleep is thus crucial for the development of these growing bodies<sup>[1]</sup>. Adolescents find themselves quickly growing and easily getting tired when lacking physical activity<sup>[1]</sup>. The life of adolescents can be divided into two extremes-either feeling very active or too drowsy to pay attention to anything.

The start of adolescence is marked by many benchmarks, with the maturation of sexual organs being an important one that attracts attention from the adolescent and caregiver alike<sup>[1]</sup>. Being surprised with the rapid change of their bodies, adolescents may not thoroughly understand why people differ so drastically depending on their sex, and thus perceive these body changes as uncomfortable<sup>[1]</sup>. They may start to feel unfamiliar and therefore, embarrassed by their bodies since the maturation of sexual organs, and other features of gender happen so rapidly. In general, females have been shown to frequently hide the maturation of their breasts, as this is a more apparent change that occurs, indicating puberty and growth. These early fears and curiosities may then be translated into an eagerness to understand their<sup>[1]</sup>. Boys appear to have a sex drive that is perceived as strange and uncontrollable, annoying them at first<sup>[1]</sup>. Girls, on the other hand, are often faced with a fear of being 'different' and ostracized and are forced to confront their changing bodies at twelve or thirteen, an earlier age compared with boys. The continuous growth of the body does not stop until both boys and girls reach their 20s, and maturation of sexual organ begins to slow<sup>[1]</sup>.

Along with the intense physical changes that occur in adolescence, the brain also undergoes rapid development. Reconstruction and reorganization of the brain in adolescence facilitate the advancement of sensory organs, thinking ability, and self-awareness. Condition of development in certain abilities seriously relies on the growing environment of adolescents. Being in a nurturing and enriching environment in which adolescents can learn and practice their cognitive skills is crucial for forming synaptic structures and developing brain functions properly<sup>[2][11][13]</sup>. An enriched environment that provides adequate resources and proper education also enables adolescents to develop their comprehension skills, which can hardly be achieved through other means.

While the brain takes many years to grow and fully develop, it experiences a spurt during adolescence in which it prunes useless or seldom-used parts in order to focus on growing more important regions<sup>[1]</sup>. The amount of brain tissue follows a non-linear pattern, reaching its amount around 16 years of age, and then subsequently beginning to reduce in late adolescence<sup>[2;11;13]</sup>. Along with these anatomical changes, the ability to distinguish faces begins to decline compared with early childhood, whereas adolescents can understand the underlying meanings of words better than adults<sup>[2;11;13]</sup>. Although prematurely losing some competences may seem frightening, the advantages outweigh the drawbacks in the long run. By restructuring the limited space within the brain, we strengthen and develop the strong points that benefit human evolution<sup>[2;11;13]</sup>.

While it is important to note how rapidly the brain develops throughout adolescence, it is crucial to understand that this does not occur synchronously throughout the entire brain<sup>[9;10]</sup>. This is most clearly demonstrated by the impulsive nature of adolescents, which is mostly due to a lack of experience and thinking skills<sup>[37]</sup>. Recognizing and avoiding risks seems relatively less important than in childhood and adulthood. This increase in impulsivity is a result of an imbalance between the prefrontal cortex and limbic systems, which mature at different speeds<sup>[1]</sup>. Prior studies using functional magnetic resonance imaging technology (fMRI) have shown that the prefrontal cortex plays an important role in suppressing and regulating negative emotions, whereas the fast-growing limbic system leads to an increase in risk-taking, in search of rewarding behaviors<sup>[28]</sup>. Therefore, the combination of the advanced development of the limbic system with the slower growing ventral prefrontal cortex leads adolescents to act on impulsive<sup>[37]</sup>. In emotional situations, adolescents know that they might be too impetuous when taking risks, but mature limbic systems win over prefrontal cortex in functioning<sup>[1]</sup>. Moreover, such imbalances contribute to the rate of affective disorders that

occur during adolescence<sup>[37]</sup>. As adolescents expand their environments and have more diversity of experience, emotions obtained in interaction and deeply thinking of various questions piled up are agog to have an exit or be diverted.<sup>[1]</sup> Making friends due to a need for communication and exchanging emotions from whom have similar versions (Brown, 1990). Peers become highly influential, in aspects spanning from the language adolescents use, their social manners, and the activities they interested in<sup>[15]</sup>. In this stage, adolescents form connections with all kinds of friends, including romantic relationships<sup>[16]</sup>. While they are building these various kinds of relationships, lower self-esteem can cause adolescents to be very sensitive to failure and therefore, afraid of rejection by others<sup>[1]</sup>.

Another important change that occurs within the brain during adolescence is the increase of activity in the orbital frontal cortex, which can help the moderate reaction of negative emotions that correspond to an increase of amygdala activity, which improves with age and shortens the reaction time of negative emotions (Hare & Casey, in press). The orbital frontal cortex serves an important role in evaluating changes of emotions. Therefore, adolescents can learn to respond to their emotions properly and adapt to their changing environment fluidly.

### 3. Cognitive Adjustments in Adolescence

In response to body and brain changes, adolescents' cognition adjusts to align with what they perceive of the world and themselves (S et al.). A shift from a concrete way of thinking to a more abstract one gives adolescents the ability to think of issues more broadly and comprehensively. They can think of things across time and space, which is important in differentiating between reality and fantasy<sup>[1]</sup>. Adolescents also develop the ability to see things from multiple perspectives, which helps them grow to understand others and build healthy relationships (Case R et al.) In judging process, logical analysis comes into use and is frequently practiced in hypothetical cases in adolescence in which adolescents highly value feelings and are easily controlled by emotions, a huge step from simple "either black or white" thinking way<sup>[37]</sup>. Thinking in a more complex manner gives adolescents the tools to form a high level of judging system later. Stronger imaginary and deductive abilities strengthen adolescents' learning skills as they continue to explore the world and learn to adapt<sup>[26]</sup>. Adolescents find themselves curious about almost anything, with a specific eagerness to master skills ranging from mathematics to leadership, outside of the knowledge they gain in school<sup>[1]</sup>.

As previously mentioned, adolescents' self-awareness increases dramatically from childhood. They begin to realize and understand the boundaries among different people, especially with parents. Growing independent thoughts and organizing systems represent the arousal of self-awareness and allow them to form feelings and opinions about themselves. They have a strong interest in understanding their strengths and weaknesses and thus pay close attention to their characteristics, often appearing very narcissistic. At the same time, they exaggerate their shortcomings and get frustrated with imperfection. With increasing concern with being 'special' or unique, adolescents often compare themselves to their peers, often trying to stand out<sup>[1]</sup>. In addition to a heightened competition that arises in adolescence, they magnify personal problems as "unable to be understood by anyone". Wanting to explore facts about themselves, they ask complex questions such as "who am I" and trace the answers to depict their sense of self.

On the other hand, the social connection appears to be increasingly important as adolescents become more independent. Social being acted out in phase that adolescents practice methods dealing with social problems. Based on their environment, family condition, and past experience, adolescents gradually develop unique moral standards and value systems and implement them into daily communication with their peers<sup>[37]</sup>.

As connection becomes tighter with peers, one's time spent with family decreases, which can lead to conflicts with parents that arise and create a divide between parent and child. Adolescents emphasize the significance of their rights, which were previously controlled by their parents in childhood.<sup>[24]</sup> Adolescents want to be recognized and respected by others, combined with the eagerness to get rid of the constraints of adults and a longing for independence, for which they

always try to do things that they have not done before, proving themselves to be brave or competent<sup>[25;20;14]</sup>.

#### 4. Adjustment of Parent-Children Attachment

Entering adolescence is a fast process for parents, but there are many things caregivers can do prior to adolescence to prepare for the changes that will occur. Additionally, most adolescents begin to reject their parents in response to overwhelming controlling or dominant commands of parents even before they reach this stage of development. So by properly preparing for the period of adolescence, parents can effectively alleviate or avoid many bad effects that occur during this important but often difficult time. While youngsters are undertaking dramatic changes, parents cannot accommodate such extreme shifts as they happen<sup>[25;20;14]</sup>. This can even break the balance of the previously formed steady attachment pattern between child and parents. The classical parent-children attachment pattern (developed by John Bowlby) describes the essential boundaries between parents and children to survive and maintain basic social connections (Scope, T H E Adolescent, O F). Infants seek for protection and caring from their caregivers when placed in strange environment, and hence display their attachment to their caregiver. When growing enough strength to defend themselves from outside dangerous factors, children's dependency on the caregiver changes. A common misconception here is which based on long-kept relationship in which parents take dominance and make decisions autocratically, parents perceive changes of their children an on-going increasing of rebellion and a tendency of misleading by others' instigation. In fact, rebellion is a manifestation of youngsters' physical maturity and improved thinking ability. Children gradually have enough physical and psychological abilities to compete with their parents, showing growth and progress<sup>[30]</sup>. Rebellion is in fact necessary for children's development of their sense of self, and a way for them to explore and build their personalities. The establishment of self-identity effectively helps children face changes and meet challenges. In addition, as mentioned above, the imbalance of brain development can easily cause emotional problems. Adolescents experience self-doubt, confusion and conflict in the process of exploration, and their confusion and doubt about their role in life can exacerbate emotional problems.<sup>[31;34]</sup> Rebellion, as a normal way for adolescents to vent their bad emotions, can help them channel their emotions and maintain their mental health.

Many caregivers can find it hard to understand adolescents, as it can be difficult to remember their own feelings during that time, and thus can find it hard to empathize with the child. Consequently, parents may try to alter such "misdeed" of adolescents by maintaining tighter control over them. Parents think that controlling their children is an expression of love, but to do so in an extreme manner may lead the children turn to other people's emotional support. Some parents treat their children as private property, believe that their children should have absolute obedience to them, and instill their social experience in their children. During this period, because of changes in their mentality, adolescence may also feel that they have great differences with their parents in many respects (Eccles et al.<sup>[15]</sup> Therefore, too much interference will make children angry at their parents' stereotypes and imprisonment of their thoughts, and the pursuit of freedom will create barriers between them. Children have a strong sense of guard against parental intervention, but they can confide in their friends without hesitation<sup>[15]</sup>; Grotevant & Cooper<sup>[24]</sup> Ryan & Lynch, 1989;. A long period of unsolvable conflicts may push children to seek solace from their peers with whom they have shared language. From this perspective, adolescents are quite likely to do anything to maintain their friendships, which may be the only source of support or communication that they perceive under strict parental rules.

It is important for both the parents and children to develop a healthy relationship, as this relationship will influence how the parent and child will interact, and set the foundation for their relationship, as attachment patterns can change in some aspects during adolescence During the early stages of development, children can typically possess three different types of attachment styles with parents. Children who get feedback and attention from parents typically develop a close relationship with parents, known as secure attachment<sup>[30]</sup> These children feel their caregiver will be there in a

time of need, and enjoy emotional bonds with family, building up esteem and self-confidence easily. On the contrary, children with ambivalent attachment patterns are uncertain whether their parent will be there for them, and have a harder time receiving love from others. Children with avoidant attachments may be unwilling to remain close with their parents, due to an absence of concern and attention in childhood. These children may have difficulty forming intimate relationships with others. According to experimental studies, securely attached children have been shown to be less likely to get involved in drinking, drug abuse, and unsafe sexual behaviors, while they show stronger social skills and emotion regulatory abilities in environmental exploration. It is clearly important for parents and children to establish safely attached figures in adolescence. These adolescents may no longer need that close contact with their parents when they experience internal or external difficulties, whereas they still rely on stable support from family to derive strength. Hence, caregivers should aim to strike a balance in which they are neither too distant nor too close<sup>[30]</sup>. In order to give parents a clear assessment of their caregiving behaviors, psychologists classified parents into four prototypes in which authoritative parents are considered the most suitable guardians<sup>[25;20;14]</sup>. They supervise and evaluate the child's practices to a certain extent, using appropriate methods to restrain the children's words and deeds and try their best to help the child avoid going astray while giving them space. Children with authoritative parents are more competent in social interactions, as they are more energetic and assertive than others. Caregivers are meant to be both engaged in the social and cognitive investigation in a four-dimensional diagram which is designed to measure the family facilitates youngsters' ability in which way<sup>[24]</sup>. Adolescents in an ideal family can master in both administrative and communicative issues. On the contrary, adolescents in an unhealthy family can be violent and moody due to early corporal punishment or unconcerned attitude<sup>[15]</sup>. A series of mental illnesses such as depression, bipolar disorder, phobias, and obsessive-compulsive disorder have a lot to do with a lack of love and attention from parents<sup>[26]</sup>.

Parents may react differently to the changes their child undergoes in adolescence. Fathers have been shown to be more encouraging of the child's independence in comparison to the mother, whereas mothers have been shown to be more accepting of adolescents' behaviors. In return, youngsters generate different emotional bonds with parents on the basis of their manners. For example, youngsters accept more about parents who support personal independence to a large degree Bowlby, As largely exposed to dangers in an advanced society, the classical dilemma of adolescence is the need for both protection and independence<sup>[41]</sup>.

For adolescents, puberty is a period when they adjust their behavior based on the expanded living space, and they gradually mature due to their own experience. During this period, parents need to play a supervisory role to know the children's movements in order to maintain authority and be consultant, but no need to overprotect, interfere, or instill their thoughts in the adolescents in an imperative manner. Parents should also adjust their mentality and try to avoid being prejudiced to look at their children's handling of things, avoid blindly denying adolescents' behavior. It is important to recognize and emphasize the necessity and importance of adolescents as an independent individual. When making a decision, parents should refer to the adolescents' needs and ideas, listen to and accept the children's opinions, and explain the decision-making as well as reasons.

## 5. Discussion

While the points in this article come from a large span of research, it is important to note that there may be cultural differences in both the experience of adolescence and parenting itself. These cultural differences are important to both note and study. For example, American parents and Chinese parents utilize diversified rearing methods according to respective history and religions.

The American style of raising children was originally shaped to a strict mode influenced by religious beliefs in the sixteenth century. But religious emphasis experienced a shift after World War II, to a modest but more permissive type by which children can enjoy a more relaxed life than before<sup>[41]</sup>. In China, the parental style has been largely influenced by Confucius principles, which

emphasize compliance and deferential manners of children to parents as the most important aspect of upbringing. This method of child-rearing is largely affected by the social activities in which children are ordered to behave desirably to make their parents proud<sup>[41]</sup>. Moreover, physical punishment was fairly common in ancient China and was viewed as parents showing concern for their children. Therefore, parents' scolding and punishing were cultural inherited practices<sup>[25;20;14]</sup>.

Furthermore, Chinese parents feel responsible for their children no matter what they do and form a relatively strong connection with children compared with American parents, who emphasize the importance of independence. Chinese parents, especially mothers, are very attentive to look after everything in their children's lives, as they are actively concerned that their children will fall ill if they lack nutrients, causing them to pay more attention to children's physical needs. American parents, on the other hand, inclined to keep an eye on children's psychological situations<sup>[41]</sup>. Therefore, there is no need to set a global standard by which parenthood will be restricted. Parents in different places should make appropriate adjustments to their special circumstances in order to get better results. A promising outcome will certainly be carried out by following suitable measures.

## 6. Conclusion

Bodily and mentally changes are extremely frequently in adolescence. Beforehand knowledge about adolescence can effectively help in reducing the panic and anxiety. Healthy family condition improve cooperation between family and adolescents, prevent whom from going apart with family. What is more, it is important for parents to remember being side-characters in the process of adolescence experience and act as guiders who patiently care about adolescents but not strictly limit them. Although the researches in exploring more befitting parental method are still inadequate, the general one has been tested globally and achieved broad success.

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