

## Parenting Adolescence

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“Change is the only constant” and we see it in every phase of life. A new born grows into a toddler and blooms into an adolescent. The adolescent goes on to become an adult and eventually a senior citizen. Is it only this new born who goes through these changes? No, even the parents go through various changes along with their child. While the child shows physical developments along with his/her cognitive, psycho-social development, the parents also go through their share of emotional, economical, professional and social changes. Every stage of development is important. But the stage of adolescence is of utmost importance since it is the cusp of childhood and adulthood. If this period of transitioning from childhood to adulthood is smooth, children create their own identity and are able to go through their life experiences in a better way. They are able to cope with difficulties and distress that they may face during their adulthood as they step out in to the world from under the protection of their parents’ care. Parents of adolescents too go through a state of confusion. The adolescence stage seems difficult to be understood, and the child behaves differently as compared to what they did a few months prior. The ‘child/adolescent’ suddenly has a mind of his own that comes across as illogical to the parents. A once obedient child now gets irritated quickly, rebels at the drop of a hat and questions almost everything!

While the parents evaluate the growth of the child through their altering physical appearance, they are oblivious that the brain too evolves and the child (now an adolescent) engages with various stimulating activities. The awareness of the ‘child’ increases and the ‘child’ begins to explore and hence a gamut of questions. This is the most drastic and contrasting behavioral change the parents take the most time getting used to. Suddenly, obedience turns to inquisitiveness, and the ‘I’ in the adolescent becomes stronger leading to a classic behavior of refutation, stubbornness and volatility.

The situation becomes such that, both the parents and the adolescent are not able to demarcate whether the youngster can be left alone to take a

decision or whether the parents need to decide for him. The circumstances start looking like a double-edge sword. The COVID-19 pandemic has unleashed a series of problems in the already existing complexities that the adolescents seem to face. Financial stress faced by the parents due to reduction in or loss of income has affected the entire family including adolescents. Higher levels of financial stress were related to higher levels of parental psychological distress, higher levels of parenting stress, and higher levels of adolescent (Low & Mount, 2021). As parents, most of us were not equipped to handle such situations. As a parent of an adolescent and a parenting expert, I have realized that an adolescent is everything, but for what we wish from him to be! And that is where the beauty of parenting lies. This stage of adolescence includes questions regarding their appearance, vocational choices and career aspirations, education, relationships, sexuality, political and social views, personality, and interests (Erikson, 1980).

### Parenting Styles and its effects on Parent-Child relationship

Parenting style is defined as a constellation of parents’ attitudes and behaviors toward children and an emotional climate in which the parents’ behaviors are expressed (Darling and Steinberg, 1993). In the field of parenting, Maccoby and Martin’s (1983) and Baumrind’s (1991) typological approach of conceptualizing parenting has had a tremendous impact. They classified parenting into four types based on responsiveness & demanding (Maccoby and Martin, 1983; Baumrind, 1991).

All parents fall in to one of four styles of parenting – Permissive (or ‘yes’ parenting), Authoritative (or democratic parenting), Neglectful (or ‘uninvolved’ parenting) and Authoritarian (or ‘no’ parenting). Researchers have shown that authoritative or democratic parenting is the one that brings forth the best in an adolescent and helps him create his own identity. This is the style where the parents and the adolescent discuss, listen and explore the possibilities together. The adolescent is encouraged to put forth his view, learn to take

responsibilities, own up to mistakes made and learn to be resilient.

Authoritative parenting style is associated with higher levels of parent–adolescent cohesion (Nelson et al., 2011) and lower levels of conflict frequency (Smetana, 1995), conflict intensity (Smetana, 1995), and total conflict (McKinney and Renk, 2011).

### Challenges of Parenting

As parents, many of us may adopt one of the styles of parenting which we may have imbibed from the environment or from our own parents. However, we need to consciously use all the four styles of parenting mentioned above as and when required. These styles can be looked at as four rooms in a house wherein we use each room based on the requirement.

Adolescence is a period of rapid biological and psychosocial changes, which has a salient impact on parent–child relationships. Parents and adolescents have to reorganize responsibilities and move towards a more egalitarian relationship. Although conflicts between parents and children become more frequent and more intense during adolescence, these conflicts are also thought to be a means to negotiate relational changes. The short-term dyadic processes that occur during conflict interactions are important in the development of parent–adolescent relationships. Parent–adolescent dyads with more emotional variability during conflict interactions tend to adapt effectively and reorganize their relationships in response to the developmental needs of adolescents. Thus, parent–adolescent conflicts are adaptive for relational development when parents and adolescents can switch flexibly between a range of positive and negative emotions.

Many a times, parents find it difficult to let the adolescent take a decision and this may come from the belief that it is the parents' duty to ensure that the adolescent arrives at the right decision or that, the adolescent is not yet capable enough to take a decision. The adolescent on the other hand may want to know the rationale behind what the parent has to say and this can come across as a rebellious attitude towards the parents. The parents think that an obedient child is now getting obstinate. In today's fast paced and virtual world, access to all and any kind of information is in excess and dealing with such information overload is a genuine concern for

most parents. Communication with the adolescent is another area of challenge for the parents in the current times.

The development of adolescents' autonomy, in turn, can have effects on parent–adolescent relationship features. Parents and adolescents expect increasing autonomy with age, but adolescents typically demand autonomy earlier than their parents are ready to grant it (Jensen and Dost-Gözkan, 2015; Pérez et al., 2016). Adolescents desire for more autonomy than their parents wish to grant them. This prompts the youth to exert more control on their own affairs and become more critical of their parents controlling behaviors—a pattern that causes conflict and reduces cohesion. (Fuligni, 1998; Zhang and Fuligni, 2006).

### Role of a Parent

The meaning of the word '*parent*' (Latin) is 'bringing forth'. If we have to bring forth the qualities in an adolescent, we need to allow him to be a participant in his own parenting. And, this is possible only when parents realize that the offspring is born with a set of his own qualities and skills. This may vary from that of the parents. And, when parents see this variation they automatically get into a mode of advising or the 'righting reflex' so that the adolescent does not make a mistake.

Although conflicts between children and parents increase during adolescence, they are more often related to relatively minor issues. As a child transitions into adolescence, the role of the parent transitions from pure provider to a supporter and provider. The parents should help their adolescents to become independent and be a guide to help them navigate through their decision, whether right or wrong.

Be friendly and not a friend so that the adolescent learns to create healthy boundaries and also learn that you have more experience to share with them. Be curious to know the world of your adolescent. Ask them about their friends, and where they spend time together. You have the right to be informed. This isn't invading their privacy. Create memories with them by sharing your own experiences and encouraging them to participate in activities they are interested in. As a parent, it will be helpful for you to learn more about those activities so that you can have a meaningful conversation.

This is an age where adolescent and young adults have various questions like “who am I?”, “who do I want to be?” (Erikson, 1980). Help adolescents to explore their options and have healthy discussions with you. The more they explore and discuss with their peer group and the family, the easier it is for them to narrow down on options. Help your adolescent to choose and build respectful relationships by role-modeling respectful and caring behaviour in your own relationships. Teach them the meaning and power of assertiveness, standing up for self in a respectful way. This helps them learn important skills and ways of relating to others.

### **The Author’s Perspective:**

Parenting is an important responsibility that begins when the set of parents plan for a baby.

Bearing and raising an infant to a responsible adult is a path that can have its own moments of elevated and drained out feeling. The parents help the offspring to move from “dependence to independence to interdependence”. COVID 19 presented before us the importance of interdependence and this is a lesson we need to handover to the next generation to have a healthy and robust society.

Adolescence is the time where the individual blooms and the right kind of guidance can help him to propel himself in a positive way. Create memories whenever possible so that he looks forward to coming back to you to get and give support.

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