



# Raising Teens

*A Synthesis of Research and a Foundation for Action*

A. RAE SIMPSON, PH.D.

Project on the Parenting of Adolescents  
Center for Health Communication  
Harvard School of Public Health

This project was supported by a grant from  
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[http://hrweb.mit.edu/worklife/rp\\_o](http://hrweb.mit.edu/worklife/rp_o)

Also available from the web site and from the Center are copies of Dr. Simpson's previous report, ***The Role of the Mass Media in Parenting Education***, published by the Center in 1997.

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# Report Summary

## Purpose and Goals

This report has been written to heighten media and public attention to both a crisis and an opportunity. The crisis is that, by almost any measure, America's teenagers are facing risks from violence, mental illness, abuse, neglect, inadequate education, substance abuse, poverty, and other sources that profoundly jeopardize their futures—and, hence, our own.

One of the most striking aspects of this crisis is how little we have involved parents as part of the solution. While initiatives are needed at all levels, from community development to policy change, we often lose sight of one of the groups that can and most wants to help teens: their parents.

Therein lies the opportunity: In recent years, an unprecedented body of research has been accumulating about the powerful ways in which parents and families make a difference in the lives of teens. Yet, little of that knowledge has been reaching the media, policy makers, and practitioners, let alone parents themselves.

**The goal of this report is to make this new body of research findings on the parenting of adolescents more accessible and useful to those who work with and on behalf of parents, adolescents, and families, so that they, in turn, can make it more accessible and useful to parents.**

Prepared within the Center for Health Communication at the Harvard School of Public Health with funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the report identifies findings that are well established and practical, organizing them into frameworks that quickly and simply capture the main points. They are offered not in the spirit of telling parents what to do, but rather of providing additional information that parents can integrate with their own values, cultural perspectives, and individual characteristics and circumstances. The hope is that the added information will have a ripple effect, serving as a tool for the collective efforts of teens, parents, families, the media, schools, communities, professional groups, religious leaders, and policy makers in building better supports for the next generation.

## For whom is the report written?

The report is written for all those who work with and on behalf of parents, adolescents, and families, including those in the news and entertainment media, policy, advocacy, health care, education, youth work, business, parenting education, community development, and many other fields. It is not specifically intended for parents, although their readership will be very much welcomed. Rather, it is intended for those whose roles as intermediaries include providing support and information to parents of adolescents or facilitating efforts to do so.

## What does the report contain?

The report provides a synthesis of major research findings on the parenting of adolescents, with an emphasis on findings that have achieved widespread agreement among leaders in the field. Based on an analysis of over 300 recent reviews of research and practice, the report distills these findings into short, clear summaries and messages that can be conveyed to parents and others in parenting roles. The report's contents are designed to be used flexibly, as quick background information, a source of ideas, and a catalyst for further initiatives.

## Highlights of the report include:

- **The Ten Tasks of Adolescence:** a list of the developmental tasks that teenagers need to undertake in order to make a successful transition to adulthood.
- **The Five Basics of Parenting Adolescents:** an outline of the central ways in which parents influence healthy adolescent development.
- **Strategies for Parents:** a set of research-based options for carrying out each of the Five Basics.
- **Key Messages for Parents:** one or two sentences capturing the bottom line for each of the Five Basics.

These highlights can be found in the next pages of this “Report Summary.” The foundation and principles on which all these findings are based, further details, and complete references are in the full report that follows.

## The Ten Tasks of Adolescence\*

**1. Adjust to sexually maturing bodies and feelings**

Teens are faced with adjusting to bodies that as much as double in size and that acquire sexual characteristics, as well as learning to manage the accompanying biological changes and sexual feelings and to engage in healthy sexual behaviors. Their task also includes establishing a sexual identity and developing the skills for romantic relationships.

**2. Develop and apply abstract thinking skills**

Teens typically undergo profound changes in their way of thinking during adolescence, allowing them more effectively to understand and coordinate abstract ideas, to think about possibilities, to try out hypotheses, to think ahead, to think about thinking, and to construct philosophies.

**3. Develop and apply a more complex level of perspective taking**

Teens typically acquire a powerful new ability to understand human relationships, in which, having learned to “put themselves in another person’s shoes,” they learn to take into account both their perspective and another person’s at the same time, and to use this new ability in resolving problems and conflicts in relationships.

**4. Develop and apply new coping skills in areas such as decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution**

Related to all these dramatic shifts, teens are involved in acquiring new abilities to think about and plan for the future, to engage in more sophisticated strategies for decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution, and to moderate their risk taking to serve goals rather than jeopardize them.

**5. Identify meaningful moral standards, values, and belief systems**

Building on these changes and resulting skills, teens typically develop a more complex understanding of moral behavior and underlying principles of justice and care, questioning beliefs from childhood and adopting more personally meaningful values, religious views, and belief systems to guide their decisions and behavior.

**6. Understand and express more complex emotional experiences**

Also related to these changes are shifts for teens toward an ability to identify and communicate more complex emotions, to understand the emotions of others in more sophisticated ways, and to think about emotions in abstract ways.

**7. Form friendships that are mutually close and supportive**

Although youngsters typically have friends throughout childhood, teens generally develop peer relationships that play much more powerful roles in providing support and connection in their lives. They tend to shift from friendships based largely on the sharing of interests and activities to those based on the sharing of ideas and feelings, with the development of mutual trust and understanding.

**8. Establish key aspects of identity**

Identity formation is in a sense a lifelong process, but crucial aspects of identity are typically forged at adolescence, including developing an identity that reflects a sense of individuality as well as connection to valued people and groups. Another part of this task is developing a positive identity around gender, physical attributes, sexuality, and ethnicity and, if appropriate, having been adopted, as well as sensitivity to the diversity of groups that make up American society.

**9. Meet the demands of increasingly mature roles and responsibilities**

Teens gradually take on the roles that will be expected of them in adulthood, learning to acquire the skills and manage the multiple demands that will allow them to move into the labor market, as well as to meet expectations regarding commitment to family, community, and citizenship.

**10. Renegotiate relationships with adults in parenting roles**

Although the task of adolescence has sometimes been described as “separating” from parents and other caregivers, it is more widely seen now as adults and teens working together to negotiate a change in the relationship that accommodates a balance of autonomy and ongoing connection, with the emphasis on each depending in part on the family’s ethnic background.

\* See **Principles and Context**, pages 29–46, for details and references.

## The Five Basics of Parenting Adolescents\*

### I. Love and Connect

Teens need parents to develop and maintain a relationship with them that offers support and acceptance, while accommodating and affirming the teen's increasing maturity.

Strategies for Parents	
<b>Watch for moments</b>	when you feel and can express genuine affection, respect, and appreciation for your teen.
<b>Acknowledge the good times</b>	made possible by your teen's personality and growth.
<b>Expect increased criticism</b>	and debate, and strengthen your skills for discussing ideas and disagreements in ways that respect both your teen's opinions and your own.
<b>Spend time just listening</b>	to your teen's thoughts and feelings about her or his fears, concerns, interests, ideas, perspectives, activities, jobs, schoolwork, and relationships.
<b>Treat each teen as a unique individual</b>	distinct from siblings, stereotypes, his or her past, or your own past.
<b>Appreciate and acknowledge</b>	each teen's new areas of interest, skills, strengths, and accomplishments, as well as the positive aspects of adolescence generally, such as its passion, vitality, humor, and deepening intellectual thought.
<b>Provide meaningful roles</b>	for your teen in the family, ones that are genuinely useful and important to the family's well-being.
<b>Spend time together</b>	one on one and as a family, continuing some familiar family routines, while also taking advantage of ways in which new activities, such as community volunteering, can offer new ways to connect.

**Key Message for Parents:**  
Most things about their world are changing. Don't let your love be one of them.

\* See *The Five Basics of Parenting Adolescents*, pages 47–64, for details and references.

## 2. Monitor and Observe

Teens need parents to be aware of—and let teens know they are aware of—their activities, including school performance, work experiences, after-school activities, peer relationships, adult relationships, and recreation, through a process that increasingly involves less direct supervision and more communication, observation, and networking with other adults.

Strategies for Parents	
<b>Keep track of your teen's whereabouts</b>	and activities, directly or indirectly, by listening, observing, and networking with others who come into contact with your teen.
<b>Keep in touch with other adults</b>	who are willing and able to let you know of positive or negative trends in your teen's behavior, such as neighbors, family, religious and community leaders, shopkeepers, teachers, and other parents.
<b>Involve yourself in school events</b>	such as parent-teacher conferences, back-to-school nights, and special needs planning meetings.
<b>Stay informed about your teen's progress</b>	in school and employment, as well as the level and nature of outside activities; get to know your teen's friends and acquaintances.
<b>Learn and watch for warning signs</b>	of poor physical or mental health, as well as signs of abuse or neglect, including lack of motivation, weight loss, problems with eating or sleeping, a drop in school performance and/or skipping school, drug use, withdrawal from friends and activities, promiscuity, running away, unexplained injury, serious and persistent conflict between parent and teen, or high levels of anxiety or guilt.
<b>Seek guidance if you have concerns</b>	about these warning signs or any other aspect of your teen's health or behavior, consulting with teachers, counselors, religious leaders, physicians, parenting educators, family and tribal elders, and others.
<b>Monitor your teen's experiences</b>	in settings and relationships inside and outside the home that hold the potential for physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, including relationships involving parental figures, siblings, extended family, caregivers, peers, partners, employers, teachers, counselors, and activity leaders.
<b>Evaluate the level of challenge</b>	of proposed teen activities, such as social events, media exposure, and jobs, matching the challenges to your teen's ability to handle them.
<b>Key Message for Parents:</b> Monitor your teen's activities. You still can, and it still counts.	

### 3. Guide and Limit

Teens need parents to uphold a clear but evolving set of boundaries, maintaining important family rules and values, but also encouraging increased competence and maturity.

Strategies for Parents	
<b>Maintain family rules</b>	or “house rules,” upholding some non-negotiable rules around issues like safety and central family values, while negotiating other rules around issues like household tasks and schedules.
<b>Communicate expectations</b>	that are high, but realistic.
<b>Choose battles</b>	and ignore smaller issues in favor of more important ones, such as drugs, school performance, and sexually responsible behavior.
<b>Use discipline as a tool</b>	for teaching, not for venting or taking revenge.
<b>Restrict punishment</b>	to forms that do not cause physical or emotional injury.
<b>Renegotiate responsibilities and privileges</b>	in response to your teen’s changing abilities, turning over some areas to the teen with appropriate monitoring.

**Key Message for Parents:**  
Loosen up, but don’t let go.

## 4. Model and Consult

Teens need parents to provide ongoing information and support around decision making, values, skills, goals, and interpreting and navigating the larger world, teaching by example and ongoing dialogue.

Strategies for Parents	
<b>Set a good example</b>	around risk taking, health habits, and emotional control.
<b>Express personal positions</b>	about social, political, moral, and spiritual issues, including issues of ethnicity and gender.
<b>Model the kind of adult relationships</b>	that you would like your teen to have.
<b>Answer teens' questions</b>	in ways that are truthful, while taking into account their level of maturity.
<b>Maintain or establish traditions</b>	including family, cultural, and/or religious rituals.
<b>Support teens' education</b>	and vocational training, including through participation in household tasks, outside activities, and employment that develop their skills, interests, and sense of value to the family and community.
<b>Help teens get information</b>	about future options and strategies for education, employment, and lifestyle choices.
<b>Give teens opportunities</b>	to practice reasoning and decision making by asking questions that encourage them to think logically and consider consequences, while providing safe opportunities to try out their own ideas and learn from their mistakes.
<b>Key Message for Parents:</b>	
The teen years: Parents still matter; teens still care.	

# 5. Provide and Advocate

Teens need parents to make available not only adequate nutrition, clothing, shelter, and health care, but also a supportive home environment and a network of caring adults.

Strategies for Parents	
<b>Network within the community</b>	as well as within schools, family, religious organizations, and social services to identify resources that can provide positive adult and peer relationships, guidance, training, and activities for your teen.
<b>Make informed decisions</b>	among available options for schools and educational programs, taking into account such issues as safety, social climate, approach to diversity, community cohesion, opportunities for peer relationships and mentoring, and the match between school practices and your teen’s learning style and needs.
<b>Make similarly informed decisions</b>	among available options for neighborhoods, community involvement, and youth programs.
<b>Arrange or advocate for preventive health care</b>	and treatment, including care for mental illness.
<b>Identify people and programs to support and inform you</b>	in handling parental responsibilities and in understanding the societal and personal challenges in raising teens.
<b>Key Message for Parents:</b> You can’t control their world, but you can add to and subtract from it.	

## Recommendations for Future Work

**Conduct media initiatives to disseminate widely the bottom-line messages on parenting adolescents about which there is wide-spread research agreement.**

This report is a source of ideas for creating positive, research-based messages about parenting teens within informational, advertising, and entertainment media. Next steps include supporting the media in adapting and expanding on the ideas in this report and others like it. Particularly needed are well-designed, ongoing, multifaceted, collaborative campaigns that tap a variety of media to convey positive information about raising adolescents to a broad diversity of parents and others in parenting roles.

**Build further consensus among researchers and other leaders in the field regarding what is known about parenting and adolescence.**

There is much more common ground to be explored within the research on parenting adolescents. Options include delving deeper into specific subtopics such as:

- Further strategies for common parenting dilemmas
- Brain development in adolescence
- Abuse of adolescents
- Parenting of troubled adolescents
- Preparing for adolescence
- Portrayal of parent-teen relationships in the news and entertainment media

Each of these topics is ripe for a project to bring together leaders, identify points of agreement, and disseminate major findings to the media, professionals, policy makers, and parents.

**Make available to the media and parents more “parent-friendly” versions of existing information on adolescent development and its implications for parenting.**

In particular, parents need (1) a “dictionary” that translates teen behaviors into developmental terms, (2) “ages and stages” guides to the major developmental milestones of adolescence, comparable to the information available to parents of young children, and (3) more information about the implications of cultural diversity for raising adolescents.

**Strengthen informational resources—such as clearinghouses, family support centers, schools, special initiatives, and parenting programs—that will allow parents, the media, practitioners, advocates, religious leaders, policy makers, and others better access to current knowledge on parenting adolescents.**

As we gather existing research findings and generate new knowledge on parenting adolescents, a stronger infrastructure is needed for disseminating that information to parents and professionals. Critical steps include creating a national clearinghouse of parenting information, as well as strengthening and expanding existing local resources.

**We have an opportunity to revolutionize the way in which we, as a society, think about parenting, in particular the parenting of adolescents.**

We can raise awareness about the importance of parenting during adolescence, we can shift negative perceptions about parenting and adolescence, and we can provide tools for raising healthy teenagers. The power to do so is well within our grasp, and the effects will reverberate throughout our schools, our courts, our workplaces, our neighborhoods, and our lives.

This report is an invitation to the media, researchers, practitioners, community leaders, parents, and policy makers to tap its findings, to build on its ideas, and to collaborate with its efforts. We look forward to working with you.





# Report

# Background

As a society, we both fear adolescents and fear for them. We fear their rashness, their rudeness, and their rawness; and we fear for their safety, their future, and their very lives.

## The Need

Research gives us no reason to fear adolescents—in fact, it shows our negative images of teens to be largely stereotypical and unfair—but it gives us many reasons to fear for them.

In anticipation of the increasingly complex demands of adult living in the United States, American teens are facing higher and higher expectations for intellectual, social, and emotional competence. Yet, the systems that could and should support them are under siege: Parents and other adults are working longer hours in settings where they are unavailable to their children; schools are often structured in ways that do not meet students' learning needs; media are sending degrading messages about teens in general and young people of color in particular; and many communities are struggling with poverty or setting priorities that shortchange the young.<sup>[1]</sup>

Symptomatic of the stresses, many of the measures of physical and emotional well-being for teens are alarming. The suicide rate for youths 15 to 19 doubled between 1970 and 1990; up to ten percent of today's teens are estimated to attempt suicide each year, with at least twice as many seriously considering it; rates among Native American and Hispanic teens are higher than those of European Americans, and are climbing among African Americans.<sup>[2]</sup> Close to a third of high-school seniors are binge drinking.<sup>[3]</sup> Over 100,000 youth each year are homeless or runaways without a secure place to stay.<sup>[4]</sup> Fully five percent of teens worry about the source of their next meal.<sup>[5]</sup> Close to half of teens report that they do not feel safe from violence in some aspect of their home, school, or community life.<sup>[6]</sup> Most do not feel that they are valued by people in their community or that they have caring adults and role models around them.<sup>[7]</sup>

Also, by almost all measures, African American, Hispanic, and Native American youth endure the hardship of fewer resources, higher risks, and greater stress than do their European American counterparts.<sup>[8]</sup> Summarizing the grim statistics, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development concluded in 1995 that fully half of American adolescents were at moderate or high risk of damaging their life chances by multiple high-risk behaviors and school failure.<sup>[9]</sup>

On the other hand, there is clear evidence that, when we put our minds to it, teens and adults together can turn around these trends; and the strengths and talents of teens give us every incentive to do so. Because it brings profound change, adolescence is a time not only of risk, but also

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[1] Stepp 2000; Garbarino 1999; Hine 1999; McAdoo 1999b; Gibbs et al. 1998; Hersch 1998; Hewlett and West 1998; Côté and Allahaar 1996; Weissbourd 1996; Strasburger 1995; Panel on High-Risk Youth 1993; Elkind 1984. • [2] Annie E. Casey Foundation 2000; Council of Economic Advisors 2000; Poussaint and Alexander 2000; Ozer et al. 1998; Clarke 1997; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; National Coalition 1994. • [3] Council of Economic Advisors 2000; Children's Defense Fund 2000; Snyder and Sickmund 1999. • [4] Snyder and Sickmund 1999. • [5] Council of Economic Advisors 2000; Snyder and Sickmund 1999. • [6] Children's Defense Fund 2000; Schoen et al. 1998; Louis Harris 1995. • [7] Scales in press. • [8] Children's Defense Fund 2000; Council of Economic Advisors 2000; Poussaint and Alexander 2000; McAdoo 1999b; Gibbs et al. 1998; Ozer et al. 1998; Resnick et al. 1997; National Coalition 1994. • [9] Carnegie Council 1995.

of opportunity. Its very plasticity offers us ways to mend the past as individuals, as families, and as a society.<sup>[10]</sup>

Given a chance, many teens excel in sports, school, community service, the arts, and other areas, contributing substantially to the American economy, social fabric, and culture.<sup>[11]</sup> About half of American teens volunteer for a community organization, participate in after-school activities besides sports, and attend religious services.<sup>[12]</sup> Some of the most characteristic traits of adolescents are also in our favor, such as their curiosity, courage, passion, skepticism, adventurousness, and fresh perspective.<sup>[13]</sup> Also hopeful are examples of communities that are mobilizing on behalf of teens.<sup>[14]</sup>

Building on these assets, major societal initiatives have made significant inroads into some of the toughest problems for American adolescents.<sup>[15]</sup> African Americans now complete high school at rates comparable to European Americans, although rates for Hispanic and Native American youngsters, among others, still lag substantially behind.<sup>[16]</sup> After years of disheartening increases, teen birth and pregnancy rates have been declining, although they are still high.<sup>[17]</sup>

One of the most effective ways to turn the tide is to support the adults playing significant roles in the lives of adolescents, including, notably, their parents. Although it is true that peers, schools, communities, and other factors take on added significance as children become teenagers, research consistently shows that parents remain a powerful influence in fostering healthy teen development and preventing negative outcomes.<sup>[18]</sup> Teens themselves acknowledge the influence of parents, reporting in studies that their parents remain critically important as guides, mentors, sounding boards, and advocates.<sup>[19]</sup>

Curiously, however, relatively little attention has been given to supporting the critical role that parents play in the lives of adolescents. Frustrated by appalling reports of teen violence and self-destruction, the media and the public sometimes gravitate to simplistic explanations that blame parents and look to them to remedy teen problems singlehandedly.<sup>[20]</sup> However, more realistic assessments of what parents can do—and allocation of the resources they need to do so—are few and far between. Social services, media information, and policy initiatives for parents of teenagers are all in short supply.<sup>[21]</sup> Anecdotally, parents of adolescents frequently express the need for more and better information and support, as well as frustration that it is not more readily available or accessible.<sup>[22]</sup>

[10] Stepp 2000; Benson et al. 1999; Blos 1962. • [11] Bales 2000; Council of Economic Advisors 2000; Fitzgerald 2000; Benson et al. 1999; Youniss and Yates 1997. • [12] Bostrom 2000b; Youniss and Yates 1997. • [13] Elkind 1993. • [14] Youth Development 2000; Zeldin, Camino, and Wheeler 2000; Benson et al. 1998; Pittman and Fleming 1991. • [15] Scales in press; Benson et al. 1999; Resnick et al. 1997. • [16] Annie E. Casey Foundation 2000; Council of Economic Advisors 2000; Clarke 1997. • [17] Council of Economic Advisors 2000; Children's Defense Fund 2000. • [18] Borkowski, Ramey, and Bristol-Power in press; Council of Economic Advisors 2000; Dishion, McCord, and Poulin 1999; Furstenberg et al. 1999; Holden 1997; Resnick et al. 1997; Steinberg 1996; Carnegie Council 1995; Hauser 1991; Feldman and Elliott 1990; Small 1990; Office of National Drug Control Policy n.d. • [19] Bostrom 2000b; Galinsky 1999; Garbarino 1999; Osherson 1999; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; Steinberg 1996; Louis Harris 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Children Now 1994; Smetana 1994; Smetana and Asquith 1994; Families and Work Institute 1993; Takanishi 1993; National Commission on Children 1991; Pogrebin 1983. • [20] Bostrom 2000a,b; Belkin 1999; Duffett, Johnson, and Farkas 1999; Goodman 1999; Leonard 1999; Meredith 1999; Hewlett and West 1998. • [21] Simpson 1997; Carnegie Council 1995; Small and Eastman 1991; Small 1990. • [22] Kipke 1999b; Ponton 1997; Comer and Poussaint 1992; Small 1990; Powell 1986.

*Research consistently shows that parents remain a powerful influence in fostering healthy teen development and preventing negative outcomes.*

This is not to say that excellent resources are not available in the media for parents of adolescents. Most media resources, however, reach a largely middle-class and female audience, and only a relatively small proportion of this group. These resources include the following:

- A number of **parenting books** offer parents insightful analyses of research on adolescence, such as *Our Last Best Shot* by Laura Sessions Stepp (2000), *You and Your Adolescent: A Parent's Guide for Ages 10–20* by Laurence Steinberg and Ann Levine (1997), and *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* by Beverly Daniel Tatum (1997), as well as offering the perspective of clinical experience, such as Anthony Wolf's *Get Out of My Life But First Could You Drive Me and Cheryl to the Mall?* (1991) and James Comer and Alvin Poussaint's *Raising Black Children* (1992).
- Some of the major **women's magazines**, such as *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Family Circle*, and **parenting magazines**, such as *Working Mother* and *Mothering*, regularly carry columns and/or frequently run feature articles on teen issues. This is also true of some of the controlled circulation parenting papers, such as *The Boston Parents' Paper*.
- **Radio and television news**, both commercial and public, local and national, frequently includes features about issues relevant to raising teens.<sup>[23]</sup>
- Experiments are under way to include more parenting content in **cable and related media**, such as Fox Family Channel's new digital cable/satellite networks, boyzChannel and girlzChannel, which carry daily programming for parents of children through early teens.
- Many major **parenting education curricula** have special programs on the parenting of teens, such as *STEP/Teen* <sup>[24]</sup> and the *Nurturing Program for Parents and Adolescents*.<sup>[25]</sup> The organization ParentLink, based at the University of Missouri-Columbia, has prepared a guide for parents and practitioners that lists and evaluates educational resources for parents of adolescents, including books, pamphlets, videos, curricula, and web sites.<sup>[26]</sup>
- A number of nonprofit and commercial **web sites** offer information on issues of adolescent health and parenting, such as the National Parent Information Network web site ([www.npin.org](http://www.npin.org)) and the American Medical Association's Adolescent Health On-Line ([www.ama-assn.org/adolhlth](http://www.ama-assn.org/adolhlth)).
- Some **public service campaigns** include parents of teenagers as a key target audience, such as the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy ([www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org)) and the Partnership for a Drug-Free America ([www.drugfreeamerica.org](http://www.drugfreeamerica.org)).

[23] Riegler 1999. • [24] Dinkmeyer et al. 1998. • [25] Bavolek 1988a,b,c,d. • [26] Sheriff 1999.

In addition, recent years have seen the growth of a stronger infrastructure that can provide research information on aspects of adolescent development. The Washington-based Forum on Adolescence was created in 1996 by the National Academy of Sciences and is chaired by David Hamburg, former head of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, to continue the work of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, whose concluding report was issued in 1995.<sup>[27]</sup> Operating under the auspices of the Board on Children, Youth, and Families of the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council, the Forum has identified a number of areas for research and policy analysis that are relevant to the parenting of adolescents.<sup>[28]</sup> A number of the research networks conducted under the auspices of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation have addressed issues related to adolescent development, such as the Network on Successful Pathways through Middle Childhood, the Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice, the Network on Transitions to Adulthood, the Network on Successful Midlife Development, and the now concluded Network on Successful Adolescent Development among Youth in High-Risk Settings.<sup>[29]</sup> The Minneapolis-based Search Institute, created in 1958, specializes in gathering, analyzing, and disseminating research on children, teenagers, and issues related to strengthening families and communities.<sup>[30]</sup> The Philadelphia-based organization Public/Private Ventures seeks to improve social policies and programs, with a special emphasis on youth.<sup>[31]</sup>

Resources are also available to encourage and support media professionals in covering issues of youth and family, such as the Casey Journalism Center for Children and Families in College Park, Maryland, and the Institute for Mental Health Initiatives in Washington, D.C.<sup>[32]</sup>

Equally encouraging is the fact that these developments are occurring against a backdrop of increased political and professional interest in parenting in general and the parenting of teenagers in particular. On the political front, for example, the White House convened a conference on May 2, 2000, entitled “Teenagers: Raising Responsible and Resourceful Youth,” bringing together researchers, advocates, teens, parents, and others, and summarizing recent developments in research and practice. On the professional front, a new peer-reviewed journal is scheduled to begin publication in 2001 called *Parenting: Science and Practice*.

Also, several initiatives are under way to develop national professional and advocacy organizations related to parenting, including: **(a)** the New York-based National Parenting Association, founded by Sylvia Ann Hewlett to provide a “think tank” on issues of parenting and family policy; under its new president Ruth Wooden, former head of the Advertising Council, the emphasis is on developing initiatives to engage in research

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[27] Carnegie Council 1995. • [28] See, for example, Forum on Adolescence 2000; Fischhoff, Crowell, and Kipke 1999; Kipke 1999a,b. • [29] See the Program on Human and Community Development description within the Foundation’s web site, [www.macfound.org/research/hcd/index.htm](http://www.macfound.org/research/hcd/index.htm). • [30] See, for example, Benson et al. 1999; Scales and Leffert 1999. • [31] See, for example, Youth Development 2000; Gambone and Arbreton 1997. • [32] For further examples, see Hass 1998; National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth 1997.

and communications strategies to change public opinion regarding the importance of parenting; **(b)** the Washington-based Parenting Coalition International, founded by Belinda Rollins in 1996, to promote awareness and resources for parenting; **(c)** an initiative, currently spearheaded by the Chicago-based organization Family Support America, to create a national membership organization for parents; and **(d)** the Pittsburgh-based National Parenting Education Network, founded in 1996 to advance the field of parenting education.

In addition, established professional organizations are giving more attention to outreach to parents of teens. For example, the American Medical Association has developed special initiatives to disseminate the results of research regarding the key role of parents and others in healthy adolescent development.<sup>[33]</sup> The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry have created resources specifically targeting parents of adolescents.<sup>[34]</sup> The Healthy Adolescents Project of the American Psychological Association is engaged in an initiative, in partnership with other professional organizations, to produce materials on normal adolescent development for practitioners who work with parents.<sup>[35]</sup>

**Although the growth in media resources, in research to fill the media pipeline, and in organizations to provide an infrastructure is encouraging, several problems remain.**

**First**, while there are a number of media resources for parents of teens, their numbers lag way behind those for parents of younger children, contributing to a perception that there is little available, it is hard to find, and it is not important to do so. According to R. R. Bowker, for example, while books on parenting of teens number in the dozens, books on parenting in general number in the thousands; only about two dozen of the close to 1,000 videos on parenting focus on parenting of teens.<sup>[36]</sup>

**Second**, efforts to close the gap in media resources and social services for parents of teens are hampered by cultural images of parents as ineffectual and parent-teen relationships as inevitably troubled and stormy.<sup>[37]</sup> Parents whose children are teenagers—or are about to become teenagers—share these pessimistic views, expressing hopelessness, helplessness, anxiety, frustration, and fear for their children.<sup>[38]</sup> Although major problems are far from inevitable (see “Principles and Context” chapter to follow), strategies for avoiding them are complex, further discouraging the media from taking the time and the risks involved in offering information and advice.<sup>[39]</sup>

**Third**, in a one-two punch, at the same time culture and media are conveying negative images of parent-teen relationships, they are also

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[33] See, for example, Blum and Rinehart n.d.; Resnick et al. 1997. • [34] See, for example, Pruitt 1999; American Academy of Pediatrics 1991. • [35] Lipton 2000. • [36] Entin 1999. • [37] Arnett 1999; Christenson and Roberts 1998; Hewlett and West 1998; Schulenberg et al. 1997; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Strasburger 1995. • [38] Duffett, Johnson, and Farkas 1999; Garbarino 1999; Hersch 1998; Maggs, Schulenberg, and Hurrelmann 1997. • [39] Stepp 1997.

conveying powerful negative images of teens themselves, further undermining parents' morale and reducing media incentives to feature teen information. Teens are typically portrayed in the news and entertainment media as unattractive, if not frightening—ugly, hostile, violent, delinquent, alienated from parents and families, and resistant to any assistance.<sup>[40]</sup> In print and television news coverage, for example, content analyses find that teenagers are depicted as perpetrators or victims of crime and violence, problem-ridden, and disruptive, even more so for young people of color.<sup>[41]</sup> Practical information for parents in news stories has been low and declining.<sup>[42]</sup> In entertainment programming on television, teen characters are typically portrayed as engaged in peer relationship problems and disconnected from family and community; when it comes to solving problems, parents are ineffectual, absent, or unavailable, if not making matters worse.<sup>[43]</sup> In surveys, teenagers themselves have noted and lamented these negative images, as have adults, particularly those involved with teens.<sup>[44]</sup>

Interacting with these media images, public attitudes toward teens are predominantly negative; when asked what comes to mind when they think of today's teenagers, two-thirds or more of Americans respond with adjectives such as “rude,” “irresponsible,” “wild,” “selfish,” “reckless,” and “materialistic.”<sup>[45]</sup> Even parents share these views, almost three-quarters responding with negative adjectives.<sup>[46]</sup> Recent surveys of adults also document broad public concern about moral decline in the young, although surveys of teens indicate that most actually hold traditional American values around honesty, hard work, and volunteerism.<sup>[47]</sup>

**Fourth**, compounding these problems is unrelenting confusion and controversy among parenting experts featured in the media.<sup>[48]</sup> Responding to marketing assumptions and pressures, the media tend to polarize parenting advice, pitting one expert against another.<sup>[49]</sup> Furthermore, authors of parenting books and articles often position themselves as offering, for the first time, the complete and correct answers, in contrast to their competitors. Some authors argue that the experts are all wrong in that parents have little influence,<sup>[50]</sup> while others argue that parents have influence but that the experts are wrong in the advice they give.<sup>[51]</sup> As *Washington Post* reporter Laura Sessions Stepp observed while in the process of researching her book, *Our Last Best Shot*, parents are left unable to find the information they need or to evaluate its significance when they do.<sup>[52]</sup>

In short, although parents are in a position to influence profoundly the well-being of adolescents, their ability to do so is handicapped at once by too little helpful information and by too much misleading information. There exists, therefore, a significant opportunity to improve outcomes for adolescents by providing more and better resources within the media for parents of teens, as well as those who support the parents of teens.

*In a one-two punch, at the same time culture and media are conveying negative images of parent-teen relationships, they are also conveying powerful negative images of teens themselves.*

[40] Scales in press; Bales 2000; Christenson and Roberts 1998; Côté and Allahar 1996. • [41] Amundson, Lichter, and Lichter 2000; Gibbs 1998b; Dorfman et al. 1997; Kunkel 1996; Woodruff, Dorfman, and Winett 1995. • [42] Kunkel, Rollin, and Biely 1999. • [43] Heintz-Knowles 2000. • [44] Aubrun and Grady 2000a; Scales, Lucero, and Halvorson 1998; Children Now 1994. • [45] Scales in press; Bostrom 2000b; Duffett, Johnson, and Farkas 1999; Farkas and Johnson 1997. • [46] Duffett, Johnson, and Farkas 1999. • [47] Bostrom 2000b; National Issues Forums Institute 2000. • [48] Pitzer 1999; Simpson 1997; Small and Eastman 1991. • [49] Turow 1999; Carnegie Council 1995. • [50] Harris 1998. • [51] Cassidy 1998; Ehrensaft 1997. • [52] Stepp 2000; 1997.

*Particularly in the last two decades, a significant body of research, unprecedented both in quantity and quality, has begun to accumulate on the role of parents and families in adolescence.*

## The Harvard Project on the Parenting of Adolescents

In the past few years, the Harvard Center for Health Communication has undertaken to address the need for more and better information about the parenting of adolescents, in particular by launching a special initiative called the Harvard Project on the Parenting of Adolescents, with funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. In doing so, the Project was guided by an earlier report published by the Center and funded by the MacArthur Foundation, entitled *The Role of the Mass Media in Parenting Education*, which underscored the potentially powerful role of the media in supporting and informing parents, the confusion and controversy that surrounds its role, and the particular gap in information and support for parents of adolescents.<sup>[53]</sup>

Because of the conflicting views in media information about the parenting of adolescents, the Project decided to take the unusual step of placing particular emphasis on identifying the common ground among the broad diversity of disciplinary and ethnic approaches to the parenting of teens. That is, it sought to bring to the attention of media, parents, and others well-established research findings.

**Why focus on research?** There is, after all, a wealth of custom and ideas that has been passed down through the generations from elders, family members, religious and medical leaders, educators, clinicians, mass media celebrities, and others. Can scientific research really make a significant addition? This Project took the position that there are many excellent sources of ideas for parents of adolescents, but that research as a source has been underrecognized and underutilized.

Particularly in the last two decades, a significant body of research, unprecedented both in quantity and in quality of methodology and analysis, has begun to accumulate on the role of parents and families in adolescence. This growing body of knowledge is potentially a very valuable asset for parents as they consider and weigh their options. For one thing, since much of the research is relatively recent, it addresses some of the questions that are particularly relevant to parents today, which may be different from those addressed by some traditional sources. For another, although research is hardly without societal assumptions and values, it can, and does, highlight the differences between approaches that assume the values in mainstream culture and those that allow for differences within and among ethnic groups. Also, it can, and does, counter some of the anxiety-provoking and pessimistic messages about adolescence and parenting within the popular culture.

Are there really solid findings amid the controversy and uncertainty that surround research and practice about parenting adolescents? The Project found that there were significant areas of agreement among

[53] Simpson 1997. Copies of the 1997 report are available from the Harvard Center for Health Communication; see inside front cover of this report.

experts on the parenting of adolescents, in spite of the broad diversity of cultures represented in the United States, the myriad individual differences in parents and children, the usual shortcomings of social science research, and the relatively short period of time in which parenting and adolescence have been the subject of psychological research and practice.<sup>[54]</sup>

**The purpose of this report, then, is to provide a summary of these areas of widespread agreement within research on parenting and adolescence.**

Scanning over 300 reviews of research and practice, the Project distilled several kinds of information:

- An outline of the central ways in which parents influence healthy adolescent development. The results are summarized in the chapter called “The Five Basics of Parenting Adolescents,” preceded by a chapter of “Principles and Context” that outlines a dozen principles common to the Five Basics.
- Options of research-based strategies that parents can consider in carrying out each of the Five Basics of the parenting role. The results are listed as Strategies for Parents at the end of each of the Five Basics.
- Bottom-line messages for parents that emerge from these findings. Each of the Five Basics ends with a Key Message for Parents.
- An outline of the critical developmental tasks that teenagers need to undertake in order to make a successful transition to adulthood. The results are organized as the Ten Tasks of Adolescence, discussed in the chapter on “Principles and Context.”

The overall result is a kind of job description for parents of adolescents. Like all job descriptions, it does not teach the skills for accomplishing the tasks within it, but rather outlines the overall task at hand, to which each individual brings different strengths, styles, interests, values, and understanding.

*There are many areas of agreement among experts on the parenting of adolescents, in spite of the broad diversity of cultures represented in the United States and the myriad individual differences in parents and children.*

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[54] Collins et al. 2000; Steinberg 2000.

## Methods, Definitions, and Assumptions

### How did the Project identify the points about which there was widespread agreement in research and practice?

**First**, the Project gathered major summaries of research and clinical observations regarding the parenting of adolescents, casting a broad net through literature searches and consultation with leading researchers. Ultimately, hundreds of articles, reports, and books were consulted, as well as materials available from the Internet and from communications with experts in the field.

No attempt was made to identify all the research and clinical, practical, and theoretical work that fell within this scope; rather, the Project sought to draw from recent reviews that have already screened and summarized existing research and practice in areas relevant to the parenting of adolescents. Special analysis and outreach were implemented to assure that the materials also represented a broad diversity of disciplinary, ethnic, and philosophical perspectives.

**Second**, the research team scanned and analyzed the materials, identifying the common themes and conclusions that spanned a variety of sources and perspectives. These themes were then organized into a structural framework that was designed to reflect accurately, but also clearly and cogently, the common ground within the knowledge base.

**Third**, reflecting on all the observations made in producing these findings, the Project reached a number of conclusions about the most urgent steps that need to be taken, building on the experience and momentum of this Project and others like it, on behalf of adolescents, parents, and families. These recommendations are outlined in the final section of the report.

**Finally**, the report was reviewed in draft form by over 20 leaders representing a diversity of disciplinary, vocational, geographical, and racial and ethnic perspectives. They include academic theoreticians and researchers in such fields as child and adolescent development, psychology, education, medicine, and family studies; and practitioners in such areas as mental health, journalism, health care, social services, parenting education, child advocacy, and health promotion. The list of reviewers is given in the “Acknowledgments” at the end of this report. Of utmost importance, given the Project’s goal of highlighting the common ground in parenting research and experience, the feedback from reviewers was carefully evaluated and incorporated, and no point was included in the final report that had attracted significant disagreement among reviewers.

In emphasizing the identification of areas of common ground within research on parenting, the Project was encouraged and guided by several previous initiatives. In the course of preparing its earlier report, *The Role of*

*the Mass Media in Parenting Education*, the Center for Health Communication had uncovered significant agreement among a number of leading experts that this kind of consensus building with respect to parenting issues was both doable and desirable.<sup>[55]</sup> Also, focusing on parenting of young children, the Families and Work Institute had analyzed a large body of research and expertise in putting together messages for parents as part of the widely known “I Am Your Child” Campaign ([www.iamyourchild.org](http://www.iamyourchild.org)). In the early 1990s, four leaders within the U.S. Department of Agriculture Extension System delineated core parenting skills, creating the National Extension Parent Education Model, to provide a basis for planning parenting education programs within the Extension system.<sup>[56]</sup> Related efforts have also been made to articulate basic principles of youth development, as well as to establish standards and best practices for parenting education and related fields of family health care, family support, and family life education.<sup>[57]</sup> Other initiatives include several encyclopedic collections of information on adolescence and on parenting.<sup>[58]</sup>

The Project on the Parenting of Adolescents has sought to identify, coordinate with, and extend these initiatives, highlighting specifically the parenting of adolescents and enhancing the availability of practical information, especially via the media. Our hope is that this initiative will help to give the knowledge base a much-needed accessibility and applicability among parents of adolescents, as well as those who work with and for these parents, allowing the knowledge to lend support to one of the most critical areas of family life.

### In laying out a set of principles for the parenting of adolescents, the Project has made several important assumptions about both parenting and adolescence.

**First, “parents” were defined broadly**, to encompass all those adults with responsibility for raising children, whatever their biological relationship to the child, including immediate and extended family members or kin, step-parents, guardians, foster parents, and tribe and clan members.<sup>[59]</sup> Where the term “parents” appears in this paper, it is shorthand for all these groups and for all others in parenting roles.

**Second, “adolescence” was also defined broadly**, in order to acknowledge that this is indeed one of the many issues on which there is no consensus. Efforts to identify and define adolescence as a special stage of development in American society date to the late nineteenth century and have led to a wide range of definitions.<sup>[60]</sup> In popular literature, it is common to equate adolescence with the “teen” years from 13 to 19, a concept also used in some scholarly work, including demographic studies that need easily identified markers.<sup>[61]</sup> In both popular and scholarly literature, it is also not uncommon for the beginning of adolescence to be defined by

[55] Simpson 1997; see also Steinberg 2000. • [56] Smith et al. 1994. • [57] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; Cooke et al. 1996; Family Resource Coalition 1996; Bredehoft and Cassidy 1995; Dunst 1995. • [58] See, for example, Bornstein in press; Lerner and Lerner in press; Lerner 1999; Smith 1999; Bornstein 1995a; Lerner, Petersen, and Brooks-Gunn 1991. • [59] See, for example, Stepp 2000; Carter 1996. • [60] Kimmel and Weiner 1985; Elder 1975; Blos 1962. • [61] Phelan 1998; Elliott and Feldman 1990; Csikszentmihalyi and Larson 1984.

*There is a striking similarity among broad goals for children across research areas and ethnic groups within the United States.*

biological milestones, such as the beginning of puberty; while the ending of adolescence is more often defined by social or psychological milestones, such as the successful adaptation to puberty or the achievement of financial independence.<sup>[62]</sup> To some extent, adolescence is also being defined by patterns of schooling in the United States, in which adolescence starts at middle school (now often fifth or sixth grade) and ends perhaps upon the completion of high school.<sup>[63]</sup> Some cultures have initiation rites to mark the beginning of adolescence or of adulthood, and the relative absence of positive rituals and consistent milestones in mainstream American society has been noted.<sup>[64]</sup> Those taking a legal perspective often define the end of adolescence around important legal changes of status, such as eligibility for public schooling.<sup>[65]</sup>

“Early adolescence” is often distinguished from “middle adolescence” or “adolescence proper,” which is in turn distinguished from “late adolescence,” in acknowledgment of not only the profound developmental differences between a 10- and a 20-year-old, but also the major contrasts in social and legal contexts.<sup>[66]</sup> A number of theories include the concept of “young adulthood” or “emerging adulthood,” in part to address the expanding number of years that many American youngsters remain in transition to fully mature adult personalities and roles.<sup>[67]</sup>

This Project has included research on adolescence that uses either biological or social definitions, notably puberty or middle school as a starting point and graduation from high school and other markers as an ending point. The Project takes the view that the completion of the transition to full adult responsibilities in many ethnic groups and many circumstances involves a period that is generally regarded as occurring after adolescence.<sup>[68]</sup>

**Third, the issue of societal goals for adolescence was addressed.**

Implicit in most research on adolescent development and parenting are certain goals for adolescence, goals that underlie research measures of “healthy development” and “positive outcomes.” The Project sought out research whose implicit or explicit goals were consistent with the goals for adolescence in the United States that cross ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious groups. Again looking for areas of widespread agreement, the Project noted a striking similarity among broad goals for children across research areas and ethnic groups within the United States. These goals almost invariably include survival, physical and mental health, and economic self-sufficiency, and generally also include social connection and responsibility of some kind, particularly around citizenship and/or family relationships.<sup>[69]</sup> The Project took the view, expressed by scholars previously, that some goals can be thought of as nearly universal, while other goals, as well as strategies, tend to be cultural and behaviors to be individual.<sup>[70]</sup>

[62] Elliott and Feldman 1990; Kimmel and Weiner 1985; Blos 1962. • [63] Elder 1975. • [64] Crockett 1997; Mahdi, Christopher, and Meade 1996. • [65] Côté and Allahar 1996; Campion 1995. • [66] Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Kagan 1972; Blos 1962. • [67] Arnett 2000; Jessor, Donovan, and Costa 1991; White, Speisman, and Costos 1983; Blos 1962. • [68] Arnett 2000; Jessor, Donovan, and Costa 1991; White, Speisman, and Costos 1983. • [69] Furstenberg et al. 1999; LeVine 1997; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; Small and Eastman 1991. • [70] Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; LeVine 1988.

This report thus assumes that there is no one “right” way to raise children. Our common expectations create similarities in some goals and strategies, while our diverse backgrounds and circumstances create differences in other goals and strategies. This report, in short, attests to both the common ground that arises from honoring and understanding our shared experience and the differences that emerge from honoring and understanding parenting across cultures, circumstances, and individual styles.

With regard to language, especially in discussing ethnic groups, the Project was mindful of the importance of using terms that are respectful and sensitive to group preferences. In choosing to use the terms European Americans, African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Pacific Americans, Hispanics, and others, the report has again attempted to assess current consensus within these groups on desirable terminology, while appreciating the fact that opinions vary widely within groups and across time on this very complex and difficult matter and that no choices are ideal.<sup>[71]</sup>

With regard to the scope of the Project, research and analysis were confined to findings about parenting of adolescents within the United States, with an acknowledgment that it will be important to extend such an analysis to the larger human community of which the United States is a part. Also, the subject of this study was the parenting of adolescents, not parenting by adolescents, with, again, an acknowledgment of the critical importance of the issue of teen parenting. Furthermore, although broadly speaking this report addresses issues of parenting, adolescence, and the media, its central focus is not the impact of the media on adolescents nor the parent’s role in monitoring or limiting that impact, although it is noted as an important issue confronting parents during their child’s adolescence.

Finally, while this report focuses on providing information and support for parents, the question is often raised—appropriately—about whether efforts should be directed toward changing parents or changing the social context to allow parents to do their job more effectively.<sup>[72]</sup> This report, like the 1997 report that precedes it,<sup>[73]</sup> takes the view that the answer is not “either-or” but rather “both-and.” Both approaches are important, not in the spirit of blaming parents for problems engendered by a lack of social and economic supports, but rather of partnering with parents in accomplishing their goals for their own development and their teen’s, both through community support and individual and family growth.

In other words, this Project recognizes that some parents will not be able to benefit from the information in this report until we, as a society,

*This report thus assumes that there is no one “right” way to raise children.*

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[71] See, for example, McAdoo 1999b; Tatum 1997; McGoldrick, Giordano, and Pearce 1996.

• [72] Dombro et al. 1996; Wallack et al. 1993. • [73] Simpson 1997.

first meet their basic needs for protection from the effects of poverty, violence, substance abuse, racism, untreated physical and mental illness, and the like. The report offers its information, therefore, with the goal of reaching both parents themselves and those who are working to create a more supportive environment for parents through social services, policy, humanitarianism, community development, and other means.

This said, the Project now offers its central findings concerning the areas of widespread agreement about the parenting of adolescents. In addition to the information and references that follow, further information is available from the resource files created in conjunction with the Project. Readers are invited to request further information and to contribute to the dialogue that these important issues engender.



# Principles and Context

What emerges most clearly and powerfully from research on the parenting of adolescents? Certainly, there is disagreement on the details, stemming in part from differences in ethnicity and values. Just as certainly, there is agreement on broad principles, arising time and time again, crossing differences of discipline, methodology, ethnicity, family structure, socioeconomic circumstance, and individual style.

## Principles and Context

At heart, the Harvard Project on the Parenting of Adolescents found that two kinds of key information emerged from identifying the areas of agreement in research on the parenting of adolescents: **(1)** important concepts that are common to all of the parenting role; and **(2)** five specific components of the parenting role, which the Project called the Five Basics.

Before laying out the Five Basics in the next chapter, this chapter will outline the common concepts, since they offer a foundation and framework for understanding the Five Basics, as well as a snapshot of the many inter-related forces that influence all Five Basics. The Project distilled these concepts as follows.

**One of the most powerful forces that influences the parenting role is the set of profound developmental changes that occurs in adolescents.**

In a dramatic interplay of biological and social forces, over the course of adolescence, teenagers take the shape of adults in size, sexual maturity, brain characteristics, thinking capacity, knowledge, emotional sophistication, moral reasoning, peer and family relationships, and occupational readiness. Although development will continue in adulthood, critical steps in physical, social, cognitive, and emotional growth during adolescence shape teens' future life course.<sup>[1]</sup> Overall, the quality and quantity of developmental change in adolescence rival that of infancy and early childhood.

Because the process of adolescent development is so closely interwoven with the parental role, the Project analyzed some of the key literature on adolescent development in order to identify the major developmental changes that parents could expect, and need to support, during adolescence.

The Project found that, as a reference point for thinking about the parenting role, these changes could be organized into **Ten Tasks of Adolescence**.

*Overall, the quality and quantity of developmental change in adolescence rival that of infancy and early childhood.*

[1] Fischhoff, Crowell, and Kipke 1999; Carnegie Council 1995.

## The Ten Tasks of Adolescence

1. <b>Adjust to sexually maturing bodies and feelings</b>	Teens are faced with adjusting to bodies that as much as double in size and that acquire sexual characteristics, as well as learning to manage the accompanying biological changes and sexual feelings and to engage in healthy sexual behaviors. Their task also includes establishing a sexual identity and developing the skills for romantic relationships. <sup>[2]</sup>
2. <b>Develop and apply abstract thinking skills</b>	Teens typically undergo profound changes in their way of thinking during adolescence, allowing them more effectively to understand and coordinate abstract ideas, to think about possibilities, to try out hypotheses, to think ahead, to think about thinking, and to construct philosophies. <sup>[3]</sup>
3. <b>Develop and apply a more complex level of perspective taking</b>	Teens typically acquire a powerful new ability to understand human relationships, in which, having learned to “put themselves in another person’s shoes,” they learn to take into account both their perspective and another person’s at the same time, and to use this new ability in resolving problems and conflicts in relationships. <sup>[4]</sup>
4. <b>Develop and apply new coping skills in areas such as decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution</b>	Related to all these dramatic shifts, teens are involved in acquiring new abilities to think about and plan for the future, to engage in more sophisticated strategies for decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution, and to moderate their risk taking to serve goals rather than jeopardize them. <sup>[5]</sup>
5. <b>Identify meaningful moral standards, values, and belief systems</b>	Building on these changes and resulting skills, teens typically develop a more complex understanding of moral behavior and underlying principles of justice and care, questioning beliefs from childhood and adopting more personally meaningful values, religious views, and belief systems to guide their decisions and behavior. <sup>[6]</sup>
6. <b>Understand and express more complex emotional experiences</b>	Also related to these changes are shifts for teens toward an ability to identify and communicate more complex emotions, to understand the emotions of others in more sophisticated ways, and to think about emotions in abstract ways. <sup>[7]</sup>
7. <b>Form friendships that are mutually close and supportive</b>	Although youngsters typically have friends throughout childhood, teens generally develop peer relationships that play much more powerful roles in providing support and connection in their lives. They tend to shift from friendships based largely on the sharing of interests and activities to those based on the sharing of ideas and feelings, with the development of mutual trust and understanding. <sup>[8]</sup>
8. <b>Establish key aspects of identity</b>	Identity formation is in a sense a lifelong process, but crucial aspects of identity are typically forged at adolescence, including developing an identity that reflects a sense of individuality as well as connection to valued people and groups. Another part of this task is developing a positive identity around gender, physical attributes, sexuality, and ethnicity and, if appropriate, having been adopted, as well as sensitivity to the diversity of groups that make up American society. <sup>[9]</sup>
9. <b>Meet the demands of increasingly mature roles and responsibilities</b>	Teens gradually take on the roles that will be expected of them in adulthood, learning to acquire the skills and manage the multiple demands that will allow them to move into the labor market, as well as to meet expectations regarding commitment to family, community, and citizenship. <sup>[10]</sup>
10. <b>Renegotiate relationships with adults in parenting roles</b>	Although the task of adolescence has sometimes been described as “separating” from parents and other caregivers, it is more widely seen now as adults and teens working together to negotiate a change in the relationship that accommodates a balance of autonomy and ongoing connection, with the emphasis on each depending in part on the family’s ethnic background. <sup>[11]</sup>

[2]–[11] See next page for references.

**A few notes on this list.** Though this particular list of developmental tasks emerged from an analysis of recent research reviews, the concept of developmental tasks has been articulated in psychological research for over half a century,<sup>[12]</sup> and summaries of developmental tasks have appeared from time to time in professional literature since then.<sup>[13]</sup> Occasionally, although surprisingly rarely, outlines of adolescent developmental milestones also appear in popular literature for parents.<sup>[14]</sup>

This list of tasks is not intended to suggest that teens encounter or resolve these tasks in any particular order or sequence, or that they accomplish each one all at once. On the contrary, most developmental milestones evolve very gradually, episodically, separately, and in combination, with pauses and regressions along the way. Also, the developmental changes during adolescence are part of a continuum of change that extends from childhood into adulthood. During adolescence, teens often rework earlier developmental tasks that they need as a foundation for current growth.<sup>[15]</sup> For these and other reasons, the tasks can be organized in a number of different ways, generating somewhat different lists. This list is offered as a particularly short, current, and parent-oriented version, with the hope that it will generate further efforts of its kind.

Ultimately, most teens navigate the developmental tasks surprisingly successfully.<sup>[16]</sup> However, a number of factors can put teens at risk, including special needs and learning disabilities; early deprivation that precluded developmental foundations; devaluation and discrimination regarding such issues as ethnicity, class, immigrant status, or sexual orientation; lack of adult support; physical or emotional trauma; mental and physical illness; family dysfunction; poverty; neighborhood and community dysfunction and violence; and shortages of opportunities for developing competencies.<sup>[17]</sup>

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[2] Furman, Brown, and Feiring 1999; Kipke 1999a; Miller and Benson 1999; Brooks-Gunn and Paikoff 1997; Furman and Wehner 1997; Susman 1997; McClintock and Herdt 1996; Dyk 1993; Koch 1993; Rickel and Hendren 1993; Savin-Williams and Rodriguez 1993; Buchanan, Eccles, and Becker 1992; Brooks-Gunn and Reiter 1990; Katchadourian 1990; Susman et al. 1987; Brooks-Gunn, Petersen, and Eichorn 1985. • [3] Fischhoff, Crowell, and Kipke 1999; Fischer and Rose 1994; Flavell, Miller, and Miller 1993; Elkind 1984; Keating 1980; Kuhn and Angelev 1976; Kohlberg and Gilligan 1972; Piaget 1972. • [4] Damon 1997; Eisenberg, Murphy, and Shepard 1997; Selman and Schultz 1990; Damon and Hart 1982; Selman 1980; Elkind 1967. • [5] Fischhoff, Crowell, and Kipke 1999; Kipke 1999b; Lightfoot 1997; Ponton 1997; Gordon 1996; Silverberg and Gondoli 1996; Collins and Laursen 1992; Nurmi 1991; Hauser and Bowlds 1990; Selman and Schultz 1990; Worell and Danner 1989; Baumrind 1987; Selman 1980. • [6] Damon 1999, 1997; Coles 1997; Wallace and Williams 1997; McGoldrick, Giordano, and Pearce 1996; García Coll, Meyer, and Brillon 1995; McAdoo 1995; Fowler et al. 1991; Gilligan and Attanucci 1988; Hoffman 1980; Kohlberg and Gilligan 1972; Kohlberg 1969. • [7] Larson and Richards 1994; Brown 1993; Buchanan, Eccles, and Becker 1992; Brooks-Gunn and Reiter 1990; Coleman and Hendry 1990; Fischer, Shaver, and Carnochan 1990, 1989; Selman and Schultz 1990; Harter and Buddin 1987; Damon and Hart 1982; Selman 1980; Elkind 1967. • [8] Maccoby 1998; Way 1998; Furman and Wehner 1997; Berndt and Perry 1990; Savin-Williams and Berndt 1990; Selman and Schultz 1990; Berndt 1989; Youniss and Smollar 1985; Csikszentmihalyi and Larson 1984; Selman 1980; Sullivan 1953. • [9] Baumeister and Vohs in press; Demo, Allen, and Fine 2000; Grotevant et al. 2000; Harter 1999; Kindlon and Thompson 1999; McAdoo 1999b; Newberger 1999; Brodzinsky, Smith, and Brodzinsky 1998; Pollack 1998; Way 1998; Phinney and Kohatsu 1997; Tatum 1997; Kroger 1996; Kegan 1994, 1982; Vondracek 1994; Surrey 1991; Spencer, Swanson, and Cunningham 1991; Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990; Marcia 1980, 1966; Erikson 1968. • [10] Demo, Allen, and Fine 2000; Youth Development 2000; Zeldin, Camino, and Wheeler 2000; McAdoo 1999b; Benson et al. 1998; Damon 1997; Youniss and Yates 1997; Graber, Brooks-Gunn, and Petersen 1996; Hamilton and Lempert 1996; McGoldrick, Giordano, and Pearce 1996; Silverberg and Gondoli 1996; Nightingale and Wolverton 1993; Vondracek, Lerner, and Schulenberg 1986. • [11] Collins et al. 2000; Arnett 1999; Grotevant 1998; Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke 1997; Larson et al. 1996; Silverberg and Gondoli 1996; García Coll, Meyer, and Brillon 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Kegan 1994; Noller 1994; Smetana and Asquith 1994; Hauser 1991; Coleman and Hendry 1990; Collins 1990; Youniss and Smollar 1985; Bengtson and Kuypers 1971. • [12] Havighurst 1972. • [13] Burt 1998; Christenson and Roberts 1998; Masten and Coatsworth 1998; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; Carnegie Council 1995; Hauser 1991; Hooker 1991; Steinberg 1991b; Ingersoll 1989; Davis 1985; Havighurst 1972. • [14] Siegler 1997; Steinberg and Levine 1997; Tatum 1997; Elkind 1994; Youngs 1993. • [15] Erikson 1968; Winnicott 1965; Blos 1962. • [16] Hauser and Bowlds 1990. • [17] McCubbin et al. 1999; McAdoo 1999b; Graber, Brooks-Gunn, and Petersen 1996; Eron, Gentry, and Schlegel 1994; Sandler, Levine, and Coleman 1991.

In some cases, for these or other reasons, teens and their families are not ready to take on some of the Ten Tasks without significant support and/or remedial work, if at all. Others, in an ongoing process of adult development, will negotiate particular tasks later in life, in response to life challenges, sometimes including parenting a teen of their own.<sup>[18]</sup>

Generally, such lists of tasks explicitly or implicitly acknowledge that they are articulated in the service of broader societal goals, such as economic self-sufficiency, physical and mental health, family connection, and citizenship, as discussed in the “Report Background” chapter. Some lists specifically emphasize tasks that meet societal demands while others focus on the developmental changes that underlie teens’ ability to meet directly the demands of society.<sup>[19]</sup> This list acknowledges both, using the most broadly held goals as described in the “Report Background” chapter, while underscoring the developmental changes, in part because it is particularly these changes that tend to be underrecognized or underappreciated by parents, and in part because it is these changes that make it possible to meet societal demands. Some aspects of the tasks are essentially skills that are needed in order to meet societal demands, such as decision making and emotional skills. Some are building blocks for others; for example, aspects of abstract thinking are essential for achieving some levels of moral thinking, perspective taking, and relationship building described in other tasks; and all these skills contribute to teens’ ability to develop aspects of identity.

Although the overall tasks of adolescence are essentially the same across the diversity of family backgrounds and circumstances that make up America, there are variations within them related to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, immigrant status, family structure, individual ability, and other factors. (See next section of this chapter.)

These Ten Tasks, like the Five Basics and other concepts in this report, are offered as a contribution to the critical process of assisting parents in understanding their role in positive outcomes for youth, and an invitation to continue the process. (See chapter on “Recommendations for Future Work.”) The ways in which parents can and do influence the Ten Tasks is the subject of the following sections of this report.

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[18] Kegan 1994. • [19] Davis 1985.

## The developmental tasks of adolescence confront parents with a dazzling and sometimes daunting array of changes in their teen, changes that the parenting role both responds to and supports.

In a mix of great leaps forward, reactive steps backward, and periodic pauses, teens present parents with striking evidence of these Ten Tasks in progress, as physical, cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of development play out gradually, unevenly, and interactively.

With regard to sexuality, parents are likely to witness not only a physical “growth spurt” and **sexual milestones**, but also experimentation with forms of sexual behavior, romantic relationships, and the forging of a sexual identity.<sup>[20]</sup>

On a different front, parents are likely to notice surges of new sophistication in their teenager’s ability to think, including a greater capacity for **abstract thinking**.<sup>[21]</sup> This can be a time rich in introspection and reflection, with deepened understanding of issues like friendship, justice, identity, and religion, and with a greater capacity for relationships, academic study, and complex work.

In a related development, teens typically become better at **perspective taking**. Although as preadolescents they probably learned how to “put themselves in another person’s shoes,” now they typically can do so more consistently. Also, they often begin to step outside of both their own perspective and that of another person, and to use this new ability in solving problems.<sup>[22]</sup>

Thanks in part to some of these new abilities, many adolescents become more proficient at several kinds of **coping skills**. These new abilities can include more sophisticated decision-making, problem-solving, and conflict-resolution skills, as well as a shift toward a future orientation and greater ability to set and plan for realistic goals.<sup>[23]</sup>

There is significant debate among researchers on how to interpret the risk taking that many consider to be characteristic of adolescence. Many researchers and practitioners argue that, like the stubbornness of toddlers, some kinds of risk taking in adolescence are essential to healthy growth, promoting identity development and decision-making skills.<sup>[24]</sup> Also, although risk taking is thought to increase from childhood to adolescence, there is debate on whether adolescents in fact take greater and more frequent risks than adults or whether it merely seems so, perhaps because they use different information in making judgment calls, and have less

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[20] Furman, Brown, and Feiring 1999; Kipke 1999a; Miller and Benson 1999; Brooks-Gunn and Paikoff 1997; Furman and Wehner 1997; Susman 1997; McClintock and Herdt 1996; Dyk 1993; Koch 1993; Rickel and Hendren 1993; Savin-Williams and Rodriguez 1993; Buchanan, Eccles, and Becker 1992; Brooks-Gunn and Reiter 1990; Katchadourian 1990; Susman et al. 1987; Brooks-Gunn, Petersen, and Eichorn 1985. • [21] Fischhoff, Crowell, and Kipke 1999; Fischer and Rose 1994; Flavell, Miller, and Miller 1993; Elkind 1984; Keating 1980; Kuhn and Angelev 1976; Kagan 1972; Kohlberg and Gilligan 1972; Piaget 1972. • [22] Damon 1997; Eisenberg, Murphy, and Shepard 1997; Selman and Schultz 1990; Damon and Hart 1982; Selman 1980; Elkind 1967. • [23] Fischhoff, Crowell, and Kipke 1999; Gordon 1996; Silverberg and Gondoli 1996; Collins and Laursen 1992; Nurmi 1991; Hauser and Bowlds 1990; Selman and Schultz 1990; Worell and Danner 1989; Selman 1980. • [24] Garbarino 1999; Lightfoot 1997; Ponton 1997; Baumrind 1987.

information about consequences, fewer options for protecting themselves from consequences, or fewer resources for recovering from failures.<sup>[25]</sup>

Also related to abstract thinking and perspective taking, teenagers typically undergo major shifts in their thinking about **morality**, in which their understanding of right and wrong is no longer based on concrete rules but rather on principles about justice and care, as well as insights from their new skills in perspective-taking and empathizing.<sup>[26]</sup> There is a similar progression toward more sophisticated thinking about religion and spirituality.<sup>[27]</sup>

Teens also develop a more sophisticated **understanding of feelings**, such as the ability to think more effectively about the intentions behind actions and about hidden emotions.<sup>[28]</sup> Adults and teens alike experience adolescence temporarily as a time of more intense emotions, self-consciousness, and mood swings, although the causes, including ways they may be related to changing hormones and other aspects of development, are not clear.<sup>[29]</sup>

**Peer friendships** take on new importance and meaning in adolescence, and most researchers see this change as a significant milestone of social development. Friendships typically become more intimate, more stable, more time-consuming, more central to teen lives, and a cornerstone for learning about adult relationships.<sup>[30]</sup> However, researchers also note that relationships with parents remain important, and teens prefer to turn to parents for advice on major life decisions. (See “Model and Consult” section of the next chapter.)

At the same time, teens are struggling to establish **key aspects of identity**. This important, and some say central, issue in adolescence often brings times of experimentation with different, temporary “identities” by means of alternative styles of dress, jewelry, music, hair, manner, and lifestyle, as teens struggle to identify a true self amid seeming contradictions in the way they feel and behave in different situations, and with different levels of thought and understanding. Included in the search are aspects of gender identity, as well as vocational identity, and other issues.<sup>[31]</sup>

A special challenge arises for teenagers in the United States around forging a sense of ethnic identity. It is increasingly argued that doing so is important for European American youngsters, who must come to understand the role of ethnicity in their own identity and to develop an appreciation for the diversity of ethnicities in the United States, as well as for youngsters of color, who must forge their identity in the face of racism and

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[25] Fischhoff, Crowell, and Kipke 1999; Scales and Leffert 1999; Beyth-Marom and Fischhoff 1997; Lightfoot 1997; Ponton 1997; Carnegie Council 1995; Strasburger 1995; Steinberg 1991a. • [26] Damon 1999, 1997; Coles 1997; Gilligan and Attanucci 1988; Hoffman 1980; Kohlberg and Gilligan 1972; Kohlberg 1969. • [27] Wallace and Williams 1997; McGoldrick, Giordano, and Pearce 1996; McAdoo 1995; Fowler et al. 1991. • [28] Larson and Richards 1994; Brown 1993; Fischer, Shaver, and Carnochan 1990; Selman and Schultz 1990; Harter and Buddin 1987; Selman 1980. • [29] Kipke 1999a; Larson and Richards 1994; Brown 1993; Buchanan, Eccles, and Becker 1992; Brooks-Gunn and Reiter 1990; Coleman and Hendry 1990; Damon and Hart 1982; Elkind 1967. • [30] Maccoby 1998; Way 1998; Furman and Wehner 1997; Hartup and Overhauser 1991; Berndt and Perry 1990; Savin-Williams and Berndt 1990; Selman and Schultz 1990; Youniss and Smollar 1985; Csikszentmihalyi and Larson 1984; Selman 1980. • [31] Baumeister and Vohs in press; Garbarino 1999; Harter 1999; Kindlon and Thompson 1999; Newberger 1999; Pollack 1998; Way 1998; Kroger 1996; Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan 1995; Kegan 1994, 1982; Vondracek 1994; Brown and Gilligan 1992; Scales 1991; Surrey 1991; Hamilton 1990; Savin-Williams and Berndt 1990; Youniss and Smollar 1985; Marcia 1980; Erikson 1968.

discrimination.<sup>[32]</sup> Additional challenges arise for teens in adoptive and immigrant families, and in other special circumstances.<sup>[33]</sup>

All these developments, in coordination with appropriate school, peer, mentoring, family, community, and work experiences, help teens to learn the skills and manage the multiple demands of **increasingly mature roles and responsibilities** with regard to education, occupation, family, and citizenship, so that ultimately they can meet the expectations for young adulthood.<sup>[34]</sup> These expectations, as indicated in the chapter on “Report Background,” are very similar at the general level—involving economic self-sufficiency, physical and mental health, family relationships, and citizenship—but they vary profoundly in details and timing, depending on a family’s ethnicity, a teen’s abilities, and many other factors.<sup>[35]</sup>

All these changes impact teens’ relationships with parents, potentially creating more conflict, criticism and self-criticism, emotional variability, self-absorption, indecisiveness, inconsistency, and distancing from family and family activities. On the other hand, they also engender more breadth and depth of discussion, new and exhilarating options for intellectual and emotional connection, and opportunities for a richer and more sophisticated range of activities in family life.<sup>[36]</sup> All told, they trigger ways in which **parents and teens together renegotiate their relationship**, separating in some ways and connecting more deeply in others, accommodating and honoring the needs and achievements of the other developmental changes and the family’s values and goals, as described in the pages that follow.

**A note on brain development.** One exciting area of research in adolescent development is the study of ways in which the brains of preadolescents, adolescents, and young adults are growing and changing, much as they are earlier in childhood.<sup>[37]</sup> Although the research is preliminary, some of these growth spurts in the brain may coincide with developmental changes in teens, such as in their capacity for abstract thinking and the processing of emotion.<sup>[38]</sup> Research is also exploring the relationships between teen behavior and other biological changes, such as those involving hormones.<sup>[39]</sup> This new research has the potential to serve as a powerful vehicle for communicating with parents about the importance of adolescent development, and for assisting parents in setting realistic expectations for their teens, forging a positive relationship with their teens, and providing an environment that supports healthy growth.

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[32] McAdoo 1999b; Phinney and Kohatsu 1997; Tatum 1997; García Coll, Meyer, and Brillón 1995; Hill et al. 1994; Spencer, Swanson, and Cunningham 1991; Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990. • [33] Grotevant et al. 2000; McCubbin et al. 1999; Brodzinsky, Smith, and Brodzinsky 1998; McCubbin et al. 1998a; McGoldrick, Giordano, and Pearce 1996. • [34] Rhodes in press; Zeldin, Camino, and Wheeler 2000; Benson et al. 1998; Damon 1997; Youniss and Yates 1997; Graber, Brooks-Gunn, and Petersen 1996; Hamilton and Lempert 1996; Silverberg and Gondoli 1996; Nightingale and Wolverton 1993; Vondracek, Lerner, and Schulenberg 1986. • [35] Arnett 2000; Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider 2000; McAdoo 1999b; Bavolek 1997; Graber, Brooks-Gunn, and Petersen 1996; Harkness and Super 1996; McGoldrick, Giordano, and Pearce 1996; Silverberg and Gondoli 1996; García Coll, Meyer, and Brillón 1995; Nightingale and Wolverton 1993. • [36] Collins et al. 2000; Arnett 1999; Grotevant 1998; Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke 1997; Larson et al. 1996; Silverberg and Gondoli 1996; García Coll, Meyer, and Brillón 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Kegan 1994; Noller 1994; Hauser 1991; Coleman and Hendry 1990; Collins 1990; Youniss and Smollar 1985; Bengtson and Kuypers 1971. • [37] Giedd et al. 1999; Diamond and Hopson 1998; Fischer and Rose 1994. • [38] Davies and Rose 1999; Yurgelun-Todd 1998; Fischer and Rose 1994. • [39] Susman 1997; Buchanan, Eccles, and Becker 1992.

**Just as developmental changes are occurring in adolescents, developmental changes are likely to be occurring in their parents, each set of changes interacting with the other.**

Many theoreticians, clinicians, and researchers have come to see human development as occurring not just in childhood and adolescence, but throughout the life span. Although development in adulthood is more variable than in childhood, it can potentially bring major changes, including fundamental shifts in ways of thinking about relating to one's children.<sup>[40]</sup>

A few writers have described parenting as going through phases, typically linking these stages to the child's age and the societal expectations for that age.<sup>[41]</sup> Some scholars have also addressed the relationship between parents' development and their adolescent's development, observing that the developmental changes interact with each other.<sup>[42]</sup> They observe that parents interpret their teenager's behavior, decide on courses of action, and communicate with their teen differently, depending on their own level of development. Furthermore, in an interwoven pattern, raising teenagers can be a stimulus for further development in adults, as well as vice versa.<sup>[43]</sup> Adults may be baffled when confronted with some of the challenges posed by teenagers' new behavior and ways of thinking, and the process of responding to those challenges can produce significant developmental growth.<sup>[44]</sup> With the increase in divorce and remarriage, these challenges may also come at different points in life, and more than once, as parents acquire step-children or have second families.<sup>[45]</sup>

Areas in which parents are particularly likely to be challenged, and hence to engage in developmental growth, include defining their own separate identity; working through moral concepts of rights and responsibilities; having perspective on the child's point of view; and putting the parent-child relationship in a context of larger principles.<sup>[46]</sup> For example, a parent confronted with a teenager who has returned home after curfew may be more effective if he or she can think about the issue as one of negotiating boundaries, which needs to happen in all relationships, rather than as a personal insult.<sup>[47]</sup> For some parents, developmental growth may also be influenced by special challenges, such as disability, illness, incarceration, poverty, racism, homophobia, or immigrant status.<sup>[48]</sup>

*Researchers have come to see human development as occurring not just in childhood and adolescence, but throughout the life span.*

[40] Grotevant 1998; Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock 1997; Heath 1996a,b; Levinson 1996, 1978; Steinberg 1994; Heath 1991; Belenky et al. 1986; Erikson 1985, 1968; White, Speisman, and Costos 1983; Kegan 1982. • [41] Unell and Wyckoff 2000; Hamner and Turner 1996; Ryff and Seltzer 1996; Galinsky 1987. • [42] Grotevant 1998; Kegan 1994; Steinberg 1994; Hauser 1991. • [43] Grotevant 1998; Newberger 1980. • [44] Kegan 1994. • [45] Demo, Allen, and Fine 2000. • [46] Kegan 1994; Smetana 1994; Smetana and Asquith 1994; Galinsky 1987; Newberger 1980. • [47] Kegan 1994. • [48] García Coll, Surrey, and Weingarten 1998.

**Furthermore, adult and adolescent developmental changes are resonating with changes in the surrounding environment, such as changes in schooling practices, legal and health-care policies, and available services.**

Adding to the complexity, the ground underneath teens and parents keeps shifting, in that the context in which they must negotiate their development undergoes changes itself. For example, sometime between fifth and seventh grade, most American youngsters enter “middle school,” with an entirely different and more difficult structure, curriculum, social atmosphere, and set of procedures for parent involvement.<sup>[49]</sup> Also, teens spend less time than younger children in the company of adults and less time in supervised activity.

Also notable is the decline in services to meet the specialized needs of teens and their parents, for both families in poverty and those in the middle class.<sup>[50]</sup> Physicians, for example, often do not give guidance about healthy development to parents of teens to the extent that they do to parents of younger children, and privacy rules begin to emerge.

Customs, commercials, and laws open doors to greater risks, such as driving, drinking, drugs, more direct experiences with racism, and legal prosecution as an adult. Worlds widen and sometimes collide, as peer groups, schools, employers, and neighborhoods present teens and parents with differing values, expectations, and agendas.<sup>[51]</sup>

**While some of these changes can be exciting and rewarding, raising teens can also be a time of significant stress for parents, creating the conditions for personal problems as well as personal growth.**

Presumably, for many parents, the process of making internal changes in response to their child’s changes is not new, but rather the continuation of a progression that began even before the child was born.<sup>[52]</sup> However, the changes at adolescence may be particularly poignant and stressful for a number of reasons, including the fact that the changes in the teens themselves are so fast, numerous, and profound; the changes in teens often involve increased moodiness, distancing, and conflict; their teen’s development may remind parents of unresolved issues from their own teen years; and these issues often coincide with other developmental stressors such as aging and caring for elderly parents.<sup>[53]</sup>

Studies suggest that many parents have at least some difficulty coping with the challenges posed by their children’s adolescence, unrelated to whether and to what extent their children are having difficulty with adoles-

[49] Eccles et al. 1993. • [50] Carnegie Council 1995. • [51] Garbarino 1999; McCubbin et al. 1999; Schoen et al. 1998; Schoen et al. 1997; Carnegie Council 1995; Jackson and Rodriguez-Tomé 1993. • [52] Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock 1997; Holden 1997; Heath 1996a,b; Levinson 1996, 1978; Ryff and Seltzer 1996; Cric and Acevedo 1995; Kegan 1994; Steinberg 1994; Galinsky 1987; Belenky et al. 1986; Erikson 1985, 1968; Kegan 1982; Newberger 1980. • [53] Grotevant 1998; Silverberg 1996; Ryff and Seltzer 1996; Carnegie Council 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Steinberg 1994; Elkind 1993; Collins 1990; Davis 1985.

cence themselves.<sup>[54]</sup> Research has pointed to a minefield of potential sources of psychological stress for parents of teens, including teenagers' sexual maturing; their change in size and hence physical power; their forming strong peer and/or romantic relationships; their seeking independence; their distancing themselves emotionally; their leaving home; their de-idealizing parents and seeing them as fallible; their questioning parents' values; their pressing for a greater share of the family's resources such as cars, telephone, and money; and their establishing identity and setting life goals just as parents are assessing theirs. Parents take measure of the job they have done in raising their children, and the temporary and permanent disappointments can take a heavy toll.<sup>[55]</sup>

Significant numbers of parents report higher levels of marital conflict and dissatisfaction, lower self-esteem, more depression and anxiety, and less satisfaction with work, family, and life than during children's younger years.<sup>[56]</sup> Some research suggests that parents who are more invested in their work are less susceptible to some of these stressors,<sup>[57]</sup> and that parents who must cope with racism, poverty, and similar issues are affected more so.<sup>[58]</sup>

It is important to note, however, that a majority of parents report no change or even an improvement in their mental health and sense of well-being, as they welcome or at least tolerate the developmental challenges in themselves that their child's adolescence poses.<sup>[59]</sup> Also encouraging are data suggesting that parenting support programs can assist parents in coping with these stresses, as well as improve outcomes for teens.<sup>[60]</sup>

### **In spite of all these changes and challenges, in most families there is no serious disruption in parent-teen relationships.**

In some ethnic and research traditions, adolescence has been thought of as a time for wrenching separation of children from their parents, a "cutting of the apron strings" so that ultimately adolescents can move on to become autonomous individuals, psychologically as well as financially independent of their family. However, researchers in the last two decades have observed a rather different process at work in most families, across a variety of ethnic groups, in which both parents and teenagers are evolving together toward a relationship that includes somewhat greater autonomy, but also significant ongoing connection.<sup>[61]</sup>

The particular balance between autonomy and connection varies among and within ethnic groups in the United States, with many Hispanic, African American, Native American, and Asian Pacific American families, for example, emphasizing family cohesiveness, inter-

*Researchers in the last two decades have observed parents and teenagers to be evolving together toward a relationship that includes somewhat greater autonomy, but also significant ongoing connection.*

[54] Grotevant 1998; Steinberg 1994; Small and Eastman 1991; Galinsky 1987; Davis 1985.  
 • [55] Steinberg 2000, 1994; Galinsky 1987; Newberger 1980. • [56] Steinberg 1994; Davis 1985.  
 • [57] Silverberg 1996; Steinberg 1994. • [58] McAdoo 1999b; Taylor and Wang 1997; McGoldrick, Giordano, and Pearce 1996. • [59] Kegan 1994; Steinberg 1994. • [60] Dishion, McCord, and Poulin 1999; Kumpfer 1999; Carnegie Council 1995. • [61] Steinberg 2000; Arnett 1999; Gorman 1998; Grotevant 1998; Weingarten 1998; Larson et al. 1996; Silverberg and Gondoli 1996; García Coll, Meyer, and Brillion 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Adams, Gullotta, and Markstrom-Adams 1994; Collins 1992, 1990; Youniss, DeSantis, and Henderson 1992; Hauser 1991; Montemayor and Flannery 1991; Coleman and Hendry 1990; Youniss and Smollar 1985; Montemayor 1983.

*Teens themselves report that they neither need nor want their relationship with parents to become distant, but rather to become different, honoring and accommodating their new capabilities and responsibilities.*

dependence, and/or respect for elders, while many European American families focus more on individuality and fostering independence.<sup>[62]</sup> The degree of a child's eventual autonomy is also influenced by individual differences, such as the presence of disabilities, and of environmental factors, such as a lack of economic opportunities or the high cost of living.<sup>[63]</sup> Overall, the adolescent's task could be said to be one of separating in some ways, while maintaining and redefining connections in others, in order to make room for a more adult relationship that meets cultural expectations and provides necessary support.<sup>[64]</sup> Teens themselves report that they neither need nor want their relationship with parents to become distant, but rather to become different, honoring and accommodating their new capabilities and responsibilities. (See "Love and Connect" section in next chapter.)

For their part, parents generally report that they experience more criticism from their adolescents, a decline in time spent together, a decrease in emotional closeness, and a higher level of disagreement and conflict, with differences of degree among ethnic groups.<sup>[65]</sup>

Behind these conflicts, however, parents and teens are also seen to be negotiating important issues around autonomy and building new skills for conflict resolution and problem solving.<sup>[66]</sup> Like a toddler who suddenly starts saying "no" to a parent, a teenager or preteen who suddenly becomes more antagonistic is sometimes showing signs of important developmental change. Also, as with toddlers, high levels of conflict in teens tend to be temporary. Conflict between parents and teens tends to decline in frequency, although not in intensity, as teens become older.<sup>[67]</sup>

In short, most parents and teens report that they continue to share a secure attachment and fundamental values. Surveys find that parent-teen relationships remain generally positive, with only five to 20 percent having serious difficulties that affect teens' overall respect, appreciation, and affection for their parents.<sup>[68]</sup>

**Despite dramatic changes in adolescents, their families, their relationships, and the surrounding environment, the basic functions of parents really change very little from childhood to adolescence. It is the strategies for carrying out these functions that can, do, and must change significantly.**

Teens need parents to continue to be parents. Pushing away, teens nonetheless challenge parents to stay the course, nurturing, supervising, guiding, and advocating for their children, as well as providing a safe envi-

[62] Bavolek 1997; Harkness and Super 1996; McGoldrick, Giordano, and Pearce 1996; García Coll, Meyer, and Brillon 1995. • [63] Read 2000; Garwick et al. 1999; Silverberg and Gondoli 1996; García Coll, Meyer, and Brillon 1995; Hodapp 1995. • [64] Silverberg and Gondoli 1996; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Hauser 1991. • [65] Arnett 1999; Grotevant 1998; Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke 1997; García Coll, Meyer, and Brillon 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Noller 1994; Coleman and Hendry 1990. • [66] Steinberg 2000; Arnett 1999; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995. • [67] Arnett 1999; Grotevant 1998; Laursen, Coy, and Collins 1998; Larson et al. 1996; Noller 1994; Coleman and Hendry 1990. • [68] Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Strasburger 1995; Noller 1994; Steinberg 1991a,b; Coleman and Hendry 1990; Collins 1990.

ronment and secure boundaries, in ways not unlike those that have been articulated for early childhood or childhood as a whole.<sup>[69]</sup>

On the other hand, in difficult and sometimes ironic ways, adolescent development and changing environments demand strategies that are often different from earlier childhood—and more complicated. For example, teens need to take risks as a way of learning, practicing decision making, and developing identity.<sup>[70]</sup> However, much of their risk taking takes place beyond the reach of direct adult supervision and in arenas where the stakes are extremely high.<sup>[71]</sup>

Teens also need to generate conflict, in order to sort out their similarities to and differences from their parents and others, and to establish a unique identity.<sup>[72]</sup> However, lacking social perspective and skills, they do so in ways that are often abrasive and aggressive, challenging the continuity of the very relationship they seek to transform.

Furthermore, teens need privacy from parents in order to experiment with separation and individuation. However, they require it just at a time when parents are losing many of their previous options for indirect feedback about their children from teachers, physicians, friends' parents, and others.<sup>[73]</sup>

Adding to the complexity, adolescent development is occurring simultaneously, and unevenly, on many fronts, which makes varying demands on parents at varying times. Sometimes, teens are working on separating, sometimes on reconnecting; sometimes, they are focusing on relationships with peers, sometimes with adults; sometimes, they are surging ahead in perspective taking, sometimes retrenching in order to come up with a higher level of integration.

Frustrating parents, teens want to be with them except when they don't, teens want their help except when they don't, and teens behave in excitingly more mature ways—except when they don't. Requiring moment-by-moment judgment calls, teens need an environment that provides opportunities for experimentation at certain times but not others; for privacy on some matters but not others; for peer influence in some areas but not others; and for negotiation and decision making on some issues but not others. Throughout, they need parents to remain available, taking the emotional high ground by providing opportunities for closeness that teens can sometimes accept and sometimes reject.

Overall the strategies for supporting healthy adolescent development require continual balancing between holding on and letting go, offering flexibility and maintaining limits, providing protection and fostering new learning. (See chapter on “The Five Basics of Parenting Adolescents.”)

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[69] Greenspan 1997; Holden 1997; Bornstein 1995b; Smith et al. 1994. • [70] Furstenberg et al. 1999; Frydenberg 1997; Coleman and Hendry 1990. • [71] Furstenberg et al. 1999; Kipke 1999b; Beyth-Marom and Fischhoff 1997. • [72] Galambos and Ehrenberg 1997; Phinney and Kohatsu 1997; Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke 1997; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Noller 1994; Coleman and Hendry 1990; Hauser and Bowlds 1990; Steinberg 1990; Winnicott 1965. • [73] Carnegie Council 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Noller 1994; Zill and Nord 1994; Youniss and Smollar 1985.

## Parenting strategies often work much better in combination rather than separately.

Research finds that it is often a combination of approaches or strategies—in particular, a combination of warmth and authoritative-ness, support and challenge—that correlates with lower risks and higher success for teens.<sup>[74]</sup>

One body of research identifies and describes this combination as an “authoritative” parenting style, combining “responsiveness” with “demandingness,” warmth with control. Studies using this framework have found the combined style to be associated with a number of outcomes that are often valued in mainstream American society, in teens as well as younger children, including social confidence, social competence, moral development, self-control, resiliency, self-reliance, work orientation, and optimism. This approach has also been associated with risk prevention, including lower rates of depression, anxiety, delinquent activity, and susceptibility to negative peer pressure.<sup>[75]</sup> The applicability of this particular framework to the parenting of adolescents in impoverished or high-risk environments and to the parenting of children of color has been questioned and is currently under examination.<sup>[76]</sup>

## Strategies vary from parent to parent, and from circumstance to circumstance, depending on the characteristics of the parent, the teen, the situation, and the world that surrounds them.

Every parent-teen interaction takes place in a context that profoundly affects what parents do, and should do. Research and theory regarding parenting across the age span have identified many influences on a parent’s decisions and behavior, some producing continuity, some producing variation in the way parents respond to their children across time and circumstances.

One set of influences comes from the parent’s individual characteristics. Each parent unconsciously or consciously shapes his or her strategies to fit factors that often include his or her physical health, such as the presence of disabilities or chronic illness; mental health, such as the presence of depression; gender; temperament, such as ease with transitions and new situations; developmental level, such as capacity for perspective-taking; early experience, such as a history of trauma and abuse; knowledge, such as fluency in the English language and an understanding of the American educational system; beliefs and attitudes, such as religious and cultural beliefs about gender roles of mothers and fathers, daughters and sons; and skills, such as problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills.<sup>[77]</sup>

[74] Fletcher, Steinberg, and Sellers 1999; Holden 1997; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; Carnegie Council 1995; Chao 1994; Larson and Richards 1994; Noller 1994; Smith et al. 1994. • [75] Collins et al. 2000; Scales and Leffert 1999; Grotevant 1998; Holden 1997; Mason, Cauce, and Gonzales 1997; Baumrind 1996; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Noller 1994; Smith et al. 1994; Steinberg and Darling 1994; Coleman and Hendry 1990. • [76] Collins et al. 2000; Brody and Flor 1998; Gorman 1998; Taylor, Seaton, and Rodriguez 1998; Mason, Cauce, and Gonzales 1997; Taylor 1997; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; Baumrind 1996; Chao 1994; Steinberg and Darling 1994; Steinberg et al. 1991. • [77] Collins et al. 2000; Holden and Miller 1999; Bornstein 1998; García Coll, Surrey, and Weingarten 1998; Grotevant 1998; Holden 1997; Heath 1996a,b; Ryff and Seltzer 1996; Luster and Okagaki 1993b; Small and Eastman 1991; Youniss and Smollar 1985; Belsky, Robins, and Gamble 1984.

In addition, teens themselves influence parenting strategies. In fact, parenting strategies often evolve interactively, responding to, as well as shaping, children's characteristics and behavior. For example, parents may respond differently to a younger adolescent than an older one, to a second child than a first one, and to a more restrained adolescent than a more active one. Some parents find their temperaments fit better with some teen temperaments than others, and with some developmental phases than others. In essence, some of the same characteristics are important in children as in parents, including health, special needs, special talents and gifts, temperament, age, developmental level, early experience, and knowledge.<sup>[78]</sup>

The history of the parent-teen relationship also weighs in, including not only its past quality, but also its length, continuity, and special circumstances. Relationships are influenced, for example, when parents are adoptive parents, foster parents, step-parents, partners of biological parents, extended family members, parents who have immigrated to the United States, and parents whose physical and/or emotional connection with their child has been disrupted by incarceration, loss of custody, illness, disability, physical distance, and other circumstances.<sup>[79]</sup>

Surrounding the influences that are generated by the parent and child are a whole set of factors in the larger environment, including **(a)** the parent's relationship with his or her partner, such as stresses between them; **(b)** employment factors, such as work-related stress and flexibility to attend to teens' needs during work hours; **(c)** social systems, such as the presence of other supportive adults; **(d)** family resources, such as the level and persistence of poverty; **(e)** neighborhood characteristics, such as level of poverty and crime; **(f)** school characteristics, such as practices that do or do not encourage parent involvement or equal opportunity; **(g)** cultural context, such as social attitudes toward teenagers and media portrayals of parenting and teens, and, for immigrant and many other families, the dissonance between family values and those of the larger society; and **(h)** community resources, such as medical, educational, and social programs and services.<sup>[80]</sup> Taken together, this host of factors within and surrounding the parent-child interaction shapes a parent's response and pattern of responses at any given time with any given child.<sup>[81]</sup>

*Relationships are influenced, for example, when parents are adoptive parents, foster parents, step-parents, partners of biological parents, extended family members, and parents who have immigrated to the United States.*

[78] Collins et al. 2000; Holden and Miller 1999; Bornstein 1998; Grotevant 1998; Bogenschneider, Small, and Tsay 1997; Holden 1997; Heath 1996a,b; Csikszentmihalyi et al. 1993; Luster and Okagaki 1993a; Small and Eastman 1991; Belsky, Robins, and Gamble 1984. • [79] Demo, Allen, and Fine 2000; McCubbin et al. 1999; Brodzinsky, Smith, and Brodzinsky 1998; García Coll, Surrey, and Weingarten 1998; Grotevant 1998; Steinberg 1994. • [80] Collins et al. 2000; Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider 2000; Demo, Allen, and Fine 2000; Furstenberg et al. 1999; Holden and Miller 1999; Kipke 1999b; McAadoo 1999b; McCubbin et al. 1999; McLoyd 1998, 1997; Sameroff, Peck, and Eccles 1998; Crockett 1997; Holden 1997; Eccles and Harold 1996; Heath 1996a,b; Garbarino 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Feldman and Rosenthal 1994; Smith et al. 1994; Small and Eastman 1991; Bronfenbrenner 1986; Belsky, Robins, and Gamble 1984. • [81] Collins et al. 2000; Holden and Miller 1999; Grotevant 1998; Holden 1997; Belsky, Robins, and Gamble 1984.

## Given the complex and profound changes occurring in adolescence, parents often need new knowledge and enhanced skills to carry out their role.

Parenting adolescents demands information and skills that parents may not previously have acquired. Areas that are likely to be new to parents, where additional knowledge and stronger skills may be needed, include the following: [82]

- What to expect from teens, what is normal, and why.
- What to expect within oneself, what typically changes at midlife, how these developments resonate with changes in teens, and why.
- What not to expect: the warning signs that parents and teens may be having difficulties requiring special assistance.
- How to access and evaluate community resources.
- How to get help in filling gaps in parenting skills.
- How to meet appropriately one's own needs for love and support.
- How to adapt to a child's emerging sexuality.
- How to accommodate powerful and sometimes sudden changes in a teen's mood, level of conflict, distancing, desire for privacy, and dependence on friends.
- How to negotiate conflicts and differences of opinion in ways that meet the needs of both parent and teen.
- How to adapt one's style of listening and talking to accommodate and facilitate a teen's new way of thinking, search for identity, and need for respectful problem solving.
- How to maintain a set of supportive family activities, rituals, and cultural traditions.
- How to enjoy some of the unique characteristics of adolescence in general and each teen in particular.
- How to design a home environment that is welcoming to the family's teens and, where appropriate, their activities, interests, and peers.
- How to plan consciously and proactively a family environment that offers a healthy level of challenge, expectation, stimulation, and risk, neither too much nor too little for teens' growth and development.
- How to give teens roles in the family and community that are genuinely useful and important to the family's well-being.

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[82] Jarrett 1999; Myers-Walls 1999; Frydenberg 1997; Phinney and Kohatsu 1997; Baumrind 1996; Heath 1996a,b; Carnegie Council 1995; Strasburger 1995; Kegan 1994; Noller 1994; Smith et al. 1994; Steinberg 1990.

- How to distinguish among areas of teen behavior where it remains important to be involved directly, where it is enough to monitor indirectly, and where it is time to let go.
- How to identify, express, and explore with teens one's parental values around issues such as sex, religion, morality, responsibility, gender roles, diversity, and risk taking.
- How to monitor behavior, including by networking with other adults.
- How and when to interact with middle- and high-school teachers and staff and other adults in a teen's life, both to gather information and to advocate on behalf of the teen.
- How to offer information and guidance to teens in effective ways.

### Even when teens are already in trouble, it is usually not too late for parents to make a difference.

Unquestionably, early emotional experiences, including parent guidance and connection, are important influences on healthy development, and it helps significantly if strong parent-child relationships, parenting skills, and family rituals and activities are in place as a foundation for adolescence.<sup>[83]</sup> However, the impression sometimes conveyed in the media that damage done in the earlier years cannot be repaired is misleading. A sizable proportion of children are able to overcome early adversity, and many who are "at risk" are able to tap into and benefit from new resources when they become available, even into adulthood.<sup>[84]</sup>

While some of the circumstances that affect the resilience of youngsters are beyond the reach of parents, many are not. In fact, the role of parents can be critical in reducing risks of poverty and racism, and interventions that strengthen family relationships and parenting skills are among the most effective strategies for addressing youth problems such as delinquency and substance abuse.<sup>[85]</sup>

### Parents can't do it alone.

By providing an environment that is nurturing, protective, stimulating, and supportive, parents contribute significantly to the healthy development of teens. Also important is the role of teens themselves. A great deal, however, must come from the rest of society. Teens need not only safe and supportive home environments, but also safe and supportive schools and neighborhoods. They need the encouragement and guidance not only of parents, but also of other caring adults, including extended family, kinship networks, teachers, employers, religious leaders, mentors, coaches, and more. They need physical care, medical care, educational opportunities,

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[83] Shure 2000; Garbarino 1999; Greenspan 1999, 1997. • [84] Hauser 1999; Noam 1999; Kagan 1998; Haggerty et al. 1996; Werner 1990. • [85] Dishion, McCord, and Poulin 1999; Jarrett 1999, 1997; Kumpfer 1999; Taylor and Biglan 1998; Youniss and Yates 1997; Carnegie Council 1995; McLoyd 1990.

employment opportunities, and social networks. They need all these factors, working together, to provide the context for healthy growth.<sup>[86]</sup>

By the same token, parents need supportive environments to be effective in undertaking their tasks. They, too, need medical care, adequate food and shelter, and freedom from the insidious effects of racism and poverty. They, too, need learning opportunities, employment opportunities, safe environments, social networks, and community resources.<sup>[87]</sup> They need school practices that encourage parent involvement.<sup>[88]</sup> They need jobs that provide not only financial support and job satisfaction, but also the flexibility to meet their children's needs.<sup>[89]</sup> They need adults who are available to join them in forming a support system for their teens.<sup>[90]</sup> In short, they need communities in which families, teens, schools, volunteers, employers, media, practitioners, and policy makers work together in fostering positive youth development.

All told, the preceding principles capture the context in which parents carry out their role in raising adolescents. Like horizontal dimensions cutting across vertical dimensions, these principles cut across the Five Basics of Parenting Adolescents, which will be presented in the next chapter.

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[86] Forum on Adolescence 2000; Furstenberg et al. 1999; Kipke 1999a; McAdoo 1999b; Scales and Leffert 1999; Laub and Lauritsen 1998; Sameroff, Peck, and Eccles 1998; Carnegie Council 1995; Garbarino 1995; McAdoo 1995; Taylor and Roberts 1995; Harrison et al. 1990. • [87] Furstenberg et al. 1999; Galinsky 1999; Kipke 1999a; Scales and Leffert 1999; Hewlett and West 1998; McLoyd 1998, 1997; Bogenschneider, Small, and Tsay 1997; Holden 1997; Eccles and Harold 1996; Carnegie Council 1995; Gottfried, Gottfried, and Bathurst 1995; Smith et al. 1994; Steinberg 1994. • [88] Eccles and Harold 1996. • [89] Galinsky 1999; Hewlett and West 1998. • [90] Youth Development 2000; Furstenberg et al. 1999; Scales and Leffert 1999.



# The Five Basics of Parenting Adolescents

With these general points in mind, what does research tell us about the basic components of the parenting role in adolescence? The Harvard Project found that the ways in which parents contribute significantly to healthy adolescent development fall into five categories.

## The Five Basics of Parenting Adolescents

Broadly speaking, the five components of the parenting role that emerge from research can be organized as: **(1)** offering teens love and connection; **(2)** monitoring teen behavior and well-being; **(3)** offering guidance, including negotiating and setting limits; **(4)** providing information and consultation for understanding, interpreting, and navigating the larger world, through a process of modeling and ongoing dialogue; and **(5)** providing and advocating for resources, including other caring adults. The Project abbreviated these categories under five headlines as follows: **(1)** love and connect, **(2)** monitor and observe, **(3)** guide and limit, **(4)** model and consult, and **(5)** provide and advocate—the Five Basics of Parenting Adolescents.

The five categories move through issues around providing love, safety, guidance, and environmental resources. They move from those that center mostly on the home environment to those that center mostly on influencing the supportiveness of the outside environment, reflective of the teen's movement into a larger and larger world. They acknowledge the unique skills and roles that come into play as parents both hold on to some aspects of the old relationship and let go of others, embracing and empowering their teen, by carrying out some old and new tasks in some old and new ways. All are a continuation of parenting functions from childhood, but with critical changes in emphasis and strategy to accommodate the dramatic transition that is underway from childhood to adulthood.

**A few notes on this list.** Although they were reached independently, the Project's conclusions about the five key areas of parental influence are strikingly similar to findings from other initiatives, across children's ages and across disciplinary approaches. There are significant overlaps, for example, among these categories and those developed from analysis of research regarding the role of families in adolescence,<sup>[1]</sup> the role of parents in earlier age periods,<sup>[2]</sup> the role of parents during adolescence,<sup>[3]</sup> the role of parents across the age span,<sup>[4]</sup> and the role of adults more generally in adolescence.<sup>[5]</sup>

At the same time, however, these five categories are unusual in emphasizing the needs that are particularly important in adolescence, as opposed to earlier childhood, and the roles that are particularly influential from parents, as opposed to other adults and resources in teens' lives. For example, the Project has underscored the kinds of transitional parenting functions, such as monitoring and advising, that move parent-child relationships from the kinds of parental guidance that are more typical during childhood to those that are more common during adulthood. Similarly, the Project has highlighted advocacy as a separate arena because of the increasing need in the teen years for parents to seek out resources beyond

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[1] Carnegie Council 1995. • [2] Greenspan 1997; Bornstein 1995b. • [3] Small and Eastman 1991. • [4] Holden 1997; Alvy 1994; Smith et al. 1994. • [5] Scales and Leffert 1999.

the home, to supplement and enhance what parents can provide in areas such as education, employment, career development, after-school activities, and community support.<sup>[6]</sup> In addition, though providing a safe environment is sometimes subsumed under another category in other analyses,<sup>[7]</sup> this Project elected to underscore the issue of abuse in a separate note, because the prevalence of abuse in adolescence is often seriously underestimated, as are its consequences. (See following section, “First Do No Harm.”) Here, then, are the Five Basics:

## I. Love and Connect

**Teens need parents to develop and maintain a relationship with them that offers support and acceptance, while accommodating and affirming the teen’s increasing maturity.**

Although there is debate among researchers about the relative importance of parents, peers, and other adults in teens’ lives, there is widespread agreement that relationships with parents remain important in healthy teen development. Studies find that supportive relationships with both mothers and fathers are linked, for example, with lower risks of substance abuse, depression, negative peer influence, and delinquency, as well as higher levels of self-reliance, self-image, identity formation, school performance, and success in future relationships.<sup>[8]</sup> A baseline of nurturing, which has been variously described and studied as acceptance, warmth, affection, encouragement, connection, and support, also indirectly strengthens the ability of parents to carry out other components of their role, such as setting limits and offering guidance, and helps teens handle the stresses of their new roles.<sup>[9]</sup>

Teens themselves, when questioned in surveys and other studies, attest to their continued dependence on their parents’ attention and support, both mothers and fathers.<sup>[10]</sup> There is no question that teens also want increasing independence and increasing participation in decisions about themselves and family matters, but rather than disconnection, they seek a new kind of connection, one that allows for increasing maturity and mastery of adult roles.<sup>[11]</sup>

The change—and challenge—for many parents is that this connectedness and support must take place in the context of their teens’ increasing efforts to establish their own values, ideas, and identity, manifesting itself in such behaviors as increased criticism, emotional distancing, withdrawal

[6] See also Small and Eastman 1991. • [7] Bornstein 1995b; Smith et al. 1994. • [8] Collins et al. 2000; Reiss 2000; Garbarino 1999; Gobeli 1999; Gray and Steinberg 1999b; Kipke 1999a; Scales and Leffert 1999; Resnick et al. 1997; Carnegie Council 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Kegan 1994; Noller 1994; Smith et al. 1994; Hauser 1991; Coleman and Hendry 1990; Collins 1990; Hauser and Bowlds 1990; Steinberg 1990; Jessor and Jessor 1977. • [9] Garbarino 1999; Gray and Steinberg 1999b; Smith 1999; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Kegan 1994; Larson and Richards 1994; Noller 1994; Smith et al. 1994; Coleman and Hendry 1990; Steinberg 1990; Youniss and Smollar 1985; Maccoby and Martin 1983. • [10] Bostrom 2000b; Galinsky 1999; Garbarino 1999; Osherson 1999; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; Steinberg 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Families and Work Institute 1993; Takanishi 1993; National Commission 1991; Pogrebin 1983. • [11] Gray and Steinberg 1999b; Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke 1997; Holmbeck 1996; Silverberg and Gondoli 1996; Hauser 1991.

from family activities, intensification of peer relationships, and more selective sharing of personal information.<sup>[12]</sup> Although there are scholarly and cultural differences about the relative emphasis on separation and connection, the common theme is the need for some of both, and for separation to occur in the context of a supportive parental relationship.<sup>[13]</sup> As indicated in the chapter on “Principles and Context,” closeness must be balanced with space for individuality, connection with privacy, support with acknowledgment of differences of opinion, family time with peer time, and nurturing with accommodation of maturing bodies and minds.

Furthermore, this delicate balance must be negotiated with teens who are typically more moody, intense, critical, and argumentative than younger children, as discussed in the chapter on “Principles and Context.”<sup>[14]</sup> To do so often requires parents to strengthen their skills, such as in handling criticism and anger, negotiation, problem solving, listening, conflict resolution, adapting to change, and delegating responsibility.<sup>[15]</sup> Research identifies a special challenge for parents and teens arising from teens’ development of sexual characteristics and behavior.<sup>[16]</sup> All these issues may require changes in the ways in which parents express love and connection, adapting their patterns for giving physical and emotional affection to fit teens’ changing needs, sensitivities, interests, and activities.

Contrary to many parents’ expectations, providing opportunities for increased debate and conflict does not generally compromise their attachment. The key is learning to exchange ideas in ways that are nonjudgmental and respectful. By allowing teens to express their own point of view, in a context of ongoing communication and connectedness, parents are enhancing their teen’s development of a sense of identity and individuality, while also strengthening the relationship by becoming better informed about their teen’s thoughts and feelings, and making room ultimately for a healthy adult-to-adult bond.<sup>[17]</sup> Moderate levels of conflict, as indicated in the previous chapter, also provide teens with the opportunity to learn conflict resolution and negotiation skills, as well as the complexities of adult-to-adult relationships.<sup>[18]</sup>

What, then, does “love and nurture” look like as children become teens? It includes behaviors that communicate respect, interest, warmth, and affection, so that the teen feels accepted and approved of as a person, while also allowing for increased privacy, autonomy, and difference of opinion. It means continuing both to work together and play together.

[12] Arnett 1999; Grotevant 1998; Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke 1997; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Kegan 1994; Noller 1994; Coleman and Hendry 1990; Collins 1990. • [13] Steinberg 2000; Arnett 1999; Gorman 1998; Grotevant 1998; Weingarten 1998; Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke 1997; Larson et al. 1996; Silverberg and Gondoli 1996; García Coll, Meyer, and Brillon 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Collins 1992, 1990; Youniss, DeSantis, and Henderson 1992; Hauser 1991; Montemayor and Flannery 1991; Coleman and Hendry 1990; Youniss and Smollar 1985; Montemayor 1983. • [14] Arnett 1999; Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke 1997; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Noller 1994; Coleman and Hendry 1990. • [15] Grotevant 1998; Baumrind 1996; Noller 1994; Collins 1990; Steinberg 1990. • [16] Gray and Steinberg 1999a; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Steinberg 1994; Collins 1990; Galinsky 1987. • [17] Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Noller 1994; Surrey 1991; Collins 1990. • [18] Steinberg 2000; Arnett 1999; Benson, Galbraith, and Espeland 1998; Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke 1997; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Noller 1994; Hauser and Bowlds 1990; Winnicott 1965.

Strategies vary across culture and philosophy, but the following appear frequently in a diversity of reviews of research and practice.<sup>[19]</sup>

**Research in no way suggests that “one size fits all” with parenting strategies,** but rather that these ideas offer starting points and overall guidelines from which to select and adapt, taking into account values, special needs, environmental risks, ethnic traditions, individual style, and many other factors.

## 1. Love and Connect

Strategies for Parents	
<b>Watch for moments</b>	when you feel and can express genuine affection, respect, and appreciation for your teen.
<b>Acknowledge the good times</b>	made possible by your teen’s personality and growth.
<b>Expect increased criticism</b>	and debate, and strengthen your skills for discussing ideas and disagreements in ways that respect both your teen’s opinions and your own.
<b>Spend time just listening</b>	to your teen’s thoughts and feelings about her or his fears, concerns, interests, ideas, perspectives, activities, jobs, schoolwork, and relationships.
<b>Treat each teen as a unique individual</b>	distinct from siblings, stereotypes, his or her past, or your own past.
<b>Appreciate and acknowledge</b>	each teen’s new areas of interest, skills, strengths, and accomplishments, as well as the positive aspects of adolescence generally, such as its passion, vitality, humor, and deepening intellectual thought.
<b>Provide meaningful roles</b>	for your teen in the family, ones that are genuinely useful and important to the family’s well-being.
<b>Spend time together</b>	one on one and as a family, continuing some familiar family routines, while also taking advantage of ways in which new activities, such as community volunteering, can offer new ways to connect.
<p><b>Key Message for Parents:</b></p> <p>Most things about their world are changing. Don’t let your love be one of them.</p>	

[19] Stepp 2000; Eberly and Montemayor 1999; Gobeli 1999; Benson, Galbraith, and Espeland 1998; Diamond and Hopson 1998; Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke 1997; Steinberg and Levine 1997; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Larson and Richards 1994; Smith et al. 1994; Hauser 1991; Collins 1990.

## 2. Monitor and Observe

Teens need parents to be aware of—and let teens know they are aware of—their activities, including school performance, work experiences, after-school activities, peer relationships, adult relationships, and recreation, through a process that increasingly involves less direct supervision and more communication, observation, and networking with other adults.

The seemingly simple act of monitoring teens' activities—having teens report on their whereabouts and knowing where teens are—is found in studies to be linked to a lower risk of drug and alcohol use, early sexual activity, pregnancy, depression, school problems, victimization, delinquency, and negative peer influence.<sup>[20]</sup> Monitoring also appears to communicate that parents care and are listening, to influence peer selection, to help teens develop social competence, and to encourage the involvement and interest of other adults, such as teachers and coaches.<sup>[21]</sup>

One of the new challenges for parents of teens is that more of the monitoring must be done indirectly, by observing changes in teen behavior, by listening to teen disclosures, and by checking in with other adults. Again, a central theme is balance, between the need for supervision and the need for privacy. Furthermore, there is so much more to monitor than in earlier years, as teens enter an ever-widening world of education, employment, activities, recreation, and friendships. Also, parents need to work within gradually increasing provisions for teens' confidentiality and autonomy within social institutions, including health care, educational, and legal systems.

Monitoring in a few specific areas has been given particular attention:

- **School progress and environment.** Parental involvement in school activities tends to decrease dramatically in adolescence, but its impact does not.<sup>[22]</sup> Supervision of grades is associated with better grades, monitoring of school behavior with fewer school behavior problems, and school involvement with both higher grades and fewer problems.<sup>[23]</sup> School involvement can take place at a number of different levels, such as monitoring communications from school, attending parent-teacher conferences and school functions, and participating in school governance.<sup>[24]</sup>

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[20] Garbarino 1999; Miller 1998; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; Chamberlain and Patterson 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Small and Eastman 1991; Steinberg 1991b; Patterson and Forgatch 1987. • [21] Garbarino 1999; Gray and Steinberg 1999b; Jarrett 1999, 1997; Brody and Flor 1998; Elliott, Hamburg, and Williams 1998; Miller 1998; Holden 1997; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; Chamberlain and Patterson 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Zill and Nord 1994. • [22] Eccles and Harold 1996; Zill and Nord 1994. • [23] Gray and Steinberg 1999b; Brody and Flor 1998; Dryfoos 1998; Holden 1997; Eccles and Harold 1996; Carnegie Council 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Zill and Nord 1994; Entwisle 1990. • [24] Eccles and Harold 1996.

- **Physical and mental health.** Although most teens navigate the physical and emotional watershed of adolescence without serious difficulty, teens are at significant risk in several ways, as their rates of suicide, mental illness, and other problems grow to be as high as those for adults. One special source of problems for adolescents centers on adjusting to sexual maturation, managing sexual feelings, and struggling to find a sexual identity. Issues that can arise include shame or self-hatred around early onset of puberty, especially in girls; late onset of puberty, especially in boys; homosexuality; and gains and losses in romantic relationships.<sup>[25]</sup> About ten to 20 percent of teens develop a serious emotional disorder, such as depression or an eating disorder. Rates of depression quadruple;<sup>[26]</sup> and depression, in turn, is one of the predictors of suicide, which has increased far faster among teens than in the general population.<sup>[27]</sup> However, if parents respond to signs of depression and seek help, treatment can reduce depressive symptoms and increase teens' capacity to cope successfully.<sup>[28]</sup>
- **After-school whereabouts, friendships, and peer activities.** It has been estimated that as much as 40 percent of young adolescents' time is spent in unstructured, unsupervised activity,<sup>[29]</sup> and as many as three-quarters of teens report no organized after-school activities.<sup>[30]</sup> In contrast to children and adults, the most common causes of mortality in teens arise from hazards in the environment, including automobile accidents and homicides.<sup>[31]</sup> Knowing a teen's whereabouts and behavior during out-of-school hours is associated with lower rates of drug and alcohol use, pregnancy, and delinquency, as well as reduced susceptibility to negative peer pressure.<sup>[32]</sup> Getting to know teenagers' friends is an important part of the strategy, as is monitoring teen employment. Part-time work for youngsters who are still in school can have negative effects if it involves long hours or high levels of disposable income; but it can also have very positive effects, such as giving teens an important or essential role in the family and building occupational and life skills.<sup>[33]</sup> About four out of five youngsters hold a job at some point during high school, and half of older teens are employed at any given time.<sup>[34]</sup>

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[25] Diamond, Savin-Williams, and Dube 1999; Larson, Clore, and Wood 1999; Tolman 1999; Maccoby 1998; Achterberg and Shannon 1993; Rickel and Hendren 1993; Savin-Williams and Rodriguez 1993.  
 • [26] Garbarino 1999; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1998; Compas and Hammen 1996; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995. • [27] Poussaint and Alexander 2000; Jamison 1999; Grotevant 1998; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997. • [28] Peterson et al. 1997; Compas and Hammen 1996. • [29] Kipke 1999a; Carnegie Council 1995. • [30] Duffett, Johnson, and Farkas 1999. • [31] Kipke 1999a. • [32] Gray and Steinberg 1999b; Carnegie Council 1995; Chamberlain and Patterson 1995; Miller 1998; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Steinberg 1991b. • [33] Council of Economic Advisors 2000; Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider 2000; Families and Work Institute 2000; Hamilton 1999b; Newman 1999; Youniss and Yates 1997; Graber, Brooks-Gunn, and Petersen 1996; Nightingale and Wolverton 1993. • [34] Council of Economic Advisors 2000; Families and Work Institute 2000.

- **Media and other popular culture.** Virtually all American adolescents are immersed in media-related activities—television, videos, video games, movies, radio, CDs and tapes, the Internet, books, magazines, newspapers—an average of close to seven hours a day.<sup>[35]</sup> The use of media consumes more time than school; most usage occurs out of the presence of parents.<sup>[36]</sup> Most teens have an audio system in their bedrooms, over half have a television in their bedrooms, and the percentages are higher among those at lower socioeconomic levels.<sup>[37]</sup>

Although there is debate about the effects of the mass media on adolescents, the research raises concerns that certain media may influence the attitudes and behavior of susceptible teens. There tends to be agreement, therefore, that it is appropriate for parents at least to observe and discuss, if not plan and limit, the amount and content of teens' use of electronic media.<sup>[38]</sup> One area of particular attention is the impact of messages about the attractiveness of suicide, violence, alcohol and drug use, early sexual behavior, stereotypical gender and racial roles, unhealthy body types, buying habits, and consumer culture. Another is the impact of heavy television use on attention and thinking skills, obesity, violent behavior, school achievement, understanding of the differences between real and entertainment worlds, buying habits, and displacement of other activities.<sup>[39]</sup>

Suggestions to parents from researchers and advocates regarding addressing these concerns have included: **(a)** listening to, taking an interest in, and learning about teens' choices in music, entertainment, and other media; **(b)** discussing with teens the messages being conveyed in entertainment and news media, encouraging critical thinking and media literacy skills; **(c)** establishing family policies about media use; **(d)** keeping computers and television sets in central locations rather than private spaces; and **(e)** mobilizing formal media education and advocacy through schools or outside organizations.<sup>[40]</sup>

[35] Children's Defense Fund 2000; Roberts 2000; Roberts et al. 1999. • [36] Roberts 2000; Gentile and Walsh 1999; Roberts et al. 1999. • [37] Roberts 2000; Gentile and Walsh 1999; Roberts et al. 1999. • [38] Brown and Cantor 2000; Children's Defense Fund 2000; Roberts 2000. • [39] Brown and Cantor 2000; Cantor 2000; Christenson, Henriksen, and Roberts 2000; Garbarino 1999; Kunkel, Rollin, and Biely 1999; Roberts, Henriksen, and Christenson 1999; Singer et al. 1999; Heintz-Knowles 1998; Damon 1997; Carnegie Council 1995; Strasburger 1995; Roberts 1993. • [40] Children's Defense Fund 2000; Gentile and Walsh 1999; Christenson and Roberts 1998; Damon 1997; Roberts 1993.

All told, with respect to monitoring teens' behavior and well-being, the following strategies emerge from the research.

## 2. Monitor and Observe

Strategies for Parents	
<b>Keep track of your teen's whereabouts</b>	and activities, directly or indirectly, by listening, observing, and networking with others who come into contact with your teen.
<b>Keep in touch with other adults</b>	who are willing and able to let you know of positive or negative trends in your teen's behavior, such as neighbors, family, religious and community leaders, shopkeepers, teachers, and other parents.
<b>Involve yourself in school events</b>	such as parent-teacher conferences, back-to-school nights, and special needs planning meetings.
<b>Stay informed about your teen's progress</b>	in school and employment, as well as the level and nature of outside activities; get to know your teen's friends and acquaintances.
<b>Learn and watch for warning signs</b>	of poor physical or mental health, as well as signs of abuse or neglect, including lack of motivation, weight loss, problems with eating or sleeping, a drop in school performance and/or skipping school, drug use, withdrawal from friends and activities, promiscuity, running away, unexplained injury, serious and persistent conflict between parent and teen, or high levels of anxiety or guilt.
<b>Seek guidance if you have concerns</b>	about these warning signs or any other aspect of your teen's health or behavior, consulting with teachers, counselors, religious leaders, physicians, parenting educators, family and tribal elders, and others.
<b>Monitor your teen's experiences</b>	in settings and relationships inside and outside the home that hold the potential for physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, including relationships involving parental figures, siblings, extended family, caregivers, peers, partners, employers, teachers, counselors, and activity leaders.
<b>Evaluate the level of challenge</b>	of proposed teen activities, such as social events, media exposure, and jobs, matching the challenges to your teen's ability to handle them.
<b>Key Message for Parents:</b> Monitor your teen's activities. You still can, and it still counts.	

### 3. Guide and Limit

**Teens need parents to uphold a clear but evolving set of boundaries, maintaining important family rules and values, but also encouraging increased competence and maturity.**

Limit setting remains an essential dimension in parenting adolescents, correlating positively with academic performance, social competence, and prevention of problem behaviors.<sup>[41]</sup>

When asked in research studies, teens acknowledge that they continue to look to parents to provide a supervisory role as evidence of their caring as well as their authority. In fact, they see parents as retaining authority to set moral and social rules, to monitor their behavior, and to hold expectations around school, chores, and other areas of performance, although they disagree with parents about the limits of their authority.<sup>[42]</sup>

At the same time, parents need to engage in limit setting in ways that acknowledge and encourage their teens' own decision making and problem solving. With respect to this balance, two principles emerge as influencing the effectiveness of limit setting, as evidenced by association with positive outcomes, including school competence, social responsibility, moral development, impulse control, self reliance, and healthy peer choices, as well as reduction in negative outcomes, including depression and delinquent behavior. They are:

- **Combine rules and expectations with respect and responsiveness.** “Love and limits” need to go together; neither is nearly as effective without the other. In particular, for adolescents, limits need to allow teens to develop and maintain their own opinions and beliefs, and to experience their parents as hearing and responding to these ideas in making decisions about rules. The reasoning behind rules needs to be explained. Also, emphasis needs to be placed on limit setting for protection and guidance, rather than for punishment and power.<sup>[43]</sup>
- **Combine firmness and flexibility.** Although some rules need to be firm, allowing for the safety and security of the teen and family, others need to be flexible, allowing for the teen's increasing competence, dependability, and decision-making capacity. Teens need the experience of negotiating rules and resolving conflicts with parents in ways that are respectful to both parent and teen. The relative emphasis on firmness and flexibility varies within families, depending in part on the safety of the neighborhood and community in which the teen lives: higher-risk neighborhoods call for more emphasis on the qualities of safety

[41] Brody and Flor 1998; Holden 1997; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; Baumrind 1996; Carnegie Council 1995; Chamberlain and Patterson 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Noller 1994; Smith et al. 1994; Steinberg and Darling 1994; Coleman and Hendry 1990. • [42] Gray and Steinberg 1999b; Smetana 1994; Smetana and Asquith 1994; Coleman and Hendry 1990; Youniss and Smollar 1985. • [43] Fletcher, Steinberg, and Sellers 1999; Brody and Flor 1998; Holden 1997; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; Baumrind 1996; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Noller 1994; Smith et al. 1994; Coleman and Hendry 1990.

and respect for authority offered by firmness, while lower-risk neighborhoods allow for more emphasis on the opportunities for learning cooperative decision making and self-expression offered by flexibility. Similarly, families' cultural traditions play a role, with more emphasis on firmness in ethnic groups that place greater value on family cohesion and respect for parental authority, and on flexibility in ethnic groups that place greater value on individuality and autonomy.<sup>[44]</sup>

As children become teens, an added challenge around limit setting for many parents is that decisions about limits often take place many times a day and must be made in the context of teens' new levels of risk taking and rule testing. Teens vigorously question rules and limits as they struggle to achieve a sense of identity, apply abstract reasoning, forge more mature peer and sexual relationships, and redefine their parental relationships.<sup>[45]</sup> The disadvantages of both rigid and permissive approaches become more apparent, and have higher stakes as teens acquire adult skills and rights. Lack of success with these "traditional" strategies can tempt parents to give up, in particular because learning better alternatives takes information, time, and energy, all of which are in short supply for already overstressed and overworked American parents.<sup>[46]</sup>

**About physical punishment.** Hitting teens as a form of punishment is far from unusual in American households. Nearly half of parents, both mothers and fathers, report hitting their teenage daughters and sons, an average of several times a year.<sup>[47]</sup> Consensus on the effects of physical punishment has not been achieved. On the one hand, a body of research has accumulated that connects physical punishment with a number of negative effects, including rebellion, depression, physically aggressive behavior, and later spousal assaults.<sup>[48]</sup> However, this research has been questioned on several grounds, including: **(a)** its correlative nature—physical punishment is associated with negative outcomes but is not shown to cause them; **(b)** its failure to take into account differences in the severity and context of the physical punishment, including whether the punishment is associated with low or high maternal warmth; **(c)** its lack of sensitivity to some ethnic traditions in which mild physical punishment has a different meaning, more typically communicating caring, respect for authority, vigilance, and acknowledgment of the special risks for children of color who are coping disproportionately with racism, poverty, and neighborhood violence; and **(d)** its inconsistency with the tenets of certain religions, including some Christian traditions.<sup>[49]</sup>

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[44] Furstenberg et al. 1999; Holden and Miller 1999; Baumrind 1996; García Coll, Meyer, and Brillon 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Chao 1994; Steinberg 1990; Youniss and Smollar 1985. • [45] Arnett 1999; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995. • [46] Phelan 1998; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Patterson and Forgatch 1987. • [47] Straus 1994. • [48] McLoyd 1998; Milburn and Conrad 1996; Straus and Yodanis 1996; Noller 1994; Straus 1994; Steinberg 1990. • [49] Brody and Flor 1998; McLoyd 1998; Baumrind 1996; Larzelere 1996; García Coll, Meyer, and Brillon 1995; Dobson 1992.

However, the predominance of researchers and practitioners, representing a broad range of racial and religious traditions, agree that there are better alternatives; and all agree that, if used at all, physical punishment should never be delivered with intent to do physical or emotional harm.<sup>[50]</sup>

The following strategies, then, take into account this controversy over physical punishment, but identify the common themes that emerge within it and across a wide range of research literature.<sup>[51]</sup>

### 3. Guide and Limit

Strategies for Parents	
<b>Maintain family rules</b>	or “house rules,” upholding some non-negotiable rules around issues like safety and central family values, while negotiating other rules around issues like household tasks and schedules.
<b>Communicate expectations</b>	that are high, but realistic.
<b>Choose battles</b>	and ignore smaller issues in favor of more important ones, such as drugs, school performance, and sexually responsible behavior.
<b>Use discipline as a tool</b>	for teaching, not for venting or taking revenge.
<b>Restrict punishment</b>	to forms that do not cause physical or emotional injury.
<b>Renegotiate responsibilities and privileges</b>	in response to your teen’s changing abilities, turning over some areas to the teen with appropriate monitoring.
<b>Key Message for Parents:</b> Loosen up, but don’t let go.	

[50] Brody and Flor 1998; McLoyd 1997; Baumrind 1996; Larzelere 1996; Dobson 1992. • [51] Eberly and Montemayor 1999; Gray and Steinberg 1999b; Jarrett 1999, 1997; Schneider and Stevenson 1999; Brody and Flor 1998; Miller 1998; Holden 1997; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; Chamberlain and Patterson 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Noller 1994; Zill and Nord 1994; Collins 1990.

## 4. Model and Consult

**Teens need parents to provide ongoing information and support around decision making, values, skills, goals, and interpreting and navigating the larger world, teaching by example and ongoing dialogue.**

Although the process of setting and negotiating limits is a powerful tool for helping teens learn values and decision making, another crucial set of strategies takes this important parenting role even further by making parents available as sources of information and counsel as teens navigate the widening world beyond home and family.<sup>[52]</sup>

There is no question that a growing circle of adults and peers influences teens' thinking and decisions during adolescence, but more surprising is the extent to which parents' values and ideas remain influential. As teens forge aspects of their sense of identity, they depend on the adults they know best to serve as steady influences, interpreters, and sounding boards. In fact, many researchers have concluded that parents are a key influence in teens' decision making around fundamental areas such as values, goals, and future directions.<sup>[53]</sup> A strong parental role has also been indicated around the formation of aspects of identity, including adoptive identity, positive racial and ethnic identity, and positive gender identity.<sup>[54]</sup>

Parents exercise their influence both by what they do and by what they say. With respect to what they do, parents' modeling, or setting a good example, has been found to be linked to better skills and attitudes around academic achievement, employment, health habits, individuality, relationships, communication, coping, and conflict resolution.<sup>[55]</sup>

With respect to what parents say, research affirms that teens are listening and talking in more ways than it may appear. Teens report that they admire their parents and turn, or wish they could turn, to them for advice and counsel, in areas including family problems, controversial social issues, philosophical "why's," and teens' plans for the future.<sup>[56]</sup>

Researchers also observe that teens tend to have values and beliefs on major issues like morality and politics that are similar to their parents. If they have strong bonds with their parents, teens even tend to choose friends with values that are consistent with those of their parents, when such peer choices are available.<sup>[57]</sup> Parents who have a stronger connection to their teen tend to have more influence with regard to teen decisions, as

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[52] Collins et al. 2000; Steinberg 2000; Resnick et al. 1997; Steinberg and Levine 1997; Riera 1995.  
• [53] Bostrom 2000b; Jarrett 1999, 1997; Resnick et al. 1997; Wallace and Williams 1997; Garbarino and Kostelny 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Noller 1994; Coleman and Hendry 1990.  
• [54] Grotevant et al. 2000; McAdoo 1999b; Brodzinsky, Smith, and Brodzinsky 1998; Phinney and Kohatsu 1997; Tatum 1997; McGoldrick, Giordano, and Pearce 1996; Ward 1996; Brooks 1994; Smith et al. 1994; Coleman and Hendry 1990; Harrison et al. 1990. • [55] Gray and Steinberg 1999b; Frydenberg 1997; Holden 1997; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Noller 1994; Coleman and Hendry 1990; Hauser and Bowlds 1990. • [56] Schneider and Stevenson 1999; Carnegie Council 1995; Louis Harris 1995; Coleman and Hendry 1990; Hayden as cited in Steinberg 1990, p. 14; Youniss and Smollar 1985.  
• [57] Collins et al. 2000; Gray and Steinberg 1999b; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995.

do parents who choose ways of conveying their ideas that are respectful of their teen’s growing maturity of thought and action.<sup>[58]</sup> (See “Love and Connect” and “Guide and Limit” sections.)

In order to strengthen their decision-making skills, teens need environments that present neither too little nor too great a level of challenge—neither an overprotective environment that presents too few opportunities for learning from mistakes and coming up against problems nor an overwhelming environment that presents too few opportunities for trying out new coping strategies and experiencing successes.<sup>[59]</sup>

All in all, strategies for modeling behavior and supporting teen decision making break down into several categories. Central to all these strategies are communication skills, including listening, modeling, offering consultation and advice, negotiating differences, and problem solving. The research, in particular, supports the following areas:

- engaging in discussions around moral and social issues, taking clear positions, while allowing teens to develop and express positions of their own;<sup>[60]</sup>
- affirming and maintaining family activities, rituals, and traditions;<sup>[61]</sup>
- offering information on areas of risky behavior, such as drug and alcohol use;<sup>[62]</sup>
- modeling good lifestyle habits;<sup>[63]</sup>
- discussing and offering frameworks for understanding and challenging negative experiences based on race, ethnicity, gender, family structure, sexual orientation, class, immigrant status, emotional and physical illness, and disability;<sup>[64]</sup>
- teaching coping skills, such as problem solving, managing multiple demands, and negotiation;<sup>[65]</sup>
- providing opportunities for debate and decision making;<sup>[66]</sup> and
- supporting formal education and life-skills training, discussing future options, and offering strategies for succeeding in school and work-place settings.<sup>[67]</sup>

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[58] Gray and Steinberg 1999b; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Coleman and Hendry 1990. [59] McAdoo 1999b; Gibbs 1998a; Clarke 1997; McLoyd 1997; Taylor 1997; Kegan 1994; Eccles et al. 1993; Savin-Williams and Rodriguez 1993; Bosma and Jackson 1990; Hauser and Bowlds 1990. • [60] Steinberg 2000; Schneider and Stevenson 1999; Coles 1997; Holden 1997; Ward 1996; Carnegie Council 1995; Kegan 1994; Noller 1994; Hauser 1991. • [61] Doherty 1997; Phinney and Kohatsu 1997; Mahdi, Christopher, and Meade 1996; Kagan 1986. • [62] Moore, Rosenthal, and Mitchell 1996; Carnegie Council 1995; Strasburger 1995; Steinberg 1991b. • [63] Diamond and Hopson 1998; Graber, Brooks-Gunn, and Petersen 1996; Carnegie Council 1995. • [64] Read 2000; McAdoo 1999b; McCubbin et al. 1999, 1998a,b; García Coll, Surrey, and Weingarten 1998; Tatum 1997; Taylor and Wang 1997; McGoldrick, Giordano, and Pearce 1996; Hodapp 1995; Savin-Williams and Rodriguez 1993. • [65] Harter 1999; Jarrett 1999; Diamond and Hopson 1998; Carnegie Council 1995. • [66] Diamond and Hopson 1998; Shulman and Seiffge-Krenke 1997; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Noller 1994; Hauser and Bowlds 1990. • [67] Gray and Steinberg 1999b; Jarrett 1999; Schneider and Stevenson 1999; Brody and Flor 1998; Dryfoos 1998; Holden 1997; Carnegie Council 1995; Holmbeck, Paikoff, and Brooks-Gunn 1995; Zill and Nord 1994; Youniss and Smollar 1985.

These research findings translate into the following strategies for parents.

#### 4. Model and Consult

Strategies for Parents	
<b>Set a good example</b>	around risk taking, health habits, and emotional control.
<b>Express personal positions</b>	about social, political, moral, and spiritual issues, including issues of ethnicity and gender.
<b>Model the kind of adult relationships</b>	that you would like your teen to have.
<b>Answer teens' questions</b>	in ways that are truthful, while taking into account their level of maturity.
<b>Maintain or establish traditions</b>	including family, cultural, and/or religious rituals.
<b>Support teens' education</b>	and vocational training, including through participation in household tasks, outside activities, and employment that develop their skills, interests, and sense of value to the family and community.
<b>Help teens get information</b>	about future options and strategies for education, employment, and lifestyle choices.
<b>Give teens opportunities</b>	to practice reasoning and decision making by asking questions that encourage them to think logically and consider consequences, while providing safe opportunities to try out their own ideas and learn from their mistakes.
<b>Key Message for Parents:</b> The teen years: Parents still matter; teens still care.	

## 5. Provide and Advocate

**Teens need parents to make available not only adequate nutrition, clothing, shelter, and health care, but also a supportive home environment and a network of caring adults.**

Widely shared across cultures, of course, is the concept that children have rights to adequate food, clothing, shelter, and health care, and that parents, including fathers, have a responsibility either to provide or to advocate for these basic needs at least through adolescence.<sup>[68]</sup>

The challenge for parents is to accomplish this task in the face of barriers such as family poverty, racism, lack of child support, unemployment and underemployment, overwork, limited formal education, lack of community resources, lack of after-school options, lack of familiarity with American systems and customs, domestic violence, neighborhood poverty and violence, parental incarceration, homelessness, and parents' physical and mental illness, including disability, chronic illness, and substance abuse.<sup>[69]</sup> The challenges are increased by a tendency at adolescence for specialized services to be less common and for some problems, such as mental illness and substance abuse, to become more common.<sup>[70]</sup>

Less widely recognized is the concept that teens also need parents to help provide "social capital," that is, to seek out relationships within the community that supplement what the immediate family can or even should provide in the way of resources, guidance, training, and support. This parental function, sometimes called "family management," "advocacy," "sponsorship," or "community bridging," is observed in parenting across ethnic and socioeconomic groups, particularly in adolescence, as the child prepares for and enters a widening world and spends more and more time in unstructured and unsupervised settings.<sup>[71]</sup>

Sometimes included in this arena of parenting is the concept of taking steps to influence the community environment, such as choosing schools and youth programs in order to resist and combat the otherwise potentially negative effects of limited peer options, lack of positive adult role models and mentors, violence, unhealthy school climate and practices, racism, lack of resources for special needs or special talents, or lack of community cohesion.<sup>[72]</sup> Even in communities with significant resources, some researchers observe that typical middle schools, with their larger size, greater departmentalization, and decreased student-teacher contact, are not a good match for the developmental tasks of early adolescence.<sup>[73]</sup>

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[68] LeMenestral 2000; Bornstein 1998; Smith et al. 1994; Small and Eastman 1991. • [69] Bell and Quick 1999; Garbarino 1999; Gray and Steinberg 1999b; Scales and Leffert 1999; Laub and Lauritsen 1998; McLoyd 1998, 1997; Galambos and Ehrenberg 1997. • [70] Furstenberg et al. 1999; Schulenberg, Maggs, and Hurrelmann 1997; Carnegie Council 1995. • [71] See Furstenberg et al. 1999 on family management; Myers-Walls 1999; Smith et al. 1994; and Small and Eastman 1991 on advocacy; LeVine 1997 on sponsorship; Jarrett 1999 on community bridging; and Laub and Lauritsen 1998 on social capital. • [72] Damon 1999; Furstenberg et al. 1999; Laub and Lauritsen 1998; McLoyd 1998; Clarke 1997; Damon 1997; Holden 1997; Eccles and Harold 1996; Eccles, Lord, and Roeser 1996; Steinberg and Darling 1994; Csikszentmihalyi et al. 1993. • [73] Eccles et al. 1993.

Also included in this thinking is the concept of creating opportunities for teens to develop meaningful competencies through jobs, after-school activities, community activism, and volunteer work, especially when needed to combat inadequate, mismatched, and discriminatory distribution of resources in schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, and other settings.<sup>[74]</sup> Mentoring has also received significant attention lately as a means of providing additional adult support, guidance, and training.<sup>[75]</sup>

A key part of this concept involves collaborating with teens themselves, working together as allies, in addressing the problems that they face.

More typically stressed is the need, within existing neighborhoods and schools, to seek out people and programs that can effectively assist a teen in areas such as education, special needs, development of talent, recreation, health care, mental health care, financial assistance, legal counsel, formal and informal mentors, and employment. Such strategies can mediate, although not eliminate, the negative impact of family poverty and neighborhood deterioration. These strategies also help to combat the reduction in opportunities for lasting adult-teen relationships that characterize American culture more broadly, given the more limited contact between teens and teachers in school, the high turnover of caregivers in managed health care, and the geographical distance separating many extended families.<sup>[76]</sup>

A subset of these strategies addresses the need for parents to advocate for their teens by involving themselves in their teens' schools, including, where culturally appropriate and logistically possible, meeting with teachers, guidance counselors, and other staff; attending school functions; participating in the classroom; assisting their child in understanding and adjusting to transitions to middle school and high school; monitoring the quality and quantity of teaching and special services; and advocating for better or more appropriate services. (See "Monitor and Observe" section.) Parents of special needs children often have taken a leadership role in learning and exercising advocacy skills in educational settings. They have developed techniques, such as the formation of parent networks and political lobbying for improved services, that can be applied more generally to parent advocacy.<sup>[77]</sup> Also noted is the need to seek out people and programs for youngsters to supplement school and home in areas such as learning community responsibility and building vocational skills.<sup>[78]</sup>

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[74] Larson 2000; Youth Development 2000; Jarrett 1999; Newman 1999; Damon 1997; Youniss and Yates 1997; Côté and Allahaar 1996; Hamilton 1990. • [75] Rhodes in press. • [76] Furstenberg et al. 1999; Jarrett 1999; Galambos and Ehrenberg 1997; Carnegie Council 1995. • [77] Read 2000; Myers-Walls 1999; Greenspan 1998. • [78] Zeldin, Camino, and Wheeler 2000; Benson et al. 1998; Damon 1997.

Specific strategies for which there is broad research support include the following.<sup>[79]</sup>

## 5. Provide and Advocate

Strategies for Parents	
<b>Network within the community</b>	as well as within schools, family, religious organizations, and social services to identify resources that can provide positive adult and peer relationships, guidance, training, and activities for your teen.
<b>Make informed decisions</b>	among available options for schools and educational programs, taking into account such issues as safety, social climate, approach to diversity, community cohesion, opportunities for peer relationships and mentoring, and the match between school practices and your teen's learning style and needs.
<b>Make similarly informed decisions</b>	among available options for neighborhoods, community involvement, and youth programs.
<b>Arrange or advocate for preventive health care</b>	and treatment, including care for mental illness.
<b>Identify people and programs to support and inform you</b>	in handling parental responsibilities and in understanding the societal and personal challenges in raising teens.
<b>Key Message for Parents:</b> You can't control their world, but you can add to and subtract from it.	

[79] Damon 1999; Furstenberg et al. 1999; McLoyd 1998; Carnegie Council 1995; Smith et al. 1994; Steinberg and Darling 1994; Small 1990.

# First Do No Harm

## A Note on the Abuse and Neglect of Adolescents

If there is any one bottom-line message that emerges from the analysis of research on adolescent and parenting tasks, it is that teenagers are vulnerable. They are still growing—their bodies, their brains, and their capacity to think, feel, relate, and work. Their physical and sexual maturity belie their emotional and social immaturity. Their growing competence disguises a continued financial and psychological dependence. Their boldness and bravado mask an inexperience in solving problems and coping with stress that is often no match for the unsupervised, risk-laden environment in which they live.

It should not be surprising, then, that teens are still powerfully affected by abuse from parents, as well as from other adults and peers. Although abuse is less likely to result in fatalities as children get older, it causes external and internal injuries that are profoundly disabling. Physical abuse of adolescents is linked, for example, to running away, substance abuse, suicide, delinquency, mental disorders such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, eating disorders, adjustment problems, aggression and violence, poor school performance, hopelessness, and lack of empathy for others.<sup>[1]</sup> Sexual abuse is linked to higher rates of mental disorders, including depression and eating disorders, substance abuse, running away, early voluntary sexual activity, sexual dysfunction, and early pregnancy.<sup>[2]</sup>

What is surprising, however, is that abuse of teenagers is commonplace in America. Far from being out of danger, teens, regardless of race, have rates of physical and sexual abuse that are as high as or higher than those of young children, much of it at the hands of parents.<sup>[3]</sup>

Overall, birth parents and other parents account for the vast majority of teen abuse and neglect, and of serious and fatal injuries stemming from abuse.<sup>[4]</sup> For girls, physical and sexual abuse happens predominantly at home and by a family member; for boys, physical abuse happens predominantly at home and by a family member, but sexual abuse occurs predominantly outside of the home.<sup>[5]</sup> By the end of high school, between ten and 25 percent of girls, and four to ten percent of boys are estimated to have been sexually abused.<sup>[6]</sup> More than half of ten- to 14-year-olds report experiencing at least one act of violence by a parent in the past year.<sup>[7]</sup> One in four high-school girls and boys, across racial groups, has wanted to leave home because of violence or threats of violence.<sup>[8]</sup> Youngsters with disabili-

*Far from being out of danger, teens have rates of physical and sexual abuse that are as high as or higher than those of young children.*

[1] Daro forthcoming; Schoen et al. 1998, 1997; Hutchinson and Langlykke 1997; Van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth 1996; Straus 1994; Council on Scientific Affairs 1993; Trickett and Weinstein 1991; Garbarino and Gilliam 1980. • [2] Diamond, Savin-Williams, and Dube 1999; Hutchinson and Langlykke 1997; Benson 1993; Rickel and Hendren 1993. • [3] Sedlak and Broadhurst 1996; Feindler and Becker 1994. • [4] Snyder and Sickmund 1999; Feindler and Becker 1994. • [5] Schoen et al. 1998, 1997. • [6] Daro forthcoming; Schoen et al. 1998, 1997; Hutchinson and Langlykke 1997; Benson 1993. • [7] Daro forthcoming. • [8] Schoen et al. 1998, 1997.

ties and those who are homosexual or bisexual are among the groups at particularly high risk.<sup>[9]</sup>

These figures may even be low, as abuse is suspected to be under-reported for a variety of reasons, including **(a)** the presence of fewer mandated reporters in teens' lives; **(b)** a shortage of caring adults in whom to confide; **(c)** the lack of clear definitions, such that neither teens nor adults identify their maltreatment as abuse or neglect; **(d)** the presence of drug abuse, suicidality, violence toward parents or other family members, and other symptoms that mask underlying maltreatment; **(e)** the ability of teens to run away; **(f)** the fact that some reporting systems do not include adolescents; and **(g)** the absence of public concern.<sup>[10]</sup> Homeless, incarcerated, and runaway youth typically report high rates of prior abuse.<sup>[11]</sup> Complicating the picture is the fact that sometimes the abused teen is also an abuser, acting out on siblings, parents, peers, younger children, and others.<sup>[12]</sup>

Although some physical and sexual abuse stops at adolescence, some begins at adolescence, triggered by a tinderbox of new issues, including parents' midlife concerns and teens' challenges to limit setting, their sexuality, and their resistance to earlier abuse and punishment.<sup>[13]</sup>

Critical changes also occur in the patterns of abuse in adolescence. For the first time, girls are more likely than boys to be abused, and fathers are increasingly likely to be the abuser, rather than mothers.<sup>[14]</sup> Girls are at higher risk for sexual abuse, boys for physical abuse.<sup>[15]</sup> Gender differences also show up in the ways teens are seen to respond to physical abuse—boys tend to turn the anger outward in the form of aggression and delinquency; girls tend to turn it inward in the form of self-destructive behavior and depression. Poverty is less likely to be a factor among families that abuse teens than among those that abuse younger children.<sup>[16]</sup>

And what about neglect? To reach adulthood successfully, teens need connection, supervision, structure, guidance, and resources, including those that meet basic needs for nutrition, housing, clothing, and opportunities for health and educational services. Yet, these basic needs are not being met in thousands of homes in the United States. Rates of emotional neglect are higher in adolescence than in younger years, and rates of physical neglect are similar.<sup>[17]</sup>

Some of the responsibility for this health care crisis rests on the larger society, which confronts some parents with staggering challenges from poverty, isolation, and other forces.<sup>[18]</sup> Some rests with the media and with the social services system. Caught in a tangle of false assumptions, adolescent abuse and neglect attract little media attention or social services

[9] Eron, Gentry, and Schlegel 1994. • [10] Daro forthcoming; Poussaint and Alexander 2000; Garbarino 1996; Feindler and Becker 1994; Council on Scientific Affairs 1993. • [11] Bradley 1997; Noller 1994; Council on Scientific Affairs 1993. • [12] Daro forthcoming; Kindlon and Thompson 1999; Snyder and Sickmund 1999; Wiehe 1991. • [13] Finkelhor 1995; Feindler and Becker 1994; Council on Scientific Affairs 1993; Trickett and Weinstein 1991; Garbarino et al. 1986; Garbarino and Gilliam 1980; Lourie 1979. • [14] Snyder and Sickmund 1999; Trickett and Weinstein 1991. • [15] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1999; Sedlak and Broadhurst 1996. • [16] Daro forthcoming; Garbarino and Garbarino 1993. • [17] Sedlak and Broadhurst 1996. • [18] McAdoo 1999a,b; Taylor and Wang 1997.

response. When teens show signs of abuse, they are often ignored by parents, teachers, youth workers, and even health care providers. When cases of abuse are reported to authorities, even in preteens as young as ten, they are more likely to be “screened out” than are those of younger children, even when the injuries are equally severe. Among the arguments given for doing so are that it is too late, that she or he “asked for it,” that the injuries are not so serious, that teens can “get away” or take care of themselves, or that there really aren’t any services available to help anyway. [19] Compounding the problems, the teens themselves, partly as a result of their abuse, may well present themselves as uncooperative and unattractive, and as perpetrators as well as victims, reflecting and perpetuating the social and emotional handicaps that come with abuse, and hence deflecting and derailing the very help they need.[20] In one study, close to half of all high-school boys and a third of girls told no one about their physical or sexual abuse.[21]

In a kind of collective societal abuse and neglect, teens are also victims of violence at disproportionately high rates.[22] About a third of all victims of violence, including robbery, assault, rape, and murder, are teens; and, while rates of abuse are similar across racial and ethnic groups, rates of victimization are much higher for African American than European American youths.[23] This violence is even happening on school property, as is a level of bullying, teasing, harassment, and discrimination that constitutes emotional abuse and neglect.[24] During high school, nearly one in ten youngsters will experience physical violence from a romantic partner, [25] and nearly one in ten girls will report date-forced sex.[26] Even more youngsters will witness violence at home, in school, and in the community, with damaging effects of its own.[27]

In short, abuse and neglect of teens is underrated, underrecognized, and underreported. The consequences are profound for teens and society, threatening the strength of our workforce, the survival of our families, the very quality of our social fabric.

*The abuse and neglect of teens is underrated, underrecognized, and underreported.*

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[19] Daro forthcoming. • [20] Garbarino and Garbarino 1993. • [21] Schoen et al. 1998, 1997. • [22] Snyder and Sickmund 1999. • [23] Daro forthcoming; Hutchinson and Langlykke 1997. • [24] Snyder and Sickmund 1999; Elliott, Hamburg, and Williams 1998; Hutchinson and Langlykke 1997. • [25] Hutchinson and Langlykke 1997. • [26] Schoen et al. 1997. • [27] Daro forthcoming.





# Recommendations for Future Work

One of the most important kinds of wealth that we must share as a nation is our wealth of knowledge. In the last few decades, a significant body of knowledge has accumulated about the parenting of adolescents. Although consolidating and disseminating that knowledge is no panacea, it is one powerful strategy, in combination with other strategies, for strengthening families and improving outcomes for America's children and teens.

*The task of getting messages of this kind to the people who need them is a complex one, but many precedents demonstrate that it can be done.*

## Recommendations for Future Work

Parents of adolescents are largely not aware that well-established research findings exist, let alone what they might be. Even some of the most basic principles that are reaching parents and policy makers regarding young children—about brain development, about abuse, about the role of parents—are in general not reaching parents of adolescents, policy makers, and even the practitioners working with adolescents and families.

**What can be done?** We must build much more effective bridges among all those who are addressing the raising of teenagers. We must promote an exchange of information among researchers, parents, practitioners, and policy makers, so that each group benefits from the others' feedback. We must create more effective means of consolidating information, making it available, and conveying it back and forth; and we must support the senders, the synthesizers, and the seekers within each group. Together, we can make this work.

**How can we do it?** The following recommendations emerge from the findings of this report as the most effective next steps. They offer compelling windows of opportunity, because they build on what has already been done, tap the momentum that is gathering, fill obvious gaps in the current array of initiatives, and promise major benefits.

### Conduct media initiatives to disseminate widely the bottom-line messages on parenting adolescents about which there is widespread research agreement.

Given the powerful knowledge that has been gained from this Project, a critical next step is to engage in sustained, comprehensive public health media initiatives, using these findings and others like them to support and inform those involved in raising adolescents.

The task of getting messages of this kind to the people who need them is a complex one, but many precedents demonstrate that it can be done with proper planning, collaboration, expertise, resources, evaluation, and time, as summarized in this Project's previous report.<sup>[1]</sup> Well-designed campaigns have been successful in influencing public attitudes and behaviors on a number of public health issues, including parenting issues such as child abuse and infant health.<sup>[2]</sup>

In this case, an essential component of the planning process will be research on the diverse and complex target audience of parents and others raising teenagers: what they know, what they would like to know, and how they would prefer to learn it. This Project has uncovered a number of studies of parents' attitudes and behaviors toward teens and family life.<sup>[3]</sup> As a first step, their results need to be consolidated and analyzed.

[1] Simpson 1997. • [2] Dungan-Seaver 1999; DeJong and Winsten 1998; Communications Consortium 1996; Dombro et al. 1996; Backer 1995; Maibach and Parrott 1995; Wallack et al. 1993; Backer, Rogers, and Sopory 1992; Office of National Drug Control Policy n.d. • [3] See, for example, Duffett, Johnson, and Farkas 1999; Galinsky 1999; Hewlett and West 1998; Freedman-Doan et al. 1993; Youniss, DeSantis, and Henderson 1992.

As a second step, new initiatives need to be supported that supplement these studies with more information regarding parents' beliefs about the importance and nature of parenting in adolescence, their needs, their knowledge of adolescent development, and their preferences for whether, what, when, and how more support and information would be helpful. The New York–based National Parenting Association (NPA) is planning an initiative to survey parents more extensively about these issues, building on recent studies sponsored by NPA and others, in preparation for a campaign to heighten public awareness about the importance of parents and parenting.<sup>[4]</sup> Also based in New York, the Families and Work Institute is conducting a series of studies, following up on the recently published *Ask the Children*,<sup>[5]</sup> in which young people are surveyed about specific issues such as violence and learning.<sup>[6]</sup> The Washington-based FrameWorks Institute, together with the Center for Communications and Community at UCLA, is preparing a working paper that includes suggestions for reframing public attitudes toward teens, including positive messages about youth.<sup>[7]</sup>

Also essential to media initiatives in this area is a multifaceted and collaborative approach, integrating a variety of strategies to target the great diversity of audiences that is involved in raising adolescents and shaping programs and policies that impact them. Many organizations, projects, and approaches should be welcomed and involved, pooling their energy and experience in a shared cause, building on the findings of previous research and practice, and mobilizing community involvement. Ultimately, entertainment as well as advertising and informational media should be more engaged in this effort, given the many ways in which teens and families are portrayed in entertainment and news information and identified as a special target for advertising.<sup>[8]</sup>

Particularly important in the planning and evaluation of campaigns regarding parenting issues is monitoring to assure that messages do not have a “boomerang” effect, in which parents feel blamed, anxious, or demoralized because they are being asked to shoulder responsibilities that require more support and/or must be shared by the larger society. In other words, the planning of such campaigns needs to be based not only on research about adolescence, parenting, and effective communications, but also on research about what actually supports, rather than undermines, parents in their efforts to be better parents.

**Certain specific areas should also be the subject of special media initiatives, including abuse and neglect of adolescents, and strategies for raising preadolescents that help lay a foundation for adolescence.** A major opportunity is being overlooked, for example, to raise public consciousness about the surprising prevalence and staggering costs of abuse and neglect among American adolescents. A campaign in this area should build on the successes of campaigns to prevent the abuse of young children,<sup>[9]</sup> but with

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[4] Wooden 2000. • [5] Galinsky 1999. • [6] Galinsky 2000. • [7] FrameWorks Institute 2000.  
 • [8] DeJong and Winsten 1998, 1990; Glik et al. 1997; Steckler et al. 1995; Montgomery 1990, 1989.  
 • [9] Dombro et al. 1996.

crucial modifications to take into account the realities of the negative cultural images of teens, limitations in detection and treatment options, and differences in prevention strategies. Such a campaign would inevitably be more challenging than efforts to protect young children, but enormously rewarding in that it would fill a critical need that is largely unmet in the American media. A campaign focusing on the “basics” of raising preadolescents so as to lay a foundation for healthy adolescent development would meet a similarly critical need.

### **Build further consensus among researchers and other leaders in the field regarding what is known about parenting and adolescence.**

The Harvard Project on the Parenting of Adolescents was designed in part to explore the question of whether there are areas of well-established knowledge about adolescence and parenting that can be identified and communicated to parents. The answer has been an unequivocal “yes.” Despite the interplay of values, diversity, and research limitations, certain basic principles have stood the tests of time, experience, and scientific validity.

However, the comments of many researchers and practitioners who reviewed this report indicate that there is far more common ground yet to explore. Many reviewers offered points that they observed to be well established, for example, but that have not yet received widespread attention in the review literature and hence were beyond the scope of this report.

The next step is to bring together a diversity of leaders, in person or electronically, for exchange, debate, and consensus building, to clarify and expand further the findings of this Project and others like it.

In other words, an infrastructure needs to be fostered in which experts on parenting come together in visible, open, and efficient ways to identify and validate the points on which they agree; that is, to delineate the body of research and experience about which they can say, “This much we know.” Options for doing so are expanding rapidly, with the introduction of email, satellite, video, and web-based conferencing, in addition to in-person meetings.

One of the many benefits of such a consensus-building process is that it might allow for articulation of more specific strategies for parents than can be distilled from reviews of research literature. While this Project could outline a kind of “job description” for parents of adolescents, meetings among leaders could potentially offer more details about the skills and techniques needed to do the job.

Also important to the consensus-building process is delineating and affirming the areas on which there is variation across and within ethnic groups, as well as highlighting the gaps that need further research. In what ways does a youngster's ethnic background affect the kinds of parenting strategies that are important? How can research that has been conducted on European American and middle-class populations be reevaluated in light of America's rich and profound diversity of class and ethnicity? What qualities of parenting are unique to particular groups and subgroups, what is the common ground, and what can different groups learn from each other? In what ways does a family's economic circumstances, in particular profound and lasting poverty, influence parenting strategies? What differences emerge from diversity of family structure, such as families headed by grandparents, single mothers and fathers, step-parents and other partners, same-sex partners, and others? Also, how does it affect parenting strategies for families to immigrate to the United States from another country?

Ultimately, the goal is to provide parents, practitioners, and policy makers with more resources for sorting out what is clear, what is common, what is culturally based, and what is uncertain.

Breaking down the options for consensus building into specific areas, the following topics emerge from this Project as among the most timely and compelling:

- **Further strategies for common parenting dilemmas.** Using this report as a working paper, how can its findings be refined, affirmed, and extended? What can be added, in particular, regarding strategies for parenting adolescents that address parents' concerns, as well as the skills for accomplishing them? Where is the common ground, and where must strategies differ for families coping, for example, with discrimination based on ethnicity, class, family structure, religion, immigrant status, illness, disability, and other characteristics? What strategies have been found to be effective for parents in protecting teens from the damage caused by these forces, in raising awareness both among those who are and those who are not targeted by them, and in forging alliances to combat the problems?
- **Brain development in adolescence.** What is known about the major biological changes in adolescence, including brain development? What occurs and when? To what extent can the biological changes be linked to behavioral changes? In what ways do nutrition, drugs, and other factors have lasting effects? How can knowledge of brain development and other biological changes be useful in guiding parents' expectations and interactions with their teens?
- **Abuse of adolescents.** What is known about the nature and prevalence of abuse of adolescents, why is it not more effectively addressed, and what can be done? How can we improve the likelihood that abuse will be identified and treated? What can be done to prevent abuse from happening? What can be communicated to parents to help them be

*Ultimately, the goal is to provide parents, practitioners, and policy makers with more resources for sorting out what is clear, what is common, what is culturally based, and what is uncertain.*

aware of what constitutes abuse, and what consequences it has? What strategies can be offered to parents to protect teens from abuse? What can be done at the level of reducing the stresses that trigger abuse?

- **Parenting of troubled adolescents.** Parents face special challenges when their teens are coping with issues such as mental illness, substance abuse, and delinquency. How can parents assess what role to play in advocating for and supporting their troubled teen? What suggestions can be offered to parents for navigating the health care, legal, social service, and educational systems? What strategies can be helpful for getting adequate resources, both for parents and teens?
- **Preparing for adolescence.** Implicit in the findings of this report is the principle that it helps significantly if families have established solid relationships prior to adolescence, including good communication patterns and family activities that can continue through adolescence. What can be said about ways that parents of younger children and preadolescents can lay a foundation for the developmental tasks and parenting role during adolescence? What principles of parenting are common across the age span, from infancy through adolescence?
- **Portrayal of parent-teen relationships in the news and entertainment media.** What is known about the images of parents, teens, and their relationships that are conveyed in Hollywood films, in entertainment television, in popular music, on the Internet, in local and national news, and in advertising? How do these images differ for families and teens across differences of ethnicity, family structure, class, and sexual orientation? What messages do parents take away from these images about parenting, and about teens? What can be done to enhance their positive effects and mitigate negative ones? What can parents do to influence the images reaching their teens?

### **Make available to the media and parents more “parent-friendly” versions of existing information on adolescent development and its implications for parenting.**

Although there is a wealth of research on adolescent development, surprisingly few efforts have been made to convey basic developmental information to parents of adolescents in ways that are accessible and useful across a variety of media.<sup>[10]</sup>

**Parents need a “dictionary”** that translates adolescent behaviors—from their strange clothes to their hostile outbursts to their risk taking—into developmental terms. They need to understand that some of these behaviors are not permanent and that most reflect and contribute to healthy development. Parents need to know approximately when they are likely to occur—often earlier than most parents expect.

[10] For examples of exceptions among trade books, see Siegler 1997; Steinberg and Levine 1997; Tatum 1997; Elkind 1994, 1984.

Like parents of younger children, they also need **“ages and stages” information** to help them understand what the developmental milestones look like and roughly when to expect them. Although they can see physical growth and sexual maturing, what about the “growth spurts” in cognitive, social, and emotional development? What do major leaps in abstract thinking look like at home, in school, and in relationships? Is it “normal” for teens to become self-conscious, self-centered, and self-absorbed, and will it pass? Why do teens dye their hair green, pierce multiple body parts, talk on the telephone for hours, forget chores and appointments, experiment with drugs, contradict themselves, get paralyzed trying to make decisions, criticize themselves, denounce parents, and withdraw to their room? When and to what extent is it appropriate for teens to be moody, hostile, defiant, and distant? To what extent are these behaviors temporary? Will they end? And what prompts them? Also, how are preadolescence, early adolescence, middle adolescence, late adolescence, and young adulthood typically different? What can parents look forward to when their teens become young adults? What are the developmental steps that follow adolescence, and how can parents support these steps during and after adolescence?

Available more extensively for parents of young children, this kind of developmental information is essential for helping parents to adjust their expectations appropriately and to plan how best to support their teen’s growth. While there may be more variability within the phases of adolescence than of childhood, nonetheless some characteristic changes distinguish preadolescence, early adolescence, middle adolescence, late adolescence, and young adulthood. Therefore, it would be a powerful asset for parents to have this information more readily available in usable formats.

This developmental information also needs to be linked to strategies for parents. Parents need to know which characteristics of each phase they can influence directly, and which ones they can influence indirectly, within schools and communities, through decision making, monitoring, and advocacy. They need information that allows them to sort out image from reality, unfounded fears from real risks, and typical teen behaviors from the uncommon ones that tend to attract media and community attention.

Tapping the recent burgeoning of literature on the subject, parents also need to understand how they can influence teens’ experience of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, immigrant status, gender, and individual ability.

Similarly distilled, “parent-friendly” knowledge about the basics and their implications is also needed for parents regarding related areas of development, including preadolescent development, early adult development, and the developmental changes common at midlife that parents themselves are experiencing.

**Strengthen informational resources—such as clearinghouses, family support centers, schools, special initiatives, and parenting programs—that will allow parents, the media, practitioners, advocates, religious leaders, policy makers, and others better access to current knowledge on parenting adolescents.**

For many parents, the idea of seeking information about parenting is either new or embarrassing. Resources are needed to make information easier to find and use by creating widely publicized, easily accessible clearinghouses and programs that can refer parents to the information they need. Local and statewide parent telephone information lines and clearinghouses are scattered around the country.<sup>[11]</sup>

**A single, major, national clearinghouse** is urgently needed to link these efforts and catalyze the creation of new ones to fill in the gaps, across states, ages of children, class, and ethnicity, including an emphasis on quality information for parents of teens as well as younger children. These resources should include referrals to print and electronic information, and to people and programs from whom parents can seek personal contact, exchange, and support. Also needed is an increase in the quality and quantity of parenting and family support programs for those raising teenagers, targeted to and designed for their needs, with effective outreach, staff training, curriculum development, evaluation, and coordination with other local services.

Especially important are **initiatives that strengthen community involvement, mobilizing parents, other adults, and teens**, formally and informally, on behalf of positive youth development. Also important is the need to make information more accessible to the professional groups with whom parents come into contact and to whom they often turn for advice and information, such as teachers, physicians, religious leaders, mental health counselors, community groups, and the media. These professional groups have a unique opportunity and responsibility to support and encourage the efforts of parents. Communicating with parents and involving parents must be viewed as an integral part of working effectively with teens, including within school systems and community programs.

At the same time, all these groups, including parents, need **assistance in evaluating the parenting resources that do exist**. Given the confusing array of experts and options available in the media and the community, professionals and parents alike need information about how to assess the credibility of experts and ideas, as well as how to determine which ones are appropriate for specific families and circumstances.

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[11] See, for example, Mertensmeyer and Fine 2000.

**These efforts also need to be coordinated** with those of advocacy organizations and community initiatives in which parents join with community leaders, policy makers, practitioners, religious leaders, researchers, and others in collaborative efforts to create safe and healthy schools, neighborhoods, and other support systems for teens and families. In some ways, teens and their parents are reflecting back to us the problems in American families and the larger society. More mechanisms are needed that allow us to listen, to join together, and to respond.

**We have an opportunity to revolutionize the way in which we, as a society, think about parenting, in particular the parenting of adolescents.** We can raise awareness about the importance of parenting during adolescence, we can shift negative perceptions about parenting and adolescence, and we can provide tools for raising healthy teenagers. The power to do so is well within our grasp, and the effects will reverberate throughout our schools, our courts, our workplaces, our neighborhoods, and our lives.

This report is an invitation to the media, researchers, practitioners, community leaders, parents, and policy makers to tap its findings, to build on its ideas, and to collaborate with its efforts. We look forward to working with you.



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The Center for Health Communication at the Harvard School of Public Health works closely with scholars in the behavioral sciences and with practitioners in advertising, marketing, and public relations to learn more about human behavior and how to influence it through mass communication. The Center has conducted major, widely known initiatives around such issues as drunk driving (the Designated Driver Campaign), youth violence (the "Squash It!" campaign), and mentoring (the Harvard Mentoring Project). Jay A. Winsten, Ph.D., Associate Dean for Public and Community Affairs at the Harvard School of Public Health, is Frank Stanton Director of the Center.

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