

**Attachment to Parents and Adjustment in Adolescence:
Literature Review and Policy Implications**

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FACT SHEET

ISSUE STATEMENT

Adolescents who are securely attached seek out parents when they are in danger or during times of stress and they use parents as a secure base from which to explore new experiences. In contrast, insecure adolescents are either anxious about the availability and support of their parent or they may avoid going to their parent when in danger or during stress. This review provides a critique of research on the relation between adolescent-parent attachment and adolescent adjustment and summarizes recommendations regarding healthy parenting practices and policy implications for government programs.

➤ **National or Key Data and Trends**

▪ **The Challenge of Adolescence**

Adolescence is a period of significant change in family and social role expectations, coupled with increases in the range and intimacy of social relationships^{1,2}. A key task for adolescents is the development of autonomy, that is, the ability to initiate and self-regulate. Although adolescents shift from dependence on parents to autonomous and mutually reciprocal relationships, this transition need not require detachment from parents^{3,4}.

▪ **Basic Findings**

Parenting characterized by high levels of warmth, availability, effective engagement in negotiation of rules and responsibilities, and clear limit setting predicts attachment security and the development of healthy autonomy¹¹⁻¹³. Secure attachment with parents is linked to healthy adjustment during adolescence and young adulthood, despite decreases in shared activities and interactions⁵⁻¹⁰.

➤ **Relationship to Child Health**

▪ **Physical**

Attachment security in adolescence is related to fewer mental health problems, including less engagement in substance use and risky sexual behavior^{10,14}.

▪ **Cognitive**

Further research is required to determine the impact of attachment security on adolescent cognitive functioning. Preliminary findings point to a link between attachment security and enhanced deductive reasoning skills¹⁵.

▪ **Social**

Attachment security in adolescence is related to more positive relationships with parents and peers, less concern about loneliness and social rejection, and more adaptive adjustment during periods of social transition¹⁶⁻¹⁸.

▪ Emotional

Securely attached adolescents experience less depression, anxiety and feelings of personal inadequacy, and are less likely to engage in aggressive and antisocial behavior⁵⁻¹⁰. They report more positive self-esteem and possess more adaptive coping strategies¹⁶⁻¹⁸.

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