

Original Paper

Over-Parenting in Middle School: How Can Parents Help?

Suzanne Lindt^{1*}

¹ Department of Curriculum and Learning, West College of Education, Midwestern State University, Wichita Falls, TX, USA

* Suzanne Lindt, Department of Curriculum and Learning, West College of Education, Midwestern State University, Wichita Falls, TX, USA

Received: August 30, 2019 Accepted: September 28, 2019 Online Published: October 9, 2019

doi:10.22158/fet.v2n4p201 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/fet.v2n4p201>

Abstract

As students enter the period of adolescence, students perceive parents as less important than their peers. However, many parents continue to remain involved in their adolescent's lives, when it comes to helping with homework, problems in their social lives, and academics. Previous research suggests that both positive and negative outcomes have resulted from parents' over-involvement in their adolescent's lives. Suggestions for teachers to encourage positive parental involvement to positively influence adolescent development are discussed.

Keywords

adolescence, social development, parenting

1. Introduction

Research suggests that middle school students experience a sudden change in their cognitive, social, and emotional development during this period of adolescence (Bandura, 1977). For many of these students, these developmental changes may lead to a decline in academic performance, while the pressure of academic performance increases (Hill & Tyson, 2009). For teachers of the current adolescent group of students, there is much to understand about these influences and changes to be expected during this critical period. Much of the social influence received from parents during childhood shifts when adolescents adopt a greater influence from peers during the period of adolescence (Muenks, Wigfield, & Eccles, 2018). However, many parents of middle school students remain involved in their adolescents' lives, resulting in both positive and negative social and emotional outcomes. Parental involvement with adolescents in middle school may lead to positive academic achievement resulting from parents' help with academic socialization (Hill & Tyson, 2009). In addition, parents who maintain an authoritative parenting style (Theresya, Latifah, & Hernawati, 2018) with

supportive feedback may also positively influence their adolescent students' development (Muenks et al., 2018). To the contrary, parental involvement may negatively impact academic achievement when parents adopt a permissive style of parenting (Theresya et al.), are overly critical (Muenks et al.), or are involved in homework help (Hill & Tyson, 2009). As teachers of middle school students, understanding parents' role in the development of the adolescent is salient, and middle school teachers can help parents to be involved enough to help their adolescent but not over-involved.

Leung and Busiol (2016) explain that over-involved parents are considered "helicopter" parents because they hover over their adolescent's life to help him or her avoid failure. Despite the fact that many parents intend to protect their growing children, the over-parenting may lead to poor development adjustment and an increased amount of problem behaviors. In their review of literature, Leung and Busiol criticize the current research in over-parenting to suggest that much of the research focuses on older samples and may not suggest that over-parenting is maladaptive for adolescents. In addition, little research exists regarding possible mediating variables, such as mutual trust and family life satisfaction. Though parents may be involved in their adolescent's life, might their over-involvement lead to stronger relationships between parent and adolescent? How can teachers encourage parents to possess a strong, supportive relationship with their adolescent, while allowing their adolescent to develop into his or her own person?

2. Over-Parenting

Self-determination theory suggests that over-parenting creates a conflict for the child when the child fails, leading to guilt and shame and eventually leading to resentment and anger toward the parent (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Though over-parenting has been defined in various aspects in the literature, Segrin Woszidlo, Givertz, Bauer, and Taylor (2012) describe over-parenting as falling into four different categories. Though parents can over-parent in one, or several of these different over-parenting styles, most tend to over-parent in one way. The four dimensions of over-parenting are: 1) anticipatory problem solving and risk aversion, 2) excessive advice and affective involvement with children, 3) control over children's self-direction, and 4) provision of abundant tangible assistance. Therefore, parents who are over-involved may try to solve problems for their adolescent, provide constant advice and opinions, control their adolescent's decisions, or provide a large amount of assistance in homework or academic activities.

Though teachers want parents to provide their adolescent with assistance and encouragement, teachers should also encourage parents and students to learn to work together. Over-parenting may cause adolescents to lack autonomy, and may cause them to have lower self-efficacy as they develop into adults. Though research demonstrates many negative correlations between overprotective parenting and adolescent's social and emotional adjustment, other studies have found that intense parental support may lead to greater life satisfaction and long-term psychological adjustment (Segrin, Woszidlo, Givertz, & Montgomery, 2013). In a recent study, both parent and emerging adult child were given surveys to

complete regarding over-parenting. Students who perceived their parents as over-parenting were more likely to report that they had difficulty forming relationships with others, especially when the child perceives the over-parenting as not from that of good intentions. This was not supported with parental reports (Segrin et al., 2013). One problem with students self-reporting is that parents may possess intentions unknown to the child (Segrin, Givertz, Swaitkowski, & Montgomery, 2015). Perhaps teachers can encourage parents to inform adolescents of parental intentions, while explaining to adolescents the importance of adolescent's actions. Table 1 provides suggestions for teachers to understand the different ways that parents may become over-involved and offers suggestions to provide a more positive way of encouraging adolescent development. Teachers may have difficulty helping parents to understand how to provide positive feedback and help to their adolescent, so Figure 1 provides some suggestions for each type of over-parenting.

Table 1. Suggestions for Parents to Avoid Over-Parenting

Tendency to Over-Parent	Negative Behavior from Parents	Positive Behavior from Teachers
Anticipatory problem solving and risk aversion	Parents seek to protect their children from failure and may not allow them to take risks (i.e., trying out for cheerleader, going to the debate competition).	Encourage parents to allow their adolescent to try new things and explain that not making the team or not winning will provide an important life lesson. Also, children can learn valuable feedback to improve skills.
Excessive advice and affective involvement with children	Parents may be very involved with their adolescent's personal life and provide feedback and suggestions for peer relationships. With technology, parents may communicate frequently and help their adolescent with every emotional problem.	Explain to parents that the period of adolescence involves much social and emotional growth. Adolescents may have difficulty with peer relationships but should learn how to deal with these relationships independently. The independence will provide adolescents with important social skills in the future.
Control over children's self-direction	Parents may take over control of scheduling of classes and extra-curricular activities of their adolescent to control his or her future career decision making.	Explain to parents that they should speak with their adolescent to get feedback to make decisions together about future college or career plans. Pushing their adolescent into a career path undesirable or

		uninteresting to him or her may result in low self-esteem in the long run.
Provision of abundant tangible assistance	Because parents may worry about their adolescent's failure, they may become over-involved in offering assistance. Most often, this may occur with homework and school projects.	Encourage parents to help their child to understand the homework or project, but not to do the work for him or her. Explain to parents the importance of their adolescent learning the required skills to be successful in the current and future classes.

Adapted from Segrin Woszidlo, Givertz, Bauer, & Taylor, 2012

3. Parenting Styles

Parenting styles have been defined as permissive, authoritative, and authoritarian (Baumrind, 1973, 1993; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). First, permissive parenting explains parents who try to avoid conflict and allow their children to make their own choices. This parenting style may have few rules and few consequences for adolescents and may lead to negative social developmental consequences (Segrin et al., 2012). Permissive parents may be difficult to reach and may not provide any type of assistance or help for students in school and outside activities. Adolescents of permissive parents may appear withdrawn and lack self-esteem because of the lack of support and encouragement they receive (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Teachers may have difficulty encouraging permissive parents to become involved in their adolescent's life, but sending notes home or emailing parents may be helpful to encourage greater parent involvement. If teachers do not make an attempt to encourage parents to become more involved, these children may withdraw further and develop lower self-esteem.

Second, authoritarian parenting imposes many rules and describes a parent who is over-protective and does not allow the child to make any choices. This parenting style is also viewed as maladaptive in one's social development. Authoritarian parents may be the over-protective or "helicopter parent". These parents may try to control their adolescent's choices, prevent them from taking risks, and become overly involved in peer relationships and schoolwork. By explaining the importance of adolescent autonomy, teachers may help authoritarian parents to step back and allow their adolescent to take some risks.

The third type of parenting style is authoritative parenting, which provides a balance between the other two parenting styles. This parenting style provides children with rules but allows the child to make choices and discuss changing rules if needed. Though consequences result from broken rules, the consequences are not overly harsh as in the authoritarian parenting style.

Table 2. Parenting Styles

Parenting Syle	Explanation
Permissive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept the child's decisions • Use little punishment • Allow the child to make his or her own decisions
Authoritative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expect mature behavior from the child • Set standards for behavior and expect child to follow them • Encourage child to be independent
Authoritarian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overbearing and controlling • Set regid standards for child to follow • Do not respond much to child's need for independence

Note. Adampted from Baumrind (1973).

Though much research suggests parenting can be categorized into one of these three styles, recent research suggests that these traditional parenting styles may not fit with the demanding parents of today because of conflicting examples and the changes occurring in youth today. Research suggests that providing rules for adolescents remains important, but with increased technology, these rules may be ever-changing. Many parents believe that their intentions are good and that over-parenting and rules will improve the well-being of the child and enable him or her to attain greater future personal and academic success (Locke, Campbell, & Kavanagh, 2012). Finding a balance between creating rules to protect adolescents from the dangers of the Internet and social media, while also providing adolescents with an opportunity to self-explore and create their own sense of self is important for parents today. Teachers may share information with parents about technology and Internet safety to help in setting rules to protect their adolescent at school and at home.

4. Creating Healthy Development

Despite the fact that research offers suggestions for avoiding over-parenting, little is known about the current generation of adolescents. With many influences from social media and the abundance of information available, adolescents of today may be different from the generations of the past. However, research does provide developmental theories to suggest the sequence of development and its stability from one generation to the next (Bandura, 1977). To create a healthy development, parents of adolescents should avoid over-parenting by becoming involved in their child's social development. When parents intervene in problems the adolescent has at school or with peers and fail to provide their adolescent with an opportunity to solve problems independently, this over-parenting may lead to negative developmental consequences (Segrin et al., 2012). With social media and the increase in bullying, many adolescents

may feel especially vulnerable to hurtful words and actions from their peers and classmates. To protect their children, parents may become involved in these conflicts.

In addition, over-parenting can be avoided when parents allow children to make some of their own decisions especially concerning future directions. Erikson (1980) suggests that the period of adolescence is critical to self-discovery and identity development. When parents and teachers attempt to control students' pathways and influence their natural self-exploration, this period of adolescence and development may become negatively influenced. Teachers and parents should provide their adolescents with an opportunity to self-explore and establish their own sense of identity.

5. Conclusion

As adolescents reach the period of development that includes great social and emotional developmental changes, the influence of parents is important to creating a healthy development. Parents who become overly involved in their adolescent's life may cause negative influence, leading to poor social skills, academic skills, and the ability to solve conflicts. However, parents adopting an authoritative parenting style, who build strong supportive relationships with their adolescents, and who allow their adolescent children to learn how to solve conflicts on their own may provide their child with the necessary skills to become a functioning adult.

As the youth of today have changed and a new generation seeks to be defined, both parents and teachers should try to better understand the role of technology and social media in this important period of development. As adolescents become more independent, they may also be hindered from engaging in much of the healthy face to face conflict of previous generations. In addition, parents and teachers must reach an agreement regarding homework help and academic pressure to ensure that this new generation does not experience stifled emotional development.

References

- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Baumrind, D. (1973). The development of instrumental competence through socialization. In A. D. Pick (Ed.), *Minnesota symposium on child psychology* (Vol. 7, pp. 3-46). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctttsmk0.4>
- Baumrind, D. (1991). Effective parenting during the early adolescent transition. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 11(1), 56-95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431691111004>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2012). Self-determination theory. In P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 416-437). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249215.n21>
- Erikson, E. H. (1980). *Identity and the life cycle*. New York, New York: Norton & Company.

- Hill, N. E., & Tyson, D. F. (2009). Parental involvement in middle school: A meta-analytic assessment of the strategies that promote achievement. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(3), 740-763. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015362>
- Leung, J. T. Y., & Busiol, D. (2016). Adolescents growing up in a “Greenhouse”: A literature review. *International Journal of Child and Adolescent Health*, 9(4), 413-422.
- Locke, J. Y., Campbell, M. A., & Kavanagh, D. (2012). Can a parent do too much for their child? An examination by parenting professionals of the concept of over-parenting. *Australian Journal of Guidance Counseling*, 22(2), 249-265. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jgc.2012.29>
- Maccoby, E. E., & Martin, J. (1983). Socialization in the context of the family: Parent child interaction. In E. M. Hetherington (Ed.), P. H. Mussen (Series Ed.), *Hand book of child psychology: Socialization, personality, and social development* (Vol. 4, pp. 1-101). New York: Wiley.
- Mihret, A. M., Dilgasa, G. S., & Mamo, T. H. (2019). Parenting Style as Correlates of Adolescents’ Academic Achievement Motivation of Bate Secondary School, Haramaya, Ethiopia. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 7(2), 172-176. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.7n.2p.172>
- Muenks, K., Wigfield, A., & Eccles, J. S. (2018). *I can do this! The development and calibration of children’s expectations for success and competence beliefs*. Developmental Review. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2018.04.001>
- Segrin, C., Givertz, M., Swaitkowski, P., & Montgomery, N. (2015). Overparenting is associated with child problems and a critical family environment. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24(2), 470-479. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-013-9858-3>
- Segrin, C., Woszidlo, A., Givertz, M., Bauer, A., & Taylo, M. M. (2012). The association between over-parenting, parent child communication, and entitlement and adaptive traits in adult children. *Family Relations*, 61(2), 237-252. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2011.00689.x>
- Segrin, C., Woszidlo, A., Givertz, M., & Montgomery, N. (2013). Parent and child traits associated with over-parenting. *Journal of Social Clinical Psychology*, 32(6), 569-595. <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2013.32.6.569>
- Theresya, J., Latifah, M., & Hernawati, N. (2018). The effect of parenting style, self-efficacy, and self-regulated learning on adolescents’ academic achievement. *Journal of Child Development Studies*, 3(1), 28-43. <https://doi.org/10.29244/jcds.3.1.28-43>