



5 Fast Facts

About Decision Making and Emotional Regulation in Adolescence

Adolescence is an important window for developing our capacities to manage our emotions, control our behavior, and make good decisions. The social and brain development that happens during this period help us tune in to the information we need to master these important skills. But still, like every skill, learning to make good decisions and to navigate strong emotions require opportunities to practice in real-world situations with room to make and learn from mistakes.

Following are five fast facts about navigating strong emotions and making decisions during adolescence:

- 1** Changes in the way our brain processes emotions combined with the novelty, uncertainty, and high stakes of our adolescent years can contribute to **emotions that can feel more intense** compared to those of adults.
- 2** Some of these changes also make us more sensitive to social feedback and belonging during adolescence. This increased sensitivity can make us **more likely to make risky decisions** when our emotions are high—but can also encourage **positive decisions** like advocating for a cause or sticking up for a friend.
- 3** Other aspects of brain development during adolescence increase our abilities to **think abstractly, solve problems** and **understand the perspectives of others**. By the time we are about 16 years old, these changes help us reason and make decisions as well as adults **when we have the time and space** to consider our options.
- 4** Support to build emotional regulation skills can help youth build decision making skills—**young people who work to strengthen their capacities to navigate their emotions** are less likely to engage in unhealthy risk taking.
- 5** These skills don't develop in a vacuum. Youth need real-life opportunities to practice navigating strong emotions and making decisions, along with support to learn from the outcomes. Adults can also help by modeling healthy expressions of emotions and communication and teaching positive coping skills.

For more research-based information about the role of parents and other caring adults in adolescence, visit developingadolescent.org/core-science-of-adolescence/support-from-parents-and-other-caring-adults.