

5 Fast Facts

About the Importance of Caring Adults During Our Adolescent Years

As we mature during adolescence, exercising more responsibility and personal agency, we become less physically dependent on adult caregivers. Yet parents and other caring adults remain as important to our healthy development as when we were younger. Below are five facts about the important role parents and other caring adults continue to play throughout our adolescent years.

1 Secure and supportive relationships with caring adults during adolescence are essential to our [physical](#) and [mental health](#).

Positive connections with our parents can [promote wellbeing](#), [prevent negative outcomes](#), and help us develop a clear [sense of self and identity](#). Caring, validating, affectionate, or humorous interactions with our caregivers affect the growth of [brain regions](#) involved in processing rewards and helping us regulate our emotions.

2 We're not only affected by what our families do for us, but also by how we contribute to our families.

Contributing to our family can be an important source of [belonging and identity](#) and can increase our levels of [happiness](#). A sense of obligation to our family may [alter brain regions](#) involved in reward sensitivity and cognitive control in ways that can help us develop the skills and motivation to avoid unhealthy risk taking.

3 Positive relationships with caregivers may look different, with different benefits and outcomes, among different social and cultural contexts.

Families of youth of color and of Black youth in particular are often a primary source of [racial and ethnic socialization](#). Family acceptance of LGBTQ youth leads to [higher self-esteem, social support, and general health](#) than among LGBTQ young people without supportive families. Natural mentors can play similarly positive roles, particularly for youth who experience homelessness or who are in the foster care system.

4 Social inequities including poverty and racism can interfere with positive family relationships.

The intersection of race and wealth disparities can lead to opportunity gaps for parents of color in education and employment, adding to stress in ways that [affect the wellbeing](#) of parents, and in turn increase depression and anxiety among youth.

5 Policies and programs that support adult caregivers of adolescents can help bolster the connections we need during these years.

Research-informed, [strength-based interventions](#) that improve connections within families have been shown to [improve mental health and reduce substance use](#). Programs that offer skills training for biological and foster parents can improve outcomes for young people in the system.

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.