

Parents and Adolescents

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Summary

When a child reaches the developmental stage of adolescence, a new dynamic emerges in the family between parents and adolescents. The developmental tasks of adolescence bring new and different relationships to which both parties need to adapt.

During the process of growing up and separation from parents, in an adolescent's life new significant others appear. These new object relations and new connections create a very slippery field between the adolescent and his or her parents. The generational gap among parents and adolescent is inevitable.

However, adolescence does not happen only to adolescents, it also affects parents in a different, specific way. Developmental tasks and developmental processes in adolescence require high capacities for adjustment from both, the adolescents, and their parents. Along with the adolescent growing up, his parents are experiencing changes.

Parents of the adolescent, just like a mother for a little baby, must be present so that their adolescent could separate from them and develop, grow up.

Key words: *adolescence, family, developmental tasks, adjustment*

Sažetak

Kada dijete dostigne razvojnu fazu adolescencije u obitelji se pojavljuje nova dinamika između roditelja i adolescenata. Razvojne zadaće adolescencije donose nove i drugačije odnose na koje se obje strane trebaju prilagoditi.

U procesima odrastanja i odvajanja od roditelja na obzoru adolescenata pojavljuju se novi značajni drugi. Ove nove objektne relacije i novi odnosi stvaraju vrlo skliski teren za sukobe na relaciji adolescent - roditelji. Generacijski jaz između roditelja i adolescenata gotovo je neizbježan.

Međutim, adolescencija se ne događa samo adolescentima, ona se na specifičan način događa i njihovim roditeljima. Razvojne zadaće i razvojni procesi u adolescenciji traže i od adolescenata i od njihovih roditelja kapacitete za prilagodbu. Usporedo sa adolescentom koji odrasta, i njegovi roditelji doživljavaju promjene.

Roditelji adolescenta, kao majka malom djetetu, moraju biti tu da bi se adolescent od njih mogao odvojiti i odrasti.

Gljučne riječi: *adolescencija, obitelj, razvojne zadaće, prilagodba*

Introduction

Adolescence is a developmental period by which the process of growing up is finalized. When children reach the stage of adolescence a specific phase of the family life cycle begins, which sets new tasks and goals for both the adolescent and the parents of the adolescent.

Families differ in many ways. Primarily through the personality traits of the parents, educational styles, system of moral values and norms of behavior. In a healthy family system, parental couple makes up one subsystem and the children another. In families, there are different ways and different levels of communication between members. All of those factors mentioned above interact with each other and affect all family members. In the developmental period of adolescence, earlier relationships are now questioned and shaped in a different unique way. Adolescence is a developmental phase in which further development achievements are built on earlier ones, but, as psychoanalysts state, it is also a time for a “second chance” or correction of unresolved conflicts of earlier developmental stages. During adolescence, developmental corrections are possible due to the significant potential for neuroplasticity of the brain, which decreases after the end of adolescence.

Normal and pathological in adolescence

Due to the range of diversity of adolescent behavior, and differences in cultural and social norms of behavior, it is very difficult to determine what is normal and what is pathological in adolescence.

Whether or not the environment will accept some adolescent behaviors depends more on environmental standards than on the adolescents themselves. Environmental standards include value systems, cultural and moral norms, but also the threshold of sensibility for adolescent behaviors. Often, adults have more capacity and justification for children's misdeeds, while they are very critical of adolescent behaviors. It seems that adults can more easily retain the memory of the "child within" than the "adolescent within".

The seemingly comfortable and adapted behavior of an adolescent does not necessarily directly mean good mental health; it can also be an expression of passive obedience to the demands of the environment. Passivity, resignation and uncriticism are not traits that lead to the development of a healthy, responsible and socially mature person.

Parents

Being a parent is a desire that belongs to the dialectic of narcissistic conflicts. Becoming a parent means identifying with your own parents and being able to act in your own way. Being a parent to an adolescent is a different position of parenting compared to the earlier developmental stages of a child. During adolescence, a lot happens for the first time - to both adolescents and their parents.

From an adolescent's perspective, his parents look like two middle-aged people, who happen to be his parents, who are much worse than the parents of his friends and the only thing they know is to invent stupid rules and complain. The gap between parent and adolescent stems from the parents' experience that "the child is two years younger than his or her real age" and the adolescent's experience that he or she is "two years older than his or her real age". This gap is difficult to overcome due to the adolescent's constant oscillation between mature and childish behavior, which recognizes the adolescent's dilemma – TO GROW UP or NOT TO GROW UP.

In principle, parents find it difficult to bear the adolescence of their children because everything in adolescence takes place rapidly. Adolescent behavior sometimes seems consistent with inner feelings, but very often it is completely opposite and defensive. Adolescents often feel that their parents do not understand them, and parents feel as if everything they say and do is in vain. In conversations, "both sides" have the experience of talking via "deaf phones".

Boundaries in adolescence

A generation gap is inevitable, especially in preadolescence and early adolescence. During these periods of growing up, parents have the most problems with their adolescents. Parents have the experience as if everything they have taught their children until then has disappeared without a trace, and the feeling of helplessness that some parents talk about is particularly difficult. In adolescence, all family functions are called into question, especially boundaries. The adolescent needs the boundaries set by his parents so that he can “break them down”. This need to push boundaries is one of the specific urges in adolescence and that is why the adolescent needs them. It is the parents who set them up, not the adolescents.

The boundaries should be “neither too firm yet clear, nor too soft yet recognizable”. Although it is the parents who set the boundaries and the adolescent the one who needs to break them down, parents are expected to allow the adolescent to experiment within and outside the boundaries of the family system. If there is no limit, the adolescent rushes into new experiences, has a feeling of great freedom, but at the same time deep down he thinks that his parents do not care, that he is not important to them. In these circumstances, the adolescent easily enters into conflicts with his environment by checking unconsciously whether the parents will notice it.

In conditions of too tight and rigid boundaries, where adolescent attempts to separate are sanctioned or punished in harsh ways, it is difficult for the adolescent to attach to peer groups. These adolescents remain lonely, without friends and either remain “attached” to their parents or join any group of peers who want to accept them into their ranks. The importance of adolescent groups, both constructive and destructive, is very great.

Parents can hold boundaries in an appropriate way if their partnership is stable. In a healthy family system, the strongest emotional connection is between parents, despite the fact that, by the definition of the family, its basic function is to raise children. Only in families with a quality parental relationship (marital or extramarital), a clear division of roles, clear boundaries, and a clear attitude toward authority can we expect a proper upbringing and a successful completion of an adolescent’s search for identity.

Parental behavior

Parents who show excessive attention or excessive concern do not help their adolescent grow up. Furthermore, if parents constantly criticize the adolescent or try to fight his “battles” at school instead, they only increase the gap and misunderstanding between friends or family. Too violent environmental reactions to an “adolescent’s internal and external storms” can significantly reduce his or her own defenses and ability to cope with tension. Crises can become more frequent leaving an adolescent with a sense of destructive insecurity and distrust of those closest to him.

It is not easy for parents to understand and accept that their, until yesterday a small child, now needs some other people with whom he wants to hang out, when until recently he spent most of his extracurricular time at home or near the house. The parent also needs time to get used to the new situation in which the child “now shares with others”.

During the developmental period of adolescence, both parents and adolescents experience their depressive states. Parental grief and parental fears are processes those parents need to overcome, respecting growing up as well as rules and boundaries as a necessity. A child who grows up should be allowed to grow up, to find his own path, and it is not good to “tie” him too much or “let him go” too quickly. As contradictory as it may seem at first glance, the adolescent does not “leave” his parents without grief. Depressive states in this phase of “untying” are completely normal and common occurrences of growing up. These depressive states are part of the developmental process that allows the adolescent to accomplish developmental tasks and achieve their independence. Just as in early childhood it is necessary for the mother of a small child to be with the child in order for the child to leave her, so in adolescence the parents need to be there for the adolescent to be able to separate from them.

Dysfunctional families

A small number of adolescents fail to solve the developmental tasks of adolescence, partly due to hereditary potential, partly due to unresolved tasks of earlier stages of development that precede adolescence, due to parental psychopathology or due to some of the many aspects of family dysfunction.

Families that are dysfunctional nurture specific systems and beliefs that we call “family myths”, and are expressed indirectly or not at all but are implied. They depict the personality traits of parents, their parenting styles, systems of moral values, and norms of behavior. “Family myths” affect the daily functioning of the family, and their impact is particularly strong in times of crisis in the family, such as the family with adolescence, when the developmental processes of adolescence require change and adjustment from the family as a whole.

An adolescent in a family that functions according to the rules of the family myth “absolute togetherness” has no possibility of separation from parents. In such families there is no privacy of members, no secrets or personal property. All family members function according to the rule “everything is ours and everything is shared”, including space, time, things, interests, and impulses...

In families where the rule “everything is in the family” applies, the adolescent is given a message that outside the family one should not look for pleasure, emotional connections or anything else, because everything outside the house is dangerous and hostile. Adolescents from such families perceive the world as a dangerous place where it is best not to even go, but to stay in the family. There are no ideal families, although some families think they are.

In “ideal families, any dissent or opposition qualifies as hatred or a threat to leave. An adolescent from the “ideal family” must choose between the right to a different view of the world from his parents and the parent themselves, and he can easily lose his own identity.

“Democratic families” sound very attractive to adolescents, but the family as a peer society, in which there are no boundaries between family subgroups, where often mothers and daughters exchange clothes and makeup or fathers and sons go out together looking for fun is not a family that offers what children and adolescents need for healthy development.

The use of authority is a necessary feature of the parent subsystem. Parenting always requires the use of. Parental authority should be inversely proportional to the age of the child, as the child gets older, more mature and more responsible the need for the parental authority diminishes. The weak parental subsystem, due to its own insecurity and inefficiency, easily falls into the opposite of constant checking and ordering, and thus leads to the denial of individuation, separation from parents and growing up.

Emotional climate in the family

For proper development, the emotional climate in the family environment in which the child or adolescent lives and grows is of paramount importance.

If the emotional climate in the family is disturbed by constant conflicts, the adolescent's search for his own identity will be difficult. An adolescent who is preoccupied or involved in parental conflict, who lives in difficult social conditions or in a family with a seriously ill member or is seriously ill himself has no space to grow up on his own and is forced to become very serious.

Nature does not tolerate skipping and it is very likely that these people will later enter the phase of "second adolescence".

Therapeutic interventions in adolescence

Therapeutic interventions in adolescence are needed when developmental processes take an undesirable course. In addition to therapeutic interventions involving the adolescent, it is important to assess the extent of parent-centered therapeutic interventions required. Therapeutic interventions involving the whole family aim to establish clear boundaries between subsystems in the family (parents - children), strengthen the subsystem of the parent pair, improve communication within the family, help adolescent separation and individuation and create stability consistent with the developmental stage of the adolescent family.

In other words, the goal of therapeutic intervention in psychotherapeutic work with adolescents should be focused on both adolescents and their parents. The laws of physiological development are always a good indicator of the direction of psychotherapeutic intervention.

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Conclusion

Parenting is the most complex task that life offers us, a role in which we give ourselves unreservedly, constantly and above all with sincere love to our children, but a role that we all "learn as we go along". The temptation of parenthood lasts as long as it does, and it is certainly most complex in adolescence, because it happens to parents as well, not just their adolescents.

The therapeutic alliance built by the adolescent, parents, and psychotherapist, represents a jointly created space in which positive shifts in the treatment of adolescents and directing developmental processes towards healthier options are possible.

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