

Gaining autonomy through decision-making

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Decision making within families is an important way for young people to gain independence and responsibility, and adolescence is a time of increasing autonomy. A new longitudinal study concludes that teens have more say in certain areas than in others and that some teens have more autonomy than others.

The findings come from researchers at The Pennsylvania State University and are published in the March/April 2010 issue of the journal *Child Development*.

Over a span of nine years, the researchers annually canvassed parents in about 200 White, European-American families about their teens' decisions. Mothers and fathers reported on who made decisions in eight areas of their children's lives, including chores, appearance, curfew/[bedtime](#), health, schoolwork, social life, activities, and money.

The study found that young people's input into decisions increased gradually from ages 9 to 14, and then surged from ages 15 to 20. Also, young people had more input into decisions about appearance, activities, schoolwork, and social life than about chores, health, and curfew. And in late adolescence (ages 18 to 20), decisions about money and health were still being made jointly by parents and [adolescents](#), suggesting that autonomy developed more gradually for these types of decisions.

The study also found that certain children had more decision-making autonomy than others. Those with more decision-making autonomy included girls, [young people](#) whom their parents said were easy to

supervise, and children with better-educated parents.

Interestingly, there wasn't a single, universal pattern in the development of decision making. Instead, decision-making autonomy, a reflection of the development of youths' independence and responsibility, depended on what kinds of decisions youngsters faced, and on their personal and family circumstances.

Provided by Society for Research in Child Development

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