

Teens use peers as gauge in search for autonomy

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As teens push their parents for more control over their lives, they use their peers as metrics to define appropriate levels of freedom and personal autonomy. They also tend to overestimate how much freedom their peers actually have. Those are the conclusions of new research that appears in the journal *Child Development*; the research was conducted at The Ohio State University.

Anyone who has parented a teen knows that expanding the boundaries of personal authority is a normal part of development. But we don't know a lot about how [teens](#) decide in which areas they want more autonomy. To answer this question, two studies were carried out—the first included more than 500 youths in 6th through 9th grades and in 12th grade; the second followed up on the 6th and 7th graders a year later, when they were in 7th and 8th grades.

The studies found that teens used their peers as a gauge to figure out when and in what areas to seek more autonomy in their own lives. Moreover, younger teens and girls wanted autonomy more than older teens and boys.

While teens' perceptions of peer [freedom](#) predicted desired levels of autonomy, the research also found that teens consistently overestimated the actual levels of their peers' autonomy, assuming that others had more freedoms than they did.

"The findings help illuminate sources of individual differences among

teens in their development of autonomy," according to Christopher Daddis, assistant professor of psychology at The Ohio State University, who conducted the studies. "Although all teens' decision-making autonomy increases, their experiences differ in when and how they develop that autonomy."

"Practically speaking, it's important for [parents](#) to understand that their children don't have explicit guidelines that define the appropriate pacing of developing [autonomy](#), but often rely on [peers](#) of the same age to gauge their own requests for additional freedoms."

Provided by Society for Research in Child Development

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