

'Emerging adults' will listen to a parent's unsolicited advice, but parent must lay the groundwork, says study

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A new study may hold a secret for getting your teenager to listen to appreciate your unsolicited advice. The study, which included "emerging adults"—those in their late teens and early 20s—found that teens will appreciate parents' unsolicited advice, but only if the parent is supportive of their teens' autonomy.

Parents support [autonomy](#) by providing clear guidelines for limitations and rules that will be enforced. They also participate in activities that are interesting to their teens, among other things.

"These parents consistently acknowledge and validate their child's feelings, and encourage and support their exploration of different interests as they figure out who they are and what they'll do with their lives," said Elizabeth Davis, a UCR psychology researcher and the senior author of the study, [published](#) in December in the journal *Emerging Adulthood*.

Conversely, Davis said, statements such as "Because I said so" minus context; "get over it," and "it's not a big deal" are the postures that will cause your child to build walls in the face of unsolicited advice.

The study included 194 emerging adults aged 18 to 25. Davis said the sample is significant because it was overwhelmingly non-white: 38.3% Asian; 33.2% Latino; 10.4% multiracial; 6.7% Middle Eastern; 4.7% Black, and 4.7% white.

"Much psychological research has focused on white middle class convenience samples, so diversifying the participant populations we study gives us a much better sense of how psychological phenomena work for everyone," Davis said. "It makes the results more broadly generalizable."

Participants were asked to reflect on occasions when a parent offered

advice to help them manage their emotions. Teens then completed a survey asking whether the parental interaction was helpful and whether it changed their emotional state. They then were asked about their ability to cope with the situation and control their emotions, and about their connection with their parents.

Next, the youths were asked if they had sought support, and finally whether they perceived their parents as supporting their autonomy.

Davis said the teens of autonomy-supporting parents perceived advice they sought from the parent as helpful. But these teens considered unsolicited advice equally as helpful. Past research has shown that unsolicited advice, generally, is less likely to be perceived as effective.

"Highly autonomy-supporting parents may have increased insight into how to offer unsolicited support and thus do not fall into the trap of giving unwanted support," the study authors wrote.

If the parent was perceived not to support autonomy, the study found, unsolicited advice was not viewed as helpful. Unsolicited [advice](#) in those circumstances "may be interpreted as less sincere, and thus less effective," the study authors wrote.

The findings build on a body of research that has asserted wide-ranging benefits for children who have autonomy-supporting parents. That includes greater feelings of self-efficacy, i.e., "I got this."

"Emerging adulthood is a special time of the lifespan, when there are new opportunities for freedom and decision-making, but still lots of ties to family of origin," Davis said. "So the way [parents support](#) their youth during this transitional phase will set the stage for later adulthood."

Along with Davis, who is an associate professor of psychology, UCR

fifth-year graduate student Madeline Newman is first author for the journal paper.

More information: Madeline Newman et al, A Helping Hand Isn't Always So Helpful: Parental Autonomy Support Moderates the Effectiveness of Interpersonal Emotion Regulation for Emerging Adults, *Emerging Adulthood* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/21676968231222304](https://doi.org/10.1177/21676968231222304)

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