What Parents Should Know about Adolescent Development:
The Influence of Schools on Adolescent Behavior and Risk-Taking

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Outline

- Developmental Tasks of Adolescence
  - Skills and Liabilities of Adolescents/Adolescence

- Influence of Schools on Adolescent Behavior and Risk-Taking
  - Why?
    - School as a system that is analogous to family system
    - Adolescent sits at the intersection of family and school as two primary contexts for development

- Summary and Implications for Parenting

...all in 10 minutes.
Key Developmental Tasks of Adolescence

  - **To Stand Out** (develop an identity, pursue autonomy)
  - **To Fit In** (find comfortable affiliations and gain acceptance from peers)
  - **To Measure Up** (develop competence and ways to achieve)
  - **To Take Hold** (make commitments to particular goals, activities, and beliefs).

- **From Cicchetti & Rogosh** *(A developmental psychopathology perspective on adolescence, Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 2003)*
  - **Successful Transition to Secondary Schooling** (gaining skills necessary for higher education and/or work)
Skills & Liabilities at Onset of Adolescence

Individually,

- Increased romantic motivation and interest,
- Increased interest in and susceptibility to peers (media),
- Increased emotional reactivity and intensity,
- Steadily increasing cognitive and behavioral self control,
- Changes in circadian rhythms, increased need for sleep,
- Increased appetite during periods of rapid growth,
- Increased risk of depression, and
- Increased risk-taking and sensation-seeking.
Skills & Liabilities at Onset of Adolescence

Ecologically,

- Decreasing adult supervision (by family/in home, in school)
- Increasing requirements of settings for self monitoring, planning, negotiating, regulating...
- Some shifts are stark and include little prep (e.g., elementary to middle school)
The Balance (imbalance) between Stress and Regulation in Adolescence

The Influence of Schools on Adolescent Behavior and Risk-Taking

Schools are a primary context for development

- **School Characteristics**
  - Broad Structural Characteristics
  - Micro-Contexts (places) and Micro-Systems (networks)
    - Composition
    - Norms for Behavior and Discipline

- **Schooling Processes**
  - Quality of Relationships (with teachers, among peers) and supervision
  - Connectedness and Bonding
  - Climate
  - Violence & Safety
A Conceptual Model of Schools and Adolescent Behavior

Fallacy is that these entities are (appear) FIXED.
In reality they change across time: across years, within a year, within a day (esp., for middle and high school students).
Variation across *place* within schools in student experience
Variation across *place* within schools in supervision...and responsibility
What contributes?
- Composition of individuals
- Context/System norms for behavior and discipline

**BOTTOM LINE:**
- Hallways, bathrooms, playgrounds, parking lots, stairwells, cafeterias = unsafe
- “Unclaimed” spaces & non-classroom contexts have no or low (quantity/quality supervision)
- Particularly true for middle schools
Variation Across Micro-Contexts

- first floor
- second floor
- third floor

(child’s main classroom is circled)

- green = places where people do not get along well
- yellow = places where people get along well
Variation Across Micro-Contexts

first floor

second floor

third floor

(child’s main classroom is circled)

- places where people do not get along well
- places where people get along well

(child’s main classroom is circled)
Percentage of students who identified each micro-context (on a map of their school) as having positive and/or negative social interactions.
What do we know about peer influences?

- Two important paths:
  - Selection: select peers similar to themselves,
  - Socialization: through socialization, adopt traits and behaviors of peers.

- Behaviors subject to peer influence:

- Peers particularly salient at developmental/ecological transitions.

- Externalizing Symptoms
  - Illegal/violent behavior
  - Aggression
- Substance Use
  - Alcohol, nicotine use
  - Marijuana use
  - “Hard” drugs
- Sexual risk behaviors
- Internalizing Symptoms
  - Depressive symptoms
  - Suicidality
- Other Health Risk Behaviors
  - Weight-related behaviors
  - Nonsuicidal self injury
- Prosocial and Health-Promotion Behaviors

**FIGURE 5-3** What behaviors are influenced by peers? SOURCE: Prinstein, 2009.
Implications for Parenting

- Align home and school contexts to developmental tasks and contexts of adolescence:
  - Providing developmentally appropriate supervision
  - Generating opportunities for competence and agency
    - Keep youth engaged
    - Capitalize on power of groups and peers and youth strivings for autonomy (from adults)
  - (Re)consider peer groupings – deliberately structure groups (minimizing saturation of aggressive youth, capitalizing in influential peers, opportunities for identity development)
    - Building connections among parents of youth peers

- Bridging home and school
  - Build parent and family knowledge of school contexts and importance of high-quality adult-youth relationships in schools
  - Build portal between home and school
    - School strategies to promote youth development
    - School knowledge of home context
    - Use school as a mechanism for building peer-family connections