

A Needs-Based Approach to Working with Adolescents

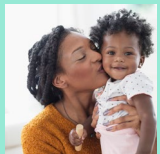
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The Concept of Needs



Physiological Needs – Nutrients required for bodily health and safety



Psychological Needs – Nutrients required for growth, integrity and well-being

Self-Determination Theory

Three Psychological Needs

- **Autonomy**

- To feel choiceful/volitional (vs. pressured/controlled)

- **Competence**

- To feel effective; capable (vs. ineffective/unable)

- **Relatedness**

- To feel valued; loved; a sense of belonging (vs. alienated/unimportant)

How Do We Know These are Needs?

- **Relate to Well-being and Adjustment**
 - General
 - Domain Specific

Basic Need Satisfaction in Adolescents – General

Autonomy

- I do the things I do because I really want to do them

Competence

- I often have doubts about whether I'm good at things

Relatedness

- The people I spend time with don't like me

Basic Need Satisfaction in Adolescents – Daily

Autonomy

- Today I felt forced to do many things that I didn't want to do

Competence

- Today I was good at what I did

Relatedness

- Today I felt close to the people I care about

Correlates of Need Satisfaction and Frustration

- Well-being – general and daily
- Lower symptomatology
- E.g.,
 - Daily need satisfaction related to changes in day-to-day well-being and ill-being

Domain Specific Relations with Adjustment Outcomes

- More autonomous motivation related to:

Academics – grades, adaptive coping, competence, use of optimal learning strategies, lower drop-out

Social – competence

Job Search – vocational identity

How Can we Create Environments That Meet Adolescents' Needs?

- Autonomy:
 - Autonomy supportive (vs. controlling)
- Competence
 - Structure
- Relatedness
 - Warm Involvement



What Does an Autonomy Supportive Interaction Look Like?

- Take Adolescent's Perspectives
- Express Empathy
- Encourage and Support Initiations
- Solve Problems Together
- Offer Choices
- Allow for Opinions, Input, and Dissension



What Does a Controlling Interaction Look Like?

- Pressure Children
- Take One's Own Perspective/Ignore Child's
- Solve Problems for Children
- Use Controlling Language



Promoting Feelings of Autonomy

- ▶ Taking children's perspectives -- finding out the basis for their opinions and trying to understand
 - ▶ I understand you'd rather not participate in the meeting. It seems to you like it won't help anything.
- ▶ Providing Empathy
 - ▶ It must be really exhausting to have to travel so far to school
- ▶ Supporting Autonomous and Joint Problem Solving
 - ▶ What ideas do you have about how you can feel more energy?
- ▶ Giving Choice
 - ▶ What do you want to do first? Unpack or meet the other kids?
- ▶ Avoiding Controlling Language
 - ▶ Should, must, have to
- ▶ Supporting Initiations
 - ▶ I see you like soccer, maybe you'd like to go to a game



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What Does the Data Say About Autonomy Supportive Parenting?

- Autonomous motivation, self-worth, perceptions of control, lower anxiety and depression, fewer externalizing symptoms

e.g., Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Joussemet et al., 2008; Vasquez et al., 2016



How Might We Think About Involvement?

Dedication of Resources (tangible and intangible)

e.g., Time
Warmth
Needed materials



Involvement: Promoting Feelings of Relatedness

Showing adolescents they are safe, secure, valued and cared for

- Spend quality time together
 - Routines like eating together
 - Plan an activity based on teen interest
- Show interest and gain knowledge
 - Carve out a time to touch base
 - What was the best part of your day?
- Provide support
 - Smiles, hugs, a shoulder to cry on



What is Structure?

Setting Up Environment to Facilitate Competence

- Clear Rules and Expectations
- Consistent Consequences
- Feedback
- Rationales

Structure: Promoting Feelings of Competence

Clear Rules and Expectations

e.g., Homework needs to be completed before going on social media

Consistent Consequences

e.g., If the rule about social media is not followed, you'll need to give up your phone during evening hours

Explain Why Rules are Important to the Adolescent's Well-being and Success

e.g., the rule about coming in on weeknights is to make sure you get enough sleep for school

What Do We Know About the Effects of Parental Involvement and Structure?

Parent Involvement – more autonomous motivation, higher perceived control, and perceived competence

- Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994

Provision of Structure – Higher perceived control and academic engagement

- Farkas & Grolnick, 2010

The Challenge!!

Providing Involvement and Structure in
a Way That Facilitates a Sense of
Autonomy

Being Involved while Supporting Autonomy

- Listen without chiming in
- Follow rather than lead
- Tune in to their interests
- Make yourself available
- Intervene when necessary



Providing Structure While Supporting Autonomy

- First try to understand the other's perspective
- Provide empathy
- Involve the adolescent in setting the guidelines
- Give Information (expectations, guidelines, consequences)
- Provide Reasons
- Provide Choice
- Listen to their opinions, even if negative
- Avoid controlling language

What Gets in the Way of Caregivers Providing Need Supportive Environments?

Pressure from Above

Stress/Lack of Support
(Grolnick et al., 1996)
Neighborhood Danger
(Levitt et al., 2021)

Pressure from Below

Children's challenging
behavior (Grolnick et al.,
1996)

Pressure from Within

Perceptions of Threat
(General, e.g., Gurland &
Grolnick, 2022,
Parent or child is
evaluated (e.g., Grolnick
et al., 2002; Grolnick et
al. 2007)

Pressure from Above

- ▶ Stress
- ▶ Time Pressure
- ▶ Lack of Support



(Grolnick, Weiss, McKenzie & Wrightman)

Pressure from Below

- ▶ Children's Competence
- ▶ Children's Cooperation



(Grolnick, Weiss, McKenzie & Wrightman)

Pressure from Within - Parents

Feeling Evaluated
Feeling Threat

Gurland & Grolnick, 2023

Relevance for Addressing System Issues

- 1) Consider ways to enhance adolescents' experiences of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in plans and procedures related to placements
- 2) Help families and advocates provide autonomy support, structure, and involvement to adolescents. Support them!
- 3) Identify the barriers and systemic factors that prevent contexts from providing need support to adolescents and target them in interventions.

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