

TAKE THE QUIZ

The following three questions are related to the concept of agency and autonomy:

1. True or False:

Providing adolescents with opportunities to share their opinions and perspectives is an example of giving them agency in their lives. _____

2. Multiple Choice:

What is the role of peer relationships in supporting autonomy in adolescence? _____

- a. Peer relationships allow adolescents to practice social skills necessary for success in adulthood, such as collaboration, decision-making, and conflict resolution with others of similar status and diverse perspectives.
- b. The increased influence of peer relationships during adolescence reflects the growing importance of relationships between similarly aged people often prioritized by adults, such as romantic relationships, professional relationships, and community relationships.
- c. A & B
- d. None of the above

3. True or False:

To effectively support autonomy in adolescents, adults should involve themselves as little as possible in adolescent experiences so as to allow learning through trial and exploration. _____

The following four questions are related to the concept of the increase in cognitive complexity during adolescence, including cognition, meta-cognition, and reflection:

4. Matching:

Match each of the student scenarios with the advanced cognitive skill or memory task listed.

Decision making _____

a. Considering how another student might feel as a result of an action

Social cognition _____

b. Weighing the benefits and costs of raising a concern to a teacher in order to make a choice

Future thinking _____

c. Revisiting initial feelings of failure from a low test grade in order to reinterpret the situation as an opportunity to learn and grow

Perspective taking _____

d. Anticipating the need to work on an essay during the week before a weekend sports event

Cognitive reappraisal _____

e. Recognizing the appropriate time to interrupt a conversation

SUPPORTING AUTONOMY

SELF-ASSESSMENT QUIZ



5. True or False:

Consistent practice of advanced cognitive skills strengthens the associated neural pathways in the brain. If children have related experience to practice these skills in early childhood, their brain will have the capacity to become efficient in executing these types of tasks. _____

6. True or False:

People are able to accurately reflect upon their own actions from birth. As humans develop, their improved language and communication skills allow for more sophisticated expression of those reflections. _____

7. Multiple Choice:

Which is an example of an adolescent exploring meaning and finding purpose? _____

- a. Pursuing a career interest related to their social and/or cultural values
- b. Learning their unique roles within their families, communities, and the broader society
- c. Challenging or questioning the status quo
- d. All of the above

The last two questions are related to the concepts of self-regulation and risk-taking:

8. True or False:

Adolescents are less able to self-regulate than adults. _____

9. Multiple Choice:

Which factors increase the likelihood of adolescent risk taking? _____

- a. Social recognition
- b. Novelty
- c. Thrill or excitement
- d. All of the above

ANSWER KEY

The first three questions were related to the concept of agency and autonomy.

Research Principle 1: Adolescents seek opportunities for agency where they can influence decisions that shape their lives, such as how they spend their time. Compared to younger children, adolescents are able to spend more time with peers without adult supervision. However, support, communication of consistent expectations, and monitoring of activities and emotional functioning by adults are essential as adolescents become more independent.

1. Question (True or False):

Providing adolescents with opportunities to share their opinions and perspectives is an example of giving them agency in their lives.

Answer: False. To have agency is to have the power and capability to produce an effect or exert influence. Adolescents seek opportunities for agency where they can decide how they spend their time, and influence other decisions that shape their lives. This is an example of student voice which is important, but not enough to support agency. A more complete example of supporting autonomy involves increasing opportunities for adolescents to take action on their opinions and decisions in their home, school, and community.

Example scenario: A class of sixth graders are having trouble with social conflict. They've been complaining that some of their classmates are rifling through one another's backpacks, harassing one another to reveal their grades and spreading mean gossip. As a solution, the teachers have the students collectively list the problems that are most troublesome to them. Then the teachers discipline the students they believe to be most involved. The teachers promote agency by having students lead the discussion; the adults should only intervene if the conversation veers wildly off course. Their default is to promote student agency.

2. Question (Multiple Choice):

What is the role of peer relationships in supporting autonomy in adolescence?

Answer: (c.) A & B. Increased expectations of and desire for independence from adults further elevate the importance of peers. Throughout the middle school years, same-sex friends account for an increasingly larger proportion of adolescents' perceived primary social network, and friends begin to equal or surpass parents as sources of support and advice to adolescents in many aspects of life. The changes in brain structure and function that occur during adolescence increase adolescents' tendency to engage in activities that create positive feelings they associate with their peer group.

Example scenario: A student hears two classmates talking privately in the hallway about her best friend. She decides to secretly videotape them so she can "prove" that they called her best friend an annoying loser with no friends. Then, because she considers herself a loyal friend, and because she believes her best friend should know that these two girls aren't true friends, she sends the video to her friend. A counselor recognizes that the girl who taped the private conversation thought she was doing the right thing, not spreading meanness. Out of curiosity, she asks a roomful of students if they thought the girl did the right thing. They all say yes. The counselor then asks the students to consider how sending the video spreads the mean comments to the target rather than shielding the target from the mean comments. Her students get the concept almost immediately, and the teacher realizes that she's dealing with a social skills deficit, not an empathy deficit.

SUPPORTING AUTONOMY

SELF-ASSESSMENT ANSWER KEY



3. Question (True or False):

To effectively support autonomy in adolescents, adults should involve themselves as little as possible in adolescent experiences so as to allow learning through trial and exploration.

Answer: False. Compared to younger children, adolescents are able to spend more time with peers without adult supervision. However, support, communication of consistent expectations, monitoring of activities, collaborative reflection and problem-solving, and emotional functioning by adults are essential as they become more independent. Adults should scaffold their support and guidance to ensure that adolescents develop the knowledge and skills necessary to support their own autonomy.

Example scenario: At a parent-teacher conference, the parent of a 6th grader is exasperated that their child is not completing homework. The parent says, "He's in middle school now! Should I really have to check his planner every night?" The teacher arranges a meeting with the student's key influencers, including his other teachers, school counselor, and football coach. The team explains to the parent that although the student should be taking on more ownership of his learning, that isn't something he magically develops the first day of middle school. Instead, his parent can support the development of these skills by: sitting down with him to check his planner together at the same time each evening, setting up a quiet place to complete assignments, and sticking with these routines consistently until the student can independently check his planner and begin his assignments on his own. Then the parent can continue to provide support by checking in, monitoring grades with their child, and helping their child set and work toward reasonable academic goals.

The following four questions were related to the concept of the increase in cognitive complexity during adolescence, including cognition, meta-cognition, and reflection.

Research Principle 2: Adolescents are in a stage of development during which the brain becomes more specialized and efficient. Learning experiences and environmental influences play key roles in this process. As the brain becomes more interconnected during adolescence, young people are increasingly able to engage in adult levels of complex cognition, such as abstract reasoning, future thinking, and social cognition. The ability to form memories and reflect on the accuracy of those memories continues to improve during adolescence. Adolescents become better able to assess their own learning, allowing more time for additional information gathering and review. In addition, social and emotional development involves exploring meaning and finding purpose during adolescence.

4. Question:

Match the student scenarios with the advanced cognitive skill or memory task listed.

Answers:

- Decision making: (b). Weighing the benefits and costs of raising a concern to a teacher in order to make a choice
- Social cognition: (e). Recognizing the appropriate time to interrupt a conversation
- Future thinking: (d). Anticipating the need to work on an essay during the week before a weekend sports event
- Perspective taking: (a). Considering how another student might feel as a result of an action
- Cognitive reappraisal: (c). Revisiting initial feelings of failure from a low test grade in order to reinterpret the situation as an opportunity to learn and grow

As the brain becomes more interconnected during adolescence, young people are increasingly able to engage in adult levels of complex cognition (e.g. abstract reasoning, future thinking).

SUPPORTING AUTONOMY

SELF-ASSESSMENT ANSWER KEY



5. Question (True or False):

Consistent practice of advanced cognitive skills strengthens the associated neural pathways in the brain. If children have related experience to practice these skills in early childhood, their brain will have the capacity to become efficient in executing these types of tasks.

Answer: False. Experts once believed that the period between infancy and early childhood was the only stage of life associated with increased brain plasticity. But recent evidence shows that the brain goes through a second period of plasticity in the adolescent years, as it prepares for adulthood and autonomy. When adolescents have opportunities to develop advanced cognitive (higher-order) thinking skills, the neural pathways associated with those pathways are more likely to develop and mature. Without these opportunities, adolescents could have more difficulty engaging in these types of advanced cognitive skills as adults, just as an athlete would need to exert more effort to win a game without prior practice.

Example scenario: A group of adults chaperoning a middle school dance were discussing math homework. “I don’t get this ‘new math.’ I don’t know how to help my daughter with her homework anymore.” A teacher, also chaperoning the dance, overheard and decided to speak up. She explained that this “new math” is designed to help build conceptual understanding so that, instead of blindly following steps, students develop number sense and understand what’s actually happening in a problem.

Practicing a variety of possible approaches instead of one standard algorithm equips them with many possible ways to solve any problem. This allows them to make choices about how to tackle a problem, even when no particular approach is designated. Rather than having to follow a teacher, then, students will be equipped to analyze any problem and make a decision about how to proceed. Although the parents didn’t necessarily seem more comfortable with their children’s homework assignments after this conversation, they did at least begin to understand why the work was more open-ended than they were used to.

6. Question (True or False):

People are able to accurately reflect upon their own actions from birth. As humans develop, their improved language and communication skills allow for more sophisticated expression of those reflections.

Answer: False. Autonomy is dependent on an individual’s capacity to reflect on the results of previous decisions and actions to inform their next steps. The ability to form memories and reflect on the accuracy of those memories continues to improve during adolescence. Adolescents become better able to assess their own learning, allowing for more time for additional information gathering and review.

Example scenario: Mr. Williams, a middle school teacher, builds time for student reflection into the end of every class as aligned to learning objectives for the day. This was an unfamiliar process for students at the start of the school year, but Mr. Williams was clear to explain why reflecting on one’s learning is important and how one can approach it, including providing structures for whole-group and peer-to-peer discussion, sharing prompting questions, and modeling reflective, thoughtful responses. Mr. Williams emphasized to students that all learners can find things difficult at times and better understand their own learning process. Over time, the reflection process became an honored routine for the classroom community and one that the students used to drive their learning and advocate for their learning needs.

SUPPORTING AUTONOMY

SELF-ASSESSMENT ANSWER KEY



7. Question (Multiple Choice):

Which is an example of an adolescent exploring meaning and finding purpose?

Answer: (d.) All of the above. For adolescents, the social and emotional development necessary for supporting autonomy involves exploring meaning and finding purpose; sometimes this development is at odds with institutional structures and expectations. Having purpose is having an overriding commitment to something bigger than ourselves. This commitment provides a sense of stability and meaning in our life. Adolescents are developing their own adult identities, trying to understand their roles and contributions in social contexts and communities. This identity development continues into adulthood, as we have more diverse and meaningful experiences.

Example scenario: A large group of students had concerns that their school dress code was unequal between boys and girls, and unevenly enforced for different groups and body types. In an effort to express their feelings, they gathered signatures of 240 students and gave their signed petition to the school leadership. The school leadership team, instead of feeling challenged by this, was eager to welcome dialogue with the students and respect the ownership the students brought as they raised valid concerns with the school's policy. This led to policy changes that were more inclusive while still meeting the needs of both the school and the students.

The last two questions are related to the concepts of self-regulation and risk-taking.

Research Principle 3: While adolescents are still developing self-regulatory systems, their expression of self-regulatory skills depends on context and learning opportunities. Adolescents are more sensitive to some types of rewards, such as social recognition, than adults and younger children. The transition from childhood into adolescence is associated with an increased sensitivity to social evaluation, including feelings of belonging, acceptance, admiration, and respect. Adolescents are more likely to engage in both positive and negative forms of risk taking, especially if peers support that behavior.

8. Question (True or False):

Adolescents are less able to self-regulate than adults.

Answer: False. Adolescents (individually and as a group) simply consider varying priorities and weigh those differently than adults may, depending on the context. The ability to manage emotions and behavior in line with the expectations of a situation and long-term goals – a skill known as self-regulation – allows humans to adapt to a variety of circumstances or challenges of an increasingly complex and interconnected world. While adolescents are still developing self-regulatory systems, their expression of self-regulatory skills depends on context and learning opportunities. Adolescents face progressively more and consequential responsibilities and higher expectations from family, school, community, and broader society to make decisions that will orient them toward “who they want to be,” which makes the maturation of self-regulation skills necessary.

Example scenario: To develop her students' self-regulatory skills and help them take greater ownership of their learning, Ms. Jones taught her students a system of goal-setting practices to help them self-monitor their learning goals over time. The practices included opportunities for planning and reflection whereby students could assess their choices in light of their future goals. Students could then prepare ahead for times when they might be tempted to make a choice for short-term gain that might put their long-term goals at risk. Ms. Jones also encouraged students to communicate their goals with their peers in order to build a community of shared support for one another's goals and learning needs.

SUPPORTING AUTONOMY

SELF-ASSESSMENT ANSWER KEY



9. Question (Multiple Choice):

Which factors increase the likelihood of adolescent risk taking?

Answer: (d.) All of the above. which includes social recognition, novelty, and thrill/excitement. Supporting autonomy includes supporting positive risk taking. Learning requires taking risks--which are essentially actions for which the outcomes are unknown--and learning from the results. Adolescents are primed for risk taking due to the stage of brain development they are in. What qualifies as a risk is highly personal and subject to the context of the experience--for some students, starring in a school play feels like a thrilling risk, while for others, simply raising a hand in class will push their limits. Adolescents are developmentally more sensitive to some types of rewards, such as social recognition (for example, social status or prestige within a group), than adults and younger children. In adolescence, this increase in sensitivity leads to higher instances of reward seeking (behaviors associated with searching for experiences that activate the reward system in the brain) and sensation seeking (behaviors associated with searching for new, varied, and intense experiences) behaviors. The transition from childhood into adolescence is associated with an increased sensitivity to social evaluation (for example, feelings of belonging, acceptance, admiration, and respect). Adolescents are more likely to engage in both positive and negative forms of risk taking, especially if peers support that behavior.

Example scenario: Every year, the seventh graders deliver a presentation to their peers about an aspect of their identity. These speeches are personal: students explore everything from having a learning challenge, to what it's like to be adopted. Often, a few students get overwhelmed and don't feel like they can present to their class. On a scale of 1-10, this risk registers as a 10 for them. The counselor is accustomed to finding students in the bathroom crying. She knows that if they avoid the risk entirely, that will feed the fear. But if she pushes them too far out of their comfort zone and it goes poorly, they may avoid that risk forever. She asks them to identify a risk in the 4-7 range, such as presenting to a few close friends, or with their back to the audience. This way, they make incremental progress instead of reinforcing the idea that they can't do it.