



# How Children Develop their Parents

*(and you thought when you became the parent you were in control?)*

By Anne Hansen

Developmental psychology offers numerous theories about human development. The perception is that the science concentrates on the stages of childhood when, in fact, it advances many theories on stages of parent development. However, the textbook examples are never quite as colorful as the examples parents live from day to day.



How the Lessons They Teach Us, Change Us.

Textbooks explain how children begin their search for independence around the age of two or three. The books advise parents to start giving children simple choices at this age. They cite choices such as breakfast foods or colors of socks or shirts. They offer little about the pre-school girl who fancies herself to be a runway model and *chooses* to change her clothes five times a day. They completely overlook the “all I do is laundry” stage the parent is experiencing.

The viewpoints, personality and family history of a parent influence how the parent interacts with the child as much as the personality and behavior of the child influences how the parent chooses to raise the child. It is a dynamic interaction, or in simpler terms, a two way street. Our children adapt to us as we adapt to them, although in my opinion, there is more adaptation on the part of the parent.

For example, parents determine bedtime. While 8:30 PM seems reasonable for a ten-year-old, what happens if the child is unable to fall asleep? The parent adapts and allows quiet reading in bed.

A strong-willed child requires more creative discipline techniques than his mild-mannered brother or sister. A slow learner will try the patience of a tired parent at homework time more than the child who excels in school will. A fussy eater can make a creative cook out of any mom or dad. The child, by the way he or she behaves, determines how the parent will behave.

When my friend called the other day to lament the stage of life she is in with her oldest daughter – teaching her to drive, I smiled and listened. First, she need not worry. Her daughter is intelligent, responsible, and considerate. She will not prove to be a reckless driver. But who can deny that it takes great faith to sit in the passenger seat of a car with

a 15 or 16 year old behind the wheel as they begin to maneuver the streets of Southern California? Danger looms at every stop sign and left turn.

My friend was curious about how I survived teaching four children to drive. It was a simple method: let Daddy do it. She had already figured this out and we agreed it is one way of getting through this stage of parenting.

She went on to explain her realization that this was a major step toward independence for her daughter. As soon as the girl secures a driver's license, she will not need her mom as much. The trips back and forth to school and sports and music lessons could be taken off mom's calendar and put on the daughter's.

My friend's life is changing. As her teenage daughter moves quickly towards total independence, the mom is moving to a stage of less control and responsibility.

She is aware that when her daughter finally earns a driver's license college will be right around the corner and then life as her family has known it for 18 years will be over. Their "cocoon", as she called it, would not be the same and she was feeling those first pangs of detachment that come when a parent faces the emerging adulthood of their oldest child.

Her question was, "How do you handle it?"

I advise my friend to slow down and spend as much time as possible with her daughter. Celebrate the emerging adulthood and independence. Understand this is a special stage, just as learning to walk was a special stage. Praise her as she successfully takes the necessary steps toward going out into the world on her own and recognize that you have given her the best care and nurturing possible.

While doing all of this I sincerely hope that my friend does some celebrating of her own. She too is entering a new stage. It is a stage of less laundry, fewer carpools, and the time to pursue some of the talents God has so generously bestowed upon her.



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