

Taiohi Need Adults: A Quick Snapshot

Written by Keryn O'Neill, MA, PGCertEdPsych, Knowledge Manager

Adolescence is a time of changes. Many things influence taiohi while they make the transition from tamaiti to adult. Relationships with parents, and other adults, are foundational to their health and wellbeing.



Relationships change during adolescence

- Relationships between taiohi and their parents differ greatly. Some experience more conflict and less closeness during adolescence, but many do not.
- How conflict is handled makes a difference. Being able to express a range of emotions is helpful as taiohi and parents work through changes in their relationship.
- A history of positive relationships as tamariki can make this transition smoother for taiohi.



Authoritative parenting

This parenting style:

- balances being warm and loving with clear, firm boundaries. Both aspects are important, and the word 'balance' is key,
- is associated with many positive outcomes for taiohi,
- applies also to other adults in the lives of taiohi e.g. teachers, coaches,
- is sometimes called back-bone, or tree parenting.

Impact of supportive adults

Healthy connections with parents and other adults support the positive development of taiohi. The impacts can be seen in many areas, including:

- better mental and physical health,
- less self-harm, less suicidal thinking, and fewer suicide attempts,
- improved school and academic performance,
- fewer conduct problems and less involvement in violence,

- higher self-esteem, better emotion regulation and more prosocial behaviour,
- lower rates of substance use and dependence,
- supporting healthy brain development, particularly the areas that process social and emotional information.



- Parental acceptance of the sexual and gender identity of taiohi profoundly affects their health and well-being.
- Acceptance is linked to improved outcomes in a number of areas, including general health, substance use and mental health.

Points to note

Strong relationships with adults do not guarantee a smooth ride for taiohi, but they do make it more likely. Importantly, when taiohi do face challenges, having committed adults supporting them increases their chance of coming through that challenge well.

Taiohi facing adversity

- The more taiohi have been exposed to adversity as pēpi and tamariki, the greater their need for adult support to foster their resilience and wellbeing.
- Warm and supportive parenting can buffer the effects of stressful experiences on adolescent's neurobiology and behaviour.
- At times when parents are not able to support taiohi it is particularly important that there are other adults in their lives who can.

Rainbow youth

- Taiohi with diverse sexual and gender identities face increased challenges during adolescence, including to their mental health.

To sum up

- Strong, positive relationships with parents and other adults are important for taiohi, influencing their development and protecting them from a range of poor outcomes.
- For taiohi facing additional challenges, supportive adult relationships are especially important.
- Taiohi need adults who balance warmth and support with clear boundaries and expectations of them.

Glossary of te reo Māori words:

pēpi – babies

taiohi – adolescents

tamaiti – child

tamariki – children

Want to know more?

See this article for more detail, and references:

Adolescents Need Adults

<https://brainwave.org.nz/article/adolescents-need-adults>