

## The Psychological Effects of Unrealistic Academic Demands on Adolescents

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### DESCRIPTION

Adolescence is a critical developmental period characterized by rapid physical, emotional and cognitive growth. During this time, academic achievement often becomes a central focus, with schools, peers and families exerting pressures on students to perform at high levels. While moderate academic expectations can motivate learning and skill development, unrealistic academic demands can have profound psychological consequences. Adolescents who are expected to consistently achieve perfection or exceed their capabilities may experience elevated levels of stress, anxiety, depression and diminished self-esteem. Understanding the psychological effects of such pressures is major for parents, educators and mental health professionals aiming to support adolescent well-being and promote healthy development.

Research consistently indicates that excessive academic demands are a significant source of stress for adolescents. Stress arises when students perceive that the expectations placed upon them exceed their personal capacity or resources, leading to a sense of inadequacy and fear of failure. This type of chronic stress can disrupt emotional regulation, impair cognitive functioning and negatively influence academic performance, creating a paradoxical cycle where high expectations reduce rather than enhance achievement. Symptoms of academic stress may include persistent worry, irritability, sleep disturbances and psychosomatic complaints such as headaches or stomachaches. Over time, these stress responses can escalate into more serious mental health concerns, including generalized anxiety disorder, depression and burnout.

### Effects on social development

Self-esteem is particularly vulnerable to the impact of unrealistic academic demands. Adolescents often tie their sense of self-worth to academic success, interpreting failure or underperformance as a personal deficiency rather than an opportunity for growth. When parental or school expectations are excessively high, students may internalize feelings of inadequacy, leading to low self-confidence and negative self-perception. This can hinder motivation, reduce engagement in

learning and exacerbate emotional distress. Moreover, the constant pursuit of unattainable goals can foster perfectionistic tendencies, where adolescents obsessively strive for flawlessness, fearing criticism or rejection, further compromising their mental health.

Unrealistic academic demands also influence social and emotional development. Adolescents under intense academic pressure may withdraw from peers, reduce participation in extracurricular activities, or avoid social interactions to dedicate more time to studies. This social isolation can limit opportunities for emotional support, peer learning and stress relief, intensifying feelings of loneliness and contributing to depression and anxiety. Furthermore, relationships with parents may become strained if adolescents feel judged, misunderstood, or inadequately supported, which can undermine family cohesion and reduce access to protective factors such as guidance, encouragement and reassurance.

### Parental involvement and support

Coping strategies and resilience play a critical role in mediating the psychological effects of academic pressure. Adolescents with effective coping mechanisms—such as time management skills, realistic goal-setting, problem-solving abilities and mindfulness practices—are better equipped to handle challenging academic demands. Schools and mental health professionals can provide interventions that promote adaptive coping, including stress management programs, cognitive-behavioral techniques and peer support initiatives. Encouraging a balanced approach to academic achievement that values effort and personal growth over mere outcomes can help adolescents manage stress while preserving psychological well-being.

Parental and educator involvement is also essential in mitigating the negative effects of unrealistic academic demands. Parents who communicate expectations clearly, set attainable goals and emphasize learning over perfection can foster motivation without inducing excessive stress. Similarly, teachers who recognize individual student differences, provide constructive feedback and promote a supportive learning environment can reduce performance-related anxiety and enhance engagement. Collaborative efforts among families, schools and mental health

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professionals are necessary to create educational settings that challenge adolescents appropriately while safeguarding their mental health.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, unrealistic academic demands exert significant psychological effects on adolescents, including heightened stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and social withdrawal. The negative consequences of excessive expectations highlight the

need for balanced, supportive and individualized approaches to academic achievement. By fostering realistic goal-setting, promoting adaptive coping strategies and encouraging open communication among students, parents and educators, it is possible to reduce the detrimental impact of academic pressure. Ultimately, understanding and addressing the psychological effects of unrealistic academic demands is essential to nurturing healthy, resilient and motivated adolescents capable of thriving both academically and personally.