

# **The Cost of Being Sensible: The Psychological Mechanisms and Long-Term Risks of Over-Maturity in Adolescents**

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## **Abstract**

**This paper carries out relevant analysis of the phenomenon of adolescents' "excessive sensibleness," focusing on its formation mechanism in the context of family education and the problems existing in long-term psychological aspects. In most families, "being sensible" is generally given the meaning of obedience, tolerance, and self-sacrifice, and in parents' eyes, this means being a good child. In a family environment where boundaries are relatively blurred, children are very easily drawn into their parents' emotions, which makes it difficult for adolescents to distinguish whether the emotions are their own emotions or their parents' emotions. Excessive sensibleness is very likely to cause emotional expression to be suppressed and make children develop a stronger tendency to please others. This may form a false self and easily cause children to deny themselves, leading to psychological states such as depression and anxiety. This paper further uses the PHQ-9 depression symptom scale for the measurement of psychological consequences and constructs an analytical method of "family cultural background—family relationship mechanism—behavioral reinforcement process—psychological consequences." Family education should pay attention to adolescents' emotional release and allow children to have self-boundaries. Being sensible cannot be simply equated with making children obedient and silent, and it should promote them to achieve a good balance between their sense of responsibility and self-development.**

## **Keywords**

**Being overly sensible; adolescent psychology; family education; emotional suppression; people-pleasing personality; PHQ-9; depressive symptoms.**

## **1. Introduction**

In family education, "being sensible" is generally regarded as a sign of adolescents' maturity, thoughtfulness, and sense of responsibility. Many children are affirmed because they can take the initiative to make concessions, reduce the expression of emotions, and understand the difficulties faced by their parents. This type of evaluation, to a certain extent, plays a promoting role in the cultivation of individuals' rule awareness and social adaptability. When "being sensible" is excessively exaggerated and gradually evolves into restraint of one's own needs, concealment of true feelings, and unquestioning obedience to family expectations, its positive meaning may possibly be transformed. For adolescents, prematurely taking on adult-like responsibilities, long-term accommodation of parents' emotions, and being accustomed to gaining recognition through self-sacrifice may cause them to form relatively high psychological pressure during growth [1-2].

Adolescence is an important period in which self-awareness, emotional regulation ability, and identity gradually develop. Individuals need to continuously clarify their own needs and values in family relationships, peer interactions, and social evaluations. If the family environment keeps children in a long-term state of "being obedient," "being considerate," and "not causing

trouble,” children may regard obedience and suppression as the main ways to obtain a sense of security and recognition. Although this behavioral pattern can reduce family conflicts in the short term, it may weaken individuals’ self-expression ability in long-term development, make individuals develop the habit of pleasing others in interpersonal relationships, and also increase psychological risks such as low self-esteem, self-denial, anxiety, and depression [3].

This paper carries out relevant analysis around the cost of “being sensible,” mainly analyzing the family cultural background, psychological formation mechanism, and long-term emotional consequences of adolescents’ over-maturity. The article will discuss aspects such as blurred family boundaries, the cycle of obedience and approval, emotional suppression, and the formation of a false self, and will also combine the PHQ-9 depression symptom scale to explain the method for measuring its psychological consequences, aiming to provide a reference for understanding adolescents’ excessive sensibleness and optimizing family education methods.

## **2. Review of Relevant Materials on Adolescents’ Excessive Sensibleness**

### **2.1. Why children who are “sensible” in childhood live a very depressed life after growing up**

**Self-suppression:** The text points out that in Chinese family education, “being sensible” is often alienated into a kind of moral medal, which may cause children’s real needs to be compressed. For children who learn to suppress emotions too early, the development of their prefrontal cortex may be inhibited, which may make them more likely to form a “people-pleasing personality” after adulthood. Individuals who remain in a state of emotional suppression for a long time may have abnormally increased amygdala activity, and this increase may lead to an anxiety level markedly higher than that of their peers.

**Collectivism:** The text mentions that in traditional Chinese family concepts, “being sensible” often means obeying the arrangements of the family and the collective and taking the initiative to sacrifice oneself. For instance, when an elder brother and a younger brother have a dispute, the elder brother will usually be required to give way to the younger brother. If he does not give way, he may be understood as not being sensible. This reflects the family’s requirements for individual behavior under collectivism [4-5].

### **2.2. Why are children who are “sensible” in childhood more likely to have psychological problems after growing up?**

**Low self-esteem:** The article points out that children who have been praised as “sensible” since childhood are more likely to develop emotional disorders, low self-esteem, interpersonal relationship difficulties, and even depressive tendencies after adulthood. Children who show high obedience and low emotional expression in childhood have a 2.3 times higher risk of developing depression after adulthood. “Sensible” children often suppress their true emotions at the cost of self-sacrifice. This growth pattern may affect the development of the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for emotional regulation in the brain, and form an “emotionally numb personality” [6].

### **2.3. Why is it more difficult for people who are more sensible to be truly happy?**

**Depression:** This literature mentions that sensible children are often skilled at suppressing emotions. They hide negative emotions deep inside. Children who suppress emotions for a long time have a 30% higher risk of developing depression than children who can express emotions normally. In order to gain others’ recognition and affection, sensible children also often unconsciously please others and form a people-pleasing personality. They are in a passive and

humble position in interpersonal relationships, bear excessive psychological burdens, and frequently experience anxiety and depression [7].

#### 2.4. When parents praise you as “sensible and precocious,” invisible harm in growth may be hidden behind it

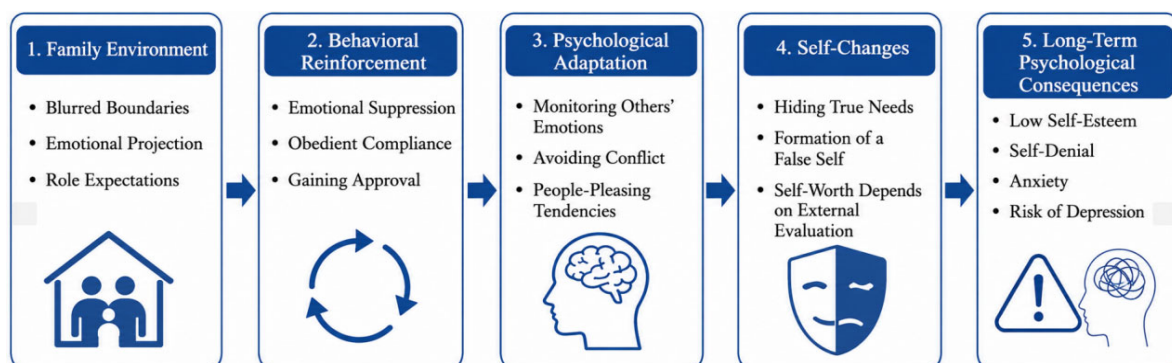
Self-denial: The text mentions that Japanese psychologist Miyamoto Musashi once pointed out that children who take on adult responsibilities too early are likely to become lonely and anxious and may even develop self-denial. “Sensible” children often lack a sense of security during growth, are accustomed to suppressing their own emotions and needs, neglect themselves, and have difficulty finding real interests and life goals. This may then trigger an identity crisis and lead to self-denial [8].

### 3. PHQ-9 Depression Symptom Scale

The 9-item Patient Health Questionnaire depression scale (Patient Health Questionnaire-9, PHQ-9) is a concise and self-rated tool, and it is often widely used in primary medical institutions for the diagnosis of mental disorders. Different from other diagnostic tools, it is revised based on the diagnostic criteria of DSM-IV, mainly including five major parts: depression, anxiety, substance abuse, eating disorders, and somatization disorders. Through repeated practice and application, it has now been translated into several languages and is widely used in primary medical institutions as a screening tool [9]. PHQ-9 is its scale concerning depression and is divided into two parts. The first part has 9 items, namely, it is composed of 9 depressive symptoms: they are respectively: 1. loss of pleasure; 2. low mood; 3. sleep disorder; 4. lack of energy; 5. eating disorder; 6. low self-evaluation; 7. difficulty concentrating; 8. psychomotor retardation; 9. negative thoughts. The second part has only 1 item, which is a survey on the impairment of social function. The scores of each item in the first part are as follows: 0 = not at all; 1 = several days; 2 = more than one week; 3 = almost every day. The scores of the second part are as follows: 0 = no difficulty; 1 = some difficulty; 2 = very difficult; 3 = extremely difficult. This scale has not yet been applied in China [10-11].

### 4. The Psychological Formation Mechanism Behind “Being Sensible”

Qualitative research “restores the truth through stories” and finds three psychological processes behind “being sensible.”



**Figure 1.** Schematic diagram of the psychological mechanism and long-term risks of adolescents' excessive sensibleness

As shown in Figure 1, the starting point of “being sensible” is the blurring of family boundaries and the construction of a symbiotic relationship. In many families, there are no clear boundaries between parents and children. Parents project all their emotions and pressure onto their

children, making children take on the responsibility of “emotional caregivers” and regard parents’ pursuits as their own expectations [12].

The behavioral logic of “being sensible” is a vicious cycle of “obedience gains approval, and approval reinforces obedience.” Many children find that as long as they suppress their emotions and cater to their parents, they can receive parents’ praise and care. If they express their true thoughts, they may trigger conflicts and make their parents unhappy. Over time, they will form a fixed cognition: only by being sensible and obedient can they gain family recognition. This pattern will gradually penetrate into their interpersonal interactions, making them accustomed to pleasing others and suppressing themselves no matter what occasion they are in [13].

The most distressing long-term consequence of “being sensible” is the loss of the self and the formation of a false self. Many adolescents remain for a long time in a state of “monitoring parents’ emotions and predicting relational risks.” Even when sleeping, they dare not relax completely, fearing that something they do poorly may make their parents unhappy. They gradually learn to hide their true emotions and needs and shape a false self that is “liked by parents and recognized by others.” Over time, they will forget what they truly like and what they want, and may even hate themselves in this state, while negative emotions will also continue to accumulate.

## 5. Conclusion

“Being sensible” itself is not a problem in essence. The problem lies in whether it comes at the cost of suppressing the self. If adolescents exchange recognition for obedience, concession, and emotional concealment over a long period, they are likely to form a tendency to please others during growth and gradually pay less attention to their true feelings and needs. Behind the causes of excessive sensibleness, there are generally relevant factors such as unclear family boundaries, parental emotional projection, and reinforcement from external evaluations. In order to keep relationships stable, children will habitually pay attention to others’ emotional states and restrain their own dissatisfaction, and they may develop conditions such as low self-esteem, self-denial, anxiety, and depression. Family education needs to re-understand the meaning of “being sensible.” Maturity that is truly meaningful to health is not to make children blindly obey and endure, but to allow them to express emotions, clarify demands, establish boundaries, and form stable self-characteristics in relationships where they are understood.

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