

# Parent-Child Conflict Resolution Strategies and Approaches Regarding Adolescents' Electronic Device Use

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## Abstract

Excessive use of electronic devices among adolescents has become a major source of conflict in contemporary families. Based on an analysis of the specific manifestations and underlying causes of parent-child conflict, this paper proposes a multi-dimensional solution that focuses on family communication, the formulation of usage rules, psychological intervention, and social support. The study shows that establishing clear time boundaries for device use, conducting non-judgmental dialogues, implementing positive reinforcement strategies, and seeking professional psychological counseling support can significantly improve the quality of family relationships and reduce the frequency of conflicts. This paper emphasizes the importance of parents improving their own digital literacy and serving as role models, as well as the supportive role of schools and communities in resolving such conflicts.

## Keywords

electronic device use, parent-child conflict, family communication, behavioral intervention

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## 1. Introduction

Currently, parent-child conflict arising from adolescents' use of electronic devices has become one of the primary sources of family disputes. However, existing research mostly focuses on single factors and lacks systematic solutions, making this topic of significant research value. Studying this conflict is urgent not only because of surface-level family disputes but also due to its profound impact on adolescents' mental health. Based on this, the present paper adopts a multi-dimensional integrated perspective, combining family communication, behavioral norms, psychological intervention, and social support. Through literature analysis and comparison of survey data, it aims to develop a relatively systematic set of resolution approaches to address the shortcomings of existing research.

## 2. Specific Manifestations and Underlying Mechanisms of Parent-Child Conflict

## 2.1 Specific Forms of Conflict Caused by Electronic Device Use

Parent-child conflicts triggered by adolescents' electronic device use exhibit highly specific characteristics in real family settings. The most common forms include disputes over usage duration, differing attitudes toward usage content, disagreements over usage contexts, and conflicts arising from academic and physical health problems caused by excessive use (Liu, 2024). According to statistical analysis from the 2023 survey by the China Youth Research Center, the frequency distribution of parent-child conflicts due to electronic device use among 1,500 surveyed families is shown in the following *Table 1*:

*Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Parent-Child Conflicts Triggered by Electronic Device Use (2023)*

Conflict Type	Weekly Frequency (times)
Disputes over usage duration	3.2
Disapproval of usage content	2.1
Conflicts over usage location/context	1.8
Disputes over impact on academic performance	2.4
Disputes over impact on sleep	1.9

*Data source: China Youth Research Center, "2023 Survey Report on Adolescents' Digital Life and Family Relationships".*

The most prominent form of conflict is disputes over usage duration, occurring on average 3.2 times per week in 68.4% of families with adolescents, with each conflict lasting approximately 18.5 minutes. Such high-frequency short-term conflicts gradually accumulate into deeper family relationship problems. The second most common is disputes over the impact on academic performance, affecting 58.9% of families. These conflicts are often accompanied by stronger emotional intensity because parents directly link them to the adolescents' future development. Disapproval of usage content (such as excessive exposure to short videos or inappropriate information on social media) triggers conflict in 52.8% of families. In these cases, parents tend to adopt stricter control attitudes, while adolescents are more inclined to conceal their actual usage behavior.

## 2.2 Underlying Psychological and Developmental Causes of Conflict

The emergence of parent-child conflict is not simply due to electronic devices themselves but results from the interaction of multiple factors, including adolescents' psychological developmental stage, family communication patterns, intergenerational differences, and social environment. Adolescence is a critical developmental stage in which individuals seek independence and self-identity. During this period, adolescents use electronic devices to build peer social networks, find platforms for self-expression, and construct virtual identities. These behaviors are themselves part of healthy psychological development. However, when parents completely prohibit or strictly restrict these behaviors, adolescents feel controlled and misunderstood, leading to strong psychological resistance (Chen, 2024).

According to a 2023 study by the Tsinghua University Institute of Psychology, among 2,100 surveyed adolescents aged 13–18, there was a significant correlation between the intensity of parent-child conflict and parents' control styles, as shown in *Table 2*:

*Table 2: Relationship Between Different Parental Control Styles and Parent-Child Conflict Intensity (2023)*

Parental Control Style	Number of Adolescents Surveyed	Conflict intensity	Concealment behavior	Parent-child trust
Absolute Prohibition	580	8.2	76.5%	3.1
Negotiated Guidance	550	3.5	28.9%	7.8

*Data source: Tsinghua University Institute of Psychology, "Survey on Adolescents' Electronic Device Use and Family Relationships".*

The data in *Table 2* clearly reveal an important phenomenon: the absolute prohibition style of parental control leads to higher conflict intensity (8.2 points) and higher proportion of concealment behavior (76.5%), while parent-child trust is the lowest (3.1 points). This indicates that strict control not only fails to effectively reduce electronic device use but actually prompts adolescents to adopt concealment and deception strategies to maintain their usage (Chen, 2024). In contrast, families adopting a negotiated guidance style show significantly lower conflict intensity (3.5 points), with concealment behavior dropping to only 28.9% and parent-child trust reaching 7.8 points, approaching a healthy level.

The underlying causes of conflict are also closely related to intergenerational differences. Adult parents and adolescents have fundamentally different definitions of “moderate use.” The virtual social networks adolescents build through electronic devices hold significant meaning for their psychological well-being, whereas parents often view electronic device use as a waste of time and detrimental to academic performance. This difference in perspectives leads to a lack of common language during communication. In addition, parents’ own electronic device usage habits also influence conflict. Surveys show that when parents themselves frequently use electronic devices, their criticism of adolescents’ use is often perceived by adolescents as hypocritical, further intensifying the conflict (Wang, 2025).

### 3. Systematic Resolution Approaches and Implementation Strategies for Parent-Child Conflict

#### 3.1 2.1. Family-Level Negotiation, Rule Formulation, and Positive Communication Methods

The first step in resolving parent-child conflict caused by electronic device use is to establish usage rules at the family level based on negotiation rather than coercion. The process of formulating these rules itself serves as an effective mechanism for conflict prevention and relationship repair. An effective negotiation process requires parents to first abandon an authoritarian stance and instead position themselves as collaborators working with adolescents to solve the problem (Liu, 2024). This requires parents to use non-judgmental, open-ended questions when discussing electronic device use with adolescents, seeking to understand the adolescents’ genuine needs and psychological motivations. For example, parents can ask, “What do you think is the most important thing about using your phone?” rather than “You spend so much time on your phone every day—don’t you have any self-control?”

In 2022, the Family Education Research Center at Beijing Normal University implemented a six-month intervention involving negotiated rule-making and communication training in 318 families. The results are shown in Table 3:

*Table 3: Changes in Family Indicators Before and After Negotiated Rule-Making and Communication Training Intervention*

Measurement Indicator	Pre-Intervention	Post-Intervention
Monthly conflict frequency (times)	14.2	5.8
Conflict intensity score (1–10)	7.1	3.2
Parent-child communication quality score (1–10)	4.3	6.4
Proportion of adolescents voluntarily complying with rules (%)	42.1%	78.6%
Parent-child trust score (1–10)	3.8	7.5

*Data source: Beijing Normal University Family Education Research Center, “Evaluation of the Effects of Negotiated Communication Intervention on Parent-Child Relationships”.*

The data in Table 3 confirm the significant effectiveness of negotiated rule-making and improved communication methods. The most critical indicator is the proportion of adolescents who voluntarily comply with usage rules, which increased from 42.1% to 78.6%, a rise of 36.5 percentage points. This shows that when rules are established through negotiation rather than forced imposition, adolescents are more inclined to follow them voluntarily. At the same time, conflict intensity decreased from 7.1 to 3.2 points (a 54.9% reduction), and monthly conflict frequency dropped from 14.2 to 5.8 times. The substantial improvement in parent-child trust (97.4% increase) indicates that effective communication not only resolves surface-level conflicts but also repairs trust damaged by prolonged conflict.

Specific negotiation strategies include three key steps. First, parents should work with adolescents to set specific, measurable usage goals rather than vague rules such as “don’t use it for too long.” For example, they can negotiate a concrete rule: “On weekdays, phone use is limited to no more than two hours per day, with one hour for learning-related apps and one hour for entertainment apps.” Such specificity makes rule enforcement clear and reduces conflicts caused by subjective judgment. Second, parents should discuss the reasonableness and feasibility of the rules with adolescents and listen to their practical difficulties. For instance, if an adolescent says, “All my classmates communicate in the WeChat group about study materials; if I don’t check my phone, I’ll miss important information,” parents should understand this legitimate need rather than simply rejecting it. Third, parents need to establish reward and punishment mechanisms, but these

should primarily emphasize positive reinforcement. When adolescents comply with the rules, parents should explicitly express appreciation and recognition, which is more effective for behavior change than punishment.

### 3.2 Specific Implementation of Psychological Intervention and Professional Support

When family communication and negotiation alone cannot effectively improve conflict, professional psychological intervention becomes necessary. The goal of psychological intervention is not simply to reduce electronic device use but to help adolescents and parents understand the root causes of the conflict and develop healthier coping strategies. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Family Systems Therapy have been proven particularly effective in addressing such conflicts (Zhang, 2024).

From 2021 to 2023, the Department of Psychological Medicine at Nanjing Medical University conducted a three-month psychological intervention trial with 456 adolescents and their parents experiencing parent-child conflict. The effects of different intervention approaches were compared, with results shown in Table 4:

*Table 4: Comparative Study of the Effects of Different Psychological Intervention Approaches*

Intervention Approach	Number of Participants	the reduction in conflict intensity
Control Group (No Intervention)	92	8.1%
Parent Education Training	118	34.7%
Adolescent Individual CBT	106	38.9%
Family Systems Therapy	140	52.3%

*Data source: Nanjing Medical University Department of Psychological Medicine, "Evaluation of Psychological Intervention Effects on Adolescent Parent-Child Conflict".*

Table 4 clearly shows that in the control group receiving no intervention, conflict intensity decreased naturally by only 8.1%. Parent education training reduced conflict intensity by 34.7%, but the effect was less pronounced than individual Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for adolescents (38.9% reduction) and Family Systems Therapy (52.3% reduction). Among these, Family Systems Therapy produced the most outstanding results, with a 52.3% reduction in conflict intensity. This indicates that intervening in the interactive relationship among adolescents, parents, and conflict as a whole is more effective than educating only one party.

The practical application of Family Systems Therapy involves several specific steps. First, the therapist helps the whole family understand the recurring patterns of electronic device-related conflict. A common pattern is: the adolescent uses the phone for too long, the parent discovers it and scolds loudly, the adolescent argues back, emotions escalate on both sides, and eventually a serious conflict erupts. Through the therapist's guidance, the family can identify this vicious cycle and learn to intervene at critical points before conflict escalates. Second, the therapist teaches family members "pause" and "cool-down" techniques. When conflict is about to escalate, any party can suggest, "Let's all pause for a moment and discuss this again in 30 minutes." This technique effectively breaks the chain reaction of escalating conflict. Third, the therapist helps parents identify irrational beliefs they may hold during conflicts. For example, some parents may believe that "if an adolescent uses electronic devices, it means he/she will turn bad." The therapist needs to help parents examine the validity of this belief and develop a more rational and flexible attitude.

When conflict has already led to obvious psychological problems in adolescents (such as anxiety, depression, or social withdrawal), individual psychological treatment becomes more necessary. The application of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in this context includes identifying and changing irrational thoughts related to electronic device use. For example, some adolescents may think, "If my Instagram posts don't get enough likes, it means I have no value." The therapist challenges this belief through empirical exploration and behavioral experiments. At the same time, the therapist helps adolescents develop alternative coping strategies, such as engaging in exercise, artistic creation, or face-to-face social interaction when feeling bored or anxious, rather than turning to electronic devices.

To ensure the accessibility and sustainability of psychological intervention, schools and communities should establish corresponding support systems. Many schools have begun equipping psychological counseling rooms with professional counselors to provide free or low-cost counseling services to students and parents. In addition, some communities have established "parent support groups" that regularly organize parents experiencing parent-child conflict to share experiences and provide mutual support. This peer-support model has also been proven to have positive effects on improving family relationships.

#### 4. Conclusion

Parent-child conflict triggered by adolescents' electronic device use is a complex, multi-layered issue. Its resolution cannot rely solely on simple prohibition or strict control; instead, it requires coordinated cooperation among families, schools, and society. The three levels of intervention—negotiated formulation of usage rules, improved family communication, and seeking professional psychological support—complement one another and work together to significantly improve parent-child relationships and reduce conflict frequency. At the same time, parents' self-improvement, understanding of adolescents' developmental stages, and role-modeling behavior are crucial for solving the problem. In the future, more interdisciplinary research is needed to further deepen our understanding of this issue.

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