



# How does autonomy help us grow?

**01** Work with a classmate to define autonomy as it applies to teens.

**02** Read “A Hot Mess,” and compare your definition in Exercise 1 with the description in the text. With your classmate, discuss the similarities and differences.



## A Hot Mess

Today’s episode focuses on a personal situation causing significant stress and tension for my family and me. As you may remember, my great-grandparents immigrated from Ukraine, and everyone takes dance classes. We are four generations of dancers.

So, we’ve arrived at my dilemma: Should I continue the family tradition that celebrates my great-grandparents’ culture, or should I follow my passion: robotics? Time constraints don’t allow me to pursue both.

My mom says I have **autonomy** in how I spend my free time, but I didn’t know what that meant, so I asked Dr. Easton, our school psychologist, to help me understand what autonomy means to teens. Here’s what she told me.

Autonomy is not about doing what we want, as it is not synonymous with selfishness. Instead, it involves **thinking critically** about choices, including, reflecting on the implications of them and taking **ownership** of our futures by picking options that support our goals; that is, making the choice that’s best for the future **providing we weigh up** all the alternatives. Dr. Easton added that awareness of social pressures, **guilt**, and self-doubt may also color our decisions. For example, my grandmother said she’d cry forever unless I chose dance.

Dr. Easton highlighted that autonomy teaches us to make decisions, helping us mature into thoughtful adults, provided we use it wisely. But does this mean we’ll never get it wrong, or that we should agonize over every little decision? Of course not!

Ultimately, this was an extremely difficult decision, but for the first time, I felt like I was maturing. So, what do you think I chose? And why?

**03** Read the text again and create a list of the benefits of autonomy for teens. Write your list and compare it with your classmates in a small group.

**04** Work with a classmate. Read the scenario and propose ways to improve the situation with autonomy.

Alexandra takes piano lessons because her parents want her to, but she doesn’t play well, hates to practice, and finds recitals very stressful. She wants to join the school drama club because she likes acting.

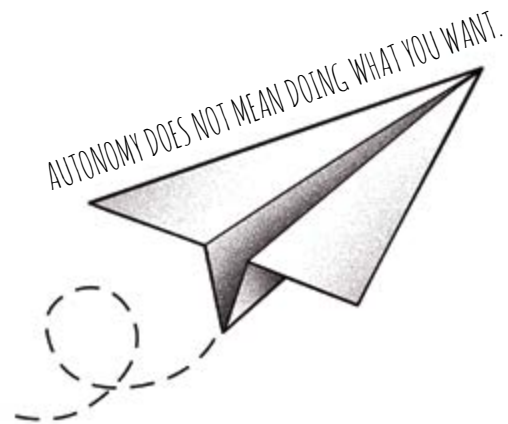
**05 Match the sentences halves.**

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| 1. Teens should be given real opportunities to make their own choices, | a. teens might feel excluded from shaping their own identity.          |
| 2. Supposing they lacked autonomy in school decisions,                 | b. so long as they feel their voice is genuinely valued.               |
| 3. Were parents to control every aspect of a teenager's day,           | c. were schools to promote student-led projects.                       |
| 4. Young people might feel more empowered in their learning,           | d. provided they are allowed to learn from their own mistakes.         |
| 5. Many adolescents feel more motivated,                               | e. they may grow up dependent and unable to make confident choices.    |
| 6. Teens may become disengaged,  | f. unless they are allowed to take part in meaningful decision-making. |

**06 Write four sentences about the importance of critical thinking for teens using the different conditionals from Exercise 5.**



**07 Work with a classmate. Create a dialogue speculating what would happen if students participated in major school decisions. Use five forms of conditionals (not 'if').**



**08 Imagine your group has been invited to talk to the school administration about the importance of autonomy for teens. Follow the instructions.**

1. Get in a group of four.
2. Identify the key benefits of student autonomy in the school.
3. Provide examples of projects and activities that could enhance student autonomy.
4. Prepare and practice your presentation.
5. Present to another group.
6. Discuss which was more persuasive and why.