

Parental Expectations, Guilt, and Autonomy in Young Adults' Life Choices

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<https://doi.org/10.53104/curr.res.psychol.sci.2026.06003>

Citation: He, Y. (2026). Parental Expectations, Guilt, and Autonomy in Young Adults' Life Choices. *Current Research in Psychological Science*, 2(2), 36-47.

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Abstract: Young adults are often expected to make independent choices about education, career, marriage, residence, and lifestyle, yet these decisions remain closely connected to family relationships. Parental expectations may be expressed through advice, concern, comparison, disappointment, or references to sacrifice and responsibility. Over time, these expectations can become internal standards that shape how young adults judge their own choices. This paper examines how parental concern develops into personal obligation and how guilt narrows the range of life options that feel acceptable. It focuses on anticipated guilt, compliance, resistance, and indecision, and distinguishes guilt linked to real family responsibilities from guilt produced mainly by disagreement or emotional pressure. The paper argues that autonomy should not be understood as rejecting parental influence or breaking family ties. A more realistic form of autonomy involves recognising parental concerns, examining inherited standards, tolerating disagreement, and accepting responsibility for the consequences of one's own decisions. Financial dependence, family duty, and emotional attachment can make this process difficult, but they do not remove the need for personal judgment. Young adults can remain connected to their families while gradually learning to separate care from obedience and parental disappointment from moral failure.

Keywords: parental expectations; guilt; young adults; autonomy; life choices; family relationships

1. Introduction

Young adulthood is usually associated with increasing independence. At this stage, people begin to take greater responsibility for decisions about education, employment, relationships, marriage, residence, and lifestyle. Legal adulthood may arrive

at a fixed age, but psychological and practical independence often develops more slowly. Many young adults continue to rely on their parents for tuition, housing, financial support, advice, or family connections. Even after this dependence has weakened, parental approval may still influence major life choices.

Parental involvement is not necessarily harmful. Parents often have greater experience with employment, financial risk, and long-term family responsibilities. Their advice may help young adults recognise difficulties that are easy to overlook, while family support can provide the resources needed to explore new opportunities.

Problems arise when parental advice becomes a standard that the young adult feels unable to reject. Parents may regard stable employment, marriage, home ownership, or remaining near the family as basic signs of maturity. These expectations may be expressed directly, but they may also appear through comparison, repeated concern, disappointment, silence, or references to parental sacrifice.

Indirect expectations can be especially difficult to manage. Parents may say that the final choice belongs to the young adult while continuing to show which outcome they consider acceptable. The young person remains formally free, but disagreement carries an emotional cost. A different career, partner, or place of residence may feel selfish or ungrateful even when the choice is reasonable.

Guilt plays an important role in this process. Young adults may imagine parental disappointment before announcing a decision and remove certain possibilities from consideration. A career change may feel like wasting the family's investment. Moving away may feel like abandoning parental responsibilities. Delaying marriage may be understood as causing anxiety or embarrassment. In this way, guilt can narrow personal choice without the use of direct control.

Young adults may respond by complying, resisting, or delaying the decision. Compliance can protect family harmony but may later produce regret or resentment. Resistance may support independence while leaving the young adult emotionally troubled by parental disappointment. Indecision can develop when neither obedience nor disagreement feels acceptable.

Guilt should not always be treated as unhealthy. Family members have real responsibilities toward one another, and personal decisions may affect

parents in practical ways. The important distinction is between guilt connected to actual neglect and guilt produced mainly by disagreement. Parental disappointment does not automatically mean that the young adult has acted wrongly.

Autonomy in this context does not require rejecting family influence or cutting emotional ties. It involves listening to parental concerns, recognising reasonable responsibilities, and still using personal judgment. This paper examines how family expectations become personal obligations, how guilt narrows young adults' life choices, and how autonomy can develop without breaking close family relationships.

2. From Family Expectations to Personal Obligation

2.1 Parental Concern and the Idea of a "Good Life"

Parents often have a fairly clear idea of what a successful adult life should look like. Stable employment, regular income, marriage, and the ability to support the family are commonly treated as signs of maturity. The details differ across families, but the basic concern is often similar. Parents want their children to avoid hardship and build a life that appears secure and sustainable.

These expectations are usually expressed as care rather than control. Parents may believe that they are helping young adults make realistic choices in an uncertain environment. A stable job is recommended because income and long-term security matter. Marriage is encouraged because companionship and family continuity are valued. Living near the family may be preferred because parents and adult children are expected to support one another.

Employment often occupies a central place in this idea of a good life. Parents may prefer occupations with predictable income, social benefits, and clear career paths. Jobs in public institutions, established companies, education, medicine, law, and finance may appear safer than freelance, creative, or entrepreneurial work. A recognised occupation also

provides visible evidence that years of education have produced a worthwhile result.

This preference is understandable when parents have experienced financial uncertainty themselves. Stable employment may represent protection from unemployment, illness, housing costs, and future family expenses. When a young adult wants to leave a secure position, parents may see the decision as giving up more than a salary. It may appear to threaten the stability that the family has spent years trying to create.

Young adults may judge work through a different set of concerns. Interest, meaning, flexibility, working conditions, and personal development may matter as much as income or occupational status. A position that appears secure from the outside can still feel exhausting or unsuitable in daily life. These experiences are not always easy to explain to parents who mainly see the salary, reputation, and long-term benefits of the job.

A disagreement about employment can therefore become a disagreement about maturity (Leung et al., 2011). Parents may interpret the wish to leave a stable position as impatience or an unwillingness to tolerate difficulty. The young adult may feel that the parents are ignoring the personal cost of remaining in unsuitable work. Both sides may care about the future, but they understand a good future in different ways.

Education is closely connected to the same family model. Parents may regard academic achievement as one of the most reliable routes to upward mobility. Considerable time, money, and emotional energy may be invested in examinations, university education, and postgraduate study. Education can then become a family project rather than a purely individual experience.

Later choices may be expected to justify this investment. A graduate who wants to work outside the field of study may be asked why so many years were spent obtaining the degree. A student who considers leaving postgraduate study may be told that stopping would waste earlier effort. The young adult may share this concern and feel that changing direction would disappoint the family.

Parental pride can make this pressure stronger. Entry into a respected university or recognised profession gives the family a clear story of success. This pride may reflect genuine affection and recognition of the young adult's effort. Yet when family identity becomes closely tied to a particular achievement, choosing another path becomes more difficult.

Marriage forms another important part of the parental image of adult life. Parents may view it as a source of companionship, emotional security, and future family support. They may also believe that marriage should occur within a suitable period. Questions about relationships can therefore become more frequent when a young adult reaches an age that the family regards as appropriate.

The disagreement may concern timing rather than marriage itself. Parents may worry that waiting will reduce future opportunities, while the young adult may care more about emotional readiness and compatibility. A partner who appears suitable to the family may still be unsuitable in the private reality of the relationship. Parents can offer useful observations, but their knowledge is necessarily limited.

Social comparison may strengthen marriage and career expectations. Parents hear about relatives, neighbours, or former classmates whose children have married, obtained stable work, or purchased homes. These visible milestones provide a simple way of measuring progress. The young adult may then feel that life is moving too slowly, even when personal circumstances are very different.

Place of residence can produce a similar conflict. Young adults may move for education, employment, relationships, or a preferred way of life. Parents may support the opportunity while still hoping that the move will be temporary. Living nearby is often associated with emotional closeness, practical support, and future caregiving.

A decision to remain in another city may therefore have different meanings for the two generations. The young adult may see professional growth and independence. Parents may see distance and uncertainty about who will assist them as they grow

older. Their concern is not purely emotional, since ageing parents may eventually need practical help. Financial support can further blur the line between concern and authority. Parents may help with tuition, housing, or the purchase of a home. Because this support makes certain choices possible, parents may expect a greater role in the decision. Young adults may accept the assistance while still hoping to keep control over the direction of their lives.

Conflict often develops because the meaning of support is not clearly discussed. Parents may see money and care as shared family resources that naturally involve shared decision-making. Young adults may see the same help as support for their independence. Neither side necessarily intends to create conflict, but they understand the relationship between assistance and authority differently.

The parental idea of a good life is not without value. Stability, care, and responsibility are important concerns, and parental experience may help young adults notice risks they have overlooked. The problem appears when one version of a good life is treated as the only respectable version.

A stable job is not suitable for every person. Marriage does not guarantee emotional well-being. Living close to parents does not always produce a close relationship. Visible stability may hide dissatisfaction, exhaustion, or regret. Parents often describe the risks of uncertain choices in detail, while the possible cost of compliance receives less attention.

Parents have knowledge based on experience, but young adults also possess knowledge that parents cannot fully access. They know how the job feels each day, what the relationship is like in private, and which form of life they can sustain over time. Neither side has complete information.

The important distinction is not between parental wisdom and youthful independence. It is between guidance that informs a decision and expectation that determines it. Parental concern becomes restrictive when rejecting the preferred path is treated as a failure of maturity, gratitude, or family loyalty. At that point, the parents' idea of a good life begins to function as a personal obligation.

2.2 How Expectations Become Internal Standards

Parental expectations do not remain outside the young adult. When the same ideas are repeated over many years, they can become part of the person's own way of judging success, responsibility, and failure (Bao et al., 2023). A stable job may no longer feel like something the parents prefer. It may begin to feel like the only sensible form of employment. Marriage at a certain age may appear to be a natural stage rather than a family expectation. Remaining close to home may be understood as a basic duty rather than one possible form of care.

This process often begins early. Children learn which achievements receive praise and which choices cause worry or disappointment. Good examination results may bring approval, while uncertainty about the future may lead to criticism. A child who follows advice may be described as sensible and mature. One who questions the family's preferred path may be called impulsive or unrealistic. These responses gradually connect particular choices with moral qualities.

By young adulthood, parental standards may already feel familiar and reasonable. The person may not experience them as direct pressure because they have become part of everyday thinking. When considering a career change, the young adult may immediately focus on income, security, and the reaction of the family. Personal interest may be considered only after these concerns have been addressed. The order in which options are evaluated already reflects the family's priorities.

Indirect communication can strengthen this internalization. Parents do not always need to say that a certain decision is unacceptable. Repeated comments about other people's achievements may be enough. Stories about a cousin with a stable position or a former classmate who has married can show which outcomes receive approval. The young adult learns to compare personal progress with these visible examples.

Silence and disappointment can have a similar effect. A parent may not openly forbid a decision but may respond with worry, reduced communication, or repeated questions. The young adult begins to

anticipate these reactions. Later decisions are adjusted before any discussion takes place. In this way, parental influence continues even when the parents are not directly present.

Family support can also make parental standards more difficult to question. When parents have paid for education, helped with housing, or used personal connections to create opportunities, the young adult may feel that later choices should produce a result that the family considers worthwhile. The person may believe that accepting support also means accepting the values attached to it.

This does not always come from an explicit agreement. Parents may see their support as a natural family responsibility, while the young adult later interprets it as a debt. A decision to leave a secure occupation may then feel like a rejection of the family's effort. The young adult is not only changing direction but also questioning the meaning of earlier support.

Parental standards may become closely connected with identity. A person who has long been praised for being obedient, hardworking, or dependable may find it difficult to make a choice that disappoints the family. The decision threatens more than approval. It threatens the person's image of being a good son or daughter.

This can create uncertainty about personal preference. Young adults may know what their parents want but have less confidence about what they want themselves. They may ask whether a less secure career is a genuine goal or only a temporary impulse. They may question whether reluctance toward marriage reflects personal values or emotional immaturity. Because parental standards have shaped self-evaluation for so long, separating personal judgment from family expectations becomes difficult (Luyckx et al., 2007).

Internalization does not mean that young adults simply accept everything their parents believe. Many recognise that their interests and circumstances differ from those of the previous generation. They may disagree with parental views about work, relationships, or residence. Yet

disagreement at the level of thought does not always remove the internal standard. A person may believe that changing careers is reasonable while still feeling irresponsible for considering it.

This gap between personal belief and internal judgment is important. Young adults may defend autonomy in general but struggle to apply it to their own lives. They may support a friend who moves away or leaves an unsuitable job, while judging the same choice more harshly when they make it themselves. The family standard continues to shape self-criticism even when it is no longer fully accepted.

Financial and emotional dependence can make this conflict stronger. A young adult who still relies on parents may have limited room to separate personal choice from family approval. Even after financial independence is achieved, emotional dependence may remain. The person may still need reassurance that the decision is acceptable and may find it difficult to act without parental agreement.

Internal standards can also affect which choices are considered possible. Some options may be rejected before they are seriously examined because they do not fit the family's idea of adulthood. A creative occupation may be dismissed as unstable. Moving to a smaller city may be viewed as a step backward. Remaining unmarried may be treated as an incomplete life. The young adult appears to choose freely, but the range of acceptable choices has already been reduced.

The issue is not that family values should have no place in personal decisions. Values such as responsibility, stability, and care can help young adults consider the wider effects of their choices. The problem appears when these values are tied to only one life path. Stability becomes identified with a particular occupation, care with physical proximity, and maturity with marriage or home ownership.

At that point, parental expectations have become internal rules. The young adult no longer asks only which choice is suitable. The person also asks which choice proves that they are responsible, grateful, and worthy of family approval. This internal judgment

gives guilt much of its later force. Even without a direct command, choosing differently can feel like a moral failure.

3. Guilt and the Narrowing of Life Choices

3.1 Anticipated Guilt Before the Choice

Guilt often appears before a young adult has made or announced a decision. The person imagines how the parents may react and begins to experience the emotional cost in advance. A career change may bring thoughts of wasted education. Moving to another city may raise fears about leaving ageing parents behind. Delaying marriage may be linked to parental anxiety or pressure from relatives. No open conflict has yet occurred, but the young adult already feels responsible for the disappointment the choice may cause.

This anticipated guilt affects which options receive serious consideration. A young adult may appear to have several choices, yet some are rejected almost immediately because they seem too difficult to explain to the family. The person may avoid applying for work in another city, remain in an unsuitable field, or continue a relationship that receives parental approval. The formal right to choose remains, but the range of choices that feels acceptable has already become smaller.

Expected parental reactions are often based on earlier family experience. Young adults remember how parents responded to past disagreements. They may recall repeated warnings, silence, emotional conversations, or comments about sacrifice. These memories create a likely script for future decisions. Even when parents have not yet opposed the new choice, the young adult may assume that the same pattern will return.

Family investment can make anticipated guilt stronger. Education may have required years of financial support and emotional effort. Parents may have paid tuition, helped with housing, or used personal connections to create opportunities. A young adult who wants to change direction may then feel that the decision rejects not only a career

path but also the meaning of what the family has provided.

The idea of “wasting the parents’ effort” often carries more emotional weight than the actual cost. Money and time have already been spent, yet the young adult may feel that gratitude requires a particular result. A degree should lead to a related occupation. A secure job should not be left. An opportunity arranged by the family should not be refused. Support from the past becomes tied to obedience in the present.

Anticipated guilt also shapes decisions about residence. A young adult may receive a valuable opportunity in another city but hesitate because distance is associated with reduced family care. The person may imagine parents becoming lonely, facing health problems, or feeling abandoned. These concerns may be reasonable, but they can also make almost any move appear morally questionable.

The future needs of parents are often uncertain. Practical care may not yet be required, and other relatives may be able to help. Still, the possibility of future need can influence a present decision. Remaining nearby begins to represent loyalty, while leaving appears selfish. The young adult may give up an opportunity not because the family currently depends on them, but because guilt has become attached to the idea of distance.

Marriage can produce a similar pattern. Parents may worry that delay will reduce future opportunities or create social pressure for the family. A young adult who does not feel ready may still feel responsible for parental anxiety. The question is no longer only whether marriage is personally suitable. It becomes whether postponement is causing unnecessary pain or embarrassment.

In these situations, disagreement is often turned into a judgment about character. The young adult may not simply think, “My parents will disagree.” The thought becomes, “A good son or daughter would not make this choice.” A decision about work, residence, or marriage is then judged as evidence of gratitude, loyalty, and maturity.

This moral meaning makes uncertainty harder to tolerate. Most major life choices involve risk. A new

career may fail. A move may lead to loneliness. A relationship may not last. When parents already prefer another path, ordinary uncertainty can feel like proof that choosing differently is irresponsible. The family's preferred option often appears safer because its risks are more familiar. Remaining in a stable job may reduce financial uncertainty, but it may also create long-term dissatisfaction. Staying near the family may preserve closeness, but it may limit professional development. Entering marriage under pressure may reduce parental worry, but it may not lead to a healthy relationship. These costs are usually less visible than the immediate conflict caused by an independent choice.

Anticipated guilt can also shape how information is evaluated. Young adults may give more attention to evidence that supports the parents' preferred option. A single failed career change may seem more convincing than several successful ones. Warnings about moving away may receive more weight than the benefits of the opportunity. The person is not only assessing risk but also looking for a decision that will reduce emotional discomfort.

This process does not always reflect current parental pressure. Some parents may be more accepting than the young adult expects. Family relationships may also become more flexible over time. Yet internal standards can remain strong. A person who learned early to avoid disappointing parents may continue to predict rejection even when direct control has weakened.

Guilt can therefore limit autonomy without a present command. The young adult monitors personal choices through the imagined reaction of the family. Some options feel unavailable because they conflict with an internal image of what a responsible child should do.

The presence of guilt does not prove that a choice is wrong. It shows that the decision concerns an important relationship. Real duties, financial consequences, and family needs should be considered. Yet parental disappointment should not automatically determine the result.

Anticipated guilt narrows life choices by making some options feel morally unacceptable before they

have been fully examined. Young adults may still describe themselves as free, but they approach certain choices with shame or fear before taking any action. In this way, guilt begins to restrict autonomy before compliance, resistance, or open conflict becomes visible.

3.2 Compliance, Resistance, and Indecision

When parental expectations conflict with personal wishes, young adults do not respond in the same way. Some follow the path preferred by their parents, some choose differently, and others postpone the decision. These responses may look very different, but all can be shaped by the wish to protect family relationships and avoid guilt.

Compliance often appears to be the safest option. A young adult may remain in a stable job, prepare for an examination preferred by the family, return to the home city, or accept pressure to enter a relationship. The decision reduces immediate conflict and allows daily family interaction to continue. Parents may feel relieved, and the young adult may receive approval for being sensible and responsible.

Compliance does not always mean that the choice is entirely unwanted. A person may value security while also wishing for more interesting work. Another may want marriage but feel uncertain about the timing. In such cases, parental expectations strengthen one side of an existing conflict. The young adult chooses the safer option but may never know how much the decision reflected personal preference and how much it reflected fear of disappointing the family.

The cost of compliance may appear slowly. A young adult can perform well in a career chosen partly for parental approval and still feel little connection to the work. Success may make changing direction more difficult because the family sees the result as proof that the original advice was correct. The person may also feel guilty for being dissatisfied with a life that appears stable and respectable.

Resentment can develop when the young adult feels that important possibilities were given up. This resentment is not always expressed openly. It may appear through emotional distance, frequent

arguments over small matters, or blame during later difficulties. Parents may feel confused because they believe the young adult made the final choice. The young adult, however, may feel that no other choice was emotionally acceptable.

Resistance brings a different form of strain. A young adult may leave a secure position, move to another city, choose a partner the parents do not approve of, or delay marriage despite continued pressure. Such decisions can create a stronger sense of personal direction, but they do not immediately remove guilt. After choosing differently, the young adult may feel pressure to prove that the decision was correct. A career change must succeed. A move must lead to better opportunities. A relationship must remain stable. Ordinary difficulties become harder to admit because they may be used as evidence that the parents were right. The person may hide financial stress, loneliness, or uncertainty in order to protect the decision.

This need to prove independence can create another kind of restriction. The young adult may continue on an unsuitable path because changing direction would feel like surrender. Advice that might be useful is rejected because accepting it seems to restore parental authority. Resistance then becomes less about the actual choice and more about defending the right to have made it.

Open resistance can also affect family contact. Conversations may become shorter because both sides expect disagreement. Certain topics are avoided during calls or family gatherings. The young adult may share less information to prevent further pressure, while parents may interpret this distance as rejection. A decision made in the name of autonomy can therefore weaken the support that the young adult still values.

Between compliance and resistance lies indecision. Some young adults understand their own preferences but remain unable to act. They continue preparing for a career they do not want, delay accepting an offer in another city, or avoid giving a clear answer about marriage. Postponement keeps several possibilities open and prevents immediate conflict.

Delay can be reasonable when more information or financial preparation is needed. It becomes a problem when the young adult is waiting for a choice that will satisfy everyone. Major life decisions rarely remove all uncertainty or disappointment. The wish to avoid guilt can turn careful consideration into repeated postponement.

Indecision may also appear as constant advice-seeking. The young adult asks parents, friends, teachers, and colleagues for opinions but becomes less certain after every conversation. Each new view adds another standard that the decision must meet. The person may already understand the practical advantages and risks but still hope that someone else will provide emotional permission.

In some cases, young adults choose a temporary solution. They remain in a stable job while planning to leave later, agree to meet potential partners without wanting marriage, or move away while promising to return soon. These arrangements can reduce pressure for a time, but they may also prevent an honest discussion about different expectations.

Compliance, resistance, and indecision are not fixed personal types. The same person may comply in one area and resist in another. A young adult may follow parental advice in employment but make independent choices about relationships. Another may move away for work while continuing to depend heavily on family approval in financial matters.

These responses can also change over time. Initial compliance may later become resistance when dissatisfaction grows. A young adult who once resisted may reconsider after gaining more experience. Indecision may end when practical independence improves or when delaying the choice becomes more painful than facing disagreement.

The main issue is not which response appears most independent from the outside. Compliance can be autonomous when the young adult has examined the options and genuinely accepts the family's preferred path. Resistance can remain psychologically dependent when the decision is

made only to oppose parental influence. What matters is whether the young adult can recognise personal reasons, consider family consequences, and accept responsibility for the choice.

When guilt dominates the process, all three responses become limited. Compliance protects approval at the cost of personal ownership. Resistance protects personal direction but may remain tied to the need for parental recognition. Indecision avoids immediate conflict while allowing important choices to be shaped by delay. The young adult may act, oppose, or wait, yet still struggle to experience the decision as fully their own.

3.3 Care, Responsibility, and Emotional Control

Guilt does not always mean that parental influence has become unhealthy. Young adults remain part of family relationships, and their choices may have real effects on other people. Leaving a job without financial preparation may require parents to provide further support. Moving far away may reduce the practical help available to ageing family members. In such cases, discomfort may reflect a responsibility that deserves attention.

Care and autonomy should not be treated as opposites (Yeh & Bedford, 2003). A young adult who wants greater independence does not necessarily wish to avoid family duties. The person may still provide financial support, maintain regular contact, assist with medical needs, or take part in important family decisions. The disagreement may concern the form of care rather than whether care should exist.

Physical proximity is one form of support, but it is not always the only one. Parents may prefer an adult child to remain nearby, especially when they are ageing or have health problems. Yet preference and practical need are not the same. A clear need for caregiving can create a real responsibility, while a general wish for closeness does not automatically require the young adult to give up work or study opportunities elsewhere.

Financial responsibility creates a similar distinction. Parents who continue to support an adult child may reasonably ask how a major decision will affect them. If a young adult leaves employment and

expects the family to cover all living expenses, parental concern cannot be dismissed as interference. Greater freedom also requires some willingness to carry the risks and costs of personal choices.

At the same time, financial support does not give parents unlimited authority over every area of life. Paying tuition may justify discussion about education, but it does not create a right to determine the young adult's partner or marriage plans. Help with housing may involve conditions related to the property, but it should not become a permanent claim over unrelated decisions. Conflict often grows because the limits of support are never clearly defined.

A useful distinction can be made between guilt linked to actual harm and guilt linked mainly to disappointment. Actual harm may involve neglecting a dependent parent, breaking a financial agreement, or shifting an avoidable burden to other family members. Disappointment may arise because the young adult chooses another occupation, delays marriage, or moves to a city the parents do not prefer. Both can produce strong emotions, but they do not carry the same moral weight.

Parental disappointment is real, and young adults may not be able to remove it. Parents may feel hurt because a long-held hope has not been fulfilled. They may also struggle with the loss of influence that comes when a child begins to make adult decisions. These feelings deserve recognition, but emotional pain alone does not prove that the young adult has acted wrongly.

The situation becomes more restrictive when parental emotion is used to make disagreement appear morally unacceptable. Parents may refer repeatedly to sacrifice, declining health, family reputation, or the suffering caused by the young adult's decision. Statements such as "We have done everything for you" can make an independent choice appear ungrateful. Formal freedom remains, but the emotional message is that choosing differently will harm the family (Rudy et al., 2014). Such communication is not always deliberate. Parents may speak from fear, frustration, or genuine

sadness. Still, the effect can be controlling. The young adult becomes responsible not only for the practical consequences of the decision but also for restoring the parents' emotional comfort. Compliance then appears to be the quickest way to end tension.

Pressure may also appear through silence or withdrawal. After a disagreement, parents may become cold, reduce communication, or avoid discussing the young adult's life. Health concerns can make this pressure stronger. If a parent becomes distressed during conflict, the young adult may fear that maintaining a boundary will cause serious harm. Honest discussion becomes difficult because every disagreement begins to feel dangerous.

Family reputation can produce another form of pressure. Parents may worry about how relatives or neighbours will view an unmarried child, an uncertain career, or an unconventional lifestyle. The young adult may then feel responsible for protecting the parents from criticism. A personal decision becomes tied to the family's public image.

Emotional control is difficult to identify because it is often mixed with love. Parents may genuinely want to protect their child while also trying to secure obedience. Young adults may care deeply for their parents while also wishing to avoid heavy responsibilities. The issue cannot be reduced to whether one side is caring and the other is selfish.

A more useful question is whether disagreement is allowed. In a relationship that respects autonomy, parents can express concern, sadness, or disapproval without treating a different choice as betrayal. The young adult can listen and respond without being required to surrender the decision.

Another question is whether the obligation can be stated clearly. Real responsibilities usually involve identifiable needs, such as financial support, caregiving, shared housing, or an earlier agreement. Emotional control often relies on broad claims about loyalty, gratitude, or being a good child. Because these claims have no clear limit, almost any independent choice can be described as selfish.

Young adults also need to examine how they interpret parental emotion. Some assume that

causing disappointment means they have failed morally. This belief may have developed long before the current decision. A parent may express worry without demanding obedience, but the young adult may still react as though approval must be restored. Care does not require the removal of all parental discomfort, and autonomy does not remove responsibility. The central task is to distinguish what the young adult genuinely owes the family from what belongs to the parents' preference for a particular life.

Guilt becomes less controlling when it is connected to specific responsibilities rather than general disappointment. The young adult can ask what harm is actually being caused, whether a clear duty exists, and whether that duty can be met without giving up the decision itself. This distinction allows family care to remain important without turning parental emotion into final authority.

4. Developing Autonomy Without Breaking Family Ties

Autonomy does not require young adults to ignore their parents or remove family influence from every decision. Choices about education, work, residence, relationships, and finances often affect other family members. A realistic form of autonomy allows young adults to consider these effects without making parental approval the final condition for action.

An important step is to distinguish listening from obeying. Parents may have reasonable concerns about income, job security, marriage, or distance from home. Their experience can help young adults notice risks that may otherwise be overlooked. Listening to these concerns does not mean that parents must make the final decision. A young adult can understand why the family values stability while still deciding that another path is more suitable.

This process may require an examination of inherited beliefs. Young adults often measure their choices through standards learned within the family. A stable job may feel necessary because instability has always been described as failure.

Marriage may appear compulsory because it has long been treated as a normal stage of adulthood. Remaining near the family may seem like the only acceptable form of care.

Examining these beliefs does not mean rejecting them. Young adults may decide that security, marriage, or family closeness genuinely matters to them. The difference is that these values are accepted after reflection rather than followed because other choices feel morally unacceptable. Autonomy is not shown by choosing the opposite of what parents want. It is shown by understanding the reasons for a decision and taking responsibility for it (Wei et al., 2022).

Communication is also important, although it may not produce full agreement. Young adults often try to explain a decision until their parents become completely convinced. They answer every objection and delay action in the hope of receiving approval. This can turn a personal choice into a continuing request for permission.

Some choices need to be presented as considered decisions rather than open questions. A young adult can explain the reasons, acknowledge the parents' concerns, and describe how practical risks will be managed. For example, someone planning a career change may explain the financial preparation, possible difficulties, and alternative plans. The tone can remain respectful while the decision itself remains clear.

Communication also requires limits. Parents may repeat the same warning because they believe the young adult has not understood it. The young person may need to state that the concern has been heard and considered. Repeating the same discussion does not always improve the decision. Without clear limits, every family conversation can become another attempt to reopen an issue.

Parents may need time to adjust to this change. They have often spent many years directing, protecting, and planning for their child. When the young adult begins to make different choices, parents may experience the change as a loss of closeness or influence. Their resistance may weaken after they

see that the young adult can manage the consequences.

Young adults may therefore need to tolerate a period of tension. Parental disappointment may continue after the decision has been explained. Family members may remain worried or critical for some time. The wish to restore harmony can create pressure to give up the choice, but adult closeness cannot depend entirely on obedience.

Practical independence can make autonomous choice more possible. A young adult who relies heavily on parental support may have limited freedom, especially when a decision creates additional costs. Greater autonomy may require saving money, reducing expenses, finding work, or delaying a plan until some financial preparation has been made.

The meaning of parental support should also be discussed clearly. Parents may believe that paying tuition or housing costs gives them a strong role in related decisions. Young adults may view the same support as help toward independence. Clear discussion cannot remove all disagreement, but it can reduce hidden expectations about what financial assistance allows.

Autonomy does not remove family responsibility. A young adult who moves away may still need to maintain regular contact, share caregiving, provide financial support, or prepare for emergencies. A person who changes careers should avoid shifting all financial risk back to the family. Independence becomes more credible when the young adult is willing to carry the consequences of personal choices.

Guilt may remain even when the young adult has acted responsibly. This does not necessarily mean that the decision is wrong. Emotional discomfort often appears when a person moves away from a familiar family role. Someone who has long been praised for obedience may feel guilty whenever a boundary is set.

The aim is not to eliminate guilt before acting. Young adults can examine what the feeling is responding to. When guilt points to a clear responsibility, the decision may need adjustment. When it mainly

reflects parental disappointment, the feeling can be recognised without allowing it to determine the outcome.

Autonomous choices can also fail. A preferred career may not develop as expected. Moving away may bring loneliness. A relationship chosen against parental advice may end. These outcomes do not prove that the parents should have made the original decision.

Personal choice includes responsibility for responding to mistakes. Young adults should be able to revise a decision without treating the change as surrender. Some parental concerns may prove accurate, while others may not. Autonomy includes the ability to learn, reconsider, and change direction.

Parents and young adults may never share the same idea of a good life. A close family relationship does not require complete agreement about work, marriage, residence, or lifestyle. It requires enough respect for different judgments to allow the relationship to continue.

Young adults can value parental care without treating compliance as the only form of gratitude. Parents can remain important without controlling every major decision. Family ties are preserved not by avoiding disagreement, but by allowing care, responsibility, and personal judgment to exist together.

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