

Karin Thorslund

Support in parenting for  
parents of adolescents



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# Universal support groups for parents of adolescents – a thematic analysis of parents' requests in terms of content and form



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Universal parental  
support



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adolescents

## Aim

The overarching aim of the present study was to explore what content parents of adolescents wish to discuss, and what kind of support parents wish to obtain from participating in a universal parent support group. The study also explored what practical requirements would enable parent participation.

## Conclusions

- This study provides further understanding of what needs universal support groups could meet and how universal support groups for parents of adolescents should be designed and promoted.
- The parents requested a group for discussing with other parents that would meet continuously throughout their child's adolescence
- The focus should be on the challenges of normal development.
- What they hoped for from participation in such a group was an improved understanding of adolescent development, mutual emotional support among parents and opportunities to develop better parenting skills together.
- According to the parents, support groups should be offered by the school and moderated by trained professionals.









# Methods

A black and white photograph of a herd of elephants walking across a savanna landscape. The elephants are in various stages of maturity, including several adults and several young calves. They are walking from left to right across the frame. The background shows a vast, open plain under a bright sky.

We contacted the headmaster through telephone and email.

Six schools with students in year 7-9 agreed to participate

Parents were invited to participate through email or platform messages

Snowball sampling

At two schools, enough participants

Three groups, 3, 5, 4 participants (one father)

Lower socioeconomic standard

One state school, one free school

# Data collection

- Focus groups were held at the school in the evening.
- Semi structured interview
- 50 minutes interview
- Audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim

# The interview guide:

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- What would you as parents of adolescents consider relevant to discuss with other parents in support groups?
- In what way may discussing these issues with other parents benefit your parenting?
- What practical circumstances would increase, or hinder, the possibilities for you to attend a parent support group?

# Thematic analysis

1. Listen, transcribe, listen again
2. Read through several times and coded on a semantic level
3. The codes were assigned to main themes and subthemes that were formed inductively
4. Themes were reviewed several times by KT and PB to ensure a good fit between the thematic structure and the data
5. Themes and quotes were further reviewed by UA. The three authors met several times to discuss the themes and subthemes. Disagreements between authors was solved through discussing, new suggestions, and discussing again.
6. Quotes were selected to illustrate each theme. Extra care was taken to make sure the quotes from various participant to represent the data. A final analysis was undertaken,

# Main themes and sub themes

MAIN THEME	SUB THEME	EXAMPLES OF CODES
<b>Dramatic development creates uncertainty</b>	<b>Insecurity arises as the adolescent gets out of reach</b>	<b>Crime, social media, silence, closing doors</b>
	Old strategies are insufficient	Body fixation, normal, worry, good at arguing
<b>Emotional support from other parents</b>	Sharing experiences counteracts loneliness	Alone as a parent, parents different views, nowhere to talk
	Getting caught up in emotions is unhelpful	Emotional overload, Bad conscience, strategies
	<b>Parents need a space for reflection</b>	<b>Individualize treatment of child, child`s perspective, remind oneself</b>
<b>Developing better parenting skills together</b>	<b>Mutual support facilitates appropriate control</b>	<b>Worry, setting limits, caring, balance, stronger together</b>
	<b>Sensitive topics require careful communication</b>	<b>Safety, calm, patience</b>
<b>Meeting throughout adolescence to focus on the challenges of normal development</b>	<b>Meeting throughout adolescent development would be helpful</b>	<b>Parent meeting, talking about children, constellations</b>
	The moderator should be an external trained professional	Training, fear, neutral

First theme: Dramatic development creates uncertainty

*Subthemes:*

*Insecurity arises as the adolescent gets out of reach*

*Old strategies are insufficient*



*Subtheme first theme: Insecurity arises as the adolescent gets out of reach*

- *Åsa: Yes, but I can't... I don't see it. I can't participate, I can't listen in. [//] It's like I'm not in the room.*



## *Subtheme first theme: Old strategies are insufficient*

- *Maria:*
- *Exactly, this is completely new! This little child you could just tell “come with me now” and “don’t do that!” Now there’s a two-meter tall and crazy “who are you?”*

## *Subtheme first theme: Old strategies are insufficient*

- *Birgitta: But setting limits did work before.*
- *Diana: Yes. Yes. Then it went off track at some point. It can go off track in one day.*
- *Birgitta: Yes. I think I can say which week it was. I actually can.*
- *Diana: Now it's happening. Like now you can't be that same person or parent anymore who says "this is how it is now, or else..."*
- *Birgitta: Yes. Yes. That happened us, too, actually overnight. Then it all just becomes so... emotional...*

## Second theme: Emotional support from other parents

*Subthemes:*

*Getting caught up in emotion is unhelpful*

*Sharing experiences counteracts loneliness*

*Parents need a space for reflection*

*Subtheme second theme: Getting caught up in emotion is unhelpful*

- *Sofia: It would be a different kind of confrontation if I didn't take it personally, if instead I could handle it according to how he feels. Logically I know he does these things because he feels bad or because he has had a bad day. But in the moment, there are so many feelings, so I just get sort of, I just feel bad and get angry! Or I say "Now you've passed my limit, get out of here" instead of seeing it as something that has happened to him that made him say what he said.*

## *Subtheme second theme: Getting caught up in emotion is unhelpful*

- *Monika: If you go back to when the children were younger, and this constant bad conscience, it doesn't go away just because the children grow, but it's still there, but it changes a bit perhaps. Cuz I should really find out more about what they are up to on the Internet, perhaps I should this, there are so many shoulds! [//] If you're in a group where you have children roughly the same age, then maybe it is easier to vent these things to relieve some of your bad conscience.*

## *Subtheme second theme: Sharing experiences counteracts loneliness*

- *Paulo: “My son is such a pain!” “How old is he?” “He’s 14.” “Ah, that’s completely normal, it will pass.” And that’s it! Nobody wants to continue and develop what it really means. What? Just because he is 14, does it have to be a hard time, or what? Well, apparently.*

## *Subtheme second theme: Parents need a space for reflection*

- Maria: If you're a bit prepared from having talked and turned yourself inside out... Is this about me? What triggers me that makes him spin away in things?
- Diana : I hear myself, or you hear your parents in certain things you say.”
- Monika: I think that... all children, regardless how... need to be seen. And confirmed in different ways. That's... that's part of growing up. I don't mean that you should do everything for them or smother them, but I mean like if I show a genuine interest it means something to them.

# Third theme: Developing better parenting skills together

- *Subthemes:*
- *Mutual support facilitates appropriate control*
- *Sensitive topics require careful communication*



## *Subtheme third theme: Mutual support facilitates appropriate control*

- Birgitta: I would like some advice from other parents, what is appropriate? What can I accept, because I understand that it is... my child is growing older and she needs some space and she is wiser too and sometimes maybe she knows what is best for her, not me. But sometimes I think I know better... have more experience. Not always. And that's, I think it's really hard to know. I don't want to sort of violate her and force her. Be a dictator at home. But at the same time, I don't want her to make too many mistakes.*

## *Subtheme third theme: Mutual support facilitates appropriate control*

- Mia: So that, I would like to talk to others about, how do you do this, and what rules do you set, because together you're strong.

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Mia: I think you can help each other. If one is really worried and someone thinks a lot of negative stuff, because I understand that you can do that. And someone else is almost excessively positive (laughter), yes, you could get a bit of help from each other [//

Mehtab: You can tell me "You are exaggerating!"

*Subtheme third theme: Mutual support facilitates appropriate control*

- Mia: Because if you decided, no you're not allowed to try, and then, they are allowed to try at someone else's place!

*Subtheme third theme: Sensitive topics require careful communication*

- *Julia: You're scared, you don't want to do it wrong, is what I'm thinking.*
- *Birgitta: No. Marching in and challenging behaviors that might not be so strange, but that are still a little worrying to me.*

## Fourth theme: Meeting throughout adolescence to focus on the challenges of normal development

- *Subthemes:*

- *Meeting throughout adolescent development would be helpful*

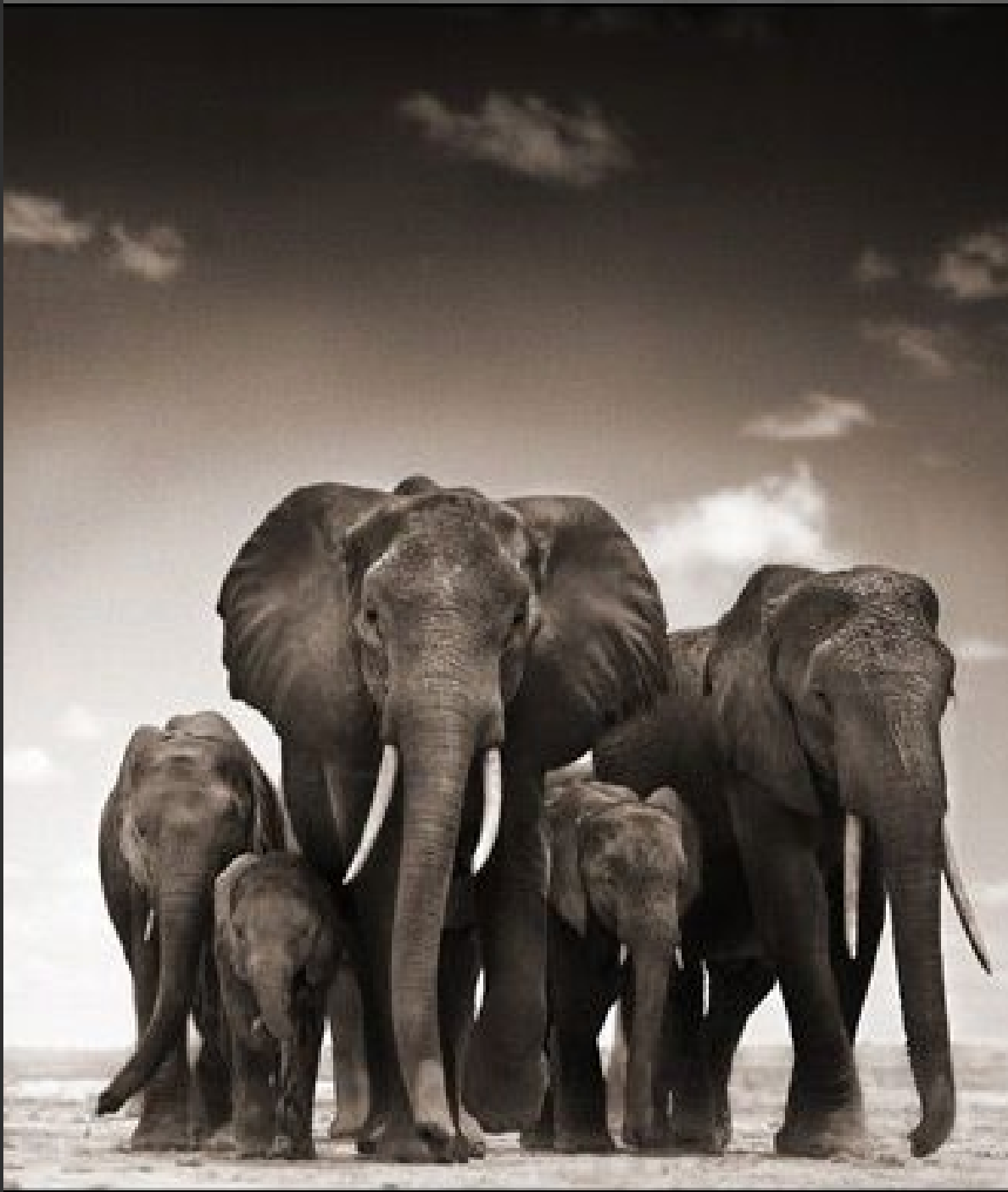
*The moderator should be an external trained professional*

*Subtheme forth theme: Meeting throughout adolescent development would be helpful*

- Maria: No, I wouldn't attend if it wasn't through the school. I don't think so. It would easily be like "Who's there?" and "Does my child have a problem now?" It would be a bit stigmatizing. So, if it's through the school, as it was this time for example, then you feel more "Wow, that's great, that is what I like!"

*Subtheme forth theme: The moderator should be an external trained professional*

- *Maria: It would be good to get in touch with the social services and the community if you don't already have that contact for your child, just to know what else there is that you could get help with.*



# Conclusions

This study provides further understanding of what needs universal support groups could meet and how universal support groups for parents of adolescents should be designed and promoted. The parents requested a group for discussing with other parents that would meet continuously throughout their child's adolescence with a focus on the challenges of normal development. What could be gained from participation in such a group was an improved understanding of adolescent development, mutual emotional support among parents and opportunities to develop better parenting skills together. According to the parents, support groups should be offered by the school and moderated by trained professionals.





Tack!



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