

Parenting practices in teen years set the stage for closeness, warmth later on

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High-quality parenting practices in adolescence lay the foundation for close parent-child relationships when the children become young adults, according to new research from Penn State.

The study is one of the first to examine how changes in [parental involvement](#), parental warmth, and effective discipline during adolescence predict the quality of the relationships between parents and their young adult children, said Greg Fosco, professor of human development and [family studies](#) and associate director of the Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center at Penn State, who was co-principal investigator on the study.

The study's findings were published recently in *Developmental Psychology*. The research team surveyed 1,631 participants in a long-term research study of families in rural and semi-rural Pennsylvania and Iowa who completed surveys between sixth and 12th grades and again at age 22.

"Our research showed that parenting can change a lot during the [teenage years](#): parents often express less warmth and affection, spend less time with their teens, and become more harsh in their discipline. Parents that were able to maintain positive parenting and involvement laid the foundation for a close relationship when their teens became adults," said Fosco.

Staying involved in teens' lives may look different than when they were younger, and it can be challenging to stay close with teens as they seek greater independence and autonomy, Fosco acknowledged. Based on the study's findings, he suggested these activities:

- Do something together, like playing sports, bike riding, exercising, going for a walk, gaming, cooking, attending events, or going out for a meal or dessert.
- Work on a project together around the house.
- Talk about what's going on at school.
- Discuss what you want to do in the future.

Further, adolescents who experienced higher levels of parental warmth in the early teen years reported feeling more closeness and warmth with mothers and fathers when they were in their 20s, Fosco said.

"This is a great reminder to say the important things in life, such as 'I love you' or 'I care about you,' or physical expressions such as a hug or a pat on the back," he said.

The study also found that parents who were skilled at using effective discipline with their sixth grade children—and maintained these effective practices over the course of adolescence—had less conflictual relationships when their children were in their 20s.

"Parents should avoid harsh consequences and yelling at their teens, and work to stay calm and consistent in upholding family rules," said Shichen Fang, postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Psychology at Concordia University and former postdoctoral fellow at the Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center. "Adolescents want to feel respected and treated like adults. It's important to have clear reasons for family rules and consequences."

When appropriate, it's helpful to include adolescents in decision-making about family rules, such as discussions to decide on a reasonable curfew, Fosco added.

"When parents can include their teens in these decisions, they are more likely to go along with what is decided," Fosco said.

The data for the study is from [PROmoting School-community-university Partnerships to Enhance Resilience \(PROSPER\)](#), and the study was funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Fang is lead author of the published paper on the findings. Mark Feinberg, research professor of health and [human development](#) at the Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, served as co-principal investigator for the study.

More information: Shichen Fang et al, Multivariate growth trajectories of parenting practices in adolescence predicting young adult relationships with parents., *Developmental Psychology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1037/dev0001443](#)

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