

Researchers find strong adolescent–parent relationships lead to better long-term health outcomes in young adults

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Researchers from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) have found that adolescents who report strong relationships with their parents have better long-term health outcomes. Study findings, published today in *JAMA Network Open*, suggest that investments in improving parent–adolescent relationships could help improve general health, mental health and sexual health while also reducing substance use in young adulthood.

Prior research shows that positive characteristics of parent-adolescent relationships are associated with improved [mental health](#), [sexual health](#) and overall general health, while also reducing the risk of substance abuse and cardiovascular issues. However, these studies have often been limited by small sample sizes, short-term outcomes, differing measures for parent–adolescent relationship characteristics, lack of diversity and a focus only on relationships with mothers rather than relationships with mothers and fathers.

To help address these issues, this study used data from the [National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health](#). Researchers tested whether [adolescents'](#) reports of specific, measurable characteristics of their relationships with mother- and father-figures with whom they live were linked to health outcomes measured 14 years later. The researchers looked at data from more than 15,000 adults who were initially enrolled in the study in the mid-1990s when they were between 12 and 17 years old.

"Our goal was to establish a clearer understanding of how different characteristics of mother-adolescent and father-adolescent relationships might be associated with a wide range of favorable outcomes in young adulthood," said senior study author Carol A. Ford, MD, Chief of the Craig-Dalsimer Division of Adolescent Medicine and the Orton P. Jackson Endowed Chair in Adolescent Medicine at CHOP.

In this study, the researchers looked at characteristics such as reported parental warmth, communication, time together and academic expectations as assessed when the participants were between 12 and 17 years old. When those same participants were 24 to 32 years old, they reported on current levels of stress, depression, optimism, nicotine dependence and substance abuse and other measures of general health. The study controlled for age, race, ethnicity, [family structure](#) and other factors and separated the data based on relationships with mother and father figures who lived in the home. More than 10,000 participants were analyzed for the study.

The study found that participants who reported higher levels of mother-adolescent and father-adolescent warmth, communication, time together, academic expectations, relationship or communication satisfaction and inductive discipline reported significantly higher levels of [general health](#) in young adulthood. Similarly, they reported significantly higher levels of optimism and romantic relationship quality, and lower levels of stress and depressive symptoms as [young adults](#). Higher levels of adolescent-reported parental warmth, time together and relationship or communication satisfaction were also significantly associated with lower levels of nicotine dependence and [substance abuse](#) in young adulthood as well as lower odds of unintended pregnancy.

"The overall pattern of these results suggests [strong relationships](#) between adolescents and their mothers and fathers leads to better health and well-being in young adulthood," Ford said. "Efforts to strengthen parent-adolescent relationships may have important long-term health benefits."

More information: Associations between mother-adolescent and father-adolescent relationships and young adult health, *JAMA Network Open* (2023). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.3944](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.3944)

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