

Mother-son ties change over time, influence teen boys' behavior

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Relationships between mothers and their sons change during childhood and adolescence. However, not all relationships change in the same way, and how the relationships change may affect boys' behavior when they become teens.

Those are the findings of a new [longitudinal study](#) of low-income families by researchers at Wayne State University, Oklahoma State University, the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Montreal, and the University of Oregon. The study appears in the journal *Child Development*.

The researchers looked at 265 mother-son pairs from low-income families in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, starting when the [boys](#) were 5 and continuing through adolescence. The families were taking part in the Pitt Mother & Child Project, an ongoing longitudinal project examining vulnerability and resilience in low-income boys.

For each of the pairs, the study looked at the family's neighborhood, the mother's relationship with her romantic partner, the quality of parenting provided by the mother, and the child's temperament. It also assessed the level of [conflict](#) and warmth between mothers and sons, and the boys' [delinquent behavior](#), relationships with best friends, and sense of morality during adolescence.

Mothers of boys who had a difficult temperament when they were toddlers reported that their relationships with the boys included a lot of

conflict and lower levels of closeness over time. When mothers had better relationships with their significant others, they tended to form closer bonds with their sons that lasted throughout childhood and adolescence. Boys who experienced a lot of conflict with their mothers were more likely to engage in delinquent behavior as teens. On the other hand, boys who had a close relationship with their [mothers](#) were more likely to have a better relationship with their best friends during the teen years.

"These results suggest that successfully adapting to the transitions of childhood and adolescence may require parents and children to maintain relatively high levels of closeness and minimize conflict in their relationships," according to Christopher Trentacosta, assistant professor of psychology at Wayne State University, the study's lead author.

"The findings also have implications for prevention and intervention," Trentacosta suggests. "Family-focused programs should address conflict in the parent-child relationship if the goal is to reduce delinquent behavior, and should foster greater closeness between parents and children if improving peer relationships is the goal."

Provided by Society for Research in Child Development

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