

Parents may help prep kids for healthier, less violent relationships

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Warm, nurturing parents may pass along strategies for building and maintaining positive relationships to their kids, setting them up for healthier, less-violent romantic relationships as young adults, according to researchers.

Researchers found that when [adolescents](#) reported a positive [family](#) climate and their [parents](#) using more effective parenting strategies—like providing reasons for decisions and refraining from harsh punishments—those adolescents tended to go on to have better relationship problem-solving skills and less-violent [romantic relationships](#) as [young adults](#).

Mengya Xia, graduate student in human development and family studies, Penn State, said the results—recently published in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*—give insight on how early family relationships can have long-term impacts on young adult romantic relationships.

"During adolescence, you're starting to figure out what you want in a relationship and to form the skills you need to have successful relationships,"

Xia said. "The family relationship is the first intimate relationship of your life, and you apply what you learn to later relationships. It's also where you may learn how to constructively communicate—or perhaps the inverse, to yell and scream—when you have a disagreement. Those are the skills you learn from the family and you will apply in later relationships."

Xia said the ability to form close relationships is an important skill for adolescents and young adults to learn. Previous research has found that when young adults know how to form and maintain healthy relationships, they tend to go on to be more satisfied with their lives and be better parents.

Hoping to learn more about how early family experiences affects later romantic relationships, the researchers recruited 974 adolescents for the study.

At three points in time between sixth and ninth grade, the participants answered several questions about their families and themselves. They reported their family climate (if they tend to get along and support each other or fight often), their parents' discipline strategies (how consistent and harsh they were), how assertive they were, and if they had positive interactions with their parents.

When the participants reached young adulthood, at an average age of 19.5, the researchers asked them about their romantic relationships. They answered questions about their feelings of love for their partner, if they could constructively solve problems in the relationship, and if they were ever violent with their partner, either physically or verbally.

The researchers found that a positive family climate and effective parenting in adolescence were associated with better problem-solving skills in young [adults'](#) romantic relationships. Additionally, kids who had more positive engagement with their

parents during adolescence reported feeling more love and connection in their young adult relationships.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

"I think it was very interesting that we found that positive engagement with parents in adolescence was linked with romantic love in early adulthood," Xia said. "And this is important because love is the foundation for romantic relationships, it's the core component. And if you have a predictor for that, it may open up ways to help adolescents to form the ability to love in romantic relationships."

The researchers also found that a more cohesive and organized family climate and more effective parenting during adolescence was associated with a lower risk of violence in young adult relationships.

"Adolescents from families that are less cohesive and more conflictual may be less likely to learn positive-problem solving strategies or engage in family interaction affectionately," Xia said. "So in their romantic relationships, they are also less likely to be affectionate and more likely to use destructive strategies when they encounter problems, like violence."

Xia said the findings suggest ways to help adolescents build positive relationship skills at an early age, including encouraging assertiveness.

"In the study, we saw kids who were more assertive had better problem-solving skills in their later relationships, which is so important," Xia said. "If you can't solve a problem constructively, you may turn to negative strategies, which could include violence. So I think it's important to promote constructive problem solving as a way to avoid or diminish the possibility of someone resorting to destructive strategies in a [relationship](#)."

More information: Mengya Xia et al, A Developmental Perspective on Young Adult Romantic Relationships: Examining Family and Individual Factors in Adolescence, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s10964-018-0815-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-018-0815-8)

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