

# Positive student-teacher relationships benefit students' long-term health

October 29 2020

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Teens who have good, supportive relationships with their teachers enjoy better health as adults, according to research published by the American Psychological Association. Perhaps surprisingly, although friendships are

important to adolescents, the study did not find the same link between good peer relationships and students' health in adulthood.

"This research suggests that improving students' relationships with teachers could have important, positive and long-lasting effects beyond just academic success," said Jinho Kim, PhD, an assistant professor in the Department of Health Policy and Management at Korea University and author of the study. It was published in the journal *School Psychology*. "It could also have important health implications in the long run."

Previous research has suggested that teens' [social relationships](#) might be linked to [health outcomes](#) in adulthood—perhaps because poor relationships can lead to chronic stress, which can raise a person's risk of health problems over the lifespan, according to Kim. However, it is not clear whether the link between teen relationships and lifetime health is causal—it could be that other factors, such as different family backgrounds, might contribute to both [relationship problems](#) in adolescence and to poor health in adulthood. Also, most research has focused on teens' relationships with their peers, rather than on their relationships with teachers.

To explore those questions further, Kim analyzed data on nearly 20,000 participants from the Add Health study, a nationally representative longitudinal study in the United States that followed participants for 13 years, from seventh grade into early adulthood. The participant pool included more than 3,400 pairs of siblings. As teens, participants answered questions such as, "How often have you had trouble getting along with other students?" "How much do you agree that friends care about you?" "How often have you had trouble getting along with your teachers?" and "How much do you agree that teachers care about you?" As adults, participants were asked about their physical and mental health. Researchers also took measures of physical health, such as [blood](#)

[pressure](#) and body mass index.

Kim found that, as expected, participants who had reported better relationships with both their peers and teachers in middle school and high school also reported better physical and mental health in their mid-20s. However, when he controlled for family background by looking at pairs of siblings together, only the link between good teacher relationships and adult health remained significant.

This could be because previously reported links between peer relationships and physical health could actually reflect other, underlying factors about students' [family background](#).

The results suggest that [teacher](#) relationships are even more important than previously realized and that schools should invest in training teachers on how to build warm and supportive relationships with their students, according to Kim.

"This is not something that most teachers receive much training in," he said, "but it should be."

**More information:** The Quality of Social Relationships in Schools and Adult Health: Differential Effects of Student-Student Versus Student-Teacher Relationships, DOI: 10.1037/spq0000373 , [www.apa.org/pubs/journals/rel...s/spq-spq0000373.pdf](http://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/rel...s/spq-spq0000373.pdf)

Provided by American Psychological Association

Citation: Positive student-teacher relationships benefit students' long-term health (2020, October 29) retrieved 17 December 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-10-positive-student-teacher-relationships-benefit-students.html>

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