



The Impact of the Parent-child Connection on Adolescent Emotional Health

Are parents key resources for an adolescent's successful transition to adulthood?

The parent-child connection does in fact affect the mental health functioning of adolescents. Positive connection = positive kids who feel good about themselves.

In a 5 year longitudinal US study, researchers examined the relationship between how adolescents perceive the parent-child connection and any depressive symptoms, self-esteem and body satisfaction. Participants in the study were 1386 females and 1140 male adolescents who

responded to surveys and rated the extent to which they felt loved, cared for, and close to their parents.

Overall, significant relationships were found for both males and females for all of the emotional functioning outcomes. Five years on, greater parent-child connectedness was associated with higher body satisfaction, higher self-esteem, and lower depressive symptoms in both male and female adolescents.

The study concluded that parent-child connectedness and youth emotional functioning reciprocally influenced each other over the 5-year period of this study.

KEY FINDINGS

- Greater parent-child connectedness was associated with increased body satisfaction for females, increased self-esteem and body satisfaction for males, and decreased depressive symptoms for both males and females.

- The importance of, and dynamic nature of parent-child relationships and emotional functioning in youth was highlighted.
- Interventions aimed at strengthening the parent-child relationship throughout adolescence may protect emotional health and prevent longer-term emotional consequences in young adults.
- Parents play a crucial role in support and protection of their adolescent's development by fostering self-esteem and self-reliance through a close and warm parent-child relationship from infancy throughout adolescence.
- Psychological literature suggests that females are more strongly influenced by parents than males.



THINGS YOU CAN DO

- ✓ Make time for one-on-one connection with your kids.
- ✓ Get to know your kids through interests, activities, humour and quiet talks.
- ✓ Don't stint on how many times you let your kids know they're loved, cared for and appreciated.
- ✓ Give appropriate praise.
- ✓ Show kids how much you care through a parenting style that sets boundaries and reinforces consequences.
- ✓ Encourage independence but also get to know your kids' friends.
- ✓ Keep the door open to communication, especially when they're ready to talk.

Source: The reciprocal relationship between parent-child connectedness and adolescent emotional functioning over 5 years. Boutelle, Eisenberg, Gregory, Neumark-Sztainer, Journal of Psychoisomeric Research 66 (2009) pp 309-316.

TAKEAWAY

FROM PROFESSOR MICHAEL BERNARD
FOUNDER, YOU CAN DO IT! EDUCATION

Connecting with our kids is essential to bonding. It's also natural and when kids feel loved, appreciated and cared for, this connection is reciprocated. Our parenting style, the way we speak to our kids and interact with them, and how much time we give to them, impacts on their mental health and the ways in which they perceive themselves.