



Are Today's Parents Less Effective Than Parents 20 Years Ago?

If so, does this explain the up-surge of conduct problems and mental health in today's young people?

Successful parenting involves many complex skills and qualities, including aspects of parental control.

Social attitude surveys in the US and the UK show a systematic shift in parenting values over time, with a long-term change from parents valuing obedience in their children to parents valuing children's independence and autonomy.

Researchers from the United Kingdom set out to assess whether changes in adolescent experiences with their parents have contributed to changes in their mental health over a twenty-

year period from 1986 to 2006. The aims of the study investigated whether the quality of parenting or parent-child relationships had changed during this period and, if so, if this affected their children's mental health.

The study compared two national cohorts of teenagers and their parents (1986; 2006) using identical measures of conduct problems reported by parents and the quality of parent-child relationships reported by young people. They also investigated whether there are differences in the parenting of adolescent boys and girls and if so, whether gender differences have changed over time.

The main finding did not support the view that a population-wide 'decline' in quality of parenting has led to an increase in youth antisocial behaviour. Results suggest that in some respects the quality of parenting had improved (notably increases in parental expectations, monitoring of children and parent-child quality time).

KEY FINDINGS

- Adolescents rated their parents as just as interested in 2006 as in 1986.
- Young people reported spending more quality time with their parents in 2006.
- Child-father relationships have become more fractured for those children in single or step-parent families.
- Girls reported higher parental expectations and monitoring, and these gender differences did not change over time.
- Girls did report greater parental interest, communicated more about their out-of-home activities with their parents, cared more strongly about their parents' opinions of them and more often chose to spend time with their mothers than did boys. By contrast, boys reported greater quality time spent with fathers.
- Lower levels of parental control and responsiveness, which did not change over time, were strongly associated with risk for conduct problems.



TAKEAWAY

FROM PROFESSOR MICHAEL BERNARD
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Positive parenting requires measures of parental supervision and control, regardless of whether we're in a dual parent or sole parent relationship. To help foster and maintain positive relationships with our kids, and for our kids to feel valued and secure, we do need to monitor out-of-home activities, communicate our expectations about appropriate conduct, set clear limits and rules, and practise the use of consistent, appropriate and effective discipline.

THINGS YOU CAN DO

- ✓ Adopt an authoritative parenting style (warm, positive, reasoning and responsive).
- ✓ Set clear limits and boundaries.
- ✓ Apply consequences when agreed limits and boundaries are breached.
- ✓ Keep lines of communication open by spending one-on-one time.
- ✓ Get to know your kids friends – who they're hanging out with, where they're going.
- ✓ Encourage independence but exercise supervision when required.
- ✓ Constantly discuss and review screen time and appropriate mobile use.
- ✓ Sure...be their friend, but be their parent too.

Source: S.Collishaw et al., *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* (2012) 40:119–132