

## Parenting Matters

### Summary

Parenting appears to influence child development and well-being from infancy to adolescence. Young children who receive better quality parenting tend to exhibit better social skills and cognitive development. Among adolescents, they are less likely to engage in negative behaviors.

- **The amount of time a mother spends preparing her infant for child care matters.** For infants entering child care, their attachments to their mothers were significantly more likely to remain or become emotionally secure if their mothers spent more time helping them adapt to child care.<sup>1</sup>
- **Maternal sensitivity in mother-child interactions impacts a child's social development.** Mothers' sensitivity in their interaction with their children from infancy through the pre-school years was the strongest and most consistent predictor of children's social skills and behaviors throughout childhood. The more sensitive a mother was, the better the outcomes. All other predictors including family environment, socioeconomic status, maternal education, and child care quality, amount and type were less consistent predictors.<sup>2</sup>
- **How much a child is read to plays a role in his or her cognitive development.** Children who scored in the highest quartile in terms of cognitive development had been read to frequently, while peers in the lowest quartile had rarely been read to.<sup>3</sup>
- **Children who do well in school are more likely to report having mothers who are warm and supportive but also firm.** Children who did well on achievement tests and scored high on teachers' rating tended to have mothers who struck a balance between being warm and supportive and setting and enforcing clear limits on their children's behavior. Children who did less well on these assessment measures tended to have mothers whose disciplinary style was extreme—either too harsh or too permissive, but, most often, unduly harsh and punitive.<sup>4</sup>
- **Cognitive stimulation provided by the parents influences a child's academic achievement.** The amount of cognitive stimulation children receive from their parents was correlated with children's IQ and academic achievement to nearly the same extent that the mother's IQ was. After adjusting for mother's IQ, a 10-point increase in the level of cognitive stimulation provided by parents was associated with a three-point increase in the child's IQ and a two-point increase in math proficiency.<sup>5</sup>
- **Children under after-school adult supervision are less likely to engage in negative behaviors.** Compared with peers who were unsupervised after school, children who were supervised by an adult after school were less likely to engage in risky or anti-social behaviors such as skipping school, using alcohol or drugs, stealing, or hurting someone. This was true even when controlling for other factors such as parents' permissive attitudes.<sup>6</sup>

- **Parental support and monitoring appears to influence the likelihood of alcohol use by adolescents.** Parental support was indirectly related to a decreased likelihood of adolescent alcohol use through parental monitoring. Parental support, which included praise, encouragement, and physical affection, was associated with an increase in parental monitoring. In turn, higher levels of parental monitoring were associated with a decreased likelihood of adolescent alcohol use.<sup>7</sup>
- **Adolescents prefer to get sex education from their parents.** Adolescents preferred their parents over school and peers as a source of sex education.<sup>8</sup>
- **Maternal employment in the first year impacts a child's socio-emotional development.** Even when taking into account gender, ethnicity, social class, and mothers' current employment status, third- and fourth-graders whose mothers worked when they were less than one year old were more likely to "act out," to have lower tolerance of frustration, and to be more likely to hit or be aggressive toward peers.<sup>9</sup>

### Endnotes

- 1 L. Ahnert *et al.*, "Transition to Child Care: Associations With infant-Mother Attachment, Infant Negative Emotion, and Cortisol Elevations," *Child Development* 75, No. 3 (May/June 2004):. 639-650.
- 2 National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, "Social Functioning in First Grade: Associations with Earlier Home and Child Care Predictors with Current Classroom Experiences," *Child Development* 74, No. 6 (November/December 2003): 1639-1662.
- 3 Tom Luster *et al.*, "Factors Related to Successful Outcomes Among Preschool Children Born to Low-Income Adolescent Mothers," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62, No. 1 (February 2000): 133-146.
- 4 Tom Luster *et al.*, "Family Advocates' Perspectives on the Early Academic Success of Children Born to Low-Income Adolescent Mothers," *Family Relations* 53, No. 1 (January 2004):. 68-77.
- 5 David J. Armor, *Maximizing Intelligence*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 51-100.
- 6 Anna Aizer, "Home Alone: Supervision After School and Child Behavior," *Journal of Public Economics* 88, No. 9-10 (August 2004): 1835-1848.
- 7 Grace M. Barnes *et al.*, "The Effects of Parenting on the Development of Adolescent Alcohol Misuse: A Six-Wave Latent Growth Model," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 62, No. 1 (February 2000): 175-186.
- 8 Cheryl L. Somers and Amy T. Surmann, "Adolescents' Preferences for Source of Sex Education," *Child Study Journal* 34, No. 1 (2004): 47-59.
- 9 Lise M. Youngblade, "Peer and Teacher Ratings of Third- and Fourth-Grade Children's Social Behavior as a Function of Early Maternal Employment," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 44, No. 4 (2003): 477-488.



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