

Parental Involvement and Children's Well-Being

Summary

Youths who experience higher levels of parental involvement and a closer relationship with their parents are less likely to exhibit behavioral problems and to engage in risk behaviors. In addition, they tend to achieve better grades and higher levels of education and to experience better emotional health.

- **Emotional Health.** Compared with peers whose parents are often absent throughout the day, teens whose parents are present when they go to bed, wake up, and come home from school are less likely to experience emotional distress. Teens were less likely to experience emotional distress if their parents were in the home when they awoke, when they came home from school, at dinnertime, and when they went to bed. They were also less likely to experience emotional distress if they engaged in activities with their parents, and if their parents had high expectations regarding their academic performance. In addition, those who had low self-esteem were more likely to experience emotional distress.¹
- **Self-Esteem.** Youths whose parents exhibit love, responsiveness, and involvement tend to have higher levels of self-esteem and internal self-control. Parental love, responsiveness, involvement and non-coercive, democratic discipline had a strong association with adolescent psychosocial development as measured in global self-esteem, feelings of internal control and ability, and susceptibility to negative peer pressure.²
- **Educational Attainment.** Students whose parents are more involved with their schooling tend to complete higher levels of education and are more likely to graduate from high school than peers whose parents are not so involved. Students whose teachers reported higher levels of parental involvement were more likely to graduate high school or earn a GED than peers whose parents were not so involved, and those who did not graduate were more likely to have completed a higher grade in high school. The more years a parent was involved, the greater was this association with educational attainment.³
- **Behavior.** On average, adolescents whose fathers are more involved in their lives and discuss important decisions with them exhibit lower levels of aggression and antisocial behavior than peers who experience less paternal involvement. The greater the fathers' involvement was, the lower the level of adolescents' behavioral problems, both in terms of aggression and antisocial behavior and negative feelings such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Fathers' involvement was measured by the frequency with which fathers discussed important decisions with and listened to their adolescents, whether fathers knew who their adolescents were with when not at home, and whether fathers missed events or activities that were important to their adolescents. Other measures included as adolescents' reports of closeness to their fathers, whether their fathers spent sufficient time with them, and how well they shared and communicated with one another.⁴

- **Delinquency (Boys).** Adolescents who experience supportive and affectionate relationships with their fathers are less likely to engage in delinquent behavior than peers who do not experience such a relationship. Paternal supervision, as well as supportive and affectionate father-son relationships, discouraged juvenile delinquency, regardless of a youth's delinquent friends, perception of trouble in the neighborhood, and/or positive attitudes about breaking the law.⁵
- **Sexual Behavior.** Youths whose parents discuss with them sexual behavior standards are more likely to be abstinent. Youths whose parents talked to them about right and wrong with regard to sexual behavior were significantly more likely to be abstinent than peers whose parents did not.⁶
- **Teen Pregnancy.** Teenage girls who experience father absence are more likely to become pregnant than girls whose fathers are consistently present. Even when controlling for differences in family background, father absence was associated with the likelihood that adolescent girls will be sexually active and become pregnant as teenagers. This association was strongest for daughters whose fathers were absent when they were younger. Compared with the pregnancy rates of girls whose fathers were present, rates of teenage pregnancy were seven to eight times higher among girls whose fathers were absent early in their childhoods and two to three times higher among those who suffered father-absence later in their childhood.⁷
- **Tobacco Use.** On average, adolescents who are strongly connected to their parents and other family members are less likely to smoke cigarettes. All youth surveyed (grades 7-12) were less likely to smoke cigarettes if they had high levels of connectedness to parents and other family members. Those in grades 9-12 were also less likely to smoke if their parents were present in the home more often, if they engaged more often in activities with their parents, and if they perceived that their parents had high expectations for their educational attainment. Youth in all the grades were more likely to smoke if cigarettes were easily accessible in the home.⁸
- **Substance Abuse.** Compared with other peers, adolescents who report having a positive relationship with their fathers are less likely to smoke, drink alcohol, or use marijuana. Adolescents who reported having more positive relationships with their fathers were less likely to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol or use marijuana compared to peers who reported having less positive relationships with their fathers. This was true taking into consideration a variety of factors: the quality of adolescents' relationships with their mothers, parental monitoring, mothers' and fathers' parenting styles, fathers' biological status, parental education, parental employment, number of children in the family, whether family received public aid, adolescents' age, gender, race/ethnicity, and school enrollment status.⁹
- **Academic Achievement.** On average, youths whose fathers engage in leisure and educational activities with them achieve better grades than peers whose fathers spend less time with them. Pre-teens whose fathers spent leisure time away from the home (picnics, movies, sports, etc.) with them, shared meals with them, helped with homework or reading, and engaged in other home activities with them earned better grades in school, on average, than peers whose fathers spent less time with them. Similarly, teens whose fathers engaged in activities in the home and outdoors, spent leisure time, and talked with them earned better grades, on average, than teens whose fathers spent less time with them.¹⁰

Endnotes

- 1 Michael D. Resnick *et al.*, "Protecting Adolescents from Harm: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 278, No. 10 (1997): 823-832.

- 2 Marjory R. Gray and Laurence Steinberg, "Unpacking Authoritative Parenting: Reassessing a Multidimensional Construct," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 61, No. 3 (August 1999): 574-587.
- 3 Wendy Miedel Barnard, "Parent Involvement in Elementary School and Educational Attainment," *Children and Youth Services Review* 26 (2004): 39-62.
- 4 Marcia J. Carlson, "Family Structure, Father Involvement, and Adolescent Behavioral Outcomes," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 68, No. 1 (February 2006): 137-154.
- 5 Gary F. Jensen, "Parents, Peers, and Delinquent Action: A Test of the Differential Association Perspective," *American Journal of Sociology* 78, No. 3 (1972): 562-575.
- 6 Cheryl B. Aspy *et al.*, *Journal of Adolescence* 30 (2007): 449-466.
- 7 Bruce J. Ellis *et al.*, "Does Father Absence Place Daughters at Special Risk for Early Sexual Activity and Teenage Pregnancy?" *Child Development* 74, No. 3 (2003): 801-821.
- 8 Michael D. Resnick *et al.*, "Protecting Adolescents from Harm: Findings from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 278, No. 10 (1997): 823-832.
- 9 Jacinta Bronte-Tinkew and Kristin A. Moore, "The Father-Child Relationship, Parenting Styles, and Adolescent Risk Behaviors in Intact Families," *Journal of Family Issues* 27, No. 6 (June 2006): 850-881.
- 10 Elizabeth C. Cooksey and Michelle M. Fondell, "Spending Time with His Kids: Effects of Family Structure on Fathers' and Children's Lives," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 58 (August 1996): 693-707.



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