

# Impact of positive parenting can last for generations

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A new study that looks at data on three generations of Oregon families shows that "positive parenting" - including factors such as warmth, monitoring children's activities, involvement, and consistency of discipline - not only has positive impacts on adolescents, but on the way they parent their own children.

In the first study of its kind, David Kerr, assistant professor of psychology at Oregon State University, and project director Deborah Capaldi, and co-authors Katherine Pears and Lee Owen of the Eugene-based Oregon Social Learning Center, examined surveys from 206 boys who were considered "at-risk" for juvenile delinquency. The boys, then in elementary school, and their parents were interviewed and observed, which gave Kerr and colleagues information about how the boys were parented.

Starting in 1984, the boys met with researchers every year from age 9 to 33. As the boys grew up and started their own families, their partners and [children](#) began participating in the study. In this way, the researchers learned how the men's childhood experiences influenced their own parenting.

"This study is especially exciting because we had already identified processes by which risk behaviors and poor parenting may be carried across generations," Capaldi said. "Professor Kerr has now demonstrated that there is an additional pathway of intergenerational influence via positive parenting and development."

The study will be published in the September issue of the journal *Developmental Psychology* in a special issue devoted to findings of some of the few long-term studies of intergenerational family processes. The journal is published by the American Psychological Association.

Kerr said there is often an assumption that people learn parenting methods from their own parents. In fact, he said most research shows that a direct link between what a person experiences as a child and what she or he does as a parent is fairly weak.

"Instead, what we find is that 'negative' parenting such as hostility and lack of follow-through leads to 'negative' parenting in the next generation not through observation, but by allowing problem behavior to take hold in adolescence," Kerr said. "For instance, if you try to control your child with anger and threats, he learns to deal in this way with peers, teachers, and eventually his own children. If you do not track where your child is, others will take over your job of teaching him about the world.

"But those lessons may involve delinquency and a lifestyle that is not compatible with becoming a positive parent," Kerr pointed out.

The researchers' prior work showed that children who experienced high levels of negative parenting were more likely to be antisocial and delinquent as [adolescents](#). Boys who had these negative characteristics in adolescence more often grew up to be inconsistent and ineffective parents, and to have children with more negative and challenging behaviors.

"We knew that these negative pathways can be very strong," Kerr said. "What surprised us is how strong positive parenting pathways are as well. Positive parenting is not just the absence of negative influences, but involves taking an active role in a child's life."

The researchers found that children who had parents who monitored their behavior, were consistent with rules and were warm and affectionate were more likely to have close relationships with their peers, be more engaged in school, and have better self-esteem.

"So part of what good parenting does is not only protect you against negative behaviors but instill positive connections with others during adolescence that then impact how you relate with your partner and your own child as an adult," Kerr said

"This research shows that when we think about the value of prevention, we should consider an even wider lens than is typical," he added. "We see now that changes in parenting can have an effect not just on children but even on grandchildren."

Source: Oregon State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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