

Parental support linked to how well millennials transition to college life

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Girl in front of computer looking stressed. Credit: pixabay

Researchers show that how well parents or guardians support millennials' psychological needs prior to their transition to college is an important predictor of their psychological well-being as they adapt to college life.

A new study published in *The Journal of Social Psychology* has assessed the role of parental relationships in mitigating millennials' worry prior to [college](#) transition by meeting their basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. The research discovered that millennials who perceive their parental relationships as supportive of their psychological needs are less likely to worry and adjust better to the transition to college, whereas parenting that feels over involved and controlling predicts less need satisfaction, higher levels of worry and poor psychological well-being.

"Millennial college students are experiencing poorer psychological health than any other previous generation," explained Mr Nathaniel Greene from the University of Missouri, who led the study.

"An early indication of student's well-being is their initial worry about college," he continued, "but understanding what factors might mitigate worry prior to millennials' transition into college is limited in current research."

Specifically, the researchers focused on whether worry, including [guilt](#) over academically succeeding [family members](#), could be moderated through the student's parental [relationship](#).

"Millennials have a uniquely close and communicative relationship with their parents," explained Dr. Carrie Veronica Smith, who contributed to the study, "so we used the well-established 'Self-Determination Theory' to test if worry would be lower for students who perceive their parental relationships meet their three basic psychological needs: the need to be in control of one's actions (autonomy), the need to feel capable and effective (competence) and the need to feel close and connected to others (relatedness)," she continued.

355 students were surveyed during their two-day orientation visits to a

public university in the southeast United States in the summer before their freshman year. Measurements of the participants' demographics, family achievement guilt, basic need satisfaction in the parental relationship, parental bonding and [student](#) worry were collected, and the data was subjected to statistical analyses to determine if higher levels of need satisfaction in the parental relationship were related to lower levels of worry and achievement guilt and if these outcomes would differ for first- and continuing-generation students.

Millennials who felt that their parents support their psychological needs reported less worry about their transition to college and lower family achievement guilt. But of the three basic psychological needs, autonomy was the most significant predictor of worry, suggesting that millennials' need to feel in control of their actions may be the most important need in combatting concerns about college. Meanwhile, millennials who felt their parents were over involved and controlling reported less need satisfaction and higher levels of worry and achievement guilt.

"We were surprised to see these results were true for both first- and continuing-generation students because past research has shown first-generation students likely suffer more from family achievement guilt and feelings of disconnection," explained Mr Greene. "But our results nicely highlight the universal importance of these basic needs," he continued.

Overall, the study identifies the importance of psychological need satisfaction in the parental relationship in offsetting millennials' worries about college and relating to their psychological well-being.

"Parents, peers and educators should support [millennial](#) students' basic needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness both before and after the transition to college, as they are essential to their overall psychological health" advised Mr Greene.

More information: *The Journal of Social Psychology* , [DOI: 10.1080/00224545.2019.1570905](https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2019.1570905)

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