

## Parents Affect the Social Development of Adolescents

Adolescent relationships with both mothers and fathers affect adolescents' social development, according to a recent two-year study of 337 young rural adolescents in two-parent families.

When mothers or fathers were observed to express more anger and hostility toward their adolescent, and less warmth and responsiveness, the adolescents tended to view their parents as less trustworthy and emotionally supportive. This view of parents as less trustworthy and emotionally supportive was predictive of adolescents' poor social behavior and lack of acceptance by peers one year later, as assessed by their teachers and siblings.

Maternal or paternal anger and hostility included criticism, disapproval, or rejection of adolescent behaviors, as well as insensitivity, lack of caring, defiance, and the use of threatening, hostile coercion in attempts to change adolescent behaviors.

Maternal and paternal warmth and responsiveness included expressions of caring, affection, affirmation, support, and the tendency to relate to the adolescent in a cooperative, sensitive, and helpful manner. It also included good listening and clear communications.

These findings may indicate that adolescents learn poor social skills when parents exhibit hostile behaviors, or they learn to expect others, including peers, to be hostile and thus adolescents may behave similarly for self-protection.

This study provides another example of the value of authoritative parenting. That is, parents providing children with plenty of warmth and support, while at the same time maintaining reasonably high expectations and firm limits for children's behavior. The benefits of such parenting have been documented in many ways by research.

Source:

Paley, B., Conger, R. D., & Harold, G. T. (2000). Parents' affect, adolescent cognitive representations, and adolescent social development. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62, 761-776.

Summarized by Rachel (Martin) Ozretich