

A Positive Family Climate in Adolescence Is Linked to Marriage Quality in Adulthood

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Experiencing a positive family climate as a teenager may be connected to your relationships later in life, according to new research published in [Psychological Science](#), a journal of the [Association for Psychological Science](#).

While research has demonstrated long-term effects of aggression and divorce across generations, the impact of a positive family climate has received less attention. Psychological scientist Robert Ackerman of the University of Texas at Dallas and colleagues wanted to examine whether positive interpersonal behaviors in families might also have long-lasting associations with future relationships.

The researchers examined longitudinal data from individuals participating in the Iowa Youth and Families Project. Family interactions were assessed when the participants were in 7th grade. The interactions were coded for five indicators of positive engagement: listener responsiveness, assertiveness, prosocial behavior, effective communication, and warmth-support.

Participants who showed and experienced more positive engagement in their families showed more positive engagement in their marriages 17 years later. Interestingly, their spouses also showed more positive engagement. Participants who came from families that expressed more positive engagement also expressed less hostility toward their spouses, and their spouses displayed less hostile behavior toward them.

Greater levels of positive engagement at the family level in adolescence also predicted more relationship satisfaction for both partners.

At a basic level, the findings suggest a link between the family climate in adolescence and marriage quality later in life. The fact that these effects seemed to extend to participants' spouses was especially interesting.

"Perhaps one of the most striking results from this work was that the quality of one marital partner's family climate during adolescence was associated with marital outcomes for the other partner," the researchers observe.

Family dynamics could foster a supportive style of interacting that elicits similar behavior from a spouse down the road; but it could also be that individuals who grew up in families with a positive and warm climate actively seek out partners who provide a similar relationship environment. The researchers speculate that both mechanisms may be at work.

Ultimately, these results are consistent with the Development of Early Adult Romantic Relationships (DEARR) model, suggesting that early family experiences are linked to the development of a person's

relationship style into adulthood.

Co-authors on the study include Deborah A. Kashy and M. Brent Donnellan of Michigan State University, Tricia Neppl and Fredrick O. Lorenz of Iowa State University, and Rand D. Conger of the University of California, Davis.

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