

Mothers' influence is decisive in tots' first year

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Study says parenting style and baby's temperament predict challenging behavior in later childhood

The way mothers interact with their babies in the first year of life is strongly related to how children behave later on. Both a mother's parenting style and an infant's temperament reliably predict challenging behavior in later childhood, according to Benjamin Lahey and his team from the University of Chicago in the US. Their findings (1) have just been published online in Springer's *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*.

The researchers looked at whether an infant's temperament and his mother's parenting skills during the first year of life might predict behavioral problems, in just over 1,800 children aged 4-13 years. Measures of infant temperament included activity levels, how fearful, predictable and fussy the babies were, as well as whether they had a generally happy disposition. The researchers looked at how much mothers stimulated their baby intellectually, how responsive they were to the child's demands, and the use of spanking or physical restraint. Child conduct problems in later childhood included cheating, telling lies, trouble getting on with teachers, being disobedient at home and/or at school, bullying and showing no remorse after misbehaving.

The results indicate that both maternal ratings of their infants' temperament and parenting styles during the first year are surprisingly good predictors of maternal ratings of child conduct problems through age 13 years. Less fussy, more predictable infants, as well as those who

were more intellectually stimulated by their mothers in their first year of life, were at low risk of later childhood conduct problems. Another observation the researchers made was that early spanking predicted challenging behavior in Non-Hispanic European American families, but not in Hispanic families.

According to the authors, these findings support the hypothesis that "interventions focusing on parenting during the first year of life would be beneficial in preventing future child conduct problems...Greater emphasis should be placed on increasing maternal cognitive stimulation of infants in such early intervention programs, taking child temperament into consideration."

Source: Springer

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