

Fathers respond to teens' risky sexual behavior with increased supervision

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Two-thirds of American teenagers have sex by the time they're 18. A new longitudinal study finds that when adolescents engage in risky sexual activity, fathers respond by increasing their efforts to supervise and monitor their children.

Researchers at Boston College, the University of Pittsburgh, and Harvard University conducted the study, which appears in the May/June 2009 issue of the journal *Child Development*.

The study followed more than 3,200 teenagers ages 13 to 18 over a period of four years. The teens were a subset of participants in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, a representative sample of American [adolescents](#). Each year, the teens reported on their parents' knowledge of their activities, friends, and so forth. Starting at age 14, the teens also answered questions about their engagement in risky sexual activities, including frequency of intercourse, number of partners, and incidences of unprotected intercourse.

The study suggests that fathers react differently than mothers to their children's sexual behavior. When teens engaged in risky sexual behavior, instead of parents becoming less involved, as previously seen, fathers boosted their involvement, learning more about their children's friends and activities. This finding contradicts previous research, which has found that parents react with hostility and are less engaged following such discoveries.

This study also identified involvement in family activities as a protective force. Specifically, it found that teens who took part in routine family activities like eating meals together or joining in fun projects were less likely to engage in risky sexual activity, and teens who didn't engage in risky [sexual behavior](#) were more likely to participate in family activities.

"This research highlights the complex interplay of relationships between [parents](#) and their adolescent children," according to Rebekah Levine Coley, associate professor of applied developmental and [educational psychology](#) at Boston College and the study's lead author. "Given the notably negative potential repercussions of risky [sexual activity](#) during adolescence, this study can inform efforts to increase parents' oversight of and active engagement with their teenage children."

Source: Society for Research in Child Development ([news](#) : [web](#))

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