

From music to sports: Autonomy fosters passion among kids

February 3 2010

Parents take heed: children and young adults are more likely to pursue sports, music or other pastimes when given an opportunity to nurture their own passion. According to a three-part study led by Geneviève Mageau, a psychology professor at the Université de Montréal, parental control can predict whether a child develops a harmonious or obsessive passion for a hobby.

Published in the latest *Journal of Personality*, the study was a collaboration with scientists from the Université de Montréal, the Université du Québec à Montreal and McGill University.

"We found that controlling adults can foster obsessive [passion](#) in their [children](#) by teaching them that social approval can only be obtained through excellence," says Dr. Mageau. "An activity then becomes highly important for self-protective reasons that don't necessarily correspond with a child's true desires."

From children to adults

As part of the study, the research team evaluated 588 musicians and athletes from swimmers to skiers. Participants were between six and 38 years old and practiced hobbies at different levels: beginner, intermediate and expert. Kids were recruited from high school or specialized summer camps, while adults were recruited at training camps and competitions. The scientific team used a Likert-type scale to

measure how parents supported child autonomy and to evaluate child well-being regarding hobbies.

While [parents](#) do well to support their children to pursue an activity, such encouragement can graduate to unwelcome pressure. "Children and teenagers who are allowed to be autonomous are more likely to actively engage in their activity over time," says Dr. Mageau. "Being passionate should not be viewed as a personality trait - it is a special relationship one develops with an activity."

More information: The paper, "On the Development of Harmonious and Obsessive Passion: The Role of Autonomy Support, Activity Specialization, and Identification With the Activity," is published in the *Journal of Personality*. www.personality.org .

Provided by University of Montreal

Citation: From music to sports: Autonomy fosters passion among kids (2010, February 3) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-02-music-sports-autonomy-fosters-passion.html>

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