

Early child-parent attachment affects behavior, especially for boys

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The quality of the relationship between children and their parents is important to children's development, but past research on the link between attachment and development has been inconsistent. Now a new analysis concludes that children, especially boys, who are insecurely attached to their mothers in the early years have more behavior problems later in childhood.

The meta-analysis of 69 studies involving almost 6,000 [children](#) ages 12 and younger was conducted by researchers at the University of Reading (in the United Kingdom), the University of Leiden (in the Netherlands), the Barnet, Enfield & Haringey Mental Health National Health Service Trust (also in the U.K.), and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. It is published in the March/April 2010 issue of the journal *Child Development*.

According to attachment theory, children with secure attachments have repeated experiences with caregivers who are responsive to their needs and thus expect their caregivers to be available and comforting when called upon. In contrast, children with insecure attachments have experiences in which requests are discouraged, rejected, or responded to inconsistently, which is thought to make them vulnerable to developing behavioral problems.

The researchers sought to clarify the extent to which bonds between children and their moms early in life affect children's later behavioral problems, such as aggression or hostility; behavior problems were

measured up to age 12. The studies included in their review used a range of methods for assessing children's behavior problems, including parent and teacher questionnaires and direct observations.

"The results suggest that the effects of attachment are reliable and relatively persistent over time," notes Pasco Fearon, associate professor of psychology at the University of Reading, who was the study's lead author. "More specifically, children who seem unable to maintain a coherent strategy for coping with separation are at greatest risk for later [behavior problems](#) and aggression."

Provided by Society for Research in Child Development

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