

# Fathers still matter to kids who have moved out

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BYU family life professor Larry Nelson's oldest daughter Jessica graduated from high school this spring, so his career researching the transition to adulthood is starting to get personal.

Fortunately his latest study shows that certain types of dads remain a force for good with children who have moved out of the house.

Dads who blend love, high expectations and respect for the child's [autonomy](#) stood out in Nelson's analysis of fathers of [young adults](#). These dads enjoy a closer [relationship](#) with their children, and the children demonstrate higher levels of kindness and self-worth.

"If their child is struggling to pick a major in college, these dads don't tell their kids what they think it should be," Nelson said. "Instead they'll say 'Have you ever considered this' or 'Here's one advantage of that.' And when the child makes a choice, they say 'I'm proud of you.'"

Scholars call this approach "authoritative parenting" – not to be confused with "authoritarian" Tiger Mothers or helicopter parents who swoop in to fix everything themselves.

"They know what's going on in their children's lives, and we're seeing that it's because the kids are willing to tell them," Nelson said. "The outcomes are better when parents aren't controlling."

The research appears in the June issue of the *Journal of Youth and*

*Adolescence*. A few years ago Nelson published research showing that parents didn't consider their college students to be adults yet – and the kids agreed.

BYU professor Laura Padilla-Walker, author of the study showing that sisters improve their siblings' mental health, co-authored the new study with Nelson.

The data for both studies comes from PROJECT READY, a broad effort looking at young people and the transition to adulthood. The project began in 2004 with an extensive survey of college students around the country. Researchers are conducting another phase of the project that follows a batch of students over time. Reports by Project Ready researchers have been published in academic journals such as *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *Journal of Family Psychology* and other peer-reviewed publications.

Provided by Brigham Young University

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