

# Teens have fewer behavioral issues when parents stay involved

January 20 2012, By Sharyn Alden

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When parents of middle school students participate in school-based, family interventions, it can reduce problem behavior, according to new research released online in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

The transition to adolescence can be particularly challenging, as during this period, children are more likely to engage in potentially harmful behavior with their [peers](#) while having less monitoring from and communication with their [parents](#). The researchers were interested in whether an intervention called the Family Check-Up (FCU)—a short program that provides feedback and skill training for parents—could mitigate some of the troubles many parents and teens face. “We hypothesized that we would find significant intervention effects on all four outcomes—family conflict, parental monitoring, antisocial behavior

and alcohol use,” said Mark J. Van Ryzin, Ph.D., of the University of Oregon and lead author of the study. “We were pleased that these hypotheses were confirmed.”

Van Ryzin and his colleagues followed 593 seventh and eighth graders and their families in a randomized controlled trial, with families assigned either to participate in the FCU program or to a control group of “school as usual” students at three public schools in the Pacific Northwest. The researchers gathered data primarily from students' self-reports to provide a broad assessment of family interaction. Researchers also videotaped parents interacting with their teens at home and school. Both parents and teens received comprehensive feedback about their interaction with each other.

One of the program’s strengths is its short duration. “The average participating family only received about 4 and half hours of intervention time,” said Van Ryzin.

“Most [adolescents](#) with behavioral problems see professionals after they are in trouble instead of beforehand, which is why this program is unique; there are few preventive programs like it,” said Garry Sigman, M.D., director of adolescent medicine at Loyola University Medical Center in Chicago. “It requires either a school district willing to incur the time and financial costs of trained professionals or collaboration between schools and mental health professionals. In either case, most districts do not have funds or interest in this type of endeavor.”

While no simple answer exists for decreasing teenagers’ behavioral problems, Sigman said, “I only wish more young adolescents would have the opportunity for their parents to get the type of education offered by the Family Check-Up. To be sure, it doesn’t happen very often in primary care offices.”

Sigman said he helps parents understand that adolescence is not a time to pull back on involvement in their children's lives. "I suggest parents know where their teens are, have curfew rules, and make their values and wishes explicit regarding teen drinking, substance use and sex."

"If support and services like the Family Check-Up are available, it can help implement reasonable strategies for change," said Van Ryzin. "The key is to involve the whole family in the process, not just the adolescent."

**More information:** Van Ryzin, M.J., et al. (2012). Engaging Parents in the Family Check-Up in Middle School: Longitudinal Effects on Family Conflict and Problem Behavior Through the High School Transition. *Journal of Adolescent Health*.  
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