

# Children showing signs of social withdrawal in risk of internalized distress

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Children are showing signs of social withdrawal are more susceptible to parental influences than others. These children were also more prone to distress caused by the impacts of guilt-inducing parenting.

The researchers of the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, have found that children showing signs of social withdrawal are more susceptible to parental influences than others. The researchers followed up about 300 children across the first three years of [primary school](#) and monitored the children's social skills and [problem behaviors](#). At the same time, mothers' and fathers' [parenting styles](#) were assessed. The study was funded by the Academy of Finland and the Alli Paasikivi foundation.

The results showed that children showing signs of social withdrawal in kindergarten were more prone to parental impacts later on in school than others. For example, a low level of maternal affection was evident as an increased level of conduct problems among socially withdrawn children in particular. These children were also more prone to the impacts of guilt-inducing parenting deployed by mothers and fathers: guilt-inducing parenting of either parent increased internalized distress and depressive symptoms clearly more among socially withdrawn children than among other children.

On the other hand, the results surprisingly showed that guilt-inducing parenting deployed by mothers decreased the [conduct problems](#) of socially withdrawn children. The researchers suggest that children showing signs of [social withdrawal](#) may have a heightened risk of

pleasing their parents at the cost of their own well-being.

In guilt-inducing parenting, a parent tries to impact on the child's behavior using psychological means rather than direct limit setting. For example, the parent may remind the child how much effort he/she makes for the child or show how ashamed he/she is because of the child's behavior. In previous research, this kind of parenting has been related to increased anxiety and [depressive symptoms](#) among children and adolescents.

The study will be published (online version already available) in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*.

**More information:** Zarra-Nezhad, M., Kiuru, N., Aunola, K., Zarra-Nezhad, M., Ahonen, T., Poikkeus, A.-M., Lerkkanen M.-K., & Nurmi, J.-E. (2014). Social withdrawal in children moderates the association between parenting styles and the children's own socioemotional development. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. Online: 2014, May 5. [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcpp.12251/pdf](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcpp.12251/pdf)

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