

Parents' perception of teens' experiences are related to mental health

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Adolescents whose parents better understand their daily experiences have better psychological adjustment, suggests a study in the October issue of *Psychosomatic Medicine: Journal of Biobehavioral Medicine*, the official journal of the American Psychosomatic Society. The journal is published by Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, a part of Wolters Kluwer Health.

Having parents who understand how their day went may even affect [teens'](#) cellular responses to stress—providing a possible link to improved [physical health](#) as well. "These results provide preliminary evidence that parental accuracy regarding their adolescent's daily experiences may be one specific daily parent factor that plays a role in adolescent [health](#) and well-being," according to the study by Lauren J. Human, PhD, of University of California, San Francisco, and colleagues.

Parents' Perceptions Are Related to Teens' Mental Health

In the study, 116 parent-teen pairs completed daily diaries for two weeks. The [adolescents](#) and their parents rated the daily demands on the teen (how much work they had at school and at home) as well as the positivity of their day together. The teens also rated their general levels of depression and stress.

The parents' ratings were more accurate when the teens generally had

more positive days at home, and when the parents and teens generally had more positive days together. Parents' accuracy in rating their teen's daily demands was not significantly associated with adolescent depression or stress levels.

"However, adolescents whose parents more accurately perceived the positivity of their day together reported lower depression and perceived stress," Dr Human and coauthors write. In other words, when parents and teens generally agreed as to whether they had a good (or not so good) day together, the teens had better [psychological adjustment](#).

Cellular Responses to Stress Suggest Link to Physical Health

The study also looked at how parental perceptions affected "biological mechanisms relevant to health." That included tests of immune functions involved in inflammation, including cellular responses to the stress hormone cortisol. Teens whose parents more accurately perceived the positivity of their day together exhibited greater "glucocorticoid sensitivity." Dr Human and coauthors explain, "[T]heir immune cells were more sensitive to anti-inflammatory signals from cortisol."

Immune responses to stress are thought to be an important link between harsh family environments and physical health, according to the researchers. Chronic inflammation has been linked to cardiovascular disease and other chronic diseases of aging.

"Overall, these findings provide novel evidence that how well [parents](#) understand their adolescents' day-to-day experiences may play a unique role in both adolescent psychological functioning and glucocorticoid sensitivity," Dr Human and coauthors write. They add that their study is the first "to link the accuracy of others' perceptions about one's daily life

to immunological processes potentially relevant to health."

Dr Human and colleagues believe that parental accuracy may play a unique role in adolescent health, deserving of further research.

"Although questions remain about causality and generalizability," they conclude, "these findings begin to shed light on day-to-day parent-adolescent relationship processes that may affect adolescent psychological and physical health."

More information: *Psychosomatic Medicine*: October 2014 - Volume 76 - Issue 8 - p 603–610. [DOI: 10.1097/PSY.000000000000105](https://doi.org/10.1097/PSY.000000000000105)

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