

Parent's suicide attempt makes child's much more likely, study says

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Suicidal behavior appears to run in families, with certain conditions putting kids at higher risk.

(HealthDay)—When a parent has a history of attempting suicide, the odds of a suicide attempt in their child rises fivefold, compared to the offspring of people without such histories, a new study finds.

Reporting in the Dec. 30 [online edition](#) of *JAMA Psychiatry*, researchers led by Dr. David Brent of the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center tracked more than 700 young and adult-aged children (ages ranged from 10 to 50) of 334 parents with mood disorders, such as depression or bipolar disorder.

A total of 191 of the parents had attempted [suicide](#) in the past. Forty-four of the offspring had attempted suicide in the past. Another 29 of

the offspring attempted suicide during the study's nearly six-year follow-up period, according to the report.

The investigators found that a history of [suicide attempts](#) in a child was strongly associated with a similar history in that child's parent—even after they accounted for any mood disorder that might be shared by both parent and child.

Behaviors involving "[impulsive aggression](#)" were closely tied to mood disorders, Brent's team found, "and could be targeted in interventions designed to prevent youth at high familial risk from making a suicide attempt."

Two experts said the study puts the spotlight on "at risk" children.

"For parents who have a history of depression, [bipolar disorder](#) and/or suicide attempts, they should be aware of the potential risk for their children and be proactive in having an evaluation if the child is experiencing depression or other [psychiatric symptoms](#)," said Dr. Jeffrey Borenstein, president and CEO of the Brain & Behavior Research Foundation in New York City.

"Just as parents seek professional help if they are concerned about their child's physical health, parents should be proactive in observing their children's mental health and seeking a professional evaluation if they are concerned," Borenstein said.

Dr. Scott Krakower is assistant unit chief of psychiatry at Zucker Hillside Hospital in Glen Oaks, N.Y. He said, "if adolescents show signs or symptoms of a mood disorder, it is important that they receive treatment for this as soon as possible. Parents battling with a [mood disorder](#) should also seek treatment, to help foster a better relationship with their children."

As for warning signs, Krakower said that "impulsive aggression is often overlooked and can raise the risk for suicide. So, it is important to make sure that youth receive treatment to help learn better ways to regulate their emotions."

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