

Interpersonal communication key to daughters' well-being

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Haley Horstman and her colleagues found that daughters re-author; stories about adversity over time, often increasing the positivity of those stories through narrative. Credit: Mizzou News Bureau

When faced with adversity, humans make meaning of their experiences through storytelling. Scholars also have found that women, in particular,

express their emotions through 'narrative sense-making' and relate to and support each other by telling stories in everyday contexts. This is especially true when it comes to mothers and daughters. Now, a recent study from a University of Missouri professor has found that daughters 're-author' stories about adversity over time, often increasing the positivity of those stories through narrative. Scientists believe these changes in storytelling can improve mother and daughter interpersonal relationships and well-being.

"The goal of the research was to understand how [communication](#) can change the way [daughters](#) make sense of their experiences," said Haley Horstman, a narrative scholar and assistant professor of interpersonal and family communication in the College of Arts and Science at MU. "When dealing with difficult situations from death to problems in school, how a daughter communicates with her mother will impact her overall well-being. We wanted to learn how aspects of interpersonal communication such as perspective-taking, coherence and taking turns impact how we make sense of adversity."

In the study, Horstman had 62 daughters write out a story of a difficulty they were experiencing and complete a well-being survey. The daughters then met with their [mothers](#) to tell their stories. Two days later, the daughters completed another written survey with the story-writing prompt and measures of well-being. In analyzing the results, Horstman found that the stories between mothers and daughters changed over time and with respect to qualities of the mother-daughter conversation. Researchers found that by taking turns and sharing each other's perspective during their conversation, daughters tended to write their stories more positively over time.

"The takeaway of this study is that our narratives matter," said Horstman. "Interpersonal communication has the power to change the way we make sense of our lives. If mothers can foster warmth and

affection in their conversations, and if daughters listen to their mother's perspective, the conversations can help daughters work through negative emotions associated with stress."

Horstman and her colleagues' study, "Unfolding narrative meaning over time: The contributions of mother-daughter conversations of difficulty on daughter narrative sense-making and well-being," was published in *Communication Monographs*.

More information: *Communication Monographs*,
www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1068945#.VkylvnaRpg

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