

# Family factors may influence a child's temperament

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A new study indicates that a child's temperament may be influenced by maternal postpartum depression, maternal sensitivity, and family functioning. Maternal depression was associated with difficult

temperaments in infants when maternal sensitivity was low, but not when maternal sensitivity was high. Family functioning similarly moderated these links.

The findings suggest that family factors play a critical role in shaping the trajectory of an infant's behavioral style as it unfolds over development.

For example, even when dealing with depression, mothers who consistently and appropriately respond to their infants' needs, which are hallmarks of sensitive parenting, may more effectively teach their infants how to regulate their negative emotions than mothers who respond less sensitively. Similarly, a highly functioning family unit characterized by effective communication and high interpersonal involvement among family members may support an infant's emotion regulation even when the mother is depressed.

"Maternal postpartum depression was only associated with persistently difficult infant temperament when other family risk factors were present," said Dr. Stephanie Parade, lead author of the *Child Development* study. "This work underscores the importance of supporting families in the postpartum period."

**More information:** Stephanie H. Parade et al. Family Context Moderates the Association of Maternal Postpartum Depression and Stability of Infant Temperament, *Child Development* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/cdev.12895](https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12895)

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