

Teens 'mocked' by their parents are at greater risk for bullying, victimization

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Brett Laursen, Ph.D., corresponding author and a professor of psychology in FAU's Charles E. Schmidt College of Science. Credit: Florida Atlantic University

New evidence suggests that adolescent bullying and victimization may

have origins in the home. Many bullies have parents who are hostile, punitive and rejecting. Researchers from Florida Atlantic University's Charles E. Schmidt College of Science, Concordia University in Montreal, Canada, and Uppsala University in Sweden, have identified another type of parenting that contributes to peer difficulties: those who direct derision and contempt at their children.

Derisive [parents](#) use demeaning or belittling expressions that humiliate and frustrate the child, without any obvious provocation from the child. These parents respond to child engagement with criticism, sarcasm, put-downs and hostility, and rely on emotional and physical coercion to obtain compliance.

The study, published in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, emphasizes the emotional underpinnings of peer difficulties. The researchers followed 1,409 children for three consecutive years from grades 7 to 9 (ages 13-15 years).

Findings show that derisive parenting fosters dysregulated anger in [adolescent](#) children. Dysregulated anger is indicative of difficulties regulating emotion, which typically result in [negative emotions](#), verbal and physical aggression, and hostility. Increases in dysregulated anger, in turn, place adolescents at greater risk for bullying and victimization, and for becoming bully-victims (bullies who also are victimized by other bullies).

The latter finding is noteworthy given that past research indicates that bully-victims are at the greatest risk for poor mental health, behavioral difficulties, and suicidal thoughts when compared to "pure" victims, "pure" bullies, or non-victims. Identification of the family-specific origins of bully-victim status may be a key step in limiting or preventing such poor outcomes.

Importantly, these findings held after controlling for parenting behaviors implicated in child adjustment, such as warmth, control and physical punishment. This study suggests that derisive behavior is a unique form of parenting that increases the risks that adolescent children will adopt inappropriate anger management strategies that increases their risk for peer difficulties.

"Inappropriate interpersonal responses appear to spread from parents to children, where they spawn peer difficulties. Specifically, derisive parenting precipitates a cycle of negative affect and anger between parents and adolescents, which ultimately leads to greater adolescent bullying and victimization," said Brett Laursen, Ph.D., co-author and a professor of psychology in FAU's Charles E. Schmidt College of Science. "Our study is important because it provides a more complete understanding of how parents' belittling and critical interactions with adolescents thwart their ability to maintain positive relationships with peers."

Daniel J. Dickson, Ph.D., Department of Psychology at Concordia University, is the senior author of the study.

"Implications from our study are far-reaching: practitioners and parents should be informed of the potential long-term costs of sometimes seemingly harmless parenting behaviors such as belittlement and sarcasm," said Dickson. "Parents must be reminded of their influence on adolescents' emotions and should take steps to ensure that adolescents do not feel ridiculed at home."

More information: Daniel J. Dickson et al, Derisive Parenting Fosters Dysregulated Anger in Adolescent Children and Subsequent Difficulties with Peers, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* (2019). [DOI: 10.1007/s10964-019-01040-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-019-01040-z)

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