

Sharing memories with toddlers helps their well-being into adulthood

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How mothers share memories with their children during toddlerhood impacts mental health and well-being in early adulthood, a University of Otago study has shown.

Researchers found 21-year-olds told more coherent stories about turning points in their lives if their mothers were taught new conversational techniques two decades earlier.

These adults also reported fewer symptoms of depression and greater self-esteem compared to adults in the study whose mothers interacted with them as usual.

The study, published in *Journal of Research in Personality*, is a long-term follow-up of a reminiscing intervention in which 115 mothers of toddlers were assigned to either a [control group](#) or taught to use elaborative reminiscing for a year.

Elaborative reminiscing involves open, enriched, and responsive conversations with children about shared experiences of everyday events. This is the first study to show long-term benefits of mother-child reminiscing for emerging adult development.

Lead author Sean Marshall, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Psychology, says understanding ways to improve the [mental health](#) of 18- to 25-year-olds is important because of their unique stage of life.

"Emerging [adults](#) face a volley of challenges as they leave home and enter university or the workforce.

"We wanted to understand how well tamariki cope with new challenges as they enter adulthood and find ways to ease the [psychological stress](#) that typically accompanies these transitions," he says.

Project lead Professor Elaine Reese, of the Department of Psychology, says the "soft-touch intervention" in [early childhood](#) proved to have enduring benefits for psychological well-being and mental health.

"This study is the first of its kind and is informing new interventions at home and in schools with parents and teachers of young children," she says.

More information: Sean Marshall et al, Growing Memories: Benefits of an early childhood maternal reminiscing intervention for emerging adults' turning point narratives and well-being, *Journal of Research in Personality* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jrp.2022.104262](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2022.104262)

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