

Parents are too hard on themselves: Teens more positive about their parenting

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Although it can be a challenge at times, parents should keep

communicating with their teens. Research by developmental psychologist Loes Janssen shows that parenting can be perceived quite differently by family members and mood plays an important role. Parents often parent better than they think they do.

In total 134 families took part in the study, and in 34 of these the [adolescent](#) had depression. The adolescents were aged between 12 and 17 at the time of the research. The parents and adolescents used a diary app four times a day for a fortnight to track their [mood](#) and the (perceived) parent-[child](#) contact.

Diary app

"The teens were asked questions like: 'How happy do you feel today?' 'Did you sleep well?' 'Have you had contact with your father or mother?' and 'How well did you listen to your mother?' The parents were asked questions like: 'How well did you listen to your child?' and 'How happy did you feel during your conversation with your child?' They used a seven-point scale to answer the questions, which went from not at all to very much," says Janssen.

Most previous studies on [parent-child relationships](#) worked with questionnaires afterwards in which the parents and adolescents indicated how their relationship had been over the past six months or year. "But then you see that the filter of time or mood at the time of completing the questionnaire can skew the answers. Now we were able to collect data at the kitchen table, as it were, and that has generated different insights." The previous studies (with questions looking back at parenting) concluded that parents were more positive about their parenting than their children were. "But we see the exact opposite in our study," says Janssen.

Fathers matter

Not only is how adolescents perceive their father and mother's parenting linked to their own mood but the differences between how parents perceive their parenting are also important to how the adolescents feel. "We can see that fathers and their behavior matter within the family and that they have an important role in the child's upbringing." Moreover, their mood appears to have more of an influence on their children's mood than that of the mothers. "But more research is needed to explain the differences."

Janssen and her colleagues also looked at the differences between the families with and without a depressed teen. Surprisingly enough, no difference could be seen in how these two groups of [young people](#) perceived their parenting at moments of contact with each other. But [adolescents](#) with depression were more negative about their parenting in the questionnaire that looked back over a longer period. "This could be related to their low mood at the moment of completion. It's important that parents realize this."

Parenting tips and therapy

"One of the main conclusions of our research is that the relationship between mood and perceived parenting can vary per family, family member and even moment." Although the research has not led directly to concrete parenting tips or recommendations for therapy for young people with depression, it may contribute to this at a later date.

"It's impressive that the families were so open. Being like that takes guts. Some parents with depressed children that I spoke to said they were at their wit's end: "How can I help my child?" Although I can't offer any concrete advice, I can show what the research is contributing to. It's

important that we researchers come down from our ivory towers. We owe that to these parents and young people."

One piece of advice that Janssen can give: keep communicating as a [family](#), however difficult this may be at times. "It may feel forced at times and sometimes you won't get anything back from your child. But sometimes you will. Listen without judgment. Only then will you find out what your child needs. And for all those [parents](#) who are looking for solutions: asking your child questions or just being there is often enough."

Provided by Leiden University

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