

Positive parenting buffers the effect of stress on the brain, study suggests

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Positive parenting—as reported by children and teenagers—protects young people from the deleterious effects of stressors like financial hardship or serious illness, according to a study published in *PNAS*

Nexus.

Jamie Hanson and colleagues examined [magnetic resonance](#) imaging (MRI) data along with survey data for 482 participants in an ongoing study, the Healthy Brain Network, who were between the ages of 10–17 at the time of data collection.

Previous work has found associations between stress and small hippocampal volumes as well as between stress and behavioral problems—associations confirmed by this study, although effect sizes were modest.

In the current study, the authors found that in [young people](#) who reported their parents were warm and supportive, these associations were weaker or absent. Positive relationships with caregivers may act as "resilience factors," according to the authors, that protect against the many deleterious developmental outcomes associated with childhood stress. Importantly, this buffering effect was not found for caregiver-reported positive parenting—only for youth-reported [positive parenting](#).

Youth are active agents and may be better informants of their own experience of stress and being cared for than caregivers, the authors argue. According the authors, the findings support evidence from interventions designed to increase positive and supportive parenting, which are associated with positive outcomes for youth.

More information: Isabella Kahhalé et al, Positive parenting moderates associations between childhood stress and corticolimbic structure, *PNAS Nexus* (2023). [DOI: 10.1093/pnasnexus/pgad145](https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgad145)

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