

Children's sensitivity to their parents' praise could affect their future mental health

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A new study published in *Developmental Science* has found that children who were more positively sensitive to their parents' praise when they were 3 years old had fewer behavioral and emotional problems when

they were 5–7 years old. Children whose behavior did not depend on their mood also had fewer behavioral and emotional problems later.

For the study, which involved 60 [children](#), [parents](#) sent in videos of their 3-year-olds brushing their teeth each night across 16 days.

Toothbrushing time served as a measure of child behavior. Investigators also noted the amount of praise that parents offered during toothbrushing and collected daily parent reports of additional variables, including child mood. Childhood sensitivity to psychosocial influences was conceptualized as the strength and direction of the relationship between child behavior and those influences, including parent praise and child mood.

When their children were age 3 and then again at age 5–7, parents completed the preschool version of the Child Behavior Checklist to identify behavioral and [emotional problems](#).

"An important future direction is to understand how childhood sensitivity to praise develops, and whether it can be shaped by interventions," said corresponding author Cassidy McDermott, of the University of Pennsylvania.

More information: Sensitivity to psychosocial influences at age 3 predicts mental health in middle childhood, *Developmental Science* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/desc.13531](https://doi.org/10.1111/desc.13531)

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