

Center-based care and insensitive parenting may have lasting effects

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A growing number of American children are enrolled in child care and questions remain about how these settings may affect them in both positive and negative ways. A new study published in the May/June 2009 issue of the journal *Child Development* finds that early interpersonal experiences—center-based child care and parenting—may have independent and lasting developmental effects.

Development ([news](#) : [web](#))

The study draws on the large, [longitudinal Study](#) of Early Child Care and Youth Development in the United States, which was carried out in collaboration with the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).

The NICHD study has followed about 1,000 children from 1 month through mid-adolescence to examine the effects of child care in children's first few years of life on later development. The researchers observed children in and out of their homes, and when the children were 15, they measured their levels of awakening cortisol—a stress-responsive hormone that follows a daily cycle (cortisol levels are usually high in the morning and decrease throughout the day).

[Children](#) who, during their first three years, (a) had mothers who were more insensitive and/or (b) spent more time in center-based [child care](#)—whether of high or low quality—were more likely to have the atypical pattern of lower levels of cortisol just after awakening when they were 15 years of age, which could indicate higher levels of early stress. These findings held even after taking into consideration a number of background variables (including [family](#) income, the mothers' education, the child's gender, and the child's ethnicity), as well as observed parenting sensitivity at age 15. The associations were small in magnitude, and were not stronger for either boys or girls.

Source: Society for Research in Child

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