

# Research reveals importance of early parent-child relations in emotional development

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New research from psychologists at the university has highlighted the long-term significance of the parent-child relationship on emotional development.

(Medical Xpress)—Researchers, in collaboration with colleagues at the University of Reading and University College London (UCL), found that the quality of the relationship in the first 18-months of life predicted the way in which the brain regulates experiences of positive emotion in young adulthood, 21-years later.

The paper 'Making an effort to feel positive: insecure attachment in infancy predicts the [neural underpinnings](#) of [emotion regulation](#) in adulthood', just published in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, reports that the brain activity linked to experiencing positive emotions differed between those who were securely attached to their mothers in infancy and those who did not have a secure attachment. The second group engaged additional brain regions when trying to increase their [positive emotions](#), but to less effect.

Commenting on the paper's findings, Dr Sarah Halligan, said: "Animal research demonstrates that the way in which the brain regulates emotional responses may be persistently altered by early experiences. Our research indicates that similar processes may operate in human development.

"This is significant, as the capacity to regulate emotional states is fundamental to day to day functioning. Importantly, our work also suggests that even relatively normal variations in the quality of the parent-child relationship in early life may have long-lasting implications for the way that the brain processes emotional experiences."

The findings are the result of a 22-year long study, which followed parents and children from infancy to adulthood.

**More information:** Moutsiana, C., Fearon, P., Murray, L., Cooper, P., Goodyer, I., Johnstone, T. and Halligan, S. (2014), Making an effort to feel positive: insecure attachment in infancy predicts the neural underpinnings of emotion regulation in adulthood. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. DOI: [10.1111/jcpp.12198](https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12198)

Provided by University of Bath

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