

# Study examines aspects of family relationships that may affect children's disruptive behaviour

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A new study has examined the interaction between coparenting and coercive parenting in predicting children's disruptive behaviour.

Coparenting describes the way in which adults work together in their role as parents. (For example, high quality coparenting may include expressions of warmth during interactions with the child, shared child-rearing values, and actions that support and extend a coparent's parenting efforts. Lower quality coparenting may involve criticism, or actions that thwart or undermine a partner's parenting attempts.) Coercive parenting represents a negative discipline strategy characterised by hitting, shouting, and scolding.

The study of 106 families with mother and father both resident found that the influence of high quality coparenting, previously assumed to be only beneficial, may be rather more complex. Mothers' perceptions of coparenting moderated the association between overall coercive parenting and children's disruptive behaviour development during school transition, but the direction of the effect was striking. Far from buffering children against mothers' coerciveness as the authors expected, mothers' perception of high quality coparenting intensified the toxicity of her coercive parenting for children's [disruptive behaviour](#). When combined with highly coercive parenting, maternal perceptions of high quality coparenting may be detrimental for children's adjustment.

"For mothers using coercive parenting strategies, having a partner who supports their parenting might not be such a good idea for their children's outcomes. For these mothers, perceptions of 'low quality' coparenting could mean having a coparent who undermines, or even stops their coercive strategies, actively failing to sanction their interpersonal aggression—so low quality

coparenting in these families could be protective for children's behavioural development, both by showing children that it's not okay to act that way and by reducing their exposure," said Dr. Bonamy Oliver, senior author of the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* study. "It's not to say that low quality coparenting is optimal in most circumstances, but it does suggest that moves to improve coparenting in families should be careful to consider the parenting in the home at the same time."

**More information:** Rachel M. Latham et al. A harsh parenting team? Maternal reports of coparenting and coercive parenting interact in association with children's disruptive behaviour, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/jcpp.12665](https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12665)

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