

child psychology

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Attempts by parents to psychologically control teens could bring difficulties in social relationships in future

Children whose parents use this tactic tend to have problems such as lower grades and lower self-esteem, likely because the children are discouraged from asserting themselves and gaining independence





The disadvantage of controlling parents

The constant attempts by parents, to psychologically control their teenage children may bring difficulties in social relationships and educational attainment by the time they [teens] reached age 32, suggests a recent study. The findings, from researchers at the University of Virginia, are published in *Child Development*, a journal of the Society for Research in Child Development.

"Parents, educators, and clinicians should be aware of how parents' attempts to control teens may actually stunt their progress," said Emily Loeb, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Virginia, who was the lead author on the study. "This style of parenting likely creates more than a temporary setback for adolescent development because it interferes with the key task of developing autonomy at a critical period," Loeb added.

Past research has identified psychological control as problematic parenting behaviour. Parents attempt to control their children in this way through intrusive and harshly manipulative means (e.g., withdrawing love and affection when the parent is angry at the child, making the child feel guilty for upsetting the parent).

Children whose parents use this tactic tend to have problems such as lower grades and lower self-esteem, likely because the children are discouraged from asserting themselves and gaining independence.

In this study, which examined perceived psychological control

earlier in adolescent development than previous work, researchers followed 184 youth annually from ages 13 to 32. The youth, from urban and suburban areas in the Southeastern United States, came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. About half of the group was male and half female and 42 per cent identified themselves as members of minority racial/ethnic groups. The study also considered family income, gender, and grade point average at age 13.

Researchers asked the participants to fill out questionnaires about themselves, their parents, and in adulthood, their relationship status and level of education. They also collected information from each youth's peers about how well-liked the teen was in school, and they observed videos of each youth interacting with his or her closest friend and later in adulthood, interacting with his or her romantic partner.

The study found that having overbearing and overcontrolling parents at age 13 was associated with less supportive romantic relationships for those who were in relationships by age 27, a lower likelihood of being in a relationship by age 32, and lower educational attainment by age 32. These outcomes were explained largely by problems at ages 15 to 16, including that teens were less psychologically mature and were less liked by their peers.

"Even though parents routinely attempt to guide their children toward successful adaptation, overcontrolling parenting in adolescence has the potential to impede development in a fundamental way that's not easy to repair," according to Joseph Allen, Hugh Kelly Professor of Psychology at the University of Virginia, who co-authored the study.

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