

How to Foster Depression: Bother Your Adolescent Child all the Time, But Leave it Alone When it Needs You

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Old view: Parenting styles and adolescents' depressive symptoms

- Dimensional approach: Authoritativeness (acceptance, behavior control, psychological autonomy granting) protects against depression
- Acceptance most important in North and South America, Europe, and Asia (Barber et al., 2005)
- Typological approach (Steinberg, 2001)



Our view: Parents' behaviors in key situations

- Is parenting like a constant air flow from a heating fan?
- Rather, parents and adolescents interact in concrete situations (Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997).
- Parents' responses in key situations might be most important



Most prone to conflicts are issues of conventions vs. autonomy (Smetana & Asquith, 1994). Most parent-adolescent influences have to do with adolescents' behaviors (Masche et al., 2003). *How* parents exert influence might be relevant.



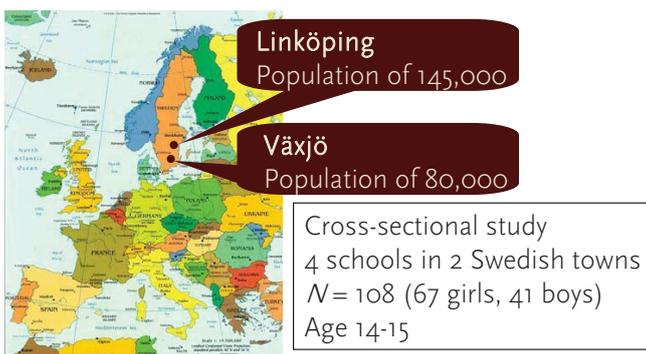
Comforting or giving advice might be a help, but the combination of both might feel best: authoritative parenting.



Adolescents expect advice in these prudential issues (Smetana & Asquith, 1994). Do parents give advice in an authoritative manner? That might count.

Hypothesis: Authoritative parenting maximally important in key situations of conflict, problem, and danger.

Methods



- Depressive symptoms:** CES-DC (Fendrich et al., 1990): 20 items, "During the last week I have felt sad." $\alpha = .88$
- Global parenting scales (interaction → 4 parenting styles)**



Acceptance (Barber et al., 2005): 10 items, "My mother gives me a lot of care and attention." $\alpha = .91$ mother/.91 father.



Behavior control (modified after Kerr & Stattin, 2003): 8 items each for *parental control* ($\alpha = .85/.84$) and *solicitation* ($\alpha = .80/.82$). "Do you need your mom's/dad's permission to go out on weekday nights?"; "How often do your parents ask whether your friends smoke or take snuff?"

- Parenting styles in key situations**



2 vignettes for each type of situations:

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TV-program Spare-time, e.g., meeting friends vs. doing chores | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schoolwork Friend or romantic friend | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Party, maybe with alcohol Other, e.g., riding motor cycle with friend, being out alone at night |
|--|---|--|

For each vignette, 6 items how mother/father reacts.

Example for the **dangerous** situation "party":

Authoritative: "Tell me to call if something happens or if I need their help in some way."

Authoritarian: "Request that I have to be home at a certain time without exception."

Indulgent: "Say that it is okay; it is most important that I enjoy it."

Neglectful: "They would not notice if I came home drunk."

Parenting *in General* & Depression

- Regression analyses, predicting depression ($n = 107$):

Standardized Variable	Main Effects Model		Interaction Model (4 Styles)	
	r	B	B	95% CI
Acceptance 	-.30**	-.37***	-.46***	[-.67, -.24]
Parental Control 	.06	.04	.01	[-.23, .24]
Solicitation	-.01	.14	.21	[-.05, .47]
Acceptance x Parental Ctrl			-.00	[-.20, .20]
Acceptance x Solicitation			-.24*	[-.46, -.01]
R^2		.11		.18
F		4.40**		4.30**
ΔR^2				.06
ΔF				3.78*

If including gender as control variable, gender reached significance ($\beta = .36***$) and acceptance had slightly larger effect. That is, girls are more depressed albeit their parents show more acceptance.

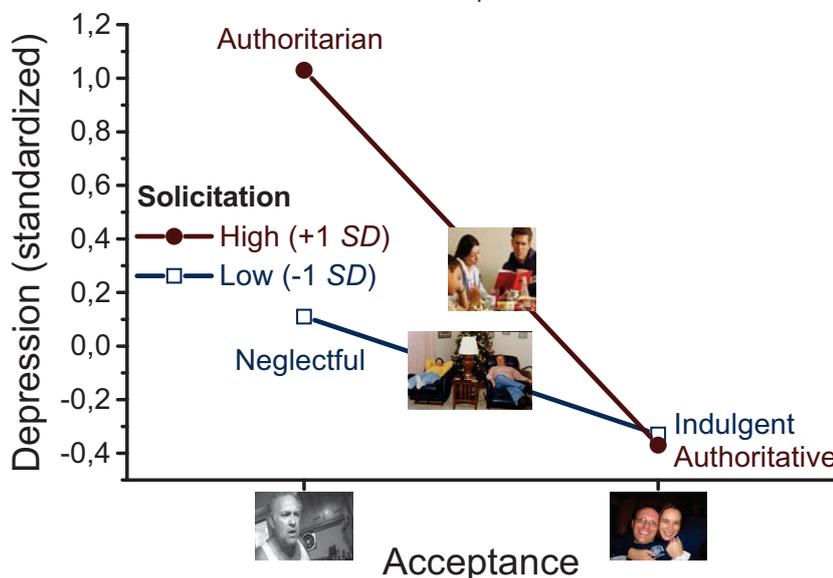
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Acceptance was linked to few depressive symptoms. Reliable parenting scales explained (only) 11% of variance.

Interaction added 6% explained variance.
 \Rightarrow Typology of styles tells a bit more than each dimension alone.
See below.

Parenting Styles *in General* & Depression

- Interaction effect of acceptance and solicitation (part of behavior control)



- Authoritative style linked to low depression.
- But no difference to indulgent.

- So, there is a better description:
 - Acceptance always linked to low depression.
 - But if parents fail to show acceptance, asking questions is associated with sky-high depression.
 - Solicitation might be a risk factor, and acceptance a protective factor.
 - Fits previous works questioning a positive role of control (Kerr & Stattin, 2000).

Parenting *in Key Situations*

- Item analyses of parenting style scales:

Parenting style		Conflict	Problem	Danger
Authoritative		3 items $\alpha = .62/.60$	2 items $\alpha = .70/.70$	3 items $\alpha = .51/.63$
Authoritarian		2 items $\alpha = .58/.67$	2 items $\alpha = .51/.40$	2 items $\alpha = .64/.65$
Indulgent		2 items $\alpha = .74/.74$	deleted (low alpha)	2 items $\alpha = .89/.88$
Neglectful		3 items $\alpha = .52/.31$	3 items $\alpha = .42/.36$	3 items $\alpha = .59/.58$

mother/father

In total, 54 of 72 items retained.
Mothers/fathers combined because of high correlations.

Some items needed to be deleted. This illustrates the difficulty to describe tokens of parenting styles in specific situations, in age-appropriate ways, because the normal level of behavior control declines with age (Masche, 2009).

Acceptable alphas with respect to how short the scales are.

But can such short scales predict depression?

Parenting *in Key Situations* & Depression

- Correlation and regression analyses, predicting depression ($n = 88$):

Parenting style		Conflict	Problem	Danger	Total
Authoritative		$r = .00$ $R^2 = .00$	$r = -.27^*$ $R^2 = .07^*$	$r = .00$ $R^2 = .00$	$R^2 = .10^{*a}$
Authoritarian		$r = .06$ $R^2 = .00$	$r = -.02$ $R^2 = .00$	$r = -.04$ $R^2 = .00$	$R^2 = .01$
Indulgent		$r = .05$ $R^2 = .00$	scale deleted	$r = .00$ $R^2 = .00$	$R^2 = .00$
Neglectful		$r = .34^{**}$ $R^2 = .12^{**}$	$r = .33^{**}$ $R^2 = .11^{**}$	$r = .33^{**}$ $R^2 = .11^{**}$	$R^2 = .22^{***}$
Total		$R^2 = .14^*$	$R^2 = .16^{**}$	$R^2 = .12^*$	$R^2 = .30^{***}$

^a Suppressor effect between situations of problems and dangers inflated total R^2 in this line of table.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Parenting in each key situation predicted depression, in total 30% of variance.

Authoritative parenting linked to depression in problem situations only.

To leave children alone (neglectful style) predicted depression in each key situation.

Is Parenting in General or in Key Situations more Important?

- Hierarchical regressions, adding key situations to general parenting, or vice versa ($n = 87$):

Variables	Adding Key Situations to General Parenting		Adding General Parenting to Key Situations	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
	General Parenting	+ Key Situations	Key Situations	+ General Parenting
ΔR^2	.22	.21	.30	.13
ΔF	4.59***	2.34*	2.94**	3.17*

Both, general parenting styles and parental behaviors in key situations, predicted depression independently of each other.

Behaviors in key situation explained more variance to begin with, and they added more to the explanation by global parenting styles.
 ⇒ Behaviors in key situations might be especially important.

Discussion

Limitations

- Unclear how representative for key situations these vignettes are, and the provided parental behaviors for actual behaviors.
- But this might actually underestimate the effects of parental behaviors in key situations.
- Difficulty to develop items which fit the target age group ⇒ difficult to build further research on this study.
- Cross-sectional study: Directions of effects unknown. From other, longitudinal work, we believe that about half of the associations are parenting effects on depression, and the other half effects in the opposite direction.

Conclusions

- If the associations found are to a large part parenting effects on adolescent depression, then holds:
1. Authoritative parenting might help, especially if adolescents encounter problems.
 2. But it seems more important to avoid bad parenting:
 3. In everyday communications, parents must not bother their children with requests to know everything when these requests occur in a distant and cold relationship context.
 4. There are situations when the child needs the parents, e.g., when it faces problems, when there are dangers, or conflicts. The worst thing to do is not to do anything at all. Adolescent children need parents who get involved in these key situations.