

Teens Are Better Off When Parents Practice Self-Compassion (Study)

A new study finds that children of mindfully self-compassionate parents tend to have lower rates of anxiety and depression.

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When their teenager struggles with anxiety or depression, many parents will blame themselves for the trouble. But a new study suggests that a self-compassionate attitude may be more helpful to the teen—and that the best way to foster that [self-compassion](#) is to cultivate [mindfulness](#).

Researchers at Radboud University collected data from 901 Dutch families, using questionnaires to measure adolescents' depression and anxiety, as well as parents' well-being and approach to parenting.

The results, [published](#) in the *Journal of Child Family Studies*, replicate past research suggesting that mindful parenting is associated with better well-being in parents. [Mindful parenting](#) involves integrating the principles of mindfulness into parenting: listening to the child with full attention, being emotionally aware of and non-judgmentally accepting of the self and the child's feelings, and not being overly reactive to stressful situations.

But the researchers found that the only facet of mindful parenting that seemed to increase an adolescent's well-being is non-judgmentally accepting one's parenting skills. In other words, parents who reported less self-blame—and were less self-critical of their own parenting—had adolescents with fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Why would a parent's self-compassion influence their child's well-being?

The researchers speculate that when parents model a non-judgmental attitude toward themselves, adolescents imitate their example. Treating the self with non-judgment and compassion could in turn reduce anxiety and depression.

However, it's equally likely that less adolescent anxiety and depression leads to more self-compassion in parents; when children are happy, parents are less likely to be hard on the self about their performance as a parent.

Though more research is needed to determine whether self-compassionate parenting leads to less anxiety and depression in adolescents or vice versa, the researchers think that this finding could be used to better focus interventions for parents. "Parenting programs might focus primarily on increasing parents' self-compassion with regard to their parenting and less on other mindful parenting practices," write the authors. A more focused practice could save time, and potentially, be more effective in helping

adolescents cope with anxiety and depression.

This article originally appeared on [Greater Good](#), the online magazine of UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center as part of their Mindful Mondays series, which provides ongoing coverage of the exploding field of mindfulness research. To view the original article, [click here](#).