

8-3-2007

Press release : 2007 : 08 : 03 : Parenting Mixed-Messages Affect Toddler Development

Erika Llenza

Follow this and additional works at: https://digital.usfsp.edu/usfsp_news_press_releases

Recommended Citation

Llenza, Erika, "Press release : 2007 : 08 : 03 : Parenting Mixed-Messages Affect Toddler Development" (2007). *USFSP News and Press Releases*. 791.

https://digital.usfsp.edu/usfsp_news_press_releases/791

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by the University Advancement at Digital USFSP. It has been accepted for inclusion in USFSP News and Press Releases by an authorized administrator of Digital USFSP.

Parenting Mixed-Messages Affect Toddler Development



Filed under [Press Releases](#), [College of Arts and Sciences](#) on Friday, August 03, 2007 by Author: Erika LLenza.

Parenting Mixed-Messages Affect Toddler Development

Editors Note: "Families Through Time" was supported by two grants from the National Institute of Child and Health Development. A Podcast interview with Dr. McHale regarding his findings and their implications is available at <http://www.usfsp.org/iNews/view.asp?ID=222>.

(St. Petersburg, Fla.) Aug. 2, 2007—Soon-to-be parents should sit down and discuss their approaches to parenthood prior to their baby's arrival, according to a new research study by Psychologist James McHale, associate professor and director of the USF St. Petersburg Family Study Center. His research found that children as young as two can show a wide variety of social, emotional and behavioral adjustment difficulties when their parents fail to establish a supportive parenting relationship.

Findings, published by Zero to Three Press in [Charting the Bumpy Road of Coparenting](#), indicate that difficulties in establishing supportive parenting relationships could be seen as early as three months after the baby's birth and were unlikely to resolve themselves with time. Additionally, co-parenting problems faced at 12 months were strong indicators of problems faced at 30 months and intricately tied to the social and behavioral problems seen in toddlers.

"It is hard enough for young children to learn to follow the rules and regulate their own behaviors when their parents are being reasonably consistent and working together," McHale said. "When parents can't get on the same page, toddlers really struggle. Our findings confirm that professionals need to be paying particularly close attention to this vitally important dynamic in families".

"*Families Through Time*" followed 120 northeastern couples getting ready to become first-time parents from prior to their child's birth to 30 months. The study examined consistency and change in co-parenting relationships between the infant and toddler years. Couples were interviewed and observed together completing routine and slightly stressful tasks with their baby. Distinctive co-parenting patterns were characterized by cooperation, support and validation in some families and detachment, disagreement and/or poor coordination in others.

Though a number of studies had previously examined early parenting adjustments by mothers or fathers, this investigation broke new ground through its in-depth look at coordination and support *between* parents. It was conceived to address gaps in the understanding of early co-parenting dynamics.

Major findings of the study:

- Mothers and fathers who harbored concerns before the baby's arrival about their capacity to work collaboratively as parents frequently went on to exhibit low co-parenting cohesion at three months post-partum, especially when their baby had a difficult early temperament.
- Co-parenting problems at three months foreshadowed co-parenting at 12 months, when conflict began to play a more prominent role in defining the co-parental relationship.
- Co-parenting difficulties at one year strongly predicted co-parenting adjustment 18 months later, when children were 30 months old.
- At 30 months, children in low co-parenting solidarity families had more problem behavior at home and poorer pre-academic skills at nursery school. They also had a less mature awareness of emotions and showed more reliance than other children on adults when trying to regulate their emotions.

Related Articles

There are no related articles.