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# Parent-Child Connectedness as a Predictor of Positive Youth Development in Early Adolescence

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**Abstract**

Parent-Child Connectedness is a strong emotional bond between a child or adolescent and their parental figure. However, the elements that contribute to connectedness are less defined. This study sought to test potential contributors as well as connections between Parent-Child Connectedness and Positive Youth Development. Operational zing Parent-Child Connectedness as a mechanism for supporting and predicting positive youth development represents a shift from much of the Positive Youth Development research, which focuses on ecological contexts rather than relationships. This study determined that climate of trust and time together achieved significance as contributors to Parent-Child Connectedness across demographics. This study also determined that Parent-Child Connectedness predicted three of the five components of Positive youth Development – character, confidence, and connection.

*Keywords*: plagiarism; professional ethics; scientific misconduct; academic integrity; referencing

## 1. Introduction

Adolescence is a period of biological, cognitive, and social growth and transformation. During this period, adolescents experience changes in cognition that lead to abstract reasoning, met cognition, and multidimensional thinking. Furthermore, as the pubertal process occurs, hormonal changes influence the growth and development of sex characteristics as well as changes in sleep patterns and overall self-esteem. Additionally, the prefrontal cortex is not fully developed, contributing to the incongruity of teens looking and acting more adult-like, although their impulse control and ability to think ahead is immature (Steinberg, 2011). During this myriad of physical and cognitive changes, adolescents experience social changes among peer groups, school and out-of-school settings, and within their own families. These developmental changes contribute to the process of autonomy and individuation of the adolescent, resulting in a transformation in the parent-child relationship.

Research indicates that during early adolescence, there are decreases in warmth, closeness, and time spent together, as well as increases in conflict from both the adolescents' and parents' perspectives (McGueet al., 2005; Shanahan et al., 2007; Shearer et al., 2005). Although the parent-child relationship is changing, its significance for adolescence remains. Fostering and preserving parent-child connectedness during the transition into adolescence is important for the prevention of adolescent health risk behaviors such as sexual activity, alcohol use, smoking, eating disorders, and depression (Ackard, et al., 2006; Boutelle et al., 2009; Pollack, 2004; Smart, et al., 2008). Conversely, parent-child connectedness has been associated with adolescent academic success, thriving, resiliency, and self-efficacy (Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009; Lerner, 2005; Pollack, 2004; Smart et al., 2008).

While research indicates the significance of parent-child connectedness, most of the literature focuses on risk prevention, creating a focus on what goes wrong rather than youth strengths. In the last couple of decades, a new framework has emerged, positive youth development. Positive youth development views youth as resources rather than focusing on the conventional problems associated with adolescence. The field of positive youth development has a primary focus on ecological contexts, including schools, youth organizations, and community agencies—with little attention given to the family context.

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## 2. Parent-Child Connectedness

Parent-child connectedness appears throughout the literature as a "super protector" (Bean et al., 2006; Lezin et al., 2004) against high-risk behaviors as well as a promoter for positive outcomes (Padilla-Walker et al., 2011). While parent-child connectedness seems to be intuitive in nature, there is an elusive quality to its definition because: 1) it is abstract in nature—based on feelings, perceptions, and self-reports; and 2) there are several similar constructs with subtle differences such as connection, family cohesion, attachment, and closeness. While each concept varies slightly, they all address the notion of a strong emotional bond resulting in a close-connected relationship between parent and adolescent.

Parent-child connectedness is related to attachment, family cohesion, and family strength. However, several elements make it distinct. Specifically, parent-child connectedness can be built deliberately and over the course of time, unlike attachment. Additionally, parent-child connectedness is dyadic, broad, and bidirectional, unlike family strength and family cohesion (Lezin et al., 2004). The terms parent-child connectedness, connection, and connectedness are used interchangeably throughout the literature. Parent-child connectedness is exclusive to the parent-child dyad. While there is agreement and consistency in the construct of connection as an emotional bond, it is critical to identify elements that contribute to parent-child connectedness.

To address this,Lezinet al. (2004) identified a broad definition of parent-child connectedness as well as distinguished constructs that contribute to parent-child connectedness. These authors defined parent-child connectedness as "a lasting bond between parent and child based on mutual respect, trust, love, and affection – all demonstrated in day-to-day interactions and expressed freely as both parent and child move through their relationship together" (p. 26).Four constructs are essential for the cultivation of parent-child connectedness: a climate of trust, communication, structure, and time together. Climate of trust refers to physical and emotional support as well as an environment that promotes openness, protection, and encouragement. Communication consists of verbal or nonverbal signals that indicate love, affection, and warmth, each allowing for the sharing of feelings and ideas. Structure refers to routines, monitoring, and guidance from parents that promote the development of autonomy. Shared time together is a meaningful interaction also incorporating elements of fun (Lezin et al., 2004).

## 3. Importance of Parent-Child Connectedness

A vast body of research demonstrates that parent-adolescent relationship quality is closely linked to adolescent well-being (Boutelle et al., 2009; Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009; Steinberg, 2001, as cited in Smartet al., 2008). Specifically, research indicates that the parent-child connection seems to be directly related to a myriad of outcomes varying from risk-taking engagement to prosaically behavior development (Ackard et al., 2006; Boutelle et al., 2009; Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009; Lerner, 2005; Pollack, 2004; Smart et al., 2008).

Most frequently in the literature, parent-child connectedness has been examined in relation to prevention against adolescent risk-taking activities such as alcohol, tobacco, and drug use, as well as teen pregnancy and teen sexually transmitted infections (Kumpfer& Alvarado, 2003; Lezin et al., 2004; Pollack, 2004). There is also evidence of direct psychosocial benefits of parent-child connectedness. For example, Boutelle et al. (2009) found that increased parent-child connectedness was associated with higher body satisfaction, higher self-esteem, and fewer depressive symptoms in adolescents. Research also has demonstrated the importance of parent-child connection for promoting desirable behaviors such as academic achievement and social competence (Ackard et al., 2006; Hillaker et al., 2008; Lezinet al., 2004).

The emphasis on parent-child connection as a "super protector" (Bean et al., 2006; Lezin et al., 2004) for risk prevention rather than a vehicle for cultivating youth assets is also evident. A recent content analysis identified various programs and approaches for building parent-child connectedness based on climate of trust, communication, structure, and time together (Irving & Richardson, 2012). This analysis concluded that elements of the Lezin et al. (2004) conceptualization of parent-child connectedness often appear as components of programs whose primary focus is mitigating high-risk behaviors. Positive outcomes have not been the primary purpose of programs promoting parent-child connectedness.

In recent years, the emphasis placed on research and interventions addressing youth risk and considering positive psychosocial development primarily as a protector against risk has drawn criticism. This emphasis has created a focus on what goes wrong rather than what goes right. The resultant perspective portrays youth as problems to be fixed and development as a process of overcoming deficits and risks. As proponents of strength-based models have noted, a risk-focused approach can obscure the fact that adolescence is also a time of mastery linked to each child's unique talents, strengths, skills, and interests (Damon, 2004; Larson, 2000; Scales &Leffert, 2004 as cited in Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008; Whitlock & Hamilton, 2003 as cited in Hamilton et al., 2004). The

literature on parent-child connectedness is framed in a deficit perspective rather than an emphasis on cultivating youth assets.

## 4. Defining Positive Youth Development

Historically, adolescence has been framed as a developmental period full of "storm and stress" (Hall, 1904, as cited in Lerner, 2005). This idea led to a negative connotation of teens as problems to be managed (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003, as cited in Bowerset al., 2009). This problem management of adolescents focused on decreasing problems in and among teens, creating a deficit perspective in research, policy, practice, and programming. This deficit perspective views the problems and behaviors youth should avoid rather than promoting positive qualities in teens (Bowers et al., 2009).

A shift in thinking enabled "youth to be viewed as resources to be developed and not as problems to be managed" (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003, as cited in Lerner, 2005, p. 23). This shift in focus is referred to as the positive youth development perspective. Positive youth development frameworks embody a broad set of personal and contextual attributes for all youth rather than targeting youth in need, at risk, or examining how particular strengths can mitigate risk factors (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008). It focuses on youth strengths and asset development rather than conventional problems (Hamilton et al., 2004). Using apositiveyouth development orientation shifts from the deficit perspective to scaffolding youth for success (Bowers et al., 2010; Hamilton et al., 2004). Positive youth development occurs when the strengths of youth are supported with ecological resources such as schools and youth-serving organizations (Bowers et al., 2010).

The outcome of this alignment is operationalized by the Five Cs: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring (Bowers et al., 2010; Lerner, 2005). According to Lerner (2005), Competence refers to the youth's "positive view of his or her actions in domain-specific areas including social, cognitive, academic, and vocational." Confidence refers to the youth's "internal sense of self-worth and self-efficacy; one's global self-regard rather than domain-specific beliefs." Connection refers to the youth's "positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in bidirectional exchanges between the individual and peers, family, school, and community in which both parties contribute to the relationship." Character refers to the youth's "respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong, and integrity." Caring refers to the youth's "sense of sympathy and empathy for others" (p. 23). When young people exhibit the Five Cs, they are said to be thriving (Lerner et al., 2003). Positive youth development experiences create an improved pathway and probability of flourishing rather than a trajectory of risk and problem behavior (Balsanoet al., 2009; Bowers et al., 2010; Hamilton et al., 2004; Lerner, 2005).

## 5. Integrating Parent-Child Connectedness and Positive Youth Development

To some extent, risk prevention and positive youth development have been framed as being on opposite ends of the spectrum (Small &Memmo, 2004, as cited in Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008). According to Guerra and Bradshaw (2008), rather than pitting risk prevention and positive youth development against one another, it is more beneficial to identify the complementary constructs of the two in order to integrate them and meet the needs of all youth. Even those scholars most passionate about positive youth development recognize the need to develop the positive to abate the negative (Hawkins et al., 1999; Lerner & Benson, 2003, as cited in Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008). Although limited in scope, recent studies suggest that the family context can contribute to positive youth development (Napolitano et al., 2011). Despite what research indicates about the protective value of parent-child connectedness and the importance of positive youth development, there is little literature examining the relationship between these two constructs. Specifically, very little attention has been given to the role of parent-child relationships in promoting positive youth development.

## 6. Methods

### 6.1. Sample

The sample for this study was drawn from Wave I and Wave II of the public use National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health dataset (Add Health). The Add Health dataset contains a sample from 80 high schools and 52 middle schools throughout the United States, with unequal probability of selection. "Incorporating systematic sampling methods and implicit stratification into the Add Health study design ensured this sample is representative of U.S. schools with respect to the region of the country, urbanicity, school size, school type, and ethnicity" (Harriset al., 2009). The Add Health dataset contains a sample size of over 90,000 adolescents aged 10-19 years old at the first wave of data collection (1994-1995). This longitudinal dataset includes four waves of data collection: Wave I (1994-1995), Wave II (1996), Wave III (2001-2002), and Wave IV (2008).

Wave I of the public use dataset includes 6,504 adolescents, and Wave II of the public use dataset contains 4,837 adolescents. The discrepancy in sample size from Wave I to Wave II can be explained by the attrition in a longitudinal data design. For this study, the sample size was further reduced by only including adolescents between the ages of 10 and 14 at the time of Wave I data collection, resulting in an *n* of 913. All demographic information is based on the responses during Wave I data collection.

The median age of the sample was 13. There were 502 (55%) females and 411(45%) males. Based on those adolescents that responded to demographic questions, there were 623 (68%) White, 214 (23%) Black or African American, 100 (11%) Hispanic or Spanish, 38 (4%) Asian or Pacific Islander, 40 (4%) American Indian or Native American, and 57 (6%) participants who identified as "other." The race and ethnicity responses exceeded 913 or 100% because the adolescent could select more than one. Although no specific question identified family income, "Are you receiving public assistance, such as welfare?" was used as a proxy to ascertain socioeconomic standing. There were 90 (10%) parents of participating adolescents receiving public assistance at the time of the first data collection.

### 6.2.Measures

This study uses items from Wave I and Wave II of the Add Health dataset to examine demographic information, parent-child connectedness, contributors to parent-child connectedness, and components of positive youth development. Many of the items used in this study were original questions created by the Add Health research team.

### 6.3. Demographic Information

The demographic information gathered in Wave I of data collection was used as independent variables when examining the relationship between parent-child connectedness and positive youth development. The questions regarding age, sex, race/ethnicity were completed by the adolescent. The parent answered the question regarding public assistance as a proxy for socioeconomic standing.

### 6.4. Parent-Child Connectedness

There were 35 items used to measure parent-child connectedness, and the four hypothesized contributors came from Wave I in the In-Home Questionnaire of the Add Health dataset. Of those 35 items, four were pertaining to parent-child connectedness, which were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Two items were specific to the mother-adolescent relationship, and two were specific to the father-adolescent relationship. For example, "Most of the time, your mother is warm and loving toward you" or "Most of the time, your father is warm and loving toward you." The scores from these four items were summed and averaged to yield a total score ranging from 1 to 5. In the sample for this study, the parent-child connectedness measure had a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .76. The other hypothesized contributors follow and include identical items for both mother and father figures.

### 6.5. Climate of Trust

Four items were selected to ascertain the climate of trust.Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). For example, "How close do you feel to your {Mother/ Adoptive Mother/ Stepmother/ Foster Mother/ etc.}?" The scores from these four items were summed and averaged, ranging from 1 to 5. In the sample for this study, the climate of trust measure had a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .68.

### 6.6. Communication

Communication was assessed using ten items that were answered with a "yes" or "no."For example, "Talked about someone you're dating or a party you went to?" [Father]. A "yes" response was scored as a 1, and a "no" response was scored as a 0. These 10 items were summed and averaged with total scale scores ranging from 0 to 1. In the sample for this study, communication had a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .66.

### 6.7. Structure

Seven items were used to measure structure, all of which were "yes" or "no" questions. A "yes" response was scored as a 1, and a "no" response was scored as a 0. The scores from the seven questions were summed and averaged, with possible scores ranging from 0 to 1. For example, "Do your parents let you make your own decisions about the time you must be home on weekend nights?" These seven items were summed and averaged, resulting in a scale score ranging from 0 to 1. In the sample for this study, the measure of structure had a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .49.

### 6.8. Time Together

Time together was assessed using ten items, all of which required a response of "yes" or "no," where a "yes" response was scored as a 1 and a "no" response was scored as a 0. For example, "Which of the things have you done with your {Mother/ Adoptive Mother/ Stepmother/ Foster Mother/ etc.} in the past 4 weeks?" Gone shopping? Played a sport? These 10 items were summed and averaged, resulting in a scale score ranging from 0 to 1. In the sample for this study, the time together measure had a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .63.

### 6.9. Positive Youth Development

The measures relating to positive youth development were selected from the Wave II In-Home Questionnaire from the ADD Health dataset. A total of 14 items were used,and all were coded to have a consistent metric throughout the measures.

### 6.10. Caring

There was one item used to assess caring, which was measured on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) Likert scale: "You are sensitive to other people's feelings."

### 6.11. Character

Character was assessed using one item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree)*: "You have a lot of good qualities."

### 6.12. Competence

Competence was assessed using four items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). For example, "When you get what you want, it's usually because you worked hard for it." These four scores were summed and averaged to create a scale score ranging from 1 to 5. In the sample for this study, the competence measure had a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .26.

### 6.13. Confidence

Confidence was assessed using five items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). For example, "You have a lot to be proud of." These five items were summed and averaged, resulting in a scale score of 1 to 5. In the sample for this study, the measure of confidence had a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .66.

### 6.14. Connection

Connection was assessed using three items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). For example, "You usually tell your mother or father where you are going when you go out on weekends or evenings." These three items were summed and averaged with a score of 1 to 5. In the sample for this study, the measure of connection had a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .65.

### 6.15. Procedure

For this study, the public use datasets from Waves I and II were downloaded from a partner data management site of the Adolescent Health website. A third dataset was created, combining the two waves of data. After integration and elimination, the dataset had a sample size of 913 adolescents and contained 56 variables.

While the Add Health dataset contained items that assessed parent-child relationships and youth development, no existing scales measured parent-child connectedness, its contributors, or positive youth development. To address this, the codebooks of Wave I and Wave II for the public use data were used to identify items to measure each variable of the present study. These items were then grouped by variable, creating a measure. Because these measures had not been originally grouped together, alpha reliabilities were run to determine the internal consistency of each measure. Upon completing the alpha reliability tests, one item in each measure of time together, parent-child connectedness, and confidence was omitted. After the omission process, 53 variables were included in the integrated dataset used for data analysis for this study.

## 7. Results

### 7.1. Parent-Child Connectedness and its Contributors

Figure 1shows the Pearson correlation coefficients for climate of trust, communication, structure, and time together in relation to parent-child connectedness. Climate of trust and time together were significantly related to parent-child connectedness. These correlations were positive and remained statistically significant across the

demographic independent variables, indicating that the control variables had no effect on the relationship between climate of trust and parent-child connectedness as well as time together and parent-child connectedness. These results indicate that as adolescents report a greater climate of trust or spend more time with their parent(s), they also report higher levels of connectedness to their parent(s). Regardless of gender, socioeconomic standing, and race/ethnicity, greater climate of trust and time together with parents were associated with increased parent-child connectedness. Four separate multivariate regressions were conducted to examine the degree to which the demographic independent variables and the contributors to Parent-Child Connectedness predicted Total Parent-Child Connectedness.

**Figure 1.** Correlations between Contributors and Total Parent-Child Connectedness

| Demographic | Trust | Communication | Structure | Time Together |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male (n=411) | .59**** | .07 | .02 | .18**** |
| Female (n=502) | .66**** | .06 | .05 | .27**** |
| Public Ast. (n=90) | .52**** | -.04 | -.09 | .19 |
| No Public Ast. (n=761) | .66**** | .08* | .07* | .23**** |
| Minority (n=287) | .50**** | -.02 | .10 | .18** |
| White (n=623) | .69**** | .09* | .01 | .26**** |

### 7.2. Parent-Child Connectedness and Positive Youth Development

Figure 2 shows how parent-child connectedness was related to the five components of positive youth development (caring, character, competence, confidence, and connection), controlling for gender, socioeconomic standing, and race/ethnicity. As indicated in Figure2, parent-child connectedness was significantly and positively related to character, confidence, and connection. This indicates that as adolescents report greater parent-child connectedness, they also report greater character, confidence, and connection. These correlations were consistent across all demographic groups, indicating that the demographic independent variables did not influence the relationship between parent-child connectedness and these three components of positive youth development. Parent-child connectedness was modestly positively related to caring for males and whites, indicating that for males and whites, as parent-child connectedness increases, so does the element of caring. Five separate multivariate regressions were conducted to examine the degree to which the demographic independent variables and parent-child connectedness construct predict the five components of positive youth development.

**Figure 2**Correlations between Parent-Child Connectedness and Components of Positive Youth Development

| Demographic | Caring | Character | Competence | Confidence | Connection |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male (n=410) | .14** | .07 | .03 | .30**** | .32**** |
| Female (n=502) | .03 | .06 | .07 | .25**** | .34**** |
| Public Ast. (n=90) | .06 | -.04 | .05 | .26**** | .34**** |
| No Public Ast. (n=758) | .06 | .08* | .01 | .29**** | .24* |
| Minority (n=287) | .05 | -.02 | .10 | .25** | .27**** |
| White (n=623) | .08* | .09* | .02 | .29**** | .35**** |

### 7.3. Parent-Child Connectedness Contributors Predicting Components of Positive Youth Development

Correlations were conducted to determine how each contributor to parent-child connectedness (climate of trust, communication, structure, and time together) were related to components of positive youth development (caring, character, competence, confidence, and connection) for each demographic group. Only those components of positive youth development that indicated statistical significance in previous correlations and regressions were included in this analysis phase; therefore, competence was excluded. These analyses are reported in Figure 3. Separate multivariate regressions were conducted to examine the degree to which the demographic independent variables and parent-child connectedness contributors predict the five components of positive youth development.

**Figure 3**Correlation between Contributors to Parent-Child Connectedness and Components of Positive Youth Development

| G | Caring | Character | Confidence | Connection |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Males (n=411)** | | | | |
| Trust | .74 | .05 | .15** | .19**** |
| Communication | .69 | .24 | .02 | -.02 |
| Structure | .06 | -.01 | -.04 | .07 |
| Time Together | .04 | .16*** | .13** | .15** |
| **Female (n=501)** | | | | |
| Trust | .04 | .24**** | .22**** | .36**** |
| Communication | .03 | .01 | .02 | -.01 |
| Structure | .03 | .04 | .03 | .03 |
| Time Together | .03 | .08 | .11* | .12** |
| **No Public Ast. (n=761)** | | | | |
| Trust | .05 | .18**** | .22**** | .32**** |
| Communication | .05 | .01 | .01 | .02 |
| Structure | .01 | .07* | .06 | .08* |
| Time Together | .04 | .11** | .14 | .15**** |
| **Public Ast. (n=90)** | | | | |
| Trust | .07 | .20 | .14 | .20 |
| Communication | .13 | -.01 | .01 | -.23* |
| Structure | .16 | -.31** | -.26* | -.07 |
| Time Together | .16 | .08 | -.17 | -.20 |
| **Minority (n=287)** | | | | |
| Trust | .00 | .05 | .11 | .20*** |
| Communication | .02 | -.08 | -.02 | -.10 |
| Structure | .15* | .04 | .05 | .12* |
| Time Together | -.04 | .07 | .06 | .05 |
| **White (n=623)** | | | | |
| Trust | .07 | .23**** | .24**** | .33**** |
| Communication | .09* | .05 | .02 | .02 |
| Structure | -.05 | .01 | -.02 | .01 |
| Time Together | .06 | .14**** | .16**** | .16**** |
| | | | | |

**8. Discussion**

This study examined parent-child connectedness and its associated constructs in relation to indicators of positive youth development. Specifically, this research considered the relationship between parent-child connectedness as assessed in early adolescence and indicators of positive youth development two years later.

This study sought to validate the Lezin et al. (2004) conceptualization of parent-child connectedness. This study concluded that climate of trust and time together were statistically significant and positively related across demographic groups in predicting parent-child connectedness. This finding indicates that regardless of gender, race/ethnicity, or socioeconomic standing, an increasing climate of trust and time spent together results in greater parent-child connectedness during early adolescence.

By contrast, the measures of communication and structure that were used in these analyses were not statistically significant and did not show a relationship. This may be attributed, in part, to how these constructs were measured. However, the lack of statistical significance among communication and structure leaves the question of how they relate to parent-child connectedness.

Fostering and preserving connection is important for the prevention of risk behaviors as well as promoting positive outcomes. However, when children reach early adolescence, parents often confront a paradox in that it becomes increasingly difficult to remain connected just at the age when it is also increasingly important. Results of the present study point to two tangible methods for building and fostering connectedness during the transition into adolescence: fostering a climate of trust and spending time together.

The present findings indicate that a climate of trust is one cornerstone of parent-child connectedness and also suggest directions to consider for understanding how to create and implement a climate of trust. Specifically, in this study, the climate of trust measure included how close the adolescent felt to their mother figure and father figure as well as how much they believed they were cared about by their mother and father figure(s). Understanding that these perceptions help to create a climate of trust, thereby increasing parent-child connectedness, may informstakeholderson identifying ways for parents to demonstrate these feelings to their young adolescents.

In addition to maintaining a climate of trust, spending time together is also associated with parent-child connectedness in early adolescence. A variety of contexts for time together were included, as adolescents were asked to report on the following activities that they have had in the last four weeks with their mother or father figures: gone shopping, played a sport, gone to a religious service or church-related event, gone to a movie, play, museum, concert, or sports event, and worked on a school project. Thus, it appears that even casual engagement may foster parent-child connection. Despite the resistance parents may receive, they should be encouraged to persist in their effort to engage with their young adolescents.

This study also sought to examine how parent-child connectedness predicted components of positive youth development two years later. The current findings indicate that across demographic groups, parent-child connectedness is predictive of three positive youth development components: character, confidence, and connection.

Positive youth development is a relatively new domain of research, and much of the existing literature focuses on ecological contexts such as schools, youth programs, and community organizations as the scaffolding for building and maintaining positive youth development. However, the results of this research acknowledge that the parent-child relationship also plays a significant role in supporting positive youth development, specifically, character, confidence, and connection. Parent-child connectedness in early adolescence predicts a young person's character, confidence, and connection two years later. This establishes the parent-child relationship as another important ecological context within the domain of positive youth development.

Based on the findings that parent-child connectedness is predictive of components of positive youth development, more detailed analyses were conducted to determine exactly which of the four contributors to parent-child connectedness were predictive of the five components of positive youth development. The overall trend that emerged from this phase of analysis is that a climate of trust and time together between parents and young adolescents is predictive of adolescent character, confidence, and connection two years later. These findings align with the earlier conclusions regarding the Lezin et al. (2004) conceptualization of parent-child connectedness. That is, the climate of trust and time together proved to be significant in predicting both parent-child connectedness and elements of positive youth development. Additionally, character, confidence, and connection are significantly predicted by parent-child connectedness. Ultimately, climate of trust and time together in the parent-child relationship contribute to the development of character, confidence, and connection in early adolescence, both directly and via the creation of parent-child connectedness.

While the focus of the study was to look at how the broad construct of parent-child connectedness predicted positive youth development, examining how the individual contributors to parent-child connectedness predict the specific elements of positive youth development has practical implications. By breaking down these broad constructs into their individual components, practitioners may be able to deliberately develop programming that promotes these contributors and components. That is to say, rather than taking on the whole entity of parent-child connectedness, developers can pinpoint specific constructs to intentionally achieve the contributors to parent-child connectedness and components of positive youth development. Acknowledging the importance of a climate of trust and time together allows practitioners to build and implement programming that best suits the families they serve. For example, family life educators may incorporate activities that help young adolescents identify how parents demonstrate love and care for them. Additionally, practitioners and family life educators may choose to create programming that integrates both constructs.

## 9. Limitations

While the Add Health dataset is a nationally representative sample, secondary data limits the information that can be gleaned. That is, the items used to create measures may not have accurately assessed some of the constructs as well as other instrumentation might have been able to do. For example, adolescents were asked to report on their conversations in the last four weeks with their mother or father. These conversations may not have the depth and intimacy needed to foster a connection and may have occurred too infrequently. Future research may include the type and frequency of communication that contributes to parent-child connectedness.

Secondary data may account for the low Cronbach's alphas for some of the scales. Caring was only a one-item measure, which may have limited its ability to accurately assess the construct. To obtain an accurate assessment of caring, items should reflect an adolescent's ability to be both sympathetic and empathetic (Lerner et al., 2003). Competence had the lowest Cronbach's alpha reliability, at .26. The items composing this measure primarily focused on problem-solving competence, which may evoke questions surrounding validity. In order to accurately assess the element of competence, items need to include social, academic, cognitive, and vocational domains(Lerner et al., 2003).

## 10.Future Study

Based on the findings of this study, future research needs to focus on specific, meaningful ways for young adolescents and their parents to build a climate of trust and spend time together. Additionally, future research may examine whether parent-child connectedness relates to competence and caring, utilizing more reliable measures. While additional research is needed to understand how to best achieve a climate of trust and spending time together, the study indicates the importance for parents of young adolescents to maintain a connection with their children as they transition into adolescence. This will result in adolescents with greater character, confidence, and connection.

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