



Society for Research in Child Development

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PRESS RELEASE

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Moms Influence How Children Develop Advanced Cognitive Functions

Executive functioning is a set of advanced cognitive functions—such as the ability to control impulses, remember things, and show mental flexibility—that help us plan and monitor what we do to reach goals. Although executive functioning develops speedily between ages 1 and 6, children vary widely in their skills in this area. Now a new longitudinal study tells us that moms play a role in how their children develop these abilities.

The study was conducted at the University of Montreal and the University of Minnesota. It appears in the January/February 2010 issue of the journal *Child Development*.

The researchers looked at 80 pairs of middle-income Canadian moms and their year-old babies. It turns out that the ways moms act when they're playing and solving puzzles with their babies can explain some of the differences in children's development of executive functioning.

Children of moms who answered their children's requests for help quickly and accurately; talked about their children's preferences, thoughts, and memories during play; and encouraged successful strategies to help solve difficult problems performed better at a year and a half and 2 years on tasks that call for executive skills than children of moms who didn't use these techniques in interacting with their youngsters.

"The study sheds light on the role parents play in helping children develop skills that are important for later school success and social competence," according to Annie Bernier, professor of psychology at the University of Montreal and the study's lead author.

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Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 81, Issue 1, *From External Regulation to Self-Regulation: Early Parenting Precursors of Young Children's Executive Functioning* by Bernier, A (University of Montreal), Carlson, SM (University of Minnesota), and Whipple, N (University of Montreal). Copyright 2010 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.