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Two Days Later: Adolescents' Conflicts With Family Spill Over to School, Vice Versa

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Family Conflict, Mood, and Adolescents' Daily School Problems: Moderating Roles of Internalizing and Externalizing Symptoms

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The lives of adolescents at home and at school may seem quite separate, but recent research has highlighted important connections. Family conflict and problems at school tend to occur together on the same day and sometimes even spill over in both directions to the next day, with family conflict increasing the likelihood of problems at school and vice versa. Now a new study has found that conflicts at home spill over to school and school problems influence problems at home up to two days later, and that negative mood and psychological symptoms are important factors in the process.

The study, by researchers at the University of Southern California, appears in the journal *Child Development*.

The kinds of problems that spill over from home and school include arguments between teens and their parents, doing poorly on a quiz or test, cutting class, having difficulty understanding coursework, and not finishing assignments.

“Spillover processes have been recognized but are not well understood,” according to Adela C. Timmons, a doctoral student, and Gayla Margolin, professor of psychology, both at the University of Southern California, who conducted the study. “Evidence of spillover for as long as two days suggests that some teens get caught in a reverberating cycle of negative events.”

The study also found that teens’ negative mood might be a way that problems are transmitted across areas (for example, failing a test might lead to irritability, which in turn could lead to conflict with parents). In addition, mental health symptoms may put adolescents at risk for intensified spillover. Teens with more symptoms of anxiety and depression showed stronger associations between conflict with parents and same-day negative mood.

To capture the day-to-day variability in adolescents' experiences of family conflict and school problems, more than a hundred 13- to 17-year-olds and their mothers and fathers completed questions at the end of each day for 14 days. The families represented a range of races and ethnicities, and a range of incomes. All three family members reported on family conflict during the day that was ending, and teens also reported on their mood and their school experiences on the same day. Adolescents also completed one-time questionnaires of symptoms associated with depression, anxiety, and externalizing problems.

The findings of this study can inform interventions to help teens better handle their negative moods and to improve teens' relationships with family as well as how they do academically.

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Summarized from *Child Development*, Family Conflict, Mood, and Adolescents' Daily School Problems: Moderating Roles of Internalizing and Externalizing Symptoms by Timmons, AC, and Margolin, G (University of Southern California). Copyright 2014 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.