

Parental Warmth and Affection

Headline

Most mothers and fathers report that they hug their children and tell their children that they love them every day, with daily hugs as high as 90 percent or more for the youngest children. ([See Figure 1](#)) ([See Figure 2](#))

Importance

Many studies have shown that warmth in the parent-child relationship is related to positive outcomes for children. Higher self-esteem, better parent-child communication, and fewer psychological and behavior problems have been linked to warmth and affection between parent and child.¹ Parental warmth and affection is also positively related to adolescent academic competence and negatively related to teen pregnancy and associations with deviant peers.² Parental warmth is even found to encourage children's use of social support and proactive, problem-focused coping styles.³ Conversely, receiving insufficient levels of parental support can foster feelings of alienation, expressions of hostility and aggression, diminished self-esteem, and antisocial and risk behaviors.⁴

Trends

Estimates available for 1997 (the only year for which data are available) show that 87 percent of mothers and 73 percent of fathers hug or show physical affection to their child (under age 13) at least once a day. Eighty-five percent of mothers and 62 percent of fathers tell their child that they love him or her at least once a day. Though the percentage of mothers and fathers who tell their child that they appreciate something he or she did is lower than the other two behaviors, the difference between mothers and fathers is found here as well (55 percent and 37 percent, respectively). ([See Figure 1](#))

Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin

Ninety-three percent of white, non-Hispanic mothers report hugging their child at least once a day, compared to 81 percent of Hispanic mothers and 75 percent of black, non-Hispanic mothers. Among fathers, more white, non-Hispanics and Hispanics report daily hugging (76 percent and 73 percent, respectively) than do black, non-Hispanic fathers (56 percent). White, non-Hispanic and Hispanic fathers are also more likely than black, non-Hispanic fathers to tell their child he or she is loved (65 and 63 percent compared to 45 percent). ([See Table 1](#))

Differences by Parental Education Level

For all three behaviors, mothers with less than a high school education are less likely to show their child warmth than are parents with higher levels of educational attainment.

For example, 75 percent of mothers with less than a high school education hug or show physical affection to their child at least once a day, compared to 87 percent of mothers with a high school diploma, 91 percent of mothers with some college, and 94 percent of mothers with college degrees. Similarly, more college-educated fathers (77 percent) report hugging their child daily than do fathers with less than a high school education (68 percent) or fathers with a high school diploma (70 percent) ([See Table 1](#)). However, educational attainment of fathers was not associated with the other two measures of warmth and affection.

Differences by Age of Child

Overall, displays of warmth by both mothers and fathers decrease as children get older. For example, over 90 percent of mothers and fathers report hugging their children ages three and under on a daily basis, compared to 74 percent of mothers and 50 percent of fathers hugging children ages 10 to 12. ([See Figure 2](#))

State and Local Estimates

None

International Estimates

None

National Goals

None

Definition

To assess the amount of warmth and affection parents show their children, three questions from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics – Child Development Supplement (PSID-CDS) are examined. Parents of children ages 12 and younger who are living with their children were asked to report how often, in the past month, they: 1) hugged or showed physical affection to their child; 2) told their child that they loved him/her; and 3) told their child that they appreciated something he/she did.

Data Source

Child Trends. 2002. *Charting Parenthood: A Statistical Portrait of Fathers and Mothers in America*. Washington, D.C.: Child Trends.

<http://www.childtrends.org/PDF/ParenthoodRpt2002.pdf> (See Indicator P10 and Table P10.1)

Raw Data Source

Panel Study of Income Dynamics – Child Development Supplement (PSID-CDS).

<http://www.isr.umich.edu/src/child-development/home.html>

Approximate Date of Next Update

None

¹ Cox, M. (forthcoming). Parent-child relationships. In M. Bornstein, L. Davidson, C. Keyes, and K. Moore (Eds.), *Well-being: positive development across the lifespan*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

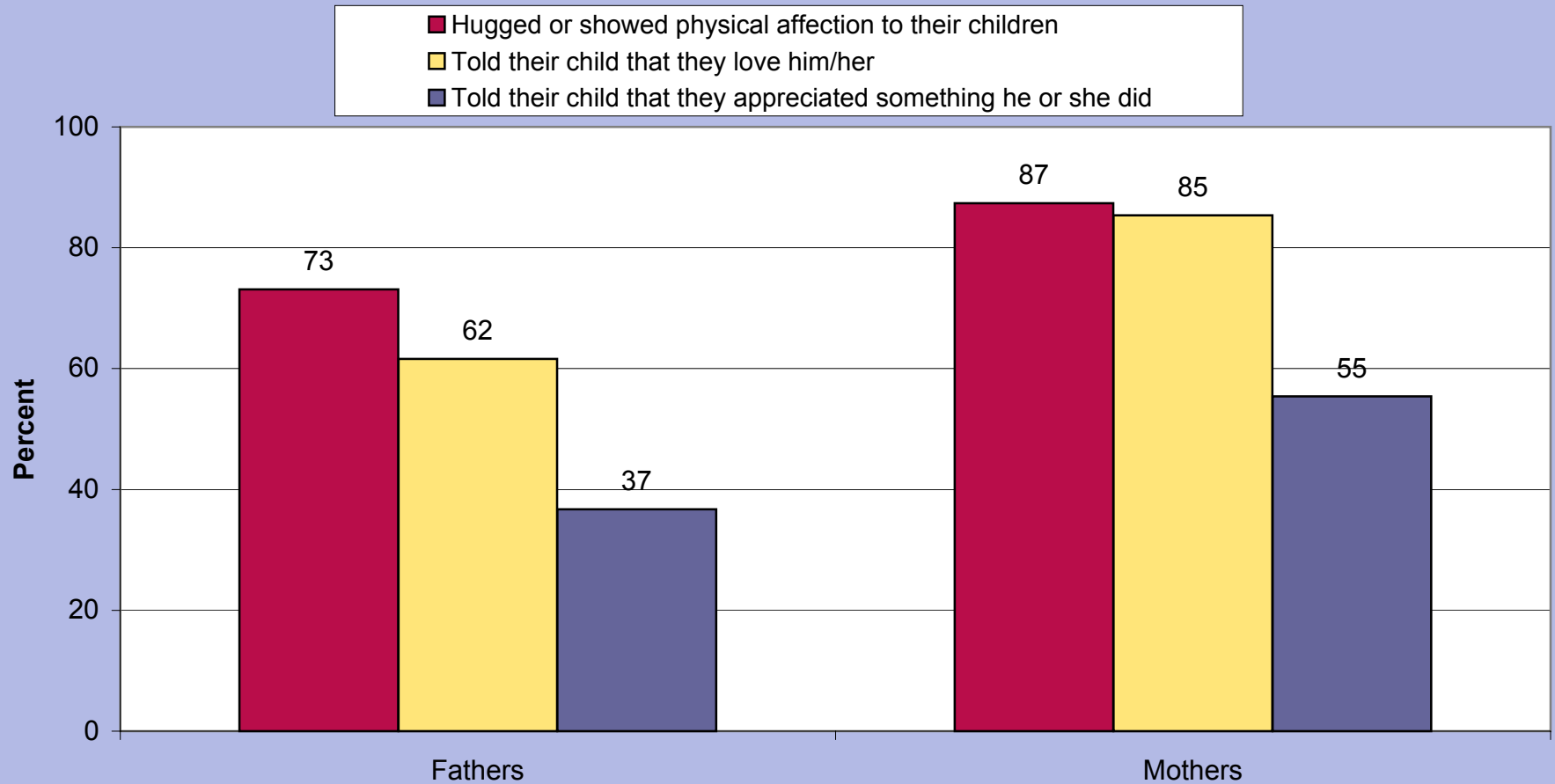
² Scaramella, L.V., Conger, R.D., Simons, R.L., & Whitbeck, L.B. (1998). Predicting risk for pregnancy by late adolescence: A social contextual perspective. *Developmental Psychology*, *34*(6), pp. 1233-1245.

³ McIntyre, J.G. & Dusek, J.B. (1995). Perceived parental rearing practices and styles of coping. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *24*(4), pp. 499-509.

⁴ Young, M.H., Miller, B.C., Norton, M.C., & Hill, E.J. (1995). The effect of parental supportive behaviors on life satisfaction of adolescent offspring. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *57*, 813-822.

Figure 1

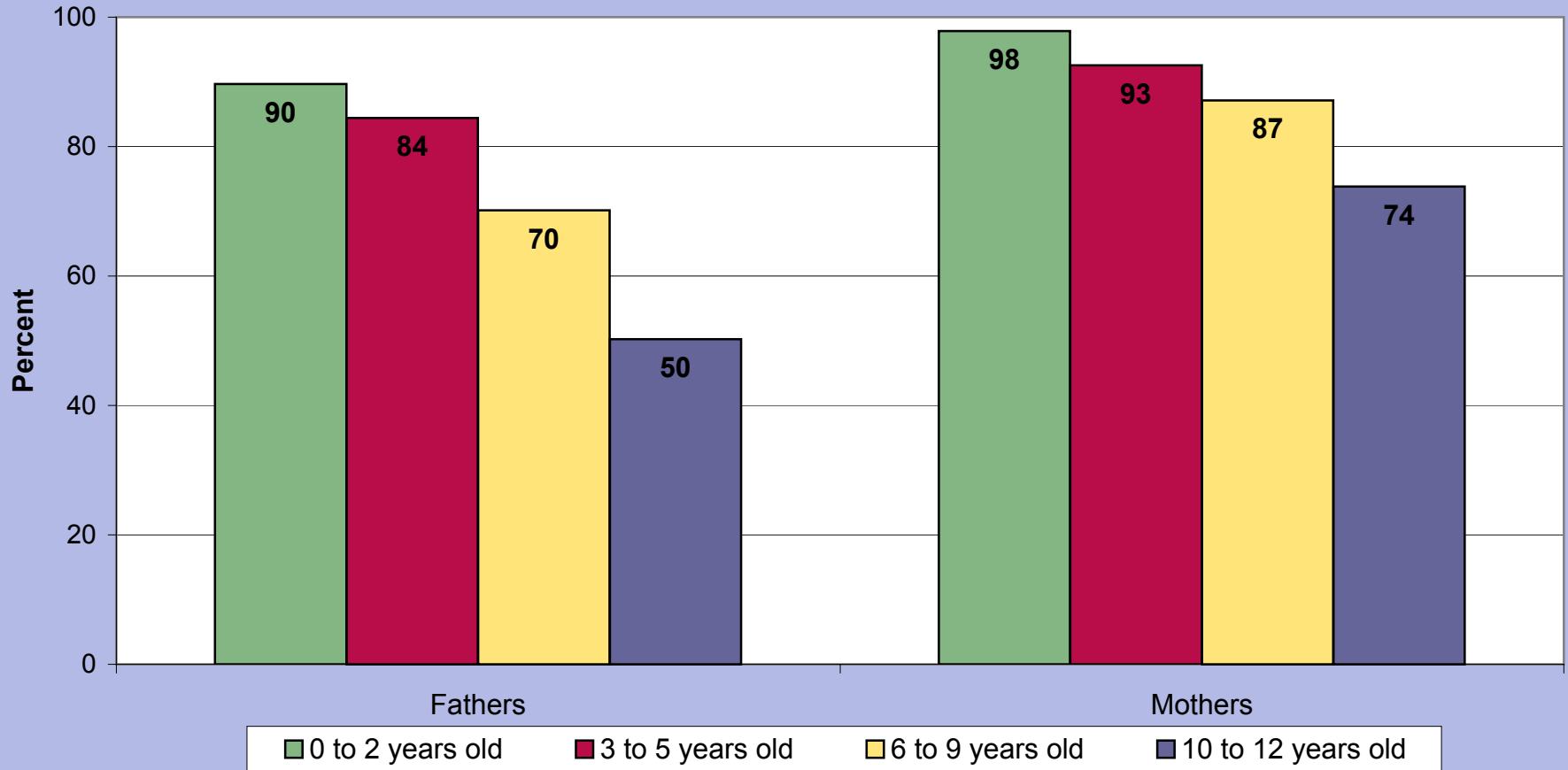
Percentage of Parents with Children Under Age 13 Who Provided Various Forms of Warmth and Affection Every Day During the Past Month, 1997



Source: *Charting Parenthood: A Statistical Portrait of Fathers and Mothers in America*. Washington, DC: Child Trends.

Figure 2

Percentage of Resident Fathers and Mothers of Children Under Age 13 Who Hugged Their Child Every Day in the Past Month, by Child's Age, 1997



Source: Reproduced from Child Trends 2002. *Charting Parenthood: A Statistical Portrait of Fathers and Mothers in America*. Washington, DC: Child Trends. Figure P10.1.



Table 1

Percentage of Parents of Children Under Age 13 Who Provided Various Forms of Warmth and Affection Every Day in the Past Month: 1997

	Fathers			Mothers		
	Hugged or showed physical affection to their children	Told their child that they love him/her	Told their child that they appreciated something he or she did	Hugged or showed physical affection to their children	Told their child that they love him/her	Told their child that they appreciated something he or she did
Total	73	62	37	87	85	55
Race and Hispanic Origin¹						
White non-Hispanic	76	65	36	93	91	56
Black non-Hispanic	56	45	40	75	76	56
Hispanic	73	63	41	81	77	52
Other	61	40	32	78	76	53
Poverty Status						
Poor (0 to 99% poverty)	67	63	44	78	80	55
Extreme poverty (at 50% or less)	58	60	47	78	80	49
Nonpoor	74	61	36	90	87	55
100% to 199% of poverty	74	60	43	88	85	58
200% to 299% of poverty	73	58	32	86	86	53
300% or more of poverty	74	64	34	93	88	55
Family Structure						
Two parents	73	62	37	89	86	55
Both biological and/or adoptive	75	63	37	89	86	55
Mother only	-	-	-	81	83	56
Age of Child						
0 to 2 years old	90	80	56	98	95	73
3 to 5 years old	84	69	44	93	91	66
6 to 9 years old	70	55	31	87	85	48
10 to 12 years old	50	45	17	74	72	39
Age of Child's Mother in Household						
18 to 24 years old	88	82	55	94	93	70
25 to 44 years old	73	61	35	87	86	55
45 to 65 years old	57	47	27	77	65	37
Age of Child's Father in Household						
18 to 24 years old	89	86	63	93	91	75
25 to 44 years old	74	61	36	89	87	55
45 to 65 years old	62	54	29	87	78	49
Educational Attainment of Child's Mother in Household						
Less than high school	67	58	45	75	75	46
High school diploma or GED	71	60	33	87	87	56
Vocational/technical or some college	76	63	35	91	90	60
College graduate	75	63	37	94	88	54
Educational Attainment of Child's Father in Household						
Less than high school	68	63	38	86	82	55
High school diploma or GED	70	59	37	87	85	56
Vocational/technical or some college	75	63	37	90	87	52
College graduate	77	62	34	95	90	58
Employment Status of Child's Mother in Household						
Not in labor force	78	67	44	86	82	57
Looking for work	49	31	21	81	80	59
Working	71	60	32	89	88	54
Employment Status of Child's Father in Household						
Not in labor force	61	46	36	81	75	52
Looking for work	60	41	36	86	77	68
Working	74	62	36	90	87	55

¹Estimates for whites and blacks exclude Hispanics of those races. Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.
Source: Reproduced from Child Trends 2002. *Charting Parenthood: A Statistical Portrait of Fathers and Mothers in America*. Washington, DC: Child Trends.