

[IMAGE]

Watching and Learning

Who's teaching your children these days? Are you teaching them? As parents, you can exert more influence over their lives than anyone else, and your children will learn from the good examples you provide as well as the bad ones.

If you don't believe that, consider a recent study that examined the potential for health-risk behaviors to be transmitted from parents to offspring. More than 300 children and their parents participated in the study, which focused on five specific negative health

- poor eating habits;
- excessive drinking;
- smoking;
- inadequate sleep; and
- physical inactivity.

The authors selected families from a rural eight-county area in North Central Iowa from 1989-1994. Families chosen had at least two children in 1989: one child in seventh grade (the focus child of the study), and a sibling within four years of age of the seventh grader. Results are presented below:

- 1) Parents' behaviors significantly influenced the health-risk behaviors of their children.
- 2) This influence occurred in two ways: by transmitting (teaching) specific behaviors and by sharing the health-risk lifestyle with them.

3) Fathers' specific negative behaviors seemed to affect only boys.

4) Mothers' specific negative behaviors seemed to affect only girls.

If you think your kids don't listen or learn from anything you say or do, you're not giving yourself (or them) enough credit. Your children are watching and learning from you, so point them in the direction of health and wellness < chances are they'll follow.

Reference:

Wickrama KAS, Conger RD, Wallace LE, et al. The intergenerational transmission of health-risk behaviors: adolescent lifestyles and gender moderating effects. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, Sept. 1999: Vol. 40, pp258-72.

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