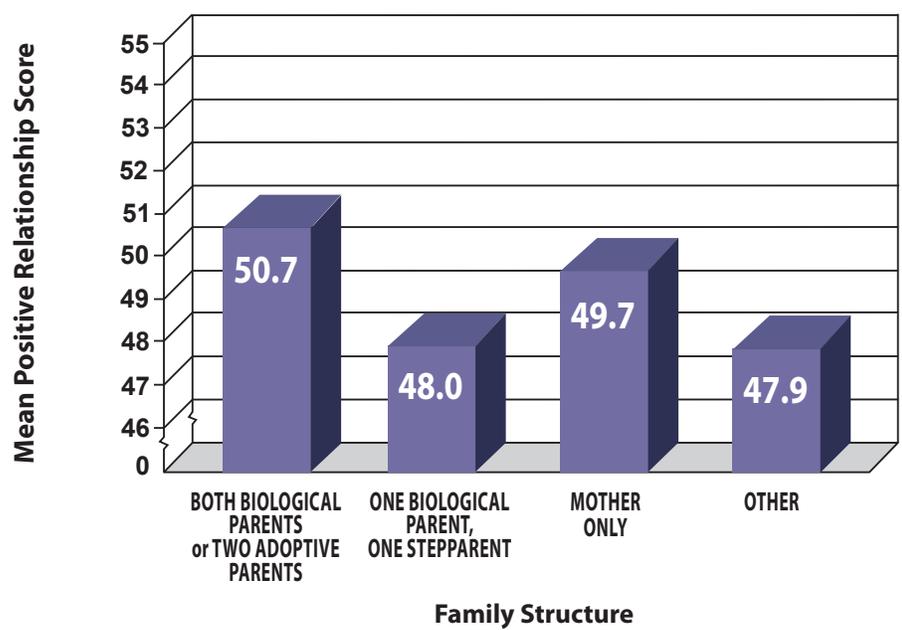




# Quality of Parent-Child Relationship and Family Structure

## Quality of Parent-Child Relationship by Family Structure



Source: National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH)

*This chart is taken from a study conducted by Nicholas Zill, Ph.D.<sup>1</sup> for Family Research Council.<sup>2</sup>*

Children who live with both biological parents or two adoptive parents are likely to have a higher quality relationship with their parents than those who do not.

According to the National Survey of Children’s Health, children who live with both biological parents or two adoptive parents score higher on the positive parental relationship scale (50.7) than children who live within other family configurations (47.9),

such as with their father only or foster parents.<sup>3</sup> In between are those who live with a biological parent and a stepparent (48.0) and those who live with single mothers (49.7).<sup>4</sup>

### Other Studies

Several other studies not only corroborate the direction of these findings but also emphasize the importance of parental marriage in the quality of parent-child relationships. Sandra Hofferth of the University of Maryland and Kermyt Anderson of the University of Oklahoma “found evidence to support the view that marriage per se confers advantage in terms of father involvement above and beyond the characteristics of the fathers themselves, whereas biology does not.”<sup>5</sup>

Alan Booth and Paul Amato of the Pennsylvania State University also reported that “parental divorce appeared to lower the quality of [children’s] relations with parents.”<sup>6</sup>

In an examination of adult child-parent relations, Diane Lye of the University of Washington found that “divorced fathers are less likely to be in contact with their children, are less likely to be emotionally close to their children, and are less likely to be involved in exchanges of assistance with their children.”<sup>7</sup>

As the data indicate, married intact families cultivate the highest quality parent-child relationships.

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- 1 Nicholas Zill is a research psychologist and consultant. Until his recent retirement, he was a vice president of Westat Inc. He was the founder of Child Trends and its executive director for 13 years.
  - 2 This chart draws on data collected by the National Center for Health Statistics in the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) in 2003. The data sample consisted of parents of 102,353 children and teens in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. 68,996 of these children and teens were between six and 17 years old, the age group that was the focus of the study. The survey sample in this age range represented a population of nearly 49 million young people nationwide.
  - 3 “Other family configurations” also include children living with grandparent or other relatives.
  - 4 Most of the parents in the “biological parent and a stepparent” category are married.
  - 5 Sandra L. Hofferth and Kermyt G. Anderson, “Are All Dads Equal? Biology versus Marriage as a Basis for Parental Investment,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 65 (2003): 213-232.
  - 6 Alan Booth and Paul R. Amato, “Parental Predivorce Relations and Offspring Postdivorce Well-Being,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 63 (2001): 197-212.
  - 7 Diane N. Lye, “Adult Child-Parent Relationships,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 22 (1996): 79-102.



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