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Children's Beliefs About and Preferences for Protective Versus Risky Parents and Their Children

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Abstract

We investigated how 7–11-year-old children ($N = 160$) think about and evaluate parental protectiveness. We presented two parent-child dyads who differed in protectiveness: One parent was consistently highly protective (e.g. requiring extensive protective gear for biking); the other consistently permitted risky behaviors (biking without protective gear in a busy parking lot). Participants then made a range of judgments. They judged the more-protective parent as better overall, but also showed context-sensitivity: On a risky field trip, they preferred the more-protective parent as chaperone; but increasingly with age preferred the less-protective parent for a safe field trip. With respect to the parents' children, participants judged the less-protected child to be popular and mischievous. In contrast, they judged the more-protected child to be brilliant and nice, and would rather have that child come to their house or be class president. These findings reveal that children consider and reason about differences in parental protectiveness.