



## Importance of Social Supports to Resiliency for Youth

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Adolescents in low-income families are vulnerable to behavior problems. Exposure to stress and trauma, lack of resources, and unmet basic needs all increase the risk for adverse behavioral outcomes. In turn, these behavioral problems can further threaten healthy functioning and long-term well-being by impeding academic engagement and performance, increasing risk for criminal justice involvement, and interfering with healthy relationships.

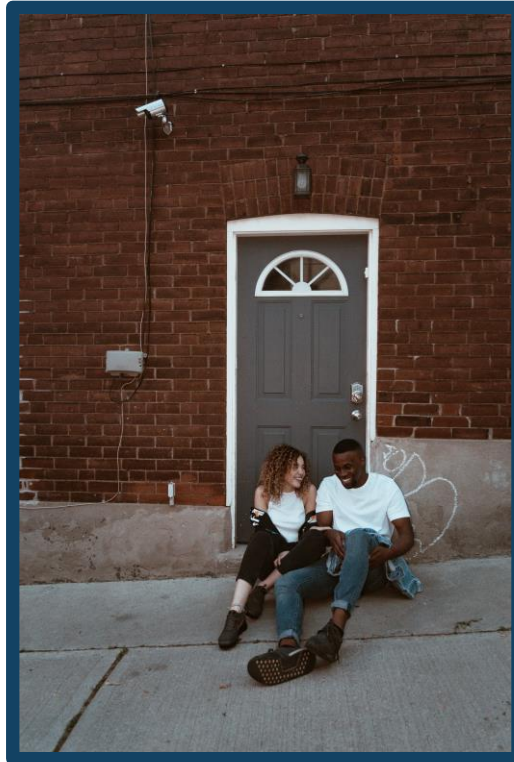


Figure 1 Photograph by Photo by Wendy Wei:  
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/smiling-man-and-woman-sitting-beside-door-2719510/> CCO

“Stable, connected communities with highly embedded social networks can promote housing stability and youth well-being in a virtuous cycle.”

Relationships with family members, friends, and neighbors may be particularly important for youth when they grow up in families with financial and social stressors. For example, money and other instrumental support from social networks may help protect against housing insecurity, which can be further harm children and parents. Emotional support from friends and family can also be helpful as it gives youth a sense of continuity and security.

### Highlights

**Informal supports are an important sources of resilience for low-income families who may be excluded from or are reluctant to engage with formal social systems.**

**Social ties can help households withstand threats to their living arrangements and may be a powerful tool in disrupting pathways to behavior problems among teens.**

We wanted to know whether social support and neighborhood cohesion predicted adolescent behavior problems over a 10-year period. If so, we also wanted to know whether housing insecurity explained these links.

### **Methods**

We used data from a large study of at-risk mothers and their children from 20 large cities across the U.S. Using structural equation modeling, we tested pathways from informal supports to housing insecurity and teen behavior problems.

### **Results**

- Cohesive neighborhoods and support from friends and family members can reduce risk for behavior problems in adolescence.
- There are direct links between social support and anxious/depressed behaviors. Neighborhood cohesion is related to lower aggression.
- Reduced housing insecurity is one mechanism by which informal neighborhood and family supports can reduce adolescent behavior problems.
- Strengthening ties within neighborhoods can promote stable housing and youth well-being.
- Relationships, like resilience, can be built and fostered in families facing poverty or other forms of marginalization. Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers who care about family and child well-being can consider how strengthening neighborhoods and communities can likewise stabilize families and individuals.

## **HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?**

An ecological perspective informed our efforts to identify alternative, informal sources of resilience for marginalized populations.

### **What Does This Mean For Research and Evaluation?**

Our findings inform the understanding of resilience among at-risk families with children. Informal support protects families from insecure housing, even controlling for household income. Thus, social ties can help households withstand threats to their living arrangements and may be a powerful tool in disrupting pathways to adverse behavioral outcomes among children. Given the scarcity of housing assistance for low-income households, promoting connectedness and supporting strong informal networks are key strategies to mitigate risk for housing insecurity and subsequent child behavioral problems.

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