

# *Family Structure, Father Closeness, and Delinquency*

## *A Report from National Fatherhood Initiative*

This report examines the relationships between adolescent delinquency and the types of family structures in which adolescents live. It addresses *why* certain family structures tend to produce lower levels of risk for adolescent delinquency, with an emphasis on the role that father involvement plays in helping adolescents avoid risky behavior. Delinquency is broken down into five categories: theft, violence, running away, disorderly conduct, and weapons use.

### **Major Findings**

- The closer adolescents feel to their fathers, regardless of the type of family structure in which they live, the less likely it is that they will engage in delinquent behavior.
- On measures of violence, disorder, and running away, father closeness has independent, positive, and powerful effects on adolescents. For theft, disorder, and running away, mother closeness has independent, positive, and powerful effects on adolescents. Fathers tend to regulate violence among adolescents more than mothers do, and mothers tend to regulate theft among adolescents more than fathers do.
- The highest levels of closeness between adolescents and both their fathers and their mothers are found in intact families. Father closeness decreases in blended (step) families, is even lower in single-parent families, and is lowest in no-parent families.
- Given that father closeness reduces adolescent delinquency, and that father closeness is highest in intact families, adolescents in intact families are at the lowest level of risk for engaging in delinquent acts. The level of risk for adolescent delinquency is about the same in blended families, increases in single-parent families, and is highest in no-parent families.
- Given that both fathers and mothers play significant roles in reducing adolescent delinquency, efforts to reduce adolescent delinquency must emphasize the strengthening of parent-adolescent relationships, regardless of the type of family structure in which the adolescent lives. The strengthening of father-adolescent relationships is especially important for the millions of adolescents living in father-absent homes, where limited contact with nonresident fathers is inadequate.

For full studies, visit: [www.fatherhood.org/research.htm](http://www.fatherhood.org/research.htm)



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