

# Parenting study: Italians strict, French moderate, Canadians lenient

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Canadian teenagers enjoy more freedom than French and Italian peers, according to a new study published in the *Journal of Adolescence*. The investigation, which examined how parents fashion emotional bonds and exert behavioural control with adolescents, was led by scientists from the University of Montreal, the Université de Rennes in France and the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Italy.

Canada, France and Italy were compared because the countries have commonalities: Latin languages, Catholic history and advanced industrialization. Questionnaires were answered by adolescents whose parents were born in their country of residence: 522 Canadians from Montreal (54.8 percent girls; 45.2 percent boys); 336 French from Rennes (65.8 percent girls; 34.2 percent boys); 398 Italians from Milan (47.2 percent girls; 52.8 percent boys).

Teens were asked to describe parents according to emotional bonding, communication, frequency of conflict, rules, discipline and tolerance of friend-related activities.

“Parents are perceived as emotionally bonded by teens from all three countries, yet perception of parental control contrasted between Italy and Canada. Of all three countries, Italian mothers and fathers are perceived as using the most constraining practices,” says first author Michel Claes, a University of Montreal psychology professor.

“Italian parents are seen as more demanding in rules and authorizations. They take more punitive actions when rules are broken and are less tolerant of peer socialization,” he adds. “They uphold family regulations and require their adolescents to ask for authorizations until a much later age.”

“Our study found Canadian parents to be the most tolerant. They, had less rules and less disciplinary actions,” says Dr. Claes. “Canadian mothers and fathers were seen as less punitive, less coercive and more tolerant than French and Italian mothers.”

The French were found to parent in a moderate style. French fathers, however, were perceived by teens as emotionally distant, rigid and prone to intergenerational conflict. French mothers, for their part, were reported to foster closer bonds as their children grew into adolescence.

In all three countries, teens experienced a gradual decrease in behavioural control between the ages of 11 and 19: fathers and mothers reduced requirements and disciplinary constraints.

“Our study found parental control is dictated by social codes and culture-specific values, which promote certain parental

practices and proscribe others,” says Dr. Claes, noting that Canadian parents value a democratic conception of education that promotes independence and negotiation, while Europeans parents, especially Italians, advocate for obligations and respect for parental authority.

**Partners in research:**

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**About the study:**

The paper, “Adolescents’ perceptions of parental practices: A cross-national comparison of Canada, France, and Italy,” published in the *Journal of Adolescence*, was authored by Michel Claes, Amélie Benoit and Éric Lacourse of the University of Montreal, (Canada); Cyrille Perchec and Françoise Bariaud of the Université de Rennes, (France); Dave Miranda of the University of Ottawa, (Canada); Margherita Lanz and Elena Marta of the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, (Italy).

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