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Cohesion in parent-adolescent relationships within different family structures and birth orders

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Previous research reports relationship closeness and cohesion between parents and adolescents decrease throughout adolescence (Collins, 1990; Collins & Russell, 1991; Hill & Holmbeck, 1987). It has also been found that birth order and family structure play a role in changes in conflict and cohesion (Campione-Barr, N. & Pasch, 2008; Campione-Barr & Smetana, under review; Vandewater, E.A., & Lansford, J.E. 1998). The purpose of the present study was to examine cohesion and closeness between parents and adolescents in different family structures and birth orders. It was hypothesized that two-parent families with first-borns would have greatest cohesion, followed by two-parent later-borns, then single/step-parent family first-borns and then single/step later-borns would show lowest cohesion. Participants included 118 adolescent boys and girls in 7th and 10th grade, along with a parent. Participants were equally divided between two groups: those who were first-born in their families and those who were later-born. Three separate hierarchical regression analyses were used to test the hypotheses; one for adolescents' relationships with their mothers, one for their relationships with their fathers, and one for the participating parent's relationship with their adolescent. According to adolescents, those in two-parent families had more trust and communication with fathers than those in single or step-parent families. According to parents, trust and communication were greater in two-parent families than in step-parent families and relationships were better with first-borns than with later-borns. There were no significant effects for adolescents' reports with mothers.