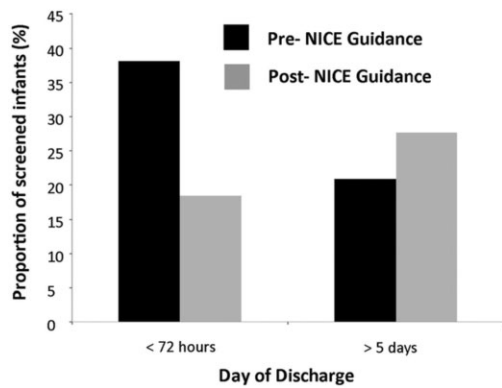
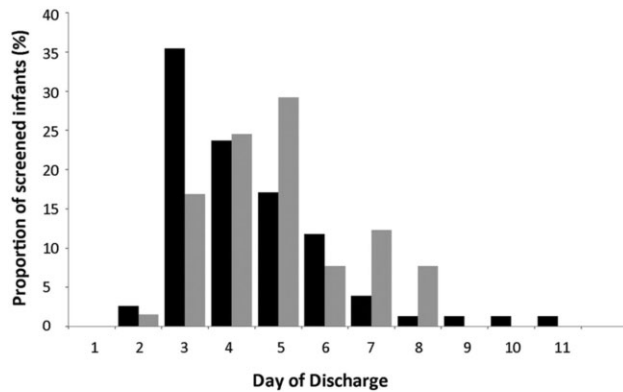




Heads Up



Excessive parental praise breeds narcissism

A longitudinal Dutch Study¹ of 565 children aged 7–12 years found that if parents ‘overvalue’ them – believing they are better, more special and deserve more – it leads to the development of narcissism, a trait linked to poor empathy, aggression and violence. This social learning theory finding flies against conventional psychoanalytical theory that narcissism is cultivated by a lack of parental warmth (unsupported by the study results). No gender difference was found between parents or children. Parental warmth was associated with high self-esteem in kids, who think they are as good as others, not better (narcissists). While children younger than seven may be narcissistic, these tendencies fade as more complex social relationships develop. If a child is given too much power and status in the parental relationship, unrealistic expectations (and later depression) develop when the child fails to be the ‘celebrity’ they think they are. Undue parental praise for tiny or non-achievements is actually harmful and a rising Western phenomenon linked to the advent of social media.²

References

- 1 Brummelman E *et al.* *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A.* 2015; doi: 10.1073/pnas.1420870112; Advance online publication.
- 2 Zehetner AA. The nature of celebrity: a poisoned chalice for today’s children? *J. Paediatr. Child Health* 2012; **48**: 455.

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