Just Hearing Mom's Voice Comforts Stressed-Out Daughters

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A stressed-out girl is as soothed by a phone call from Mom as by a hug from her, according to a study from University of Wisconsin at Madison and published in *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*.

For the study, researchers increased the stress levels of a group of 7- to 12-year-old girls by asking them to perform impromptu speeches and a series of math problems in front of a group of strangers.

Scientists measured the girls' stress by noting the rise in their cortisol levels. (Cortisol is a hormone associated with stress.)

Once stressed, a third of the girls received in-person comfort from their mothers with hugs or an arm around the shoulder, one third watched an emotionally neutral video and the remaining girls spoke to their mothers on the phone.

The result? Children who interacted with their mothers on the phone and in person had the same hormonal response, said Leslie Seltzer, PhD, a biological anthropologist at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and the study's author.

The girls' oxytocin levels also rose significantly and eliminated cortisol levels. (Oxytocin, known as the "love hormone," is associated with emotional bonding.)

"It was understood that oxytocin release in the context of social bonding usually required physical contact," Seltzer said. "But it's clear from these results that a mother's voice can have the same effect as a hug, even if they're not standing there."

Did you know men and women respond to stress differently? Click here to learn why.

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