Emotion & Self-Regulation in Parents of Children with Developmental Challenges

Nastassia Hajal, PhD

Attending Psychologist
Family Stress, Trauma, & Resilience Clinic
PEERS for Preschoolers Program

Clinical Researcher
Nathanson Family Resilience Center

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Overview

1. Why it is crucial to consider parental emotion
2. Emotion, stress, & coping in parents of children with developmental challenges
3. Integrating parent emotion regulation into treatment

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Keeping Parental Emotions in Mind

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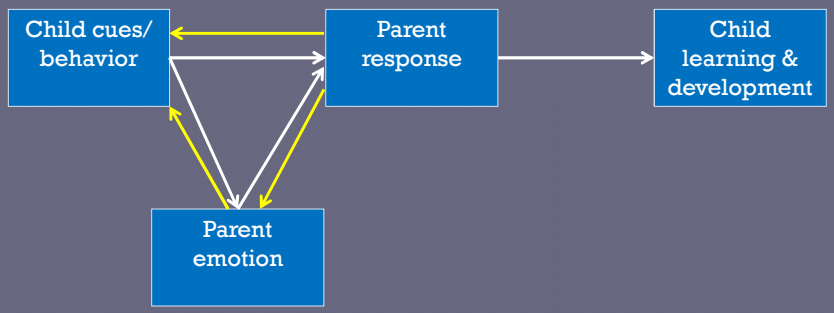
Parenting & development

- Parents play a central role in healthy child development



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Parenting & Emotion

Caring for children is emotionally evocative

&

Emotions organize parenting behavior

Dix, 1991

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Parenting & Emotion

Caring for children is emotionally evocative

- Observation during parent-child interaction
  - Facial expressions
  - Vocal tone
- Psychophysiology
- Self-report

Dix et al., 2004 / Cole, LeDonne, & Tan, 2013 / Bugental, Blue, & Lewis, 1990 / Bartels & Zeki, 2004 / Lorberbaum et al., 2002 / Strathearn et al., 2008 Swain & Lorberbaum, 2008 / Killeen & Teti, 2012 / Leerkes et al., 2015, 2017

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Parenting & Emotion

Parents' emotions organize their parenting behavior

- Positive emotion → supportive, sensitive

- Anger → harsh, over-reactive

- Anxiety → intrusive, restrictive

- Sadness → detached

Rueger et al., 2011 / Martin, Clements, & Crnic, 2002 / Dix et al., 2004 / Lorber & Slep, 2005

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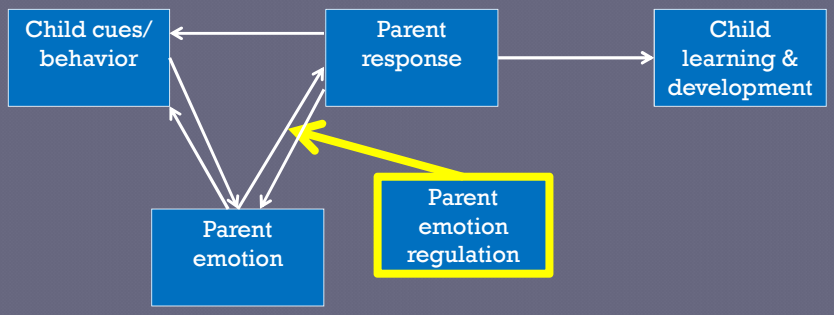
Emotion Regulation

- Emotion Regulation
  - Monitoring, evaluation, & modulation of emotional reactions



Thompson, 1994 / Gross & Thompson, 2007

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Parent ER & Parenting

- Parental emotion regulation (ER)

→ more supportive, sensitive, & effective parenting

→ models ER for children

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Parent ER & Child Response to Intervention

- Parent stress reduces effectiveness of child intervention

Maliken & Katz, 2013:
- Recruitment, retention, & engagement in treatment
- Learning of new skills
- Appropriate use of skills

Osborne et al., 2008 / Maliken & Katz, 2013

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Emotional Experience of Parents of Children with Developmental Challenges

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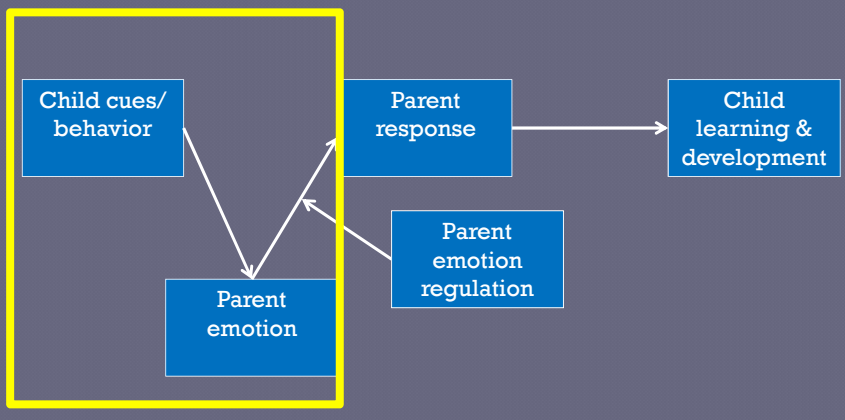

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Parental stress

- Elevated in parents of children with developmental challenges
  - "In-the-moment" stressors
  - "Overarching" stressors

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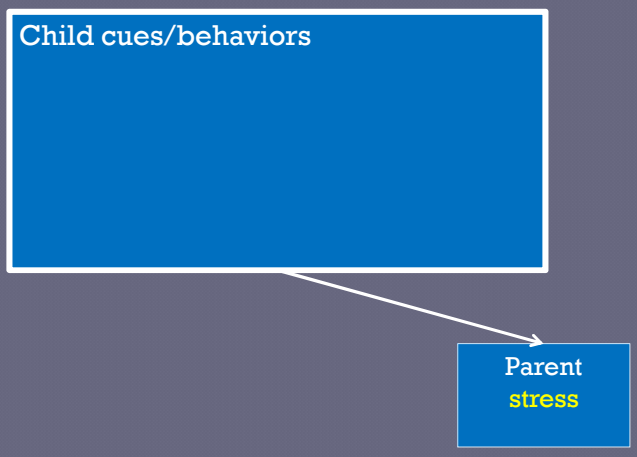
Parental stress

- "In-the-moment" stressors



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Parental stress

- "In-the-moment" stressors

Child cues/behaviors
- Externalizing behaviors
- Internalizing behaviors
- Executive functioning difficulties
- Sensory processing difficulties
- Negative affectivity

→ Parent stress

Hayes & Watson, 2013 / Hassall et al., 2005
Paley et al., 2005, 2006 / Epstein et al., 2008
Ben-Sasson et al., 2013 / Hajal et al., in prep
Jirikowic et al., 2012

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Parental stress

- "Overarching" stressors
  - Coordinating multiple services
  - Family life restrictions
  - Family composition/ custody status
  - Financial strain
  - Stigma

→ Child cues/ behaviors → Parent emotion/ stress

Ben-Sasson et al., 2013 / Paley et al., 2006 / Abbeduto et al, 2004

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Emotion Regulation

- Positive findings for:
  - Cognitive restructuring/reframing
  - Emotional modulation
- Mixed findings for:
  - Problem-focused/active/engagement coping
  - Distraction/disengagement coping

Benson, 2010, 2014 / Lyons et al., 2010 / Hastings et al., 2005 / Pottie & Ingram 2008 / Smith et al., 2008 / Zhou &

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Integrating Parental Emotion Regulation into Treatment

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Integrating Parent ER into Your Practice

1. Assessment
2. Education
3. Vicarious learning

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1. Assessment

- Make it part of the intake!
- Rating scales
  - Parenting Stress Index
  - Parental Feelings Inventory
  - Parent Emotion Regulation Inventory
  - Parent Self-efficacy Questionnaire

Abidin et al., 1995 / Bradley et al., 2013; Lorber et al., 2017; Teti & Gelfand, 1991

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2. Education

- Importance of parental emotions
- Acknowledge their feelings
- Normalize reactions
- "Practice" emotional expression & communication

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2. Education

- General psychoeducation
  - → Emotion regulation strategies
    - cognitive reappraisal/reframing
    - positive thinking
    - acceptance
  - → Reflective parenting

"Having an understanding of the mind of the child"

Carmichael Olson & Montague, 2011 / Hajal et al., under review

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3. Vicarious learning

Any emotion skill you teach a child, parents should learn for themselves, too!

- Benefits:
  - Parent is calmer → more effective parenting
  - Parent is modeling the skill for their child

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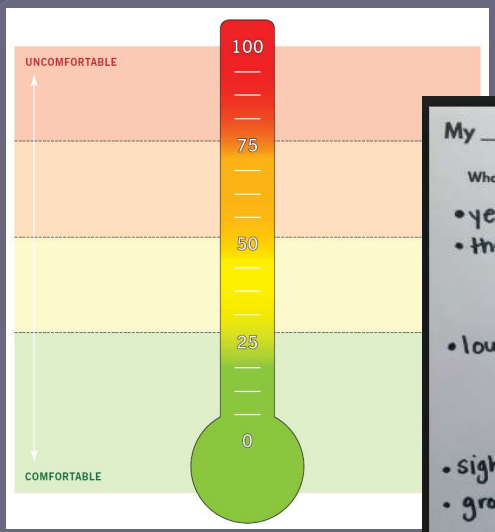

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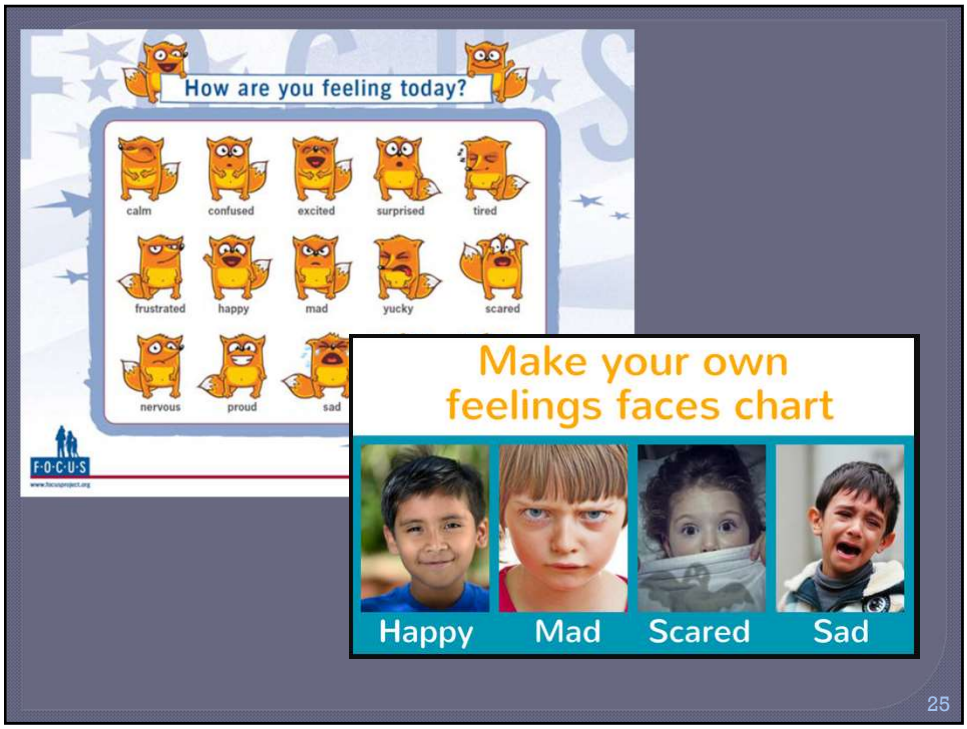
How are you feeling today?
calm
confused
excited
surprised
tired
frustrated
happy
mad
yucky
scared
nervous
proud
sad
FOCUS
Make your own feelings faces chart
Happy
Mad
Scared
Sad
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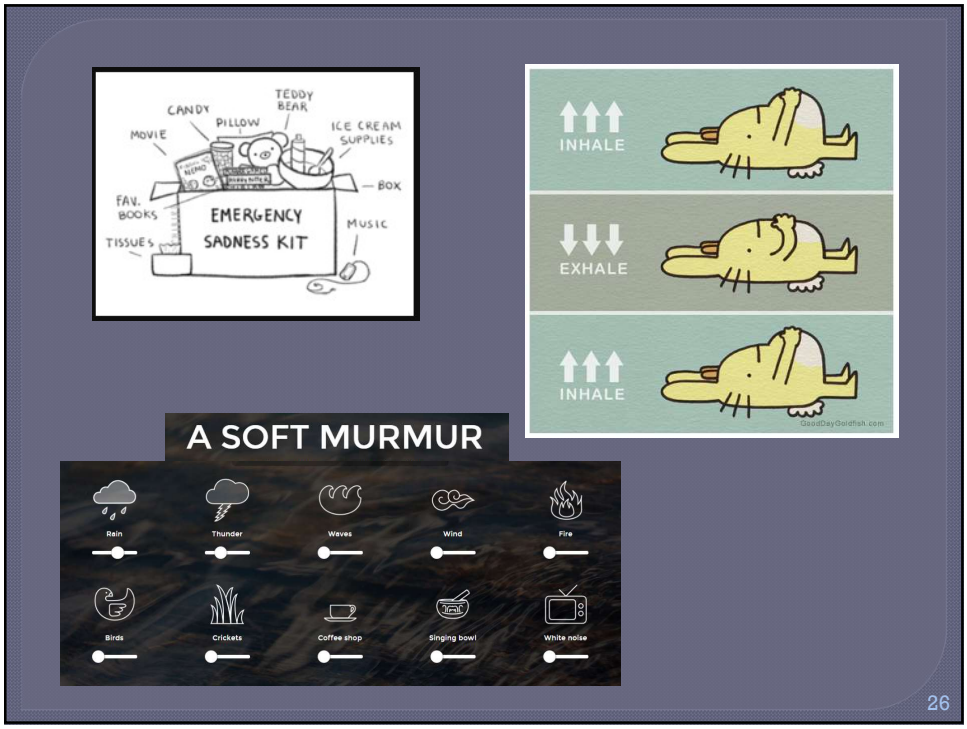
CANDY
TEDDY BEAR
MOVIE
PILLOW
ICE CREAM SUPPLIES
BOX
FAV. BOOKS
EMERGENCY SADNESS KIT
MUSIC
TISSUES
INHALE
EXHALE
INHALE
A SOFT MURMUR
Rain
Thunder
Waves
Wind
Fire
Birds
Crickets
Coffee shop
Singing bowl
White noise
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Acknowledgements

- Families OverComing Under Stress (FOCUS) Program
  - Patricia Lester, MD, Catherine Mogil, PsyD, & team
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Follow-up questions??? NHajal@mednet.ucla.edu

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