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
Keeping Parental Emotions in Mind

- Parents play a central role in healthy child development

Parenting & development

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Parenting & Emotion

Caring for children is emotionally evocative

&

Emotions organize parenting behavior

Dix, 1991

Parenting & Emotion

Caring for children is emotionally evocative

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

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

Emotion Regulation

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

Thompson, 1994 / Gross & Thompson, 2007
Parent ER & Parenting

- Parental emotion regulation (ER)
  - more supportive, sensitive, & effective parenting
  - models ER for children

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
Emotional Experience of Parents of Children with Developmental Challenges

[Diagram showing relationships between Child cues/behavior, Parent response, Parent emotion, Parent emotion regulation, and Child learning & development]
Parental stress

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

- "In-the-moment" stressors
  - Child cues/behaviors
    - Parent stress
Parental stress

**“In-the-moment” stressors**

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

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**“Overarching” stressors**

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

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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

Ben-Sasson et al., 2013 / Paley et al., 2006 / Abbeduto et al., 2004
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 &
Integrating Parent ER into Your Practice

1. Assessment
2. Education
3. Vicarious learning

 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
2. Education

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

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 / Hajil et al., under review
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

![My ANGER Thermometer](image)
Make your own feelings faces chart

Happy  Mad  Scared  Sad

EMERGENCY SADNESS KIT

A SOFT MURMUR
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Follow-up questions?? NHajal@mednet.ucla.edu