Parenting Behavior and Child Emotion Regulation During a Delay Task

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Emotion skills are critical for children’s development. This study examined the association between parenting behavior and children’s affect and regulation. Thirty-five families participated in a frustration task. Parental behavior and child behavior were both rated. We found that parental sensitivity was associated with children’s sadness, while hostility was associated with both anger and sadness.

Introduction

Emotion Regulation: Emotion regulation is the process of monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions based on their appropriateness to the particular context (Thompson, 1994). Emotion regulation deficits have been associated with psychopathology in both children and adults (Fernandez, Jazaieri, & Gross, 2016). Regulation of emotions is a chief developmental task of early childhood, and is important for young children and adults (Fernandez, Jazaieri, & Gross, 2016). Emotion regulation deficits have been associated with psychopathology in both children and adults (Thompson, 1994).

Emotion regulation is the process of monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotion regulation (Leerkes et. al., 2009). Emotion regulation is a critical skill for children’s development. This study focused on the role of emotion regulation in children’s development, particularly in the context of parents’ behavior.

Parenting: Sensitivity is defined as the degree to which a parent responds appropriately to a child’s needs. This includes accurate, attuned, prompt, and consistent responsiveness (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Sensitivity during frustrating tasks has been found to be predictive of children’s attachment (Hopkins, Gouze, & Lavigne, 2013), independent competence (Toth et al., 2013), and family conflict (Hopkins et al., 2013). Sensitivity during frustrating tasks has been found to be predictive of children’s attachment (Hopkins, Gouze, & Lavigne, 2013), independent competence (Toth et al., 2013), and family conflict (Hopkins et al., 2013).

Hostility is defined as parent behavior that expresses negative affect or indifference. It may involve the use of coercion, threat, or physical punishment to influence the child’s behavior (Hopkins, Gouze, & Lavigne, 2013). Hostile parenting behaviors have been associated with parental stress, depression, and family conflict (Hopkins et al., 2013). Parents rated as more hostile have been shown to have more dysregulated and distressed children (Little & Carter, 2000) who mirror their traits (Toth et al., 2000). Much less research has been conducted on the role of hostility in the development of emotion regulation, relative to sensitivity.

Hypothesis

- Higher levels of parental sensitivity and non-hostility would be associated with greater positive affect and less negative affect, as well as use of more adaptive emotion regulation.

Participants

The research began with a longitudinal study that assessed the importance of the child-parent attachment style with the preschooler’s emotional functioning. Participants recruited from preschool programs serving low-income families in rural Appalachia, KY. All the families were given compensation for their participation.

Participants:
- A total of 35 families
- 32 mothers and 3 fathers
- 35 children between the ages of 5-7 years old.

Procedure

Cookie Task: The parents and the child completed the Cookie Task (Silk et al., 2006), on our observational ratings. The parents were to complete a total 2 questionnaires with the child in the room. During the task, the child is to wait for the prize bag that is located on the table. No directions were provided to the caregiver on how to manage the delay. The child’s behaviors were then coded for in 15 second intervals for a total of 7 minutes. At the end of the task, the parents were then signaled to giving the prize bag to the child.

Results

Average non-hostility score of parents was 3.74 (1.21). This indicates a fair amount of covert hostility. Average score of parent sensitivity was 4.76 (1.94). This indicates inconsistent sensitivity. Average score of child responsiveness was 4.31 (2.30). This indicates children were moderately responsive.

Discussion

- Parental sensitivity in this task, where children were likely frustrated, was found to be inconsistent. Many parents were not engaged with their children, and some demonstrated hostility.
- Parents who demonstrated more sensitivity had children who displayed less sadness.
- Parents who expressed greater hostility had children who showed more sadness and anger, and also focused more on the bag of prizes. This strategy was expected to cause greater frustration or stress.
- Future tasks will include examining the implications of children’s functioning outside the lab.

Works Cited


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