



Leveraging Emotion Socialization Research: Innovative Prevention and Intervention Programming for Vulnerable Families

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Objectives

- Provide overview of parent emotion communication and its relations to youth emotional development
- Discuss applications of developmental research on emotion communication to clinical interventions
- Review emerging data from multiple studies illustrating feasibility and effectiveness of emotion coaching interventions



Healthy Emotional Development

Emotional competence

- Expressing emotions
- Understanding own and others' emotions
- Managing emotions

Emotion regulation

- Modulation of emotions to promote goals
- Up-regulate, down-regulate, sustain, re-interpret, etc.

Emotion regulation is a primary and transdiagnostic correlate and predictor of mental disorders for youth and adults, and impaired emotion regulation is a correlate and outcome of childhood maltreatment



Contributors to Emotion Competence

1. **Temperament:** Proneness to emotional reactivity, intensity
2. **Observations:** Modeling of emotional expressiveness, especially in family context
3. **Socialization:** Responses to, and teaching about, child's emotions



Emotion Socialization

Occurs in many contexts (e.g., friends, schools)

- to date, most research is in family context

Includes many modes of socialization (e.g., modeling, reminiscing, direct teaching)

- to date, most research focuses on parent responses to and communication about child emotions



Emotion Socialization in Families

Parental emotion support skills (e.g., validation, normalizing) and emotion coaching skills (e.g., emotion awareness/labeling, extending emotional understanding, coping and problem solving) relate to:

- children's psychological adjustment
- physical health
- social and academic competence
- increased help-seeking from adult caregivers when distressed

“How did you feel when that happened?”

“It makes sense that you feel angry.”

“You could try taking some deep breaths.”

Cunningham, Kliewer, & Garner, 2009; Lunkenheimer, Shields, & Cortina, 2007; Suveg, Zeman, Flannery-Schroeder, & Cassano, 2005; Yap, Allen, & Ladouceur, 2008; Brown, Fitzgerald, Shipman, & Schneider, 2007

Unsupportive parental emotion socialization, such as invalidation and criticism, is on a continuum with emotional maltreatment, and is associated with poorer psychosocial outcomes for youth.

“You’re overreacting.”

“Stop crying like a baby.”

Buckholdt, Parra, & Jobe-Shields, 2014; Krause, Mendelson, & Lynch, 2003; Shipman et al., 2007



Emotion Socialization and Maltreatment

Emotion socialization is implicated in the contexts and sequelae of childhood maltreatment:

- Maltreating parents engage in less supportive and more unsupportive emotion socialization than non-maltreating parents
- Parents' own CM histories predict unsupportive emotion socialization
- Unsupportive emotion socialization amplifies risks to self-regulation in maltreated youth

Fay-Stammbach et al., 2017; Milan et al., 2021; Shipman et al., 2007



Interventions to Promote Emotion Communication

Challenges in Emotion Communication

Parents differ in their own emotion competence

Parents have varying beliefs about the acceptability of certain emotions

Parents have varying levels of comfort with their child's discomfort

Parents may believe that all emotions are OK, but the behaviors...



Don't We Already Have a Lot of Parenting Interventions?

Evidence-based parenting interventions are primarily based on behavioral principles:

- Praise and rewards for positive behaviors
- Contingencies, time-out, and loss of privileges for negative behaviors

There is encouragement of warm and supportive relationships, but less explicit guidance on this.



EC-focused Interventions are Needed

Do parenting programs include components relevant to emotion coaching?

- Most common emotion-focused components: active listening, praise (*Baker et al., 2011*)
- Emotion communication skills as significant predictor of parenting intervention outcomes (*Kaminski et al., 2008*)

Does traditional parent training address unsupportive/critical behaviors sufficiently?

- “Rebound” effect for psychological aggression over 3-year follow-up, despite initial decreases (*Shaffer, Lindhiem, Kolko, 2013*)



Evidence for Emotion Coaching Interventions

Current Evidence Base for EC

Stand-alone programs

Tuning in to Kids (*Havighurst et al., 2009*) and its spin-offs (e.g., Toddlers, Teens)

Augmented parenting interventions

For ADHD (*Chronis-Tuscano et al., 2016; Herbert et al., 2013*)

For oppositional behaviors (*Salmon et al., 2009*)



Pilot Study: Let's Connect

Let's Connect (Shipman, Fitzgerald, & Torres, 2019) includes innovative content for teaching EC skills:

- Emphasizes emotion support (i.e., validation) in addition to active listening and emotion coaching
- Extensive opportunities for in vivo practice and scaffolding of skill development
- Clear steps and strategies for noticing parents' own needs, integrating self-care and stress reduction to promote attunement to child's needs



Let's Connect Skills and Traps

Connection Skills

Notice and appreciate
Listen to learn more

Emotion Support

Validate child's experience

Emotion Coaching

Teaching about emotions



Connection Skills

- Positive body language, warm voice tone
- Active listening: reflecting or repeating what child said
- Asking helpful questions (e.g., open-ended, child-focused)

Connection Traps

- Distracted or disinterested body posture
- Unhelpful questions (e.g., bombarding, focus on fact-finding, communicate disagreement, commands in disguise)
- Focused on disruptive behavior rather than child's emotions



Emotion Support Skills

- Perspective taking
- Empathy for child's feelings
- Normalizing emotional responses
- Demonstrating affection and kindness

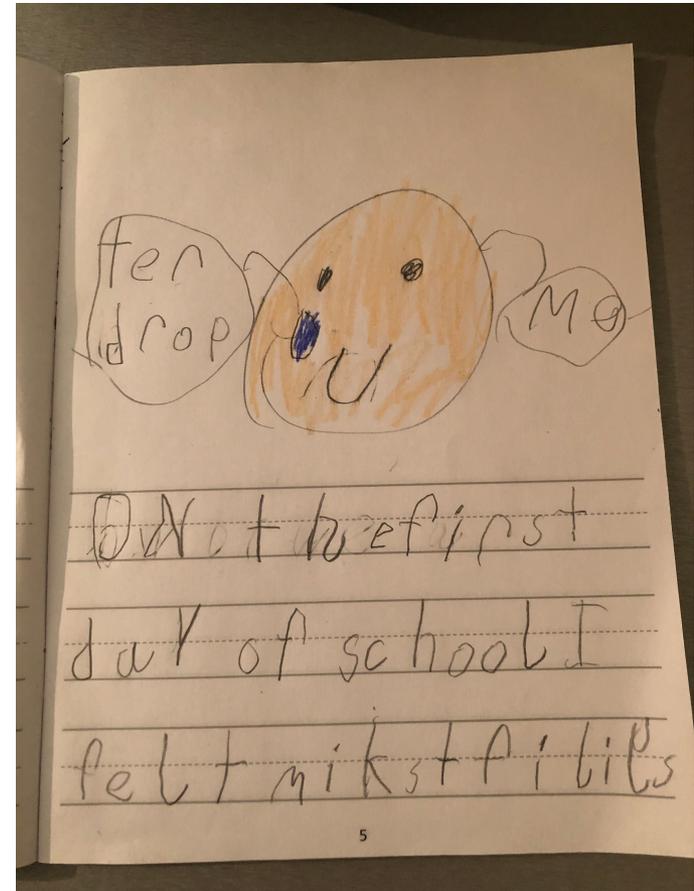
Emotion Support Traps

- Invalidating of child's experience
- Minimizing or doubting the child's experience
- Silver linings; focus on positive without addressing feelings
- Criticizing or blaming
- Lecturing / teaching



Emotion Coaching Skills

- Labeling emotions and intensity
- Recognizing secondary emotions or mixed emotions
- Identifying causes and outcomes of emotions
- Supporting healthy coping or problem-solving



"On the first day of school I felt mikst filings"



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Let's Connect: A developmentally-driven emotion-focused parenting intervention



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Let's Connect is *modular*

- Can be implemented as stand-alone intervention or as strategic enhancement to other interventions
- For pilot study, tested as stand-alone in group setting, community sample



Pilot Study Overview

34 female caregivers (biological and adoptive mothers)

72% European American, 25% African American, 3% Latina
Predominantly married (70%) and college-educated (69%)
Community sample, not clinical referrals

Children aged from 5 to 13 ($M = 8.45$)

8 weekly sessions led by 2 interventionists

Children were invited to 4 sessions for practice
Weekly “homework” practice sessions were also recorded

Primary outcome: **emotion communication skills**

Observed (1-5 rating scale) at baseline, post-intervention, and 3-month follow-up via structured discussion tasks



	Mean	SD
EC skills		
Pre	4.04	0.85
Post	4.42	0.80
3m	4.83	0.38
EC traps		
Pre	2.66	0.90
Post	2.12	0.78
3m	2.12	0.69

Solution for fixed effects

	Estimate (SE)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI
Emotion coaching skills				
Intercept	4.21 (0.11)	39.79	0.00	3.99, 4.42
Time	0.30 (0.07)	4.43	0.00	0.16, 0.44
Emotion coaching traps				
Intercept	2.34 (0.13)	17.92	0.00	2.08, 2.60
Time	-0.15 (0.08)	-1.91	0.06	-0.32, 0.01

Let's Connect: Take-aways and next steps

Preliminary evidence indicates that Let's Connect can improve parents' emotion-focused communication skills

Individual and group approaches

Integration with other evidence-based practices

- Enhancement to Trauma-Focused CBT
- Supplement for child welfare-involved families

Letsconnect.org

*Let's Connect*TM



Lessons Learned

- Importance of *in vivo* practice
 - Already knew this from behavioral parenting intervention literature (e.g., Kaminski et al., 2008)
- How to focus on child emotions when parents want to deal with child behavior
- Have to address parents' own emotions and emotion regulation in order to effectively coach/support child's own emotions
 - How to assess parent emotion regulation?*



Validation of the Regulating Emotions in Parenting Scale (REPS): Factor Structure and Measurement Invariance

Violeta J. Rodriguez

University of Georgia and University of Miami Miller School of
Medicine

Anne Shaffer

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REPS: 18-item self-report measure of emotion regulation *in the context of parenting*

Three dimensions:

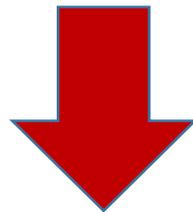
- Self-Awareness
- Suppression
- Rumination

Stronger correlations with parenting behavior than generic adult self-reports of emotion regulation

EC Augmentation to FBT for Adolescent Anorexia

While family-based treatment (FBT) is the evidence-based treatment for adolescents with anorexia nervosa, 50% of patients have poor treatment outcomes including failure to weight restore.

Notably, parental expressed emotion (i.e., hostility, criticism) and low warmth are associated with poor outcomes in FBT.



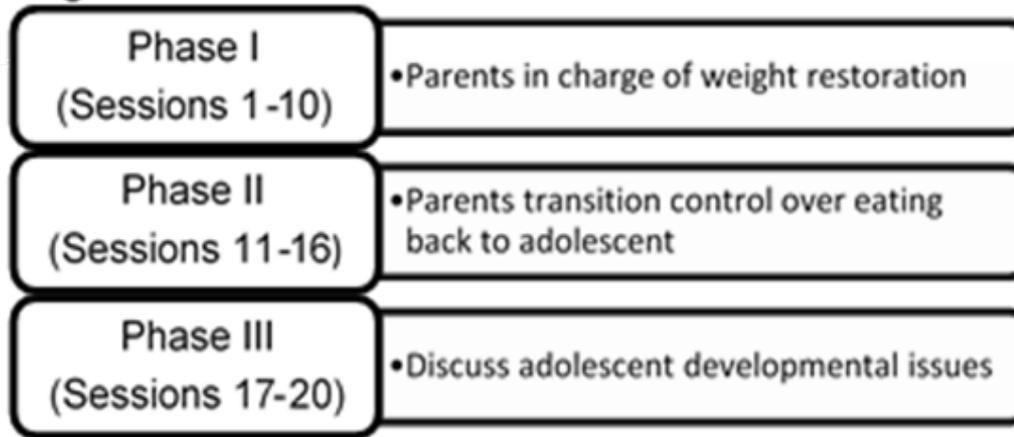
Strategic enhancement to FBT: Target parent emotion communication

NIMH R34 (Clinical Trial Planning Grant)

PI: Claire Aarnio-Peterson, Cincinnati Children's Hospital and Medical Center



Figure 7. Control Condition: FBT



FBT can be challenging for families

- High parental criticism and emotional maltreatment can be a predisposing factor for anorexia
- Parental criticism can emerge through coping with and treating AN



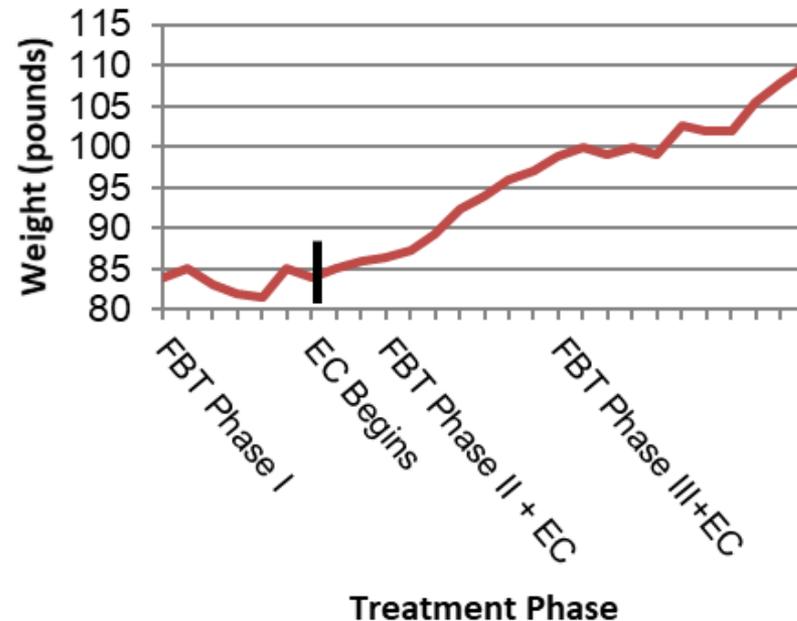
Preliminary case study data
(Peterson, Fischer, Loiselle, &
Shaffer, 2016)

Adolescent male completing FBT in
context of high family conflict,
criticism

Augmented FBT to include weekly
EC sessions with parents

Subsequent improvements in
weight restoration, subjective
weight/shape concerns, less
frequent arguments

**Figure 5. Weight Change Over the Course of
Treatment**



FEED: Families Ending Eating Disorders

Parent skills group targeted to improve emotion-based communication with their adolescents, delivered weekly in addition to FBT.

Parents were eligible to participate if they screened high criticism and/or low parental warmth using the Five-Minute Speech Sample.

Phase I: Four families aged 12-17 with AN or AAN recruited from an eating disorder clinic at the beginning of FBT.

Participants completed baseline assessment, the 10-week emotion coaching intervention, and a post-assessment.

Mean age of participants was 13.8, 75% were female, and all caregivers were female.



And then, COVID happened

Mid-pilot pivot to virtual delivery of intervention and post-intervention assessment

One participant dropped out

Post-intervention family meals were observed in homes via Zoom

Interesting possibilities for future recruitment, service delivery



Phase I Outcomes

Value and Impact

- Interventionists gave the highest ratings (5/5)
- Caregivers provided positive ratings ranging from 5-7 (1-7 scale)
- Overall, positive impact of the intervention in improving their emotion communication with their teens.

“I thought the group was very helpful to teach me how to manage emotions with both of my daughters.”

Parent Emotion Communication

- Baseline mean parental criticism scores were 7.67 (1-9 scale) while post-treatment mean scores were 4.30.

Weight Restoration

- Of the treatment completers, one partially weight restored (>90% mBMI), and two completely weight restored (≥95% mBMI).





Next Steps

Completing small RCT, planning for larger multi-site trial

Will continue virtual service delivery and assessment

Less-intensive versions of these interventions (e.g., fewer sessions)?

Need to recruit, assess, and involve more fathers



Conclusions

Parent communication about emotions is a critical aspect of socialization, and is an aspect of maltreating family contexts that is often overlooked.

Emotion coaching interventions are an emerging and promising target for a variety of families, including those engaging in or at risk for emotional maltreatment.

Defining supportive and unsupportive emotion communication is evolving: what is universal, what is context-dependent?



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