

Changes in Parenting Practices during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

- Relationships between parents, families, and children are connected in a mutually reinforcing system. Stress in one of these systems can cause stress within another.
- Social disruptions caused by COVID-19 can impose stress on caregivers, which may disrupt parent-child relationships.
- Positive reinforcement and limit-setting are two key aspects of parenting. Mindful parenting has been proposed as an effective way to improve parenting practices overall.
- Children may also shape parenting practices through their behavior and symptomatology.

Aim

The purpose of the current study was to:

- 1) Examine whether parenting practices prior to COVID-19 (i.e. parental support of good behavior and parental limit setting) changed after the onset.
- 2) Determine whether changes in parenting practices are moderated by mindful parenting or child symptoms (i.e., oppositional, anxiety, and depression).

Figure 1

Parental Levels of Supporting Good Behaviors and Child Anxiety Symptom Levels from fall (pre-pandemic) to spring (during pandemic)

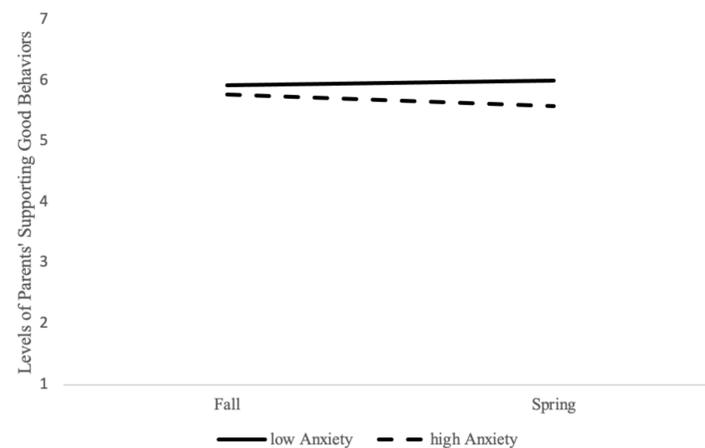


Figure 2

Parental Setting Limits and Child Oppositional Symptom Levels from fall (pre-pandemic) to spring (during pandemic)

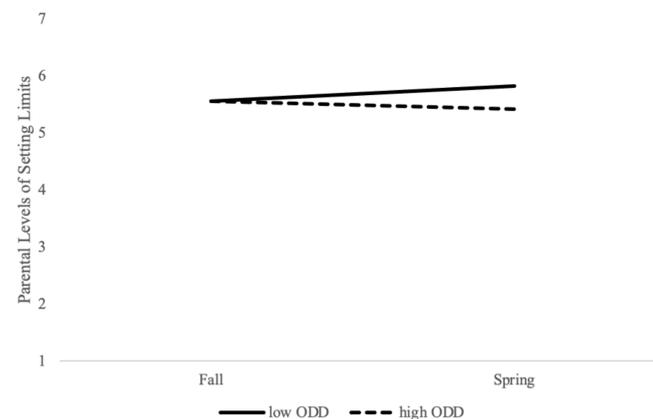
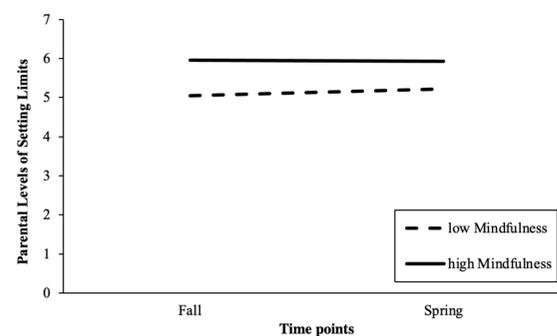


Figure 3

Parental Setting Limits and Mindfulness Levels from Fall (pre-pandemic) to Spring (during pandemic)



Results

- Figures 1-3 illustrate significant within-person moderation effects of child symptoms and mindful parenting.
- For parents of children with higher levels of anxious behavior, parents were more likely to decline in their levels of supporting good behavior. For the parents of children with lower levels of anxiety symptoms, parent's levels of supporting good behaviors scores increased (Figure 1).
- For parents of children with higher levels of oppositional behavior, parents were more likely to decrease in limit setting. For the parents of children with lower levels of oppositional symptoms, parent's levels of setting limits increased (Figure 2).
- Mindful parenting was positively associated with parents' levels of setting limits, such that mindful parenting moderated the change in setting limits from prior to the pandemic to during the pandemic (Figure 3). For parents with higher mindful parenting scores, their tendency to set limits was similar from fall (M = 5.96; .90) to spring (M = 5.93; .76). For the parents with lower mindful parenting scores, their tendency to set limits increased from fall (M = 5.05; .77) to spring (M = 5.22; .86).

Implications

- Schools can support families not only by providing academic content, but also information and support for managing and supporting children's behavior. These supports may be especially important for youth with elevated oppositional and anxiety symptoms.
- Since mindful parenting involves the ability to pause before reacting, it can lead to more positive parenting practices. Parents who engage in mindful parenting may be more likely to remain consistent in positive parenting approaches with their children.

Limitations

- The current sample was limited due to a smaller sample size and limited racial and socioeconomic diversity. Further, parenting can be impacted by many contextual factors (i.e., economic hardship, culture) which were not measured in the current study. Future research could investigate these potential effects with larger and more diverse samples.