Parent-Child Conflict Study

A NOTE FROM DR. JACKIE NELSON, DIRECTOR

My students and I would like to thank each and every family who participated in our parent-child conflict study! It was a big undertaking with 142 families (61 with both parents) completing surveys for 8 straight days. We really appreciate your commitment and diligence in helping us reach our goals. We enjoyed working with all of you and hope you had a nice experience too!

STUDY FINDINGS

Stress from work, family, and finances is common for many parents. A primary goal of this project was to learn more about mothers’ and fathers’ daily experiences, and specifically, to see if conflicts between parents and children are less negative and more collaborative when parents experience fewer daily stressors.

Preliminary findings have revealed that particularly stressful days at work or at home appear to reduce parents’ patience during conflicts with children. Our results also suggest that stress within parents’ romantic relationships may spill over into conflict interactions with children, but that this tends to happen for mothers more than fathers.

But if stress is a common component of daily life, how can parents prevent this negativity from affecting conflict interactions with their children? One protective factor appears to be a strong coparenting relationship. Coparenting refers to the mutual joint efforts of adults raising children for whom they share responsibility (McHale, 1995). This might include married mothers and fathers, but could also include mothers and grandmothers, separated or divorced parents, a parent and a childcare provider, etc. A strong coparenting relationship emerges when there’s support and solidarity, consistency and predictability, a secure home base for the child, and attunement to the child’s needs. In our study, we found that, for both mothers and fathers, coparenting support was related to less inconsistent discipline with their child, and for mothers, less of a perception that parenting was a demanding task.

FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

We will be starting three new studies in the coming months: two with parents of preschoolers and one with early adolescents. If you or someone you know is interested in more information, please contact us to let us know. We will also be sending emails with more details in the next few months, and you can always check our lab website for updates.

Thank you for all your help!

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