Mindfulness in Parenting to Promote Self-Regulation and Social-emotional Competence in Parents and Children in Low-income Contexts

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Exposure to Economic Disadvantage and Adversity in Childhood

Exposure to economic **disadvantage and adversity** during childhood disrupts the development of key neurobiological systems underlying **self-regulation** during a sensitive developmental period with potentially **lasting and pervasive detrimental effects**.

**Parenting** in early childhood may be a key mediator of these effects, and may be a critical protective factor.
Executive Control

- Attention regulation
- Inhibitory control
- Flexibility

Executive Control Scores

- At/Near Pov
- Low Income
- Middle Income
- Upper Income (> $100K)
HPA Axis: Diurnal Cortisol

![Diagram showing the HPA axis with cortisol regulation](image)

Bar graph showing % Disrupted Cortisol Regulation:
- At/near Poverty
- Not in Poverty
Cascade effects of economic disadvantage on child well-being

Low Income/Poverty → Cumulative Risk → Neuroendocrine Regulation (Cortisol) → Executive Control or Delay Ability → Academic Achievement, Social-Emotional Comp, Behavior/Emo Problems

3 years old

3 to 5.5 years old

5.5 years old
Low income and CR predict less effective parenting

Low Income/Poverty

Cumulative Risk

-0.22

Warmth

-0.30

Negativity

-0.24

Consistent Limits

-0.30

Scaffolding

-0.13
Cascade effects of economic disadvantage on child well-being

Low Income/Poverty

Cumulative Risk

Neuroendocrine Regulation (Cortisol)

Executive Control

Academic Achievement
Social-Emotional Comp
Behavior/Emo Problems

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Academic Achievement

Social-Emotional Comp

Behavior/Emo Problems

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Cascade effects of economic disadvantage on child well-being

Low Income/Poverty

Cumulative Risk

- Warmth
- Negativity
- Consistent Limits
- Scaffolding

Neuroendocrine Regulation (Cortisol)

Executive Control

Academic Achievement
Social-Emotional Comp
Behavior/Emo Problems

Cultivate Mindfulness & Emotion Regulation

Promote Warmth, Scaffolding & Consistency

3 years old
3 to 5.5 years old
5.5 years old
Two Generation Approach

• Parent self-regulation $\rightarrow$ parenting $\rightarrow$ child self-regulation

• **Mindfulness** and **emotion regulation** practices to:
  – decrease stress
  – increase awareness
  – respond flexibly
  – model regulation for children
Mindfulness has been shown to...

- Improve adult executive function
- Improve emotion regulation and stress responses
- Reduced symptoms of depression, anxiety and PTS

“...paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, nonjudgmentally.” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994)
Mindfulness in Parenting

• Listening with full attention
• Nonjudgmental acceptance of self and child
• Emotional awareness of self and child
• Self-regulation in the parenting relationship
• Compassion for self and child

(Duncan, Coatsworth & Greenberg, 2009)
SEACAP
Social, Emotional, and Academic Competence for Children and Parents

• Program Targets:
  – Parent Mindfulness & Emotion Regulation
  – Warmth, Scaffolding & Consistency
  – Mindfulness/ER integrated into parenting practices

• Outcome:
  – Child SR → social, emotional, and academic competence

• 6 group (+ 2-4 individual video-based coaching) sessions:
  – Brief, easily integrated into early learning programs
  – “Tiered” with more intensive work in home coaching sessions
Mindfulness practices support parenting:

**Parenting that Promotes Executive Control:**
- Increase
  - Warmth (Child Led Time, Validation)
  - Consistency (Expectations, Contingencies)
  - Scaffolding (Balancing Structuring with Autonomy)
- Reduce Negativity (Emotion Regulation)

**Informal Mindfulness Practices:**
- Noticing and Participating in the Moment
  - Active listening
  - Practice of observing and participating during child-led time
- Wise-Mind - Balancing rational and emotional mind
  - Dropping in the pauses
  - Breathe in “wise” and out “mind”
- Stress and Emotion Regulation:
  - Paced Breathing
  - STOP (Stop, Take a breath, Observe, Proceed wisely)
  - Soothing Hands
  - Parent Time-Out (mindfulness and emotion regulation practices)
Demographic Information about the SEACAP Pilot Samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>(N = 50)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Age</td>
<td>44.97 (12.26) mos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>5.03 (3.98), ≈$29,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public assistance</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s Education</td>
<td>5.26 (1.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>≈some college, tech/professional school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Moves in 3 years</td>
<td>1.33 (1.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic or Racial Minority</td>
<td>54%</td>
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None of these variables predicted whether parents improved in EF, mindfulness or parenting.
Parents increased in EF, scaffolding and trend towards decrease in negativity. Parents reported decreased rejection, increased consistency. Children demonstrated decreased negativity, and parents reported increased social competence and academic readiness. No change in FFMQ – pre- to post-program r = .9
### Changes in Parenting → Changes in Child Adjustment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Parenting</th>
<th>Parent-Report</th>
<th>Observed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warmth</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negativity</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolding</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limit Setting</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.25†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td><strong>.26</strong>*</td>
<td>-.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejection</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td><strong>.26</strong>*</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.18</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-regulation</th>
<th>Parent-Report</th>
<th>Observed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(BRIEF)</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.01</td>
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Evaluation of Impact and Feasibility

Parent Satisfaction

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<tr>
<th>Overall</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session/program...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Content</td>
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The parts of the SEA CAP program that were most helpful were:

- Calm body! I love the class
- All of it was helpful; every mtg I learned as least one thing that has helped me effectively parent
- The part about being more present with the child and active listening
- Understanding stress before resolving problem. Having options for child
- Acknowledging that I need to pay more attention to my children
- **Being present**
Summary

• Parents increased their scaffolding and limit-setting, and decreased rejection

• Parents reported increase in their self-regulation

• Improvements in parenting → improvements in child adjustment

• Parents reported high satisfaction with the program

• Program was delivered by early learning staff, suggesting that it can be feasibly implemented in early learning settings.
• Next steps:
  – Conduct RCT
  – Examine effects on child self-regulation
  – SEACAP for Infants, Grade School
• Enhance the effectiveness of parenting programs by promoting parent self-regulation by including mindfulness and emotion regulation practices.
• Brief programs like SEACAP may be an effective way to support families experiencing adversity.
• Explore training models that increase feasibility of implementation.
Acknowledgments

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