

STRONG CHILDREN'S RESEARCH CENTER

Summer 2017 Research Scholar

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ABSTRACT

Title: Parent Acceptability of Mindfulness in High Risk Families

Background: Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are associated with many long-term negative physical and mental health outcomes. Yet, positive parenting and parent-child relationships promote resilience and improve outcomes among children with ACEs. Though educational and healthcare settings have been identified as ideal for addressing ACEs among large numbers of children and youth, little is known about effective interventions that are feasible in these settings. Mindfulness-based parenting interventions have an emerging evidence-base for improving parenting skills and parent-child relationships but little is known about whether mindfulness based interventions are acceptable to parents of high risk youth.

Objective: To evaluate the perceived acceptability and utilization of a mindfulness based parenting strategy among caregivers of young adolescents who have multiple ACEs.

Methods: Three handouts detailing a mindful parenting technique and reference to a website (the parenting pause) were sent to caregivers of 6th and 7th grade students who have multiple ACEs and attended small group therapy as part of the School-Based Health Center at East Lower School. Semi-structured phone interviews were conducted with caregivers and detailed notes were taken to develop categories that would guide subsequent analysis. A subset of these interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. A deductive, framework approach guided analysis using these initially developed categories.

Results: Phone interviews were completed with 41% (N=17) of youth's caregivers, resulting in four initial coding categories. Of these interviews, 10 were recorded and used for final analysis. This analysis revealed three main inter-related themes and subthemes 1) *Mindfulness tools facilitate mindful skill development*- Caregivers viewed the handouts as an attention grabbing tool that they can save, reread and take with them as a skill strengthener; 2) *Mindful parenting interrupts negative caregiver-child interactions*- Caregivers viewed the mindful parenting strategy as effective, and attribute effectiveness its ability to interrupt negative interactions (subthemes: *taking a break prevents yelling; thinking before acting; staying calm to reduce stress*); and 3) *Mindfulness as an effective in the moment parenting strategy that is difficult to use in the moment*- Caregivers were aware that the strategy could be helpful to reduce stress, but reported difficulty using it in the midst of a stressful situation.

Conclusion: Caregivers of high-risk middle school youth saw mindful parenting as an effective way to improve caregiver-child interactions and reduce stress. These caregivers perceived benefits in using mindfulness skills in times of high stress, but also felt stressful times were the most challenging to implement the skill. Caregivers may benefit from additional support to apply daily mindfulness practice as a way to improve skill development and to optimize effectiveness during stressful parent-child interactions.