

Parent Management Training: An Example of Parenting Done the Right Way

Graduate Article Critique

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Introduction

Parenting is a choice: children are directly affected by our every action (or lack thereof), and the final product is some strange amalgamation of the choices we made as parents and those our children have made for themselves. There is a distinction, though, that I would like to point out early on in this review; there *is* a difference between a *good* parent who is overwhelmed or poorly prepared, and a *bad* parent that does not care or habitually makes decisions that are detrimental to themselves and/or the child(ren). Parry et al. (2018) wrote an article about how the parent-child relationship may be strengthened through individual parent training, and why this form of program is necessary to help improve coping skills for the parents along with better social adjustment in the child's behavior. I have gathered a collection of resources to further emphasize the content of this article into three main points: how parenting style affects a child's behavior, the ways in which disruptive behavior may affect the parent-child relationship, and the benefits of utilizing parent management training to alter unwanted behaviors in order to foster a happier, healthier relationship between parents and their children.

“It Hurts Them More Than It Hurts You”

Is it just me, or did your parents always used to say, “This hurts me more than it hurts you” whenever doling out some form of punishment? I cannot be the only one who remembers this. However, our actions as parents often have a far deeper effect on our children than we could possibly ever realize. A healthy form of punishment is one thing- but how many people do you know that can describe their parents with some form of anecdote over how often one (or both) parent would drink and the way it colors their perspective? Whether said parent was abusive or not, kids tend to notice these sorts of things. Whether positive or negative, the way that a parent will interact with their child has a profound effect on their behavior. One of the main points that Parry et al. (2018) used was that children base their behavior on their interactions with their caregivers while citing Bowlby's attachment theory. To help bolster this opinion, I found evidence from Buchanan-Pascall et al. (2021) that suggested specific parenting behaviors contribute to the development and maintenance of child behavior problems. For instance, negative parenting behaviors such as harsh or inconsistent discipline and poor monitoring or supervision have been repeatedly linked to externalizing problems (i.e., aggression, defiance, oppositionality) and provide a poor model of behavior; in addition, examples of internalizing problems such as depressive symptoms are also consistent in cases where parents exhibit low warmth and often issue threats or induct guilt (Buchanan-Pascall et. al, 2021). This is further supported by McCabe et al. (2022) who write that intervention in early childhood is crucial to reduce the negative impact of both externalizing and internalizing disorders on children's lives. On the other hand, Buchanan-Pascall et. al (2021) states that positive parenting behaviors (warmth, appropriate discipline, parental involvement) provide the foundations for healthy child development and are associated with fewer behavioral problems, and that children who grow up in an environment of warm, supportive parents are less likely to develop externalizing or internalizing behaviors, even when faced with oppositional forces such as poverty or low socio-economic status. The ways in which we interact with our children, even in the smallest of gestures, could go on to have a monumental impact in the future development of their behavior

both at home, and in a social environment. Speaking of behavior, let's talk about some of the ways in which the behavior of our children can affect the parent-child relationship.

“Who Taught You That?!”

Every time I watch one of my children eat, I sit there thinking “Wow...you definitely take after your mother.” The first time I ever went to lunch with their mom, I jokingly asked our waitress for extra napkins because of how messy she was- I thought it was hilarious, but she was less than thrilled. All kidding aside, behavior is a fascinating, yet tricky component of the parent-child relationship. Children watch everything we say and do, sometimes picking up on some of our less than desirable habits or mannerisms in the process of us trying to parent. My next point is regarding the way that undesirable behaviors can affect the parent-child relationship; while some behaviors such as messy eating are relatively harmless, there are more severe examples that are not as adorable. Patel et al. (2022) discuss how the total stress a caregiver experiences is ecological, a function of variables between caregiver, child, and external situations such as various life stressors which lead to an increased risk for negative parenting behaviors that harm the parent-child relationship. In other words, on any normal day, parents deal with certain levels of stress that can influence the way they behave towards their children. However, when a parent is dealing with a child that has severe behavioral problems, their stress levels are increased which may have a negative effect on the way they handle said behavioral problems. Disruptive behavior problems place significant resource and emotional demands on caregivers, who must effectively manage their child's behaviors and their own parenting responses (Patel et al., 2022). Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or ADHD for short, is one such behavioral issue that is prone to strain parent-child interactions. According to Morgan & O'Keefe (2022), ADHD is the most common chronic neurobiological disorder of childhood, and has been proven to be effectively treated with medication to reduce symptoms of inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity, along with behavioral interventions that are aimed towards improving social skills and academic achievement. When your child has zero interest in behaving at home, is constantly in trouble at school, is failing classes and lashing out at everyone...what do you do? This is a constant question asked by parents of children with ADHD who are at their wits' end with nowhere else to turn. Parent-child interaction is very cyclical in nature: how we treat our children affects their behavior, while the way they treat us affects *our* behavior, which in turn also affects how we react or respond to *them* and begin all over again. You can see how exhausting it is. Fortunately, there is a healthy way to deal with these kinds of stressors in a mutually beneficial way that will ultimately yield a better parent-child relationship: parent management training.

“Parent Management Training: Not Just For the Adults, The Kids Will Love It Too!”

So now we circle back around to the original article written by Parry et al. (2018) to examine the effects of parent management training- what is it good for? Absolutely...lots of things...it turns out. The authors gathered a small group of White British female participants with children between the ages of 5 to 9 to participate in what they referred to as the Parent-Child Game, a form of individual parent training aimed to help nurture better relationships between parent and child. A flexible interview schedule was developed using seven main questions and associative prompts to encourage reflexive conversation concerning the participants' experiences; each participant was asked to take part in a minimum of 6 intervention sessions out of a possible 12 so as to fully benefit from the structure of the PCG sessions (Parry et al. 2018). Researchers used a thorough thematic analysis due to the nature of the interviews. Three prevalent themes arose

during the study: a developing of awareness and change, the perception of change as a concept, and interactional changes. Throughout these themes participants learned to be more aware of their own emotions and the way in which they dealt with adversity, while developing new ways of coping with these challenges and understanding what a positive change can look like.

Researchers recorded each conversation verbatim and found that the amount of change experienced by each participant was varied- there was no 'one size fits all' solution. The end results of the PCG sessions were meant to bring about some form of change in the parent-child relationship through the change mechanisms that participants learned throughout the process; this did not necessarily mean that the PCI would change completely, but rather that parents would now possess the tools to properly handle adversity so that they could continue to work at a better parent-child relationship (Parry et al., 2018). Additional research has been conducted by kakhki et al. (2022) in the field of mindful parenting training to help reduce parenting stress and regulate cognitive emotion, particularly for mothers of preschool children (God bless). Their research focused on early intervention and noted that most examples of mindful parenting training were applied in the case of individuals with disabilities; however, similar to the Parry study, researchers in the kakhki article were more concerned with parents who were having difficulties with a behavioral condition, not a disability (kakhki et al., 2022). The use of parent management training does have its applications for mood disorders as evidenced by Byrne & Connon (2021), who conducted research in using PMT in disruptive mood dysregulation disorder. They note that research using PMT has been limited regarding the effectiveness of treating symptoms of irritability, temper and aggression associated with disruptive mood dysregulation disorder; it has largely been aimed towards patients with ADHD symptoms (Byrne & Connon, 2021).

Summary

So, what does all of this mean? In essence, individual parent training, or parent management training, can be an effective tool for both parents and educators dealing with a wide spectrum of behavioral problems in children. Whether the child has a disability, a disorder, or is just flat-out mis-behaved, PMT has shown to be a beneficial program to improve parent-child interaction. As a fairly new parent myself, I see the merit that PMT displays as a prospective class that *all* parents should enroll in. Even if parents form a positive and warm relationship with their child, there *will* be days that this relationship is challenged in unforeseen ways that could potentially disrupt what was once a healthy relationship between parent and child. I actually come from a family who has dealt with mild forms of autism, and been around more severe cases as well; ADHD runs rampant in my step-father's side of the family, so I have seen many variants of disruptive behavior and how parents deal with it. Unfortunately, we do fail as parents from time to time, and I have seen firsthand the damaging effects that certain types of parenting styles have on their children. Let me reiterate, I believe that all parents should engage in some form of parent management training at one point or another, particularly if your child has a form of disability or disorder. Children's needs vary in each individual, and what may work for one child may not necessarily work for another. Parents and caregivers should be adaptive, flexible, and understand in the way they interact with children, which is, in my opinion, one of the greatest benefits of PMT. Identifying the problem and learning to express yourself in a more positive way, while understanding the need for change and thereby learning to apply the change is a great way to reduce that stress in parents and allow for a healthy parent-child relationship.

Conclusion

I believe the concept of parent management training is instrumental for all adults/parents/educators- anyone who in any way works with children- to develop a healthy relationship/interaction with them. One of the most detrimental forces in a child's life is having a caregiver mistreat or mislead them; bad parents, bad teachers, bad authority figures- it doesn't matter what the case. These are people that children look towards for guidance and care, and the onus of responsibility falls on us to properly prepare them in a warm, loving environment. The article from Parry et al. (2018) highlights the impact of how proper training can make even the smallest of changes in our interactions with children, and the steps we need to take in order to make these changes a lasting improvement. Further research should be conducted, however, into how PMT may be applied to parents of children with a wider range of behavioral disorders instead of focusing primarily on ADHD. Research has been heavy in the areas of ADHD and disability, but I believe that parents on all ends of the spectrum would benefit from participating in a similar study regardless of the nature of the child's behavior. As I stated in my introduction, parenting is a choice. I believe that participating in parent management training, or individual parent training, is an example of choosing to be a good parent.

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