What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is most commonly associated with meditation techniques which aim to increase an individual's awareness in the present moment, reduce mindless responding, and enhance non-judgmental observation. Building on this definition, researchers defined mindful parenting as “the intentional bringing of moment-to-moment awareness to the parent-child relationship.”

The ability to remain present in each moment is part of what makes us human; however, the capacity to sustain attention of our present state is usually short-lived, we often remain in this state briefly before becoming reabsorbed into on-going internal dialogues.

Areas of Focus

Education. This study evaluated the integration of a mindfulness-based intervention curriculum into an existing parenting education program at Emmaus House in Atlanta, Georgia (Figures 3 and 4). A Great Start for Parents and Children, Emmaus’ current parent education program, consists of 8 weekly training sessions for parents and caregivers of children ages zero to five.

Community. Individuals in low SES communities generally report more exposure to stressful life events than individuals living in higher SES neighborhoods. The impact of elevated stress on their lives could be dramatic and lifelong. In addition to living in a lower SES neighborhood, parents of young children report higher parental stress as a result of many reasons including poverty, occupation status, and family relationships.

Social-Emotional Learning

There is a correlation between problems in parenting/family functioning and higher levels of parental stress (Substance, 2015). High parental stress levels correlate with dysfunctional parenting and child behavioral problems. There is an increased risk for persistence into adolescence (Field et al., 2005; Spelt et al., 2015).

- Children’s stress hormone levels associated with their mothers’ SES and depressive state (Coplan et al., 2005).
- Parents who are stressed and depressed tend to demonstrate more reducing and controlling behavior, while engaging in less loving and accepting interactions (Rabin & Rabin, 1997).

Desired Program Outcomes:

1. Increased parental mindfulness, 2. Reduced anxiety and depression, 3. Improved parenting efficacy, 4. Acceptable strategy for parenting education programs.

Ultimately, parents/caregivers wanted to obtain tools to manage stress in their daily lives.

Implementing the MAC Interactive Curriculum

Methods ~ Results ~ Discussion

The participants of this study were 15 parents and caregivers of young children (birth-5 years old) living in the Peolopetown neighborhood in Atlanta, Georgia. On average, 12.0 years old (SD = 9.7). Thirteen of the 15 participants (86%) were female. Assessment Tools were administered during 1st and 8th sessions:

- Mc: Beck Anxiety Inventory
- CES-D: Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale
- FFMQ-SF: Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire – Short Form
- PFSS: Parenting Sense of Competency Scale
- FFC: Family Event Checklist
- Mindfulness Ambassador Participant Survey
- Parental Interviews

This study utilized a pre-posttest group design with follow up to evaluate the effectiveness of the integrated mindfulness-parenting education program. Comparison of participants’ pretest and posttest scores were used to address this study’s research questions. As reported by participants, partaking in the integrated mindfulness-parenting education program led to an increased level of mindfulness (Tables 1 and 2; Chart 1). Parents/caregivers also demonstrated decreases in self-reported anxiety and depression (Table 3).

How would you define mindfulness?

“Stay at peace within yourself.”

What did you learn about yourself through taking this class?

“Don’t have to boil over, I can calm down, think, then approach,”

“Learned that I can use different ways to channel anger and take a minute to think about my next move.”

In what ways does mindfulness or meditation help you manage your emotions and thoughts?

“It helps by giving me time to calm down, think it over so I can handle it positively.”

“It helps me gather thoughts, talk to myself, find a solution, lay it out and don’t hold it in anymore.”

What influence has this mindfulness parenting class had on your parenting values and behaviors?

“To have more patience to deliver positive results.”

This class taught me to think before responding to my kids as opposed to reacting first.

Participant Interviews Cont.

Research. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether parents of young children living in low socio-economic status (SES) neighborhoods are able to effectively use mindfulness practices to lower levels of depression, anxiety, and parental stress. Research has demonstrated an association between SES, beliefs about parenting and subsequently parental and child stress levels.

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Methods ~ Results ~ Discussion

The participants of this study were 15 parents and caregivers of young children (birth-5 years old) living in the Peolopetown neighborhood in Atlanta, Georgia. On average, 12.0 years old (SD = 9.7).

- Thirteen of the 15 participants (86%) were female.
- Average number of children 2.5 (SD = 1.2).

Assessment Tools were administered during 1st and 8th sessions:

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How would you define mindfulness?

“To be at peace within yourself.”

What did you learn about yourself through taking this class?

“I have been taught effective ways to deal with my stressors,”

“I have been taught effective ways to control my thoughts?”

“I have been taught effective ways to control my reactions when I am triggered.”

“I have been taught effective ways to set goals and take action to support the future I want for myself.”

“I help others in my daily life.”

“I have been taught effective ways to calm down.”

Re: All data is presented without units, the re-informed family is an aggregate of all children’s sense of mindfulness. Possible response choices include: 1 = Not at all true; 2 = A little bit true; 3 = True most of the time; and 4 = True all of the time.

Table 3. Parental Well-being and Family Stress

Conclusions

According to the results from this pilot study, mindfulness training appears to be an acceptable strategy for inclusion in parenting education programs.

The effectiveness of mindfulness trainings on parents in low-SES neighborhoods is an area of research that is ready to be further explored.

By reducing their anxiety, stress, and depression, these parents may be able to interact with their families in a healthier way (Figure 4). Through mindfulness trainings, participants were given a way to better cope with those stressors, which we hope will ultimately help improve parent-child interactions.

References