Mindful Parenting and Reciprocal Parent–Child Learning as a Transdiagnostic Framework for Promoting Child and Family Mental Health: A Narrative Review

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Abstract:

Background: Child and adolescent mental health is influenced by much more than individual psychological vulnerability. The relationships, family environments, and social contexts in which children grow up can strongly affect how they regulate emotions, communicate with others, develop a sense of security, and seek help when they experience difficulties. Among these relationships, the parent–child relationship is particularly important because it provides an everyday setting in which children learn how to understand and respond to emotions, manage conflict, and develop social and coping skills.

This narrative review explores whether mindful parenting and reciprocal parent–child learning can be brought together within a practical, prevention-oriented framework for promoting the mental health of children, adolescents, and their families.

Objective: The purpose of this review is to synthesize existing evidence on relationship-focused parenting, mindful parenting, emotional responsiveness, and reciprocal learning, and to consider how these approaches may contribute to mental-health promotion and early intervention.

Methods: A structured narrative review was conducted using major international guidance documents and selected systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and evidence syntheses concerning parenting interventions, parent–child relationships, mindfulness-enhanced parenting, internalizing and externalizing problems, and digitally supported parenting interventions.

Results: Across the reviewed literature, a consistent message emerges: responsive, developmentally appropriate, and non-harsh parenting practices are important for healthy child development and family well-being. WHO guidance supports evidence-based parenting interventions aimed at strengthening parent–child relationships, reducing harsh parenting, and preventing emotional and behavioural difficulties. Systematic reviews also suggest benefits from relationship-focused and attachment- and emotion-focused interventions. Mindfulness-enhanced parenting programmes appear promising, particularly in relation to parenting skills and parenting stress, although the certainty of evidence remains limited. Digital programmes may improve access to parenting support, but digital delivery alone cannot replace sustained human and relational support.

Conclusion: Mindful parenting should not be presented as an independent treatment for psychiatric

disorders. Instead, it may be most useful as one component of a broader family-centred mental-health framework. Such a framework can bring together emotional awareness, responsive communication, reciprocal learning, early identification of concerns, and appropriate referral to specialized services when necessary. Future research should examine culturally adapted and longitudinal models and should pay greater attention to how these approaches can be implemented effectively across different communities and resource settings.

Keywords:
Mindful parenting, parent–child relationship, child mental health, adolescent mental health, emotional regulation, prevention, family-centred care.