

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Parental Autonomy Granting and Child Perceived Control: Effects on the Everyday Emotional Experience of Anxious Youth

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SUMMARY: Childhood anxiety is associated with a lack of mastering and control. A group of anxious youth were examined to study the relationships among parental autonomy granting, child perceived control, and child emotional reactivity in negative life events. Results revealed that both parental autonomy granting and child perceived control were important for anxious youth to deal with negative life events.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Granting autonomy by parents was not associated with child perceived control.
- When negative life events happen, child perceived control was associated with less anxiety and more use of emotion-regulation strategies such as cognitive restructuring (i.e., identify and dispute irrational thoughts).
- A high level of parental autonomy granting and low child perceived control were associated with more anxiety and less use of problem solving when children were facing negative life events.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Participate in professional trainings to learn more about preventing and reducing youth anxiety, and how these strategies relate to military families
- Help military parents develop strategies to cope with their youth's anxiety, and promote youth-perceived control

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide after-school activities for military youth to promote social support and communication
- Offer support groups for military parents whose youth are suffering from anxiety disorders

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote additional research on best parental practices in the context of military families
- Continue to support parent education programs that aims to increase well-being of military children

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METHODS

- Data were collected from a large study examining the treatment outcome of pediatric anxiety.
- Parental autonomy granting was assessed by observing the parent-youth interaction for five minutes.
- Youth completed an assessment over phone where they reported on their perceived control, emotional reactivity (anxiety and somatic symptoms), and emotional regulation strategies in response to daily negative life events.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 106 youth who were diagnosed as anxious and their primary caregivers.
- The average age of the youth was 11.03 years (SD = 1.46); 55% of them were female.
- The majority of the participants were White (91%), followed by multi-racial (5%), Black (3%), and Latino (1%).

LIMITATIONS

- The age range of the youth in the study (9-14 years) was narrow, so the results may not apply to younger children and older adolescents.
- The cross-sectional design of the study makes it difficult to determine the causal relations among parental autonomy grant, child perceived control, and child emotion regulation.
- Other parenting practices that may contribute to child emotion regulation were not examined in the study.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Recruit older adolescents to examine if they benefit from a higher level of parental autonomy granting than younger adolescents
- Examine other parenting practices (e.g., emotion socialization) that may potentially influence child emotion regulation
- Collect longitudinal data to investigate the causal relationship between child perceived control and parental autonomy granting

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