

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## Changing Parent's Mindfulness, Child Management Skills and Relationship Quality With Their Youth: Results From a Randomized Pilot Intervention Trial

Coatsworth, J. D., Duncan, L. G., Greenberg, M. T., & Nix, R. L. (2010). Changing parent's mindfulness, child management skills and relationship quality with their youth: Results from a randomized pilot intervention trial. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 19(2), 203-217. doi:10.1007/s10826-009-9304-8

**SUMMARY:** Mindfulness has emerged as a promising new technique and may be useful in the context of parenting. Changes in parenting outcomes (e.g., child management, parent-child relationship) were compared between groups of mother-child dyads assigned to either an original Strengthening Families Program (SFP) group, a mindfulness-added intervention group, or a wait-list control. Mothers who received mindfulness-added SFP had more mindful parenting and better parent-child relationships post-treatment.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Mothers in the mindfulness-added intervention group, but not the original or control groups, displayed significantly greater levels of post-treatment mindful parenting (e.g., openness, non-judgmental receptivity).
- Mothers in both the original and mindfulness-added intervention groups showed similar improvements greater than control group mothers in communicating rules to their children.
- Models of intervention change suggested that the increases in mindful parenting which mothers in the mindfulness-added intervention group experienced partially explained those mothers' improvement in their parent-child relationship quality.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Attend professional development trainings about the benefits of mindfulness in parenting, including for military parents
- Collaborate with parenting programs to disseminate information about the benefits of mindfulness for military parents

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops that aim to improve relationship quality between parents and children by using a mindfulness component
- Provide classes that focus on anger in the family relationship by integrating evidence-based mindfulness components

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support the use of evidence-based practices, including mindfulness in parenting, with military families
- Encourage existing military parenting programs to include education about and practice of mindfulness exercises

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## METHODS

- Families in three Pennsylvania school districts were recruited with information distributed via phone, mail, school presentations, newspaper and radio ads, and flyers.
- Mother-child dyads were randomly assigned to either the original SFP intervention group, the mindfulness-added intervention group, or the wait-list control group; mothers and youth also completed questionnaires before and after the intervention.
- Changes in parenting outcomes (e.g., child management, parent-child relationship) were compared pre- and post-intervention within each group, and the size of changes were also compared between groups.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 65 mothers, with an average age of 39.4 years (SD = 7.0), and 65 adolescents, who were 62% male and had an average age of 11.65 years (SD = .75).
- Participants primarily identified as White (96%).
- The majority of mothers had completed high school (98%) and were employed (82%).

## LIMITATIONS

- Without a follow-up, there is no evidence for long-term effects of adding mindfulness to the Strengthening Families Program.
- The small sample size may have limited generalizability to other families and resulted in insufficient power to detect effects, with many analyses having marginally significant results.
- Several families failed to complete the pre-treatment (8%) or post-treatment (37%) questionnaires, and differences between participants who did and did not complete measures may have influenced results.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a study with follow-up measures to assess the long-term effects of adding mindfulness to the Strengthening Families Program
- Investigate whether parent or child characteristics (e.g., age, gender, openness, agreeableness) impact the efficacy of mindfulness in parenting interventions
- Examine the efficacy of providing mindfulness training to parents and families through several methods (e.g., online modules, individual or group training, phone applications)

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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