

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Integrating Mindfulness With Parent Training: Effects of the Mindfulness-Enhanced Strengthening Families Program

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SUMMARY: Parent education programs include a variety of elements in their curriculum. Researchers used a randomized controlled trial to investigate the effects of parent education with and without mindfulness elements on positive parenting behavior. Findings indicated that parent education was effective and including mindfulness had different results for mothers and fathers.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Fathers' relationships with youth and management of youth behavior were significantly more positive when they participated in parent education with mindfulness compared to parent education without mindfulness or home study; these increases continued at least a year after the program ended.
- Mothers who participated in the parent education without mindfulness showed the most positive behaviors immediately after the program, while those who participated in the parent education with mindfulness showed worse outcomes than the control group immediately after participation.
- At the one-year follow-up, the group of the mothers who participated in the parent education with mindfulness demonstrated positive parenting similar to that of the parent education without mindfulness group; both groups demonstrated more positive parenting than the control group.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Help parents identify strengths and areas for growth within their relationships with their children
- Assist parents who feel like they are doing worse after a program to develop possible long-term benefits and growth

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Consider incorporating elements of mindfulness into parent education, particularly for fathers
- Provide parent education that aims to increase positive parenting behaviors for military parents

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend training for professionals who work with military families regarding different approaches to working with parents and advantages and disadvantages of those approaches
- Continue to support the development of parent education programs for military families

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited from urban and rural schools in Pennsylvania over four consecutive school years.
- Families were randomly assigned to a group which participated in parent education without mindfulness, parent education with an additional mindfulness element, or a control group who received information about youth development to study at home.
- Parents and youth completed surveys regarding parent behaviors, parent-child relationship, and youth behavior control.
- Data from the groups were compared immediately after the program and one year later to determine effects of the parent education and parent education with mindfulness.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 432 families with children in the sixth and seventh grade.
- Families identified as White (69%), Black (15%), Latino (8%), Asian-American (4%), Native American (1%), or Multiracial (3%).
- Of the families, 66% included two parents.

LIMITATIONS

- All families were from one geographic location, so results may not be generalizable to other areas of the United States.
- The youth were all in sixth and seventh grade so it is unclear whether these results extend to parents of younger or older children.
- Many of the mothers who participated in the parent education with the mindfulness element noted that their analysis of their parenting behavior would be more negative after program participation because they were newly aware of missed opportunities; this may have influenced findings.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of parent education with and without mindfulness elements in a more geographically-representative sample and in families with youth in a wider age range
- Use observations to collect data immediately after program participation to avoid the possible influence of mothers' realization of missed opportunities on results
- Investigate the efficacy of parent education with and without mindfulness elements in military families

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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