

Parent Emotion-Related Talk in Mothers of Infants with and without Elevated Behavior Problems

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BACKGROUND

- Research indicates that increased use of parental socialization of emotion predicts later child emotion understanding and expression (Izard et al., 2011).
- Parental socialization of emotion is typically described as a factor comprised of three elements: how parents express, teach, and react to their child's emotions (Denham & Kochanoff, 2002).
- One method of assessing these three elements of parental socialization of emotion is by examining parent emotion-related talk.
- However, most studies examining parent emotion-related talk have relied on cross-sectional designs and therefore have not examined how parent emotion-related talk changes over time.
- It is important to consider how parent emotion-related talk may differ among parents of infants with and without elevated levels of behavior problems
- Preliminary evidence suggests that the extent to which parents use emotion terms (e.g., happy, sad) and desires (e.g., wants, needs) is associated with positive child outcomes (Ensor, Spencer, & Hughes, 2011).
- Additionally, two studies have demonstrated that increases in critical remarks by parents are associated with higher levels of behavior problems (Baker, Heller, & Henker, 2000; Hastings, Daley, Burns, & Beck, 2006).
- However, these studies examined emotion aspects of parenting (e.g., parent negativity, warmth, hostility) rather than parent socialization of emotion and relied on samples of children preschool age and older.

AIMS

- Examine differences in parent emotion-related talk between mothers of infants with and without elevated behavior problems.
 - We expected that mothers of infants with elevated behavior problems would use less emotion-related talk at each time point compared to mothers of infants without elevated behavior problems.
- Evaluate the developmental trajectory of parent emotion-related talk with their infant during play at three time points for the low-risk and high-risk group.
 - We hypothesized that mothers would increase their use of parent emotion-related talk over time in each group.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were mothers and their infants who participated in three assessments from 12 to 15 months up through 17 to 24 months as part of two larger NIH-funded studies
- Mother-infant dyads participated in a parent-infant play task: a 5-8minute situation during which parents are instructed to follow their child's lead in play with three standardized sets of creative, constructive toys (e.g., blocks, farm house).
 - Inclusion criteria
 - Mothers who spoke English or Spanish during the play task
 - Risk Status
 - Participants were grouped as high risk (elevated behavior problems) if BITSEA score \geq 75%ile
- $N = 126$ mother-infant dyads
 - Low Risk Group $n = 44$
 - High Risk Group $n = 65$

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	Low Risk n (%)	High Risk n (%)	Total N (%)
Child sex (% female)	23 (52.3)	32 (49.2)	66 (52.3)
Child ethnicity (% Hispanic)	25 (63.6)	59 (90.8)	95 (75.3)

METHOD, continued

MEASURES

- Emotion Talk Coding System (Brownell, Svetlova, Anderson, Nichols, & Drummond, 2013; Drummond, Paul, Waugh, Hammond, & Brownell, 2014)
 - Parent verbalizations of emotions (e.g., happy, sad, angry) and desires (e.g., wants, needs)
 - Simple Affect:
 - Production (SAP)
 - Elicitation (SAE)
 - Desires
 - Production (DP)
 - Elicitation (DE)
 - Elaboration/Explanation/Inferences
 - Production (EP)
 - Elicitation (EE)
 - Empathy Statements/ Sounds (EMP)
 - Other Mental State Utterances (OMS)
 - Other Internal State Utterances (OIS)
 - Brief Infant Toddler Social Emotional Assessment (BITSEA) : used to determine level of behavior problems (\geq 75%ile considered high risk group)

ANALYSIS & RESULTS

- Using paired samples t-test, results demonstrated a significant increase in Total Parent Emotion-Related Talk over time for the low risk sample ($t(27) = 2.38, p = .025$).
- Overall, several categories of emotion-related talk as well as the total amount of emotion-related talk demonstrated significant group differences at each time point.
- Latent growth models of parent emotion-related talk were developed to evaluate change in parent emotion-related talk over time. Linear trends were evaluated in the models, using frequency (counts) of parent emotion-related talk.
- Parent emotion-related talk did not significantly change over time in the total sample ($p = .288$), in the high risk sample ($p = .164$), or in the low risk sample ($p = .997$).

Table 2. Means of Parent Emotion-Related Talk Among Low and High Risk Groups

Parent Emotion-Related Talk	Time 1			Time 2			Time 3		
	Low Risk	High Risk	p	Low Risk	High Risk	p	Low Risk	High Risk	p
SAP	0.56 (.88)	0.18 (.50)	0.007**	.36 (.62)	.83 (2.04)	0.238	.86 (1.21)	.50 (1.09)	0.222
SAE	1.47 (2.05)	.23 (.96)	<.001***	1.04 (2.05)	.46 (.98)	0.093	1.95 (3.72)	.45 (1.34)	0.02*
DP	.53 (1.32)	.21 (.58)	0.094	.11 (.32)	.17 (.55)	0.561	.50 (1.19)	.25 (.62)	0.262
DE	5.00 (5.43)	1.38 (2.69)	<.001***	3.64 (3.46)	.85 (2.73)	<.001***	6.23 (5.05)	.66 (1.14)	<.001***
EP	.00 (.00)	.02 (.13)	0.404	.00 (.00)	.42 (1.32)	0.095	.00 (.00)	.43 (1.39)	0.151
EE	.02 (.15)	.02 (.13)	0.804	0	0		0	0	
EMP	.05 (.31)	.11 (.55)	0.463	.04 (.19)	.06 (.24)	0.672	.23 (.69)	.30 (.85)	0.745
OMS	.35 (.92)	.03 (.26)	0.012*	.82 (1.79)	.15 (.69)	0.017*	.86 (1.67)	.27 (.82)	0.057
OIS	.02 (.15)	.02 (.13)	0.804	.18 (.48)	.42 (1.61)	0.29	.18 (.85)	.25 (.75)	0.741
Total	8.00 (7.11)	2.80 (4.01)	<.001***	6.07 (5.68)	3.37 (5.50)	0.041*	10.82 (6.45)	3.05 (3.83)	<.001***

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

RESULTS, continued



Figure 1. Total Parent Emotion-Related Talk in the low- and high-risk groups at each time point

DISCUSSION

- The purpose of the current work was to examine the trajectory of parent emotion-related talk in mother of infants with and without elevated levels of behavior problems.
- Findings suggest that parent emotion-related talk is fairly stable throughout infancy. However, little is known about the developmental trajectory in older children who may engage in more sophisticated parent-child interactions.
- Overall, findings highlight there are significant differences in parent emotion-related talk in mother of infants with and without elevated behavior problems.
- Specifically, our findings suggest that mothers of infants without elevated behavior problems use more emotion-related talk than mothers of infants with elevated behavior problems.
- Future research should examine the effect of parent emotion-related talk on infant and child outcomes. Given the differences between the low and high risk group, possibly intervening and educating parents about the benefits of parent emotion-related talk as early as infancy may have potential long term effects.

Limitations

- Notably, the assessment points when the samples were collected varied, which possibly impacted the results of the trajectory analyses and findings.
- Another limitation is that analyses were conducted using frequency (counts) of parent emotion-related talk which does not take into account the overall amount of speech the parent is using. Future analyses will included proportions of parent-emotion related talk.

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