

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR COMMON BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS IN YOUNG CHILDREN WITH AUTISM RICHARD SOLOMON MD

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GBU: Masterclass

- Quick review of The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly model
- · Answer questions from the audience
- Review the recent research on parenting the child with autism

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GBU: Framework

"Misbehavior is the immature expression of a valid feeling."

- How can we help children on the spectrum learn to express their feelings in a "good negative" way?
- How can parents and professionals use 'behavior problems' to help autistic children develop into more mature emotional thinkers?
- How to help parents promote good, discipline bad, and ignore ugly behavior?



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Greenspan's DIR Model

6 Functional Developmental Capacities

- 1. Shared Attention & Self-regulation
- 2. Engagement and attachment
- 3. Two-way Communication
- 4. Complex two-way Communication
- 5. Shared Meanings/Symbolic Play
- 6. Emotional Thinking/Connecting ideas logically

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Developmental Readiness

- Discipline for misbehavior is appropriate for children when they *understand* they are misbehaving
- Beginning age equivalent: 18 months-2 years to 4-5 years
- Before that, keep the home safe and use distraction
- Many autistic children are not developmentally ready for the GBU approach.





Diagnostic Considerations

- · Common behavioral difficulties (large majority of children)
- · Childhood anxiety/fearfulness is common
- · ADD/ADHD
 - Can be diagnosed reliably by age 6-7
 - Early ADD/ADHD by age 4-5 but meds not recommended
 4-5 ADD/ADHD
- · Oppositional Defiant Disorder
 - Uncommon in pre-adolescent
- · Psychiatric diagnoses (uncommon in pre-adolescents): See FH
 - Depression

Bipolar

- OCD

Mood disorder

- Regulatory Disorder
- Autism

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Review of Research

Parenting of Children with ASD: A Grounded Theory Study

- Aim: understand the process of parenting autistic children:
 - The meanings and expectations of having a child with autism
 - Critical events
 - Facilitating and inhibiting conditions/factors
 - Patterns of response by the parents in their parenting roles.
 - How the parents cope with the autism diagnosis and adapt to the complex experience of raising an autistic child.
- Method: Detailed interview of 9 couples and 1 single parent who had a young child (<6 yo)
- A process of transition, of deep integration of change, and complex adaptive activity. Parents recognized being different people, with ruptures and identity reconstruction, supported by the experience of their new roles.

Roquette-Vian et al, 2021

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eview of Research

Parenting of Children with ASD: A Grounded Theory Study

- The birth of a child with differences challenges all the expectations of the parents leading to a natural crisis period
 - The grief experience of an idealized child.
- Disability is characterized as difficult, time-consuming, and challenging, even though everyone recognizes it as unfinished a continuum in a process of self-transformation.
- Causes ruptures in systems of meanings and reveals weaknesses in view of the need to redefine a new reality in life
- Four reactions to diagnosis:
 - 1. We knew and have gone through grieving process
 - 2. Grieving upon diagnostic evaluation
 - 3. Denial of diagnosis
 - 4. Acceptance despite diagnosis

Roquette-Vian et al, 2021



- The strategies ("self restructuring") to deal with parenting an autistic child:
 - Cognitive, related to the learning of new skills,
 - The redefinition of the parental role and decision making;
 - Relational, where family support and friends stand out;
 - Social, child and family support associations
 - Health services, schools, and society
 - Reorganization of habits,
 - Sharing of tasks and the reconciliation of roles stand out.
- All these elements contribute to favor the transformation of the concepts of life, beliefs, expectations, relationships, and day-to-day living

Roquette-Vian et al, 2021

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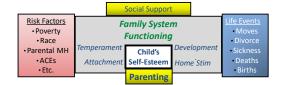


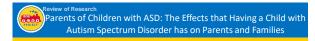
- Review of the literature on having a child with autism.
- In several studies parents of autistic children report more stress, anxiety, in several studies.
 - Rise in cortisol levels
 - With less support, more anxiety/stress
 - With more autism severity more stress
 - With more externalizing behavior (e.g. aggression), more stress
 - Overall decline in health, social functioning, mental health, emotional role
- Having positive spousal relationships was protective and reduced stress.
 - A 'common project'
 - Autism strains marriages

*Fisher, 2022

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- · Mothers felt they must take on more responsibility
 - Socially isolating to have a child with autism
 - Difficulties with transitions, rigidity of child
- · Conflicts with work/financial issues
- · Siblings felt they received less parental attention
- Extended family support, a major external resource.
- · Several families worried about stigma
- Parent coaching increased parental competence/decreased stress
 - Findings similar to our NIMH study on PLAY Project

Fisher, 2022

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- Little is known about differences in parenting styles and behaviors between parents of children with ASD and parents of typically developing (TD) children.
- Children with ASD experience high levels of cooccurring internalizing and externalizing symptoms, with 11–84% of children experiencing internalizing symptoms, such as anxiety
- More than 40% of children displaying disruptive and other forms of externalizing symptoms

Ventola et al, 2017

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Parenting a Child with ASD: Comparison of parenting style between ASD, anxiety, and typical development

Study aims:

- How children's internalizing and externalizing symptoms, parent symptoms of anxiety and depression, as well as parenting styles compare across children with anxiety and children with ASD, when compared with TD children.
- Within each diagnostic group, how children's symptoms and parents' symptoms may be associated with each parenting style, to further evaluate potential factors underlying different parenting styles.
- Assessed:
 - 'Acceptance'
 - 'Psychological control'
 - 'Firm control'

Ventola et al, 2017



Parenting a Child with ASD: Comparison of parenting style between ASD, anxiety, and typical development

- Participants included children with ASD (N = 48), children with an anxiety disorder (N =85), typically developing (TD) children (N = 26)
 - Average age 10 years old for all 3 groups
- Measures:
 - Child Behavior Checklist, School Age Version (CBCL; Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983)—
 - Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI; Steer & Beck, 1997)-
 - Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck, Steer, & Carbin, 1988)
 - Parent Report of Parenting Behavior Inventories (PRPBI; Mann & Sanders, 1994; Morton, 1991)
- Higher scores reflected greater amounts of acceptance, psychological control, and firmness.

Ventola et al, 2017

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Parenting a Child with ASD: Comparison of parenting style between ASD, anxiety, and typical development

Results & Conclusion

- The current study did not find overall differences in parenting style between parents of TD children and children with ASD,
 - Which contrasts with other findings of reduced parental acceptance and greater use of psychological control among parents of children with ASD compared to parents of TD children
- But parents of autistic children did report increased psychological control and firm control when the children showed more externalizing behavior.
- Therefore, interventions that target such maladaptive behaviors, or integrate
 ways to teach parents to effectively manage such challenging behaviors, may
 be beneficial for improving quality of parent-child interaction for children with
 ASD.

Ventola et al, 2017

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Parenting Practices and Externalizing Behaviors in Autistic Children: A Systematic Literature Review

- Literature review: 30 Quantitative studies. Major paper with large number of references. Open access.
- Aim: To investigate what parenting practices are associated with lower or higher levels of externalizing behaviors in autistic children.
 - Externalizing behaviors including aggression, destructiveness, oppositionality, etc.
- Therefore, for the purpose of this review, the term parenting practices will be used, which is inclusive of the broader parenting styles, mindful parenting, and parenting behaviors that occur across parenting dimensions.
 - Permissive, authoritative, authoritarian & mindful styles

Suvana et al, 2024



Types of Parenting Patterns

	Control		Quality of Communication		Maturity Demands		Nurturing	
Pattern	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
Authoritarian	х			х	х			х
Authoritative	х		х		х		х	
Permissive		х	х			х	х	
Neglectful		х		х		х		х

Baumrind, 1966/2016

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Style of Parenting and Children's Aggressiveness

	High Punitiveness	Low Punitiveness	
High	Most	Moderately	
Permissiveness	Aggressive	Aggressive	
Low	Moderately	Least	
Permissiveness	Aggressive	Aggressive	

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Parenting Practices and Externalizing Behaviors in Autistic Children: A Systematic Literature Review

- Parenting includes parenting styles and parenting behaviors.
- Parenting styles describe 'how parents parent' and have been defined along two broad dimensions: parental warmth and behavioral/psychological control
- Parental warmth acceptance, involvement, sensitivity, and positive affect (also called positive parenting)
- Parental behavioral control includes behaviors such as managing/ controlling child behaviors via monitoring, setting limits and standards, strict discipline, adapting the environment
- Parental psychological control includes more intrusive controlling behaviors such as inconsistent discipline, withdrawal of love and guilt induction (also called negative parenting in the literature)

 Suvana et al, 2024



Parenting Practices and Externalizing Behaviors in Autistic Children: A Systematic Literature Review

Authoritarian Style:

- Harsh and disengaged parenting, inconsistent discipline, the use of corporal punishment, and poor monitoring and supervision, predicted higher levels of child externalizing behaviors.
- Criticizing and ignoring the child were associated with greater externalizing behaviors in autistic children.
- Results were consistent across studies for authoritarian parenting with higher levels of authoritarian parenting associated with higher levels of externalizing behaviors (frequency).

Suvana et al, 2024

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Parenting Practices and Externalizing Behaviors in Autistic Children: A Systematic Literature Review

Supportive and Permissive Styles

- Supportive styles i.e. accommodating the child, modifying the environment, providing structure and routine, supervision and monitoring, managing non-compliance with everyday activities, responding to externalizing behaviors, managing distress, maintaining safety, and analyzing and planning were the most common strategies used by parents in response to externalizing behaviors
- Results for permissive parenting were relatively consistent with four studies finding higher levels of permissive parenting style associated with higher levels of externalizing behaviors

Suvana et al, 2024

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Parenting Practices and Externalizing Behaviors in Autistic Children: A Systematic Literature Review

Authoritative Style

- Findings for authoritative parenting style were mixed. Greenlee et al. (2022) found in a large longitudinal study that higher levels of authoritative parenting at Time 2 in fathers were associated with lower levels of autistic child externalizing behaviors at Time 3 one year later
 - However higher levels of authoritative parenting at Time 2 in mothers were associated with higher levels of externalizing behaviors at Time 3
- This finding for mothers was similar to Portes et al. (2020), who found crosssectionally that higher levels of authoritative parenting in mothers and fathers were associated with higher levels of externalizing behaviors (frequency) in autistic children
- Limit setting may be helpful and associated with lower levels of externalizing behaviors in neurodivergent children (e.g., provision of expectations and structure via limit setting/discipline).

Suvana et al, 2024



Parenting Practices and Externalizing Behaviors in Autistic
Children: A Systematic Literature Review

Mindful Parenting

- Mindful parenting involves being present and fully engaged in interactions with your children, responding thoughtfully rather than reacting impulsively, and cultivating self-awareness and compassion for both yourself and your child
- All five studies identified mindful parenting as negatively associated with child externalizing behaviors i.e., higher levels of mindful parenting were associated with lower levels of child externalizing behavior

Suvana et al, 2024

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Parenting Practices and Externalizing Behaviors in Autistic Children: A Systematic Literature Review

Mindful Parenting

Presence and Attention: Being fully present in the moment rather than being preoccupied with other thoughts or worries.

Emotional Awareness: Recognizing and understanding your own emotions and reactions, as well as those of your child, without judgment.

Non-Judgmental Acceptance: Mindful parenting encourages accepting yourself and your child, along with their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, without judgment.

Compassion: It fosters compassion for both yourself and your child, recognizing that everyone makes mistakes and that everyone deserves kindness and understanding.

Intentional Responses: Mindful parenting involves pausing before reacting, allowing for a more thoughtful and intentional response to your child's needs and behaviors.

Self-Regulation: It emphasizes the importance of managing your own stress and emotional reactions, which can help create a more stable and supportive environment for your child. Listening with Full Attention: Mindful parenting involves actively listening to your child, truly hearing what they have to say, and responding with empathy and understanding.

Benefits: Mindful parenting can lead to stronger parent-child relationships, improved communication, and a more positive and supportive family environment.

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Parenting Practices and Externalizing Behaviors in Autistic Children: A Systematic Literature Review

- Six studies found mediating/moderating effects of parenting practices on the relationship between various parent and child variables
 - Parenting stress, parent emotional regulation, parent relationship satisfaction, child autism characteristics
- Parenting stress mediated the relationship between mindful parenting and child externalizing behaviors,
 - Higher levels of mindful parenting were associated with lower levels of parenting stress, and lower levels of parenting stress were associated with lower levels of child externalizing behaviors.

Suvana et al, 2024



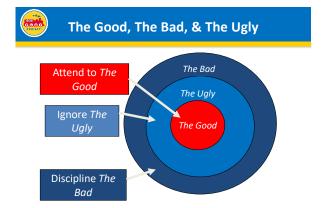
Rules: Do's and Don'ts

- Nurture, nurture, nurture: Love & fun
- The "mirror" technique:
 - Feeling reflections
 - Behavior reflections
 - Language reflections

Do <u>not</u> ask <u>questions</u>. *Make* statements: "You're mad because your brother took your toy!!!"

- The "never ever ever ever ever ever rule."
- Rule by the rules, not emotions
- · Toe over the line rule
- · Message of competence
- GOYA

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Reasoning & Processing Feelings

- It's important that you understand his behavior. It is good, bad, or ugly behavior?
- For me tantrumming is just ugly behavior which I would normally ignore but not following the rule—It's time to eat would be bad behavior if he doesn't turn off TV and come to the table.
- So, what is his feeling? First TELL him what he is feeling. Be a mirror to his feelings: Jacob, you want to watch TV and you don't want to eat.
- · And you know what he'll do? He'll say 'Yeah' and stop crying.



Rules, Reasons & Consequences Chart

Rules	Reasons	Consequences

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Time Out

- A review of the time-out literature spanning nearly 30 years examined the best practice time-out procedures (Everett, Hupp & Olmi, 2010).
- Best practice time-outs include:
 - A verbalized warning,
 - verbalized reason,
 - placement in a safe location,
 - removal from environmental reinforcement (e.g., toys, siblings),
 - location in a chair,
 - short duration (e.g., typically around 3 minutes for children between ages 3 and 7),
 - returns to the chair following escape, and
- follow-through with original request if the time-out was due to noncompliance.
- Also,
 - remain calm
 - $\,-\,$ using the intervention consistently, and
 - having realistic, developmentally appropriate expectations



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Time Out Strategies From Least to Most Severe

- Warnings: Toe Over the Line
- Mini time out in a chair (Remember, it's not punishment)
- 5-minute time out in room or chair
- 10-minute time out if not cooperative in room (make room safe!)
- Holding ("I love you very much, but you may not hit or break.")





The Impulse Sandwich

- · The "Impulsive Brain"
- From the amygdala to the cingulate gyrus to the frontal lobe
- Gain control through discipline
- Then the Impulse Sandwich
- · The key to maturity
- · Sophisticated social story

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Message of Competence

- How parents FEEL when they discipline is key! Take your own pulse.
- If you are yelling, feeling out of control, etc. you are doing something wrong.
- Children try to push your buttons to get their way. It's not about you!
- You should feel NEUTRAL.

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Message of Competence

- Discipline is about teaching not punishment.
- "Iron fist in a velvet glove."
 - Pick your battles (ignore ugly behavior) and win all important battles.
- When you expect the child to do what he <u>can</u> = message of competence.
- Goal: A mature impulse sandwich

