Development of emotion regulation in school aged children and parents’ roles in helping children regulate their emotions.

Introduction

Emotion Regulation (ER) is a multidimensional construct that includes clarity, awareness, and acceptance of emotions, as well as coming up with strategies to manage these emotions (Pisani et al., 2013). Studies demonstrate a strong relationship between emotion regulation in children and parenting styles/patterns.

Purpose: The aim of this review is to understand the development of emotion regulation in children, parents’ role in the development of ER, and different mechanisms of influence.

Literature Review

Emotion Regulation Development in Children (Zeman et al., 2006)
- **Infancy** (3-12 months) and **Toddlerhood** (1-2 years): Expressing emotions as a reaction to an event and to connect specific events.
- **Preschoolers** (3-5 years): Understanding display rules.
- **Middle Childhood** (6-12 years): Gender differences, frequency and intensity of emotions increase.

Outcomes of Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation and social competence was attributed to less conflicts in relationships with peers since children were able to use compromising strategies to resolve conflict in a healthy manner rather than using more verbally aggressive and retaliating strategies (Morris et al., 2017).

Another outcome of poor emotion regulation skill is psychopathology. When children are under stressful conditions and experience negative emotions, the high emotional arousal may interfere with the adaptive ways of handling emotions and experience negative emotions, the high emotional arousal may interfere with the adaptive ways of handling emotions (Cisler et al., 2010).

Environmental Mechanism of Influence: Parenting

- **Parents’ Emotion Socialization Behaviours** (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Hajai et al., 2020; Lambie et al., 2020).
- **Parents’ negative and positive emotion expressivity** (Zeman et al., 2006).
- **Attachment Theory** (Thompson et al., 2007; Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1978).
- **Emotion dismissing** (Barrett and Magee, 1998).

Outcomes of Attachment Styles in Children

- **Secure** (Sensitive and quick to respond to children’s needs).
- **Anxious/avoidant** (Anxious, ambivalent, or contradictory).
- **Anxious/resistant** (Anxious, resistant, or over-dependent).
- **Disorganized** (Child may become emotionally distant).

Review of Parenting to Support ER in Children

- **Four ways through which parents’ emotion expressivity influences children’s emotional competence** (Barrett and Campos, 1987)
  - Social referencing
  - Modelling behaviours, facial, and verbal displays
  - Displaying common actions/behaviours required to cope with emotions
  - Helping children acquire unique emotional history
- **Parents’ negative and positive emotion expressivity** (Zeman et al., 2006)
- **Emotion Coaching versus Emotion dismissing** (Gottman et al., 1998)

Parenting Programs

- Turning it to Kids (Havighurst et al., 2009)
- Parent-Child Interaction Therapy Emotion Development (Luby et al., 2012)
- Emotion Enhanced Triple P (Salmon et al., 2009)

Discussion

Limitations:
- Studies do not explain the differences found between males and females when parents have discussions about emotions with them.
- Cultural and SES factors are not taken into consideration in most of the studies about emotion regulation.
- Methods used to collect data were parents’ self-report so it may be bias or inaccurate.

Future Directions:
- Address the limitations above.
- The use of technology or applications on smart devices to help parents and children learn more about emotion regulation.

Clinical Implications

- When children are unable to regulate their emotions, their anxiety levels increase and so does the parents’ anxiety levels when they are unable to help their child regulate their emotions.
- MFTs can help families explore the impact that a child’s lack of emotion regulation has on the whole system and not just the child.
- MFTs can help parents explore and address their own emotion regulation skills in therapy (second order changes).
- MFTs can provide psychopathology on importance of parenting styles on the development of emotion regulation in children.

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