



Can Parenting Practices Predict Children's Emotional Intelligence?

Past research has found that the time mothers and children spend in joint activity is an important aspect of the parent-child relationship.

But until recently, researchers had not investigated this time spent together in relation to children's emotional intelligence. As part of a more comprehensive study of children's emotional intelligence and parenting styles and practices, parents (and their children aged 7-12) from four schools in northeast Spain, were invited (via questionnaires) to participate in this research study.

Findings showed that when mothers and children spend extended periods of time together in joint

activities, there are increased opportunities for mothers to model emotions and reinforce self-regulatory behaviour in their children. Consistent with previous research findings, sample results show that time spent in joint play predicts improvement in conduct problems. It also appears that the time parents spend with their children, and the kinds of activities they engage in, relate to emotional intelligence. Depending on the type of activity in which the mother and the child engage, these relations may be positive, neutral or negative.

Most efforts in the education of emotional intelligence have been directed towards training children's emotional abilities. This study suggests that in addition to training, parent-child informal joint activity (play for instance) may be an important factor in the development of children's trait emotional intelligence.

KEY FINDINGS

→ Not only is the time mothers spend with their children important, but the kinds of activities they develop also matter.

- Children whose mothers spend more time with them in joint activities are likely to have fewer emotional and behavioural problems; misbehave less at home; and enjoy higher academic achievement at school.
- When mother and child play together, they establish and maintain shared attention on objects or games. This means the child has to modulate his or her excitement or distress and therefore to regulate his or her emotions and be able to respond to the demands of the joint-play situation.
- Time children spent with their mothers watching TV was related to a higher difficulty to cope with stress. TV exposes children to multiple instances of fictional, real, physical and emotional violence and stress. It is likely that after confronting continuous virtual emotional stressors, children exhaust their resources to cope with further stress, even in real life.
- Time together spent doing practical things such as homework, reminding kids to clean up or do their chores would not necessarily relate to emotional intelligence. These kinds of interactions have the potential for warm, loving exchanges, but also for high levels of negative, often chronic conflict.
- Educational activities facilitate exploration of personal interests and therefore allow children to learn about their own feelings and emotions in a variety of situations.

- ✓ Adopt an authoritative parenting style that is responsive to emotional needs and sets reasonable limits, but also includes warmth, encouragement and support.

Source: The Relation Between the Time Mothers and Children Spent Together and the Children's Trait Emotional Intelligence, Albert Alegre, Child Youth Care Forum (2012) 41: 493-508.



THINGS YOU CAN DO

- ✓ Set aside quality time with kids, free of technology and other interruptions
- ✓ Read together, start a jigsaw puzzle, brainstorm ways to do something new
- ✓ Take in a museum or junk shop or just hang out on a walk
- ✓ Talk about news and politics, sport or hobbies
- ✓ Do handicrafts together
- ✓ Play together – sport, board games, apps, puzzles, jokes

TAKEAWAY

FROM PROFESSOR MICHAEL BERNARD
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Studies that have addressed the way in which parenting relates to children's emotional intelligence have consistently found a positive relationship between warm, accepting and democratic parenting and high levels of emotional intelligence. Mother-child time spent together in authentic and positive interaction is important not only because the child experiences his/her mother's warmth, but also because those times are opportunities for mothers to model social and emotional behaviour. Children learn to negotiate conflict, to share attention, and successfully enjoy a common activity.