

Parental socialization practice of emotions and social skills of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

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Introduction

Emotional regulation, which develops during childhood and adolescence, is an important aspect of social communication. Many potential environmental contributions to children's emotional development exist, but few rival the prominence and constancy of parental influence. Therefore, emotion regulation can be facilitated or impaired, depending on how parents evaluate their child's emotions. Empirical studies support the postulate that supportive reactions to the child's negative emotions allow them to learn how to regulate their emotions.

Specifically, supportive parents are aware of children's negative emotions, they talk to the child about the emotional experience and guide them to solve the problem inducing the negative emotion. In contrast, unsupportive parents consider negative emotions as unpleasant and tend to criticize and punish the child for expressing them.

Since better practices of parental socialization of emotions could promote the social and emotional development of the child, the purpose of this study was to explore parental reactions that influence the social adaptation of children with atypical development such as those with ASD.

Methods

Parental behaviors of forty-nine Quebec mothers of children with ASD aged between 2 and 13 years old were assessed through self-report questionnaires about parents' reactions to the child's emotions which can be "supportive" or "unsupportive" (Mazzone and Nader-Grosbois, 2014). Parents reported their reactions to the child's expression of negative or positive emotion for 8 hypothetical scenarios. On a seven-point Likert scale, parents rated the likelihood of reacting in six ways. These included :

Unsupportive strategies :

- (1) matching the distress of the child
- (2) expressing punitive reactions that reduce the child's exposure or need to address the negative emotions
- (3) minimizing the seriousness of the event

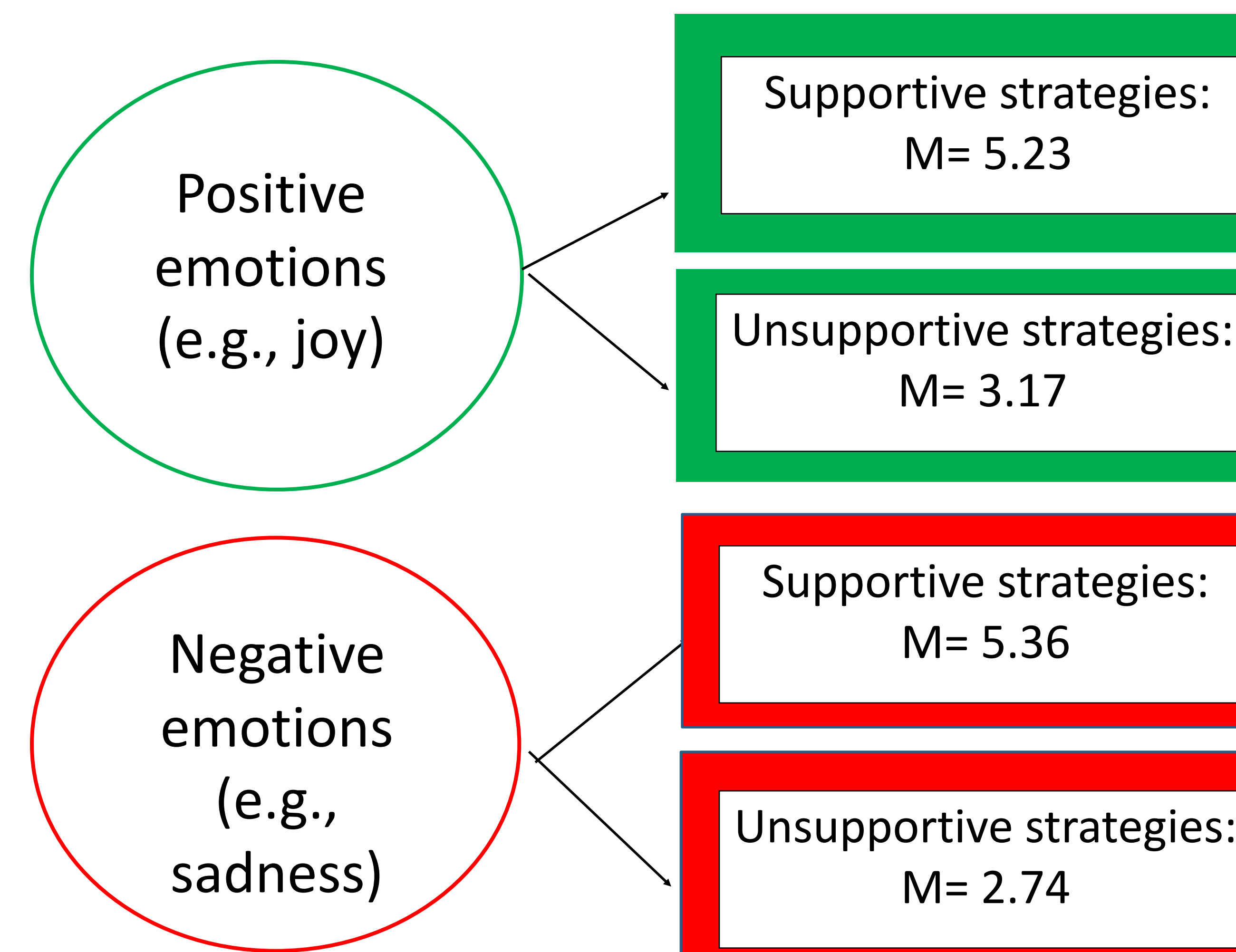
Supportive strategies :

- (4) encouraging the child to express her or his negative emotions or validating the expression
- (5) emotion-focused interventions
- (6) focus on helping the child engage in problem-solving related to the causes of the emotion

Results

Figure 1

Likelihood on a seven-point Likert scale of reacting to positive or negative emotions of their child with ASD with supportive or unsupportive strategies



According to a preliminary analysis, the results report that mother of ASD children are more likely to react with supportive strategies when their child expresses negative emotions (M= 5.36) (e.g., sadness) compared to when he expresses positive emotions (M=5.23) (e.g., happiness). Therefore, they are more likely to react with unsupportive strategies towards the positive emotions of their child (M=3.17) than towards their negative emotions (M=2.74).

Conclusion

Researchers indicated that parents who reacted with supportive strategies could facilitate children to develop adaptive emotion regulation skills, whereas parental unsupportive emotion socialization, such as hostility toward and minimization of children's emotional experience, has been linked to deficiency in child emotion regulation (Eisenberg et al., 1998). It turns out that mothers of ASD children respond with supportive strategies when their children express negative emotions such as sadness, but it would be important to underline why they are more likely to respond with unsupportive strategies when their child expresses positive emotions such as joy.

Given that our sample consisted only of mothers of ASD children, it would be relevant for future research to compare mothers' reactions (supportive or unsupportive) to the child's emotions (positive or negative) with fathers' reactions to the child's emotions.

References

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