USING MINDFUL PARENTING STRATEGIES TO INCREASE MEDICAL ADHERENCE IN YOUNG CHILDREN

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Learning Objectives

• At the end of this presentation, the participant will be able to:
  1. define mindful parenting
  2. recognize ways in which mindless parenting can get in the way of medication adherence
  3. list at least 3 mindful parenting strategies that can improve compliance in young children

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and nonjudgmentally

Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994, p. 4)

What did you say?

Mindfulness means that we are aware of what is happening, as it is happening, without any judgement or opinion.

Mindfulness roots

• In the 1970s, Jon Kabat-Zinn brought mindfulness to the medical community

• Today, the hype is everywhere!
**Why is this important?**

- The simple act of **slowing down** and **paying attention** and remaining in the present moment is powerful.

  *How powerful…?*

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**The research**

- Improves immune system function (Davidson et al., 2003)
- Reduces elevated blood pressure (Hughes et al., 2013)
- Reduces perceived stress levels for parents with children with neurodevelopmental disorders (Anderson & Guthery, 2015; Neece, 2013)
- Increases working memory capacity (Quach et al., 2016)
- Improves quality of relationships (Kozlowski, 2013)
- Reduces stress and anxiety in senior medical students (Wameckie et al., 2011)
- Decreases physician burnout (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998)

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**The research**

- Provider mindfulness practice benefits patients.
- Researchers looked at the impact on therapeutic outcome after a provider took part in a brief, 5-minute mindfulness exercise (Dunn, Callahan, Swift, & Ivanovic, 2013).
- Patients perceived the sessions as being more effective.

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**Treatments**

- Evidence Based Treatments
  - Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)
  - Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)
  - Mindfulness-Based Relationship Enhancement (for couples)

- Empirical evidence on the role of mindfulness in parenting is rapidly evolving (e.g., Bogels, Hoogstand, Van Lieke, De Schutter, & Restifo; Duncan et al., 2009; Monera et al., 2015).

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**Parenting and stress**

- Stress is a common byproduct of parenting.
- High stress levels are associated with:
  - Parent depression
  - Marital conflict
  - Poorer physical health
  - Less effective parenting
  - Child behavior problems
- Greater stress among parents of children with medical complexities

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**Mindless parenting**

- Stress and mindlessness often occur:
  - moving through life with limited awareness
  - getting lost in the past and future
  - multi-tasking
Mindless parenting

- Under poor conditions, parenting skills often collapse
- Small events can cause kneejerk reactions
  - even when events themselves are not life threatening

Mindful Parenting

- Parents pay attention to their children and their parenting in a non-judgmental way
- Increase their awareness of the present moment with their child
- Reduce automatic (negative) reactions to their child

Mindful parenting targets the bigger process in medical adherence

Mindful Parenting

- With mindful parenting, parents tend to:
  - Respond less reactively to parenting stress
  - Develop more empathy and compassion
  - Tolerate difficult emotions more easily
  - Resolve conflict better
  - Develop a stronger interpersonal bonds
  - Have better self-care

Mindful parenting

- Bögels et al. (2008):
- Parenting for families of children with behavior disorders (ADHD/ODD/autism spectrum disorders)
- Children 8 to 11 years old
  - Mindfulness
    - 8 sessions mindful child training
  - 8 sessions mindful parenting training
  - Versus waitlist control
  - Decreased child externalizing problems
    - After training
    - 8 week follow up

Mindful parenting strategies

- Change your language
- Show gratitude
- Recognize signs of stress
- Enter "being mode"
- Practice self-compassion
**Change your language (#1)**

- What is happening with my child in this moment?
- What does my child feel?
- What does my child need?
- What am I feeling?
- What do I need?

**Change your language**

*What is wrong with me?! Why can't I handle this?*

to

*What do I need right now? What kind of support would help me?*

**Connect the dots (#2)**

- Recognizing signals of stress
  - body sensations
  - feelings
  - thoughts
  - behaviors

**Connect the dots (#2)**

- Body sensations
  - Tension in the shoulders, heart beating fast, headache…
- Feelings
  - Angry, sad, frustrated, guilty, tired, burned out…
- Thoughts
  - “I can’t take this anymore,” “I can’t handle this,” “this ALWAYS happens”…
- Behaviors
  - Yelling, avoiding, getting angry at yourself…

**Connect the dots (#2)**

- Attempt to acknowledge all reactions, nonjudgmentally
- Create opportunity to feel and identify the reaction
- Pause before taking action until we are aware of our bodily reaction and the accompanying thoughts/feelings.
Choosing mindfulness

STIMULUS (Medication refusal) → REACTION (anxiety, anger)

STIMULUS (Medication refusal) → Mindfulness → RESPONSE (calm, controlled)

Mindfulness opens the possibility of “being mode”
* Goal is just to be with what is
* Approach with curiosity and openness

“Why are you so angry—nothing bad has happened yet.”
- calm nurse

Be in the being mode (#3)

• Connecting with the body to return attention to the moment
  – doing mode → being mode
• Experience small pleasures in life by tuning into body
• Ground ourselves in our bodies to experience the situation fully and pause before reacting
• Result: Makes the situation more likely to de-escalate

Be in the being mode (#3)

• If out of sync with body, how do we truly tune into our others?
  – Children
  – Patients
• Breath as an anchor

STOP! (#3)

• S – Stop what you’re doing
• T – Take a deep breath
• O – Observe your experience
  – body sensations, thoughts, feelings, and action tendencies
• P – Proceed with something that will support you in the moment

Be in the being mode (#3)

• Checking in
  Bring yourself into the present moment by asking yourself: What is my experience right now? What thoughts are going through my mind? What feelings are here? What body sensations do I notice? What action tendencies am I aware of?

• Breathing
  Turn your full attention towards your breathing. Follow each breath all the way in...and all the way out...maybe also become aware of the pause between the in-breath and the out-breath. Use the breath to anchor you into the present and help you tune into a state of awareness and stillness.

• Expanding
  Now expand the field of awareness around your breathing so that it includes a sense of the body as a whole, your posture, and facial expression. A sense of this breathing body, in this moment of time, in this space.
Self-compassion (#4)

• Not justifying/excusing “wrong” behavior/behavior you would like to change, but acknowledging that:
  – You are human
  – We all make mistakes
  – We all have challenging interactions with loved ones
• Not self-justification
• Acknowledgment of pain/suffering, and allowing compassion instead of more suffering

3 ways to practice self-compassion (#4)

Teach your patients and their parents:
• Awareness that this is a moment of pain (but it doesn’t have to be suffering)
  – Ouch! This hurts.
  – This is hard.
• Connecting with our common humanity
  – All parents have made mistakes.
  – I’m not alone.
• Self-kindness
  – It’s okay to be kind to myself.
  – It’s okay to forgive myself.
  – It’s okay to be patient.

Adapted from Solomon (2016)

Gratitude (#5)

• Intentionally focus attention on things that may otherwise get lost
• If parenting is a value,
  – What do I feel grateful for in my child / patient?
  – What do I feel grateful for in myself as a parent / provider?

Mindful parenting strategies

- Change your language
- Show gratitude
- Recognize signs of stress
- Practice self-compassion
- Enter “being mode”

Mindfulness in parenting questionnaire

McCarthy, Retiman, and Black (2016)
• Mindful parenting can often times be unhelpful especially in medical adherence.

• Mindful parenting helps parents:
  - Change their language
  - Recognize signals of stress
  - Enter the ‘being zone’
  - Practice self-compassion and gratitude

• Mindfulness allows parents to be present, slow down, and act in accordance to their values.

• We can model this for parents & patients.

References