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How Supportive and Maladaptive Parental Responses toward Adolescent Emotions May Affect Adolescent Depressive Symptoms

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During the peak of adolescent development, teenagers experience a variety of influences that can either improve or exacerbate mental health. Specifically, the way in which an adolescent manages his or her emotions can greatly influence mental health stability. Emotional regulation can decrease the risk of experiencing depressive symptoms. Adolescents may learn how to manage their emotions through a variety of sources, but one of the most influential sources is likely to be their parents. When parents inflict negative philosophies and responses toward negatively expressed adolescent emotions, adolescents are more likely to learn unhealthy emotional regulation skills. Consequently, poor emotional regulation can increase the risk of experiencing depressive symptoms. On the other hand, supportive parental responses toward negative adolescent emotions can improve adolescent emotional management, which can subsequently decrease risk of depressive symptoms and improve overall well-being. Supportive responses can include warm responses and emotional coaching strategies to teach an adolescent how to manage his or her emotions. This literature review discusses both maladaptive and supportive parental responses on adolescent emotional well-being as well as the effects of such parenting on adolescent mental health, specifically depression. Better awareness of supportive and maladaptive parental techniques toward negative adolescent emotions and their consequences may help to improve overall adolescent mental health.

Adolescence is a time of critical emotional development (Barry, Christofferson, Boorman, & Nelson, 2019; Houtepen, Sijtsma, Klimstra, Van, & Bogaerts, 2019; Lybbert, Ryland, & Bean, 2019). This emotional developing process often renders exploration of adolescent individuality and emotional beliefs (Barry et al., 2019; Lybbert et al., 2019; Shortt et al., 2016). During this transitional period, adolescents seek social acceptance, develop decision-making skills, participate in riskier behaviors, and desire for greater individuality (Crandall, Ghazarian, Day, & Riley, 2016; Houtepen et al., 2019). While adolescent

exploration can often establish positive self-identity and emotional regulation strategies, some adolescents seem to struggle identifying who they are, why they act or feel a certain way, and what they believe about themselves (Schwartz et al., 2017). Adolescents who feel comfortable with their identity may only occasionally search for their own existential purposes (Barry et al., 2019; Lybbert et al., 2019). However, frequent concerns and insecurities of identity have been shown to correlate with more adolescent emotional instability (Allen, Kuppens, & Sheeber, 2012; Hunter et al., 2011; Lybbert et al., 2019; Shortt et al., 2016). In fact, adolescents who struggle with identifying and understanding their emotions are at greater risk of exacerbating depressive symptoms (Trent et al., 2019). Difficulty with emotions and handling depressive symptoms may undermine how an adolescent develops individuality and stability.

During an adolescent's development, learning or discovering emotional regulation techniques may be helpful in regulating other aspects of his or her life. Regulating emotions includes understanding, accepting, and managing one's emotions in a way that prevents greater levels of dysphoria, distress, or apathy (Hurrell, Houwing, & Hudson, 2017; Trent et al., 2019). This ability to understand and cope with negative emotions such as anger, sadness, anxiety, or self-doubt can help prevent feelings of hopelessness, maladaptive responsive behaviors, and even depressive symptoms (Hunter et al., 2011; Trent et al., 2019). Oftentimes, adolescents with emotional control can express greater confidence in their feelings and behaviors and therefore avoid guilt, uncertainty, excessive stress, or self-doubt, which are all symptoms of depression (Trent et al., 2019). Therefore, mentally healthy adolescents are more likely to show better responses to their negative emotions than do adolescents with depressive symptoms (Hunter et al., 2011). On the other hand, poor emotional control may decrease one's ability to manage and understand one's own behaviors or emotions (Allen et al., 2012; Hurrell et al.,

2017; Shortt et al., 2016). Consequences of this maladaptive emotional management may cause rebellious behavior, unhealthy use of technology, struggles in social contexts, intensified sadness, mood disorders, and, in some cases, suicide (Allen et al., 2012; Coyne, Stockdale, & Summers, 2019; Houtepen et al., 2019; Lybbert et al., 2019; Shortt et al., 2016; Trent et al., 2019). Therefore, to understand and manage emotions may not only affect behaviors but may also correlate with adolescent mental health, specifically depression (Shortt et al., 2016; Trent et al., 2019).

Among the various social influences that contribute to the acquisition of emotion regulation, parents are among the most influential (Allen et al., 2012; Crandall et al., 2016). For example, on average, adolescents generally express their emotions according to the perceived approval of their parents' reactions to those emotions (Hunter et al., 2011; Scherr et al., 2018). Consequently, parental beliefs of and responses to adolescent emotions can greatly influence what emotions are acceptable or unacceptable in the home. In addition, when families are dysfunctional, adolescents are more likely to have poor emotional regulation skills, which in turn can predict greater depressive symptoms (Allen et al., 2012; Crandall et al., 2016; Trent et al., 2019).

Therefore, consistent criticism or maladaptive responses toward certain emotions may contribute to greater depressive symptoms in adolescents (Allen et al., 2012; Johnco & Rapee, 2018), and positive reactions towards emotions may promote healthier emotional regulation (Crandall et al., 2016; Hurrell et al., 2017). This is important to examine in adolescents because in comparison with younger children, adolescents receive significantly less support from parents in regards to their emotions due to the assumption that teenagers should already know how to emotionally regulate (Scherr et al., 2018). Because this is a time when adolescents are still developing emotionally, parental responses to adolescent negative emotions may influence how they develop skills for emotional regulation and vulnerabilities to depressive symptoms (Allen et al., 2012; Hurrell et al., 2017). Although depressive symptoms largely depend on biological, psychological, and social factors, parents who are supportive of children's negative emotions can scaffold emotion regulation skills and decrease vulnerability to depressive symptoms. This literature review will identify the various ways that parents respond to their adolescent's negative emotions and explore both maladaptive and supportive responses.

Maladaptive Responses toward Adolescent Emotions

Parents' maladaptive responses toward adolescent emotions manifest in both implicit and explicit ways. Implicitly, parents' pessimistic emotional philosophies can be

projected through example, beliefs, or reactions such as dismissive and negligent beliefs toward negative emotions. (Shortt et al., 2016; Trent et al., 2019). For example, parents can sometimes have negative stigmas toward depressed individuals, conveying a subtle disapproval to their adolescent regarding emotions such as fear, sadness, or anger (Hunter et al., 2011; Hurrell et al., 2017). These pre-judgements of depression can also lead to ignorance, misunderstandings, and criticism of depressed individuals (Johnco & Rapee, 2018). Even the simple act of disbelieving or failing to accept adolescents' negative emotions as legitimate can diminish adolescent trust in parents and the likelihood that they would rely on their parents for future help. Parents can improve their beliefs of depression by learning to accept and support any type of emotion that adolescents need to express (Shortt et al., 2016). These messages toward adolescents can cause several disturbances in adolescent development including increased risk for experiencing depressive symptoms (Johnco & Rapee, 2018). Parents' pessimistic attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts can inadvertently send messages to their child that his or her emotions are either acceptable or unacceptable in the home (Hurrell et al., 2017; Johnco & Rapee, 2018; Schwartz et al., 2017). Adolescents may be more likely to revert to unhealthy emotional regulation skills when they feel that their emotions may be unacceptable in the home.

In addition, some children assume that their parents do not like it when they express negative emotions such as anger, sadness, and fear (Scherr et al., 2018). Refraining from expressing such emotions is likely to increase chances of depression (Johnco & Rapee, 2018). Similarly, some parents may feel uncomfortable with the expression of negative emotions and can often neglect or dismiss such expression in their adolescent child (Hurrell et al., 2017; Shortt et al., 2016). Ignoring those emotions is likely to reduce emotional regulation skills practiced by that child and therefore increase the risk of experiencing depressive symptoms (Trent et al., 2019). Implicit maladaptive parenting behaviors and beliefs toward adolescent emotions are associated with maladaptive emotional regulation skills and outcomes (Allen et al., 2012; Houtepen et al., 2019; Hurrell et al., 2017; Trent et al., 2019).

While parents may sometimes implicitly lead their children to believe that they dislike certain emotions, other parents may explicitly and directly express dissatisfaction towards specific adolescent expression. Explicit parenting may include clear criticism, rejection, verbal aggression, or threats aimed toward negative emotional expression (Johnco & Rapee, 2018; Trent et al., 2019). As adolescents correlate their own emotions with these poor parental responses, they are more likely to develop unhealthy regulatory behaviors. Some of those behaviors may include

low self-esteem, uncertainty in emotional functioning, negative beliefs of ones' self, and emotional withdrawal, which are all predecessors of depression (Johnco & Rapee, 2018). In addition, depressive symptoms in adolescents is likely associated with parents who seek to manipulate their child's emotions (Houtepen et al., 2019; Johnco & Rapee, 2018; Schwartz et al., 2017). Children who feel forced to suppress or express emotions in a certain way can feel uncomfortable with their own emotions. Specifically, control over emotional expression can lead to greater withdrawal tendencies (Johnco & Rapee, 2018), as well as create distance in the parent-child relationship (Schwartz et al., 2017). As parents seek to explicitly change, reject, criticize, or punish specific emotions, adolescents are more likely to develop depressive symptoms (Allen et al., 2012; Houtepen et al., 2019; Johnco & Rapee, 2018).

Although overall maladaptive parenting has poor effects on adolescent emotional regulation, the differing parenting responses between mothers and fathers may have separate negative outcomes on their adolescent children. First, mothers, as opposed to fathers, are more likely to have a greater influence on both genders of children when they refrain from validating emotions (Hunter et al., 2011; Shortt et al., 2016). Validating emotions is when one acknowledges someone else's feelings as important and accurate in order to allow that individual to feel comfortable expressing his or her emotions. For example, children who lack proper validation from their mothers often feel penalized for their emotions and consequently tend to show unhealthy regulatory habits of their emotions (Hunter et al., 2011). On the other hand, fathers have a greater influence on their adolescent children when they express harsh or angry threats toward adolescent emotions (Allen et al., 2012; Shortt et al., 2016). Indeed, adolescents are more likely to experience depressive symptoms after harsh parenting by fathers as opposed to harsh parenting by mothers (Allen et al., 2012). Overall, maladaptive emotional responses from both parents may negatively impact either gender of adolescents, contributing to greater depressive symptoms.

Supportive Parental Responses toward Adolescent Emotions

Improvement in emotion regulation and mental health for adolescents is likely correlated with supportive parental responses of emotions, both implicit and explicit in nature. Implicitly, when parents have positive philosophies of emotions, they are likely to view negative emotions and depressive symptoms as an opportunity to teach emotional regulation strategies and develop more intimate relationships with their adolescent child (Hurrell et al.,

2017). Such supportive responses can communicate a certain degree of parental openness to emotionality that can make adolescents more comfortable approaching their parents with their negative feelings. As parents seek to understand negative emotions and depression, overall adolescent emotional well-being and positive behavior is more likely to increase (Hunter et al., 2011).

Explicitly supportive responses to emotions can include comments conveying warmth (e.g. "I hear you; that sounds hard") (Crandall et al., 2016), acceptance of the emotion (e.g. "It's okay to feel that way; we all feel like that sometimes") (Shortt et al., 2016), and support (e.g. "When you're ready, let's talk about what we can do together to help you") (Johnco & Rapee, 2018). When an adolescent feels sadness, fear, depression, or anger, supportive responses allow that child to feel comfortable expressing those emotions. These intentional positive efforts can increase emotional management skills in adolescents (Crandall et al., 2016; Shortt et al., 2016). In fact, adolescents who receive such responses from their parents show an increase in emotional coping skills (Houtepen et al., 2019). These are protective skills that enable one to better function psychologically, preventing internal problems and depressive symptoms (Houtepen et al., 2019; Johnco & Rapee, 2018).

Furthermore, emotional coaching techniques are other strategies that can help to prevent depressive symptoms in adolescents. Emotional coaching is an instructional method that parents can use to intentionally teach their adolescent how to handle his or her own emotions. For example, in response to their adolescent's distress, parents can teach the adolescent to process negative emotions by writing them down, help him or her understand appropriate versus inappropriate expressions of those emotions, and discuss potential solutions that can help him or her feel better. Strategies such as these can teach the function of emotions and how to manage emotions in a healthy way in order to prevent psychological distress (Houtepen et al., 2019). Indeed studies have found that implementing emotional regulation in the home is associated with improved psychological adjustment and overall health (Houtepen et al., 2019; Trent et al., 2019). Adolescents who receive these formal coaching strategies are also likely to improve in social relationships, experience higher levels of behavioral control, develop higher self-esteem, less overall stress, and higher academic achievement (Houtepen et al., 2019; Hunter et al., 2011; Hurrell et al., 2017; Shortt et al., 2016). In sum, during a time of critical emotional development, supportive strategies including emotional coaching, compassion, autonomy support, and validating attitudes can prevent adolescent depressive symptoms by supporting the development of emotion regulation skills (Houtepen et al., 2019).

Conclusion

Adolescents experience a variety of influences that can shape the way they deal with and view their own emotional tendencies. During this critical time of development, parental responses seem to be one of the most guiding sources that lead adolescents to their specific emotional beliefs (Hurrell et al., 2017). Parents who have negative philosophies toward emotional expression and regulation can influence their child to feel guilt for expressing such emotions. This suppression or even unhealthy regulation of the adolescent can affect his or her mental health. Such symptoms of poor emotional regulation are correlated

with adolescent depressive symptoms (Johnco & Rapee, 2018). On the contrary, parents who intentionally seek to teach emotional regulation techniques and respond positively to negative expression of adolescent emotions are likely to help their adolescent experience fewer depressive symptoms. Parents should be more aware that their emotional responses toward adolescents can greatly affect their mental health. Supportive responses can improve the way that adolescents deal with their own depressive symptoms. Therefore, parents should cease to criticize negative emotions and seek to learn emotional regulation techniques in order to help their adolescents manage their own emotions.

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