

Helping children with their emotional responses to stressful and traumatic life events – how can parents assist in this process?

Sophie Havighurst, PhD.
Tuning in to Kids Program
Mindful: Centre for Training and Research in Developmental Health
sophie.h@unimelb.edu.au



Acknowledgements

- **Program Authors:** Sophie Havighurst and Ann Harley
- **Research Team:**
Sophie Havighurst, Margot Prior, Ann Sanson, Daryl Efron, Katherine Wilson, Ann Harley, Elizabeth Pizarro, Galit Hasen, Rebecca Banks, Christiane Kehoe, Emily Incledon, Angeline Ho, Lara Silkoff
- **Research Collaborators:**
 - Mindful, Department of Psychiatry, University of Melbourne
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Aims of this presentation

- To describe a prevention program (Tuning in to Kids) that has targeted children's emotion competence via a parenting intervention
- To explore how TIK helps parents respond to children's emotions such as those that may occur after a stressful or traumatic event
- To explore outcomes from the TIK efficacy study



Theoretical Basis

The role of Emotional Competence

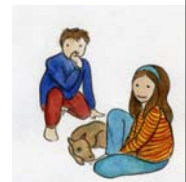
- Emotionality/expressivity
- Emotion regulation
- Emotional understanding

Role in children's functioning

- Behaviour
- Social competence
- Cognitive and learning capacities

Influenced by:

- Intrapersonal factors (temperament, cognition, language etc)
- Socialisation: parents/carers, teachers, siblings, peers etc via observation, reactions to and coaching of emotions in the child, and family emotion climate
- Social/cultural factors



How does parenting shape children's emotional competence?

- Meta-emotion Philosophy - (Gottman, Katz, and Hooven, 1996)
- Influence of Family of Origin
- Impacts on attitudes and responses to own and child's emotions
- Parenting styles
 - Emotion Coaching
 - emotion dismissiveness
 - emotion disapproving
 - laissez-faire/permissive
- Differential impact depending on parent and child factors (e.g., temperament)



Tuning in to Kids

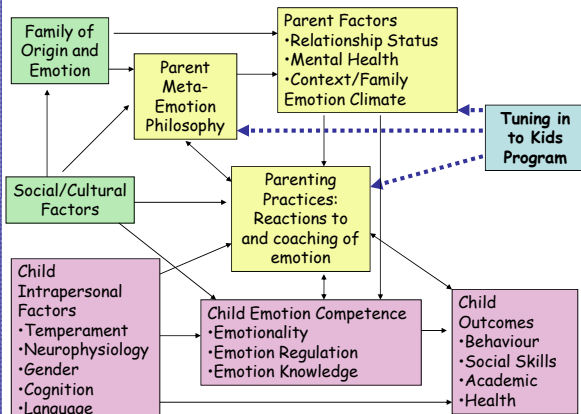
Emotionally Intelligent Parenting

Sophie Havighurst and Ann Harley

Mindful:
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in Developmental Health



TIK Theoretical Model



Tuning in to Kids

- Group parenting program - 6, weekly, 2-hour sessions, + 2 boosters
- Teaches parents ways of responding to children's emotional experiences that facilitate emotion understanding and regulation
- Addresses parent emotion awareness and regulation
- Improves responsiveness of parents to children's emotional needs rather than only focusing on managing children's behaviour
- Integrates mindfulness, attachment theory, developmental theories, emotion focused CBT concepts



Key Components of the Program

- Emotion coaching and emotion tuning
- Focus on low intensity emotions
- Reflection and labelling of emotions
- Empathy and validation
- Parents learn to "sit with" emotions
- Impact of emotion dismissiveness/criticism
- Explore emotion experience in family of origin
- Emotion awareness and self-care for parents
- Anger regulation for parents and children
- Problem solving
- Limits around children's behaviour (containment, safety, and family rules)
- Use of role plays



Emotion Coaching

To emotion coach your child you:

- Become aware of their emotion, especially if it is of a lower intensity (such as disappointment or frustration)
- View their emotion as an opportunity for intimacy and teaching
- Communicate your understanding and acceptance of the emotion - empathy
- Help them use words to describe what they feel
- If necessary, help them to solve problems. You may also communicate that all wishes and feelings are acceptable, but some behaviours are not.



Adapted from Gottman, J. M. & DeClair, J. (1997). The Heart of Parenting: Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Emotional Tuning Explained



Notice the Emotion

- What facial expression/body language does the child have?
- What sort of emotion/s might the situation make the child feel?
- How might you feel in a comparable adult situation?

Clarify with a question

- "When Hilda ignored you, how did you feel?"
- "Were you scared when you couldn't find me?"
- "How did you feel when you saw Toby playing with Karl?"
- "I wonder if you were feeling mad at your sister?"

Reflect the Emotion

- "You seem a bit sad."
- "I can see you are very frustrated."
- "It seems like you are a bit anxious."
- "I bet that made you pretty grumpy."

Locate Emotion in the Body

You could ask where the child feels that emotion in their body.

- "Where in your body do you feel angry?"
- "I wonder if your tummy feels a bit anxious?"
- "It looks like you might feel your sadness in your shoulders."

Empathise

- "That would make me feel angry if my sister had been allowed to go out and I hadn't."
- "It makes me feel sad when I'm not included with my friends."

Explore

You might follow this up with a further question or comment to find out more about the situation or explore other emotional reactions.

Tuning In to Kids. Havighurst & Harley, 2007

HOW ARE YOU FEELING?



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The Emotion Detective: Discovering What Your Child Feels

What would be a similar situation for an adult?
How would you feel in the adult situation?

- The birth of a sibling
- Starting preschool
- Being told by a parent you to share your special new toy
- Being told to eat something you don't like
- Being left out of a group of children playing
- Getting in trouble for scribbling on another child's drawing when it was in revenge for something the other child did
- Thinking there might be monsters in the dark



Emotion Regulation Strategies

- Self-soothing:
 - Stop and breathe - The Anger Manager
 - Relaxation - the Noodle
- Anger regulation:
 - Awareness
 - Self-control - doing turtle
 - Effective anger expression - letting off steam

These strategies are for children and parents.

Things to do when you are angry!

Let off steam!!

- Jump on the trampoline
- Run up and down the stairs twenty times
- Go for a run around the house/yard
- Punch a cushion or punching bag (but don't punch people or things)
- Shut yourself in a room and have a yell
- Tell your toys how you feel and why
- Bang a drum!
- Play with a ball outside
- Twist a towel
- Have a good cry
- Listen to your favourite music
- Yell your anger down the plug hole and rinse the words away

Calm yourself...

- Breathe slowly in and out ten times
- Have some quiet time in your bedroom
- Have a bath or a shower
- Talk to someone who is a good listener
- Draw how you feel or make it out of play dough
- Pretend to be a turtle - crawl into your shell



Responses to stressful and traumatic life events

- Importance of parents managing their own emotions
- Helping children to feel secure and safe
- Worry and fear may present as anger/withdrawal
- Giving children time to express what is felt with words - may take time and varies across children
- Heightened emotion often results in poorer capacity to think and problem solve - need first to contain, soothe and lower emotion intensity
- 'Sitting with' strong emotions while staying close and connected (with boundaries around behaviour)
- Using reflection and empathy
- Use of problem solving

Tuning in to Kids Research Evaluation

TIK Preschool RCT-Efficacy

- Community sample N = 218
- 4 -5 yr old children and primary caregiving parent from low/mid SES preschools
- Randomised intervention or 9 mth wait-list
- Data collected Pre, Post, and 6 month FU
- Tuning in to Kids Intervention
 - 6 session parenting program
 - 2 booster sessions
 - 1 teacher session
- 95% retention in study
- 78% attended 5 or 6 sessions

Measures- direct assessment and reported (parent/teacher)

Child

- Receptive Language PPVT - 3 (Dunn & Dunn, 1997)
- Emotion Knowledge Puppet tasks (Denham, 1986)
- Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory (Eyberg & Pincus, 1999)
- Emotion Regulation Checklist (Shields & Cicchetti, 1999)
- Affective Intensity Scale (Eisenberg et al., 1996)
- Preschool Anxiety Scale (Spence et al., 2001)
- Parenting, Parent Functioning, Family Functioning:
 - Emotion Focused Parenting (Cervantes & Callanan, 1998)
 - Maternal Emotional Style Questionnaire (Lagace-Seguin & Coplan, 2005)
 - Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (Gratz & Roemer, 2004)
 - General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg, 1981)
 - Family Expressiveness Questionnaire (Halberstadt, 1991)

TIK Community Sample

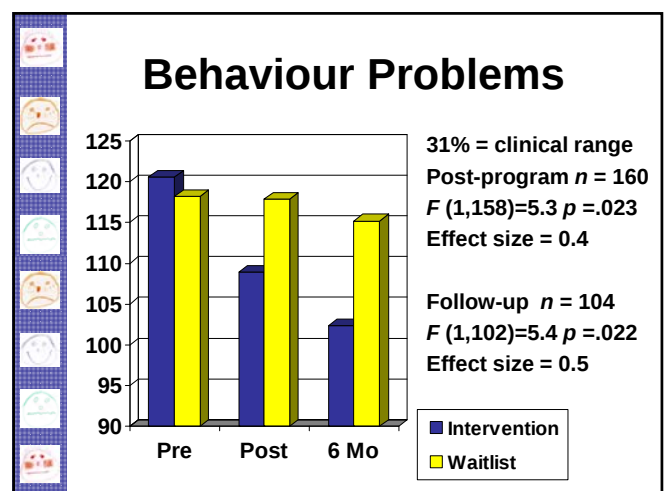
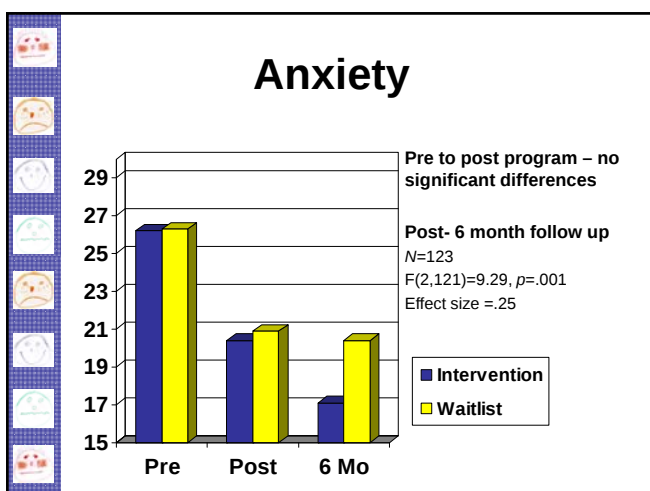
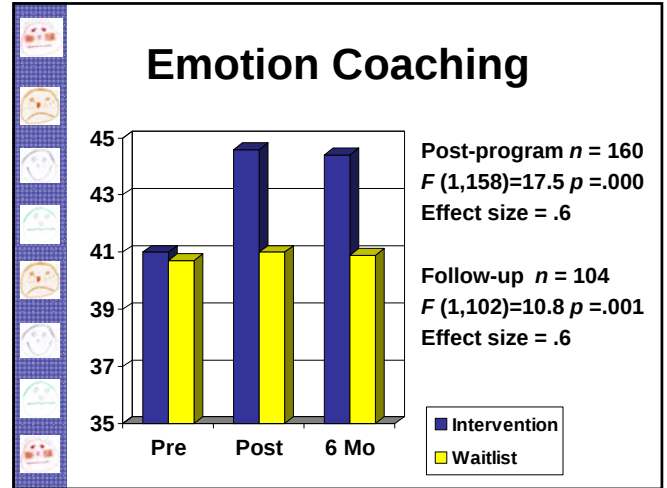
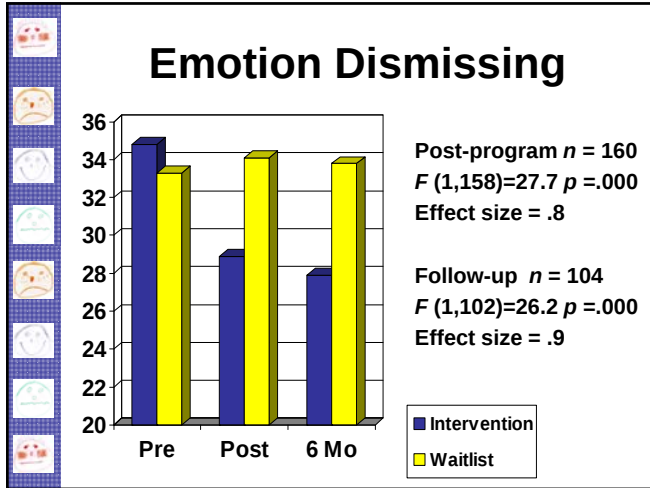
Boys = 116 (53.2%); girls = 102 (46.8%)

Child difficulties:

- 23% experienced a trauma
- 31% clinical range for behaviour problems
- 31% clinical range for anxiety problems
- 19% speech language problems - 9% intervention

Child trauma (N=41):

- Trauma included: death of parent/grandparent/sibling; serious illness or accident in child; physical/emotional abuse witnessed and/or victim of; robbery; parent separation or hospitalisation
- T-tests reveal significant relationship with parent somatic symptoms ($p=.000$), parent social dysfunction ($p=.01$) and parent wellbeing ($p=.002$)
- Not significantly related to anxiety in the child ($p=.14$) or behaviour problems ($p=.70$)



Final Points

- Evidence that we can teach parents skills that help their child's emotion competence
- A key change is in parent's awareness of emotion
- Too much parent stress = less effective
- Child trauma related to parent functioning
- Assisting parent coping central for child



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www.tuningintokids.org.au

sophie.h@unimelb.edu.au

Mindful: Centre for Training and Research in
Developmental Health
University of Melbourne
Austin Repatriation Hospital, Bldg 36,
Heidelberg 3084
Melbourne, Australia