



Mindful Parenting in Mental Health Care

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Ideal(ised) parenting



Actual parenting

Evolution of parenting: Why parenting is inherently stressful

- We are *evolved* creatures
- Long period of dependence – takes huge resources to raise one child to maturity
- Evolved in communities of shared care
- Affect regulation system – threat detection
- Intergenerational transmission of parenting - an evolutionary strategy???

*At the moment of giving birth
to a child, is the mother
separate from the child?*

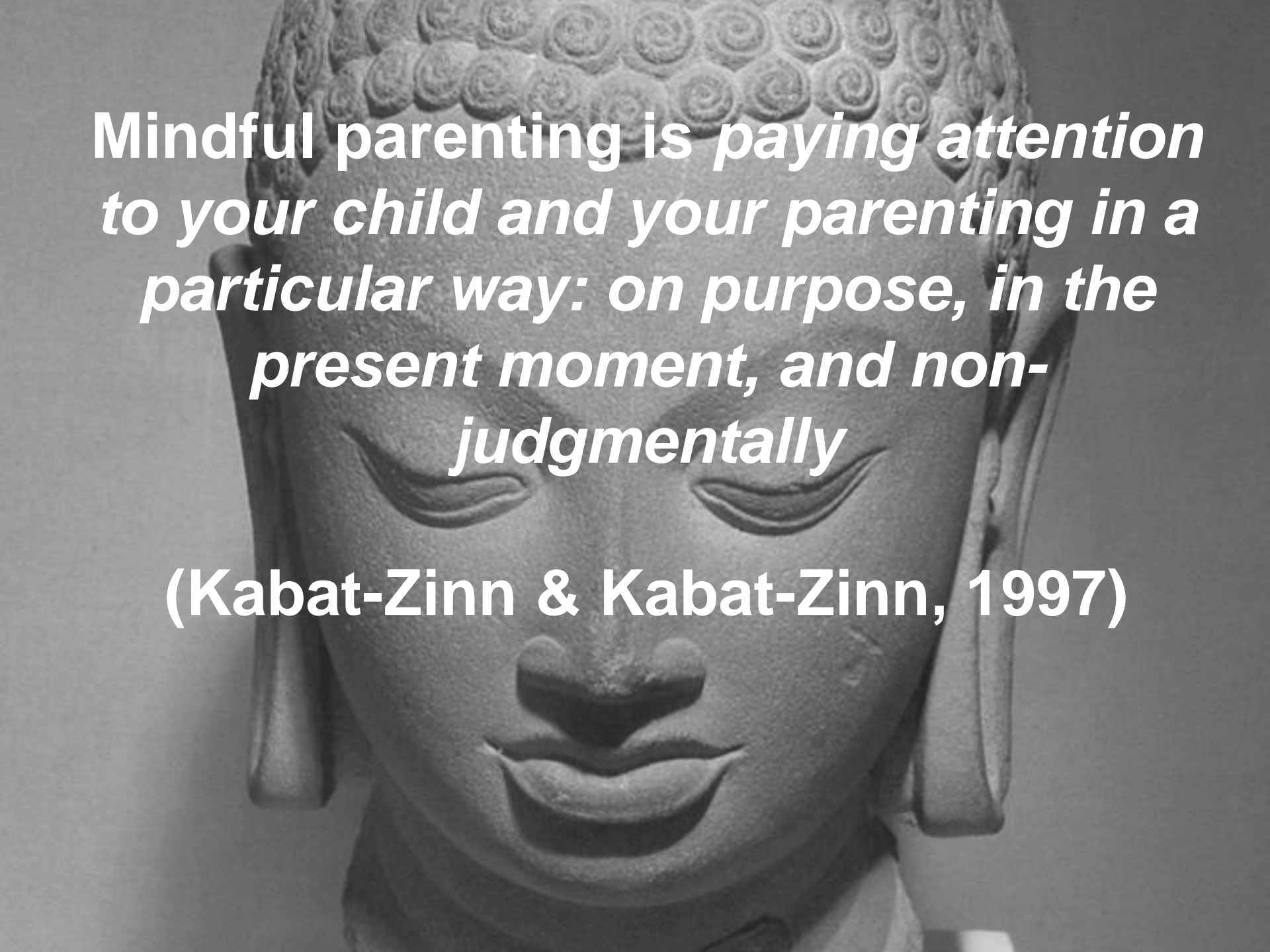
*You should study not only that
you become a mother when
your child is born, but also that
you become a child.*

Dogan Zenji



Three parenting modes (schemas) activated when we become parents (see Young, 1994)

1. Self as parent relating to our child (healthy or adult parent)
1. Parent as child relating to own parents (e.g. vulnerable or angry child)
1. Self as our own parent -Internalized parent (e.g. punitive or high demands parent)



Mindful parenting is *paying attention to your child and your parenting in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally*

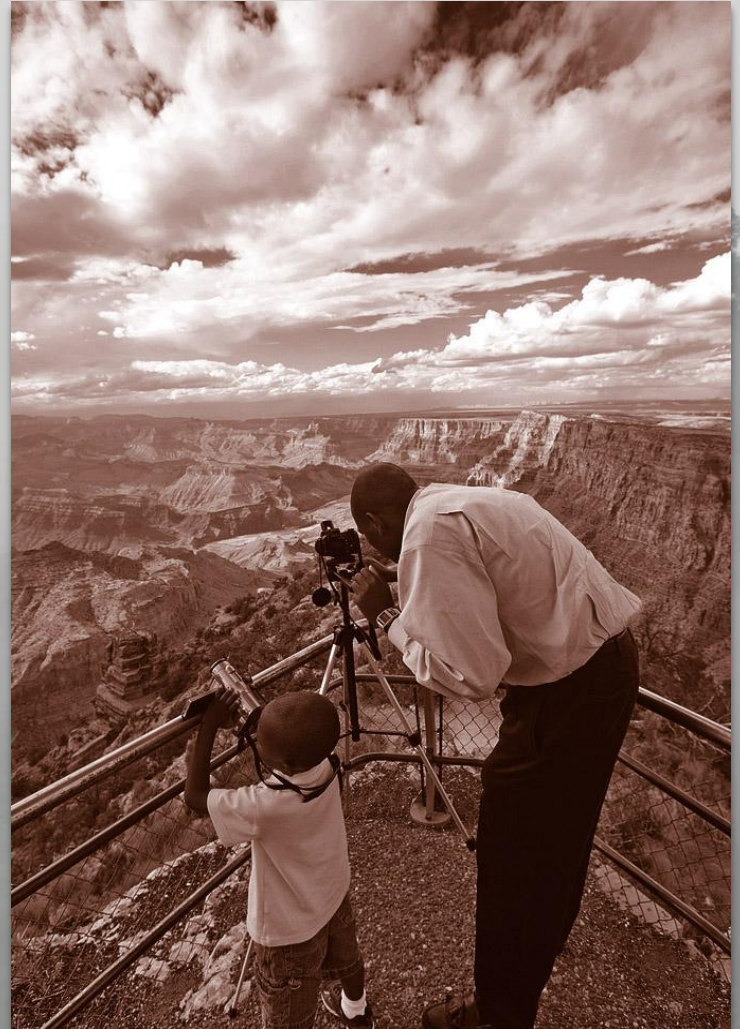
(Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997)

We re-visit the raw emotions of our own childhood when we have a child. We feel intense love, undiluted hate and anger, as well as extreme anxiety and fear, and can swing from one extreme emotion to another.

Kate Figes, Life After Birth, What Even Your Friends Won't Tell You About Motherhood

Why Mindful Parenting?

- Deep emotional engagement
- Intensity and vulnerability
- Increased motivation to help child



Why mindful parenting in mental health care?

(Bögels, Lehtonen, & Restifo, 2010)

- 1) parental stress resulting from parents and child mental disorders
- 2) parental preoccupation resulting from these disorders
- 3) parental poor executive functioning > poor response to parenting training
- 4) repeating dysfunctional own upbringing schemes and habits
- 5) self-nourishing attention and compassion
- 6) marital functioning and co-parenting

Threat System: The Low Road

- Perceived threat, under stress
- Short route in brain: subcortical processing; higher brain areas bypassed
- Adrenaline
- Fast judgment and fast response

(Siegel, 2007)

The High Road

- Slow down reacting to engage higher cortical areas (frontal brain)
- Brings reflection and judgment to bear on low road impulses
- *Respond* rather than react

(Siegel, 2007)

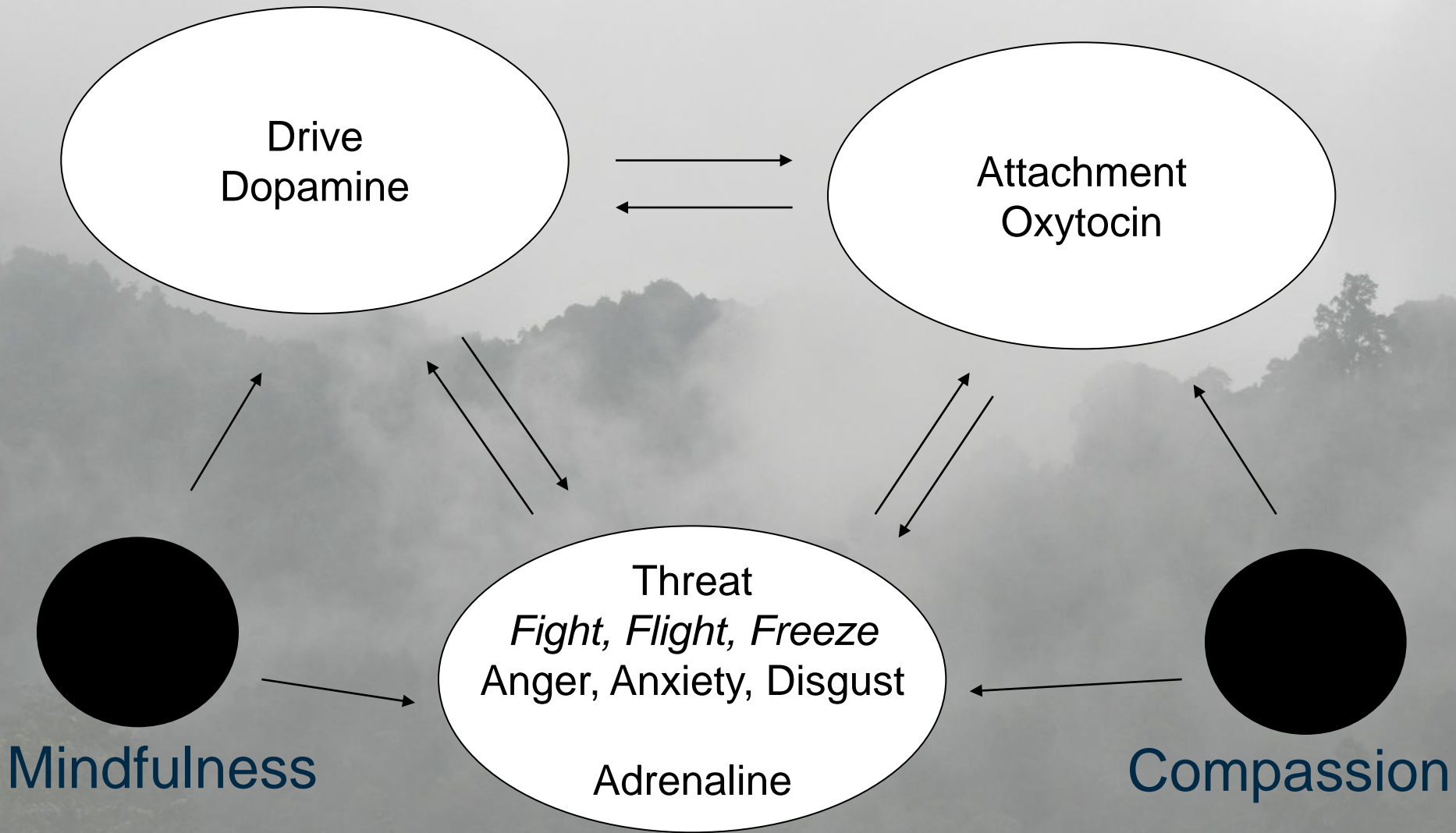
Compassion (*karuna*)

Self-compassion:

- Mindful awareness and attention critical=alone
- Kindness you poor thing, physically
- Connection to the rest of humanity “I know how you feel” “can you think of another time where another person made a similar mistake..”

(Neff, 2010)

Affect Regulation Systems



(Adapted from Gilbert, 2009)

Themes of 8 sessions

(Bögels & Restifo, book Mindful Parenting in Mental Health Care, in prep.)

1. Nonreactive vs. Automatic parenting
2. Beginner's mind parenting, self-kindness
3. Watching the body during parenting stress
4. Responding vs. Reacting to parenting stress
5. Automatic pattern parenting
6. Conflict and parenting
7. Love & limits
8. A mindful path through parenting

Mindfulness in everyday parenting

- Putting kids to bed, reading, dressing, feeding kids
- On your way to pick up kids from school
- Mindful listening for partner conflict
- Mindful bell before dinner
- 3 breaths instead of 3 minute breathing
- Child's worst behavior as mindfulness bell
- .p



Session 1: Non-reactive vs. Automatic parenting



Where's the old fight-flight when you need it?

Session 2: Seeing your child with beginner's mind



Session 3: Watching the body during parenting (stress)



Awareness and acceptance of parenting stress

- Awareness of body sensations, thoughts, feelings
- Allowing it to be there: “Let me feel it”
- Bringing kindness: “Soften, allow, love”
(Germer, 2010)

Session 4: Responding vs. Reacting

- What happens to parenting when we are under stress
- Fight, flight, freeze, dance
- Taking a breath as first step when under stress

Session 5: Automatic Patterns of parenting



Dysfunctional parent-child patterns

- Are we doomed to repeat dysfunctional patterns of our parents?
- Automatic responding seems to be the rule, not the exception, in parenting
- What can we do about it?

Session 6: Conflict and parenting

Conflict occurs when people love each other:

- Siblings fight once an hour
- Parents fight once/day with adolescent
- Unresolved marital conflict has negative effect on children
- Resolved conflicts can benefit children
- Idea is not to avoid, but to resolve conflicts
- Opportunities for learning and growth

Hormones and perspective taking

Adrenaline	Oxytocin
<p>Fight, flight, freeze</p> <p>Fast judgement & response</p> <p>Turn away from other</p> <p>Diminished perspective-taking or empathy</p>	<p>Attachment</p> <p>Slower response, longer brain route (frontal)</p> <p>Turn towards other</p> <p>Facilitates empathy, trust, bonding</p>

Rupture & Repair

- Important to go back after conflicts, especially “low road” conflicts (Siegel & Hartzell, 2004)

Session 7. Love and Limits

Love

- Bringing kindness and compassion to ourselves and our children
- Metta
- Inner child
- Love begets love

Limits and limit setting

Self-compassion

- Basis for compassion for others
- We need to connect to our own suffering to connect to the suffering of others
- True compassion for ourselves and others connects us with others in the most profound way.
- Necessary for the empathic tuning in to our children (Siegel & Hartzell, 2004)

Metta

- Builds on parent's love for their child
- Everyone has the capacity for love and compassion – it is our genetic heritage
- Even parents with traumatic backgrounds, or serious mental disorders have the capacity for increasing love
- Potential for self-healing

Limits

- Awareness of our own limits
- Setting limits

Session 8: A mindful path through parenting



I'm seated in a little bay hearing how the water slightly and rhythmically slaps the rocks of the shore. I hear singing birds now and then, the sound of a train, a car passing by. On the other side of the shore lines of trees in grayish green shades of different sizes and types.

It's a misty midday. Everything looks as if it's seen through a moistened piece of glass. The sun starts reflecting on the waters with silver sparks. One more train passes by.

I had left my house this morning before my kid wakes up, It's Sunday, I have decided to take sometime for myself. Maybe my kid will miss me or maybe not. I feel a bit guilty of having decided to make a nice ride and walk in nature this morning.

That's the kind of moments that make me a better-happy person, therefore a better, much better mother. I wish my mum had take them for herself and thought me how to give to myself small and simple moments of joy.

I feel so lucky of had been able to attend to this wonderful course with this amazing caring and openhearted group of women.

It had taught me so many things, confirmed me others, gave me hope and strength and what it's more important it filled me with a sense of self security and possibility that it would take pages to describe.

I stay with few keywords: Stopping, Not judging, Believing in myself as a source of solutions and new ways of seeing at daily evenst, Perseverance, the realization that nothing come by itself with no effort or attention involveld, Wonderment of seeing how unlimited human capacities can be, Brotherhood for finding people that search and are willing to give their time and energy in order to have a healthier relation with the others, Peace, the best counselor we can get.

All my thanks to you all. I hope you find the strenght in your heart and plant the seed of mindfulness in every person you have around

A study on the effects of Mindful Parenting

(Bögels et al., subm.)

- 10 mindful parenting groups of each about 10 parents
- Referred for own psychopathology, child psychopathology or parent-child relationship problems
- 8 sessions of three hours, follow-up session after 8 weeks
- Homework 1 hour a day
- Possibility of participating in a silence day between session 5 and 6

Measures of child and adult psychopathology

- child psychopathology (CBCL of *all* children rated by parent, internalising and externalising)
- parent psychopathology (adult CBCL, internalising and externalising)

Measures of parenting

Parental stress (NOSI, De Brock et al., 1992) *Parenting my child is more difficult than I expected*

Parenting styles (RBQ, Bogels & Melick, 2004)

- Autonomy encouragement *I encourage my child to make his own decisions*
- Overprotection *I am overprotecting*
- Acceptance *I don't approve some of the things my child does, but I don't reject him as a person*
- Rejection *I don't look at my child, if he has disappointed me*

Measure of coparenting

Co-parenting (McHale, 1997) *How often in a typical week..*

- Family Integrity *..when you are alone with this child do you make a comment to enhance his mental image of the absent parent*
- Disparagement *.. do you undo or oppose a punishment or limit your partner has set with this child*
- Conflict *..do you find yourself in a mildly tense or sarcastic interchange with your partner about your child*

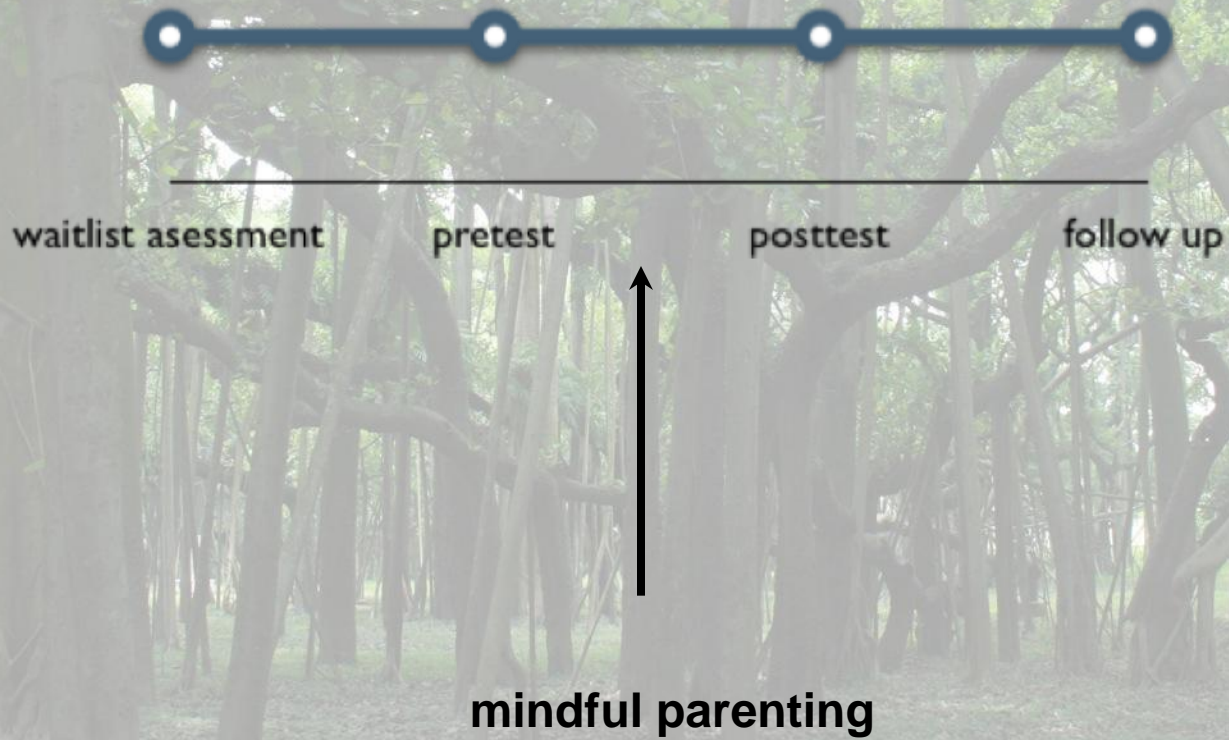
Measures of marital functioning

Marital satisfaction and Stability (DMSQ, Gerris et al., 1993)

- Marital Satisfaction *If I could choose again, I would choose the same partner*
- Negative Communication *My partner often blames me when we are quarrelling*
- Open Communication *I often talk with my partner about personal problems*

Marital conflict (YASR, Achenbach, 1997) *My partner and I disagree about money*

Design

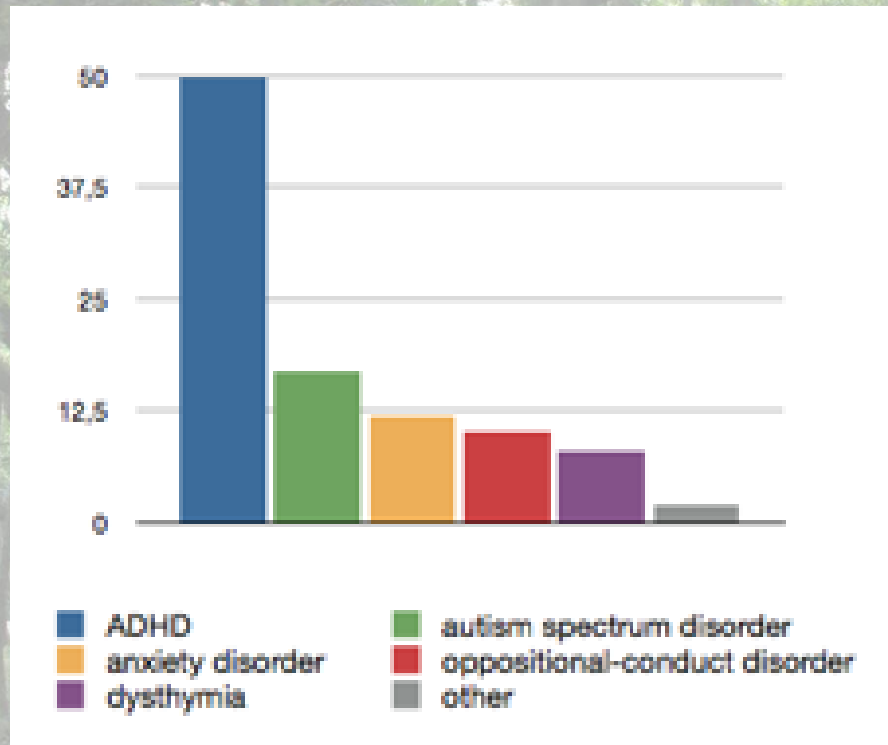


Participants

- 86 (of 98) parents participated in research
- 77 mothers, 9 fathers (7 couples)
- 63% together, 24% separated-divorced, 4% LAT, 9% widow
- Parent age 45
- Education above average, 81% Dutch
- 2.2 children

Child psychopathology

- Of the parents, 81% had at least one `target` child



Waitlist results

- No improvement on all measures, deterioration on parental and child externalising problems

Intervention results on symptoms

- Significant, medium effect size improvement on target child internalising and externalising problems
- Significant, medium effect size improvement on parent internalising problems, and large effect size for parents externalising problems

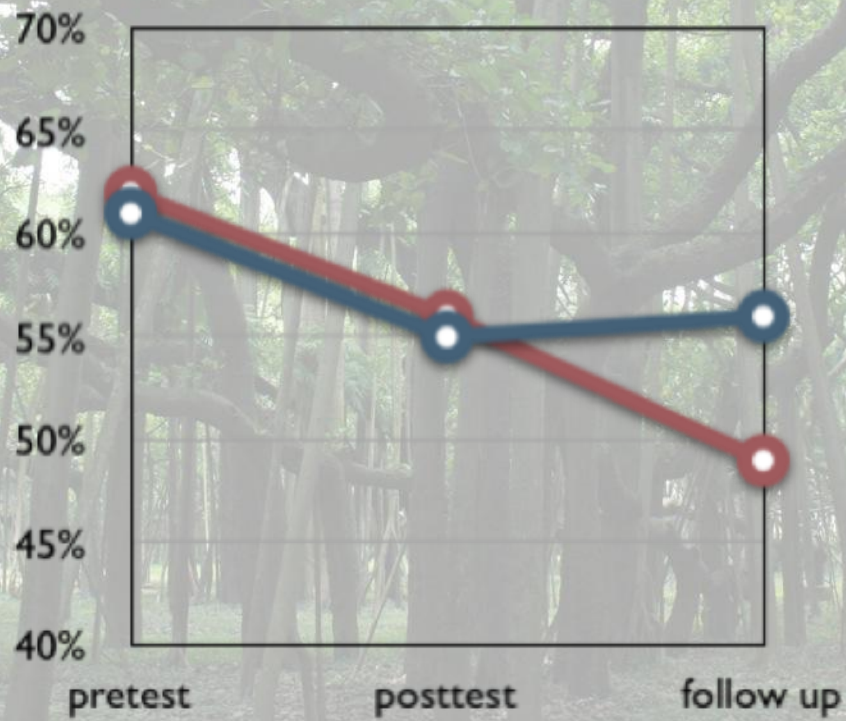
Intervention results on parenting

- Significant, medium effect size improvement on Overprotection, Autonomy Encouragement, and Rejection (no change on Acceptance)
- Significant, medium effect size improvement on Parenting Stress

Intervention results on coparenting and marital functioning

- Significant, small effect size improvement on Conflict in front of the child and on Marital conflict
- No improvement on Marital Satisfaction

Internal External



Future

- Does mindful parenting affect *objective* measures of rearing and child psychopathology (but *subjective* measures are important!)
- Does mindful parenting work on the other factors of the model: executive functioning, own upbringing schemes (Young), self-compassion?
- Do changes in the 6 factors mediate changes in parenting and child psychopathology?

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