

Mindful Parenting: What it is and Why it is Important

Guest Ye Rang Park: In this study, among the three correlated indicators of positive parenting, it was only mindful parenting that was uniquely predictive of recurrent conflict, and it also had an indirect effect on adolescent externalizing and internalizing problems one year later. So, it appears that mindful parenting has distinctive contributions to help family functioning.

Host Sal Nudo: You're listening to the family Resiliency Center podcast. I'm your host, Sal Nudo. The Family Resiliency Center is a transdisciplinary participatory research and policy center at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. In this podcast, I'll be talking to Doctor Ye Rang Park, a research assistant professor who supports the transdisciplinary participatory research at the Family Resiliency Center in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies. Doctor Park and her colleagues published a paper in 2019 that examined whether mindful parenting sets in motion a developmental cascade leading to less recurrent conflict between parents and their early adolescent children and, thereby, fewer externalizing and internalizing problems. We'll talk about that study today, as well as about Dr. Park's research endeavors at FRC.



Sal Nudo: Welcome to the FRC Podcast Doctor Park.

Ye Rang Park: Thank you so much for having me.

Sal Nudo: So, let's start out by defining for listeners what exactly mindful parenting is.

Ye Rang Park: Mindful parenting involves paying attention to the present moment, parent-child interactions in an open and non-judgmental. Dr. Larissa Duncan suggested that there are five different components of mindful parenting, which are listening with full attention, non-judgmental acceptance, emotional awareness, compassion, and self-regulation in the parenting role. Mindful parenting doesn't mean that you never get angry or you're happy with your child all the time. It means that you are bringing an awareness to what is happening in the moment and accepting your or your child's feelings and thoughts rather than being judgmental about them. Also, during an emotional, challenging situation, instead of engaging in automatic negative reactions, mindful parenting can help you take a pause and choose to respond in a more intentional and positive way.

Sal Nudo: Tell us about the past research you've done on mindful parenting, specifically the 2019 study I referred to.

Ye Rang Park: There's been an increasing interest in mindful parenting over the past decade or so. And research evidence showed that mindful parenting has positive effects on parent-adolescent relationships and adolescent adjustment. But the exact mechanisms explaining these relations are not as clear, including how the effects of mindful parenting may differ from other positive and supportive parenting. To address this gap in the literature, our study aimed to examine unfolding relations among mindful parenting, parent-adolescent recurrent conflict, and adolescents' externalizing and internalizing problems among a community sample using a longitudinal design.

Sal Nudo: Tell us what you discovered regarding the relation between mindful parenting and less parent-adolescent recurrent conflict.

Ye Rang Park: Yeah, in this study, I found that higher levels of mindful parenting were significantly related to lower levels of recurrent conflict two to three months later, even when the previous levels of recurrent conflict were accounted for. This is consistent with prior research showing that when parents are more mindful, they may be more understanding and compassionate towards their adolescence during difficult conversations. As a result, adolescents may learn from their parents how to solve conflicts in a more constructive way and better navigate challenges in their lives.

Sal Nudo: What did you find regarding the relation between recurrent conflict and adolescents' externalizing and internalizing problems?

Ye Rang Park: I found that lower levels of recurrent conflict were significantly related to lower levels of externalizing and internalizing problems one year later, and this was also when the previous levels of problems were accounted for. So, overall the results show that mindful parenting may help set emotion, a positive developmental cascade improving parent-child communication and preventing problem behaviors in adolescents.

Sal Nudo: Are relations among mindful parenting, recurrent conflict, and the externalizing and internalizing problems of adolescents similar across different kinds of families?

Ye Rang Park: Yeah, so moderation analysis revealed that the primary relations were comparable across different kinds of families defined by adolescent gender, race, premarital status, and family financial strain. This means that the positive effects of mindful parenting may apply across diverse kinds of families. Even though the nature of recurrent conflict impairs adolescents, diets may differ by gender and race. The strength of the relation between mindful parenting and recurrent conflict appears stable. Based on this result, mindfulness-based family

intervention has the potential to benefit all kinds of families with synergistic effects on recurrent conflict.

Sal Nudo: In your study, you also looked at other positive parenting such as inductive reasoning and warmth in the parent-child relationship. How were they related with mindful parenting?

Ye Rang Park: Inductive reasoning and warmth in the relationship were positively related to mindful parenting. These positive parenting behaviors were also significantly, and negatively, related to recurrent conflict. This shows that these other positive parenting measures could be potential compounds of the relation between mindful parenting and recurrent conflict. And so, in the next step of my analysis I included these to account for the overlapping nature of these constructs.

Sal Nudo: Do you think the effects of mindful parenting on family functioning overlap with those indicators of positive parenting?

Ye Rang Park: That's a great question. This study showed that even when other measures of positive and supportive parenting were accounted for, mindful parenting still had unique and positive effects on recurrent conflict. In most of the previous studies, it was hard to determine whether the positive effect of mindful parenting was just a proxy for other positive parenting. However, in this study, among the three correlated indicators of positive parenting, it was only mindful parenting that was uniquely predictive of recurrent conflict, and it also had an indirect effect on adolescent externalizing and internalizing problems one year later. So, it appears that mindful parenting has distinctive contributions to healthy family functioning that does not overlap with other positive parenting such as inductive reasoning and warmth in the relationship.

Sal Nudo: Where can families get more information on this topic?

Ye Rang Park: Yeah, I recommend checking out the Gottman Institute's blog on parenting. They use a research-based approach to create and maintain healthy relationships. So, in their blog you can find more information about how mindful parenting looks like and how to talk to your children in a calm and non-judgmental way. I also recommend a book called *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids* by Dr. Laura Markham. This book is a guide for parents to better understand their own emotions so they can engage in clear communication with empathy when talking to their children. There's also more information about mindfulness in general and practical tools to practice mindfulness in FRC's [Building Block section](#).

Sal Nudo: That's great. So, switching gears a bit, one of the things you've started doing here at FRC is building partnerships with communities and youth through cross-discipline collaboration. Can you tell us how this is going so far and why you are focusing on youth engagement?

Ye Rang Park:

Yeah, I'm happy to talk more about this new and exciting project. So, Dr. Amy Lehman and Dr. Jacinda Dariotis and I have started working on this new collaboration last year, which focuses on building the next generation of researchers by engaging youth in policies and programs impacting young people. To do this, we are using youth participatory action research to directly partner with the youth as co-researchers. This will allow youth to use their own voice to solve problems in their community that matter most to them.

We also aim to help youth develop competencies in research, leadership, communication, and problem-solving so they will be *empowered* to implement the solutions they come up with. This project will support two youth advisory boards in East Central Illinois, and the final goal is to disseminate research findings of these youth projects with the local governments to pursue policy-level action changes. By having youth at the center of this project, we hope to strengthen connections between research evidence, decision-making, and youth outcomes.

Sal Nudo:

Well, we're looking forward to seeing what your future research produces and appreciate your efforts as a relatively new team member here at FRC, Dr. Park. Thank you for joining us today.

Ye Rang Park:

Thank you again for having me. I really appreciate the opportunity to share my research today.

Sal Nudo:

In addition to the resources Doctor Park mentioned in her interview, those who want further information on this topic can go online to read the paper Dr. Park discussed today titled "[Unfolding Relations Among Mindful Parenting, Recurrent Conflict, and Adolescents' Externalizing and Internalizing Problems.](#)" Additionally, Dr. Park has written an FRC Building Blocks of Resilience brief that has more information about mindful parenting, why mindful parenting is important, and how to avoid emotional triggers. That brief can be found on FRC's website, in the Building Blocks section under [Resources](#).