

# Emotional Aspects of ADHD

**T**HIS COLUMN focuses on emotional aspects of ADHD, including a study on the effects of a preschool intervention on parental negativity and another that examined child physiological markers of emotion and behavior regulation.

## ADHD & EMOTIONAL UNDERSTANDING

### How do ADHD symptoms impact emotion understanding, reactivity, and regulation?

In this study, researchers compared young children who had elevated symptoms of ADHD to young children without ADHD symptoms on several emotion-related tasks. They found that the children with high ADHD symptoms had more difficulty matching pictures of emotional expressions, as well as more difficulty matching these expressions to appropriate situations. The children with elevated ADHD symptoms also experienced greater difficulty regulating their emotions during a frustrating task.

Similar results have been found in older diagnosed children, but this study demonstrates that children with ADHD symptoms are already experiencing emotion-related challenges as early as four to seven years old. This suggests that interventions designed to improve emotion reactivity and regulation may be beneficial for children showing early signs of ADHD.

Lugo-Candelas, C., et al. (2017). Emotional understanding, reactivity, and regulation in young children with ADHD symptoms. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 45, 1297-1310.

## PRESCHOOL INTERVENTION & EMOTIONAL FUNCTIONING


### How do behavioral treatments affect physiological markers of emotion and behavior regulation in preschoolers with ADHD?

As was suggested by the study summarized above, interventions that impact emotional and behavioral regulation may be relevant to preschoolers with ADHD. This study examined one possible mechanism by which such interventions (The Incredible Years program) may impact emotional functioning.

Researchers examined whether changes in parenting behaviors following treatment resulted in changes in physiological markers of emotion and behavior regulation in young children with ADHD. They found that decreases in negative parenting—things like criticism, physical intrusions, and negative commands—were



related to more adaptive changes in physiological markers of emotion and behavior regulation in the children. This was not the case for increases in positive parenting, suggesting that it is especially important for behavioral treatments to focus on reducing negative parenting when it comes to impacting emotion and behavior regulation in preschoolers with ADHD.

Bell, Z., et al (2017). Improvements in negative parenting mediate changes in children's autonomic responding following a preschool intervention for ADHD. *Clinical Psychological Science*, epub ahead of print. 

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