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Assignment 3.2

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Wellness Project

The population I have chosen to focus on is parents of young children diagnosed with developmental delays. Astonishingly, the interventions designed for stress management for parents with developmentally delayed children are scarce and few have been empirically tested. “Parenting a young child with a developmental delay (DD) poses unique difficulties for parents, including having to accept the presence of the delay alongside managing the characteristic behavioral problems (Romagnano & Gavidia, 2009, p. 87). Parents of children with developmental delays report more parenting stress than parents of typically developing children. Interestingly “the relationship between behavior problems and parenting stress appears to be reciprocal such that high behavior problems lead to increases in parenting stress over time and high parenting stress leads to increases in behavior problems in children with DD, indicating that the two variables have a mutually escalating effect on each other over time” (Neece, 2014, p. 174).

High levels of parental stress are particularly concerning given their association with numerous undesirable outcomes including “parent depression, marital conflict, poorer physical health, less effective parenting, increased child behavior problems, higher frequency of family problems, lower parental satisfaction and well-being, and less parental competence and social support” (Neece, 2014, p. 175). Additionally children with developmental delays are at high risk of not only behavior problems but also

developing comorbid mental disorders. Early behavior problems have been associated with “development of psychopathology in children with and without early developmental risk” (Neece, 2014, p. 175). In light of the link between parental mental health and child behavior outcomes, interventions targeting parental stress offer the chance to improve and idyllically avoid the development of psychopathology in youth with developmental delays, thereby addressing a major public health concern and improving the lives of youth with developmental delays and their families.

In reviewing several scholarly articles on the topic of parental stress management I have been able to piece together different interventions that would appear to be beneficial to providing stress reduction to this specific population. Peer support, mindfulness and cognitive behavior interventions have all shown preliminary positive impacts on parental stress levels. It is established in multiple studies “coercive discipline is often employed by parents with low parenting self-efficacy (DD parents often report low parenting self-efficacy) and coercive discipline has been linked to the maintenance of child behavioral problems” (Romagnano & Gavidia, 2009, p. 89). Mindfulness encourages “parents to slow down, notice impulses before they act, really listen to their children and come to a more relaxed and peaceful state of mind which can have a more positive effect in children with DD” (Neece, 2013, p. 177). In consideration of these various interventions I would like to propose 4 activities centered on Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction to incorporate into a wellness program focusing on stress reduction for parents of young children with developmental delays.

Session One: What is stress?

Goal: Understanding the psychology and physiology of stress and anxiety and the ways in which mindfulness can be implemented in everyday life to facilitate more adaptive responses to challenges and distress

Activity: Help parents define areas of stress in their lives

- Have participants complete the parent stress index-short form to assess parenting stress (measures parental stress dependent of child behavior)
- Have participants complete Parental Distress subscale to assess the extent to which the parent is experiencing stress in their role as a parent (independent of child behavior issues)
- Have participants complete Satisfaction with Life Scale to assess general satisfaction with life

Have participants discuss areas of stress in their lives, encourage exploration of physical, behavioral, emotional and cognitive areas of stress. Compile a list of group members' stressors and discuss the concept of mindfulness.

Introduce one mindfulness exercise, mindful breathing a simple one-minute technique. Starting by breathing in and out slowly, breathing in through your nose and out your mouth, letting go of your thoughts (simply letting thoughts rise and fall on their own accord), purposefully watching breath, and watching with your awareness and it enters your body and as it exits your body and dispels out of you.

Session Two: Expansion of Mindfulness Techniques

- Mindfulness observation: choose a natural object in your environment and focus on it for one minute, don't do anything except observe what you are looking at, visually explore every aspect of its configuration and allow yourself to connect with its energy and purpose in the natural world
- Have parents discuss their experiences in the past week in group in the areas of how stressed they felt, how much the stress impacted their daily life, how well they were able to cope with this stress, how problematic their child's behavior had been, how satisfied they were with the relationship with their child, and how often they practiced mindfulness

Session Three: Expansion of Mindfulness Techniques

- Mindfulness awareness: think of something that happens everyday more than once that you take for granted (e.g. opening a door), when you touch the doorknob stop and be mindful of where you are and how you feel in that moment (idea: instead of going through daily motions on auto pilot stop, take occasional moments to nurture purposeful understanding of what you are doing and the blessing these actions bring to your life)
- Have parents discuss their experiences in the past week in group in the areas of how stressed they felt, how much the stress impacted their daily life, how well they were able to cope with this stress, how problematic their child's behavior had been, how satisfied they were

with the relationship with their child, and how often they practiced mindfulness

Session Four: Expansion of Mindfulness Techniques

- Mindfulness appreciation: use a notepad to check off 5 things in your day that usually get unacknowledged. The point of this exercise is to simply give thanks and appreciate the apparently insignificant things in life, once you have identified your 5 things find out everything you can about their creation and purpose to truly value the way in which they support your life
- Have parents discuss their experiences in the past week in group in the areas of how stressed they felt, how much the stress impacted their daily life, how well they were able to cope with this stress, how problematic their child's behavior had been, how satisfied they were with the relationship with their child, and how often they practiced mindfulness

Works Cited

- Neece, C. L. (2014), Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for Parents of Young Children with Developmental Delays: Implications for Parental Mental Health and Child Behavior Problems. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, (27) 174–186. doi:10.1111/jar.12064
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