

“What does it mean to parent?” A Qualitative study of parenting group perceptions

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Introduction

TIPs for Parents is a free 8-week parenting group intervention study led by trained marriage and family therapy clinicians. The weekly curriculum was developed to providing trauma-informed parenting support for parents of five- to ten-year-olds in Tallahassee. The 8-week program consists of a 1.5-hour group session per week and emphasizes a different parenting topic each week through discussion, presentations, and take-home activities to help implement these new skills at home. The group is free of charge with research participation and free childcare. Using data from interviews before the group started, the present study uses qualitative methodology to explore seven parents’ reasons for seeking a parenting group, as well as expectations and hopes for treatment outcomes.

- “Initial results of RPC (Resource Parent Curriculum) suggest that parents who participated in a RPC workshop became more knowledgeable and confident about their ability to practice trauma-informed parenting and care for traumatized children (Sullivan et al., Citation2016).

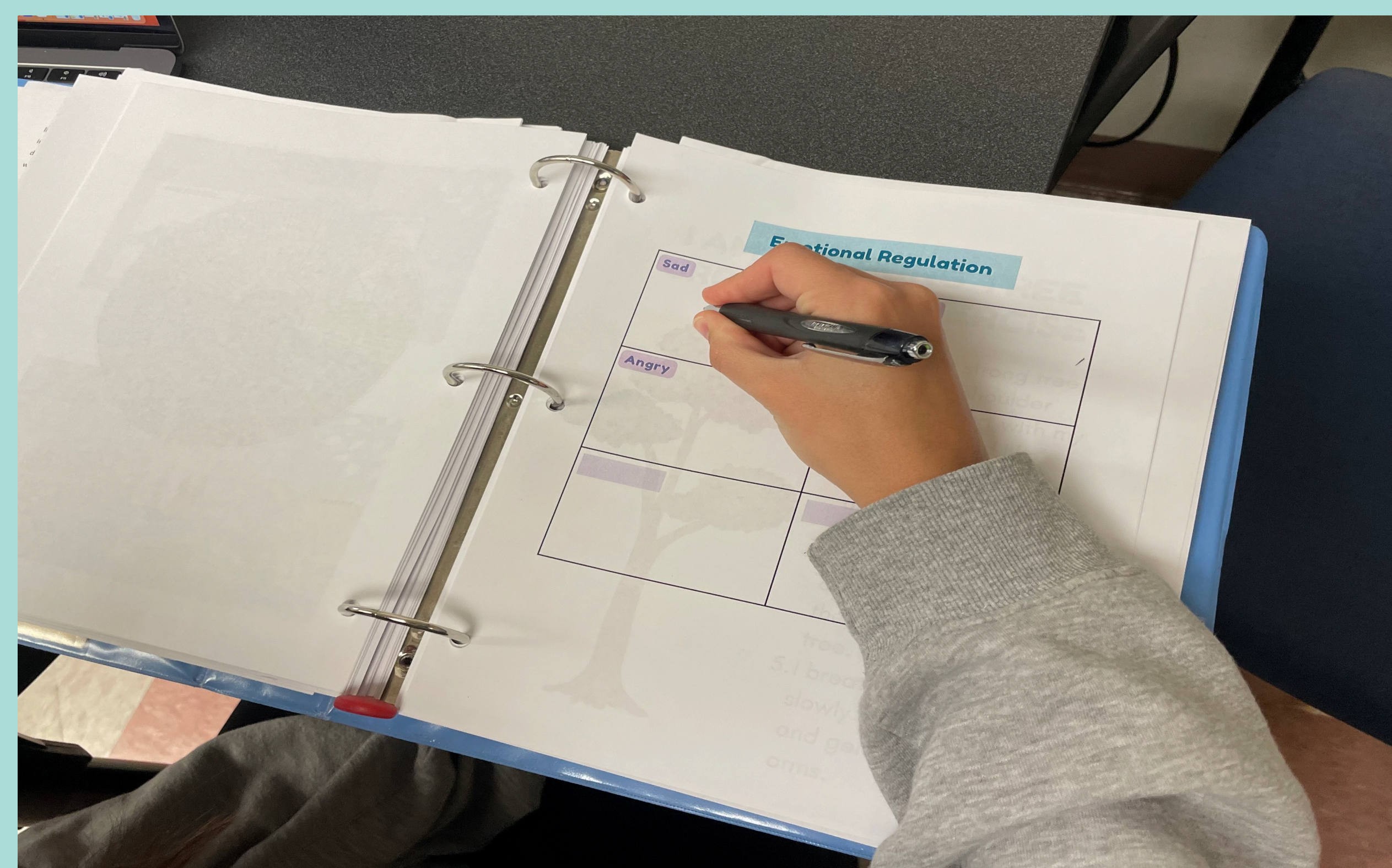
Most parenting group studies focus mainly on post-group experiences and quantitative data. This study adds to the current literature by assessing possible barriers to treatment or ways to increase interest in parenting groups. The rationale for this research is to enhance parents’ self-understanding and strengthen connections with their children through a trauma-informed approach. The findings and their implications will be discussed to provide insights into the significance of trauma-informed parenting support.

Methods

A qualitative, cross-sectional design was used to understand participants’ perceptions of parenting before starting a parenting group. Participants were recruited via physical flyers around Tallahassee, online posts in Facebook mom groups, and through flyers Tallahassee Memorial Hospital sites. The final sample included 5 mothers. These participants completed a 1-hour semi-structured Zoom interview before the 8-week parenting group started. In this interview, parents were asked about their views of parenting and their meaning making in this role. The research involves pre- and post-interviews with the group participants regarding their parenting experiences, along with three surveys to assess individual, relational, and family outcomes. Additionally, parents complete a weekly session skills assessment that gauges the usefulness of the weekly content and exercises. These interviews were transcribed and coded. Using thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006), the research team identified themes generated from the data.



References



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Results

Four general themes emerged from the interview data: (a) connection, (b) pressure, (c) breaking intergenerational patterns, and (d) gender roles in parenting. Every participant discussed the importance of *connection* with their children and how they hope to gain skills to better relate with their children. Specifically, one participant said,

“So getting back into more of a normal routine where we eat dinner together at the dinner table. And so you know, during the summer, we get really bad about watching a show while we’re eating or decompressing from summer camp... But now that we’re back, and we got to get more in the normal routine, we’re sitting back down together, and just making sure we’re connecting. And we’re spending quality time as a family.”

On a similar note, regarding her stance as a mom, one participant stated, “I’m so much more on let’s connect, let’s build trust. Let’s have this relationship where we can talk about anything.”

Parents also spoke often about *pressure* in their parenting experience. Participants discussed widespread guilt and messaging they receive regarding parenting from other parents, online, and from their family members. Parents reflected on how this pressure inspired them to seek out a group of other parents from whom they could receive support. For example, one participant said,

“So, my kids go to school, and they’ve always gone to school or daycare. So, it’s a constant struggle of like, are you giving them enough of yourself because you’re tired from work and other things. And it’s a constant struggle to be everyone or be everything to everyone, you know, but also make sure that you’re giving enough time for yourself. But yeah, it’s a struggle like when they have a hard time at school, or something’s not going right at school, and you want to make sure you like that you can help make it better. But it’s I struggle with mom guilt all the time.”

Another theme was the hope of *breaking intergenerational patterns* in parenting. Almost every participant referenced specific parenting practices from their childhood that they aimed to either remove or enact differently with their own children. Several participants identified one of their main motivators in joining a parenting group as being able to add new tools to their parenting toolbox. Specifically, the parents hoped to learn skills and ideas related to parenting that are different from how they were raised.

“And a lot of the reason that I delayed being a parent for a long time after I was married. And, you know, just because is that I was very concerned... I didn’t think I could be a good parent. I didn’t think I could be the parent that I wanted to be. And a lot of that had to do with being really frustrated with some of the ways that my mom had raised me, and that feeling like there was an option to do better or do things differently.”

The final theme that emerged was the influence of *gender roles in parenting*. All participants in the sample were female and heterosexual. They discussed how gender roles affect their own experience in motherhood and their partner’s experience in fatherhood. Most often, parents articulated how they had unique needs and stressors as a mother. One participant shared regarding her husband’s role,

“Yeah, I mean his childhood was boys don’t cry on an extreme. I mean, it’s really hard. And even with his with his dad here, and his dad being really sick. I mean, he is so stoic and stubborn.... That reinforces the mommy is safe person to talk about things. And with that, [my child] can’t really talk to him.”