Title: Observed parent involvement associated with child developmental outcomes.

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Background: Parents play a fundamental role in the way a child learns to cope with stressful situations. The present study examined whether observed parental involvement during a stressful task was associated with child social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes. We expected that more positive parent involvement would be related to better child outcomes, while negative parent involvement would be related to poorer child outcomes.

Method: Participants were children (n=50, M age=9.44, SD=.77, 56% males, 98% Caucasian) and one of their parents (95.9% biological mothers.) Parents completed the Child Behavior Checklist, which assessed the emotional and behavioral functioning of the child. Parent involvement was observed during a stress-inducing laboratory task in which the child traced a star pattern by looking at the image through a mirror. The parent sat next to the child during the task and was instructed to interact with their child as they normally would. Two trained undergraduates coded positive and negative involvement separately on a scale from 0 (no positive/negative involvement) to 3 (frequent positive/negative involvement) for all subjects. Inter-rater reliability was fair (ICC=.70) and all discrepancies were resolved in coding meetings.

Results: Pearson’s correlations analyses were conducted. We found that positive involvement was positively and significantly associated with parent report of child attention problems (r=.292, p<.05). Negative involvement was positively and significantly associated with parent report of child social problems (r=.303, p<.05) and parent report of rule breaking (r=.304, p<.05).

Discussion: We found that children with more attention problems had parents who were more positively involved, when children with more social and behavior problems had parents who were more negatively involved. This study suggests that parent involvement during stressful tasks is important to child developmental outcomes. The results further emphasize the importance of parenting styles on a child’s social, emotional, and behavioral development.