Symposium Title: IDD in the Family: Insights from Observed Parent-Youth Interactions

Chair: Bruce Baker

Discussant: Laura Lee McIntyre

Overview: Youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have a heightened risk of mental health concerns and social maladjustment, and their parents experience high levels of stress, beginning early in development (Baker, Blacher, Crnic, & Edelbrock, 2002; Einfeld & Tonge, 1996). Previous research has supported a strong link between parenting behaviors and youth outcomes in these families (e.g., Harker et al., 2016), but more clarity is needed as to the factors that predict these parenting behaviors (Smith, Dishion, Shaw, & Wilson, 2015). The three presentations in this symposium examine predictors of parenting behaviors and associated child outcomes from early childhood to mid-adolescence, providing a longitudinal perspective. The first presentation examines the relations between parent feelings, optimism, parenting behavior, and child problem behavior for preschool-aged children (2.5-3.5 years) with developmental delay in a longitudinal context. The second presentation explores predictors of maternal responsivity and assesses the impact of responsive and interfering parenting behaviors on child social skills across time in 4- to 7-year-old children with ASD. Finally, the third presentation explores how mothers’ perceptions of parent-child conflict relate to observed mother and youth conflict resolution behaviors during mid-adolescence (age 15 years). Taken together, these presentations shed light on how parents’ perspectives and characteristics of their youth predict the use of effective parenting practices, and how this, in turn, impacts behavior and social functioning in these at-risk youth.

Paper 1 of 3

Paper Title: Optimism, Parent Feelings, and Parenting Behavior over Time for Children with Developmental Delay

Authors: Eva Kurtz-Nelson, Laura Lee McIntyre

Introduction: Young children with intellectual and developmental disabilities are at increased risk of developing persistent mental health and behavior problems (Einfeld & Tonge, 1996). While the link between parenting behavior and the development of problem behavior is well understood in this population, there is a need for examination of key parent factors that affect parenting behavior and child problem behavior over time in families of children with developmental delay (DD). Private events such as parents’ thoughts and feelings about their children may impact parenting behavior through a variety of mechanisms, including experiential avoidance and relational schemas (Smith et al., 2015; Shea & Coyne, 2011). Parent feelings and optimism are two constructs that reflect parents’ private events and have been established as affecting parenting behavior and child problem behavior in typically developing populations, but more information is needed as to how these constructs function for children with DD and their parents. As such, this study proposed to examine relations between parent feelings, optimism, parenting behavior, and child problem behavior for young children with developmental delay in a longitudinal context.

Methods: Data for this study were collected from 132 caregivers of preschool children (2.5-3.5 years) with developmental delay. Caregivers and children participated in 3 in-home assessments at Time 1 (baseline), Time 2 (3 months after baseline), and Time 3 (9 months after baseline). At each time point, caregivers completed the Parent Feelings Questionnaire as a measure of positive and negative feelings toward the child with a disability, the Revised Life Orientation Test as a measure of dispositional optimism, and the Child Behavior Checklist for Ages 1½ - 5 as a measure of overall problem behavior. Parents also completed a parent-child free play task at each time point, and each task was coded for effective limit setting, proactive parenting, and praise statements per minute.

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**Results:** To examine relations between and change in constructs over time, data were analyzed using a latent growth modeling approach. In a model predicting problem behavior from positive feelings, negative feelings, and optimism, negative feelings about the child were a significant predictor of problem behavior over time ($\beta = .66, p < .001$). Optimism, change in positive feelings, and initial positive feelings did not significantly predict problem behavior when included in the full model with negative feelings. Final analyses consisted of evaluating whether change in parenting behavior or mean levels of parenting behavior mediated the relationship between negative feelings and child problem behavior. The path predicting praise from negative feelings was significant ($\beta = -.24, p < .05$), which suggests that increased negative feelings are associated with a decreased rate of praise during parent-child play interactions. The path predicting growth in limit setting from negative feelings approached significance ($\beta = -.26, p = .09$). However, observed parenting behaviors and child problem behavior were not associated.

**Discussion:** This study suggests that among children with DD, a strong and stable association between child problem behavior and parents’ negative feelings about their child is present at a very early age, even after controlling for the effects of positive feelings and optimism on child problem behavior. Novel relationships between negative feelings and decreased use of effective parenting behaviors during direct observation were also identified, which is consistent with a relational frame theory approach to understanding parenting behavior. Implications for future longitudinal research involving these constructs and for interventions with parents of young children with DD will be discussed.

**References/Citations:**

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**Paper 2 of 3**

**Paper Title:** Responsive Parenting of Young Children with ASD: Predictors and Associations with Longitudinal Social Development

**Authors:** Barbara Caplan\(^2\), Jan Blacher\(^3\), Abbey Eisenhower\(^4\)

**Introduction:** Parent responsivity, or parenting behavior that is contingent on a child’s interest and focus of attention, predicts gains in language and social functioning for children with typical development. Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) demonstrate difficulties in understanding social-pragmatic cues such as joint attention and may be particularly dependent on parenting that is responsive to their current interest and focus. This type of maternal responsivity is associated with language development and social behaviors (e.g. social smiling, joint attention) in children and toddlers with or at risk for ASD (Harker et al., 2016; Siller & Sigman, 2002), yet little is known about predictors of this style of parenting within families of children with ASD. Moreover, it is unclear how parent responsive or non-responsive (e.g. interfering) behaviors predict social-pragmatic skills among children across the autism spectrum, as some studies find differential effects on these skills by child initial level of functioning (Haeg, McDuffie & Weismer, 2013).

**Methods:** The present study examined responsive parenting and social functioning in 4- to 7-year-old children with an ASD diagnosis ($N=142$) using data obtained from a multi-site longitudinal study collected at three time-points across 1.5 years. All eligible children met clinical criteria for ASD diagnoses according the ADOS-2 and exhibited IQ $\geq 50$ as assessed by the WPPSI-III.

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A coding system of parent verbal and nonverbal direction that coincided with ongoing child activity (responsive direction) or deterred child ongoing activity (interfering direction), was implemented during a 10-minute parent-child free play interaction. Children’s social functioning was assessed via multi-rater (parent, teacher) report of the Social Responsiveness Scale and the Social Skills Improvement System.

Results: Interestingly, responsive parenting was not associated with concurrently assessed parent and family factors, including parent gender, level of education and family income (all \( p > .05 \)). Initial child IQ and expressive language levels were positively associated with concurrent parent responsive direction \( (r = .27 \text{ to } .31, p < .001) \), while greater autism severity (ADOS-2, SRS) was associated with greater levels of interfering direction \( (r = .17, p < .05) \). Controlling for initial child social skills and parent education, parent responsive direction positively predicted later child social skills \( (\beta = .15, p < .05) \), and interfering direction negatively predicted later teacher-reported social skills \( (\beta = -.13, p < .05) \). Child IQ did not moderate the associations between responsive and interfering direction and change in child social skills over time.

Discussion: In line with the transactional model of development (Sameroff, 2009), it is vital to consider bidirectional relationships between parenting and child functioning. While the present study was limited in only assessing parent responsivity at one time point, we did find child functioning (IQ, language, autism severity) to be more strongly associated with parent responsibility than parent- and family-factors, which may help to identify at-risk families. It is also essential to move beyond cross-sectional relationships to assess predictions over time. Results suggest that responsive parenting may be influential in encouraging child social skills development, particularly for those skills seen in a school setting (e.g. peer interactions, cooperation with teachers). Parent responsivity may be an important consideration for parent-mediated interventions for children with ASD through the early school years.

References/Citations:
Paper 3 of 3


Authors: Willa Marquis\textsuperscript{5}, Bruce Baker\textsuperscript{1}

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Introduction: While the transition to adulthood presents challenges for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD; Young-Southward, Philo, & Cooper, 2017), research suggests that youth with IDD may experience more similar trajectories to their typically developing (TD) peers if provided positive opportunities for assuming adult social roles (Gorter et al., 2014). One such opportunity is developing conflict resolution skills within the parent-adolescent relationship, during which conflict and its resolution are a normative aspect of development. However, little is known about how conflict and its resolution differ—or not—in families of youth with IDD. Furthermore, while researchers debate the value of using observational versus self-report methods to assess conflict and its resolution (Ehrlich, Richards, Lejuez, & Cassidy, 2016), no research of this kind has included youth with IDD and their families. We examined how observed conflict resolution behaviors and perceptions of conflict differed in parent-adolescent dyads for youth with typical cognitive development (TD), intellectual disability (ID), or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and also how the observed behaviors and perceptions aligned.

Methods: The present sample included 167 participating 15-year-old youth (TD = 86, ID = 54, ASD = 27) and their mothers selected from a longitudinal study of the development of psychopathology in youth with or without IDD. Conflict resolution behaviors (i.e., Mother Problem Solving, Youth Problem Solving, Mother Affect, Youth Affect, Resolution Reached) were coded from a behavioral Parent-Child Conflict Resolution Task. Mothers’ perceived conflict indices (i.e., Total Perceived Conflict, Specific Problems) were assessed from a self-report questionnaire. ANOVA, Chi square, and rank correlation analyses were used to discern disability status differences in the observed and perceived conflict variables. A series of linear and logistic regressions were conducted to examine how mothers’ perceptions of conflict related to observed conflict resolution behaviors.

Results: Regarding disability status differences, mothers of youth with ID displayed higher levels of Mother Problem Solving ($t = 3.75, p < .001; t = 3.00, p = .004$), and youth with ID exhibited lower levels of Youth Problem Solving ($t = 2.88, p = .005; t = -2.77, p = .007$), than in the TD and ASD groups, respectively. There were no disability status differences in Mother or Youth Affect, in whether a resolution was reached, and in mothers’ Total Perceived Conflict. With a few exceptions, mothers endorsed conflict around Specific Problems (e.g., chores, youth’s attitude/tone of voice) as equally contentious among the disability status groups ($p = .74$ to $.86, p < .01$). Regarding how observed and perceived conflict aligned, higher mother-reported Total Perceived Conflict was associated with lower levels of Youth Problem Solving ($\beta = -.35, p < .001$), less positive Mother Affect ($\beta = -.32, p < .001$), less positive Youth Affect ($\beta = -.33, p < .001$), and a lower likelihood of the dyad reaching a resolution ($z = -3.32, p = .001$). While these associations were present across the disability groups, a few unexpected disability status differences also emerged (e.g., youth with ID were more likely to reach a resolution than their TD peers; $z = 2.22, p = .027$).

Discussion: These findings indicated disability status differences in conflict resolution behaviors that were consistent with previous research (Wieland, Green, Ellingsen, & Baker, 2014). Overall, however, parent-youth dyads exhibited similar observed conflict resolution behavior and perceptions of conflict across the disability groups, and these observed and perceived indices of conflict were similarly associated with one another. Given the heightened risk for mental health concerns and poor social adjustment that youth with DD experience during childhood (Baker et al., 2002), and the challenges that come with the transition into adulthood (Young et al., 2017), it is promising that parent-child conflict may not present a heightened risk during
adolescence. Parent-child conflict and its resolution during mid-adolescence may be more similar than different for youth with IDD and their families and may provide a period of normative growth and transition.

References/Citations: