"Being With": An analysis of parental responses to young children's emotional expressions

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Abstract

There is limited research on how parents respond to their children's emotions, both positive and negative, and how the type of emotion and internal processes of the parent are linked to their responses. The current study focuses on the construct of "being-with" (i.e., the degree to which a parent is emotionally available, accepting, and in-tune with their child's emotions). The goal of this study was to develop and assess The Being-With Questionnaire, a measure aimed at assessing a parent's ability to be-with their child's different emotions when directed at the parent, to examine patterns in being-with, and to explore the relatedness of patterns in being-with to other factors of the parent–child relationship. Parents of 147 children ages 3-5.99 years (Mean age= 4.44, standard deviation= 0.85) were invited to participate, with either 1 or 2 parents contributing for each child (total N = 240; 58% mothers; 41% fathers). Participants completed an online survey including parental self-report measures and parental reports of child behavior and characteristics. Results suggested that, on average, parents reported a greater tendency to be-with a child's positively-valanced emotions (i.e., happiness, excitement, kindness) relative to a child's negatively-valanced emotions (i.e., sadness, anger, fear). Within children's expressions of negative emotions, parents reported they were more likely to be with these emotions when they were viewed as justified rather than unjustified. Looking within parents, parents who experience more emotions that treat a child's emotion as legitimate (e.g., attentive) were more likely to respond to their child's emotion with being-with behaviors. These results have implications for both understanding situations in which parents may be less likely to be with their children as well as identifying subsets of parents who may particularly benefit from interventions aiming to encourage supportive parental responses to the emotional expressions of their children.

"Being-With": An analysis of parental responses to young children's emotional expressions

Introduction

Children learn to express and regulate their emotions in the context of others. Emotion socialization, or how one's emotions are responded to in the form of either reinforcement or punishment, is believed to influence child emotional expression (Eisenberg et al., 1991, 1996, 1998; Fabes et al., 2001, 2002; Feng et al., 2008; Wu et al., 2017; Yi et al., 2016). It is within the parent–child relationship that children learn to express their feelings and needs, and where emotion first becomes socialized (Eisenberg et al., 1998). Within this relationship, parents' behaviors may intentionally or unintentionally socialize a child to have different beliefs about their emotions and how those emotions can be expressed or regulated. The process of socializing emotions may have a long-term impact on how children later behave and understand their emotions beyond the parent–child relationship (Eisenberg et al., 1991, 1998)**.**

Importance of the caregiver relationship

A large body of research has found that the quality of care received during early childhood is predictive of outcomes across nearly every domain (e.g., cognition, language, physical development; socioemotional functioning; morbidity and mortality) (Byford et al., 2012; Davidov & Grusec, 2006; Demakakos et al., 2016; Glascoe & Leew, 2010; Lomanowska et al., 2017). As children develop, they traverse different stages of environmental interactions as they move from infancy to toddlerhood to preschool and beyond. Unlike earlier in life, as children start preschool, they begin to socialize with individuals other than their caregivers. At this age, children begin encountering more complex experiences while still relying on their caregivers to help navigate these complexities. Moreover, preschool children are still largely developing emotional and behavioral regulation skills. Children who experience more supportive parenting

during emotional experiences are more likely to have strong emotion regulation skills in later childhood (Perry et al., 2020)**.**

The focus of emotion socialization tends to be on parent–child relationships, as parental reactions to a child's emotions are considered a direct socialization factor (Eisenberg et al., 1998). As such, the ways in which a child's emotions are socialized are determined mainly by the way their parent responds to emotions and emotional expressions (Eisenberg et al., 1998). When parents react negatively to their child's negative emotions, children's displays of negative emotion may become dysregulated and heightened due to a lack of regulatory understanding (Eisenberg et al., 1996).

Although there has been extensive research on how different parental responses may either reinforce or punish children's emotional expressions (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Fabes et al., 2001; Feng et al., 2008; Wu et al., 2017; Yi et al., 2016), there has been limited research on how different types of emotions from the child may be related to how a parent responds. Research on this topic is important in identifying whether or not certain emotions are more likely to leave a young child without an emotionally and physically present caregiver. When a child's emotions are responded to negatively by a caregiver through discouragement or punishment, "children may learn to view their own and others' emotions as negative or threatening and may avoid opportunities to explore the meaning of emotions and ways to deal with them" (Eisenberg et al., 1998, p. 248). To study the relationship between children's emotions and parents' responses to those emotions, this study focuses on the construct of "being-with." Introduced by Powell and colleagues (2014) in the Circle of Security Intervention, being-with refers to a parent's ability to help their child through different emotions via their presence and co-regulation. The purpose of the current study is to a) develop and test the Being-With Questionnaire (BWQ), a new measure aimed at assessing emotional availability and attunement in the parent–child relationship, and to b) examine patterns between and within participants in being-with.

Being-With: A construct to examine parental responses to children's emotions

Understanding how parents feel and react when their children express all emotions is essential because it is within the parent–child relationship that children learn to express their feelings and needs, and where emotion first becomes socialized (Eisenberg et al., 1998). We believe that by better understanding how different child emotions affect parental responses, we can improve long-term outcomes in child behavioral and emotional development using interventions centered around parents' ability to be emotionally available to their child and to positively socialize their emotions. However, limited research has been done on the processes that underlie a parent's ability to be available and attuned during a child's parent-related emotional responses (i.e., when the emotion of the child occurs as a result of something the parent has done or said), motivating the goal of this current study. Parent-related emotions will be defined at greater length in discussion of the Being-With Questionnaire.

The construct of being-with is defined as a parent's ability to be emotionally and physically available to the emotional needs of their child, without trying to change the child's emotion, but rather providing support and organization of their emotions (Powell et al., 2014). A parent exemplifies being-with their child by being emotionally available (i.e., acknowledging and accepting the needs and emotions of their child) and responding to their child's emotional needs through validation and support (Powell et al., 2014). For example, a parent might see their child playing with a toy at the park expressing happiness, and in response smile at their child and tell them, "That looks pretty neat, huh?"(Powell et al., 2014, p. 33-34), acknowledging the child's joy. Alternatively, the parent might see their child expressing anger or fear after their toy breaks and tell their child, "You didn't like it when he wouldn't let you play. Was that a little scary?" (p. 34). Both of these examples demonstrate the parent's helping their child organize their emotion by labeling *what* they are feeling and describing *why* they are feeling it. In both cases, the parent acknowledges the child's emotion and stays with their child as they feel and express the emotion, thus validating that emotion for the child. In this way, a parent is fundamentally being-

with their child when they acknowledge their child's emotions, help the child organize those emotions and show the child that they will not be left alone in those emotions. For the purposes of this study, when we think about being-with, we are thinking about the construct in the context of, and in response to, a child's emotion.

The role of an emotion's characteristics

In order to address the question of how the type of child emotion affects parental response to that emotion, previous literature on negative emotions and parental beliefs about emotions must be considered. Previous research on children's emotions and parents' responses have been focused around negative emotions broadly (Eisenberg et al., 1996; Fabes et al., 2002), but there has been comparatively less research examining how parents respond to positive emotions. Perhaps not surprisingly, mothers were less likely to report feeling positive emotions when responding to children's negative emotions, and more likely to report feeling positively in response to children's positive emotions (Wu et al., 2017). Maternal behavioral responses to their child's emotions were also linked to the emotionality of the child: negative emotions were more likely to be met with passive soothing or distress-focused reactions from a parent and positive emotions were more likely to be met with active engagement from the parent (Feng et al., 2008; Wu et al., 2017). Moreover, within a child's negative emotions, previous research suggests that with higher emotional reactivity and intensity of a child's emotion, there is a higher rate of harsh parental coping and distress responses (Fabes et al., 2001). Thus, there is a positive association between emotionally-unavailable parenting and how negative a child's emotion is perceived to be.

In addition, although some research has looked into parents' beliefs about emotions more broadly (Gottman et al., 1997; Meyer et al., 2014), there has been little research that has examined how a parent's belief about specific expressions (e.g., is the expression of an emotion a justified reaction to an event) may be related to how they respond to their child. Previous research on global beliefs of emotions has found that parents who view emotions as being used

for manipulative purposes are more likely to mock or trivialize those emotions (Gottman et al.,

1997). Parents who view children's emotions as a legitimate indicator of how their child is

feeling are less likely to dismiss or minimize those emotions and are more likely to engage in

emotion-focused problem solving (Meyer et al., 2014). These parents are also less likely to

share the negative affect of their child or match their child's negative emotion with the same

negative emotion (e.g., meeting anger with anger).

Three-step framework of being-with

To conceptualize how a parent may be-with their child's emotions, it is important to

address the relevant components of a parent's response to a child's emotions. Powell and

colleagues (2014) introduced the construct of being-with alongside an idea they labeled "shark

music," or the internal feelings a parent may experience when a child expresses an emotion.

These internal feelings or emotions are activated in the parent and may unconsciously signal to

the parent that the emotional expression of the child and their accompanying emotional needs

are "dangerous" or "safe" to the parent (Powell et al., 2014). Thus, in order to conceptualize and

assess being-with a child's emotions, both the external behaviors a parent may exhibit in

response to an emotion (e.g., comforting, mocking), and the internal processes that are

activated before a parent reacts (e.g., feeling discomfort) must be understood.
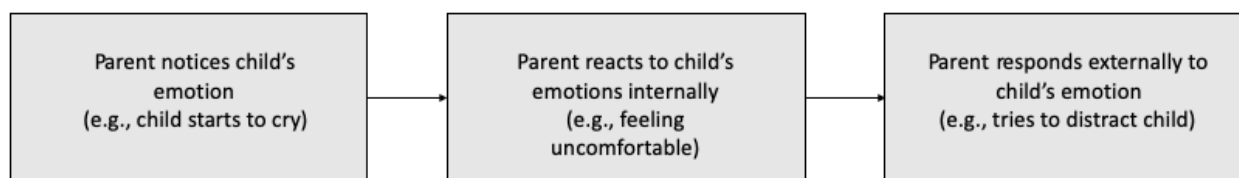
Figure 1. Three-step framework of a parent's response to a child's emotional expression

We propose that this three-step framework (Figure 1) is useful for linking children's

emotional displays to the parent's response to the emotion. Specifically, understanding how a

parent responds to a child's emotions requires a throughway to a parent's internal feeling

following the initial recognition of a child's emotion. Previous research has pointed to the

importance of a parent's internal responses in predicting how accepting and available they are

towards their child's emotions. Studies have shown that feelings of anger or frustration activated in a parent following a child's negative emotional expression are more likely to precede responses that are minimizing of the child's emotions, distress-based, or punishing of the child (Fabes et al., 2002). Parents that report experiencing distress when their child is upset are also more likely to focus on their own discomfort over their child's (Fabes et al., 1990) and are more likely to respond with emotionally magnifying responses (Gottman et al., 1997). Even when attempting to express sensitive caregiving, internal feelings of discomfort in the parent are likely to result in a forced or pseudo-sensitivity that, although warm, may not show emotional availability (Biringen, 2001).

Measuring parent's responses to emotions: The Being-With Questionnaire

In response to the gap in existing literature and to measure the construct of being-with, we have developed the Being-With Questionnaire (BWQ), a measure aimed at identifying how parents respond to their young children's emotions both internally and externally. The measure is a self-report questionnaire in which parents are prompted with nine different emotion sets that may be expressed by their child: happiness, excitement, kindness, sadness (justified and unjustified), anger (justified and unjustified) and fear (justified and unjustified). The emotional expressions of the child included in the measure are all parent-related emotions (e.g., happiness focused towards the parent or following the actions of a parent). Parents are prompted before answering any questions in the BWQ to think about their child's emotions as being parent-related (i.e., occurring as a result of something the parent did or said). Before each item, parents are reminded to be thinking of their child's emotion as being the result of their own behaviors (see Appendix for a copy of the BWQ). Parents are asked to identify how likely they are to experience certain internal feelings in response to each emotion, how much they would like to change the emotion their child is expressing, and how likely they are to respond in a certain way to each emotion, with each representing a different way a parent may either be-with or not be-with their child.

Current study

Thus far, there is a gap in knowledge regarding parental differences in their response to children's emotions, how internal processes and beliefs about the child's emotion predict a parent's response, and potential factors associated with these differences. There is a gap in the literature regarding whether or not internal processes activated by a child's emotion play a role in how parents respond externally to that emotion. Further, it is unknown whether or not certain types of children's emotional expressions are harder for a parent to be-with versus others (e.g., justified versus unjustified). Moreover, it is also unknown whether or not certain parents struggle to be-with children's emotions more than other parents, and if those differences are associated with different behaviors in response to those emotional displays. The current studies aim to:

Aim #1A: Examine differences in parents' emotional reactions to their child's parent-related emotions depending on the valence (i.e., positive, negative) of a child's expressed emotion.

Aim #1B: Examine differences in a parent's ability to behaviorally be-with the emotions of one's child depending on the valence of a child's expressed parent-related emotion.

Hypothesis #1A: We hypothesized that parents would be more likely to experience positive emotions when their child's parent-related emotions are positive, and that parents would be more likely to experience negative emotions when their child's parent-related emotions are negative.

Hypothesis #1B: We hypothesized that parents would be more likely to be-with their child's parent-related emotions when those emotions are positive and more likely to engage in being-without behaviors during their child's parent-related emotions when children's emotions are negative.

Aim #2A: Examine differences in parental emotions in response to their child's parent-related emotions depending on whether a negative emotion is perceived as "justified" versus "unjustified."

Aim #2B: Examine differences in parent's ability to behaviorally be-with their child's parent-related emotions depending on whether a negative emotion is perceived as "justified" versus "unjustified."

Hypothesis #2A: We hypothesized that in response to a child's negative unjustified parent-related emotions, parents would be more likely to feel distressed (e.g., frustrated, angry) and in response to a child's negative, justified parent-related emotions parents would be more likely to experience feelings that indicate viewing a child's emotions as legitimate (e.g., attentiveness, guilt, sadness).

Hypothesis #2B: We hypothesized that in response to a child's negative unjustified parent-related emotions, parents would be more likely to engage in being-without behaviors during the emotion and in response to a child's negative, justified emotions parents would be more likely to engage and be-with that emotion behaviorally.

Aim #3: Examine relations between parents' reported comfort with their child's parent-related emotions and parents' tendency to be-with those emotions.

Hypotheses #3: We hypothesized that parents that report feeling more likely to feel attentive, guilty, and sad would be more likely to be-with their children in their negative parent-related emotions. We also hypothesized that parents that report feeling more likely to feel frustrated, angry, and indifferent would be more likely to leave their child being-without in their negative parent-related emotions.

Methods

Participants

Participation in this study was conducted through an entirely online REDCap survey. This study was approved by the Vanderbilt Institutional Review Board. Participants of the study were parents of 150 children between the ages of 3 to 5.99 years old. We obtained at least one and up to two parents for each child, leading to a final sample size of 240 participants. Participants were screened via survey or phone to confirm eligibility requirements of being fluent

in English and having at least one child between the ages of 3 to 5.99 years old. Participants

with more than one child within this age range were asked to think only about their oldest child

that qualifies. Participants were compensated with a $20 Amazon gift card for their participation.

Participants also had the option to include the name of their child's other caregiver (e.g.,

partner, ex-partner), and if both caregivers of the child participated, the pair received an

additional $10 Amazon gift card. Participants were recruited via email from a research database

of families previously consented to being contacted for child development research through the

Department of Psychology and Human Development at Vanderbilt University, as well as through

Research Match and the Research Notifications Email Distribution List. Participants were also

recruited through recommendation from enrolled participants. Before participating, participants

gave written informed consent via an online consent form. Consent was obtained through an

online form including a description of the study goals and procedures. Only data collected from

participants who completed the entire survey were included in the results. To address concerns

of inattentive answers, we included three check and attention questions throughout the study.

Data from participants who did not answer the check and attention questions accurately were

removed from the analysis. Characteristics of the participants are broken down in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Adult Participants	N (n=240)
Parent Sex Assigned at Birth	
Number (percent)	
Female	140 (58%)
Male	98 (41%)
Parent Age	
Mean (SD) years	35.86 (5.27)
Ethnicity	
Number (percent)	10 (4%)
Hispanic or Latinx	230 (96%)
Not Hispanic or Latinx	
Racial Identity	
Number (percent)	5 (2%)
Asian	8 (3%)
Black or African American	223 (93%)
White	4 (2%)
Other	
Education Level	
Number (percent)	
High school graduate	4 (2%)

Some college	16 (7%)
Trade/technical/vocational training	6 (3%)
Associate's degree	10 (4%)
Bachelor's degree	94 (39%)
Graduate degree	108 (45%)
Other	2 (1%)
Employment Status	
Number (percent)	
Employed full time	161 (67%)
Employed part time	19 (8%)
Self-employed	17 (7%)
Out of work	5 (2%)
Homemaker	32 (13%)
Student	3 (1%)
Military	1 (0.5%)
Other	2 (1%)
Relationship Status	
Number (percent)	
Single, never married	4 (2%)
Married or domestic partnership	232 (97%)
Divorced	4 (2%)
Relationship with other parent	
Number (percent)	
In a relationship with other parent	223 (93%)
Not in relationship with other parent	6 (3%)
Unsure if in relationship with other parent	1 (0.5%)
Not in relationship at all	9 (4%)
Annual income	
Number (percent)	
$5,001-15,000	4 (2%)
$15,001-30,000	19 (8%)
$30,001-60,000	44 (18%)
$60,001-90,000	93 (39%)
$90,001-150,000	64 (27%)
$150,000-250,000	14 (6%)
Greater than $250,000	4 (2%)
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Children	N (n=147)
Child Sex Assigned at Birth	
Number (percent)	
Female	76 (52%)
Male	71 (48%)
Child Age	4.44 (0.85)
Mean (SD) years	

Measures

Being-with during Positive Emotional Expressions. Using concepts from Powell and

colleagues' (2014) *Circle of Security*, parent self-reported behaviors and cognitions were

measured in terms of being-with their child's parent-related emotions. Parents reported on the

ways in which they are able to accept and organize their child's needs when their child is feeling

and expressing positive emotions: happiness, excitement, and sympathy. Parents were provided with 12 emotional responses (e.g., attentive, guilty, sad, stressed, frustrated, angry, excited, happy, calm, uncomfortable, indifferent, pride) and asked to rate, on a 1-6 Likert-type scale ranging from "*Very Unlikely*" to "*Very Likely*", how likely they would feel each emotion response when their child expresses each of the above listed positive emotions. They were also asked to rate, on a 1-6 Likert-type scale ranging from "*Very Unlikely*" to "*Very Likely*," their likelihood of exhibiting a certain behavioral response to their child's emotion (e.g., holding their child, distracting their child, asking their child to stop, walking away from their child, organizing their child's emotions, mocking their child). An example of organizing a child's positive emotions would be: "When my child is expressing happiness (e.g., laughter) because of me, I would tell them how I see that they are enjoying whatever is making them happy." For our analyses, parent's scores on these subscales were recoded to reflect their likelihood of being performed or being felt, with -3 representing "*Very Unlikely*" and 3 representing "*Very Likely*." Thus, negative scores reflect that a parent is unlikely to experience or exhibit a certain response, and positive scores reflect that a parent is likely to experience or exhibit a certain response. Holding and organizing are considered being-with behaviors, whereas distracting, telling to stop, walking away, and mocking are considered being-without behaviors.

Being-with during Negative Emotional Expressions. Parents also reported on the ways in which they are able to accept their child's needs when their child is feeling and expressing negative parent-related emotions. Parents reported their likely responses to six different negative emotion sets: justified sadness, unjustified sadness, justified anger, unjustified anger, justified fear, and unjustified fear. Again, parents were provided with 12 emotional responses (e.g., attentive, guilty, sad, stressed, frustrated, angry, excited, happy, calm, uncomfortable, indifferent, pride) and asked to rate, on a 1-6 Likert-type scale ranging from "*Very Unlikely*" to "*Very Likely*", how likely they would be to feel each emotional response when their child expresses each of the above listed negative emotions. They were also asked to rate, on a 1-6

Likert-type scale ranging from "*Very Unlikely*" to "*Very Likely*," their likelihood of exhibiting a

certain behavioral response to a child's emotion (e.g., holding their child, distracting their child,

asking their child to stop, walking away from their child, organizing their child's emotions,

mocking their child). An example of organizing a child's negative emotions would be: "When my

child is sad (e.g., cries) because of something I said or did and I feel their sadness is justified, I

would tell them that I see they are feeling sad and talk about what is upsetting them." Again, for

both emotions and behaviors, parent's scores on these subscales were recoded to reflect their

likelihood of occuring, with -3 representing "*Very Unlikely*" and 3 representing "*Very Likely*."

Results

Establishing Validity of Being-With measure.

Intra-measure validation of being-with. A series of bivariate Pearson correlations

were conducted to examine the extent to which parents' endorsement for engaging in the six

different behavioral responses were interrelated. First, parents' behavioral responses to their

child's emotions were averaged across all nine child emotions. Using the mean scores for each

parental behavior across all the child's emotions, we compared each of the mean scores for

each parental behavior (e.g., holding one's child, mocking one's child) against each other.

Correlations were then calculated among these average response scores. We predicted a

significant positive correlation between the two being-with behavioral responses (Holding and

Organizing) and between the four being-without behavioral responses (Distracting, Asking to

Stop, Walking Away, and Mocking), and we predicted that responses on the being-with

behavioral responses would be negatively correlated with responses on the being-without

behavioral responses. Results of these analyses can be seen in Table 2. In line with our

hypothesis, average likelihood of Holding was significantly positively correlated with average

likelihood of Organizing, and significantly negatively correlated with average likelihood of

Walking Away. However, average likelihood of Holding was also significantly positively

correlated with average likelihood of Distracting and was not significantly correlated with average likelihood of Asking to Stop or with average likelihood of Mocking. Average likelihood of Organizing was significantly negatively correlated with average likelihood of Asking to Stop, average likelihood of Walking Away, and average likelihood of Mocking. Average likelihood of Distracting was significantly positively correlated with average likelihood of Asking to Stop, average likelihood of Walking Away, and average likelihood of Mocking. Average likelihood of Asking to Stop was significantly positively correlated to average likelihood of Walking Away and to average likelihood of Mocking and average likelihood of Distracting. In sum, our being-with subscales (holding one's child, organizing emotions) were positively correlated and highly related. In addition, our being-without behaviors (distracting child, asking to stop, leaving, mocking) were mostly positively correlated with one another. However, Distracting was positively correlated with Holding one's child, suggesting that parents who reported holding their child during their emotions were also likely to report distracting their child from their emotions.

Table 2. Pearson Correlations for Being-With Subscales.

	Mocking	Walking Away	Asking to Stop	Distracting Child	Organizing Emotions	Holding Child
Mocking	1	.34**	.32**	.17**	-.15*	-.03
Walking Away		1	.49**	.39**	-.21**	-.25**
Asking to Stop			1	.56**	-.24**	-.03
Distracting Child				1	-.07	.19**
Organizing Emotions					1	.52**
Holding Child						1
Mean (SD)	-2.93 (0.21)	-2.45 (0.59)	-1.76 (1.01)	-1.07 (1.16)	2.21 (0.82)	1.63 (1.12)
Range	-3.00, -1.37	-3.00, -0.29	-3.00, 0.89	-3.00, 1.11	-1.11, 3.00	-2.67, 3.00

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

Examining differences in parental emotional and behavioral responses to children's positive versus negative emotions.

      Patterns in emotional valence on parental emotions. Parents' emotional reactions also differed significantly across positively- versus negatively-valanced emotions in all emotions aside from parental indifference. Differences between parental emotions across positive versus negative emotions are seen in the pair-wise t-test described in Table 3, and these differences are graphically represented in Figure 2. As we hypothesized, parents are more likely to express positive emotions such as happiness, excitement, and calmness in response to a child's positive emotions. Parents were also more likely to feel attentive to positive emotions. Parental likelihood of experiencing more negative emotions, such as frustration, anger, stress, and sadness was associated positively with the expression of children's negative emotions. In summary, parents reported feeling more positively and attentively to a child's positive emotion, and more negatively to a child's negative emotions.

Table 3. Comparison of Parental Emotions Across Child's Positively- versus Negatively-Valanced Emotions.

	t	p	d	95% CI
Feeling Proud	10.72	<.001	0.70	.73, 1.05
Feeling Indifferent	-1.04	.298	-0.07	-0.23, 0.08
Feeling Calm	-31.83	<.001	-2.07	-3.27, -2.91
Feeling Happy	-27.60	<.001	-1.80	-3.20, -2.78
Feeling Excited	-30.11	<.001	-1.96	-3.14, -2.76
Feeling Uncomfortable	-18.27	<.001	-1.19	-1.80, -1.45
Feeling Angry	-15.79	<.001	-1.03	-2.05, -1.6
Feeling Frustrated	69.25	<.001	4.51	4.80, 5.08
Feeling Stressed	178.47	<.001	11.62	5.64, 5.76
Feeling Sad	30.90	<.001	2.01	3.22, 3.66
Feeling Guilty	-30.74	<.001	-2.00	-2.96, -2.61
Feeling Attentive	79.67	<.001	5.19	4.98, 5.25
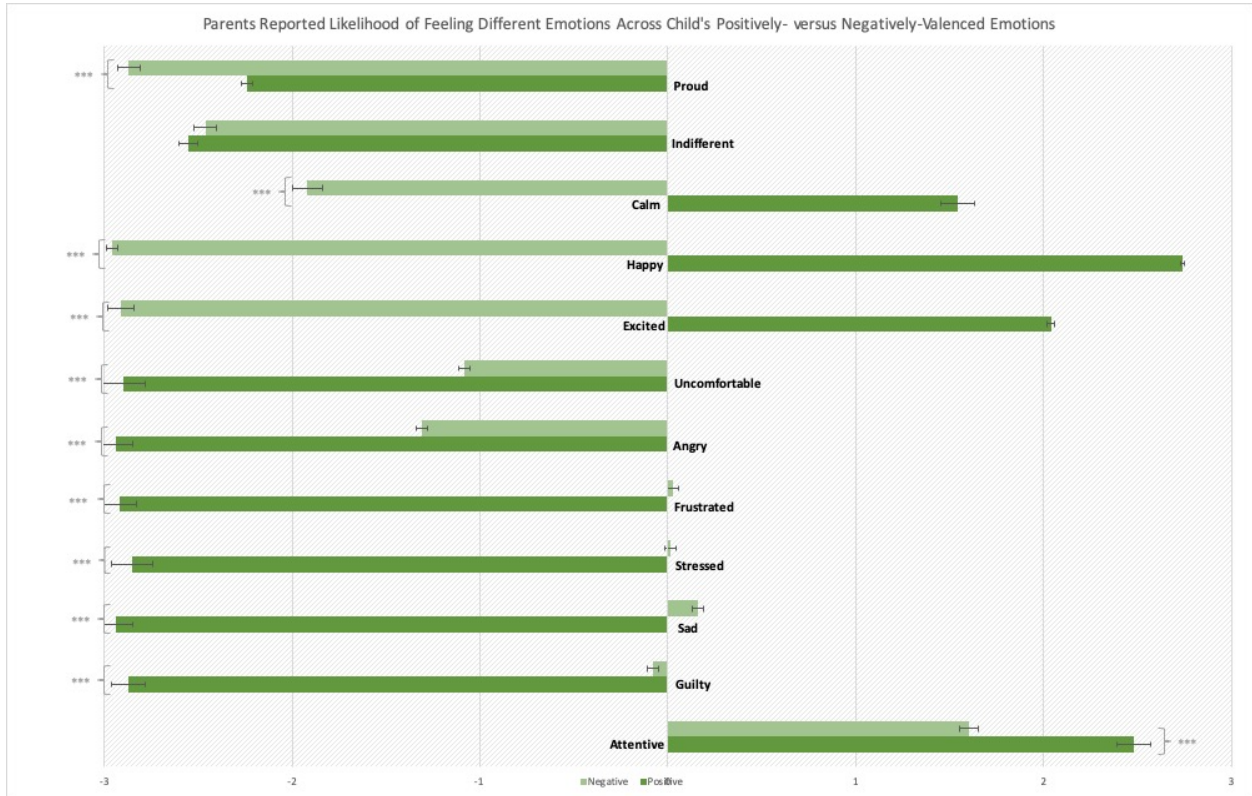
Figure 2. Comparison of Parent Reported Likelihood of Feeling Different Emotions Across Child's Positively- versus Negatively-Valanced Emotions.

Patterns in emotional valence on overall being-with. We examined whether parents'

tendency to be-with their child differs depending on the emotional valence of their child's

emotion. We predicted that parents would report being likely to exhibit being-with behaviors in

response to positively-valanced emotions (i.e., happiness, excitement, kindness) and that

parents would report being more likely to exhibit being-without behaviors in response to

negatively valanced emotions (i.e., sadness, anger, fear). We conducted a series of paired

sample t-tests between the behavioral response of the parent to a child's positive emotions and

the behavioral response of the parent to a child's negative emotions. The valence of the child's

emotion was dummy coded with 0 representing negatively-valanced emotions, and 1

representing a positively-valanced emotions. Results of these models are presented in Table 4.

Valence of the child's emotions was significantly related to parental responses for each of the

being-without behavioral responses. As can be seen in Figure 3, parents reported being more

unlikely to ask their child to stop expressing their emotions, walk away from their child, and

mock their child's emotion when the emotion positive as compared to negative. Parents

reported being more likely to distract their child when the emotion is negative as compared to

positive. Valence of the child's emotions was not significantly related to parental responses for

each of the being-with behavioral responses. In sum, parents were more unlikely to report

expressing being-without to their children's emotions when that emotion was positive, versus

when it was negative.

Table 4. Comparison of Parenting Behaviors Across Positively- versus Negatively-Valanced Emotions.

	t	p	d	95% CI
Mocking	-2.37	.02	-0.16	-0.09, -0.01
Walking Away	-14.01	<.001	-0.93	-1.00, -0.76
Asking Child to Stop	-18.89	<.001	-1.26	-2.20, -1.79
Distracting Child	-25.95	<.001	-1.73	-3.44, -2.96
Organizing Emotions	1.61	.11	0.11	-0.01, 0.22
Holding Child	-1.14	.26	-0.08	-0.28, 0.07
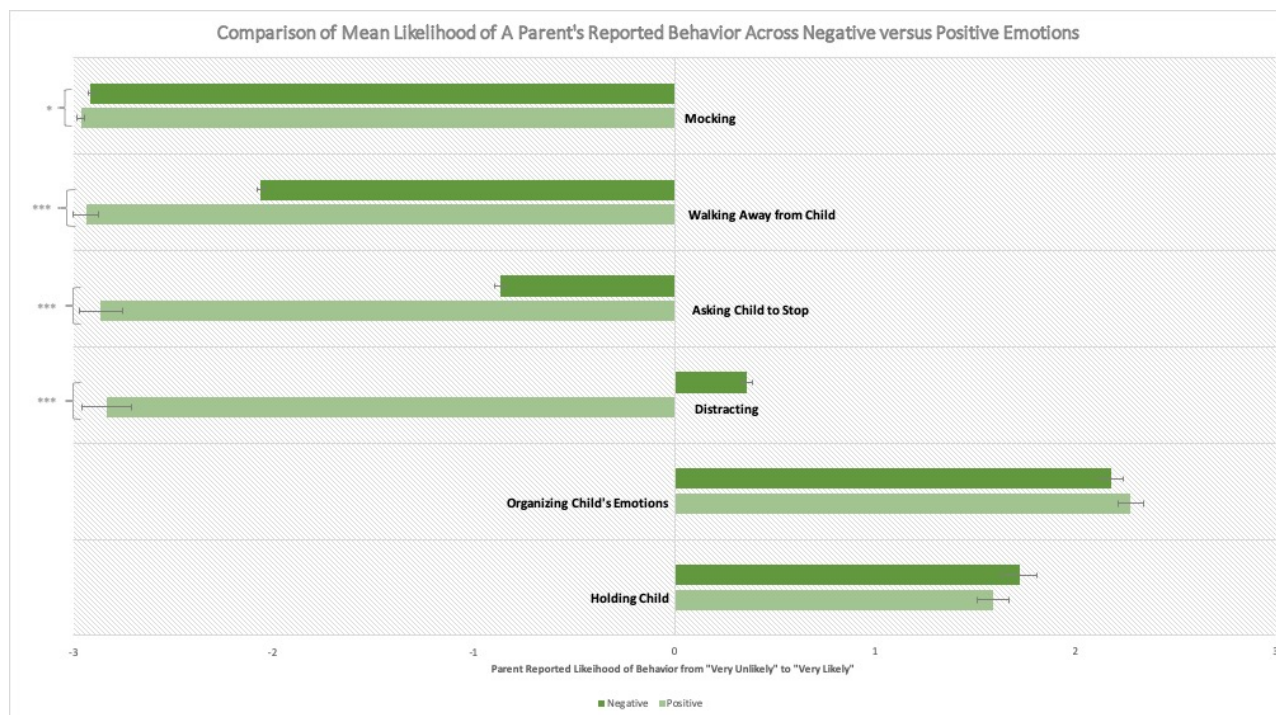
Figure 3. Comparison of Mean Likelihood of a Parent's Reported Behavior Across Negative versus Positive Emotions.

Examining the role of an emotion's justifiability on parental responses.

Our third aim was to examine how a parent's response to their child's negative emotions, both emotionally and behaviorally, changes based on justifiability of a child's negative emotions. We hypothesized that parents would be more likely to feel negative, affect-matching emotions when they perceive their child's negative emotion as unjustified. That is, they would be more likely to feel distressed (e.g., frustrated, angry) when a child expresses unjustified negative emotions. We also hypothesized that parents would be more likely to feel attentive to their child's emotions when they find them justified, as well as more likely to experience emotions that reflect viewing their child's emotions as legitimate (e.g., feeling sad, feeling guilty). In addition, we hypothesized that parents would report being more likely to engage in being-with behaviors, such as comforting their child or helping them organize their feelings, for child emotions seen as justified. Lastly, we hypothesized that parents would report being more likely

to engage in being-without behaviors, such as distraction-based or punitive reactions, for child emotions seen as unjustified.

        Role of justified vs. unjustified emotions on parental feelings. To examine the role of the perceived justifiability of a child's emotion on how a parent reports feeling in response, we conducted another series of paired sample t-tests between the emotional response of the parent to a child's justified negative emotions and the emotional response of the parent to a child's unjustified negative emotions. The justifiability of the emotion was dummy coded with 0 representing an unjustified emotion, and 1 representing an justified emotion. Results are summarized in Table 5. As can be seen in Figure 4, parents were significantly more likely to feel attentive, guilty, sad, and stressed when emotions were categorized as justified, as well as less unlikely to report feeling uncomfortable and proud. Results also suggest that parents are more likely to feel frustrated when children's emotions were perceived as unjustified, and less unlikely to report feeling angry and indifferent. These results were not completely consistent with our hypotheses. We hypothesized that parents would be more likely to feel attentive, guilty, and sad in response to a child's justified negative emotions, and that parents would be more likely to feel frustrated and angry in response to child's unjustified negative emotions. However, we did not hypothesize that parents would report feeling less unlikely to express feeling indifferent in response to a child's unjustified emotions, or that they would report feeling less unlikely to feel uncomfortable and proud, and more likely to feel stressed in response to a child's justified emotions.

Table 5. Comparison of Parental Emotions Across Child's Justified versus Unjustified Negative Emotions.

	t	p	d	95% CI
Feeling Proud	2.92	0.004	0.20	0.03, 0.15
Feeling Indifferent	-6.29	<.001	-0.43	-0.57, -0.31
Feeling Calm	1.09	0.28	0.07	-0.06, 0.21
Feeling Happy	0.06	0.95	0.00	-0.03, 0.03
Feeling Excited	-0.91	0.36	-0.06	-0.05, 0.02
Feeling Uncomfortable	5.79	<.001	0.39	0.32, 0.68
Feeling Angry	-9.63	<.001	-0.65	-1.15, -.74
Feeling Frustrated	-11.95	<.001	-0.81	-1.39, -1.01
Feeling Stressed	2.56	0.01	0.17	0.05, 0.42
Feeling Sad	15.4	<.001	1.05	1.53, 1.97
Feeling Guilty	22.57	<.001	1.53	2.33, 2.79
Feeling Attentive	10.6	<.001	0.72	0.75, 1.09
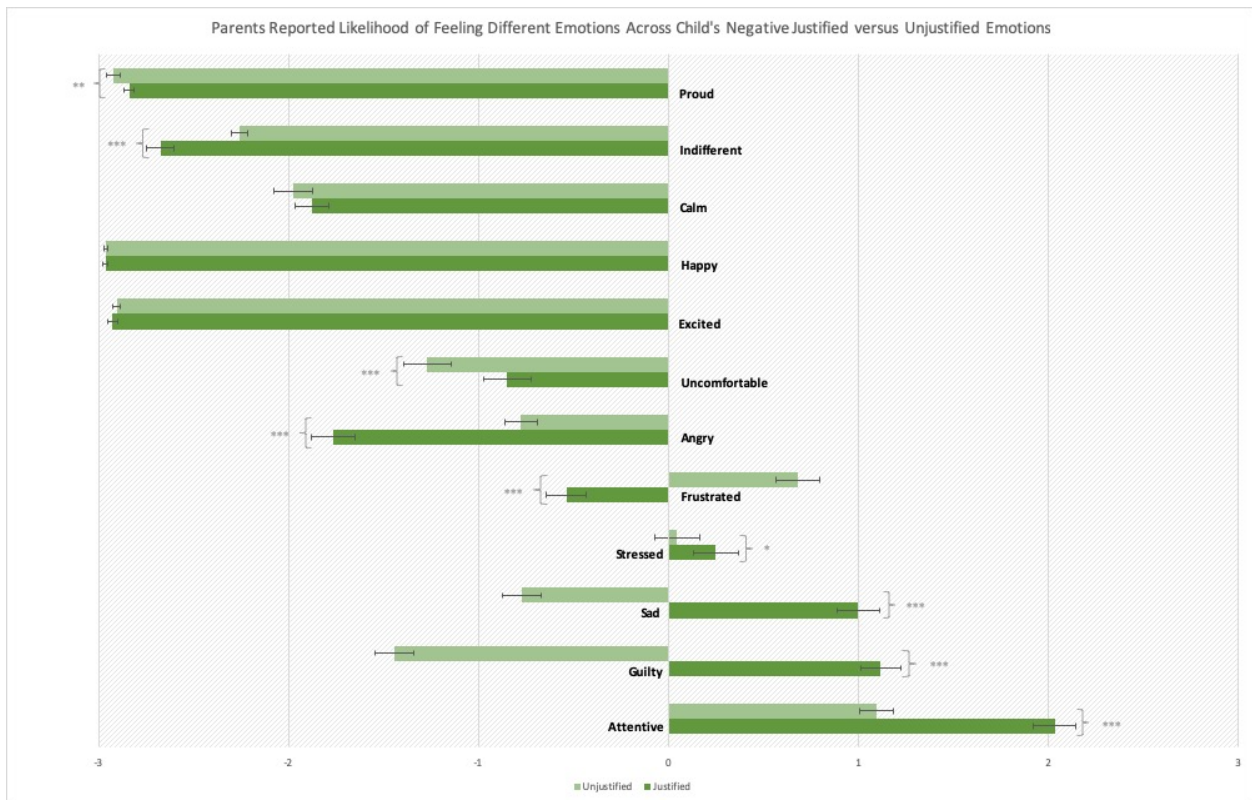
Figure 4. Comparison of Parent Reported Likelihood of Feeling Different Emotions Across Child's Negative Justified versus Unjustified Emotions.

Role of justified vs. unjustified emotions on parental responses. To examine whether the perceived justifiability of a child's emotion is related to the way a parent behaviorally responds to that emotion, we ran a series of paired-sample t-tests comparing the behavioral response of the parent to a child's justified negative emotions and the behavioral response of the parent to a child's unjustified negative emotions. The justifiability of the emotion was dummy coded with 0 representing an unjustified emotion, and 1 representing a justified emotion. Results suggest that parents are more likely to report holding their child and organizing their child's emotion when an emotion is justified. These results can be seen in Table 6 and in Figure 5. In addition, results from this paired-sample t-test also suggest that parents are more likely to report asking their child to stop and to distract their child, and are less unlikely to report trying to stop expressing their emotion, to walk away from their child, and to mock their child if the child's emotion is viewed as unjustified. These results are in line with our hypothesis that parents will be more likely to be-with their child in justified versus unjustified emotions.

Table 6. Comparison of Parental Behaviors Across Child's Justified versus Unjustified Negative Emotions.

	t	p	d	95% CI
Mocking	-4.14	<.001	-0.29	-0.19, -0.07
Walking Away	-11.39	<.001	-0.79	0.36, 0.61
Asking Child to Stop	-12.96	<.001	-0.90	-1.20, -0.85
Distracting Child	-2.11	.04	-0.15	-1.50, -1.08
Organizing Emotions	7.66	<.001	0.53	-0.35, -0.01
Holding Child	13.73	<.001	0.95	1.21, 1.63
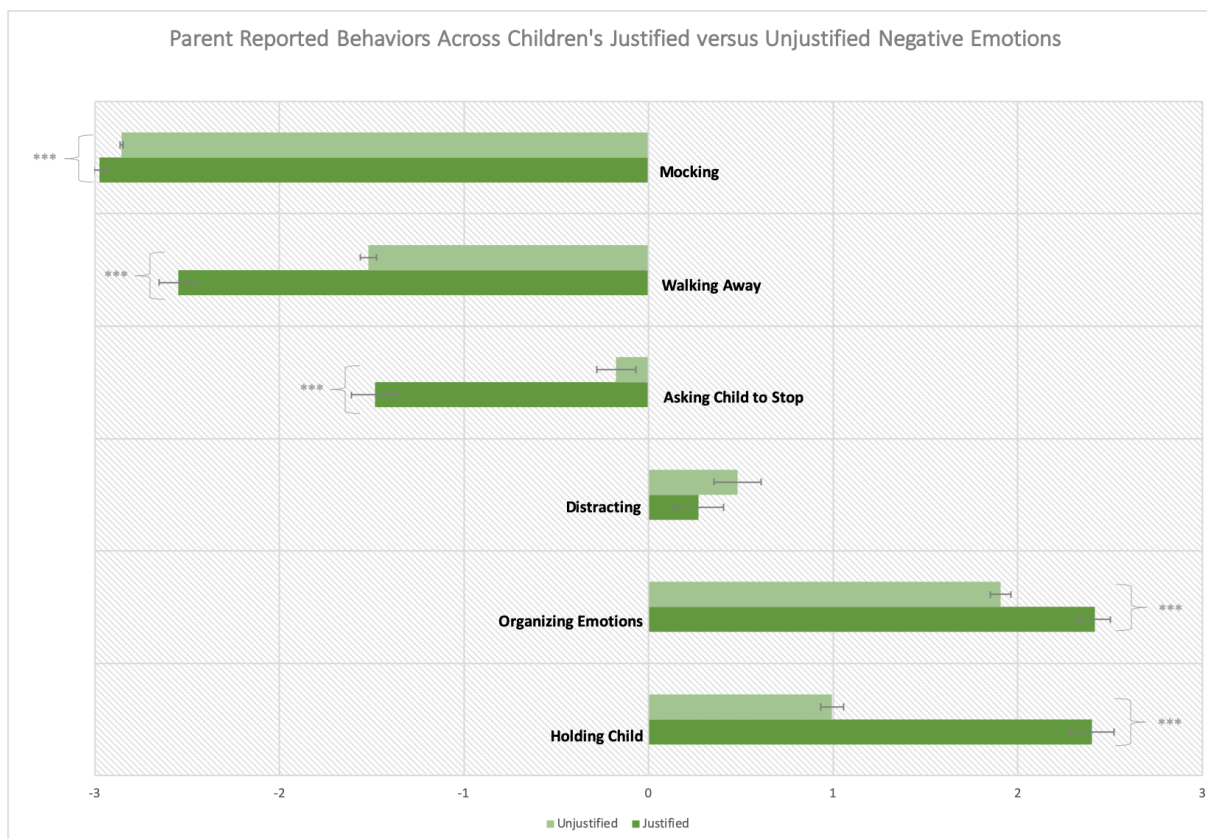
Figure 5. Comparison of Parent Reported Behaviors in Response to Children's Justified versus Unjustified Negative Emotions.

Examining the relationship between parental emotions and parenting behaviors in response to child's negative emotions.

Our final aim was to understand whether or not a parent's reported emotions to their child's emotions are linked to their reported behavioral response. We hypothesized that parents who reported being more likely to experience distress-based emotions (frustration, anger) or to be unbothered by their child's emotions (indifferent) would respond as being more likely to engage in being-without behaviors (e.g., mocking, walking away), and less likely to be-with (e.g., holding child, organizing emotions). We ran several bivariate correlations between the behavioral responses of the parent and the emotion the parent reports feeling for the child's justified and unjustified negative emotions. The emotions of the parent that were included were

feelings of attentiveness, guilt, sadness, frustration, anger, and indifference given existing

literature linking parents' distress-based emotions (e.g., frustration, anger), in-tune emotional

responses (e.g., guilt, sadness), and overall emotional attentiveness (e.g., attentive, indifferent)

to parental behaviors.

Results for correlations between parent emotional and behavioral responses to their

child's *justified* negative emotions can be seen in Table 7, and those between emotional and

behavioral responses to their child's *unjustified* negative emotions can be seen in Table 8.

Parents' likelihood of feeling guilty, attentive, and sad in response to both justified and

unjustified negative emotions was positively related to their reported likelihood to hold their

child. Parents' likelihood of feeling attentive and sad in response to both types of negative

emotion was positively related to their reported likelihood of organizing their child's emotions.

Parents reported likelihood to express guilt or sadness was surprisingly also positively

correlated with their reported likelihood to ask their child to stop when they believe their child's

negative emotions are justified.

In the case of unjustified negative emotions, however, reports of feeling likely to be guilty

or sad were negatively correlated with reported likelihood of walking away from one's child.

Reports of attentiveness of parents in response to a child's unjustified negative emotions were

also negatively correlated to a parent's likelihood to ask their child to stop, walk away from their

child, and to mock their child.

Likelihood of parental frustration and anger, on the other hand, is seen to be positively

correlated with a parent's likelihood of distracting, asking to stop, and walking away in response

to a child's justified negative emotion. Reports of feeling parental anger is linked to a parent's

likelihood to mock their child in these emotions as well. There is no link between feeling

indifferent and a parent's behavioral response in justified negative emotions.

In unjustified emotions, parents' reported likelihood of feeling anger and frustration is

positively correlated with parent's likelihood of distracting one's child, asking one's child to stop,

walking away, and mocking, as well as negatively correlated with parent's likelihood of organizing a child's emotion. In addition, parental frustration and indifference are linked to a lower likelihood to hold one's child. Parent's likelihood of feeling indifference in response to a child's unjustified negative emotions is also positively correlated with reports of likelihood of walking away. In sum, on average, parents who report feeling more likely to feel attentive, guilty, and sad are more likely to be-with their child by organizing their emotions or holding their child. Parents who report feeling likely to feel frustrated and angry, in comparison, are more likely to leave their child being-without by walking away, distracting, asking their child to stop, and mocking their child. There is some relationship between likelihood of parental indifference and being-without within unjustified negative emotions. These results do support our hypotheses that parents who report feeling more distress-based emotional responses (e.g., frustration, anger) or who report feeling unbothered (e.g., indifferent) are more likely to leave their child being-without. However, we also see that parental guilt and sadness, in response to justified negative emotions, may be linked with asking one's child to stop.

Table 7

Pearson Correlations for Parent's Emotions and Behavioral Responses to Justified Negative Emotions

	Attentive	Guilty	Sad	Frustrated	Angry	Indifferent
Mocking	.03	.06	-.01	.10	.14*	.12
Walking Away	-.09	.02	-.02	.24**	.26**	.09
Asking to Stop	-.07	.21**	.14*	.32**	.38**	.11
Distracting	.02	.11	.11	.29**	.21**	-.03
Organizing Emotions	.27**	.12	.20**	-.09	-.08	-.03
Holding Child	.29**	.26**	.34**	.08	.04	-.05

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

Table 8

Pearson Correlations for Parent's Emotions and Behavioral Responses to Unjustified Negative Emotions

	Attentive	Guilty	Sad	Frustrated	Angry	Indifferent
Mocking	-.19**	.02	.05	.27**	.29**	.13
Walking Away	-.29**	-.17*	-.19**	.36**	.26**	.25**
Asking to Stop	-.21**	-.05	-.06	.41**	.44**	.10
Distracting	-.08	.11	.12	.28**	.24**	-.00
Organizing Emotions	.43**	.11	.19**	-.19**	-.20**	.03
Holding Child	.50**	.35**	.39**	-.17*	-.13	-.16*

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

Discussion

The goals of our study were to examine the Being-With Questionnaire, to identify differences in parenting behaviors between positive and negative emotions, to identify differences in parenting responses (emotionally and behaviorally) to a child's negative emotions that were either justified or unjustified. In addition to these group level questions, we explored individual differences in emotional responses (e.g., feeling guilty) and their association with parent self-reported behaviors (e.g., holding their child). To explore these questions, we collected data from 240 parents of 147 preschool-aged children via an online, survey-based research study. Parents completed several self-report and child-report measures, including a new measure we created assessing parenting behaviors and emotions associated with children's emotions.

Examining the Being-With Questionnaire

Behaviors that target being-with a child's emotion (e.g., holding one's child, organizing child's emotion) were positively correlated with each other, indicating that parents who report being-with their children by holding their child are also likely to be-with their child by organizing their child's emotions. In addition, behaviors that indicate being-without (e.g., walking away from one's child, telling one's child to stop) were positively correlated with each other. The positive correlation between distracting one's child and holding one's child may indicate that although

distracting is considered "being-without" it is still employed regularly by parents who frequently

endorse responding to their children's emotions with other being-with behaviors. Distracting

does hold benefits in helping a child downregulate their emotions: emotion-focused responses

from parents may ask the child to think about a happier time to subvert attention from ongoing

distress (Fabes et al., 1990a). Thus, although distracting is not being-with given its intention to

change the emotion of the child, it may be an effective tool at times to improve child mood, but

perhaps risks the child experiencing lower levels of being-with from their parent. Previous

research indicates that there are positive and negative consequences of distracting oneself or

one's child from emotional expressions. Although there is research that indicates that

suppressing negative emotions, or having a parent discourage or distract from negative

emotions, may make it harder for negative emotions to reach a functional level (Roberts &

Strayer, 1987). However, when studying a child's likelihood to develop depression after

experiencing a negative event, ruminating on the emotion present was positively related to later

depressive symptoms whereas distraction from one's emotions was negatively related to later

depressive symptoms (Abela et al., 2007). Although rumination differs from a parent being-with

one's child, this field of research does suggest potential benefits to distracting children from

negative emotional experiences.

Examining the role of emotional valence on parental responses

      Child's Emotional Valence on Parental Emotions. Our first aim was to examine how

parent's emotions felt in response to their child's parent-related emotions differed based off of

the valence of the child emotion. Our hypothesis was that parents responding to their children's

positively-valanced emotions would be more likely to also feel positive emotions (e.g., happy,

calm). We also hypothesized that parents that were responding to their child's negatively-

valanced emotions would be more likely to experience negative emotions (e.g., stressed,

angry). Our results support our hypothesis that parents would be more likely to feel more

positively-valanced emotions during their child's positive emotions as compared to negative

emotions. In addition, with the exception of "indifference," parents reported being more likely to

negatively-valanced emotions during their child's negative emotions versus positive emotions. In

sum, and consistent with prior research (Wu et al., 2017), parents report being more likely to

feel negative emotions in response to their child's negative emotions, and more likely to feel

positive, attentive emotions in response to their child's positive emotions.

Child's Emotional Valence on Parental Being-With Behaviors. The second part of

our primary aim was to look at how parent's behaviors towards their child, and their ability to be-

with, differed based off of the valance of the child's parent-related emotion. We hypothesized

that when responding to positive emotions, parents would be more likely to be-with their child

(i.e., holding their child, organizing their child's emotions). In addition, we hypothesized that

when responding to negative emotions, parents would be more likely to leave their child being-

without. Our results also give us better insight into how a parent's behaviors differ in response to

a child's positive versus negative emotions. Previous research has drawn a link between

negative emotions and parenting behaviors such as harsher parental coping and more distress-

based reactions (Fabes et al., 2002). The results of this study suggest that parents differ in their

likelihood to respond to a child's emotions through different behaviors, such as distracting one's

child or mocking one's child, based off of the valence of the child's emotion. Parents were no

more likely to be-with their child by holding their child or organizing their emotions when the

emotion was negative versus positive. However, our results suggest that, when responding to a

child's negative emotions, parents are more likely to try to distract their child and less unlikely to

walk away from their child, to ask them to stop expressing their emotion, or to mock them than if

the child was expressing a positive emotion. Nevertheless, parents from our sample, on

average, indicated that they would be more unlikely than likely to walk away, try to stop, or mock

their child while they expressed negative emotions. In summary, parents' behavioral responses

to their children's emotions are related to whether or not that emotion is negative versus

positive. When thinking about how these parenting behaviors relate to being-with, parents tend

to report that positive parent-related emotions, relative to negative parent-related emotions, are easier to be-with and negative parent-related emotions may be more likely to be met with being-without behaviors than positive emotions.

Examining the justifiability of a child's negative emotions on parental responses.

  Child's emotional justifiability on parent's emotional response. Our secondary aim was to examine how a parent's perceived justifiability of their child's negative emotions about the parent was associated with how a parent was able to be-with their child's emotions, and how they would report feeling emotionally. We hypothesized that parents would report being more likely to feel distressed (e.g., frustrated, angry) when a child's emotions were considered to be unjustified. In addition, we hypothesized that when parents were responding to negative emotions towards themselves that they viewed as justified, they would be more likely to report feeling attentive, guilty, and/or sad.

  Within the category of negative emotions, the justifiability of a child's emotion accounts for differences both in how the parent responds behaviorally and how they respond emotionally. The conceptual framework underlying this study, as described in Figure 1, breaks down a parent's response into two categories: internal experiences (i.e., emotions) and behavioral responses. When examining the role of justifiability of a child's emotion, parent's responses were significantly affected, on average, by whether or not the child's emotions were viewed as justified or not. These findings are in line with previous literature examining how legitimate or manipulative a parent believes their child's emotion to be may affect their feelings and behaviors towards their child's emotion (Gottman et al., 1997; Meyer et al., 2014).

  When examining how the justifiability of a child's emotion is related specific parental emotional responses, we found that parents are more likely to feel attentive, sad, guilty, and stressed when their child is expressing what they perceive to be justified emotions, and less unlikely to experience pride and discomfort than when they perceive the child's emotion to be unjustified (see Table 5). Attentiveness to a child's negative emotion is linked to how justified a

parent believes that child's emotion to be. Our results suggest that, on average, a parent is less likely to experience feeling attentive when they do not think their child's emotion is justified. In addition, parents report feeling more likely to be sad or guilty in response to negative emotions that are perceived to be justified. Feeling attentive, guilty, and sad are in line with previous research findings that parents who believe their children's emotions are a legitimate indicator of a child's well-being are more likely to pay attention to that emotion and treat them as legitimate (Meyer et al., 2014). Given the emotions prompted in the Being-With Questionnaire are parent-centered, meaning the emotion the child feels is directed at the parent, parents who view these negative emotions as justified may see themselves as the reason for the negative emotion, and thus feel more guilty and sad. We did not predict that parental stress and discomfort would differ over justified versus unjustified emotions, but parents are more likely to report feeling stressed and less unlikely to report feeling uncomfortable in response to justified versus unjustified emotions. Given this finding, it is possible that treating these emotions as legitimate, and acknowledging one's role in causing that emotion, may elicit a greater likelihood for parents to feel stressed out by and uncomfortable around that emotion than if they did not believe their child's emotion was legitimate and that they played any role in it.

When looking at parental emotions associated with a child's unjustified negative emotions, we found that parents are more likely to report feeling frustrated and less unlikely to report feeling angry and indifferent than if the emotion were justified (see Table 5). Parental frustration and anger are distress-based, negative emotions. The difference in likelihood between justified and unjustified negative emotions in feeling frustrated and angry suggests that these types of negative, distressed parental emotions are linked to how a parent perceives their child's emotions. In addition, parents' reports of feeling indifferent were less unlikely when the child's emotions were unjustified. Emotional availability research examining parents responding to a child's emotion in a forced manner tend to be "apparently sensitive," and fail to really be emotionally available to their child (Biringen, 2001). Given our results, it is possible that parental

indifference, and thus this sort of forced sensitivity, is more likely to occur when a parent does not view their child's emotion as justified.

Child's emotional justifiability on parental behaviors. The second part of our secondary aim is focused on examining the differences in parent's reported behavioral responses to their children's negative emotions based off the justifiability of that emotion. We hypothesized that parents would be more likely to engage in being-with behaviors when responding to a child's justified, negative emotions and that they would be more likely to express being-without behaviors when responding to a child's unjustified, negative emotions.

Beyond emotional responses in parents, a parent's behavioral response to a child's negative emotion also differs based off of its perceived justifiability (see Table 6). Parents reported being more likely to be-with a child's justified negative emotions than unjustified negative emotions on average. Being-with behaviors such as holding one's child and organizing one's child's emotions were more likely to be expressed in justified negative emotions than in unjustified negative emotions. Parents were more likely to distract their child during negative emotions they viewed as unjustified, and were less unlikely to walk away from their child, ask their child to stop, and mock their child during unjustified negative emotions. These results are consistent with previous findings that parents who believe their child's negative emotions are being used for manipulation, or are unjustified, are more likely to mock, trivialize, or punish those emotions (Gottman et al., 1997). In summary, our results suggest that there is a link between how justified a parent views their child's emotions and how emotionally available and physically present a parent can be during that emotion.

The relationship between parental emotions and parental behaviors. Our tertiary aim was to focus on the relationship between a parent's reported emotions in response to their child's parent-related emotions and their reported behaviors. We hypothesized that, when dealing with their child's negative emotions, parents who reported feeling more likely to feel attentive, guilty, and sad would be more likely to be-with their child. In addition, we hypothesized that parents in

the same situation that felt more distressed or indifferent would also report feeling more likely to engage in being-without behaviors.

Parents who reported being likely to feel attentive also tended to be-with their child behaviorally in both justified and unjustified negative emotions. Parental guilt and sadness tended to be related to being-with behaviors, but seemed to be more nuanced than attentiveness. Parental guilt and sadness, although linked to viewing a child's emotion as justified, are negatively valanced emotions and not unanimously linked with positive parenting practices or being-with. Parental frustration and anger, however, were found to be associated with being-without behaviors across the board. These distress-based, negative emotions were significantly related to being-without behaviors in both justified and unjustified negative emotions from the child. Parental indifference remained largely uncorrelated to parenting behaviors, besides a positive correlation with walking away and a negative correlation with holding one's child in unjustified negative emotions. As seen in the Appendix, however, very few parents reported feeling indifferent, and these results should be interpreted with caution.

Limitations

One major limitation of this study is the demographic distribution of the sample population we have. The sample, as seen in Table 1, was largely White, high income, and highly educated, which may skew our results and limit the generalizability of these findings. Future research on this topic should look to replicate these results with a more diverse population. In addition, the self-report nature of our data has some notable limitations, as there is not established agreement regarding observations of parenting behavior in the moment and self-reported actions. Furthermore, another limitation of our study is the method of measurement in our Being-With Questionnaire. Parents are prompted on their likelihood to feel emotions and express behaviors in response to their child's emotions. Assessing likelihood allows us to pinpoint an estimated frequency of a parent's emotions and behaviors. However, reports of likelihood is only one facet of the experience, and is not capturing the intensity and

duration of a parent's emotional experience, which could allow for greater specificity on how a parent's emotions in response to a child's emotion could be related to their behavioral response. In addition, our analyses do not take into account how several different emotions being felt at the same time by the parent may interact, or how feeling several emotions at once is related to a parent's ability to be-with their child's emotions. Finally, a limitation of our study that must be acknowledged is the nested nature of our data as both parents of a child are able to participate. In the current study, there is no accounting for within family-level variation.

Future directions

Given our findings that a parent's emotional and behavioral responses to a child's emotion are affected by the valence of the emotion and the perceived justifiability of the emotion, future research on this subject should look to identify patterns in how parents are able to be-with different emotions from their child. These patterns would examine what being-with looks like outside of the individual-level: how might clusters of parents vary based off of the emotion of the child being expressed?

In addition to identifying clusters or patterns of being-with responses in parents, future research on being-with and this process of emotion socialization should look at how characteristics of the caregiving environment may be involved. Previous research examining parental depression (Salo et al., 2020; Humphreys et al., 2018), narcissism (Hart et al., 2017; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Cohen, 1998; Cooper & Maxwell, 1995), and stress (Abidin, 1992) indicate links to parenting behaviors towards their children and their child's emotions. In addition, given the role of justifiability in our findings, examining the ways in which a parent thinks about their child is also of importance in future research, such as a parent's mind mindedness and reflective functioning (McMahon & Meins, 2012; Rosenblum et al., 2008). Child-level characteristics, such as a child's temperament, are also of importance in understanding the role of the caregiving environment, as literature suggests a bidirectional

relationship between the temperament of the child and the behaviors of the parent (Lengua & Kovacs, 2005).

There are five different implications of these future directions. First, with future analyses on clusters of parental being-with, we would be able to identify which emotions parents, in general, struggle to be-with. Second, understanding these patterns or clusters may be able to help identify which contexts parents tend to leave their child being-without. Third, a greater understanding of how the type of emotion and context of emotion is relevant would be an important step in understanding the underlying mechanisms that may play into responding to a child's emotions, both generally and specifically to a single type of emotion. Fourth, future research examining how parental being-with during different emotions is linked to parent-, family-, and child-linked characteristics could help identify specific parents that may need the most support through caregiving interventions. Finally, these characteristics of the parent–child relationship may be relevant on an individual level, in how parent's emotional response predicts their behavioral response to a child's emotion, as well as on a group level, in how clusters of parents struggle to be-with either a specific type of emotion or a specific emotional context.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings from this study build upon a growing field of research on the interaction between a child's emotions and parenting behaviors (Fabes et al., 2002; Eisenberg et al., 1998; Feng et al., 2008; Wu et al., 2017; Yi et al., 2016). The introduction of our new measure, the Being-With Questionnaire, allows for better insight into the emotional and behavioral processes a parent experiences as they respond to a child's emotions. The findings of this study support the idea that this measure can validly assess a parent's behaviors, and allows for data collection on a child's emotions that are positive and negative, and justified and unjustified. In addition, our findings also lend support to the hypothesis that parents have greater difficulty being-with a child's negative emotions than positive emotions. Moreover, parental emotions and behaviors also differ based off of whether a child's negative emotion is

viewed as justified or not. Finally, parents who report feeling likely to feel attentive, guilty, and

sad are on average more likely to be-with their child, and parents who report feeling likely to feel

frustrated and angry are on average more likely to leave their child being-without.

Appendix

Table 9. Percentages of Parents Reporting "Somewhat Likely" to "Very Likely" to Express Behaviors Across Positively-

versus Negatively-Valanced Emotions

Parent Behaviors	Positive Emotion Likelihood	Negative Emotion Likelihood
Mocking Child	0%	0%
Walking Away from Child	0%	2%
Asking Child to Stop	0%	30%
Distracting One's Child	0%	60%
Organizing Child's Emotions	97%	96%
Holding One's Child	83%	89%

Note. Positively Valanced Emotions (N=235). Negatively Valanced Emotions (N=226)

Table 10. Percentages of Parents Reporting "Somewhat Likely" to "Very Likely" to Feel Emotions Across Justified

versus Unjustified Negative Emotions

Parent Behaviors	Justified Likelihood	Unjustified Likelihood
Attentive	87%	69%
Guilty	72%	15%
Sad	70%	28%
Stressed	57%	49%
Frustrated	35%	63%
Angry	9%	30%
Uncomfortable	32%	23%
Excited	0%	0%
Happy	0%	0%
Calm	8%	8%
Indifferent	5%	5%
Proud	2%	0%

Note. Justified Emotions (N=235). Unjustified Emotions (N=218).

Table 11. Percentages of Parents Reporting "Somewhat Likely" to "Very Likely" to Express Behaviors Across Justified Versus Unjustified Negative Emotions

Parent Behaviors	Justified Likelihood	Unjustified Likelihood
Mocking Child	0%	0%
Walking Away from Child	0%	17%
Asking Child to Stop	18%	46%
Distracting One's Child	56%	61%
Organizing Child's Emotions	97%	87%
Holding One's Child	96%	67%

Note. Justified Emotions (N=225). Unjustified Emotions (N=209)

Copy of the Being-With Questionnaire

Parenting a child often involves interacting with your child when they are experiencing different emotions. These emotions may be caused by something you have done (e.g., they are happy because you made them their favorite breakfast), or the emotions may be caused by something attributed to someone or something else (e.g., they are excited because it is snowing outside).

For the following questions, we would like you to think about how you would respond to your child's different emotions. As you do this, think specifically about your child's emotions being directed towards you or as a result of something you have said or done.

It is important to note that your actions or your demeanor which cause a change in your child's emotions may or may not be intentional. For example, you might purposefully decide to play a game with your child to make them happy, or you might accidentally say something funny which also makes them happy but that wasn't your intention. We are interested in how you would respond to your child's emotions in either of these cases.

Please indicate on a scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 6 (very likely) the likelihood that you would respond in the ways listed for each item. Please read each item and answer as honestly as possible. If you are unsure about how likely you may be to respond in the listed way, please select "unsure."

As a reminder, we are asking you to think specifically about times in which your child's emotions were being directed towards you or as a result of something you have said or done.

In order to demonstrate that you have read the instructions, in the following text box please write: "I have read the instructions."

_____

When my child expresses happiness (e.g., laughter) because of me, I would:

	1 - Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6 - Very likely	Unsure
Feel attentive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel guilty	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel sad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel stressed	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel frustrated	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel angry	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel uncomfortable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel excited	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel happy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel calm	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel indifferent	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel proud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

When my child expresses happiness (e.g., laughter) because of me, I would:

	1 - Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6 - Very likely	Unsure
Hold my child	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Try to distract my child	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tell them to stop laughing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Walk away from them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tell them how I see that they are enjoying whatever is making them happy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Mock or tease them for being happy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate on a scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 6 (very likely) the likelihood that you would respond in the ways listed for each item. Please read each item and answer as honestly as possible. If you are unsure about how likely you may be to respond in the listed way, please select "unsure."

As a reminder, we are asking you to think specifically about times in which your child's emotions were being directed towards you or as a result of something you have said or done.

When my child expresses excitement (e.g., jumping up and down) because of me, I would:

	1 - Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6 - Very likely	Unsure
Feel attentive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel guilty	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel sad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel stressed	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel frustrated	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel angry	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel uncomfortable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel excited	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel happy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel calm	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel indifferent	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel proud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

When my child expresses excitement (e.g., jumping up and down) because of me, I would:

	1 - Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6 - Very likely	Unsure
Hold my child	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Try to distract my child	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tell them to stop reacting	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Walk away from them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tell them that I see that they are excited and join in their excitement	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Mock or tease them for being excited	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate on a scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 6 (very likely) the likelihood that you would respond in the ways listed for each item. Please read each item and answer as honestly as possible. If you are unsure about how likely you may be to respond in the listed way, please select "unsure."

As a reminder, we are asking you to think specifically about times in which your child's emotions were being directed towards you or as a result of something you have said or done.

When my child expresses kindness towards me (e.g., offers help, shows concern), I would:

	1 - Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6 - Very likely	Unsure
Feel attentive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel guilty	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel sad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel stressed	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel frustrated	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel angry	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel uncomfortable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel excited	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel happy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel calm	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel indifferent	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel proud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

When my child expresses kindness towards me (e.g., offers help, shows concern), I would:

	1 - Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6 - Very likely	Unsure
Hold my child	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Try to distract my child	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tell them to stop being sympathetic	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Walk away from them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tell them that I see that they are being kind and praise their acts of generosity	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Mock or tease them for being kind	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

As stated before in the previous survey, parenting a child often involves interacting with your child when they are experiencing different emotions. These emotions may be caused by something you have done (e.g., they are sad because you could not play a game with them), or the emotions may be caused by something attributed to someone or something else (e.g., they are angry because a friend or sibling took their toy).

For the following questions, we would like you to think about how you would respond to your child's different emotions. As you do this, think specifically about your child's emotions being directed towards you or as a result of something you have said or done.

It is important to note that your actions or your demeanor which cause a change in your child's emotions may or may not be intentional. For example, you might purposefully tell your child a scary story that makes them afraid, or you might accidentally startle your child which also makes them afraid but that wasn't your intention. We are interested in how you would respond to your child's emotions in either of these cases.

Some parents feel that not all the emotional expressions of their child are reasonable or justified.

For example, a child may have a toy they do not like very much and never play with. However, when their parent gives the toy away or the toy gets lost, the child may get really sad or angry that they no longer have this toy. The parent of this child might find this behavior to be unjustified, given that the child did not like or use the toy in the first place.

In contrast, a child may have a toy that is their absolute favorite possession and that they bring everywhere. When the toy gets lost or is given away, the child may express extreme sadness or anger that their favorite toy is gone. The parent of this child would likely find this behavior to be justified, given that the child loved this toy and always used it.

Does your child ever cry or express sadness because of you or something you have said that you think is reasonable or an appropriate reaction based on the situation at hand?	○ yes ○ no

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Please indicate on a scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 6 (very likely) the likelihood that you would respond in the ways listed for each item. Please read each item and answer as honestly as possible. If you are unsure about how likely you may be to respond in the listed way, please select "unsure."

As a reminder, we are asking you to think specifically about times in which your child's emotions were being directed towards you or as a result of something you have said or done.

When my child is sad (e.g., cries) because of something I said or did and I feel their sadness is justified, I would:

	1 - Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6 - Very likely	Unsure
Feel attentive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel guilty	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel sad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel stressed	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel frustrated	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel angry	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel uncomfortable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel excited	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel happy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel calm	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel indifferent	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel proud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

When my child is sad (e.g., cries) because of something I said or did and I feel their sadness is justified, I would:

	1 - Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6 - Very likely	Unsure
Hold my child and comfort them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Try to distract my child	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tell them to stop crying	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Walk away from them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tell them that I see they are feeling sad and talk about what is upsetting them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Mock and tease them for being sad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate on a scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 6 (very likely) the likelihood that you would respond in the ways listed for each item. Please read each item and answer as honestly as possible. If you are unsure about how likely you may be to respond in the listed way, please select "unsure."

As a reminder, we are asking you to think specifically about times in which your child's emotions were being directed towards you or as a result of something you have said or done.

When my child is sad (e.g., cries) because of something I said or did and I feel their sadness is NOT justified, I would:

	1 - Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6 - Very likely	Unsure
Feel attentive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel guilty	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel sad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel stressed	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel frustrated	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel angry	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel uncomfortable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel excited	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel happy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel calm	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel indifferent	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel proud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

When my child is sad (e.g., cries) because of something I said or did and I feel their sadness is NOT justified, I would:

	1 - Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6 - Very likely	Unsure
Hold my child and comfort them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Try to distract my child	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tell them to stop crying	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Walk away from them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tell them that I see they are feeling sad and talk about what is upsetting them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Mock or tease them for being sad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate on a scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 6 (very likely) the likelihood that you would respond in the ways listed for each item. Please read each item and answer as honestly as possible. If you are unsure about how likely you may be to respond in the listed way, please select "unsure."

As a reminder, we are asking you to think specifically about times in which your child's emotions were being directed towards you or as a result of something you have said or done.

When my child is angry (e.g., yells, stomps) because of something I said or did and I feel their anger is justified, I would:

	1 - Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6 - Very likely	Unsure
Feel attentive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel guilty	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel sad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel stressed	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel frustrated	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel angry	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel uncomfortable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel excited	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel happy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel calm	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel indifferent	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel proud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

When my child is angry (e.g., yells, stomps) because of something I said or did and I feel their anger is justified, I would:

	1 - Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6 - Very likely	Unsure
Hold my child and comfort them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Try to distract my child	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tell them to stop being mad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Walk away from them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tell them that I see they are feeling mad and talk about their anger with them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Mock or tease them for being angry	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate on a scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 6 (very likely) the likelihood that you would respond in the ways listed for each item. Please read each item and answer as honestly as possible. If you are unsure about how likely you may be to respond in the listed way, please select "unsure."

As a reminder, we are asking you to think specifically about times in which your child's emotions were being directed towards you or as a result of something you have said or done.

When my child is angry (e.g., yells, stomps) because of something I said or did and I feel their anger is NOT justified, I would:

	1 - Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6 - Very likely	Unsure
Feel attentive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel guilty	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel sad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel stressed	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel frustrated	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel angry	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel uncomfortable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel excited	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel happy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel calm	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel indifferent	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel proud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

When my child is angry (e.g., yells, stomps) because of something I said or did and I feel their anger is NOT justified, I would:

	1 - Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6 - Very likely	Unsure
Hold my child and comfort them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Try to distract my child	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tell them to stop being mad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Walk away from them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tell them that I see they are feeling mad and talk about their anger with them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Mock or tease them for being angry	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate on a scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 6 (very likely) the likelihood that you would respond in the ways listed for each item. Please read each item and answer as honestly as possible. If you are unsure about how likely you may be to respond in the listed way, please select "unsure."

As a reminder, we are asking you to think specifically about times in which your child's emotions were being directed towards you or as a result of something you have said or done.

When my child is afraid (e.g., cowers, hides) because of something I said or did and I feel their fear is justified, I would:

	1 - Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6 - Very likely	Unsure
Feel attentive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel guilty	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel sad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel stressed	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel frustrated	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel angry	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel uncomfortable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel excited	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel happy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel calm	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel indifferent	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel proud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

When my child is afraid (e.g., cowers, hides) because of something I said or did and I feel their fear is justified, I would:

	1 - Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6 - Very likely	Unsure
Hold my child and comfort them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Try to distract my child	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tell them to stop being afraid	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Walk away from them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tell them that I see they are feeling scared and talk about what they are afraid of	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Mock or tease them for being afraid	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate on a scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 6 (very likely) the likelihood that you would respond in the ways listed for each item. Please read each item and answer as honestly as possible. If you are unsure about how likely you may be to respond in the listed way, please select "unsure."

As a reminder, we are asking you to think specifically about times in which your child's emotions were being directed towards you or as a result of something you have said or done.

When my child is afraid (e.g., cowers, hides) because of something I said or did and I feel their fear is NOT justified, I would:

	1 - Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6 - Very likely	Unsure
Feel attentive	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel guilty	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel sad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel stressed	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel frustrated	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel angry	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel uncomfortable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel excited	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel happy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel calm	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel indifferent	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feel proud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

When my child is afraid (e.g., cowers, hides) because of something I said or did and I feel their fear is NOT justified, I would:

	1 - Very unlikely	2	3	4	5	6 - Very likely	Unsure
Hold my child and comfort them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Try to distract my child	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tell them to stop being afraid	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Walk away from them	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tell them that I see they are feeling scared and talk about what they are afraid of	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Mock or tease them for being afraid	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

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