



**MINDFUL PARENTING AND TEACHABLE MOMENTS: FROM
THEORY TO PRACTICE IN CHRISTIAN PARENTING**

By: Jonathan C. Robinson, Ph.D.

**Presented at:
NACSW Convention 2016
November, 2016
Cincinnati, OH**

**MINDFUL PARENTING AND TEACHABLE MOMENTS:
FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE IN CHRISTIAN PARENTING**

Jonathan C. Robinson, Ph.D.

Licensed Clinical Psychologist and Christian Author

Margaret M. Robinson, Ph.D., LCSW

Christian Psychotherapy Resources, Inc., Athens, GA

(The authors can be reached at 115 Moss Side Drive, Athens, GA, 30706, and at jonrobinson))@bellsouth.net, or mrobinson@cprathens.com.)

ABSTRACT: *Since Biblical times, parenting styles have changed drastically. Early on, children were seen as nothing more than property. How else could Abraham have offered Isaac as a burnt offering to God? How else did families make enough field hands to get the crops in? In time, children came to be seen as projects. The parents' job was to "train your children up in the ways of the Lord, so that when they are old they will not depart from Him." Give your child the skills and know-how to make it in the world. Later, children came to be known as progeny. How my child is defines my mark on the world, the parental legacy. More recently, parents are learning to respect and appreciate their offspring as people. The relatively new concept of mindful parenting focuses on the quality of relationship between parent and child. This is a huge leap forward in the evolution of parenting styles. Mindful parenting moves the relationship from the extremes of permissive or authoritarian, to the middle ground of authoritative, where the parent conveys both high control and high warmth to the child. This is well thought out theory, but theory without practice gains no traction. As parents create teachable moments for their children, the theory of mindful parenting gains traction. Teachable moments are the result not only of a mindful parental mindset, but also from the use of specific resources and tools to structure child activities and family life to promote emotional intimacy and meaningful parent-child relationship.*

Children as People

Emerging in both practice and in the literature currently is the perspective of children as people. Studies of attachment theory promote this perspective, e.g., Kerns, et.al. (2000) and Sroufe (2005). Woolgar, et.al. (2013) took session-by-session observational data of an evidence-based treatment and concluded that positive, sensitive interactions between the caregiver and the child re-calibrated the relationship, especially when the caregiver "caught the child being good."

Grusec (2100), in his review of parenting literature, found that the interaction between children and their parents is bidirectional. Further, children need to experience parents as supportive, protective, with mutual reciprocity, control, guided learning and group participation. Beyond the focus on outcome

research into the role of attachment theory in the parent-child relationship is recent study and focus on relationship with mindful parenting.

Mindful parenting is a new concept in parenting studies. It describes a set of parental practices and skills that seek to enhance moment-to-moment awareness in the parent-child relationship (Goeveia, et.al., 2016). Key to mindful parenting is the capacity to be aware of the present moment with a non-judgmental attitude. The authors identify five variables in mindful parenting:

1. Listening with full attention to the child,
2. Non-judgmental acceptance of the self and child,
3. Emotional awareness of the self and child,
4. Self-regulation in the parenting relationship, and,
5. Compassion for the self as a parent as well as for the child.

The authors conclude that mindful parenting brings an attitude of compassion, acceptance, and kindness to the parent-child relationship (Geoveia, et.al., 2016).

The authors also mark out middle ground in parenting styles. Historically, there have been three styles of parenting:

1. Authoritative --- characterized by parental interaction with the child which is high control and low warmth.
2. Permissive --- characterized by parental interaction with the child which is low control and high warmth.
3. Authoritarian --- characterized by parental interaction with the child which is high control and high warmth.

Geovia, et.al. (2016) conclude that the authoritarian, mindful parenting style generates greater emotional awareness and self-regulation, leading to less parental stress and a more adaptive relationship with children.

Putting Theory Into Practice

New to the commercial, Christian parenting education, consumer market is *Teachable Moments: Building Blocks of Christian Parenting* (Robinson, 2016). This book is dual-focused, both for the consumer parents who want to enhance the quality of their relationships with their children, and also for the health care provider, who can use this resource adjunctive to the counseling process.

Robinson's (2016) *Teachable Moments* presents a "toolbox" to parents and health care professionals in a Christian parenting context. The nine appendices included in the text spell out instructional protocols for implementing the "tools" of the parenting trade. These tools dovetail nicely with the emerging research on mindful parenting. Listed is the Geoveia, et.al (2016) mindful parenting theoretical concept, juxtaposed with the Robinson (2106) teachable moments parenting tools:

<u>Concept</u>	<u>Parenting Tool</u>
1. Listening with full attention	Active Listening, Empathy
2. Non-judgmental acceptance	Earned Authority, Active Listening
3. Emotional awareness	Using calming techniques, journaling
4. Self-regulation in relationship	Weight management strategies, Personal-couple-family devotionals
5. Compassion for parent and child	Good Kid Chart, Nurturing-Holding Procedure, Family Meetings, Developing relational model of restriction
6. Compassion for parent and child	Principle of Responsible Freedom Parent as Benevolent Despot

These tools are offered within the context of what Robinson calls nine, thought provoking, parental imperatives:

1. Communication **Is** Relationship.
2. Parents **Are** in Charge.
3. Children **Will Always** Test the Limits.
4. Children **Never** Mean What They Say.
5. A Family **Is Not** A Democracy.
6. Hormones **Will** Wreak Havoc.
7. Teenagers **Will** Rebel.
8. Problems **Can** Be Solved.
9. The Principle of Responsible Freedom **Will Guide** Teens to Adulthood.

Enhancing Your Clinical Practice

Christian counselors and clinicians are charged with the mental health care of their clients. Incumbent in that charge is their support of healthy, Christian parenting practices. Meichenbaum (2009) and Duncan, et.al. (2009) highlight the

healing power of prescriptive homework, adjunctive to counseling. Robinson's (2016) is an excellent resource for that endeavor. Four options benefit both the counselor, in building a viable clinical practice, and also their clients, in applying clinical insights to their daily family functioning:

1. Embrace the Resource --- Keep a copy of *Teachable Moments* in your office to refer to in your ongoing counseling with your clients.
2. Provide the Resource ---Keep a stock of *Teachable Moments* available for purchase by your clients, and/or make reference to availability on-line and in national bookstores.
3. Outreach --- Extend your clinical practice into the community by offering weekly classes on *Teachable Moments* through your local churches and community centers. Class models have been structured for four-, eight-, and ten-weeks for participants to receive the Christian Parenting tools and have structured practice in using them.
4. Outreach --- Offer weekend workshops in your office, churches, and community centers, for four hours on Friday night and four hours on Saturday morning, adding time for fellowship and personal discovery.

Summary

Despite the proliferation of self-help, Christian parenting books available to guide well-intended parents on their life-long parenting journey, their connection to meaningful theory into the efficacy of parenting styles is limited. Similarly, there seems to be a dearth of research confirming these theoretical perspectives. Parenting styles have historically reflected children as property, as projects, and as progeny. The emerging theory of mindful parenting reflects on children as people. In the development of *Teachable Moments*, the theory of mindful parenting has found a home in practical application. As momentum in the field moves from theory to practice, benefits abound for both Christian parents and families and the counseling practice of helping professionals and caregivers.

Selected Research References

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. New York: W.H. Freeman & Co.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

- Dobson, J. (2007). *The New Dare to Discipline*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- Dobson, J. (2007). *The New Strong-Willed Child*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- Duncan, B.L., Miller, S.D., Wampold, B.E. & Hubble, M.A. (2009). *The Heart and Soul of Change: Delivering What Works in Therapy*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Goeveia, M., Carona, C., Canavarro, M. & Moreira, H. (2016). Self-Compassion and Dispositional Mindfulness are Associated with Parenting Styles and Parenting Stress: The Mediating Role of Mindful Parenting. *Mindfulness*, 7, 700-712.
- Gordan, T. (1975). *P.E.T.: Parent Effectiveness Training*. New York: New American Library.
- Gottman, J. & DeClaire, J. (1998). *Raising An Emotionally Intelligent Child: The Heart of Parenting*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Gottman, J., Katz, L. & Hooven, C. (1997). *Meta-Emotion: How Families Communicate Emotionally*. Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum Publishing.
- Kimmel, T. (2011). Grace as a Family System. *Christian Counseling Today*, 18(2), 13-15.
- Kimmel, T. (2004). *Grace-Based Parenting*. Nashville, TN: W. Publishing Group, Thomas Nelson.
- Meichenbaum, D. Bolsering Resilience: Benefiting from Lessons Learned. In D. Brom, R. Pat-Horenczyk & J.D. Ford. (2009). *Treating Traumatized Children: Risk, Resilience and Recovery*. New York: Routledge, 183-192.
- Robinson, J. (2016). *Teachable Moments: Building Blocks of Christian Parenting*. New York: Morgan James Publishing.