CHAPTER 9

Parental Socialization of Children's Emotion and Its Regulation

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Decades of research indicate that the constructs of emotion and emotion regulation are critical for a wide range of developmental outcomes in childhood (see Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Eggum, 2010). Caregivers undoubtedly affect the experience and expression of children's emotions and their regulation, and consequently, such socialization processes have important implications for children's subsequent emotional and social competence. In this chapter, we first present our theoretical model of the socialization of emotion and discuss relevant literature supporting the relations of various parental emotion-related socialization behaviors to children's emotion-related outcomes. We next discuss potential moderators involved in these relations and conclude with a focus on intervention and prevention efforts and areas for future research.

9.1 A Heuristic Model of Emotion Socialization

Emotion socialization refers to the processes involved in the ways that socializers teach about and affect children's experience, expression, and regulation of their emotions and emotion-related behaviors. Eisenberg and colleagues (1998a, b; Eisenberg, 2020) coined the term emotion-related socialization behaviors (ERSBs) to describe the ways that caregivers contribute to children's emotionality and regulation. ERSBs are thought to be somewhat distinct from other parenting behaviors such as general warmth and/or harshness because they are strategies that may be directly modeled and/or enable children to understand and regulate their own emotions (see Speidel et al., 2020). In their heuristic model, the authors proposed that some of the relations between ERSBs and children's outcomes (e.g. social competence, adjustment) are mediated by children's arousal and regulation skills and moderated by a variety of factors such as children's characteristics (e.g. age, sex, temperament) and situational factors (see Figure 9.1).

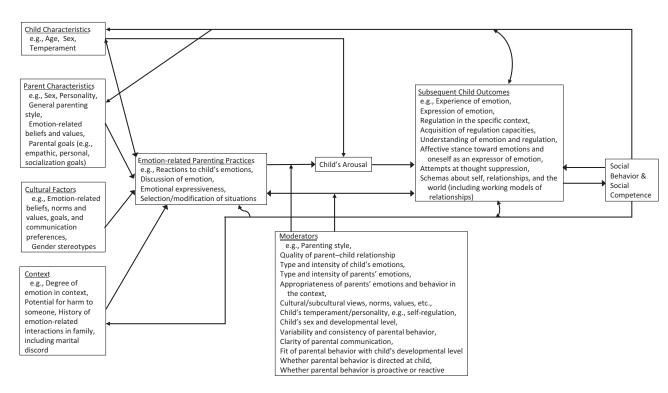


Figure 9.1 A heuristic model of the socialization of emotion *Note*. There also may be linear relations and interactions among the four predictors on the left. Moreover, the four predictors can predict child outcomes.

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ERSBs are thought to be of at least three types: (1) socializers' responses to children's emotions; (2) socializers' own expression of emotions in the family or toward the child; and (3) socializers' discussions of emotions.

9.1.1 Socializers' Reactions to Children's Emotions

In everyday contexts, parents' reactions to their children's displays of emotions, especially to their children's negative emotions, provide rich opportunities for the socialization of emotional experience and expression, as well as its regulation. Researchers examining emotion socialization in infancy and the first few years of life often focus on how socializers respond to and deal with their infants' cues and emotional reactions, as well as the sensitivity of parenting to children's emotionality more generally. (Note that parental responsivity and warmth are examples of emotion-related socialization only when this parenting behavior is in response to children's emotionality or potential experience/expression of emotion.) When caregivers meet their infants' needs and appropriately respond to their expressions of emotions, they are providing a context that supports infants' and toddlers' regulation. Researchers have found that responsive, supportive parenting in infancy and toddlerhood has been linked with children's relatively low emotional negativity and high regulatory skills and/or effortful control (the temperamental characteristic that reflects voluntary (willful) regulatory processes; Davidov & Grusec, 2006; Eisenberg, Spinrad, Eggum, Silva, et al., 2010; Feldman et al., 2011; Gilliom et al., 2002; Kochanska et al., 2000, 2008; Kochanska & Kim, 2014; Mintz et al., 2011; Spinrad et al., 2007, 2012). As a case in point, Spinrad and colleagues (2012) found that a maternal warmth and sensitivity positively predicted children's effortful control concurrently and over time in toddlerhood. On the other hand, intrusive parenting, which is reflected in parent-centered, overcontrolling behaviors, has been related to lower regulation/effortful control (Taylor et al., 2013). Although parental warmth, sensitivity, and intrusive parenting are not always expressed in a context that involves the socialization of emotion, these findings support the potential importance of these parenting behaviors for the socialization of emotion. From an attachment perspective, caregivers' emotional availability and responsivity foster a secure parentchild relationship and in turn enable children to develop better selfregulation skills (Boldt et al., 2020; Cassidy, 1994). In a meta-analysis of 106 studies, Pallini and colleagues (2018) found a significant effect size for the relation between the quality of children's attachment and their effortful control. This association is likely due to responsive caregiving – often in response to children's expression of emotion – that is a core feature in a secure attachment.

Similar to investigators' research on parents' responsivity and sensitivity to children's cues, researchers have examined caregivers' specific behavioral reactions to children's expression of emotion, especially their negative emotions (Spinrad et al., 2004). Investigators suggest that socializers' reactions to children's negative emotions can provide children with valuable information about the experience of emotions and can also directly teach ways to handle emotions in the future. For example, socializers can support their children's emotions and emotion regulation by encouraging the child to express their feelings, helping them to resolve the issue that is causing the distress, and helping their children to find appropriate ways to handle their distress. In support of this reasoning, researchers sometimes have found parents' reactions to children's emotions that encourage problem-solving or coping with distress to be positively associated with children's adaptive regulation or effortful control (Berona et al., 2022; Blair et al., 2014; Cui et al., 2020; Eisenberg et al., 1996; Godleski et al., 2020; Raval et al., 2018; Spinrad et al., 2007; Yap et al., 2007, 2008).

In other studies, parents' punitive or minimizing reactions to children's negative emotions have been associated with children's dysregulation or maladaptive strategies. When children receive the message that emotions are unacceptable and should not be expressed, or are not very important, children may have difficulty acknowledging and expressing their negative emotions when in future distressing situations. When they feel emotionally aroused, these children may become anxious, feel overwhelmed, react intensively, or destructively. It is also possible that children eventually learn to suppress or detach from their emotions in the future. Investigators have found that parents who minimize their children's emotions or who respond punitively to their negative emotions have children who exhibit more negative emotionality (Blair et al., 2014; Briscoe et al, 2018; Eisenberg, Spinrad, Eggum, Silva, et al., 2010) and display relatively low levels of effortful control or adaptive regulation or coping (Berona et al., 2022; Morelen et al., 2016; Valiente et al., 2007, 2009). In a recent meta-analysis, a small but significant positive effect size was found between parents' responses to children's emotions that validated/acknowledged their feelings and preschool-aged children's self-regulation skills (Zinsser et al., 2021).

Interestingly, researchers have often obtained the expected associations between parents' reactions to children's emotions and their children's emotional competence across various samples. For example, parental reactions to emotions have been found to predict children's regulation skills in clinical populations, such as children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD; Breaux et al., 2018; Oddo et al., 2022), anxiety disorders (Hurrell et al., 2015), and the risk for externalizing symptoms (X. Zhang et al., 2020), as well as in high-risk samples, such as in families with fathers with an alcohol problem (Godleski et al., 2020).

9.1.2 Socializers' Own Expression of Emotions and Regulation

Socializers' emotional expressivity involves the display of either positive, negative dominant (e.g. anger, hostility), or negative submissive (e.g. sadness, crying) emotions. Parents' expressions of emotion are thought to affect children's regulatory abilities and emotion-related behaviors in at least two ways. First, caregivers' own expression of emotions can serve as models for children's own expressiveness. That is, socializers' modeling of emotion provides guidance to children regarding how emotions should be handled, when and where they should be expressed, and ways that emotions can be regulated. Second, caregivers' expressivity may contribute to children's emotionality and emotional skills due to parents' emotion eliciting children's emotion and producing arousal that can disrupt children's attempts to regulate their emotions. For example, parents' general expression of positive or negative emotionality in the home may induce children's emotions through emotional contagion. Specifically, if a parent explodes or displays intense anger in the home, children may become anxious or distressed themselves and, due to negatively valenced arousal, may become dysregulated.

Consistent with expectations, in empirical studies, children's emotion and emotion-related self-regulation have been associated with parents' own expressions of emotion. Parents' positive expressivity has been related to relatively high effortful control/regulation both concurrently (Eisenberg, Gershoff, et al., 2001; Speidel et al., 2020) and longitudinally (Valiente et al., 2006). Parents' expressions of negative emotion (especially anger, hostility) have been negatively related to children's adaptive regulatory skills (Ogbaselase et al., 2022; Valiente et al., 2004, 2006; Yap et al., 2010).

In addition to the ways that parents express emotions, socializers are likely modeling ways to regulate their feelings. It is possible that parents' own regulation predicts children's regulatory skills through their regulated parenting practices (see Leerkes & Augustine, 2019; Morelen et al., 2016). Prior work has shown that maternal regulation (or dysregulation) has been related in expected ways to children's and adolescents' regulatory skills (Bridgett et al., 2011; Buckholdt et al., 2014; Ramsden & Hubbard, 2002; Xu et al., 2019 for a review, see Bridgett et al., 2015). In a recent meta-analysis, Zimmer-Gembeck and colleagues (2022) reported a significant effect size (r = .21, p < 0.001) across 10 studies for the positive association between parents' own emotion regulation skills and children's emotion regulation.

9.1.3 Discussion of Emotion

Socialization of emotion also includes the ways that caregivers talk about emotions, label emotions, and explain the causes and consequences of emotions. Parents who discuss emotions with their children are providing important lessons about the meaning of emotions, the circumstances in which they should be expressed, and ways to regulate distress and other types of feelings. Discussions about emotions may also provide children tools to use in managing their feelings. In one recent study, Curtis et al. (2020) reported that Chinese American mothers' discussion of emotion with their 6- to 9-year-old children predicted higher effortful control 2 years later. In another study, Eisenberg and colleagues (2008) found that mothers' discussion of emotion with their young adolescents during a conflict discussion was negatively related to youths' negative reactions when discussing conflictual situations with their parent. These findings point to the benefits of parental emotion talk for children's regulatory abilities.

A similar concept includes the notion of emotion coaching. Emotion coaching involves validating and accepting children's emotions, helping children to understand their emotions, labeling the emotion in response to children's feelings, and encouraging the expression of both positive and negative emotions (Gottman et al., 1996). Emotion coaching sends the message to children that is acceptable to express both positive and negative emotions. Empirical findings indicate that parents who discuss emotions with their children or use emotion coaching strategies have children who tend to be well-regulated (Dunsmore et al., 2013; Eisenberg et al., 2008; Gentzler et al., 2005; Lunkenheimer et al., 2007; Ramsden & Hubbard, 2002; Shipman et al., 2007; Shortt et al., 2010) and have reduced emotional lability (Ellis et al., 2014). Conversely, emotion-dismissing practices (e.g. "he's such a brat when he's angry") involve invalidating children's emotions by conveying to children that their emotions are unimportant. Emotion dismissing practices has been associated with relatively low regulation skills in children (Lunkenheimer et al., 2007).

In sum, research on emotion-related socialization practices has demonstrated that parents' reactions to children's emotions, parents' own emotional expressiveness, and their discussion of emotions predict children's emotion-related regulation. Further, researchers have found that ERSBs have distinct prediction to children's emotion-related outcomes from other general parenting styles (Speidel et al., 2020). Specifically, Speidel and colleagues (2020) found that family expressiveness uniquely predicted children's emotion regulation, even after accounting for more general positive parenting (i.e. involvement, responsivity).

9.2 Bidirectional Relations

Although most often it is assumed that children's emotions and emotion regulation are affected by parental socialization practices, it is also

recognized that children can evoke certain parenting reactions and that the process of influence between socializers and children's self-regulation is likely bidirectional. Children who are unregulated or highly negatively reactive undoubtedly can elicit controlling, negative, or ineffective parenting behaviors. Consistent with this line of reasoning, children's self-regulation has been shown to positively predict parents' later sensitivity, warmth, support and cognitive assistance (Eisenberg, Vidmar, et al., 2010; Otterpohl & Wild, 2015; Van Lissa et al., 2019), that is, behaviors similar to emotion-related socialization behaviors. In a recent meta-analysis, Li et al. (2019) found bidirectional relations between parenting and adolescents' self-control, with no significant difference between the longitudinal associations from parenting to youths' selfcontrol compared to the other direction of effects. In a meta-analysis, Xu (2022) showed significant effect sizes for both parent and child effects for longitudinal relations between parenting behaviors and children's effortful control. In contrast, in some studies, child effects have been tested but were not found (Eisenberg, Spinrad, Eggum, Silva, et al., 2010). Thus, it is critical for researchers to consider bidirectional and transactional relations between ERSBs and children's self-regulation.

Researchers also have begun to examine the temporal, moment-to-moment dyadic relations between ERSBs and children's emotions or emotion-related regulation (Lunkenheimer et al., 2020). As a case in point, Chan and colleagues (2022) assessed children's positive and negative emotions during a challenging puzzle task, and mothers' regulatory strategies were observed. Children's positive emotion 2 seconds earlier predicted mothers' lower problem-solving strategies, whereas child negative emotion predicted lower approval but higher comforting behaviors. Further, maternal approval predicted children's positive emotion 2 seconds later. These findings point to the dynamic nature of children's emotions and the ways that parents and children may feed off each other at the micro level.

9.3 Moderation

In Eisenberg and colleagues' heuristic model (Eisenberg et al., 1998a, b; Eisenberg, 2020; see Figure 9.1), pathways between ERSBs and children's emotion/regulation are sometimes moderated by a number of factors. That is, relations of ERSBs might depend on variability in parents' or children's emotions, the context (immediate and cultural), and children's temperament. Next, we briefly consider the ways that culture or race, child characteristics, or more global parenting behaviors might moderate the relations between ERSBs and children's regulatory skills.

9.3.1 Culture and/or Race

In their heuristic model of the socialization of emotion, Eisenberg and colleagues (1998a, b; Eisenberg, 2020) highlighted the possibility that racial and cultural goals and values shape caregivers' ERSBs. For example, communicating one's emotions appears to be encouraged in some cultures (such as in European American families) and discouraged (or expected to be suppressed or controlled) in other cultures, particularly for emotions that are viewed as disruptive to social harmony and communality (such as in some Asian cultures). For example, researchers have shown that Asian parents often enact more punitive responses to negative emotions (Cho et al., 2022; McCord & Raval, 2016; Yang et al., 2020) and make fewer references to emotions during storytelling (Doan & Wang, 2010) than do European American parents. In addition, Cho and colleagues (2022) found mean-level differences in the frequency of caregivers' encouraging the expression of joy, pride, and sadness among German, Nepali, and Korean mothers. Specifically, in Germany, parents encouraged the expression of pride and sadness more than in Nepal and Korea, whereas Nepali mothers encouraged the expression of joy more than did German and Korean caregivers.

In addition to mean-level differences in ERSBs, the impact of caregivers' socialization behaviors likely can vary as a function of culture. For example, Eisenberg, Liew, and Pidada (2001) found that, unlike in samples from the United States, parental positive expressivity was not related to children self-regulation in Indonesia, perhaps due to the cultural norms discouraging the expression of intense emotion (even positive emotion) in Indonesia. Similarly, in another study, mothers' encouraging the expression of pride was positively related to emotion regulation in German children but was negatively related to emotion regulation in Nepali children (Cho et al., 2022). These findings could be due to the notion that expressions of pride are considered inappropriate or lacking consideration in Asian cultures. Thus, the differential associations between ERSBs and children's emotion-related outcomes suggest that socialization experiences function differently across cultures.

Even within the United States, there is evidence that culture and race norms should be considered when predicting relations of socialization processes to children's emotional experience, expression of emotion, and emotion-related functioning. For families of color living in the United States, the context of racism and discrimination undoubtedly is relevant for caregivers' emotion socialization values and beliefs. For example, Nelson and colleagues (2012) found that Black American parents engage in more punitive and negative responses to their children's (especially their boys') negative emotions than do European American parents.

However, such differences should be interpreted with parents' values and goals in mind. In this case, Black American parents might socialize emotional control in their children to protect their children from discrimination or racially biased situations when and if expressing negative emotions could be dangerous (Dunbar et al., 2017). In Black American families, the use of punitive and minimizing responses in response to children's emotions was not related to negative emotional outcomes in children (see Dunbar et al., 2017) In fact, among Black American families, the use of punitive and minimizing reactions to children's emotions has been linked with more adaptive behavioral and emotion regulation, but only if these practices are paired with discussions about racism (Dunbar et al., 2022). These findings further support the need to understand racial and cultural socialization practices in addition to emotion-related parenting practices and their joint relations to children's emotions and emotion-related regulation. Punitive and minimizing reactions have previously come to be labeled as "nonsupportive"; however, this term is inappropriate (and arguably, harmful) in light of research noting that such strategies might reflect Black parents' strategies to protect their children from racism by suppressing negative emotions in certain circumstances. Thus, we now endorse the use of nonjudgmental labels for these strategies and refer to them as suppressive and corrective (rather than nonsupportive). Moving forward, it is critical that race and culture are considered in nuanced ways in work focusing on the socialization of emotion.

9.3.2 Child Characteristics

Children's characteristics, such as age, gender, and temperament, might serve as important moderators of the relations between parental ERSBs and children's emotion-related regulation. For example, the frequency and effectiveness of parental ERSBs undoubtedly change with children's development. Spinrad and colleagues (2004) found that between 18 and 30 months, mothers decreased their attempts to regulate their child's emotions and the types of strategies that mothers used, such as comforting or distracting at each age, differentially predicted children's regulation and emotions at age 5. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of particular strategies could depend on their children's self-regulatory abilities as they develop. Similarly, Mirabile and colleagues (2018) reported that parents' use of emotion-focused/problem-focused reactions to children's negative emotions predicted children's emotional competence for children younger than age 4 but not for older children. The role of parents as socializers is likely to change with development due to the increased roles of teachers, peers, and youths' own autonomy. Thus, it is expected that parents' strategies not only change with age, but the relations of socialization to children's emotion-related regulation also weaken (see Valiente et al., 2006).

Gender differences in emotion and emotion-related regulation have been established (Chaplin et al., 2005) and researchers have sometimes considered the moderating role of child gender in emotion socialization research. For example, boys may be vulnerable to particular socialization responses compared to girls. In one study, mothers' emotion coaching philosophy related to boys' but not girls' emotion regulation (Cunningham et al., 2009). In contrast, maternal support has been found to predict adolescent girls', but not boys', emotion regulation (Van Lissa et al., 2019), suggesting that the quality of the mother–daughter relationship might play a particularly prominent role in outcomes for teens. Further, parents' gender should be examined when studying the socialization of emotion. Mothers and fathers not only respond differently to children's emotions (Cassano et al., 2007; Chaplin et al., 2005), but each of their behaviors may also uniquely predict children's emotional outcomes (Van Lissa et al., 2019).

9.3.3 Global Parenting Behaviors

The degree to which ERSBs play a role in children's emotionality and emotion-related regulation likely depends on other aspects of parenting. Darling and Steinberg (1993) suggested that parents create an 'emotional climate' to communicate their socialization goals. In other words, ERSBs may be more or less effective depending on the global quality of parenting or the parent–child relationship. For example, children may be more receptive to ERSBs if they have a warm and reciprocal relationship with the parent. Consistent with this reasoning, Jin and colleagues (2017) found that mothers' supportive responses to negative emotions were positively related to children's emotion regulation only when the parent–child dyad was relatively collaborative and they worked together on a task (and not under conditions of low dyadic collaboration). Other researchers have reported interactions between maternal warmth and discipline strategies when predicting children's subsequent effortful control (Kopystynska et al., 2016).

9.4 Promoting Children's Regulation Skills through Parenting Intervention

Although the research is somewhat limited, there is evidence that interventions can promote children's ability to regulate their emotions. There are promising school-based interventions that target children's emotion

regulation skills; nonetheless, for the purposes of this chapter, we focus on interventions targeting parenting and parent-child interactions. Recently, Hajal and Paley (2020) reviewed the literature on parental intervention programs and noted that they are focused on four areas of emotion socialization: (1) emotion coaching; (2) parent–child attachment; (3) family-based programs that focus on teaching all family members emotional skills, often in the context of family trauma; and (4) programs that are designed to reduce problem behaviors, such as conduct problems, and focus on emotion management.

Parenting interventions that specifically target emotion socialization include those that teach emotion coaching behaviors. The Tuning into Kids program (Havighurst et al., 2010, 2013) and the parallel program for parents of young adolescents (Tuning into Teens; Kehoe et al., 2014, 2020) specifically teach parents how to recognize and manage their children's emotions and provide strategies for parents to improve their emotion coaching. Results of randomized control trials indicate that these programs improve parental emotion socialization and reduce children's problem behaviors and emotional negativity. In another emotion-coaching intervention, Katz and colleagues (2020) developed a parenting intervention for survivors of intimate partner violence. In this 12-week intervention program, mothers were taught skills to improve their own emotion regulation as well as emotion coaching skills. Findings showed that, compared to mothers who were in a waitlist (control) group, mothers in the intervention group showed improvements in emotion coaching, awareness and validation of their children's emotions, and confidence in their parenting. Also, mothers in the intervention group decreased their use of negative parenting strategies, such as scolding or lecturing, compared to the control group. Children whose mothers were in the intervention group increased their mother-reported emotion regulation and decreased their negativity toward their mothers compared to children of mothers in the waitlist group.

Also at least partially informed by Eisenberg and colleagues' heuristic model, interventions that focus on discussions of children's past emotions have been conducted. For example, mothers participating in a reminiscing and emotion training program were trained to increase conversations with their children that make connections between the causes and consequences of emotions and help resolve children's negative emotions. In a randomized control trial in a sample of maltreating and nonmaltreating mothers, the intervention predicted improved maternal sensitive guidance and positive family expressiveness, which in turn, predicted greater improvements in children's emotion regulation compared to those in the control condition (Speidel et al., 2020).

Other intervention programs have been conducted that incorporate emotion socialization, but these programs often have somewhat broader

goals. That is, although each program has an emotion socialization component, they mainly target the parent-child attachment system, family resiliency, and/or specific child symptoms such as child behavioral problems, disruptive behavior disorders, or anxiety and depression. Nonetheless, many of these programs have shown progress in improving both parenting and child outcomes (see England-Mason & Gonzalez, 2020; Hajal & Paley, 2020, for reviews). Interestingly, in a meta-analysis testing different components of parental intervention programs, those programs the included emotional communication and/or consistent responding demonstrated larger intervention effects on parenting behaviors than programs that did not include emotional components (Kaminski et al., 2008). In a recent parenting intervention program that included a focus on mindfulness and emotion coaching skills for post-deployed military families, N. Zhang and colleagues (2020) found that parents in the intervention group showed greater declines in both mothers' and fathers' corrective and suppressive responses to children's negative emotions over 2 years compared to families in the control group. Thus, although there are few longitudinal studies that examine the effectiveness of various intervention programs targeting parental emotion socialization, the existing research is encouraging in regard to the goal of improving children's self-regulation through promoting change in parenting practices (Speidel et al., 2020).

9.5 Future Directions for Research on Parental Socialization of Emotion

Studies focused on the socialization of emotion and emotion-related regulation could benefit from advanced methodological approaches. For example, recently researchers have studied the socialization of emotion in various innovative ways, including using time series data (Zhang et al., 2022), dyadic data (Lunkenheimer et al., 2020), or neurological measures (Tan et al., 2020). Such data can be used to understand moment-to-moment dynamics of emotional parent–child interactions and can take into account the transactional nature of interactions.

Although research focusing on the role of fathers' emotion socialization has received increasing attention in recent years (see Eisenberg, 2020), there is a need to study the additive and interactive effects of different socializers on children's emotionality and self-regulation. For example, it is important to understand the additive (cumulative) prediction of children's emotionality and other aspects of emotion-related functioning from each parent's emotion-related socialization behaviors. Perhaps each parent's behaviors uniquely predict children's emotion-related outcomes.

In addition, fathers' emotion-related socialization behaviors could interact with mothers' emotion-related socialization behaviors to either amplify, compensate, or undermine the impact of the other parents' behaviors. As one possibility, one parent's validation of their child's emotions could compensate for the other parent's invalidation or punitive responses to their child's emotions. Furthermore, other socializers such as older siblings and extended family members (i.e. grandparents) might also be considered in future work.

Finally, research on contexts outside of the family must be considered with regard to the socialization of children's emotional competence. For example, Valiente and colleagues (2020) posited that the school context provides important socialization of emotions. That is, teachers' own regulation and interactions with students likely play an important role in the socialization of emotion for school-aged children. Further, peers undoubtedly function as important socializers of emotion in the classroom context (and outside of the classroom). Additional research on the roles of multiple sources of socialization on children's regulation is needed.

In this chapter, we have explored relations between parental emotion-related socialization practices and children's emotionality and emotion-related regulation. One of our goals was to review the literature on relations with, and prediction of, children's emotional outcomes from parents' responses to children's emotions, parents' own emotionality, and parents' discussion of emotions. We also offered additional considerations for future study, particularly with regard to potential moderators. Such work could contribute to the formulation and testing of existing and new intervention and prevention programs that specifically address parental emotion socialization.

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