

Social and emotional learning for parents through Conscious Discipline

SEL for
parents
through CD

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine Conscious Discipline's (CD) Parenting Education Curriculum (CD PEC), the parenting component of CD's research-based social and emotional learning program. CD aims to change child behavior by changing how adults understand and manage their own behaviors and emotions. Researchers explored CD PEC's association with improved parenting skills, parent-child relationships and child behavior and emotion management.

Design/methodology/approach – During pre- and post-site visits, parents in four Head Start programs completed the Attentive Parenting Survey ($n = 25$) and interviews ($n = 19$); and 20 staff were also interviewed.

Findings – Parents reported that CD PEC shifted their perspectives and practices for managing children's challenging behaviors, improved parent-child relationships and resulted in decreased child behavior problems.

Research limitations/implications – The study was correlational, based on self-report, and had a small sample with no comparison group.

Practical implications – This study supports CD PEC as a means of shifting parenting practices, relationships and child behavior by focusing on adult social-emotional skills and self-regulation.

Social implications – This study provides preliminary evidence that addressing the social-emotional needs of adults is a viable step to helping children improve their social skills, emotion regulation and general behavior, which have all been linked to later academic and life success.

Originality/value – The paper studies improvements in parents' emotion recognition and self-regulation before disciplining their children.

Keywords Discipline, Self-regulation, Behaviour problems, Parent-child relationships, Parenting skills, Social and emotional learning and competencies

Paper type Research paper

Purpose of research

This paper summarizes findings from a mixed-methods study investigating associations between the parent component of the school-based, social and emotional learning (SEL) curriculum conscious discipline (CD) and parenting skills, parent-child relationships and child behavior. Researchers also looked at whether there were improvements in parent-teacher communication about children's social-emotional development. This study, funded by CD, was conducted by a team of independent researchers.

Literature review

Beginning in infancy, children form the foundations of their social-emotional knowledge and abilities through experiences with family members, other caregivers and their environment (Cooper *et al.*, 2009; Morris *et al.*, 2017). SEL is the process by which individuals acquire and

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apply social-emotional competencies – including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making and relationship skills – that promote healthy individual and relational functioning (Payton *et al.*, 2008). Social-emotional competencies, in turn, affect mental health, social functioning, cognitive functioning and long-term achievement (Brackett *et al.*, 2011). Indeed, Jones *et al.* (2015) found an association between social-emotional competencies measured in kindergarten and positive outcomes later in life including higher levels of educational achievement, higher rates of employment and reduced criminal activity.

Acquiring and refining social-emotional competencies is an on-going process that starts early and occurs naturally through interactions with caregivers and peers. However, SEL can be significantly aided through formal instruction (Brackett *et al.*, 2011). SEL instruction has been incorporated into schools and classrooms from early education to high school, to foster children's and adolescents' skill development. Multiple studies have found that incorporating SEL programs into classroom instruction improves students' academic performance, increases student's positive social behavior and well-being and reduces behavior problems (Payton *et al.*, 2008; Ashdown and Bernard, 2012; Durlak *et al.*, 2011).

In addition to programs for children, research suggests that programs geared specifically toward parents are effective in promoting children's SEL. The greater parents' knowledge of normative child development and positive parenting practices, the better equipped they are to support their children's social-emotional competencies (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016). For example, parents can benefit from learning specific strategies to improve their self-regulation abilities, which in turn, shape their children's emotion regulation and well-being (Rutherford *et al.*, 2015; Barros *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, studies have shown that increased parental empathy and promoting consistent, sensitive and developmentally appropriate discipline strengthens the parent-child connection and results in fewer behavior problems (Stern *et al.*, 2015; Scaramella and Leve, 2004). Morris *et al.* (2017) examined the influence of both parent-child relationships and parenting practices on children's development of emotion regulation. Supportive and responsive parenting relies on parents modeling positive emotion regulation, use of specific parenting behaviors that teach children about emotions and emotion regulation and the emotional climate of the family ("e.g., attachment, parenting style, emotional expressivity, family relationships," p. 233) (Morris *et al.*, 2017). To the extent parents demonstrate positive emotional regulation and other social-emotional skills at home, children can follow by example.

Various parenting programs focused on SEL have demonstrated significant positive links to both parent and child outcomes. A research study of the Incredible Years® parenting program showed that participating parents were more positive and competent in their parenting, used fewer critical remarks and commands and practiced less harsh discipline (Webster-Stratton, 1998). In addition to improved knowledge and beliefs about parenting, participants of the ACT Raising Safe Kids program reported reduced use of physical acts of discipline, such as spanking or hitting (Knox, Burkhart and Hunter, 2011). Studies have also shown improved behavior and conduct in children of parents who attended these two programs (Knox, Burkhart and Howe, 2011; Menting *et al.*, 2013). This research suggests that parenting programs focused on SEL can influence parental attitudes, knowledge and behavior, which in turn, can positively influence children's social-emotional development.

Background on conscious discipline curriculum

CD is a research-based SEL program that seeks to promote behavior change and the development of social-emotional competencies in children by first changing how adults understand and manage their own behaviors and emotions. The main CD curriculum is used in classrooms, mostly by preschool and early elementary teachers. The current paper focuses on the parent component of CD, which is based on the classroom curriculum and described below.

CD's program framework is based on a multidisciplinary brain state model (Siegel, 2012; Schore, 2015; Phillips and Shonkoff, 2000), organized around helping individuals navigate the survival, emotional and executive brain states. By teaching adults better self-regulation skills and more positive ways to respond to the emotion behind a child's behavior, CD prepares adults to effectively respond to children's behavior and returns both adult and child to the optimal state for learning, problem solving and relating to others. A key component of CD entails teaching individuals (whether child or adult) to clearly identify and acknowledge their emotions, before attempting to manage their feelings. The curriculum also emphasizes strengthening the connections between adults and children, rather than focusing narrowly on eliciting behavioral compliance on the part of the child. Box 1 details CD-specific terminology used throughout this paper.

Box 1. Key CD Terms Used in This Article

Conscious Discipline Powers

- The seven CD powers (**Perception, Unity, Attention, Free Will, Acceptance, Love, and Intention**) describe the optimal state of awareness and emotional intelligence on the part of the adult. The CD powers help adults override impulsive and reactive tendencies and become more conscious, present, attuned, and responsive to the needs of children and others.

Conscious Discipline Skills

- **Assertiveness:** The skill of Assertiveness encourages parents to clearly communicate with their child and focus on what they want the child to do—not what they do *not* want them to do. For example, say “Walk” instead of “Don’t run.”
- **Choices:** The skill of Choices promotes offering two positive, viable choices to reduce power struggles. For example, when upset, a parent may offer a child the choice of finding a quiet space to calm down alone or sitting on an adult’s lap.
- **Composure:** The skill of Composure promotes self-regulation. CD PEC encourages parents to calm themselves when upset so they can better respond to their child and model self-regulation behaviors.
- **Consequences:** The skill of Consequences encourages parents to allow their child to experience the results of their choices (when safe to do so) as a motivation for learning. Instead of preventing children from feeling discomfort from the results of their choice or imposing an additional consequence, CD PEC encourages parents to allow that discomfort and then help their children learn from their mistakes.
- **Empathy:** The skill of Empathy encourages parents to listen to and accept how their child is feeling. Parents then help children identify their emotions, which helps the child learn to manage their own emotions.
- **Encouragement:** The skill of Encouragement teaches parents to give their child helpful direction by focusing on a specific skill their child is exhibiting and describing what they did without judging the quality of the child’s work. For example, CD PEC teaches parents to say, “You did it! You wrote your name,” instead of, “Nice job writing your name!”
- **Positive Intent:** The skill of Positive Intent encourages parents to attribute positive motives to their child’s behavior. Instead of punishing a child, CD PEC encourages parents to teach their children what would be a more appropriate behavior.

Conscious Discipline Strategies (used across the range of CD skills)

- **Breathing:** This strategy promotes Composure and self-regulation in parents and children. CD uses the phrase “Be a S.T.A.R. (Smile, Take a deep breath, And Relax)” to encourage deep breathing.
- **I Love You Rituals:** This strategy includes interactive songs and fingerplays designed to promote and strengthen adult-child relationships and connection, build self-esteem, facilitate language development, and teach children how to be kind and caring using gentle touches.
- **Routines:** This strategy provides predictability and consistency to children, helping them anticipate what comes next throughout the course of their day. Specifically, CD encourages the use of *visual* routines that allow children to think and act by following a picture guide, rather than just verbal or written instructions. This helps children clearly understand and recall what is expected of them.
- **Safe Place:** This strategy helps children practice Composure. A Safe Place is a location in which adults invite children to calm themselves (either alone or accompanied by a friend or adult) when they feel upset. A Safe Place is not a time-out, which is a punishment and does not promote permanent behavior change.

A 2017 review of 25 SEL programs noted that CD is one of only three programs that focuses three-quarters or more of their content on emotional processes (specifically emotion knowledge/expression and emotion/behavior regulation) and one of 13 programs that focuses more than half their program content on interpersonal skills (Jones *et al.*, 2017). In comparing key components of SEL programs (e.g., classroom activities beyond core lessons and integration with academic content; climate and culture supports; professional development supports), Jones *et al.*, gave CD high ratings in 8 of 10 categories.

Research to date on CD classroom curriculum has shown reductions in student aggression, hyperactivity and conduct problems (Hoffman *et al.*, 2005) and improvements in school climate (Hoffman *et al.*, 2009). One study of 28 CD-implementing classrooms (Rain, 2014) also found improvements to the emotional climate, as well as to organizational and relational supports; parents and teachers in this same study also reported improved pro-social behavior among the children. Prior to the development of CD PEC, a Head Start program piloted a parenting education program, derived from the CD classroom curriculum, in 2016. A study of the pilot program found between 70 and 100 percent of parents in different training cohorts reported improvements in seven key parenting skills addressed by the curriculum. Parents also reported greater awareness of how their internal emotional state affected others (97 percent), feeling more connected to their children (100 percent), adoption of techniques to calm themselves before approaching a scenario with their children 87 percent and fewer aggressive acts in their family (73 percent) (Knox County Head Start, Inc., 2016).

Recently, CD expanded its school-based general curriculum by creating CD PEC, which aims to positively impact children's social-emotional development by teaching parents and primary caregivers how to recognize and moderate their own emotions. CD PEC seeks to positively shift caregivers' perceptions and attitudes toward parenting, as well as increase parents' understanding of how their actions influence – either positively or negatively – their child's emotional state and response to behavior problems and discipline. CD PEC also aims to strengthen the connections between home and school by teaching parents the same skills and strategies that adults use with children in the school context.

CD PEC consists of eight class sessions, including a foundational open house to introduce parents to the content, followed by seven skill-based parent nights, each focused on one of the seven core CD powers and skills. Additionally, CD PEC includes the option for 4 interactive home visits that reinforce selected powers and skills, and 12 mini-sessions that provide opportunities for parents to practice what they are learning. This paper provides a summary of the findings from the first study of the CD PEC. In this descriptive study, researchers examined attitudinal and behavioral shifts for parents and children reported by parents and program staff, as well as the implementation fidelity of CD PEC. Researchers hypothesized that, after completion of the lesson series, parents would have a greater understanding of how modulating their own emotional and behavioral reactions could improve management of their children's challenging behavior. Specifically, the CD PEC would teach parents how to reduce rates of conflict in daily family routines, increase parent-child connection and improve parental patience and empathy toward challenging yet typical emotions and behaviors.

Method

This mixed-methods study took place in four Head Start programs implementing CD PEC in four states and used interviews with program staff and parents, questionnaires completed by parents, and observations of program staff facilitating the training. The research team collected data at three time points: prior to the start of the CD PEC class series ("Pre"), immediately after the last class ("Post 1") and six to eight weeks after the last session ("Post 2"). (Note: Data collection for one site started during Week 2 of the class series due to scheduling difficulties.)

Data collection

Site selection. The research team contacted 40 programs from CD's customer database to inform leadership and family support staff about the study. Programs interested in participating in the study were required to meet the following conditions: served children ages three to four years old; had received training on CD PEC; were planning to begin implementation of CD PEC in Spring 2018; and had already implemented the CD classroom-based curriculum in their program for at least a year. Of the 31 programs that responded, 19 were ineligible and 8 declined. Four Head Start programs met the inclusion criteria and agreed to participate. This convenience sample included three programs in the Midwest and one in the West. Each program conducted all seven skill-focused parent classes. Three of the four sites held classes weekly, for seven weeks; the fourth site held classes twice weekly.

Program staff interviews. Program directors selected the CD PEC trainers and classroom teachers to take part in the interviews. The research team completed interviews in person with 4 program directors, 4 trainers and 11 teachers. Directors were interviewed once, after CD PEC classes (Post 1). Trainers and teachers were interviewed both before (Pre) and after CD PEC classes (Post 1). All teachers who took part in the interviews had students whose parents were taking part in the CD PEC class series.

Parent interviews. Prior to the start of the parenting classes, program staff helped recruit parents for interviews by distributing fliers to parents who had enrolled or by asking parents directly. The research team selected up to six parents per site for interviews from those who expressed interest. When more than six parents at a site expressed interest, the research team selected six participants at random. When fewer than six expressed interest, the research team recruited all of them for the study. Parents were interviewed in person for the first two time points and over the phone for the last one.

Parent surveys. The research team asked all parents who were present at the first and last class sessions to complete the questionnaire. A total of 25 parents completed questionnaires at both Pre and Post 1, reflecting a retention rate of 64.1 percent. Of those 25 parents, 19 completed interviews at all three time points, reflecting a retention rate of 90.4 percent. See Table I for details regarding sample sizes and data collection time points.

Incentives. All interviewees received \$25 gift cards as incentives at each time point, except directors, who received a single \$200 gift card for their center at the conclusion of the study.

Data collection instruments

Instruments used for this study included a class observation rubric, interview protocols and questionnaires (copies available upon request). All programs administered the curriculum in English and all data collection activities took place in English.

Parent surveys. To assess changes in parenting attitudes and perceptions, parents completed the Attentive Parenting Survey (APS) (The Incredible Years[®], 2013) at Pre and Post 1.

Respondent	Pre	Post 1	Post 2
Directors	n/a	4	n/a
Trainers	4	5	n/a
Teachers	11	11	n/a
Parents (surveyed)	39	26 ^a	n/a
Parents (interviewed) ^b	21	19	19

Notes: n/a indicates that the research team did not collect data at this time point. ^aOne parent who was interviewed completed the survey only during Post 1; analytic results reflect the 25 individuals who completed both Pre and Post 1 questionnaires; ^bparents who completed interviews were a subset of those who completed Pre and Post 1 surveys

Table I.
Total number of
participants by
respondent and
time point

This tool was selected because its content was well aligned with the content taught by CD PEC. It contains 49 items, each rated on a five-point Likert-type scale.

Staff and parent interviews. The research team developed staff and parent interview protocols to explore CD-related experiences, perceptions and implementation.

Fidelity observations. To assess the fidelity of implementation, a CD-certified instructor observed the first or second session and the last session and rated fidelity using a rubric created by CD for this study. Using this rubric, the observer assessed three dimensions of the fidelity: use of CD PEC *materials*, presentation of CD PEC *content*, and *facilitation* skills. For each dimension, observers rated trainers on a series of 8–16 items (e.g., having necessary materials, introducing content accurately, modeling CD principles while facilitating), using a three-point scale ranging from met completely (2), to partially (1), to not at all (0). Trainers received copies of their ratings at the end of each observed session.

Data analysis

Survey data analysis. In order to create subscales from the 49 items of the APS, three individuals from the research team divided the items from the APS into four subscales based on an examination of the content: Parental Responses and Discipline Methods, Parental Attitudes, Support for Child Play and Learning and Promoting Children's Social-Emotional Development. The team came to a consensus about which items to reverse code based on the philosophy of CD PEC so that higher values were aligned with positive outcomes. The sample size was too small for factor analysis, so Cronbach's α was calculated for each of the conceptually derived subscale using the Pre and Post 1 data combined. The Promoting Children's Social-Emotional Development scale α was strong, so all items were retained. For the remaining three subscales, items that reduced the α were removed from the subscales one-by-one until the α reached 0.7. Dropped items were low in relevance to CD PEC.

Specifically, 11 items were retained in the Parental Responses and Discipline Methods scale ($\alpha = 0.72$). Example items included: "When your child misbehaves, how likely are you to give this attention and instruct the child in better behavior?" (reversed), "How likely are you to show your child you are angry by raising your voice or yelling?" (reversed) and "If your child gets frustrated when learning new things, how likely are you to support your child to continue trying?". Two items were retained in the Parental Attitudes scale ($\alpha = 0.75$). These items were: "I feel confident as a parent" and "I am happy in my role as a parent." In total, 18 items were retained in the Promoting Children's Social-Emotional Development scale ($\alpha = 0.86$). Example items included: "How likely are you to encourage your child to share his/her feelings?," "How likely are you to practice self-regulation strategies when your child is calm (e.g., deep breathing, counting, positive self-talk)?" and "How likely are you to model problem solving language yourself for your child to observe?".

One item ("I feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of being a parent") was included in the analyses by itself, not as part of a subscale. This item was originally tested as part of the Parental Attitudes subscale but was not retained. Because it is so relevant to CD PEC's brain state model, the research team elected to consider it as a stand-alone item. Specifically, parental overwhelm suggests that parents are operating in a survival or emotional state, vs the preferred, higher-level executive problem-solving state. Researchers attempted to assess parents' shift in this dimension.

To look for change over time, paired *t*-tests were conducted between Pre and Post 1 scores for each of the subscales and the stand-alone item.

Qualitative data analysis. The research team used open-coding and a thematic analysis to analyze the interview data. Researchers developed a coding scheme based on question topics from the interview protocols. To demonstrate inter-coder reliability, team members completed two exercises – one at the beginning of the coding work, and one after about

one-third of interviews had been coded. For this exercise, the team applied the coding scheme to interview excerpts selected and master-coded by a team lead. Team members had to achieve a κ coefficient score for code application that was > 80 percent. Researchers also had weekly meetings to ensure they were applying the codes consistently. Reliable coders applied the coding scheme to interview transcriptions using Dedoose, a qualitative analytic software package. The codes included identification of common themes, such as the type of responses parents had to challenges with their children (e.g., hugging/holding their children, yelling, etc.), changes in children's behaviors at home (e.g., reduced frequencies of tantrums) and staff impressions about improvements in parent engagement (e.g., more frequent parent-teacher discussions about children's behavior). Totals are reported below by theme, site and type of respondent.

Fidelity observation data analysis. The research team generated a score for each dimension of the fidelity rubric (materials, content and facilitation), by totaling individual item scores and dividing by the number of possible points in the dimension. A total score was also calculated by dividing the total number of points earned by the total possible points across all dimensions. Fidelity was defined as reaching 75 percent of the total possible points on each dimension and on the total score combined.

Results

Attendance

Parents typically attended most of the CD PEC sessions. The majority of parents (13 of 19) reported they attended at least six of the seven classes.

Changes in parent attitudes, knowledge and practices

Based on what they had learned, all parents ($n = 19$) articulated their intention and efforts to shift their parenting practices. Some parents shared specific action steps they were trying, such as connecting and engaging more with their children ($n = 6$) or being more assertive ($n = 4$). Parents also mentioned improvements in how they handled emotions generally or as an aspect of their parenting, citing the need to be calmer and less reactive ($n = 6$) or less harsh and restrictive ($n = 7$); practicing empathy by acknowledging and letting their children express their feelings ($n = 10$); and avoiding the use of punitive measures such as yelling, screaming or physical discipline ($n = 3$).

About one-third of parents ($n = 7$) also shared that they had gained a better understanding of their children and the scientific basis (linked to brain science) for children's emotional and behavioral expression. Some parents commented that they always knew their children had the potential to be better behaved, but their previous parenting approach had not helped their children maximize this potential ($n = 5$).

Finally, parents ($n = 6$) reported that they now had a greater understanding of the CD strategies and skills being used in their children's school. This knowledge made it easier to communicate with their children's teachers about how to support their children's SEL and development.

Survey results. As described in the Methods section, parents participating in the classes were asked to complete the APS during the first and last class. The research team created three subscales to test changes in parenting among the 25 parents who completed Pre and Post 1 surveys. There was a significant change on the Parental Responses and Discipline Methods subscale ($t(24) = -2.42, p < 0.05$), where parents reported more positive responses and discipline methods after the classes ($M = 3.65, SD = 0.58$) than before ($M = 3.38, SD = 0.44$). The difference from Pre to Post 1 approached significance on the Parental Attitudes subscale ($t(24) = -1.74, p < 0.10$) where parents reported more positive attitudes about their parenting after the classes ($M = 4.24, SD = 0.79$) than before ($M = 4.02, SD = 0.88$).

There was a significant change on the Promoting Children’s Social-Emotional Development subscale ($t(24) = -3.69, p < 0.01$) where parents reported using more positive emotional development promotion techniques after the classes ($M = 3.71, SD = 0.52$) than before ($M = 3.23, SD = 0.51$).

One item that did not fit into a subscale but was highly relevant to CD PEC, “I feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of being a parent” (reversed), was tested individually. Parents reported feeling significantly less overwhelmed ($t(24) = -2.59, p < 0.05$) after taking the classes ($M = 3.56, SD = 1.39$) than before ($M = 3.04, SD = 1.17$).

Figure 1 illustrates the means of the subscales and one additional item from Pre to Post 1.

Changes in parents’ responses to child behaviors

An open-ended interview question asked parents to describe how they typically responded to challenging situations and behavior problems with their children (see Figure 2). Between Pre and Post 2, parents shared fewer instances of responses discouraged by CD (e.g., ignoring their child completely; using time-out, removal of the child from the situation, physical discipline or yelling). Among the 19 interviewees, the number of parents who

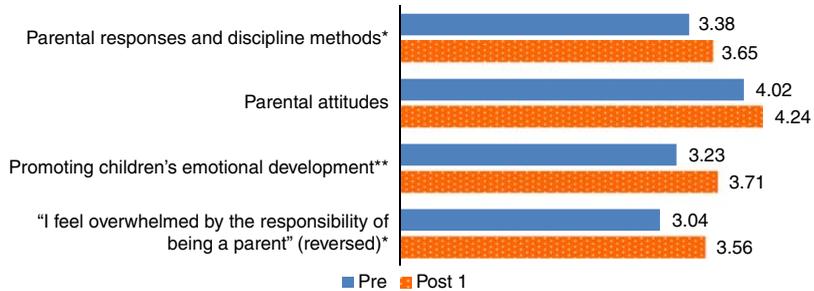


Figure 1. Parenting survey results before and after (Pre and Post 1) CD PEC class series

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

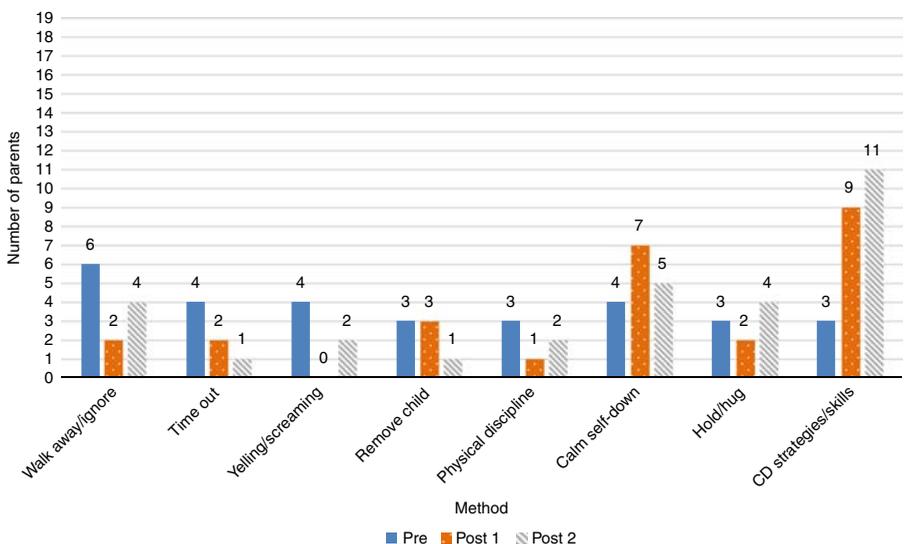


Figure 2. Number of parents reporting each method used in response to a challenge with their child

reported making efforts to calm themselves down or promote connection with their children increased slightly over time.

Researchers also asked parents about whether they had tried any new strategies with their children since taking part in CD PEC. Across time points, nearly three-quarters ($n = 14$) indicated trying something new or responding differently to children's behaviors. In fact, more parents at each time point reported using one or more CD strategy and skill specifically in response to a challenge with their children's behavior ($n = 3$ at Pre, $n = 9$ at Post 1, $n = 11$ at Post 2).

When probed about specific new parenting techniques, parents increasingly reported consistent use of specific CD skills and strategies between Post 1 and Post 2 (see Figure 3). For instance, the number of parents who reported using breathing techniques more than tripled and the number of parents who mentioned their efforts to express empathy for their children's feelings and behaviors doubled. While only one parent mentioned promoting connection using *I Love You Rituals* (see the Box 1 section regarding CD strategies for a description) during Post 1, almost half of the parents interviewed at Post 2 mentioned using them. Additionally, parents reported using some additional new skills or strategies during Post 2 that were not mentioned at Post 1. Specifically, six to eight weeks after the intervention, five parents mentioned offering encouragement to their child, and four parents mentioned using routines to help their child.

Parents were also asked more generally about any positive changes that had occurred since participating in the intervention. More than half ($n = 10$) reported positive changes in regulating their own emotions (e.g., taking deep breaths and remaining calm; thinking about how best to respond before acting; not yelling), and nearly half ($n = 8$) reported positive changes in their skills in communicating with their children (e.g., taking time to talk to their children about their behavior; using more positive wording). Similarly, when parents were asked how they responded to challenging situations with their children, an increasing number of parents reported trying to calm themselves down before responding to their children's behavior ($n = 4$ Pre and $n = 9$ at either Post 1 or Post 2).

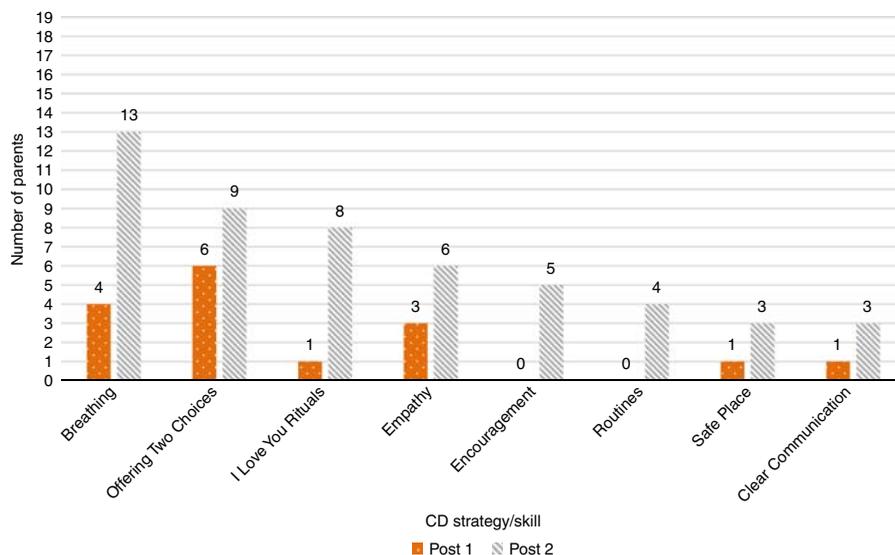


Figure 3.
Number of parents
reporting use of
specific CD skills and
strategies after the
class series

Children's behaviors and emotion management

Researchers asked parents about change in their children's behavior across time points, including changes in how children handled their frustrations and managed their emotions. More than four-fifths of parents ($n = 16$) reported at least one specific example of a positive change in their children's behavior after the parent completed CD PEC classes. The most frequently reported changes included children being able to better identify and communicate their emotions ($n = 9$) and being better at calming down or handling their emotions (e.g., breathing with the parent, listening to the parent more, calming down faster) ($n = 9$). About one-third of parents ($n = 7$) reported that their children showed fewer behavioral issues (e.g., less crying, and fewer tantrums), and three-quarters ($n = 14$) reported overall positive changes across the two later time points.

Several parents ($n = 11$) specifically attributed some or all of the positive changes to their recent efforts to better help their children cope with emotions and manage unwanted behaviors. Parents often credited CD PEC classes for inspiring their efforts to try new strategies and skills.

The teachers and trainers who were interviewed also observed increases in children's self-regulation ($n = 3$) and improved behavior ($n = 2$), as well as general improvement ($n = 3$) among the children of parents enrolled in the classes.

Parent/teacher relationships and home-school connection

The research team also explored whether parents believed that attending CD PEC classes affected the relationships among parents and teachers. At the beginning of the class series, most of the 19 parents and some teachers reported a positive or strong relationship with one another. Specifically, most parents ($n = 14$) believed they held similar views as the teachers regarding the best way to support children's development, learning, behavior and discipline. Although teachers reported having positive relationships with parents overall, only 4 of 11 teachers felt they held similar views as parents regarding care and education of their students; the remaining seven teachers reported that attitudes varied greatly by family.

While both parents and teachers reported positive relationships prior to the class series, at Post 1 interviews, more than half of the teachers ($n = 7$) reported a change in the content of their discussions with parents, including the use of CD-specific language and conversations around CD strategies and skills. In addition, a handful of parents ($n = 3$) and about one-third of teachers ($n = 4$) reported a positive change in the home-school connection, including the sharing of information about activities happening at home or school, and greater shared understanding of CD and the benefit of using it consistently across the two settings.

Helpful and unhelpful CD PEC content for parents

During the interviews, researchers showed and read aloud to parents a list of CD-specific skills and strategies and asked them to indicate which were helpful or which were not helpful or difficult to understand. Researchers also showed and read aloud to staff members the same list and asked them to indicate which skills or strategies were difficult for parents to learn. Table II reports their responses. Additionally, all parents identified at least one specific skill or strategy they found valuable. When asked to identify skills they found not helpful or difficult to learn, parents identified very few specific components of CD. In fact, half of the parents and one trainer responded that all of the skills were helpful. Additionally, three parents and one trainer attributed difficulties with applying the skills to their need for more practice, not to the skill being unhelpful.

Fidelity of CD PEC delivery by sites

Fidelity of implementation was assessed to inform whether programs were implementing the program as intended and contextualize the parent outcome findings. Across dimensions,

Table II.
Parent and trainer
reports of utility of
selected CD skills and
strategies

Skill or strategy	Parent report (<i>n</i> = 19)		Director/trainer report (<i>n</i> = 5)	
	Helpful	Not helpful OR difficult to understand	Helpful for parents	Not helpful OR difficult for parents to understand
Composure	15	3	4	1
Breathing ^a	11	1	2	1
Safe Place ^a	1	2	0	0
Choices	14	1	4	3
Empathy	6	2	3	1
Positive Intent	6	0	1	2
I Love You				
Rituals ^a	6	0	0	0
Consequences	3	1	0	1
Encouragement	3	0	0	0
Assertiveness	1	0	0	1

Notes: Four trainers and one director (*n* = 5) indicated skills that parents found helpful. Five trainers (*n* = 5) indicated various skills that parents found not helpful or difficult. Impressions across directors and trainers were generally consistent. Items with (°) refer to CD strategies (as opposed to skills)

three of the four sites met the fidelity threshold (i.e., a score of at least 75 percent on each domain and overall) at Week 1 and increased their scores by Week 7. One program, Site 2, improved its content dimension score (deemed the most important by the developer of CD) to meet fidelity at Week 7 but did not meet fidelity overall due to a low materials score (see Table III for detail).

The experiences of parents enrolled in Site 2 classes did not vary substantially from those of parents from other sites, suggesting that fidelity was high enough for parents to experience benefits. The fact that parents from Site 2 reported similar experiences as those at other sites may also confirm CD's preliminary impressions that the content component of CD PEC assessed by the rubric is the most important.

Discussion

The current study provides preliminary evidence of CD PEC's positive associations with parent- and teacher-reported improvements in parenting skills, parent-child relationships and child behavior and emotion management. Across four Head Start programs, parents who attended CD PEC sessions reported increased understanding of the CD skills and strategies, as well as numerous examples of how they were actively practicing new ways of interacting with and supporting their children. Survey results showed significant improvements in parents' self-reported skills and attitudes following the conclusion of the seven-week series. Notably, six to eight weeks after the intervention, more parents reported consistent usage of many CD skills and strategies than immediately after classes concluded, suggesting

	Materials		Content		Facilitation		Total	
	Week 1 (%)	Week 7 (%)	Week 1 (%)	Week 7 (%)	Week 1 (%)	Week 7 (%)	Week 1 (%)	Week 7 (%)
Site 1	77.27	90.00	94.44	92.86	88.89	94.44	86.21	92.31
Site 2	50.00	36.36	61.11	78.57	81.25	85.00	62.96	64.29
Site 3	85.00	100.00	88.89	92.86	88.89	95.00	87.50	96.43
Site 4	75.00	100.00	77.78	92.86	88.89	94.44	80.36	96.30

Table III.
Fidelity of
implementation scores
at weeks 1 and 7

the sustainability of what parents learned from the sessions. Program staff also reported observed changes in parenting behavior and some cases of behavioral improvements among children. Overall, CD PEC was successful in helping parents learn to first regulate their own reactions before addressing their children's behavior. Parents reported feeling better prepared to effectively help their children cope with their emotions, including using more positive practices while avoiding punitive actions.

Study limitations

Limitations of this study include its descriptive nature and small sample size of convenience. While the results trended very positively, the study relied on participant self-report and not on observed behavior changes in parents or children; furthermore, the study did not have a comparison group. Therefore, the changes in parents cannot be attributed solely to participation in CD PEC. Due to the small sample size, the research team could not analyze potential differences in outcomes by participants' characteristics such as race/ethnicity or socio-economic status or program characteristics such as urbanicity or fidelity to the curriculum.

With respect to methods, some terminology used in the survey and interview protocols included vocabulary that was unfamiliar to respondents; parents periodically asked interviewers to define terms or interpret questions. Transcripts showed that interviewers were not always consistent in the way they asked interview questions or responded to participant requests for clarifications. Finally, related to the use of the fidelity assessment tool used in this study, this new tool developed by CD was piloted as part of this study and had not been validated yet. The CD PEC guide also did not make clear which materials were especially important, leaving materials choices up to the site-level trainer's discretion; lack of use of some materials had implications for fidelity scores.

Implications

In society broadly, there is an increasing understanding of the critical need for improved social and emotional competencies and learning (Weissberg *et al.*, 2015; Zins *et al.*, 2004). These competencies have been linked to later academic and life success, yet research on the impact of SEL interventions on the development of social competencies lags behind increased rates of various SEL curricula implementation. CD is unique among SEL curricula in that it is one of very few that focuses on enhancing adult awareness, skills and learning as a pathway to fostering children's social-emotional well-being and competencies. The current study provides preliminary evidence that addressing the social-emotional needs of adults (especially parents) is indeed a viable step to helping children improve their social skills, emotion regulation and general behavior.

Specifically, this study confirms that programs with CD general curriculum experience can implement CD PEC with fidelity after a brief training and be well received by families and program staff. Parents were very receptive to information that helped them better understand normal child development and behavior. After participating in CD PEC, parents – noting the potential benefit of reduced stress and conflict in their relationship with their children – were willing to reflect on and shift their parenting behaviors toward more responsive and supportive approaches. Parents and program staff also observed reduced behavior problems and increased emotional competencies among children whose parents took the classes. This study suggests that schools and programs should aim to support SEL for both children and the adults who care for them; the study also provides a valuable starting point for future implementation and impact research.

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