Chapter 5

Tuning in to Kids: an emotion-focused parenting intervention for children with disruptive behaviour problems

Sophie S. Havighurst*, Christiane E. Kehoe, Ann E. Harley and Katherine R. Wilson

Mindful: Centre for Training and Research in Developmental Health, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia

Abstract The way parents model emotional expression, the way they react to children's emotional expressions, and the way in which they teach children about emotions all play an important role in promoting emotional competence and behaviour in children. The Tuning in to Kids (TIK) program targets parents' awareness and responses to emotions in themselves and their children, with the goal of improving parent–child relationships, enhancing children's emotional competence and positively impacting children's behavioural functioning. This paper explores how this emotion-focused parenting approach can be applied to understanding and intervening with children with disruptive behaviour problems. Particular aspects of TIK are discussed including paying attention to lower intensity emotions, parent emotion awareness and regulation, exploring influences of family of origin, and use of time in rather than time out. A case study is used to illustrate how the TIK program might be applied in parent work. The evidence for TIK is reviewed (both with clinical and community samples) as well as evidence for other program variants. Finally, program dissemination is outlined. This overview outlines how an emotion-focused approach to parent work is an alternative to the dominant behavioural parenting approaches for working with children with disruptive behaviour problems.

Keywords Tuning in to Kids, disruptive behaviour problems, emotional expression, emotion regulation, emotion coaching

*Correspondence Sophie S. Havighurst, Mindful: Centre for Training and Research in Developmental Health, University of Melbourne, Building C, 50 Flemington St, Travancore Vic 3032, Australia; Email: sophie.h@unimelb.edu.au
doi:10.13056/OP33.h

Key points
• Children with disruptive behaviour problems frequently present with limited understanding of their emotions and poor emotion regulation.
• The way parents model emotional expression, the way they react to children's emotional expressions, and the way in which they teach children about emotions all play an important role in promoting emotional competence and behaviour in children.
• The Tuning in to Kids program targets parents' awareness and responses to emotions in themselves and their children, with the goal of improving parent–child relationships, enhancing children's emotional competence and positively impacting children's social and behavioural functioning.
• The TIK program has been found effective in improving parenting and reducing children's emotional and behavioural difficulties across different age groups and with community and clinical samples.

Introduction
Toby is a 5-year-old boy who recently started school. He lives with his mother, father and 3-year-old sister. His teacher and his parents are concerned that he still has not learned to manage his emotions and behaviour, and this means he often reacts with anger or overexcitability when playing with other children. He also has problems following the directions of his teacher and is often ‘silly’ during class activities. His parents report he frequently has huge tantrums and they avoid taking him anywhere socially because things often end badly and they both feel very embarrassed by him. They say they are fed up with him and admit to feeling angry and out of control
Tuning in to Kids: overview and aims

Tuning in to Kids is a parenting program that focuses on emotions and is designed to assist parents to establish better relationships with their children. Parents learn how to be emotionally responsive when their children are emotional. Children's difficult behaviours are viewed as an opportunity to teach emotional awareness, understanding and regulation rather than solely a time to extinguish the difficult behaviour by withholding attention or using punishment. In addition, the program aims to increase parents' empathy in order to provide them with the skills to validate children's emotional experience as part of a more child-centred approach to parenting.

The program teaches parents how to emotion coach, that is how to recognise, understand, and manage their own and their child's emotions. The five steps of emotion coaching from Gottman and DeClaire (1997) used in
TIK include: become aware of the child’s emotion, especially when at a lower intensity (such as disappointment or frustration); view emotion as an opportunity for intimacy and teaching; communicate understanding and acceptance of the emotion; help the child use words to describe what they feel; and if necessary, help the child to solve problems and/or set limits (communicating that all feelings are acceptable, but some behaviours are not). When a child is emotional, the parent notices the emotion, names it, shows empathy and then remains available (such as by comforting the child) while the emotion subsides before engaging in limit setting, problem solving, reassurance, distraction, redirection or teaching about family values. The program aims to promote close connections between parents and children, improve their emotional competence and, thereby, reduce children’s internalising (i.e., anxiety, depression) and externalising (i.e., oppositional) behaviour problems.

The TIK program was designed and evaluated as a 6-session group program for community samples and has been adapted and evaluated as an 8 and 10-session version for clinical/high-need participants. Many practitioners trained in TIK also use the materials in one-to-one parent psycho-education or therapy.

Program influences

* Tuning in to Kids* is based on the work of eminent researchers and practitioners who view emotions as integral to human relationships (Denham, 1998; Faber & Mazlish, 1980, 1999; Ginott, 1965; Gottman et al., 1997; Greenberg et al., 1993; Izard, 2002; Linehan, 1993; Safran & Greenberg, 1991) and integrates aspects of attachment theory, emotion-focused cognitive behavioural therapy, mindfulness and the neuroscience on brain-behaviour relationships. The program focuses on developing supportive, emotionally responsive parenting, characteristics that are also central in a secure attachment relationship (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Laible & Thompson, 1998). Children develop their capacity to think about emotional experiences and regulate their responses when their parents attend to emotions and support, soothe and help them to learn about and regulate emotions. This approach to parent–child work is similar to cognitive behavioural therapies that focus on emotions (i.e., Hayes, Follette, & Linehan, 2004), in which a therapist helps a person to identify, tolerate, and accept emotions rather than change their perceptions (cognitions) or responses to events (behaviours). The process of noticing and developing a language about emotional experience may also facilitate cognitive and brain development where neuronal pathways are strengthened between the prefrontal cortex and the limbic system (Codrington, 2010).

When parents’ own emotional issues overwhelm them, they are less able to parent in an emotionally responsive way (Maliken & Katz, 2013). Therefore another of the main approaches taken in TIK is to teach parents emotion awareness and regulation skills by exploring parents’ beliefs and attitudes to emotions. Addressing parental reactions is central to TIK but also common to mindfulness approaches to adult and parenting interventions (Coatsworth, Duncan, Greenberg, & Nix, 2009; Dumas, 2005). Mindfulness helps a person to notice their emotional experience but, rather than react, remain present in the moment and to breathe slowly before responding. We also examine parents’ family of origin experiences that have shaped their beliefs and responses to emotions in themselves and their children (their meta-emotion philosophy or attitudes and beliefs about having emotions) (Gottman, et al., 1997). This enables greater empathic responding, a finding made by other researchers who examine how parents’ family of origin impacts current parenting (Leerkes & Crockenberg, 2006). By drawing on these different complementary theoretical influences we have developed an emotion-focused program that encourages a child-centred approach to parenting while also valuing and addressing the emotional needs and capacities of parents.

Program components

The five steps of emotion coaching

The TIK program involves exercises that aim to teach parents the five steps of emotion coaching outlined by Gottman and DeClaire (1997). Across the sessions of the program we gradually teach parents to use the five steps of emotion coaching (see Table 1). In session one, the ideas of emotion coaching are introduced, with an initial opportunity to watch and then enact (using a scripted role play) the emotion coaching skills which builds awareness and valuing emotions; session two focuses on tuning into the emotion, noticing and beginning to use simple reflection skills; session three strengthens these initial skills and targets empathy and taking the child’s perspective by ‘stepping into the child’s shoes’; session four focuses on emotion coaching anxiety and teaches a structure for problem solving as well as emphasising the importance of parents’ emotional self-care; session five focuses on parents’ awareness and responses to anger within themselves and their children while also exploring family of origin experiences with anger; session six consolidates the five emotion coaching steps and looks at how parents will use the skills into the future. Booster sessions are encouraged; these enable parents to return at a later time for refreshing their skills or addressing new challenges in their use of emotion coaching.

Emotion coaching versus emotion dismissing

Throughout the program emotion coaching is contrasted with emotion dismissing so that parents can experience the different response styles. Because emotion dismissing is a common way of responding to
children's emotions, many parents recognise this style in themselves and become motivated to change. At times guilt about the effect of emotion dismissing arises. This is addressed by discussing how dominant emotion dismissing is within many cultures, thus 'normalising' this way of responding to emotions.

**Paying attention to lower intensity emotions versus planned ignoring**

In TIK we encourage a cultural shift in how parents respond to children's emotions. This is part of the second step of emotion coaching, in which even lower intensity emotions that may at times be perceived as annoying to parents are viewed as an opportunity for teaching and connection. Planned ignoring is a strategy used in behavioural parenting programs in which lower intensity emotions and behaviours that are undesirable are not given attention. Examples of behaviours in this category are: a child whining for a parent to buy them a toy at the supermarket, or repeatedly dropping marbles down the stairs in an effort to get attention. The idea behind planned ignoring is that paying attention to children at these times reinforces them in using undesirable behaviours to get attention or to get what they want. In TIK we believe that lower intensity emotions and the challenging behaviours that may come with these emotions are opportunities to teach the child about what they are feeling and to be closer while not necessarily 'giving in' to their wishes. We believe that ignoring children sets up a less than ideal way of communicating in close relationships when one dislikes or disapproves of another's actions. Ignoring can also encourage children to escalate their emotions and behaviour if they want parents' attention. Instead we encourage creative responses in parents which include aspects of emotion coaching and recognise the emotional need being conveyed by the child. For example, 'whining at the supermarket' might be met with an emotion coaching response such as 'Oh, I know it's hard to see all these great things you'd like and shopping can get so boring. (Pause.) If you could have anything in the whole store what would you choose? (Pause.) I think I'd have a great big bag of liquorice!' In the example of 'dropping marbles down the stairs', an emotion coaching response might be, 'Maybe you're feeling a bit lonely now your friends have gone home. And you like the sound of those marbles dropping all the way down the stairs! I wonder if you need a bit of a cuddle and then we can find something for you to do which also makes some good noises (like the drums or shakers).'

**Problem solving, limit setting and when not to emotion coach**

The fifth step of emotion coaching is problem solving and setting boundaries and limits. Parents are encouraged to
have clear family rules and to assert boundaries around children's behaviours. The fifth step is sometimes unnecessary, however, especially when the child's need is simply for a supportive response to their emotion. When beginning the program, many parents miss the first four steps of emotion coaching and shift straight to limit setting or problem solving. We emphasise that you often need to talk about the feelings or 'sit with' the child's emotion without talking for a period of time, until the emotion lessens. After this the child is more likely to be able to engage in the problem solving or limit setting process. The TIK program also outlines conditions when emotion coaching may not be the approach to take; these include: when parents are highly emotional, when everyone is in a rush, when there is an immediate safety issue, or if hunger, illness or tiredness need to be addressed. Naming the emotion can still be used during these times.

**Application of the TIK program with the case study of Toby**

Using TIK with Toby, we would first help his parents to understand how emotional competence develops and that difficult emotions often underlie challenging behaviours. Then we would explain the benefits of emotion coaching and how using this approach could help Toby better manage his tantrums. Toby's parents would be encouraged to notice lower intensity emotions (the first part of emotion coaching), such as frustration or irritation, to prevent him escalating his feelings. We would highlight how emotion dismissing responses can lead to a rapid increase in the emotional intensity for parents and children. We would assist Toby's parents to reflect his feelings and help Toby begin to name the emotions he was experiencing, especially those underlying his anger. Part of the teaching would include role-playing how to emotion coach (often contrasted with the emotionally dismissive approach). Toby's parents would be encouraged to intervene early when he was becoming emotional and to use the emotion coaching steps at those times, including empathising and conveying to Toby that they understood how he might be feeling. We would also ensure that his parents had clear family rules and that these were understood and discussed first at emotionally-neutral times. If Toby's emotions escalated and resulted in more challenging behaviours, we would encourage them to help Toby use emotion regulation strategies that allowed him to let off steam or calm down, and possibly remove him from the context in which he had become emotional. (Time in.) We would highlight that when parents and children are both highly emotional, it may be necessary for parents to 'build in a pause' and address the situation when everyone is calmer. This provides children with an important model of parents regulating emotions. Then the parent might emotion coach after the event while also helping to repair and, if necessary, to apologise to Toby if they had responded with anger or in a destructive way. This would also provide a model of apology for Toby to use in the future.

**Parents' own emotion regulation and family of origin experiences**

In TIK we recognise that responding to challenging behaviours and strong emotions in one's children can be a very difficult part of parenting. It can lead to strong feelings in parents, and may remind them of family of origin experiences and elicit automatic reactions that create dissonance between one's ideals of parenting and what one actually does. Guilt, helplessness, anger, rage, sadness, embarrassment and shame may be some of the feelings that parents experience. A critical part of TIK is addressing parents' beliefs and reactions to emotions (meta-emotion philosophy) in both themselves and their children (Gottman, et al., 1997). We do this in TIK gradually across the sessions by examining the messages parents received from their family of origin. For example, “My mother never showed anger, she just cried”; “When my father was angry we were all scared. I try to change my reaction with my son, but I see he's having great difficulty showing anger and I can't seem to teach him how to be angry safely.” We help parents to identify the messages that were conveyed to them by their family of origin, and to determine whether these continue to influence their current parenting. For example, if a parent was reared by a mother who had been supportive of expressing sadness, yet had restricted anger in the home and had made her children stay in their room when angry, this parent may now be accepting of sadness but prohibitive and dismissive of anger. We have noticed in our TIK groups that many parents have major 'light bulb' moments when they connect their own family of origin experiences with their responses to their own children.

Attention is paid throughout the program to the way in which parents express emotions and to their strategies for self-care. It is emphasized that children watch and learn about emotion competencies from their parents, and parents' management of their own emotions also affects the emotion climate of the home.

With the case of Toby, TIK would help his parents examine the ways that emotions had been responded to in their families of origin in order to help them to consider changes in the ways they were parenting Toby. His mother might talk about how her own father was very explosive when angry and that she had made the decision that anger expression was prohibitive and dismissive of anger. We have noticed in our TIK groups that many parents have major 'light bulb' moments when they connect their own family of origin experiences with their responses to their own children.

With the case of Toby, TIK would help his parents examine the ways that emotions had been responded to in their families of origin in order to help them to consider changes in the ways they were parenting Toby. His mother might talk about how her own father was very explosive when angry and that she had made the decision that anger expression was prohibitive and dismissive of anger. We have noticed in our TIK groups that many parents have major 'light bulb' moments when they connect their own family of origin experiences with their responses to their own children.

With the case of Toby, TIK would help his parents examine the ways that emotions had been responded to in their families of origin in order to help them to consider changes in the ways they were parenting Toby. His mother might talk about how her own father was very explosive when angry and that she had made the decision that anger expression was prohibitive and dismissive of anger. We have noticed in our TIK groups that many parents have major 'light bulb' moments when they connect their own family of origin experiences with their responses to their own children.

With the case of Toby, TIK would help his parents examine the ways that emotions had been responded to in their families of origin in order to help them to consider changes in the ways they were parenting Toby. His mother might talk about how her own father was very explosive when angry and that she had made the decision that anger expression was prohibitive and dismissive of anger. We have noticed in our TIK groups that many parents have major 'light bulb' moments when they connect their own family of origin experiences with their responses to their own children.

With the case of Toby, TIK would help his parents examine the ways that emotions had been responded to in their families of origin in order to help them to consider changes in the ways they were parenting Toby. His mother might talk about how her own father was very explosive when angry and that she had made the decision that anger expression was prohibitive and dismissive of anger. We have noticed in our TIK groups that many parents have major 'light bulb' moments when they connect their own family of origin experiences with their responses to their own children.
was angry; they may have noticed that they felt choked up and stuck for words or just lost their temper. We would encourage them to engage in emotional awareness and self-care, thereby maximizing their emotional availability and capacity to respond to their child’s emotions calmly. They may both benefit from learning how to ‘build in a pause’ and step away when they were becoming very angry.

**Time in or Time out?**

The use of time out as a strategy for responding to challenging behaviours is a key part of behavioural parenting programs. TIK uses a very different approach for responding to challenging behaviours. Firstly, emotion coaching is used to examine the underlying causes of anger. Anger is viewed as an emotion which conveys important information such as when one’s goals are impeded or when there is an unmet emotional need for the child. Examples include: a child feeling jealous of a sibling and hurting their younger counterpart; a child who is feeling anxious about a change in access arrangements between parents and erupts with anger, destroys their favourite game and throws the pieces around the room breaking a vase; a child who is embarrassed by their parent talking about them with the teacher, drops their bag, yells abusively at their parent and starts to kick the car door. We encourage parents to make a clear distinction between feelings and behaviours, signalling acceptance of the feeling while setting limits around some behaviours, either at the time of the challenging behaviour or afterwards. Anger is a very physical emotion, and as part of the flight and fight response can result in tremendous energy. Strategies are taught to parents that assist them to help their child to let off steam and calm down. These can be important for moving through the intense stages of anger, especially in young children when language skills for understanding emotions and regulating them are limited. ‘Time in’ may be used if behaviours and emotions escalate, especially in younger children. This is where a parent remains with the child but may remove them from the situation. We believe that when children experience very strong emotions such as intense anger, it can be overwhelming for them and they often need a parent to remain close so that the person with whom the child has an attachment relationship assists them to calm down (rather than rejecting them). This is in contrast to behavioural parenting programs where ‘time out’ is believed to assist children to learn to regulate their own negative emotions (Morawska & Sanders, 2011). When children are overwhelmed by emotions their ability to think about what they are feeling and doing is significantly reduced or impossible (see also Siegel & Bryson, 2011); we believe close proximity to the attachment figure is necessary to help the child down regulate their intense emotions at this time. Many children are scared and overwhelmed by having strong negative emotions. They may need a parent to hold them in a safe way, to sit near them with gentle touch, or just to be in the room with them. This may not, however, be appropriate when the parent is extremely angry and feels unable to control their own behaviour. Then it might be necessary for the parent to build in a pause (such as by running their hands under cold water or taking 5 deep breaths) or to have time away until they are calm enough to sufficiently respond to the child. Talking too much when a child is very emotional requires the child to engage cognitive processing using their frontal lobes (their thinking brain) and this is often too demanding for them when they are highly emotionally aroused. Therefore, we encourage naming the emotion using simple language (such as by saying ‘wow, you’re really feeling angry’), and/or conveying empathy either verbally or non-verbally through tone of voice, body language or facial expression. This helps the child to re-engage their thinking brain and consider their emotional experience in a safe and supported way, thereby encouraging children to think about what is felt (Gottman, et al., 1997; Siegel & Bryson, 2011).

We advocate outlining clear family rules and use of natural consequences implemented with empathy when rules are broken. Emotion coaching after strong emotions and challenging behaviour is a critical part of repair and learning, enabling child and parent to consider what has occurred and been felt, providing mental maps for each about how future experiences might be handled but also strengthening the connection between the parent and child. When parents listen and empathise, children feel supported, and they are then able to make sense of their emotions and feel calmer.

Returning to our case example of Toby, we might discuss with his parents what happens when he has intense anger. We would ascertain whether there were times when his parents were calm and could stay with Toby when he was angry. We would encourage his mother/father to name the feeling and if necessary the family rule, such as “I can understand that Isabel making a taller block tower has made you very angry. When we are angry we can feel like hitting but in our family we don’t hit people.” If the behaviour were to continue Toby’s parent would be encouraged to take him from the room and to repeat this statement. His parents might also let him know that he needed some time to calm down. This might involve his parents having him sit on their knee or if he did not want this his parent might say, “I am going to sit here with you” and be close but not touching. Talking might be minimal. When his parent noticed a shift in the level of anger, they might invite him to come and sit with them. Toby may or may not accept this, but the message would be that the parent would remain with him while he calmed down. With these skills his parents might feel more confident to support Toby when he is angry and less fearful of his strong emotions. At a time when the anger had reduced and sufficient time had passed, his parent might say, “Hey, you got really angry before with your sister. I wonder if you
were feeling cross and a little worried that she could build a taller tower than you? Maybe you felt a little jealous of her? (Pause and notice effect). I remember when I was your age how much I hated it when my brother was better at drawing than me. (Pause and see what emerges).” The conversation might end with helping Toby to apologise to his sister, finding a way of repairing the situation and/or talking about what he could do should he encounter a similar situation in the future. This last part of the conversation might not occur until a later time depending on the parent having sufficient time to emotion coach, and whether in the immediate context Toby might just need food, a sleep or time to settle. Sometimes emotion coaching needs to happen after the event, when parent and child are in a better frame of mind to think and talk.

**Program delivery**

The TIK program is delivered using psycho-education, DVD examples, worksheets, role plays, group facilitator demonstrations and role plays. It is emphasised throughout the program that while emotion coaching is easy to understand it can be hard to implement and that parents learn best by practicing in the parenting group and then trying the new skills at home. Engaging in role plays allows parents to experience what it feels like to be emotion coached compared with emotion dismissed as well as how different it feels to emotion coach. Such direct experience of the two different response styles helps parents to understand the skills at a deeper level. Each session begins with a warm-up designed to enhance parents’ own emotional competence, followed by a reflection on the week where parents share their concerns or successes with the group; these examples may then be used to workshop how to emotion coach. It is often the exploration of both successful and unsuccessful real-life examples shared within the group and guided by the facilitators that enables parents to gain greater insight and contemplate changes for themselves. This is a powerful aspect of TIK group work.

**The empirical basis for Tuning in to Kids**

We turn now to an overview of the empirical basis to TIK. While reviewing the research studies of TIK we also provide greater description of the uses of the program with different populations.

*Tuning in to Kids* was developed by Sophie Havighurst and Ann Harley in 1999 with other authors contributing to program variants over time. Initially called *Essential Parenting: Raising Emotionally Intelligent Children*, the program was developed at the Victorian Parenting Centre and reflected the PhD research and clinical psychology work of Havighurst and the 25 year history of parent education experience by Harley. Both had been significantly influenced by the work of Gottman, Katz and Hooven (1997) on meta-emotion and had a shared concern that behavioural parenting programs overlooked central aspects of the parent–child relationship and the role of emotions that were important to address in an intervention. The initial version of the program was piloted during 2000–2002 with 43 mothers and 8 fathers of children aged between 4–5 years (51% girls); 36% of children were rated by their parents in the clinical range for behaviour problems (Havighurst, Harley, & Prior, 2004). The pilot showed significant improvements in parental mental health, parents’ emotion socialisation behaviours, and child behaviour problems immediately post program and these were maintained at 3 months follow-up. Further, the largest improvements were found for children who were rated above average for behaviour problems.

After the pilot study, the program was revised with additional content for assisting parents with emotion regulation. A structured manual was written and the program was renamed *Tuning in to Kids: Emotionally Intelligent Parenting* (Havighurst & Harley, 2007). A large group-randomised control trial was conducted to assess the efficacy of the program with a general population sample (Havighurst, Wilson, Harley, & Prior, 2009; Havighurst, Wilson, Harley, Prior, & Kehoe, 2010). Participants were 218 primary caregivers (107 intervention, 111 waitlist control) of children aged 4 – 5 years (115 boys, 103 girls) who were attending kindergarten. Participants were mostly mothers (95.9%) and, similar to the pilot study, almost one-third (31.9%) of children were rated in the clinical range for behaviour problems. At 6 months follow-up (Havighurst et al., 2010), results revealed intervention parents reported significantly improved emotion coaching and empathy, and significantly reduced emotion dismissing and child behaviour problems compared with waitlist control parents. In addition, intervention children showed greater improvements in emotion knowledge, compared with waitlist control children. Intervention parents also reported significantly greater improvements in emotion awareness and regulation and were observed to use more emotion labels and greater emotion exploration with their children when compared to the waitlist control group. A real-world effectiveness trial of TIK delivered by practitioners with a community sample (i.e., without high levels of children with behaviour problems) has also been conducted and found similar parent outcomes and reduced child behaviour problems (Wilson, Havighurst, & Harley, 2012).

We were also interested in whether TIK would be efficacious in reducing behaviour problems in clinical populations. Reviews of the efficacy of behavioural programs have concluded that they can be limited when there are parental difficulties in emotion regulation, when parents hold negative beliefs about the child, when there is disrupted attachment or when there is marital conflict (Malik & Katz, 2013; Scott & Dadds, 2009), and that not all practitioners are comfortable with using this approach to work with parents (Taylor & Biglan, 1998). There is, therefore, considerable room for examining whether an
emotion-focused intervention would be effective with parents of children with clinical presentations of behavioural difficulties. We recruited a clinical sample from the Melbourne Royal Children’s Hospital Behaviour Clinic, where all families were receiving paediatric care (guidance in use of behavioural strategies for responding to the child) for managing their child’s difficult behaviour (Havighurst et al., 2013). Participants were 54 mothers (mean age = 35.66; SD = 6.73) of a child aged between 48 and 71 months (mean age 59.31; SD = 7.38; 78% boys). One-third were sole parents (33.3%) and 94.3% of children were rated by their mothers in the clinical range for behaviour problems with mean Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory scores of 167.67 (SD = 25.91). Families were randomised into TIK intervention or treatment as usual waitlist control. Results showed that at six month follow-up both intervention and waitlist control mothers reported significant reductions in parents’ emotion dismissing, parent difficulties with emotion awareness and regulation, and child behaviour problems. However, parents who took part in the TIK intervention were observed to use more emotion exploration and emotion labels and reported greater empathy at 6 months follow-up when compared with waitlist controls. However, parents who took part in the TIK intervention were observed to use more emotion exploration, emotion labels and empathy at 6 months follow-up when compared with waitlist controls.

We were able to build on this preschool clinical trial in an early intervention effectiveness trial, where an 8-session version of the TIK program was used along with a child and teacher socio-emotional intervention for school-aged children with emerging conduct disorder (Havighurst, Duncombe et al., 2015). Results showed intervention parents but not controls became less emotionally dismissive and increased in empathic responding; intervention families showed a trend for less negative emotional expressiveness in the family; and children showed better emotion understanding and lower hyperactivity, conduct problems, and oppositional defiant disorder compared to control children. The same study also investigated whether the multisystemic intervention was more efficacious in reducing behaviour problems when the parent component of the program was emotion-focused (TIK) versus when it was behaviour-focused (Triple P). Results showed that, when combined with the teacher and child interventions, both parent programs (emotion focused and behavioural focused) led to significant changes in child behaviour problems as reported by parents. Teachers, however, reported a greater reduction in child behaviour problems at six months follow-up for TIK children (effect size $d = .4$) when compared to Triple P children (effect size $d = .3$) (Duncombe et al., 2015).

Other versions of TIK

With other TIK team members we have made a number of modifications to the TIK program for use with different populations. Dads Tuning in to Kids (DadsTIK; Havighurst, Harley, & Wilson, 2010), a 7- session (plus one booster) version of TIK designed specifically for fathers, incorporates father-specific materials/exercises and additional content about the benefits of positive father involvement for children, the importance of play, and the unique contribution of fathers’ playful style. Pilot study results for DadsTIK were promising, showing fathers reported significant increases in emotion coaching and reductions in emotion dismissing (beliefs and practices) immediately post intervention (Wilson, Havighurst, & Harley, 2014). Fathers also reported significantly increased parent satisfaction and parent efficacy, decreases in reactive/angry parenting and significant reductions in their pre-schoolers’ social and emotional difficulties. A large randomised controlled trial of Dads-TIK was completed in 2015 with journal publications on the outcomes currently under review.

A toddler version of TIK has also been developed (Havighurst & Harley, 2011). Preliminary findings support the Tuning in to Toddlers program with a general population sample: results showed significant increases in parents’ self-reported and observed emotion coaching beliefs and behaviours, and lower emotion dismissing beliefs and behaviours (Lauw, Havighurst, Wilson, Harley, & Northam, 2014). Mothers also reported significant improvements in toddlers’ externalising behaviour difficulties. A randomised controlled trial of this program will be completed in 2017.

A version of TIK has been developed and trialled for parents of adolescents. Tuning in to Teens (TINT; Havighurst, Harley, Kehoe, & Pizarro, 2012) takes a similar approach to TIK but incorporates additional material on helping parents to understand the changing nature of the parent-adolescent relationship, how to remain connected with their teen while providing greater autonomy, and how to manage their experiences of rejection. The program also integrates more information about adolescent development, responding to teens’ sadness, fears and worries as well as specific strategies to assist parents in noticing adolescents’ bids for emotional connection. TINT has been evaluated as a group-randomised control trial with a general population sample of 225 parents (200 mothers, 25 fathers; Mage= 44.1, $SD = 5.13$) and 224 youth aged 10–13 years (Mage = 12.01, $SD = .42$; 49% boys) to assess the efficacy of the program with internalising (Kehoe, Havighurst, & Harley, 2014; Kehoe, Havighurst, & Harley, 2015) and externalising behaviour problems (Havighurst, Kehoe, & Harley, 2015). Results show significantly greater improvements in parents’ reports of their own anxiety/depressive symptoms, parents’ difficulties in emotion awareness and regulation, emotionally dismissive parenting, family conflict and youth somatic complaints, anxiety, depressive symptoms, conduct problems and hyperactivity compared to control participants. Finally, a version of the program has also been trialled with parents of children who have experienced complex
trauma. This real-world clinical trial by staff at the Australian Childhood Foundation used a 10-session version of the program that incorporated information about trauma and attachment difficulties with the main TIK program content. This study is currently under review.

**Dissemination of Tuning in to Kids**

Since 2008 over 3,500 facilitators have been trained across Australia, the United States of America and the United Kingdom in the TIK and TINT programs. The training teaches professionals the main skills taught to parents in the program using direct teaching, watching DVDs, demonstration, small-group exercises, role plays and group discussion. A structured manual is provided as part of the training (Havighurst & Harley, 2007; Havighurst, et al., 2012). Anonymous feedback is collected after each training and includes a rating to ascertain how valuable the workshop is with respect to facilitators’ work (scale of 1 to 5; 1 = not at all to 5 = extremely). Ninety-five per cent of trainees have rated the training 4 and above and reported that the training fills a significant gap in evidence-based parenting programs. Post training, supervision is provided on an as needed basis by the TIK training team. To date the program has been delivered by certified facilitators in child care centres, educational settings, community health centres, child and adolescent mental health services, prisons, foster care agencies, drug and alcohol rehabilitation services, indigenous and multicultural communities, as well as in the general community. TIK parent materials have been translated into 10 different languages: Arabic, Vietnamese, Thai, Chinese, Somali, Amharic, Cambodian, Chin, German and Karen. A German version of the TIK manual is also available.

**References**


**Conclusion**

The evidence base for parenting programs has for many years been dominated by behavioural approaches. These have produced good outcomes for many families; however, we believe they continue to miss some important needs within children and parents and may not always be the intervention of choice for all families. The *Tuning in to Kids* program targets parents’ awareness and responses to emotions in themselves and their children, with the goal of improving parent–child relationships, enhancing children’s emotional competence and positively impacting children’s social and behavioural functioning. This approach offers professionals a way of working that may complement behavioural parenting programs or offer an alternative way of working altogether. We hope that emotion-focused approaches to parenting will continue to gain in acceptance and use, and become more mainstream. Ultimately, parenting that is respectful of the emotional worlds of parents and children has the potential to contribute to more empathic, socially aware human beings.

**Acknowledgement**

This contribution was invited for this publication. The authors have declared that they have no competing or potential conflicts of interest, aside from the disclosure that as Investigators, trainers and staff for the TIK program, the authors may benefit from positive reports about the Tuning in to Kids program (which receives funding from organisations including the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund, the William Buckland Foundation, and the Financial Markets Foundation for Children), http://www.tuningintokids.org.au/.


Making parenting work for children’s mental health

Edited by Cecilia A. Essau and Jennifer L. Allen
**How to Cite:**


**Chapters:**

Parenting has been identified as a key factor associated with childhood illnesses, spanning beyond mental health problems. The long-term significance of this becomes more apparent as understanding grows regarding the link between experiences during childhood and long-term outcomes. Varying levels of significance attached to different stages in a child’s development, from birth through to adulthood, and recent research investigating the influence of parenting on each of these stages has received consideration from services and governments across the world. The following papers further highlight the importance of parental influence in the prevention and intervention of children with emotional, neurodevelopmental and behavioural disorders.

This Occasional Paper was conceived following the Emanuel Miller Memorial Lecture and Annual Conference which was held in March 2013. The event was titled “Making Parenting Work for Children’s Mental Health”. We are very fortunate to have received contributions from authors of parenting interventions for a wide range of child and adolescent emotional and behavioural problems.

Judy Hutchings, one of the speakers at the conference, writes about her experience in implementation and dissemination of the Incredible Years (IY) programme in Wales. The IY programme was initially developed 30 years ago at the University of Washington (Webster-Stratton, 2011) as a prevention and treatment programme for conduct disorder and other difficulties. The main features of this intervention include teaching participants new skills, such as problem solving using role play, goal setting and home activities. The programme has since then been evaluated and implemented in various countries and different service settings, results of which indicate improvement in parental mental health, parenting skills and ultimately child problem behaviours.

David Hawes outlines growing evidence that children with conduct problems are a highly heterogeneous population, with subgroups of such children following distinct risk pathways associated with distinct treatment needs. One important distinction is made between emotionally-disregulated (‘hot tempered’) children versus those with callous–unemotional (CU) traits, who demonstrate more severe problems and are less responsive to current parenting interventions. Drawing on emerging evidence concerning the interplay between parenting, CU traits, and conduct problems, he examines numerous ways in which the planning and delivery of parenting interventions may be improved to better promote the behavioural and emotional development of distinct subgroups of children with conduct problems.

Sophie Havighurst and her colleagues give a comprehensive review of their Tuning in to Kids (TIK) programme which describes how emotion-focused parenting can be employed in interventions for disruptive problem behaviours. Taking roots from mindfulness, emotion-focused cognitive therapy and attachment theory, the TIK programme highlights the importance of emotionally responsive parenting. By providing parents the opportunity to communicate their understanding of emotions and offering the child appropriate words to express their emotions, the programme further encourages close parent–child connections while improving children’s internal and external behavioural problems. Children develop the ability to recognise emotional experiences and appropriate ways to respond to parents’ emotions and regulate their own emotions.

Jennifer Allen explains the importance of personalising treatment based on child temperament. Temperament theory and research helps us to understand the substantial heterogeneity in child psychopathology and social-emotional development. The ‘goodness of fit’ framework (Thomas & Chess, 1977) provides guidance as to how parents can best support their child to promote his or her social-emotional competence and healthy psychological adjustment. Temperament-based parenting programmes involve the modification of existing parenting strategies and/or development of innovative new strategies to achieve optimal outcomes for children based on their unique temperament profile. In this manner, treatment is individualized or personalised for children and families, with the aim of achieving improved treatment outcomes.

Sam Cartwright-Hatton describes her Timid to Tiger programme, which is a parenting-based approach to managing anxiety in young children. Parents learn a new approach to managing their children, using attachment-based play, praise and reward for confident behaviours, and planned ignoring for unwanted behaviours. Parents are also taught simple cognitive-behavioural
techniques for managing their children's fear and worry. The outcome from their randomized controlled trial showed that those in the intervention group, compared to those in a waiting list group, were approximately seven times more likely to be anxiety-free than the untreated control group at the end of treatment, with treatment gains maintained over 12 months.

Bonny van Steensel and Magiati review psychosocial interventions which target social skills, internalizing and externalizing difficulties in children and young people with ASD. These interventions use primarily behavioural and/or cognitive behavioural approaches. Results of these approaches indicated general improvements in social competence and friendships, however the significance of parental influence is not considered in these treatment programmes. As for repetitive behaviours, applied behavioural strategies that target stereotypical behaviours resulted in positive outcomes, whereby the role of parents in implementing strategies that involve redirecting and monitoring repetitive behaviours is highlighted.

Maggie Johnson and Alison Wintgens give an overview of what is known about selective mutism and made a persuasive argument in support of selective mutism having a stand-alone diagnosis under Anxiety Disorders, as adopted in DSM-5. As selective mutism involves more factors than the conditioned fear response associated with Specific Phobia, they suggest using a multimodal approach to address the family and school's role in maintaining the child's mutism.

We hope that the collection of seven papers stimulates readers' interests in promoting a holistic and evidence-based approach, delivered through supporting better parenting.

References