

Parenting Style and Weight Status among Overweight Adolescents Attending a Healthy Weight Camp

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Abstract

Childhood obesity is a growing concern and family systems theory would suggest that childhood obesity is an issue that involves the entire family and not just one family member. Studies have found that parental involvement is important in the success of treating childhood obesity (e.g., Beckman, Hawley & Bishop, 2006). Yet, little research has been done on parenting style and weight status. This exploratory study examines the influence of parenting style on weight status among 74 adolescents who attended a residential weight loss camp.

Parenting Styles

- ▶ Parenting Style (Baumrind, 1971) is characterized by two primary dimensions:
- ▶ Control
 - Rules and expectations of the child
 - Structure provided
- ▶ Acceptance
 - Warmth and emotional connection of parent–child relationship
 - Respect for the individual

Literature Review

- ▶ Gable & Lutz (2000): Parenting style not different between obese and non-obese children, ages 3–10.
- ▶ Kitzmann et al., (2008): Authoritative parenting = greater self-regulatory skills.
- ▶ Agras et. al.,(2004): Parental style not significant in determining overweight status among children birth–9.5 years.
- ▶ Rhee et. al., (2006): Permissive, neglectful, and authoritarian parents more likely to have overweight children in first grade, than authoritative parents.
- ▶ Golan (2006): Children of permissive parents lost less weight in weight loss programs than children of authoritative parents.

Measuring Parental Impact

- ▶ It is clear that parenting is influential in children's weight status. However, the nature of the influence is unclear.
 - ▶ The inconsistencies in the literature may be a result of the way that parenting style is measured and the distinction between parenting behaviours (what parents do) and parenting styles (how they do it).
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Sample

- ▶ 74 campers (67 females, 7 males), ages 10–18, who attended a healthy weight camp either during the summer 2007 or 2008
 - 2007 camp was all females
 - Six-week camp
 - 4–5 hours of physical activity per day
 - Calorie restricted diets
 - Nutrition classes
 - Group therapy sessions

Measures

- ▶ Pre-camp and post-camp weights & BMI
- ▶ Campers and parents completed a variety of instruments:
 - ▶ Camper Health Assessment Survey
 - ▶ Parent/Guardian Health Assessment Survey
 - ▶ Both contained a measure of parenting practices
- ▶ **Emotional Connectedness (Acceptance)**
 - 14 questions (7 questions in parent version), 1 –not very connected to 5 strongly connected
- ▶ **Autonomy (Control)**
 - 7 questions, 1 –never to 5 –all the time

Parenting Style Categories

- ▶ Used a median split on acceptance and control scales to create high and low categories.
- ▶ Authoritative (high acceptance, high control)
- ▶ Authoritarian (low acceptance, high control)
- ▶ Permissive (high acceptance, low control)
- ▶ Uninvolved (low acceptance, low control)
- ▶ Using this method, only 40% of parent & child reports of parenting resulted in same style.
- ▶ Correlations showed a significant relationship between parent and child reports of acceptance, but not control.
 - Parents reported higher levels of control than their children.

Results

- ▶ Based on child's reports 27.9% of parents were categorized as being Uninvolved, 25.0% Permissive, 23.5% Authoritarian, and 23.5% Authoritative. Parent reports were 28.1%, 23.4%, 20.3%, and 28.1%.
- ▶ Compared to estimates from a nationally representative sample (Add Health) using similar measures: 5.3% Uninvolved, 12.1% Permissive, 20.4% Authoritarian, and 62.2% Authoritative.

Parenting Style by Weight & BMI: Child Reports

Parenting Style	Pre Camp Weight	Weight Change	Pre Camp BMI	BMI Change
Uninvolved	146(87)	5.57(7.76)	37.77(10.50)	1.23(1.18)
Permissive	203(70)	12.16(7.24)	39.83(10.18)	2.29(1.13)
Authoritarian	204(113)	17.28(15.96)	43.10(11.25)	3.13(2.36)
Authoritative	166(72)	11.63(9.97)	35.23(10.79)	2.13(1.50)

Note: ANCOVA results indicated no significant differences on post (last day) camp weight or BMI.

Parenting Style by Weight & BMI: Parent Reports

Parenting Style	Pre Camp Weight	Weight Change	Pre Camp BMI	BMI Change
Uninvolved	164(73)	8.09(6.37)	36.23(10.27)	1.59(0.85)
Permissive	197(123)	13.30(15.69)	43.83(11.83)	2.44(2.34)
Authoritarian	148(76)	7.68(9.70)	38.40(10.29)	1.66(1.60)
Authoritative	197(65)	15.67(9.32)	36.44(10.01)	2.78(1.44)

Note: ANCOVA results indicated no significant differences on post (last day) camp weight or BMI.

Conclusions and Implications

- ▶ Camp provides a unique opportunity to remove children from the immediate effects of parenting. Therefore, it is not surprising that weight and BMI changes were similar across the different styles.
 - ▶ Understanding the effects of parenting style on weight loss will assist in designing and implementing family-based prevention and intervention program that address issues of childhood obesity.
 - ▶ Further analysis will look at the effects of parenting style on sustained weight loss.
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