

Unfolding Relations among Mindful Parenting, Recurrent Conflict, and Adolescents' Externalizing and Internalizing Problems

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The current study examined unfolding relations among mothers' mindful parenting, parent-adolescent recurrent conflict, and adolescents' externalizing and internalizing problems. In a community sample of 117 families (31% black, Asian, American Indian, or Latino), parents and adolescents (52% female; average age = 12.13 years) were followed over 15 months. Parents answered questions about mindful parenting and recurrent conflict, and adolescents reported on their own externalizing and internalizing problems. Path analyses indicated that higher levels of mindful parenting were significantly related to lower levels of recurrent conflict 2–3 months later, controlling for previous levels of recurrent conflict. Moreover, lower levels of recurrent conflict were significantly related to lower levels of externalizing problems and internalizing problems 1 year later, controlling for previous levels of those problems. Subgroup analyses indicated that relations were comparable across subgroups defined by adolescent gender, race, parent marital status, and family financial strain. The effects of mindful parenting were robust even after accounting for other indicators of positive and supportive parenting, namely inductive reasoning and warmth in the parent-adolescent relationship. These findings highlight the potential of mindful parenting to improve family interactions and adolescent adjustment.

Keywords: mindful parenting; parent-adolescent conflict; adolescent externalizing and internalizing behaviors

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Mindfulness involves a purposeful attention to present moment thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations with an attitude of acceptance. Mindful parenting, which applies principles of interpersonal mindfulness to the domain of parenting, involves paying attention to present moment parent-child interactions in an open and nonjudgmental way (Kabat-Zinn, 2009).

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Initial research provides evidence of the positive effects of mindful parenting on parent–adolescent relationships and adolescent adjustment (Parent, McKee, Rough, & Forehand, 2016). However, exact mechanisms accounting for those relations are still unclear, including when the effects of mindful parenting are distinct from other aspects of positive and supportive parenting. The present study examines how mindful parenting may be uniquely related to lower levels of recurrent conflict between mothers and their early adolescents, which, in turn, may be related to lower levels of both adolescents' externalizing and internalizing problems.

Components of Mindful Parenting

Much research on parenting has emphasized the importance of factors such as inductive reasoning, appropriate behavioral expectations, psychological autonomy granting, and warmth on positive adolescent outcomes (Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Pinquart, 2017). Extending that research, mindful parenting focuses on listening with full attention, non-judgmental acceptance, emotional awareness, compassion, and self-regulation in the parenting role (Duncan, Coatsworth, & Greenberg, 2009).

Listening with full attention entails being completely present in the moment so parents hear what their adolescents (or younger children) actually say and so parents are more likely to accurately construe underlying meaning. Nonjudgmental acceptance involves acknowledgment of what is happening in the present moment, and an openness to the different thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that individual family members experience. Parents' emotional awareness comprises the ability to attend to and correctly identify their own and their adolescents' feelings during interactions, including conflicts. Compassion is an active projection of empathic concern, which helps parents cope with stress more effectively by making them less likely to ruminate on their own mistakes in parenting; compassion also helps parents relate to the particular challenges their adolescents face, respond with an attitude of loving-kindness, more appropriately meet their adolescents' needs, and soothe their adolescents' distress. Self-regulation in the parenting role involves parents' ability to be aware of their emotional reactions, inhibit automatic reactions, remain cognizant of long-term goals, and act accordingly.

Associations between Mindful Parenting and Recurrent Conflict

As children transition to adolescence, disagreements with parents change in tone and frequency (Smetana, Crean, & Campione-Barr, 2005). Being more mindful can help parents recognize adolescents' growing need for independence and respond to challenging interactions in the thoughtful manner parents aspire to (Duncan et al., 2009). Mindful parenting also may help reduce recurrent conflict because parents are more likely to recognize and disengage from negative interactions as they are occurring (Singh et al., 2010).

When parents are more mindful in their parenting, they are more likely to identify and intentionally enact potential solutions that more effectively meet both parents' and adolescents' needs (Duncan, Coatsworth, Gayles, Geier, & Greenberg, 2015). Being more mindful might be especially beneficial for parents who are facing stressful circumstances, such as structural racism and discrimination (Rivaux et al., 2008), being a single parent, or experiencing financial strain. Under higher levels of stress, parents are more likely to resort to automatic and negative patterns of interactions with their adolescents (Bögels, Lehtonen, & Restifo, 2010). Being more mindful might help such parents shift their attention to engage in self-soothing behaviors and restore parents' capacity to nurture their adolescents (Bögels, Hellemans, van Deursen, Römer, & van der Meulen, 2014; Dumas, 2005). When parents are more mindful, they may be more understanding and compassionate toward their adolescents during difficult conversations. This approach may help

adolescents to be less intransigent and more willing to negotiate, resulting in better family functioning (Bögels et al., 2014; Kabat-Zinn, 2009). Being more mindful also can help parents cultivate open communication with their adolescents, so that parents can monitor their adolescents more effectively, thus promoting more adaptive adolescent outcomes (Lippold, Duncan, Coatsworth, Nix, & Greenberg, 2015).

Associations between Recurrent Conflict and Adolescent Outcomes

Recurrent conflict between parents and adolescents has negative effects on both externalizing and internalizing problems. Negative interactions between parents and adolescents are reinforced and tend to escalate over time, establishing maladaptive social behaviors that can transfer to other relationships and settings (Carson & Parke, 1996; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). In white families, there tends to be more recurrent conflict between parents and adolescent girls (Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991), whereas in black families, there tends to be more conflict between parents and adolescent boys (Sagrestano, McCormick, Paikoff, & Holmbeck, 1999). Previous research also suggests that recurrent conflict has a stronger influence on the development of adolescent girls than boys (Lewis, Collishaw, Thapar, & Harold, 2014).

There are several reasons why parent–adolescent recurrent conflict may increase the likelihood of adolescents’ problems with others. If parents do not teach and model effective conflict resolution strategies, adolescents will be at a disadvantage in applying similar strategies in other relationships and contexts. For example, such adolescents may be more likely to behave aggressively and get into arguments with peers and teachers at school (Klahr, McGue, Iacono, & Burt, 2011). Furthermore, as conflict increases, parents and adolescents are more likely to become estranged, curtailing parents’ ability to help adolescents navigate normative challenges and avoid more serious problems with delinquent peers (Ingoldsby et al., 2006).

In addition to exacerbating externalizing problems, parent–adolescent recurrent conflict may increase internalizing problems. Conflict with parents can be a source of great stress for adolescents (Byrne, Davenport, & Mazanov, 2007). More family conflict can lead to more depression in adolescents (Sheeber, Hops, Alpert, Davis, & Andrews, 1997). Moreover, recurrent conflict with parents may make adolescents feel helpless and hopeless about the potential fulfillment of other relationships, thus increasing withdrawn behaviors (Ladd & Pettit, 2002).

The Present Study

Although research in mindful parenting is growing, there has been little longitudinal research examining relations among mindful parenting, parent–adolescent interactions, and adolescent outcomes. The present study helps fill that gap by examining whether mindful parenting sets in motion a developmental cascade leading to less recurrent conflict between parents and their early adolescents and, thereby, fewer externalizing and internalizing problems.

This study seeks to answer three research questions. First, is mindful parenting related to less parent–adolescent recurrent conflict and does less recurrent conflict predict fewer externalizing and internalizing problems? Second, are relations among mindful parenting, recurrent conflict, and adolescents’ externalizing and internalizing problems similar across different kinds of families, defined by adolescent gender, race, parent marital status, and family financial strain? Third, do the effects of mindful parenting hold in the presence of potential confounds representing other aspects of positive and supportive parenting?

METHOD

This study involved secondary analysis of data from the Mindfulness-Enhanced Strengthening Families Program (Coatsworth et al., 2015), which incorporated brief activities to foster mindful parenting within an evidence-based family support intervention, the Strengthening Families Program: 10–14 (Spoth, Redmond, & Shin, 1998). However, only the control group families which did not receive any intervention were included in this study. The Institutional Review Board approved all procedures, and parents and adolescents provided informed consent.

Participants

One hundred and seventeen mothers and their early adolescents participated in this study. Approximately 69% of families were white, 21% were black or multiracial, 5% were Asian, 4% were Latino, and 1% was American Indian. Approximately 74% of families included two parents. Approximately 6% of mothers did not complete high school; 22% graduated from high school or received their general education diploma; 32% attended some college or technical training; and 40% graduated from college. Median annual family income was \$55,732. Approximately 57% of mothers were employed full-time, and 25% were employed part-time.

In those families, 52% of adolescents were girls and 48% were boys. On average, adolescents were 12.13 years old (standard deviation [*SD*] = 0.67) at the beginning of this study. Approximately 69% of adolescents were in 6th grade, and 31% were in 7th grade.

Family Recruitment and Condition Assignment

All families of 6th- and 7th-grade students in four school districts in rural and urban areas of central Pennsylvania were invited to participate in this study; there were no exclusion criteria. In-person presentations about the project were conducted in classes, and project staff members attended open houses and other school events to meet with families. The study was described as focusing on changing family relationships during the transition to adolescence; all families were told about the assessments and the possibility of participating in intervention activities.

When parents indicated they were interested in the study, an assessment was completed as soon as possible. Families then were randomly assigned to study condition.

Assessment Procedures

Assessments included paper and pencil measures that were mailed to parents and adolescents to complete on their own. Assessments also included computer-assisted surveys that were completed as part of in-home interviews.

The Time 1 assessment took place before any families received any intervention. The Time 2 assessment occurred 2–3 months after the Time 1 assessment, corresponding to the end of the intervention within the larger project. The Time 3 assessment occurred approximately 1 year after the Time 2 assessment. Families received incentives of \$75, \$100, and \$125 to complete the assessments at Times 1, 2, and 3, respectively.

Measures

For this study, the measure of mindful parenting was collected at Time 1. The measures of potential moderating variables and potential confounds were also collected at Time 1. The measure of recurrent conflict was collected at Times 1 and 2. The measures of adolescents' externalizing and internalizing problems were collected at Times 2 and 3.

Mindful parenting

Mothers reported on their mindful parenting, which was assessed with 31 items tapping all five dimensions of the mindful parenting conceptual model (Duncan et al., 2009). A sample item of listening with full attention was, "I pay close attention to my child when we are spending time together." A sample item of nonjudgmental acceptance was, "I listen carefully to my child's ideas, even when I disagree with them." A sample item of emotional awareness was, "I can tell what my child is feeling even if she/he does not say anything." A sample item of compassion was, "When my child is going through a difficult time, I try to give her/him the nurturing and caring she/he needs." Finally, a sample item of self-regulation in parenting was, "When my child does something that upsets me, I try to keep my emotions in balance." All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale with response options ranging from 0 = never true to 4 = always true ($\alpha = .91$). Numerous studies have established the construct validity, ecological validity, and reliability of this measure of mindful parenting (Coatsworth, Duncan, Greenberg, & Nix, 2010; Coatsworth et al., 2015; de Bruin et al., 2014; Duncan et al., 2015; Lippold et al., 2015).

Recurrent conflict

Mothers reported on recurrent conflict, which was assessed with 2 items created for the original evaluation of the Strengthening Families Program: 10–14 (Spoth et al., 1998). These items were, "How often do the same problems between you and your child come up again and again and never seem to get solved?" and "When you and your child have a problem, how often can the two of you figure out how to deal with it?" (reverse coded). Both items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale with response options ranging from 0 = never to 4 = always ($\alpha = .52$). This measure of recurrent conflict is best considered formative, like SES, in which items define or tally the underlying construct rather than reflect it (Borsboom, Mellenbergh, & Van Heerden, 2003), and therefore have lower interitem relations.

Adolescent outcomes

Adolescents reported on their own externalizing problems, which were assessed with the 17-item aggressive behavior syndrome and 15-item rule-breaking behavior syndrome of the *Youth Self Report for Ages 11–18* (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). Sample items were, "I get in many fights" and "I steal from places other than home." All items were rated on a 3-point Likert scale with response options ranging from 0 = not true to 2 = very true or often true ($\alpha = .91$). Previous research has established the construct and concurrent validity of the *Youth Self Report* (Ebesutani, Bernstein, Martinez, Chorpita, & Weisz, 2011).

Adolescents also reported on their internalizing problems, which were assessed with the 13-item anxious/depressed syndrome and 8-item withdrawn/depressed syndrome of the *Youth Self Report for Ages 11–18* (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). Sample items were, "There is very little that I enjoy" and "I am afraid of going to school." All items were rated on a 3-point Likert scale with response options ranging from 0 = not true to 2 = very true or often true ($\alpha = .91$). Previous research also has established the validity of this subscale (Stanger & Lewis, 1993).

Potential moderators

To determine whether relations among variables were similar across the sample, four potential moderators were included in this study. Gender was based on how adolescents self-identified. Race represented whether adolescents considered themselves to be white or a person of color. Parent marital status reflected whether mothers were single versus married to or cohabitating with someone. Family financial strain was reported by mothers

and indicated whether families had experienced some, quite a bit, or a great deal of difficulty paying bills during the previous year versus a little or no difficulty paying bills.

Potential confounds

To test whether the effects of mindful parenting were distinct from—or due to—shared variance with potential confounds, inductive reasoning and warmth in the parent–adolescent relationship were included in this study. These constructs are emblematic of positive and supportive parenting and are related to a wide range of positive adolescent outcomes (Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Pinquart, 2017).

Mothers reported their use of inductive reasoning, which was assessed with four items from the original evaluation of the Strengthening Families Program: 10–14 (Spoth et al., 1998). Sample items were, “How often do you ask this child what she/he thinks before making decisions that affect her/him?” and “How often do you ask this child to consider how others will feel if she/he misbehaves?” All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale with response options ranging from 0 = never to 4 = always ($\alpha = .73$).

Mothers also reported on warmth in the parent–adolescent relationship, which was assessed with four items from the original evaluation of the Strengthening Families Program: 10–14 (Spoth et al., 1998). Sample items were, “During the past month, when you and this child have spent time talking or doing things together, how often did you let this child know you really care about her/him?” and “During the past month, when you and this child have spent time talking or doing things together, how often did you help this child do something that was important to her/him?” All items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale with response options ranging from 0 = never to 6 = always ($\alpha = .91$).

Data Analysis

Data analyses for this study proceeded in three stages. First, to test mediation, an autoregressive path model (Maxwell & Cole, 2007) was estimated in which mindful parenting and recurrent conflict at Time 1 predicted recurrent conflict at Time 2; recurrent conflict and externalizing problems at Time 2 predicted externalizing problems at Time 3; and recurrent conflict and internalizing problems at Time 2 predicted internalizing problems at Time 3. (As standard in tests of mediation, this model also included direct paths between mindful parenting at Time 1 and externalizing and internalizing problems at Time 3, as well as correlations among all exogenous variables.) Joint tests of significance were used to estimate the indirect effect of mindful parenting on externalizing and internalizing problems that operated through recurrent conflict (Preacher & Kelley, 2011). The path model was estimated within the latent variable analysis project of R and used full-information maximum-likelihood procedures with robust standard errors to include all families and minimize bias due to missing data (Schafer & Graham, 2002). Following best practices, multiple indicators of model fit are reported, including χ^2 , which should be non-significant or low in relation to degrees of freedom (*df*); the standardized root mean-squared residual (SRMR), which should be close to 0.08 or lower; and the comparative fit index (CFI), which should be close to 0.95 or higher (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Parameter estimates were interpreted according to Cohen’s effect sizes, such that a standardized estimate of 0.10 is considered small in magnitude, 0.30 is moderate, and 0.50 is large (Cohen, 1988); these values have been validated empirically and correspond to the lower, middle, and upper one-thirds, respectively, of the distribution of relations reported in meta-analyses (Hemphill, 2003).

Second, multigroup moderation analysis was used to test whether relations between mindful parenting at Time 1 and recurrent conflict at Time 2, recurrent conflict at Time 2 and adolescents’ externalizing problems at Time 3, and recurrent conflict at Time 2 and

adolescents' internalizing problems at Time 3 were similar across subgroups of families, defined by adolescent gender, race, parent marital status, and family financial strain. For each potential moderator, one path model was estimated in which those three relations were allowed to vary across subgroups, and another path model was estimated in which those three relations were constrained to be equal across subgroups. Scaled chi-square difference tests—again derived from maximum-likelihood estimates with robust standard errors—were used to determine superior model fit.

Third, to control for potential confounds and assess the unique effect of mindful parenting, inductive reasoning and warmth in the parent–adolescent relationship were added to the path model. Like mindful parenting, inductive reasoning and warmth in the parent–adolescent relationship at Time 1 each predicted recurrent conflict at Time 2. (This expanded model also included direct paths between inductive reasoning and warmth in the parent–adolescent relationship at Time 1 and externalizing and internalizing problems at Time 3, as well as correlations among all exogenous variables.)

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics including the means, standard deviations, and observed range of scores for all study variables are presented in Table 1. Correlations among study variables are presented in Table 2. Data were missing for 20 families (17% of the sample) at Time 1, 30 families (26% of the sample) at Time 2, and 32 families (27% of the sample) at Time 3. There were no statistically significant differences between families with and without complete data on any of the variables included in this study.

Mediation Analysis

Results of the path model estimated in the first stage of data analysis are depicted in Figure 1. This model represented an acceptable fit to the data with $\chi^2 = 17.20$ (6), $p = .01$; SRMR = .09; and CFI = .96. Mindful parenting at Time 1 predicted lower levels of

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Range</i>
Time 1				
Mindful parenting	107	2.53	0.44	1.50–3.92
Recurrent conflict	106	1.42	0.72	0.00–3.00
Time 2				
Recurrent conflict	90	1.36	0.72	0.00–3.00
Externalizing problems	96	0.18	0.19	0.00–0.88
Internalizing problems	96	0.24	0.24	0.00–1.00
Time 3				
Externalizing problems	85	0.20	0.23	0.00–1.16
Internalizing problems	85	0.29	0.32	0.00–1.24
Potential moderators				
Adolescent gender	117	0.48	0.50	0.00–1.00
Adolescent race	111	0.74	0.44	0.00–1.00
Parent marital status	117	0.26	0.44	0.00–1.00
Family financial strain	111	0.58	0.50	0.00–1.00
Potential confounds				
Inductive reasoning	106	2.97	0.58	1.50–4.00
Warmth in relationship	108	4.84	0.91	2.50–6.00

TABLE 2
Correlations Among Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Time 1												
1. Mindful parenting												
2. Recurrent conflict	-0.42											
Time 2												
3. Recurrent conflict	-0.49	0.62										
4. Externalizing problems	-0.18	0.13	0.21									
5. Internalizing problems	-0.12	0.05	0.10	0.73								
Time 3												
6. Externalizing problems	-0.08	0.00	0.23	0.28	0.06							
7. Internalizing problems	-0.08	0.04	0.19	0.26	0.22	0.77						
Potential moderators												
8. Adolescent gender	-0.12	0.15	0.13	-0.02	-0.16	0.00	-0.10					
9. Adolescent race	-0.14	0.10	0.05	0.39	0.39	-0.12	-0.13	-0.04				
10. Parent marital status	-0.13	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.12	-0.15			
11. Financial strain	-0.07	0.07	-0.01	-0.03	-0.06	0.08	0.05	0.06	0.12	0.12		
Potential confounds												
12. Inductive reasoning	0.53	-0.35	-0.35	-0.11	-0.12	-0.01	0.07	-0.16	-0.01	-0.15	0.06	
13. Warmth	0.47	-0.36	-0.41	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.05	-0.08	-0.04	0.03	-0.07	0.43

Note. All correlations with an absolute value greater than or equal to 0.23 are statistically significant, $p < .05$. In addition, the correlation between Time 2 recurrent conflict and Time 2 externalizing problems is statistically significant, $p < .05$.

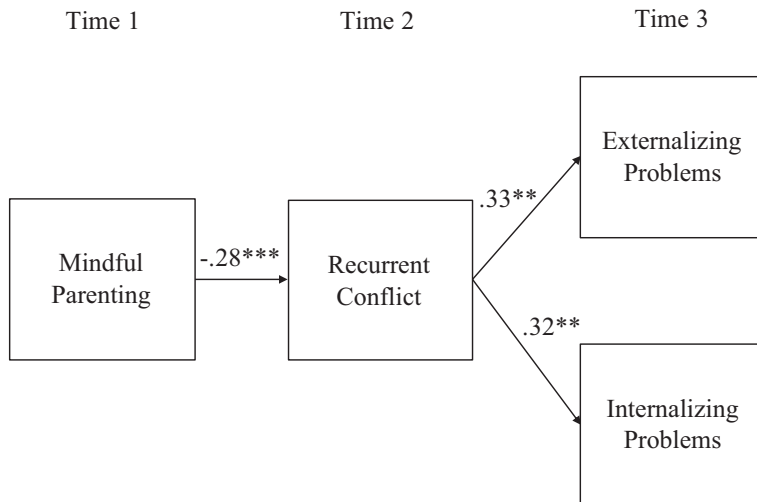


FIGURE 1. Relations among mindful parenting, recurrent conflict, and adolescents' externalizing and internalizing problems. Notes. $^{***}p = .001$, $^{**}p = .01$. Although not depicted, recurrent conflict at Time 1 also predicted recurrent conflict at Time 2; externalizing problems at Time 2 predicted externalizing problems at Time 3; and internalizing problems at Time 2 predicted internalizing problems at Time 3. In addition, the path model included direct paths between mindful parenting at Time 1 and externalizing and internalizing problems at Time 3, neither of which were statistically significant, as well as correlations among all exogenous variables.

recurrent conflict at Time 2, controlling for levels of recurrent conflict at Time 1. The standardized path coefficient of this relation, $\beta = -.28$, $p = .001$, 95% confidence interval [CI; $-0.44, -0.12$], would be considered moderate in magnitude. The path model also revealed that recurrent conflict at Time 2 predicted adolescents' externalizing problems at Time 3, $\beta = .33$, $p = .01$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.57], controlling for the effects of externalizing problems at Time 2. Similarly, recurrent conflict at Time 2 predicted adolescents' internalizing problems at Time 3, $\beta = .32$, $p = .01$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.56], controlling for the effects of internalizing problems at Time 2. These relations also would be considered moderate in magnitude. (The direct paths between mindful parenting at Time 1 and adolescents' externalizing and internalizing problems at Time 3 were not statistically significant.)

Joint tests of significance showed that mindful parenting at Time 1 had a significant indirect effect on adolescents' externalizing problems at Time 3 through recurrent conflict at Time 2, $\beta = -.09$, $p = .04$, 95% CI $[-0.17, -0.01]$. These tests also showed that mindful parenting at Time 1 had a significant indirect effect on adolescents' internalizing problems at Time 3 through recurrent conflict at Time 2, $\beta = -.09$, $p = .04$, 95% CI $[-0.17, -0.01]$.

Moderation Analysis

Results of the chi-square difference tests computed in the second stage of analyses revealed that primary relations in that path model were comparable across different kinds of families. There was not a statistically significant difference between the two models in which parameter estimates between mindful parenting at Time 1 and recurrent conflict at Time 2, recurrent conflict at Time 2 and adolescents' externalizing problems at Time 3, and recurrent conflict at Time 2 and adolescents' internalizing problems at Time 3 were allowed to vary or were constrained to be equal across adolescent gender, $\chi^2(3) = 0.44$, $p = .93$. This indicates that those three primary relations among mindful parenting, recurrent conflict, and adolescents' externalizing and internalizing problems were similar for

families with girls and families with boys. Likewise, there was not a statistically significant difference between models in which those three relations were allowed to vary or were constrained to be equal across subgroups defined by race, $\chi^2(3) = 3.00, p = .39$; parent marital status, $\chi^2(3) = 0.59, p = .90$; or the presence of family financial strain, $\chi^2(3) = 2.79, p = .42$.

Control for Potential Confounds

As shown in Table 2, mindful parenting at Time 1 was significantly related to inductive reasoning and warmth in the parent–adolescent relationship at Time 1, $r = .53, p = .001$, and $r = .47, p = .001$, respectively. Inductive reasoning and warmth in the parent–adolescent relationship at Time 1 were also significantly related to recurrent conflict at Time 2, $r = -.35, p = .001$, and $r = -.41, p = .001$, respectively. This pattern of shared variance among constructs indicates that inductive reasoning and warmth in the parent–adolescent relationship could be potential confounds of the relation between mindful parenting and recurrent conflict.

Results of the expanded path model estimated in the third stage of data analysis are depicted in Figure 2. When inductive reasoning and warmth in the parent–adolescent relationship were included, model fit was still acceptable with $\chi^2 = 19.28(6), p = .004$; SRMR = .07; and CFI = .97. Moreover, the effect of mindful parenting at Time 1 on recurrent conflict at Time 2 was still significant, $\beta = -.25, p = .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.43, -0.07]$, indicating that the relation between mindful parenting and recurrent conflict was unique and not due to more positive and supportive parenting practices in general. Interestingly,

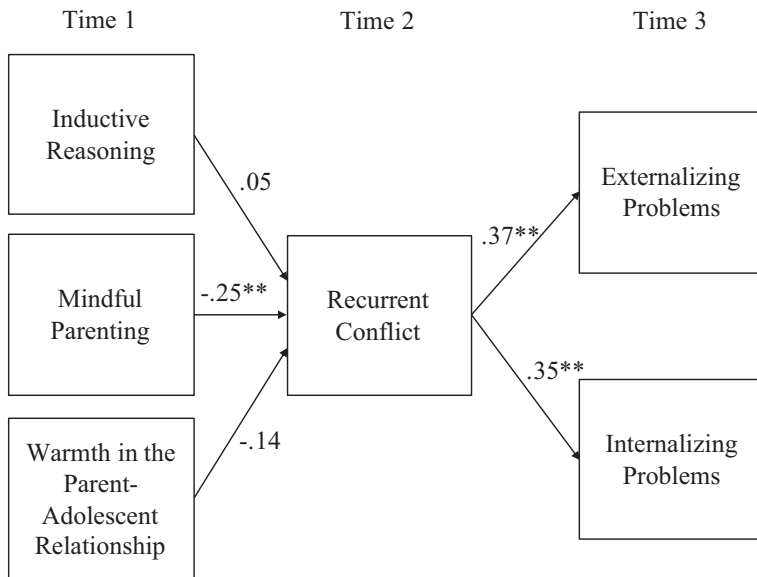


FIGURE 2. Relations among mindful parenting, recurrent conflict, and adolescents’ externalizing and internalizing problems, controlling for the effects of inductive reasoning and warmth in the parent–adolescent relationship. Notes. ** $p = .01$. Although not depicted, recurrent conflict at Time 1 also predicted recurrent conflict at Time 2; externalizing problems at Time 2 predicted externalizing problems at Time 3; and internalizing problems at Time 2 predicted internalizing problems at Time 3. In addition, the path model included direct paths between inductive reasoning, mindful parenting, and warmth in the parent–adolescent relationship at Time 1 and externalizing and internalizing problems at Time 3, none of which were statistically significant, as well as correlations among all exogenous variables.

neither inductive reasoning nor warmth in the parent–adolescent relationship at Time 1 was significantly related to recurrent conflict at Time 2. In this expanded model, the effect of recurrent conflict at Time 2 on adolescents' externalizing problems at Time 3 was $\beta = .37, p = .002, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.15, 0.59]$; the effect of recurrent conflict at Time 2 on adolescents' internalizing problems at Time 3 was $\beta = .35, p = .004, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.11, 0.59]$. (The direct paths between mindful parenting, inductive reasoning, and warmth in the parent–adolescent relationship at Time 1 and adolescents' externalizing and internalizing problems at Time 3 were not statistically significant.)

Joint tests of significance in this expanded path model indicated that mindful parenting still had an indirect effect on adolescents' externalizing problems through recurrent conflict, $\beta = -.09, p = .04, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.18, -0.01]$. Mindful parenting also had an indirect effect on adolescents' internalizing problems through recurrent conflict, $\beta = -.09, p = .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.18, -0.002]$.

DISCUSSION

This study examined unfolding relations among mothers' mindful parenting, recurrent conflict between mothers and adolescents, and adolescents' externalizing and internalizing problems. When mothers reported they were more mindful in their interactions with their adolescents, there was less recurrent conflict between mothers and adolescents 2–3 months later. In addition, when there was less recurrent conflict, adolescents reported fewer externalizing and internalizing problems the following year. As such, greater mindful parenting may help prevent dysfunctional interactions in families and thereby enhance adolescent well-being.

Mindful Parenting and Recurrent Conflict

This study demonstrated that mindful parenting is related to lower levels of recurrent conflict between mothers and adolescents even when controlling for initial levels of recurrent conflict. With each standard deviation increase in mindful parenting, there was a little more than a one-quarter standard deviation decrease in recurrent conflict. Given that stress of family life, as typified by recurrent conflict, is the most commonly reported source of stress among adolescents (Byrne et al., 2007), it is important to understand how mindful parenting can reduce recurrent conflict.

Being more mindful may help reduce the stress parents experience as their children become adolescents and levels of conflict increase. Prior research has demonstrated that, when parents participated in mindfulness training, they reported reductions in stress (Bögels et al., 2014) and greater skill in managing cognitive demands and regulating emotions (Jha, Stanley, Kiyonaga, Wong, & Gelfand, 2010). Being more mindful may help parents be more accepting of adolescents' challenging but normative attempts to establish autonomy. If parents can pause before they react to provocations, they may be more likely to act in accordance with their long-term parenting goals and avert recurrent conflict.

Mindful parenting also may enhance the quality of communication between parents and adolescents, leading to more successful conflict resolution. Listening with full attention is one way in which parents can foster higher-quality communication and better understand what their adolescents are going through. Higher-quality communication becomes especially important during the transition to adolescence when parents come to rely more on adolescent disclosure than physical presence to effectively monitor and guide behavior (Stattin & Kerr, 2000). That higher-quality communication might allow parents to work with their adolescents to identify solutions to problems that simultaneously address parents' concerns for safety and meet adolescents' needs for autonomy. When

parents are aware of their adolescents' emotions and are more compassionate, adolescents may be more open to the parents' suggestions, thus further decreasing the chances of recurrent conflict.

In prior research, higher levels of mindful parenting were related to higher levels of marital satisfaction, lower levels of depression, and more optimal parenting behaviors (Parent et al., 2010, 2014). Those studies elucidate the processes by which mindful parenting might affect family dynamics. This study adds to our understanding of those processes.

Recurrent Conflict and Externalizing and Internalizing Problems

This study found that parent–adolescent recurrent conflict was related to adolescents' externalizing and internalizing problems. In particular, this study demonstrated that when parents reported lower levels of recurrent conflict, their adolescents reported lower levels of externalizing and internalizing problems the following year, controlling for initial levels of those problems. The findings of this study are consistent with prior research showing that recurrent conflict is characterized by cycles of negative exchanges that reinforce adolescents' externalizing problems (Patterson et al., 1992). The findings of this study are also consistent with prior research showing that persistent unresolved conflict involving criticism and anger may increase anxiety or depression in adolescents (Marmorstein & Iacono, 2004).

Intervention studies demonstrate how training in mindfulness can disrupt those cycles of negativity associated with children's and adolescents' externalizing problems (Bögels, Hoogstad, van Dun, de Schutter, & Restifo, 2008; Singh et al., 2010). Mindful parenting, particularly nonjudgmental acceptance, also appears to be related to lower levels of internalizing problems among adolescents (Geurtzen, Scholte, Engels, Tak, & van Zundert, 2015). When parents and adolescents have learned mindfulness-based cognitive therapy practices, parents appear to experience less stress themselves, and adolescents exhibit fewer externalizing as well as internalizing problems (Haydicky, Shecter, Wiener, & Ducharme, 2015). This study suggests that recurrent conflict also might be implicated in such changes.

Robustness of the Positive Effect of Mindful Parenting

This study demonstrated that the positive effect of mindful parenting appears to apply across diverse kinds of families. Even though the nature of recurrent conflict in parent–adolescent dyads differs across adolescent gender and race (Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Sagrestano et al., 1999), the *relation between* mindful parenting and recurrent conflict was similar regardless of gender or race. The relation between mindful parenting and recurrent conflict also was comparable in families with one or two parents and in families that were or were not experiencing financial strain. Even when mean levels of mindful parenting and recurrent conflict vary across families, the strength of the relation between mindful parenting and recurrent conflict appears stable.

Importantly, this study also demonstrated that the positive effect of mindful parenting was evident even when other measures of positive and supportive parenting were accounted for. In almost all previous studies, it was not possible to determine whether the presumed positive effect of mindful parenting was a proxy for other aspects of positive and supportive parenting more broadly. This study showed that, among the three correlated indicators of positive and supportive parenting, it was mindful parenting—and not inductive reasoning or warmth in the parent–adolescent relationship—that was uniquely predictive of recurrent conflict and that had an indirect effect on adolescent's externalizing and internalizing problems more than 1 year later. In other words, it did not appear that

mindful parenting was redundant with inductive reasoning and warmth in the parent–adolescent relationship, but vice versa. Being more mindful may help parents use more inductive reasoning and be warmer in their interactions with their adolescents. As such, this study helps establish the empirical base for the distinctive contributions of mindful parenting to healthy family functioning.

Strengths and Limitations

In examining relations among mindful parenting, recurrent conflict, and adolescents' externalizing and internalizing problems, this study has several strengths. To reduce problems associated with common informant bias, this study relied on mothers as the most reliable informants of their own mindful parenting and adolescents as the most reliable informants of their own externalizing and internalizing problems. This study relied on a longitudinal design whereby the assessment of mindful parenting, the purported predictor, occurred before the assessment of recurrent conflict, the purported mediator, which occurred before the assessment of adolescents' externalizing and internalizing problems, the purported distal outcomes. Not only was temporal precedence established, but also prior levels of recurrent conflict and adolescents' externalizing and internalizing problems were controlled. In addition, this study was one of the first to assess the effects of mindful parenting in the presence of other indicators of positive and supportive parenting.

Despite those strengths, this study also has several limitations. First, the sample size of 117 families is relatively small. Confidence in these findings will be enhanced once replicated with more families. Second, there is no way to know how representative the families in this study were of the low- to middle-income communities from which they were recruited. For the most part, families appeared to exhibit low rates of recurrent conflict and normative values of adolescents' externalizing and internalizing problems. The relations among mindful parenting, recurrent conflict, and adolescents' externalizing and internalizing problems were moderate in size and typical of most empirical studies (Hemphill, 2003), but it is unclear whether relations would be larger or smaller in families with clinical-level problems. Third, there were only two items measuring recurrent conflict, and both were reported by mothers. Although those two items have high face validity and high stability ($r = .62, p < .001$, from Time 1 to Time 2; see Table 2)—and although it was not clear how to ask parents without being redundant whether they and their adolescents kept arguing about the same issues—it would have been preferable to have had a richer assessment of recurrent conflict. Fourth, although the longitudinal design of this study allowed temporal precedence to be established, the timing of the assessments did not correspond to any particular developmental theory of change, but rather were planned for the evaluation of the intervention included in the larger research project. Finally, this study only included mothers. Although the Mindfulness-Enhanced Strengthening Families Project also included fathers, there were only 61 fathers in the control group, and the relation between mindful parenting and recurrent conflict for those fathers was relatively small in magnitude and not statistically significant, $\beta = -.12, p = .31, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.34, 0.11]$. In prior research, fathers have displayed lower mean levels of mindful parenting than mothers (Parent et al., 2016), but relations between mindful parenting and parent–child interactions were comparable (Medeiros, Gouveia, Canavarro, & Moreira, 2016) or even stronger for fathers than mothers (McKee, Parent, Zachary, & Forehand, 2017).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

As always, additional research is needed to address limitations and further explore the potential implications of this study. In particular, additional research is needed to examine the impact of mindful parenting in families seeking counseling due to more serious

problems. Additional research also is needed to examine fathers' mindful parenting. Additional research must continue to establish the validity of mindful parenting, both by controlling for additional aspects of positive and supportive parenting and by developing additional non-self-report measures of the construct. Intervention studies could help delineate exactly how mindful parenting improves parent-adolescent communication and reduces recurrent conflict. New intervention studies that teach mindfulness practices to both parents and adolescents could reveal possible synergistic effects on recurrent conflict.

This study has helped to lay the groundwork for that additional research by inching forward our understanding of the unique contribution of mindful parenting. Extending prior research on the mechanisms of action, the current study demonstrates how, when mothers engage in mindful parenting, they are less likely to experience recurrent conflict with their adolescents, which, in turn, may help promote positive adolescent adjustment.

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