

Domestic Violence, Emotion Coaching, and Child Adjustment

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This article addresses the question of whether parents in domestically violent homes have difficulty talking to and helping their children manage their emotions—what has been referred to as emotion coaching. Emotion coaching as a moderator in the relationship between domestic violence (DV) and children's behavior problems was also examined. Results indicated that DV was not associated with a general deficit in emotion coaching but that DV was associated with less coaching of anger and fear depending on whether the parent was the perpetrator or victim of DV. Emotion coaching also moderated the relationship between DV and children's behavior problems. Implications for the development of an intervention program to improve parental coaching of emotion in domestically violent homes is discussed.

Keywords: domestic violence, parenting, child adjustment

Children from domestically violent homes show a variety of mental health problems. They are at increased risk for difficulties with anxiety (Christopolous et al., 1987; Hughes, 1988), depression (Spaccarelli, Sandler, & Roosa, 1994; Sternberg et al., 1993), self-esteem (Hughes, 1988), and externalizing problems (for a review, see Jouriles, Norwood, McDonald, & Peters, 2001).

There is also increasing evidence that children in domestically violent homes have difficulty in the area of emotional expression and regulation. Graham-Bermann and Leven-dosky (1998) reported that emotional expression in children of battered women was significantly more negative and dysphoric than in a comparison group. Children of battered women had higher rates of sadness, depression, worry, anger, and frustration than their peers. Their ability to regulate emotion was also less well developed. They were less likely to show appropriate emotions to events and more likely to express their negative feelings. Difficulties in affect regulation are also reported by Lee (2001), who found that DV was associated with children's reported experience of negative emotions.

However, we know little about the processes within DV families that may support or undermine children's ability to regulate emotion. Theoretical discussions of factors relating to children's emotion regulation skills support the idea that

children learn how to regulate emotion within the course of parent-child interactions (Cole & Kaslow, 1988; Eisenberg, Fabes, & Murphy, 1996; Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996; Thompson, 1990, 1991). Parent-child interactions may reflect an ongoing process of teaching children how to maintain, alter, and modulate their emotional experiences and expression. Such teaching may occur through modeling of affective expression and regulation, direct coaching in how to recognize and cope with emotion and the situations that give rise to them, and/or reinforcement of emotional displays.

Empirical findings also support these theoretical notions that children learn to regulate negative emotions through parents' responses to their affective displays. Eisenberg et al. (1996) found that children whose mothers responded to negative affect with minimizing or punitive reactions were more likely to use avoidant strategies of coping with negative affect and were less likely to use constructive strategies. In studies of adolescent depression, adolescent's ability to transition out of depressive affective states (an index of emotion regulation) was influenced by family interaction patterns. When mothers reinforced their adolescent's depressive states by displays of facilitative behavior, adolescents exhibited depressive affect for longer periods of time (Sheeber, Allen, Davis, & Sorensen, 2000).

There is evidence that parent's awareness of their own and their children's emotions, and their ability to coach children during emotionally upsetting moments are related to children's emotion regulation abilities and positive child adjustment. Parental awareness and coaching of emotion has been central to work by Gottman, Katz, and Hooven (1997), who found that parents have an organized set of feelings and thoughts about their own emotions and their children's emotions. In what they termed *parental meta-emotion philosophy*, they found that some parents have a meta-emotion philosophy that is high in awareness and coaching of emotion. These parents are aware of low intensity emotions in themselves and in their children, view the

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child's negative emotion as an opportunity for intimacy or teaching, validate and label their child's emotion, and problem-solve with the child by discussing goals and strategies for dealing with the situation that led to the emotion. Other parents have a meta-emotion philosophy that is low in awareness and coaching of emotion. These parents deny or ignore emotion, view their job as needing to change these toxic negative emotions as quickly as possible, convey to their children that emotions are not very important, and hope that the dismissing strategy will make the emotion go away quickly.

Parental meta-emotion philosophy had broad implications for the emotional well-being of family members and family subsystems (Gottman et al., 1997). Parents' thoughts and attitudes about emotion were related to marital satisfaction, marital stability, the quality of marital interaction, and parents' cognitions about the marital system. Parental meta-emotion was also strongly related to parenting during a laboratory teaching interaction and to the child's autonomic regulatory physiology (vagal tone and the suppression of vagal tone) when they were 5 years old. Vagal tone is an index of parasympathetic nervous system functioning and has been associated with the ability to focus attentional processes and regulate emotion (Porges, 1995). Children whose parents were high in emotion coaching and used scaffolding-praising methods of teaching had higher vagal tone and greater ability to suppress vagal tone when engaging in tasks that demand impulse control and mental effort. This regulatory physiology was a strong index of the ability to self-soothe when upset and to inhibit impulsive behavior. Regulatory physiology at age 5 predicted the children's ability to down-regulate their own negative affect at age 8, and both abilities, in turn, predicted a host of child outcomes, including the child's greater ability to inhibit automatic responses, enhanced peer social competence, lower levels of child behavior problems, greater emotional regulatory ability, higher levels of academic achievement, and better physical health. Hence, the concept of meta-emotion provided a central theoretical link between marital, parent-child, and child-peer systems.

How parents talk to their children about emotion may be particularly important in domestically violent homes, where children are exposed to hostile and threatening interactions that can be highly emotionally arousing. Although studies of parenting suggest that DV is associated with increased parenting stress levels (Holden & Ritchie, 1991; Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 1998), lower levels of parental warmth and nurturance (McCloskey, Figueredo, & Koss, 1995), lower parenting effectiveness (Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001), and higher rates of parent-child aggression (Jouriles & Norwood, 1995; O'Keefe, 1995), there is little research on how parents in domestically violent homes talk to their children about feelings and how they teach them to regulate emotion. Parental meta-emotion philosophy has been found to buffer children from the negative effects of marital distress (Katz & Gottman, 1997), but we do not know if it operates similarly in families experiencing DV. If parents in DV families do not coach their children when emotions occur, children may have particular difficulty regulating negative affect (Katz, 2000).

In this article, we examine DV parents' thoughts and feelings about talking to their children about emotion. Parental coaching, rather than parental awareness of emotion, was examined as our key indicator of parental meta-emotion philosophy for two reasons. First, from a theoretical perspective, awareness of emotion is a precondition for emotion coaching because it would be difficult to coach emotion without being aware of emotion. Thus, the notion of emotion coaching presupposes the awareness of emotion. Second, previous studies have indicated that emotion coaching, rather than emotional awareness, is the more proximal variable that relates directly to parenting and child emotion regulation (Gottman et al. 1996, 1997).

Three main questions were addressed. First, we examined the relationship between DV and parental coaching of emotion. Because parents experiencing DV may experience high levels of negative affect and have difficulty regulating their own emotions (Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001), they may either be too distressed to help their child or they may not have the necessary emotion regulation skills to impart to their child through coaching. We hypothesized that DV may be associated with a general difficulty in emotion coaching that is present across a variety of emotions. Second, we examined whether parents have difficulty helping their child with specific emotions depending on whether they are the perpetrator or victim of abuse. For example, it may be that victims of abuse are less likely to coach children's fear because they live in a threatening environment that generates a continuous state of fear and so they struggle with managing their own fear. Similarly, it may be that perpetrators of violence are less likely to coach children's anger because they have difficulty containing and managing their own anger. To test this hypothesis, we examined relations between coaching of specific emotions and perpetrator-victim status.

Finally, we examined whether emotion coaching moderates the relationship between DV and children's adjustment (see Figure 1). If parents in DV families are able to help their children manage their emotions, children may show better emotion regulation abilities and fewer behavior problems (Katz, 2000). Emotion coaching after witnessing DV may help children calm down and learn to understand the feelings that were generated by the violence. Coaching may also help children feel supported and reassure them that their parents are still available to them despite the heightened family conflict. We predicted that for those children whose parents are poor emotion coaches, there would be a strong relationship between DV and child behavior problems, whereas for children whose parents are good emotion coaches, the association between DV and children's behavior problems would be weak or nonexistent. To test this hypothesis, we computed moderation analyses with Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach.

One notable issue was addressed within these hypotheses. Given the relative absence of information on parenting in fathers in domestically violent homes, emotion coaching was examined in both mothers and fathers.

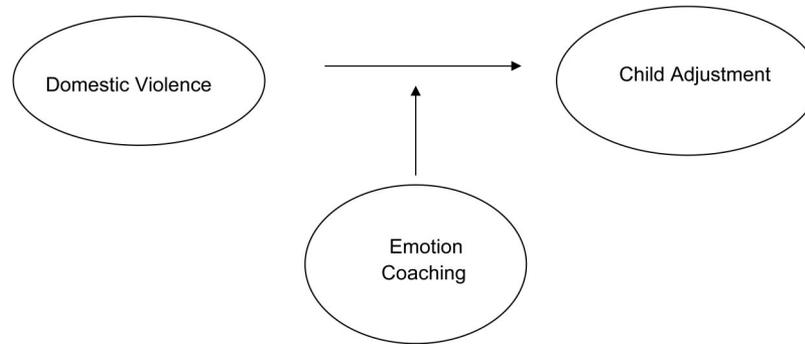


Figure 1. Conceptual model of emotion coaching as a moderator of relations between domestic violence and child adjustment.

Method

Participants

Participants were part of a large-scale study of family factors related to aggressive behavior in preschool-aged children. One hundred and thirty families with a preschool-aged child were recruited through preschools, newspaper announcements, and offices of pediatricians and pediatric dentists. Recruitment brochures and advertisements targeted families who were married and had a 4–5-year-old child for participation. Families were offered \$150 for their time. One child was selected at random in those rare instances when there was more than one child within the appropriate age range. Children were on average 60.5 months old (range = 49–71). The predominant ethnic identification was European-American (88.5%), and the remainder of the sample was Hispanic (6.2%), African American (3.8%), and Native American (1.5%). Sixty-two percent of the sample were men ($N = 81$); 38% were women ($N = 49$). All couples were married at the time of the study and had been married on average 8.45 years ($SD = 3.33$; range = 1–20 years). In all except 5 families, both mother and father were the biological parents of the target child. For these remarried families, the step-parent had been living in the home at least 2 years.

Procedures

Procedures consisted of meta-emotion interviews with both mothers and fathers as well as self-report measures of DV, marital satisfaction, children's behavior problems, and family income. Meta-emotion interviews were completed in a laboratory session, and self-report measures were completed at home.

Measures

DV. The Physical Violence subscale of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979) was used to measure the amount of physical aggression between spouses. The CTS is the most widely used measure of physical aggression between spouses, and the Physical Violence subscale has adequate reliability (as reported by Straus (1979) range from .82–.88) and adequate construct validity (Straus, 1979). Both parents reported the frequency of their own aggressive acts over the past 12 months with the CTS. Items that measure physical aggression include (a) threw something that hit the other one; (b) pushed, grabbed or shoved the other one; (c) kicked, bit, or hit with a fist; and (d) threatened partner with a knife or gun. As would be expected from a community-based sample,

severity of violence was low. None of the families endorsed any of the more severe CTS items, such as beat up partner, threatened partner with a knife or gun, or used a knife or gun. The majority of the incidents of DV endorsed involved pushing, grabbing, or shoving partner (14.6% and 11.5% of wives and husbands, respectively); throwing something at partner (9.2% of wives); throwing something that hit partner (3.8% and 2.3% of wives and husbands respectively); and blocking partner from leaving the room (3.8% and 19.2% of wives and husbands respectively).

All endorsed items on the Physical Aggression subscale were summed to form a total violence score for each partner. This is a dimensional score that represents each partner's report of their own use of violence within the relationship. Families varied widely in the degree to which violent tactics were used during marital conflict. Using Straus' data indicating that couples who report two or more violent incidents fall at the 90th percentile of a national sample (Straus, 1979), we found that 24% of our sample fell into this violent range. In 36% of the sample ($N = 48$) at least one instance of violence was endorsed; 64% of the couples ($N = 82$) reported no instances of violence. The number of violent acts endorsed by husbands and wives as occurring within the last 12 months ranged between 0 and more than 20.

Meta-emotion interview. Mothers and fathers were administered the meta-emotion interview (Katz & Gottman, 1986). They were individually interviewed about their own experience of anger, fear, and sadness as well as their feelings, attitudes, and behaviors toward their children's anger, fear, and sadness. Questions about the parent and child's experience of emotion were phrased broadly, referring to their experience of emotion across a variety of situations, and did not make specific reference to their marriage or to the DV. Sample questions include "What is it like for you to be angry?", "What do you do to help your child get over feeling sad?", and "Can you give me a recent example of a time when your child was scared?" This interview was audio-taped and later coded for emotion coaching. Interviews typically lasted 45–60 min.

The meta-emotion interview was coded with the meta-emotion coding system (Katz, Mittmann, & Hooven, 1994) to assess parental coaching of anger, sadness, and fear. Parental coaching of emotion consisted of items that tapped the degree to which mothers showed respect for the child's experience of emotion, talked about the situation that gave rise to the emotion while the child was upset, used strategies that are age and situationally appropriate, intervened in situations causing the emotion, and gave thought and energy to what the child knows about emotions. Scores were summed across items, and possible totals ranged from 9 (low) to 21 (high).

Mothers and fathers were individually coded for parental coach-

ing of anger, fear, and sadness. Interrater reliability was computed on 24% of the sample. Interobserver reliability, computed as correlations between independent observers, were $r = .82$ and $.75$ for coaching of anger; $r = .76$ and $.67$ for coaching of sadness; and $r = .75$ and $.74$ for coaching of fear, for husbands and wives respectively.

Child Behavior Checklist. Mothers completed the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) as an index of children's behavior problems (Achenbach, 1991). Fathers also completed the CBCL, but their data were not included to minimize the number of variables in analyses. The CBCL yields both broadband factors as well as several narrow-band factors (e.g., delinquency, aggression, social withdrawal). The test-retest reliability, internal consistency, concurrent and predictive validity, and the construct validity of these scales have been well established. We used T scores on the Aggression, Withdrawal, and Anxiety-Depression subscales because of previous evidence that DV is associated with these forms of child maladjustment.

Marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction was measured to rule out the hypothesis that observed effects may be due to marital satisfaction rather than DV. Marital satisfaction was assessed with the Locke-Wallace Marital Satisfaction Inventory (Locke & Wallace, 1959). This inventory has been found to have high levels of reliability and validity (Burgess, Locke, & Thomas, 1971) and is one of the most widely used instruments for assessing marital satisfaction. Because husband and wife reports of marital satisfaction were strongly correlated ($r = .60$, $p < .001$), they were summed to form a marital satisfaction score for the dyad.

Education and income. Education and family income were examined as possible confounds that may relate to parental meta-emotion philosophy and explain why parental meta-emotion philosophy may be associated with child outcomes. To maximize fathers' willingness to participate in the study, we minimized the amount of data requested from them, so only mothers were asked questions about family income. Each mother indicated the number of years of schooling she and her husband completed on a 1-20 scale. Mothers also responded to a dichotomous question about family income, indicating whether the family income was less than or greater than \$40,000. Only 40% of the sample responded to this question. Analyses indicated that DV families did not differ from nonviolent families in whether they responded to this item, $F(1, 130) = 0.441$, $p = .51$.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations

Means and standard deviations of predictors, dependent variables, moderators, and covariates are presented in Table 1. Correlations were computed between mother and father coaching of individual emotions (anger, sadness, and fear), a general index of emotion coaching that was created for each parent by summing across individual emotions, and parental education and income (see Table 2). No significant correlations emerged, although relations between husband's sadness coaching and parental education approached significance. Given the limited endorsement of the question related to income, analyses were also conducted to assess whether DV families differed from nonviolent families in whether they responded to the item about income. No differences were found, $F(1, 130) = .441$, $p = .51$.

Associations among emotion coaching variables. For each parent, correlations among coaching variables across specific emotions were statistically significant but were in

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
Mother report of domestic violence	1.01	2.32	0-12
Father report of domestic violence	0.67	1.73	0-8
Marital satisfaction	216.58	44.11	67-311
Father coaching of anger	18.08	2.26	10-20
Father coaching of sadness	18.43	2.16	10-21.25
Father coaching of fear	18.67	2.02	10-21
Mother coaching of anger	18.38	2.08	10-20
Mother coaching of sadness	18.88	1.55	11.67-20
Mother coaching of fear	18.87	1.59	11.25-20
Child aggression	55.78	8.23	50-85
Child withdrawal	52.72	5.14	50-76
Child anxious-depressed	52.75	5.30	50-77

the low to moderate range (see Table 3). Some correlations between mother and father coaching were also found. Mother coaching of sadness was related to father coaching of sadness and anger. Mother's coaching of anger also related to father's coaching of sadness.

Associations between DV and child adjustment. Partial correlations were computed between indices of DV and child adjustment, controlling for marital satisfaction to rule out the possibility that marital satisfaction may account for observed effects (see Table 4). DV was associated with child outcomes even when controlling for marital satisfaction. Mother's report of DV was positively correlated with child aggression and withdrawal, and father's report of DV was positively correlated with child aggression and marginally related to child withdrawal. Both mother and father reports of DV were marginally related to higher levels of child depression-anxiety.¹

Associations between emotion coaching and child adjustment. Table 4 displays correlations between indices of emotion coaching and child adjustment. Mother's coaching of anger and fear was associated with lower levels of child aggression. Mother's coaching of sadness was associated with lower levels of child depression and anxiety. Father's coaching of fear was associated with lower levels of child withdrawal.

DV and Parental Meta-Emotion Philosophy

The first question addressed was whether DV is associated with a general difficulty in emotion coaching. To test this hypothesis, we computed a general emotion coaching variable for each parent by summing emotion coaching across specific emotions of anger, sadness, and fear. Correlations between each parent's report of their own level of DV and this general index of parental coaching were computed, controlling for marital satisfaction (see Table 5). No significant relations were observed, although mother's use

¹ Results were virtually identical when marital satisfaction was not controlled.

Table 2
Correlations Between Emotion Coaching, Parental Education, and Income

Emotion coaching	Income ^a	Wife education	Husband education
Mother			
Anger	.17	.01	.06
Sadness	.16	.05	.07
Fear	.03	-.06	-.03
Father			
Anger	.10	.14	.07
Sadness	.16	.20†	.19†
Fear	.08	-.02	.12
General Index			
Mother coaching	.15	-.01	.04
Father coaching	.16	.16	.17

^a *N*s for analyses with income ranged from 48–51.

† *p* < .10.

of DV was marginally associated with less emotion coaching.

The second question addressed was whether parents have difficulty helping their child with specific emotions depending on whether they are the perpetrator or victim of abuse. Correlations between husband and wife's report of their own perpetration of violence within the marriage and parental coaching of specific emotions were computed, controlling for marital satisfaction (see Table 6). Mothers' reports of their own use of violence were associated with lower levels of fear coaching in fathers. Marginally significant negative correlations were also found between mother's report of her own use of violence and her coaching of anger and fear.

Does Emotion Coaching Moderate the Relationship Between DV and Child Adjustment?

We also examined whether parental meta-emotion philosophy moderates the relationship between DV and children's adjustment. Following the recommendation by Baron and Kenny (1986) and Aiken and West (1991), we conducted statistical tests for moderation effects with a series of hierarchical multiple regressions with centered variables. To minimize the number of analyses conducted, we used parent's general use of emotion coaching as the emotion

Table 4
Correlations Between Report of Violence, Parental Meta-Emotion Philosophy, and Child Outcomes

Variable	Child Outcomes		
	Aggression	Withdrawal	Depression-anxiety
Domestic violence			
Mother report ^a	.26**	.24**	.16†
Father report ^a	.24**	.17†	.16†
Mother coaching			
Anger	-.22*	-.16†	-.13
Sadness	-.14	-.15	-.18*
Fear	-.24*	-.05	-.14
Father coaching			
Anger	.11	.03	.02
Sadness	-.02	-.06	.03
Fear	-.06	-.29***	-.09

^a Partial correlations controlling for marital satisfaction.

† *p* < .10. * *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

coaching variable, rather than their coaching of specific emotions. Three regressions were conducted for each parent, one for each child outcome variable. In each regression, marital satisfaction was entered as the first step to rule out the possibility that mediation effects were due to marital satisfaction rather than DV per se. The covariates of education and income were not included in analyses because there were no significant correlations between parental meta-emotion philosophy, education, and income. The independent variable (i.e., DV) and the moderator were entered in the second step of the equation. Because the child witnesses DV by both parents, and because there was a strong correlation between mothers' and fathers' report of their own violence ($r = .54, p < .001$), a summary code of DV was computed across reporter and was used in all analyses. An interaction term, created from the product of the independent and moderator variables, was entered in the third step.

When a moderation effect was established, the significant interactions were interpreted by plotting the simple regression lines for the high (+1 *SD*) and low (-1 *SD*) values of the moderator variable (Aiken & West, 1991). Equations were then used to plot values of the dependent variable at high and low values of DV and high and low values of parental coaching. The slopes of these two simple regres-

Table 3
Intercorrelations Among Coaching Variables

Coaching	Mother coaching			Father coaching		
	Anger	Sadness	Fear	Anger	Sadness	Fear
Mother						
Anger	—	.49***	.52***	.13	.18*	.09
Sadness		—	.45**	.06	.03	.01
Fear			—	.19*	.20*	.08
Father						
Anger				—	.42***	.31***
Sadness					—	.26**
Fear						—

* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

Table 5
Correlations Between Domestic Violence and Parental Coaching Across Different Emotions, Controlling for Marital Satisfaction

Coaching	Domestic violence	
	Mother report	Father report
Mother	-.16†	-.06
Father	-.15	-.12

† $p < .10$.

sion lines were examined to see whether the slopes were significantly different from zero (Aiken & West, 1991). For moderating effects to be evident, the slopes of the regression lines would demonstrate a strong association between DV and children's behavior problems for children whose parents are poor emotion coaches and a weak association between DV and children's behavior problems for children whose parents are good emotion coaches.

Mother's coaching. A significant interaction between DV and mother's emotion coaching was found for predictions of children's aggression, withdrawal, and depression-anxiety: overall for aggression, $F(4, 118) = 8.94, p < .001$; overall for withdrawal, $F(4, 118) = 5.23, p < .001$; overall for depression-anxiety, $F(4, 118) = 2.44, p < .05$; for regression statistics, refer to Table 7. The plot and analyses of the slopes indicate that when mothers were low in coaching, there were positive associations between DV and children's aggression, withdrawal, and anxiety-depression. The slopes of these lines were positive and significantly different from zero. If mothers were high in coaching, there was no association between DV and child aggression, withdrawal, or depression-anxiety. In these families, the slopes of the relations between DV and child adjustment were not significantly different from zero. Figures 2-4 depict these findings.

Father's coaching. A significant interaction between DV and father's coaching was found when predicting children's withdrawal: overall, $F(4, 116) = 4.37, p < .01$; for regression statistics, refer to Table 8. The plots and analyses of the slopes indicated that when fathers were low in coaching, a positive association was found between DV and children's withdrawal; the slopes were positive and significantly different from zero (see Figure 5). In contrast, when fathers were high in coaching, there was no relationship between DV and children's withdrawal; the slopes were not significantly different from zero. No interactions were found between DV and father's emotion coaching when predicting child aggression or depression-anxiety.

Are Differences Due to Differential Exposure to DV?

To rule out the possibility that differences between high and low coaching parents may be due to differential exposure to the risk factor (i.e., DV), we divided families into high and low coaching (+.50 SD for high coaching; -.50 SD for low coaching) on the general emotion coaching variable used in the moderation analyses (i.e., summed

across emotions). Separate groupings were formed for mother and father coaching, and two ANOVAs were computed comparing groups on DV. DV was computed by summing across reporter. For both mothers and fathers, there were no differences in DV between parents who were high and low in emotion coaching, $F(1, 73) = .60, p = .44$ for mothers; $F(1, 70) = .23, p = .64$ for fathers.

Discussion

Efforts to understand the family dynamics that characterize domestically violent homes have been growing, and a variety of dysfunctional processes have been identified. At the level of the violent dyad, conflict resolution in DV couples is characterized by high levels of hostility, negative affect reciprocity, and withdrawal (Berns, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1999; Burman, John, & Margolin, 1992; Coan, Gottman, Babcock, & Jacobson, 1997). At the level of the coparenting relationship, DV has been associated with lower levels of positive and higher levels of hostile-withdrawn coparenting (Katz & Low, in press). DV is also associated with a variety of parenting difficulties, such as lower levels of parental warmth and effectiveness and higher levels of parent-child conflict (McCloskey et al., 1995; Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 1998; Jouriles & Norwood, 1995).

Our research adds to this growing description by examining parental attitudes and feelings about emotion. Our data suggest that parents in domestically violent homes do not generally have difficulty with emotion coaching. In some sense, these results may be surprising given evidence of lower levels of parental warmth and higher levels of parent-child conflict in families experiencing DV. However, our study differs in several important ways from other studies of parenting and DV. First, research on DV has been limited by an overreliance on samples from battered women's shelters, and our data reflect findings from a community-based sample with low frequency and severity of DV. Second, we focused specifically on how parents talk to their children about emotion, rather than the more general constructs of warmth or responsiveness. It is possible that in families exhibiting more extreme levels of DV, emotion coaching may be compromised. Parents experiencing severe forms of DV may have difficulty regulating their own

Table 6
Correlations Between Domestic Violence and Coaching of Specific Emotions, Controlling for Marital Satisfaction

Coaching	Domestic violence	
	Mother report	Father report
Mother		
Anger	-.17†	-.08
Sadness	-.05	.04
Fear	-.15†	-.09
Father		
Anger	-.05	-.07
Sadness	.02	-.08
Fear	-.32**	-.14

† $p < .10$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 7
Mother's Emotion Coaching as a Moderator in the Associations Between Couple's Report of Domestic Violence and Children's Behavior Problems

Step	Independent variables	R^2	ΔR^2	β	ΔF
Aggression					
1	Marital satisfaction	.05		-.23**	6.50**
2	DV	.16	.11	.30***	7.31***
	Coaching			-.11	
3	DV \times Coaching	.24	.08	-.32***	11.87***
Withdrawal					
1	Marital satisfaction	.006		-.08	.71
2	DV	.08	.07	.23**	4.55**
	Coaching			-.12	
3	DV \times Coaching	.15	.08	-.31**	10.26**
Depression-anxiety					
1	Marital satisfaction	.006		-.08	.83
2	DV	.04	.03	.18†	2.05
	Coaching			-.04	
3	DV \times Coaching	.08	.04	-.22*	4.68*

Note. $N_s = 116$ for child aggression, withdrawal, and depression-anxiety.
 † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

emotions, may be depressed, or may be too focused on basic survival to engage in emotion coaching. Thus, our findings may overestimate emotion coaching abilities among parents in help-seeking samples. Studies that directly compare parenting in community-based and shelter samples are needed to more clearly understand the potentially unique parenting characteristics in these different types of families.

There was some indication that parents may have difficulty talking to their children about certain feelings depend-

ing on the dynamics of the violence within the relationship. When fathers were victims of aggression, they were less likely to coach their children around feelings of fear. Similarly, when mothers were perpetrators of aggression, they were marginally less likely to coach their children around feelings of anger and fear. These results must be viewed with caution given the modest size of these relations but raise the possibility that parental coaching of certain key emotions may be neglected in families with more extreme



Figure 2. Significant interaction between domestic violence and mother coaching in predicting children's aggression.



Figure 3. Significant interaction between domestic violence and mother coaching in predicting child withdrawal.

levels of DV. If replicated, associations between DV and coaching of anger and fear may reflect difficulties these families have in modulating the experience of anger and fear. Their pattern of escalation and reciprocity of anger

may engender a sense of fear and hypervigilance to threat (Katz, 2000) that may make it difficult for parents to coach these specific emotions.

The lack of an overall general deficit in emotion coaching

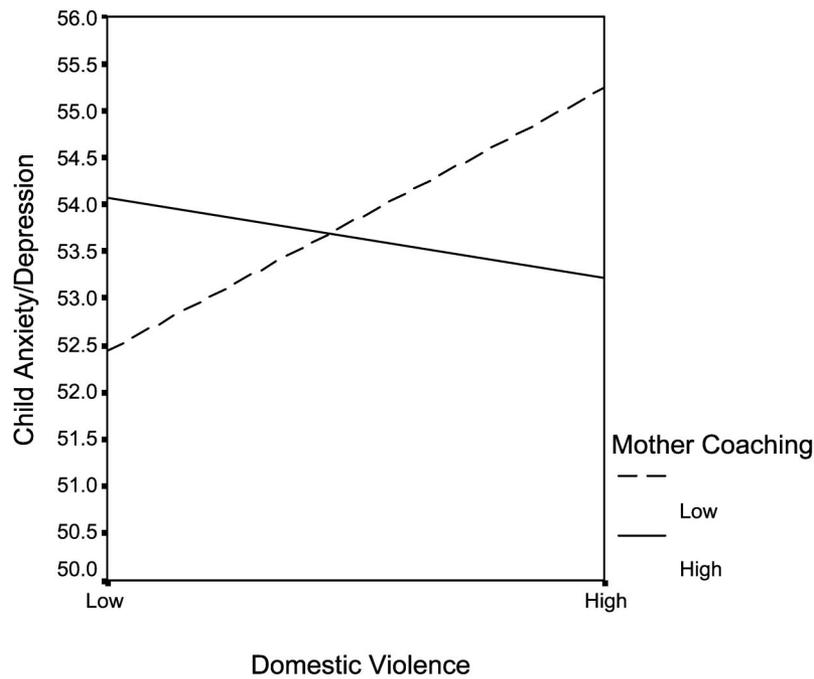


Figure 4. Significant interaction between domestic violence and mother coaching in predicting children's anxiety-depression.

Table 8
Father's Emotion Coaching as a Moderator in the Associations Between Domestic Violence and Children's Behavior Problems

Step	Independent variables	R^2	ΔR^2	β	ΔF
Aggression					
1	Marital satisfaction	.05		-.23**	6.50**
2	DV	.14	.09	.30***	5.77**
	Coaching			.03	
3	DV \times Coaching	.15	.01	-.12	1.59
Withdrawal					
1	Marital satisfaction	.005		-.07	.53
2	DV	.08	.08	.25**	4.95**
	Coaching			-.12	
3	DV \times Coaching	.14	.05	-.24**	6.50**
Depression-anxiety					
1	Marital satisfaction	.005		-.07	.52
2	DV	.04	.04	.19*	2.05
	Coaching			-.01	
3	DV \times Coaching	.06	.02	-.15	2.40

Note. $N_s = 118$ for child aggression, withdrawal and depression-anxiety.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

in families with DV and the modest correlations between DV and coaching of specific emotions suggest that some families are able to encapsulate the DV and prevent it from impacting how they talk to their children about emotion. The ability to use emotion coaching in the face of DV has beneficial effects for children. When mothers were high in emotion coaching, there was no relationship between DV and children's behavior problems; however when mothers were low in emotion coaching, DV was associated with

higher levels of child behavior problems. These effects held even when controlling for marital satisfaction, extending previous findings that emotion coaching buffers children from marital distress (Katz & Gottman, 1997) and indicating that it is coaching in the presence of physical marital aggression rather than global marital distress that buffers children from negative outcomes. Furthermore, these effects were not attributable to the differential degree of DV present in the home because there were no differences in



Figure 5. Significant interaction between domestic violence and father coaching in predicting child withdrawal.

DV between mothers who were high and low in emotion coaching. Thus, these findings extend previous research on emotion coaching and marital discord (Katz & Gottman, 1997) to suggest that emotion coaching is also important for children's well-being, even in extreme cases when parents resort to physical aggression.

Similar results were found for fathers, but effects were seen only for child withdrawal. Father's role in emotion coaching may best be understood when considering how DV is manifested within community-based samples. Johnson (2001) distinguished between two forms of DV: (a) Patriarchal terrorism, which is generally found in shelter samples, is perpetrated almost entirely by men and involves a general motive to control one's partner, and (b) common couple violence, which is generally found in community-based samples, is gender-symmetric and reciprocal and is less characterized by the man's desire to dominate his wife. This suggests that in community-based samples violence is more likely to be perpetrated by both father and mother, and it opens the possibility that there may be greater variability in these samples in how sensitive and responsive fathers are to children's emotion. If fathers in domestically violent homes have emotion coaching skills, children are less likely to be socially withdrawn, perhaps because coaching mitigates against children's impressions of their father as frightening. Through coaching, children may experience their father as sensitive to their feelings, which may help them feel supported despite the family stress or may increase their sense of security within the family (Davies & Cummings, 1994). When physical aggression is perpetrated by the mother, father's coaching may help the child feel connected to at least one parent and prevent the child from becoming socially withdrawn.

Gottman et al. (1996) have suggested that emotion coaching teaches children how to regulate emotion. When parents are emotion coaching, children learn how to inhibit inappropriate behavior related to strong affect, self-soothe any physiological arousal the strong affect has induced, focus attention, and organize themselves for coordinated action in the service of an external goal. The role of emotion coaching in teaching emotion regulation is consistent with findings that children in domestically violent homes have difficulties managing strong emotion. Lee (2001) found that children from domestically violent homes reported stronger feelings of sadness and anger than children from non-domestically violent homes and used a greater range of strategies to regulate their emotions. Whereas some studies have found that it is beneficial for children to flexibly use several different strategies to regulate emotion (Radovanovic, 1993) reported that children in domestically violent homes who used a larger number of emotion regulation strategies had higher levels of behavior problems. Children from domestically violent homes may use a greater range of emotion regulation strategies to manage their feelings, but their efforts are not effective. Either they may have difficulty using these strategies effectively or the particular emotion regulation strategies they choose do not serve the goal of reducing problem behavior. Alternatively, their choice of strategies may be random, suggesting a lack of parental guidance about appropriate strategies to use in

varying situations. The use of situationally appropriate emotion regulation strategies may be one of many skills that emotion coaching parents impart to their children.

Emotion coaching may also influence other components of children's emotional competence. Parental coaching of emotion may help increase children's awareness of emotion in themselves and others, enhance their ability to find words to describe their feelings, or increase their willingness or comfort in talking to others about their emotions. We have recently developed a meta-emotion interview and coding system for use with school-age children and adolescents which will enable us to test these notions and to see whether children's own philosophies about emotion explains links between parent's meta-emotion philosophy and child adjustment in DV families. Knowing what children internalize about emotions in DV families is crucial to developing programs aimed at helping children reduce problematic behaviors.

In examining the pattern of findings, the strongest and most consistent relations were found between DV, emotion coaching, and child aggression. Weakest effects were seen in relation to child anxiety and depression. This may in part be due to the nature of the sample because families were recruited on the basis of the presence of child conduct problems. Alternately, studies have indicated that parents are better at reporting child externalizing behavior and children are better at reporting their internalizing behavior (Hodges, Gordon, & Lennon, 1990). The failure to find consistent relations between DV, emotion coaching, and child anxiety–depression may in part be due to the reliance on parent's report of the child's internal experiences. However, it is important to note that mother's emotion coaching did moderate associations between DV and child anxiety–depression, providing some validity to parental report of anxiety–depression.

Several drawbacks to the current study suggest caution in interpreting results. One limitation is that families in this community-based study were not specifically screened for the presence of significant levels of DV. Parental meta-emotion philosophy may operate differently in families with more extreme levels of DV, and additional research with larger samples of families that range more broadly in DV is needed to determine whether findings generalize to DV families exhibiting more extreme levels of violence.

A second limitation is that our interviews capture parents' general philosophy about how they approach their children's emotions, rather than what parents actually do when their child is distressed. In previous studies, parental coaching of emotion has been associated with certain aspects of parenting (i.e., heightened scaffolding–praising, lower levels of derogation), as well as children's ability to regulate emotion (Gottman et al., 1997). However, there are currently no observational studies that describe how parents who are high in emotion coaching talk to their children about emotion. We are currently in the process of collecting and analyzing observational data on what emotion coaching parents actually do when their children are experiencing strong emotion to get a fuller picture of the construct of emotion coaching.

A third limitation is that our coding of emotion coaching does not distinguish between instances when parents are

coaching an emotion that has its origins outside the family or with another family member's behavior (e.g., a sibling) and instances when parents are coaching an emotion that was generated from something a parent did (e.g., engaged in DV, enforced a rule). Thus, it is impossible to say that the buffering effect of emotion coaching has something directly to do with how the parents handle children's feelings about the family violence itself. In previous work, parent meta-emotion philosophy has been described as a characteristic approach to emotion that parents bring to different emotion-eliciting situations (Gottman et al., 1997). We think that parents who are high in coaching are likely to help their children manage feelings arising from the DV, but this remains an empirical question.

Finally, the cross-sectional nature of this design limits our ability to rule out the possibility that these findings may in part reflect a child effect. Our sample consisted of children who varied in aggression, and it is possible that when paired with DV this child characteristic contributes to parent's ability to coach and exacerbates their presenting problem. These data may reflect a more cyclical pattern of influence that cannot be determined from this study's design. We are currently conducting a longitudinal follow-up of these families that will help us separate out child and parent effects.

Implications for Application and Public Policy

Our findings expand current understanding of the family dynamics associated with DV and deleterious outcomes in children and suggest new possibilities for interventions with families who experience DV. In addition to attention to the physical violence occurring between adults, these data offer specific implications for developing an intervention program aimed at helping DV families help their children manage their emotions. This is an important objective given the negative sequelae of DV for both short- and long-term adjustment in children (Graham-Bermann & Edleson, 2001; Jouriles et al., 2001). Previous research on emotion coaching suggests that how parents talk to their children about emotion reflects a characteristic approach to emotion that consists not only of specific behavioral strategies for managing emotion but also attitudes and cognitions about it (Gottman et al., 1997). A meta-emotion intervention program should be aimed at both teaching parents specific ways to talk to their children about emotion and addressing parental beliefs and attitudes about emotion. The current study offers the first step in understanding parental meta-emotion philosophy among DV families and offers ways to help children manage difficult behavior through parent training in emotion coaching. Such training could teach parents how to show respect for their child's experience of emotion, talk about situations that generate feelings of upset in the child, offer strategies that are age and situationally appropriate, and intervene in situations that cause the emotion.

These findings also provide some insight into the role of fathers in parenting children in domestically violent homes. Despite a now rich body of evidence on the importance of fathers in children's socioemotional development (Lamb, 1997), there is a relative absence of data on fathers in

domestically violent homes. This may in part reflect the overreliance on samples from battered women's shelters, which typically comprises families experiencing a time of limited contact between fathers and their children. Research with community-based samples of DV families in which there is continued contact between father and child will help elucidate the ways in which fathers can both positively and negatively impact children's adjustment; it will also help us better understand the conditions under which continued contact between father and child may be appropriate or inappropriate. In community-based samples with low levels of DV that are likely to be reciprocal in nature, fathers' ability to talk to their children about emotion may be a protective factor that prevents children from spiraling into a pattern of social isolation, withdrawal, and loneliness. Continued attention to the role that both mothers and fathers play in parenting children exposed to DV can help guide policy that speaks to issues related to family reunification and can help optimize family and child functioning. Such policy decisions must also be guided by a clearer understanding of the different forms that violence takes in community-based and shelter samples as well as the potential associated differences in family interaction patterns.

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