

Study shows link between working memory and reactive parenting

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Any parent knows that sometimes maintaining your cool with misbehaving children is a challenge. We all have times when we get frustrated or angry and lash out at someone without thinking. A new study by psychologists at Virginia Tech and two other universities suggests that parents with poorer working memory skills are less likely to be able to control their emotions with their children.

"Angry, oppositional behavior in [children](#) is aversive and challenging to parents," said Kirby Deater-Deckard, professor of psychology in Virginia Tech's College of Science, who, along with colleagues at Ohio State and Case Western Reserve universities, observed mothers and their children while they completed two frustrating tasks that required cooperation. "To avoid responding reactively to oppositional behavior, a parent must appraise the situation and respond in a way that promotes regulation of her or his own negative emotions and thoughts as well as those of the child."

Deater-Deckard found that reactive negativity was evident only among mothers with poorer [working memory](#). This cognitive skill plays a central role in the regulation of thoughts and emotions via a cognitive function known as reappraisal. By reinterpreting or reappraising the event or the situation such as a child's oppositional behavior, the parent is better able to understand the cause and thereby regulate his or her emotional response.

"Chronic parental reactive negativity is one of the most consistent

factors leading to child abuse and may reinforce adverse behavior in children," Deater-Deckard said. He added that [working memory](#) training can be highly effective.

Results of the study will be reported in the January issue of *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science.

Source: Virginia Tech ([news](#) : [web](#))

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