Certain parenting behaviors associated with positive changes in well-being during COVID-19 pandemic

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, parents have been faced with challenging circumstances to balance work, household, care of children

and support of distance learning for school-age children without help from their regular support systems such as schools, childcare, and often other family members as well. A new longitudinal study in Germany examined day-to-day parenting behavior during the restrictions and closures caused by the pandemic from the end of March until the end of April 2020. Research showed that autonomy-supportive parenting (offering meaningful choices when possible) contributed to positive well-being for both children and parents.

The findings were published in a *Child Development* article written by researchers at DIPF | Leibniz Institute for Research and Information in Education and the Center for Research on Individual and Adaptive Education of Children at Risk (IDeA) in Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

"We explored whether or not autonomy-supportive parental behavior would facilitate adaptation and better child well-being. We also explored whether such parenting behavior helps to create a positive emotional climate that benefits parents as well as children," said Andreas B. Neubauer, postdoctoral research scientist at DIPF | Leibniz Institute for Research and Information in Education. "Findings suggest autonomy-supportive parenting behavior is positively associated both with better child well-being and higher parental need fulfillment." According to the authors, such parenting behavior requires parental energy and vitality but also reciprocally contributes to it.

Participants for the online study were recruited via social media, a press release, and contacts to school and parent-teacher associations. The study assessed parents of school children using online questionnaires over three weeks through the following methods:

- 970 parents filled in an online questionnaire after which they could opt to enroll in a second part of the study (562 parents participated).

- Through the second part of the study, for three consecutive weeks, parents (predominantly female and well-educated) received 21 daily online questionnaires with questions such as "As far as possible, I let my child decide today what he or she wanted to do" or "As far as possible, my child was able to do what he or she liked today." They also received a final questionnaire after the three weeks.
- Parents were asked about their parenting behavior, the extent to which their psychological needs were fulfilled and their child's well-being.

Additionally, parents were asked about their own well-being, their perceptions of the family climate and their child's behavior once before the 21-day period and once again after the 21 days.

"Our findings from the daily questionnaires suggest that autonomy supportive parenting is beneficial for the well-being of both children and parents," said Florian Schmiedek, professor, and head of the cognitive development unit at DIPF | Leibniz Institute for Research and Information in Education. "Helping parents in their daily parental behavior choices might be an effective way to improve the family climate and child wellbeing in a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic."

The authors recognize several limitations within the present study: only one aspect of autonomy-supported parentings was assessed ("choice within limits"), the questionnaire had previously only been used in adolescents, the reports were only obtained from the perspective of predominantly female parents, and a daily low compliance rate (however this was considered adequate given the demanding time period).

More information: A Little Autonomy Support Goes a Long Way: Daily Autonomy-Supportive Parenting, Child Well-Being, Parental Need Fulfillment, and Change in Child, Family, and Parent Adjustment

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Across the Adaptation to the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Child Development* (2021). DOI: 10.1111/cdev.13515

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