



## Positive parenting of children with developmental disabilities: A meta-analysis

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### ABSTRACT

Although a large body of literature exists supporting the relationship between positive parenting and child outcomes for typically developing children, there are reasons to analyze separately the relevant literature specific to children with developmental disabilities. However, that literature has not been synthesized in any systematic review. This study examined the association between positive parenting attributes and outcomes of young children with developmental disabilities through meta-analytic aggregation of effect sizes across 14 studies including 576 participants. The random effects weighted average effect size was  $r = .22$  ( $SE = .06$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicative of a moderate association between positive parenting attributes and child outcomes. Publication bias did not appear to be a substantial threat to the results. There was a trend for studies with more mature parents to have effect sizes of higher magnitude than studies with young parents. The results provide support for efforts to evaluate and promote effective parenting skills when providing services for young children with disabilities.

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## 1. Introduction

For more than 40 years researchers have examined the relationship between parenting styles and child development outcomes. Many of these studies have been based on the work of Baumrind (1966, 1971, 1989) and her typological approach describing authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting styles. The authoritative parenting style or features of authoritative parenting, considered “positive” forms of parenting, have uniformly been associated with positive child development outcomes (Baumrind, 1989; Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Hart, Newell, & Olsen, 2003).

Although a large body of literature now exists supporting the relationship between positive parenting and child outcomes for typically developing children, fewer studies have examined the association between positive parenting and child

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outcomes for children with developmental disabilities such as Down syndrome, intellectual disabilities, and autism. Positive parenting of children with disabilities is a particularly relevant area of investigation due to the many stressors these parents experience (Dabrowska & Pisula, 2010; Gray, 2006; Kersh, Hedvat, Hauser-Cram, & Warfield, 2006), which may impact their parenting. Furthermore, the relevant literature is fragmented and has not been synthesized in any systematic review.

Consequently, a meta-analytic study examining the relationship between positive parenting and child development outcomes for children with developmental disabilities is warranted. The present meta-analysis is intended to address the following research questions: (a) Is positive parenting reliably related to child development outcomes for children with developmental disabilities? (b) What child and study variables moderate the association between positive parenting and child development outcomes?

## 2. Conceptual underpinnings of the association between positive parenting and child outcomes

The prototypes of three distinct parenting styles emerged in the 1960s, when Baumrind (1966) investigated permissive, authoritative, and authoritarian parenting. A permissive parenting style is one that is non-punitive, accepting, and non-demanding. On the opposite end of the spectrum is an authoritarian parenting style where parents attempt to influence and control the child in order to maintain obedience and respect for authority. An authoritative parenting style is described as one that is rational and respects the child's self-will balanced with disciplined conformity. This parenting style results in more positive child outcomes than the other two styles.

We begin this discussion by defining positive parenting. Next, we discuss how positive parenting is related to child development outcomes in typically developing children. Finally, in an effort to synthesize the relevant literature on this topic, we examine the literature on positive parenting of children with disabilities, focusing on possible mediators and moderators of the relationship between positive parenting and outcomes for children with developmental disabilities.

### 2.1. Positive parenting

We define *positive parenting* as parenting that is authoritative in nature or parenting that includes features of authoritative parenting. While there is no agreement in the literature as to what constitutes positive parenting (Russell & Russell, 1996), features of positive parenting have been described using different terms, including accepting, warm, involved, sensitive, responsive, caring, and empathetic; social-emotional and cognitive growth fostering; and directive (Baumrind, 1989; Bornstein, 2003; Hart, Nelson, Robinson, Olsen, & McNeilly-Choque, 1998; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Russell, 1997).

Three broad classifications have been used to subsume most positive dimensions of parenting: (a) parental support or connection, (b) behavioral regulation, and (c) respect for individuality (Barber & Olsen, 1997; Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005; Hart et al., 1998). Parental support or connection is characterized by interactions between parents and children that are positive, warm, sensitive, affectionate, predictable, and supportive (Barber et al., 2005). Behavioral regulation is the feature of authoritative parenting related to how parents establish structure around the child's behavior (Barber et al., 2005) that includes setting limits, reasoning, and applying consequences. Parents' respect for individuality includes acknowledging the child's development by avoiding intrusive, exploitive, and manipulative parenting behaviors.

### 2.2. Positive parenting and child development outcomes

The literature suggests authoritative parenting is related to a number of positive child outcomes. These include children's prosocial behavior such as responsible independence, psychosocial maturity, cooperation with peers and adults, self-regulation, and compliance (Baumrind, 1971, 1989; Dix, 1991; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Eisenberg et al., 2005; Hart et al., 2003; Karreman, van Tuijl, van Aken, & Dekovic, 2006; Robinson, Mandlco, Olsen, & Hart, 1995). Other research has demonstrated the association between authoritative parenting styles and characteristics such as empathy (Krevan & Gibbs, 1996), child attachment (De Wolff & van Ijzendoorn, 1997), and emotional expression (Barber, 1996, 2002).

Components of authoritative parenting have also been demonstrated to be related to skills for school success. Evidence is found in skills such as student achievement (Luster, Lekskul, & Oh, 2004; Rosenzweig, 2000), receptive language skills (Luster et al., 2004) and cognitive-language development (Hart et al., 1998; Landry, Smith, Miller-Loncar, & Swank, 1997).

Authoritative or positive parenting is also related to lower levels of maladaptive social skills such as externalizing behavior (Eisenberg et al., 2005; Kuczynski & Kochanska, 1995; Rothbaum & Weisz, 1994). Conversely, the absence of an authoritative parenting style is related to childhood depression and childhood anxiety (McLeod, Weisz, & Wood, 2007; McLeod, Wood, & Weisz, 2007), and antisocial behavior (relational and physical aggression) for both young children and adolescents (Barber, 1996, 2002).

## 3. Positive parenting of children with disabilities

While research exists regarding parenting styles of caregivers of children with developmental disabilities (Pino, 2000), the literature is scarce when parenting styles are investigated in light of children's functional outcomes. The extant literature is also limited to a small range of participants. Most of the research has investigated parenting styles of mothers rather than fathers. Also, few studies exist which include children with disabilities other than Down syndrome.

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