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Mothers Matter - Self-Compassion, Reflective Functioning & Parental Burnout

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Statement of the Problem: Parenting and in particular motherhood requires a significant investment of time, energy, and emotional resources. Parental burnout was already a problem prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the expectations, fears, and requirements associated with it have only exacerbated an already serious problem. Mothers are at a greater vulnerability for developing parental burnout as they spend more time with children and complete less rewarding parental tasks such as shuttling children to appointments and preparing meals. Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: An online, research study was utilized to identify the relationship between parental self-compassion, reflective functioning, and parental burnout. Findings: Mothers who endorsed lower self-compassion were more likely to believe their children's misbehaviors were deliberately directed at them (pre-mentalizing) and in turn, endorsed higher levels of parental burnout. Mothers who reported greater self-compassion were less likely to engage in pre-mentalizing thoughts, which, in turn, served as protective factors to parental burnout. Conclusion & Significance: Mothers who can show compassion to themselves in times of stress are able to stay present and recognize their children's own distress as a separate entity from themselves. This research found a lack of self-compassion and the pre-mentalizing thought pattern leads to parental burnout which is characterized by feelings of exhaustion, distancing, and loss of parental accomplishment. Recommendations are made for mothers to develop skills in self-compassion so they can serve as a steady presence during times of familial stress without over analyzing the situation, ultimately allowing them to feel engaged and connected to their children.

Biography

Courtney Katzenberg's expertise is in learning, development, and maternal mental health. A former teacher, mother, and psychology graduate student, Courtney is intricately familiar with the challenges that parents and children face. As a practicing clinician, and research assistant she is interested in understanding ruptures in relationships and teaching skills to mothers to make parenting become a space of growth and acceptance

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