

## Original Paper

# A Study on the Current Situation and Educational Strategies of Parents' Emotional Coping Styles of 3-6 Year Old Children

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### Abstract

*The pre-school stage is a critical period for young children's emotional development. During this stage, children gradually learn to express their emotions, understand the emotions of others, and acquire the ability to regulate their emotions appropriately. As the first mentors in a child's life, the importance of what parents do to cope with their toddler's mood swings is a form of potential emotional education.*

*In this study, questionnaires and interviews were used to investigate parents' coping styles in dealing with the five emotions of excitement, pride, sadness, fear, and anger in 3-6 year old toddlers and to explore corresponding educational strategies. The results of the study show that young children's emotions are usually in a variety of situations and have many triggering factors. Moreover, parents usually tend to adopt more supportive coping methods in their lives.*

### Keywords

*Early childhood emotions, Parents, Coping*

## 1. Introduction

With the development of society, the mental health of young children is receiving more and more attention, and the critical period for the emotional development of young children is from 3 to 6 years old. In order to effectively promote the healthy physical and mental development of young children, adults should create a warm interpersonal environment for young children, so that they can fully feel affection and care, and form positive and stable emotions. Young children are not yet physically and mentally mature and need careful care and attention from adults.

Along with cognitive abilities, young children's emotions change. The positive attitudes that young children display during activities are one of the most important factors influencing their academic achievement and future development. At the same time, emotional competence is central to young

children's ability to communicate their emotions and maintain positive peer interactions, and has the function of establishing, maintaining, and transforming internal and external relationships within individuals. (YAO, CHEN, & ZHAO, 2004) During the preschool years, the development of young children's emotional competence is crucial. They are gradually understanding, expressing and regulating emotions, a process that is moving towards deeper cognitive development. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in young children's emotional competence, and research has shown that the development of emotional competence in early childhood can directly influence the quality of their future cognitive and social development. (MA, DAN, & LI, 2023)

Parental responses to young children's emotions can have a corresponding effect, and positive emotional responses can help promote positive emotions in young children. For example, compliments can enhance a child's self-confidence, while reassurance helps stabilize a child's emotions and calm him or her down. On the contrary, when parents respond negatively to their children's behavior, it is easy for young children to develop negative emotions and even jeopardize their health. Children's emotional development is mainly built up gradually through interaction with surrounding individuals and the environment. If parents use inappropriate responses when dealing with their children's emotions, not only will this not solve the problem, but it may also have a bad effect on their children's physical and mental health. Therefore, parents should pay attention to the correct way of coping with emotions and actively communicate with their children to promote the healthy development of their children's emotional abilities.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1 Subject*

In this study, an online questionnaire was used to survey the parents of young children, 142 questionnaires were recovered, and the recovered questionnaires were screened to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data. Finally, 133 valid questionnaires were recovered 93.66%. Among them, 87 mothers (65.41%) and 46 fathers (34.59%) participated in the survey. 16 people (12.03%) were 25 years old and below, 33 people (24.81%) were 26-30 years old, 68 people (51.13%) were 31-40 years old, and 12 people (12%) were over 40 years old. 12.03%. There are 12 people with less than specialized education, accounting for 9.02%; 25 people with specialized education, accounting for 18.80%; 78 people with bachelor's degree, accounting for 58.65%; and 18 people with bachelor's degree or above, accounting for 13.53%.

### *2.2 Instrument*

#### *2.2.1 Questionnaire on Emotional Coping Styles of Parents of Young Children*

This study was conducted using the Questionnaire on Emotional Coping Styles of Parents of Young Children, which consists of two parts; the first part is the basic information about parents of 3-6 year olds, which consists of 7 questions. The second part is the main part of the questionnaire, which consists of 10 questions. Among them, there are 3 questions on positive emotions, including 2

situations of excitement and pride, and 7 questions on negative emotions, including 3 situations of sadness, fear and anger. Parental responses to each emotion are categorized into supportive and non-supportive coping styles. Reference standards as the Table 1:

**Table 1. Classification of Emotional Coping Styles of Parents of 3-6 Year Olds**

Classification	Content	Examples
Supportive coping	emotional care	Soothe your child while expressing your understanding of his/her emotions
	Focus on the issue	Help your child think of places they haven't looked yet
	Encouraging expression	Encourage your child to express his/her feelings of pride
	divert attention	Use new things in the surroundings to distract your child
Non-Supportive coping	minimize	Tell your kids it's nothing to get excited about
	displeased	Showing your child an angry or warning facial expression
	punish	Tell your child that if they shrink like that again, they won't be allowed to go out anymore
	noninterference	Ignore the child.
	temptation to give	Tell your child that calming down right away can lead to certain rewards

### 2.2.2 Outline of an Interview with Parents of 3-6 Year Olds about Their Emotional Coping Styles

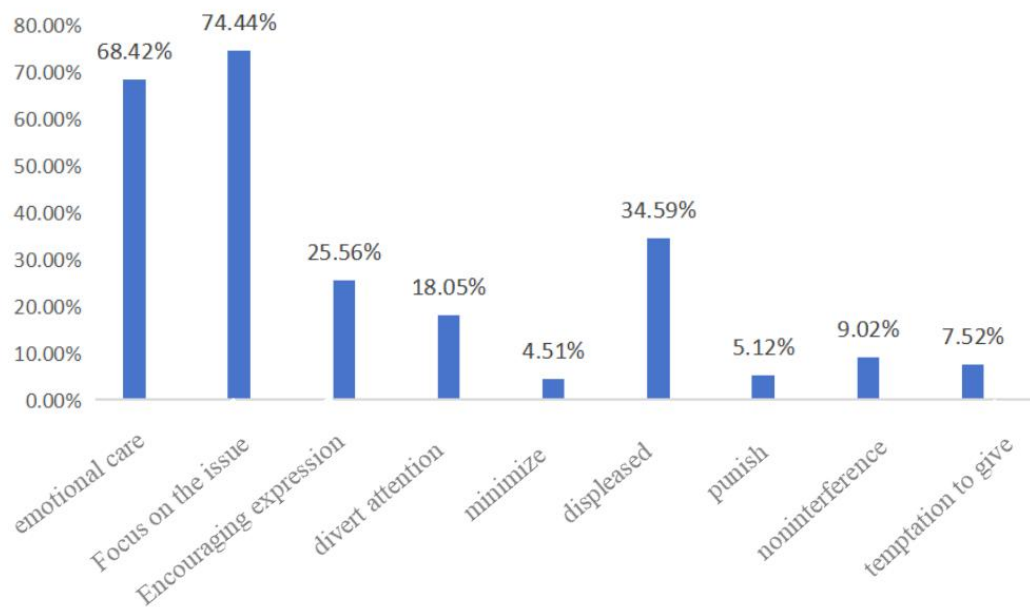
Based on the study, an interview outline was prepared in conjunction with the questionnaire questions, and in-depth interviews were conducted with parents and toddlers with six questions each.

## 3. Result

### 3.1 Positive Emotional Coping

#### 3.1.1 Coping with Excitement

From Figure 1, it can be learned that parents responding to the arousal of young children aged 3-6 years old use the coping style of attention to the problem the most, accounting for 74.44% of the total. It is followed by emotional concern with 68.42%. Minimizing coping was used the least with 4.51%.

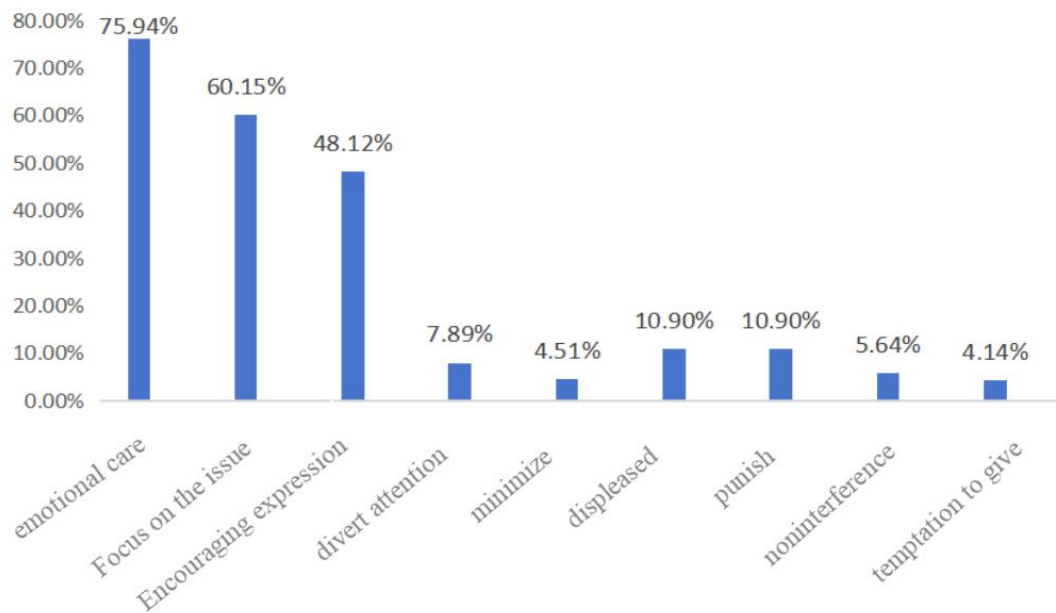


**Figure 1. Statistics on the Ways of Coping with Excited Emotions of Parents of Young Children**

When toddlers are excited, parents' supportive responses are mainly emotional care and encouragement of expression, which not only help toddlers better understand and deal with their emotions, but also promote their emotional development. And when faced with excitement in some special situations, parents also adopt non-supportive coping styles, such as dangerous situations (toddlers running excitedly on the road), or disturbing others in public, parents often show the reaction of distraction and chastisement (usually criticism).

### 3.2 Coping with Pride

As can be seen in Figure 2, the most common response of parents to the prideful emotions of 3-6 year olds was emotional care, showing understanding of the child's emotions (e.g., saying to the child: you're so great, that's wonderful!), accounting for 75.94%, followed by concern (e.g., saying to the child: don't be too proud, consider other people's feelings.) (60.15%), and encouraging expression of response (48.12%). The “minimizing” response (telling your child that it's nothing to get excited about) and the “bribing” response had the lowest mean scores, with comparable scores.



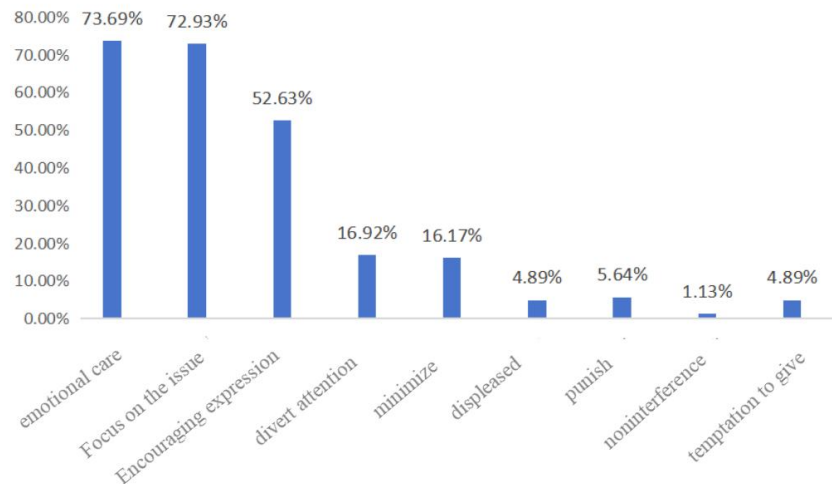
**Figure 2. Statistics of Parents' Proud Emotional Coping Styles for Young Children**

It was also learned through the interviews that parents use a range of strategies to support their young children when they display pride. Examples include paying attention to their emotions, focusing on the problem itself and encouraging them to express it. Doing so not only helps to boost children's self-confidence, but also motivates them to keep striving for improvement. However, in order to prevent their children from becoming too complacent, parents sometimes deliberately expose their children to setbacks in order to curb their complacency.

### 3.2 Negative Emotions Coping

#### 3.2.1 Sadness Coping

As can be seen in Figure 3, when young children are faced with sad emotions, the main coping strategy adopted by parents is the emotional care response, which has a high percentage of 73.69%. Secondly, parents tend to respond by focusing on the problem and encouraging expression, and the average percentages of these two strategies are relatively high. In contrast, the response strategy of non-interference had the lowest percentage of 1.13%. Almost all parents took steps to calm their toddlers when they showed sadness.

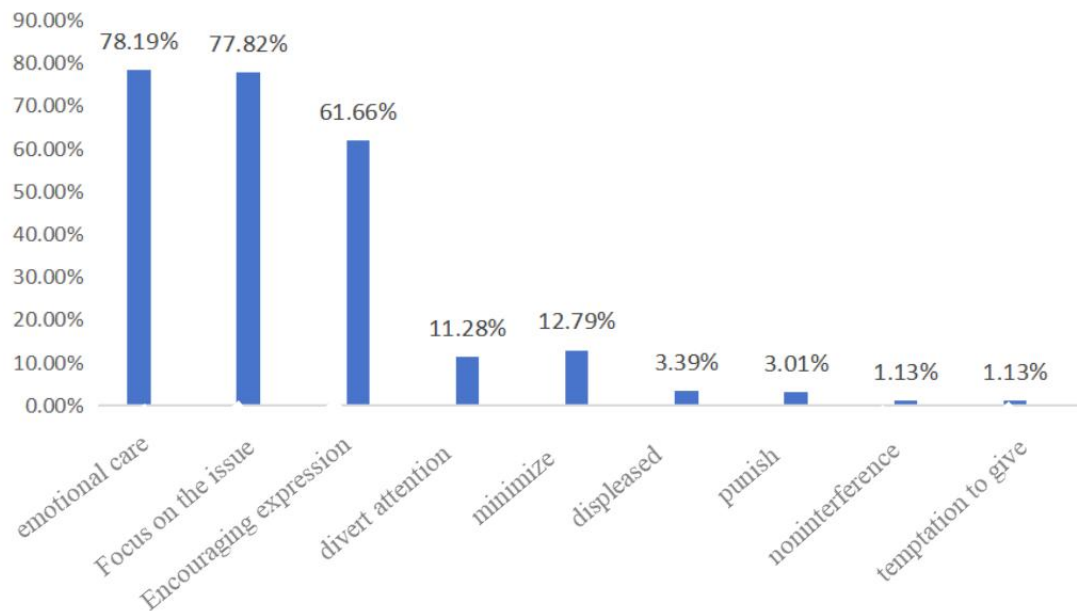


**Figure 3. Statistics on the Way Parents of Young Children Cope with Sad Emotions**

Compared with other emotions, parents tend to adopt a supportive approach to deal with their young children's sadness and help them solve their problems so as to get out of their sadness. This supportive approach not only effectively relieves toddlers' sadness, but also helps them develop positive emotional coping mechanisms, laying the foundation for solving problems on their own in the future. Some parents, on the other hand, will adopt a minimalist approach depending on the situation, hoping that their children can exercise self-control and do not over-immersed in sad memories, which may have a negative impact on their physical and mental health.

### 3.2.2 Fearful Emotional Coping

As can be seen from Figures 4, when facing young children's fearful emotions, the main coping styles adopted by parents are emotional care and concern for the problem, accounting for 78.19% and 77.82%, respectively. In addition to this, 61.66% of parents will use the coping style of encouraging expression. In contrast, strategies such as displeasure coping, chastisement coping and non-interference coping are used less frequently.

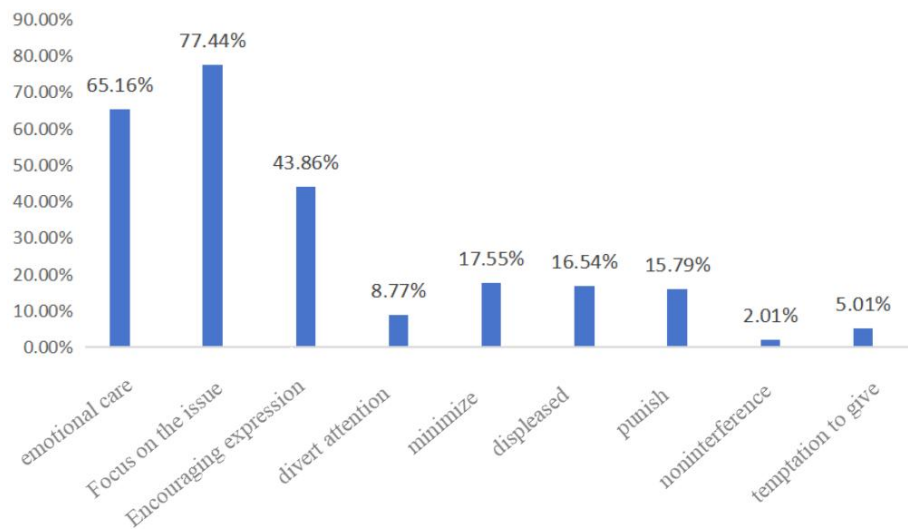


**Figure 4. Statistics on the Way Parents of Young Children Cope with Fearful Emotions**

Parents usually take into account the psychological resilience of their young children and do not try to force them to overcome specific fears, out of a deep concern for their mental health. Parents are concerned that if they force their young children to face their fears, they may leave a psychological shadow on their young children, which may intensify their feelings of fear and may also make them show stronger resistance when facing difficult tasks.

### 3.2.3 Anger Coping

As can be seen from Figures 5, parents are more likely to use attention to the problem and emotional care when dealing with their young children's anger. Specifically, the percentage of the coping style of attention problem reaches 77.44%, while the percentage of emotional care has 65.16%. Meanwhile, the average percentage of all non-supportive coping styles was relatively low. In particular, the response of non-interference was only 2.01%, which may be attributed to the unique nature of the emotion of anger, i.e., its more direct and destructive expression, which makes it difficult for parents to choose to ignore this emotion.



**Figure 5. Statistics of Parents' Response to Young Children's Anger Emotions**

Anger is a natural emotional response, and when confronted with angry feelings in young children, parents primarily tend to adopt supportive coping strategies with the primary goal of stabilizing their children's emotions. However, some parents report that they sometimes have difficulty controlling their own emotions and that their child's anger often triggers empathic anger in them. Parents who chose the chastisement strategy aimed to curb their children's angry emotions and their misbehavior. In their view, appropriate punishment enables children to recognize their mistakes, thus correcting bad behaviors and developing good character and habits. However, in this process, parents need to be careful about the degree of punishment so as not to negatively affect their children psychologically and emotionally.

#### 4. Advice

##### 4.1 Response to Young Children's Excited Emotions

When young children's emotions are so high that they are unable to control themselves, they may ignore outside voices and may not respond much even if they are reprimanded in a stern tone of voice. However, ignoring them outright may cause them to lose control even more in public.<sup>[4]</sup> Parents can adopt the following methods to deal with this situation:

Method 1: Parents need to stay calm and avoid their own emotions being driven by their children, and use gentle communication with their children to ease their tension.

Method 2: lead the child to a quiet and comfortable environment, complex environmental stimuli have a negative impact on the emotional calming of young children. Parents should try to lead their children to a quiet environment to calm them down.

Method 3: Help your toddler find peace through distraction. Understanding your toddler's needs and interests is the key to successful distraction. For example, parents can tell their toddler a bedtime story about Tyrannosaurus Rex, try quiet activities such as asking them to count how many dinosaurs there



are and take deep breaths to lead them back to their senses.

Method 4: Try a cooling-off method. When toddlers are still excited late at night and find it difficult to fall asleep, parents can appropriately ignore their agitated behavior. This is a rational way of coping and helps develop the toddler's ability to self-soothe and fall asleep.

#### *4.2 Coping with Toddlers' Pride*

Toddlers can feel proud of receiving praise from adults. To help toddlers build self-confidence, parents should give timely positive feedback and recognize their success.

Method 1: Foster empathy. When toddlers show excessive self-importance in front of their peers, they can be guided to learn to put themselves in other people's shoes and think, "How would they feel if they were not praised?"

Method 2: Correct your child's shortcomings at the right time. When a child achieves a certain level of success in a certain area, he or she may become complacent and not want to work harder. At this time, parents should gently tell their children about their shortcomings so that they realize that learning is never-ending and that there are many children who are better than they are.

#### *4.3 Coping with Toddlers' Sadness*

Sadness is a complex emotional experience, a natural reaction that occurs when people face frustration, and toddlers often express it by crying. When toddlers face sadness, parents should not stop them directly but allow them to express their sadness as much as possible.

Parents should understand their children's sadness and encourage them to express their feelings, especially "why they feel sad", so that children can feel that their parents are always by their side. In addition, parents need to be careful when using material comfort and should not use bribery to try to stop crying, as this may teach the child to use emotional blackmail to achieve his/her own goals.

#### *4.4 Coping with Fearful Emotions in Young Children*

Toddlers develop a wide range of fearful emotions, which is normal for their development. However, parents need to cope with them appropriately to help toddlers overcome their fears and develop their courage. Here are some strategies for parents:

Method 1.: Let toddlers understand the emotion of fear. Young children's fear often comes from the fear of the unknown, such as darkness, loneliness, animals and so on. Parents should first understand what their children are afraid of and why they are afraid. From there, they can help their children recognize the emotion of fear and then face it.

Method 2: Listening and comforting. When children are afraid, parents should listen patiently to their feelings and offer comfort. They can gently caress the child, hug them, etc. to let the child know that their parents will be there for them.

Method 3: Cultivate children's self-confidence. Parents can praise their children's small achievements to make them feel empowered. This can help children become more independent and confident so that they can better cope with fearful emotions.

#### 4.5 Coping with Anger Emotions in Young Children

It is normal for young children to experience mood swings, and the emotion of anger is one of the common emotions. Young children may become angry when they feel resentful, frustrated, or other negative emotions. Parents can use the following ways to cope:

Parents should first remain calm. When toddlers are angry, they may cry loudly, throw things, or attack others. At this point, parents need to control their emotions and not lose their temper or blame their child.

Then teach your child to express their emotions correctly. Young children often lack the words to express their emotions, so they will express their dissatisfaction by crying and throwing tantrums. Parents can teach their children to use the right words to describe their feelings, for example, “I am angry”, “I think it is unfair”, and so on.

Parents can also provide appropriate outlets for children to vent their frustrations. For example, some stress relieving toys, paintbrushes, paper, etc., so that they can vent their emotions by drawing, shooting balls, etc.

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