

Why and *How* to support autonomy when it's difficult to do so (and matters the most)

Mireille Joussemet

The basic psychological need for autonomy is central to human development. I will first present an integrative review of research coming from various theoretical frameworks that all point to the importance of considering children's experiences when exerting the parenting role (Joussemet & Grolnick, 2022). In addition to promoting children's socio-emotional learning (Kurdi et al., 2021), parental autonomy support (PAS), also facilitates cognitive and physical development.

PAS is thus a protective and promotive factor for children but unfortunately, it can be quite challenging to provide, perhaps especially in early childhood (Joussemet & Mageau, 2022) and when children's temperament is more reactive (Andreadakis et al., 2020). Moreover, the parenting role involves socialization, and I argue that it is a bigger challenge to promote identified motivation than to preserve intrinsic motivation (e.g., clean-up vs. play). Sadly, children are probably deprived of PAS when they need it the most.

Effective and accessible programs are thus needed to help parents provide AS across all situations and developmental periods. I will go over new results from our (Geneviève Mageau and I) assessment of the *How-to Parenting Program* (Faber & Mazlish, 1980), derived from Ginott's work. This experiential parenting group builds on perspective-taking and teaches 30 concrete communication skills.

With our recent studies, we learned that (a) it is possible to deliver this parenting group with great fidelity (Lafontaine et al., submitted), (b) its positive impact on child mental health is maintained over time (e.g., Mageau et al., 2022), and (c) its effects are generally not moderated by parents' cultural background (hierarchical vs. egalitarian; Saïb et al., submitted). In addition, a pilot study suggests that this program is more helpful than a treatment-as-usual condition, when delivered online to

parents of preschoolers (Corbeil et al., 2023). Our new, current RCT has the same design, with observations and long-term follow-ups.

In sum, PAS is certainly worthwhile, and though it can be challenging, it can be also be learnt. Sharing this know-how can prove useful at all times, perhaps particularly when facing crucial, stressful, and challenging situations.