

## Parents Dealing with the Expression of Sadness by their Children

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### Abstract

Objectives: Identifying sadness inductors on children according to parents' perception; checking strategies of emotion regulation used by parents before children's sadness; comparing the ways mothers and fathers deal with children's sadness. Participants: 26 heterosexual couples (Average age = 37 years old), at least two children from six up to twelve years old, one boy and one girl. Delineation: collective case study. Instruments: General data questionnaire; *Econômica Brasil* qualification criteria; The questions were: "What usually upsets your child?"; "Tell me a situation which made your son sad."; "What did you do in this situation?"; stimulus-story. Outcome: fathers tend to punish sons and daughters when they are sad and replace something lost; mothers minimize it, *i. e.*, reduce the importance of child's reaction, or the problem that caused it. Reaction centered in the problem was the most used by father and mother before children's sadness.

**Keywords:** sadness, emotional regulation, children, parent practices

### Manejo dos Pais frente à Expressão de Tristeza dos Filhos

#### Resumo

Objetivos: identificar eliciadores de tristeza nos filhos na percepção dos pais; verificar estratégias de regulação emocional usadas pelos pais frente à tristeza dos filhos; comparar como pai e mãe lidam com a tristeza dos filhos. Participantes: 26 casais heterossexuais (M = 37 anos), pelo menos dois filhos de seis a doze anos, um de cada sexo. Delineamento: estudos de casos coletivos. Instrumentos: Questionário de Dados Gerais; Critério de Classificação Econômica Brasil; perguntas: "O que costuma deixar seu filho triste?"; "Conte uma situação em que seu filho ficou triste."; "O que você fez nessa situação?"; história-estímulo. Resultados: o pai tende a punir os filhos e filhas diante da tristeza e substituir algo perdido; as mães minimizam, ou seja, diminuem a importância da reação emocional da criança, ou do problema que a provocou. A reação centrada no problema foi a estratégia mais utilizada por pai e mãe frente à tristeza dos filhos.

**Palavras-chave:** tristeza, regulação emocional, filhos

### Proceder de los Padres frente a la Expresión de Tristeza de los Hijos

#### Resumen

Objetivos: Identificar los inductores de tristeza en los hijos según la percepción de sus padres; verificar estrategias de regulación emocional usadas por los padres y también comparar como ellos se comportan en relación a la tristeza de sus hijos. Participantes: 26 parejas heterosexuales, edad media de 37 años, casadas o en unión estable con dos o más hijos, con edad entre 6 y 12 años, uno de cada sexo. Delineamiento: estudios de casos colectivos. Instrumentos: Cuestionario de Datos Generales; Criterio de Clasificación Económica Brasil; guion de entrevista conteniendo tres preguntas: "¿Qué suele dejar a su hijo triste?" "Relate una situación en que su hijo quedó triste." "¿Qué hizo usted en esa situación?"; y una historia de estímulo. Resultados: el padre tiende a castigar a los hijos frente a la reacción de tristeza y substituir algo perdido; ya las madres minimizan, o sea disminuyen la importancia de reacción emocional del niño, o del problema que la provocó. La reacción centrada en el problema fue la estrategia más usada por los padres frente a la tristeza de sus hijos.

**Palabras clave:** tristeza, regulación emocional, hijos, prácticas parentales

## Introduction

Emotion is fundamental to human development and functioning, and may be classified as positive or negative. Among negative emotions, there is sadness, which is a state of inhibition and decreased cognitive activity. Through this emotion it is shown that some desire was not carried out and/or it signals the existence of problems involving the individual (Melo, 2005).

Sadness is usually elicited by adverse events, such as being rejected, losing something, or simply not

getting what you want; evaluating an event as negative and themselves as powerless to reverse the outcome or change the situation. In childhood, for example, the parents' decision to divorce is characterized as a large inductor of that feeling. The experience of sadness may result in giving up on a goal or in developing a new plan; and even in avoiding contact with other people (Reis, Habigzang, & Sperb, 2015). Sadness is a basic emotion, present in all individuals and also linked to the development of empathy, seek for social support, evaluation of possible inductors of the problem and aid in narrowing the interpersonal relationship (Melo, 2005).

The parental response to the child's emotion is related to the development of children's emotional, social and interpersonal competence (Almeida, 2006; Denham, Basset, & Wyatt, 2010). One aspect of emotional competence is the regulation of emotions (RE), which consists of an extrinsic and intrinsic process responsible for monitoring, evaluation and alteration of emotional reactions (Thompson, 1991). Several characteristics of the parents influence the socialization of child RE, among them the attachment style and past family experiences, stress levels, social support, mental health and parental beliefs about emotions. Child-related factors such as temperament, sex, stage of development and the child's behaviors in emotionally challenging situations also moderate the parental response to the child, making this, therefore, a two-way process (Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007). For example, children with high levels of frustration, impulsiveness, irritability, low self-control are more vulnerable to negative parental behaviors that, in turn, are predictors of the increase in these children's characteristics (Kiff, Lengua, & Zalewski, 2011).

According to Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers and Robinson (2007), the influence of parents in the development of RE in children occurs from three complementary processes: observation for modeling, parental actions in response to the child's emotional and family emotional environment. The observation by modeling suggests that the child learns to regulate emotions themselves with family life, watching emotional displays of parents that elucidate what emotion is acceptable and expected, taking them as social reference on how they should react in similar situations.

The reaction of parents to the child's emotion and the strategies they teach the child to deal with emotions, for example, distracting the child from a negative event, or promoting a reassessment of the situation also influence the child's RE. Therefore, parents may consider the emotional expression of the child as an opportunity to teach them how to handle such experiences. In this case, they pay attention and are aware of the child's emotion, encourage them to identify and name the emotion, have empathy, validate the child's emotional state and help the child to solve problems related to inductors of emotion. On the other hand, parents may feel uncomfortable with the child's emotional response and disapprove of it (Morris et al., 2007).

Children that come from families with positive emotional expression and who accept the children's

emotions tend to feel safe and free to express emotion, for they understand that their need will be met. Responsiveness to the child's emotions is positively associated with good self-esteem index, good school results and cognitive development, and lower incidence of behavior problems (Sanders & Morawska, 2011). In turn, punitive parents can teach the child to avoid negative emotional demonstration, leading to inadequate expression of emotion (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996; Katz, Maliken, & Stettler, 2012; Morris et al., 2007). Ignoring the child's emotion is associated with poorer developmental outcome of emotion (Melo, 2005). Lack of parental support for the child's emotion leads to lower coping with sorrow (Sanders, Zeman, Poon, & Miller, 2013).

The emotional environment is constituted by the quality of the interpersonal relationship (involving attachment, relationship between parents and parenting style) and the amount of positive and negative emotion arising from family. When the emotional atmosphere is negative, the child can become reactive and emotionally insecure (Morris et al., 2007). Nevertheless, parental training for handling the emotions of the children has shown positive results (Wilson, Havighurst, & Harley, 2012), indicating that the influence of parents on the child's RE can be adjusted.

The punitive or minimizing parental reaction can impair a child's ability to process emotional information (Eisenberg, Fabes, & Murphy, 1996), and the low sensitivity of the mother has been correlated with a greater emotional deregulation of the child (Friedlmeier & Trommsdorff, 1999). Parents of aggressive children tend to be highly punitive and critics (Sanders & Morawska, 2011); anguished parents who use harsh coping strategies such as aggressive behavior in response to negative emotion, have children who express the emotion intensely and who find it hard to behave in a socially responsible way (Fabes, Leonard, Kupanoff, & Martin, 2001).

Regarding the differences between father and mother to deal with their son's emotion, Melo (2005), using the Coping with Children's Negative Emotions Scale (CCNES), which assesses parental response to negative emotions of the child, found that father and mother tended to react to the child's emotion more often with constructive strategy, but when considering the whole sample, fathers had more constructive reactions than mothers. This showed that the positive reaction of the father and mother is more frequent with internalizing emotions such as sadness, humiliation/

shame or anxiety/fear, than with externalizing emotions such as anger. Another study conducted in China found that the mother had less aggressive strategies on the emotions of son and daughter, while their father acted more often with aggressive and punitive reaction. Such reactions were positively correlated with the child's aggressive behavior (Chang, Schwartz, Dodge, & McBride-Chang, 2003).

Also through CCNES scale, Eisenberg, Fabes and Murphy (1996) found that, compared to the father, the mother showed more strategies to encourage the expression of negative feelings and validate this state; focusing on emotion, he made use of a strategy that helped the child feel better; and with emphasis on the problem, helped him cope with the inductor of sadness. This study concluded that the lack of child's social competence is linked to the reaction of minimization and punishment of parents. Accordingly, Cassano, Perry-Parrish and Zeman (2007) found that both father and mother tend to respond to the child's sadness with behaviors that minimize emotion. However, minimization tends to decrease when the child becomes older.

The parental RE can also be distinguished taking into account the child's gender. In a study of children 3-4 years old, it was discovered that the mother manifests more about the child's emotional experience than their father. When discussing sad events, the father uses more emotional expressions with his daughter than with his son (Fivush, Brotman, Buckner, & Goodman, 2000). Another survey revealed that both parents tended to have more negative reactions to the son than to the daughter, when facing the expression of these emotions (Melo, 2005). Corroborating this finding, Cassano, Perry-Parrish and Zeman (2007) noted that facing the child's sadness, expressive encouragement was more common for the girl than for the boy, and the mother was more likely to use this strategy than the father, especially with the older child. Still, the mother reported distress when facing her daughter's sadness and tended to encourage emotional expression, using a strategy directed to solving the problem.

Cassano, Zeman and Sanders (2014) evaluated the response of father and mother to the expression of sadness taking into account the sex of the children. From a measure of self-report, mother and father react to the sadness of the children in the same way, regardless of the sex of the child. However, when a spouse assessed the reaction of the other, the husband reported that his

wife provided more support for the sons and his wife reported that her husband gave more support to the daughters. According to Almeida (2006), the father tends to minimize the negative emotion of the daughter and react more negatively against their emotion of anxiety/fear than when compared to the son.

Whereas parental response to children's emotional expression influences the child's socialization RE (Morris et al., 2007), it is important to conduct a survey about parenting and management of children's emotion, that is, the second process proposed by Morris et al. (2007). Moreover, as international studies are inconclusive as to differences between the father and mother responses to the emotions of the male and female children, it is relevant to see whether there are differences in Brazilian culture in these relations. We start with the hypothesis that perception and parental response to the child's expression of sadness varies depending on the gender of the parents (Eisenberg et al., 1996) and the child (Cassano et al., 2007; Melo, 2005).

The research objective is to identify the inductors of sadness in children, in the perception of the parents; ascertain the RE strategy that parents use with the male and female child's expression of sadness and compare the way in which both parents deal individually with the child's expression of sadness.

## Method

### *Participants*

The participants were 26 heterosexual couples, married or in a civil union. The age of the mothers ranged from 27 to 45 years ( $M = 35.92$ ,  $SD = 5.32$ ) and fathers from 29 to 49 ( $M = 39.62$ ,  $SD = 5.05$ ). The average schooling of the total sample was 13.55 years, mothers 13.88 and fathers 13.21 years of study. The duration of relationship for the couples was 9-19 years ( $M = 13.92$ ,  $SD = 3.23$ ). Family income varied from R\$ 1,100.00 to R\$ 50,000.00 ( $M = 3,848.90$ ,  $SD = 6,976.27$ ), socioeconomic classes ranging from A1 to C2, according to the Brazilian Economic Classification Criterion (CCEB) (Brazilian Association in Research Studies [ABEP], 2014).

The inclusion criterion sought couples with at least two children, these aged six to 12 years, one of each sex, both biological children of the couple; married or in a stable relationship and residing in the same home with the children. Participants were selected according to the chain-referral technique (snowball) (Goodman, 1961).

## Instruments

To collect demographic data we used a General Data Questionnaire, which addressed education, age and profession of parents, marriage time, age of children and family composition, and also the CCEB, economic segmentation tool that identifies household characteristics to economically classify the population (ABEP, 2014).

In individual interviews the father and the mother had three open questions both for the son and the daughter: "What usually makes your child sad?" "Tell a situation where your child was sad."; "What did you do in this situation?". Also a stimulus based in a literature story was used (Fabes, Eisenberg, & Bernzweig, 1990; Shields, Ryan, & Cicchetti, 2001), "You go out to walk with your son/daughter and (s) he takes her/his favorite toy. Arriving home after the walk, (s)he asks you where the toy is. You say you do not know, and (s)he lost their favorite toy. Your child is very sad and starts to cry a lot. What happens next?".

## Outlining and Procedures

The research has qualitative, quantitative and transversal character, with outlining of collective case studies and narrative interview method (Bauer & Jovchelovitch, 1999).

From the researchers' contact network, the first couples were selected by convenience, which were then asked to indicate other couples. The explanation and scheduling of the interview happened by telephone. In all, contact was established with 43 couples, but only 26 agreed to participate. The interviews took place at the residence of the couples. Each spouse was interviewed separately, and one investigator interviewed the mother and one the father at the same time, making it that one could not participate or interfere in the interview of the other. To start, each participant signed the consent form for recording and participation in the research, answered the CCEB, followed by General Data Questionnaire and interview guide containing the three questions, followed by the story-stimulation and its questioning. Father and mother responded to the interview questions twice, once about the son and the other regarding the daughter. The interviews lasted about 30 minutes, having been recorded and transcribed. The study was approved by the Ethics in Human Research Committee (information removed to preserve the anonymity of the author), according to Resolution 466/12.

## Data Analysis

The data were analyzed from a quantitative content perspective, in which, in predetermined categories, the frequency of responses was scored. The chi-square test was also used, in order to verify differences in fathers' responses in comparison to the mothers' responses.

After transcribing the interviews, two researchers individually evaluated parental responses as: (1) the sadness inductors for the children; (2) the parental reaction in the situation where the son/daughter was sad; and (3) regarding stimulus-story. The inductors of sadness were classified considering the categories of Cruvinel's study (2009). In this study, the author listed eight categories such as inductors of sadness: physical and verbal aggression, bad events, lack of emotional-social support, illness or death, prohibition/frustration, lack of recreational activities, school environment, and "do not know". In the present study all categories cited by Cruvinel (2009) were found and a new category emerged from the data and was added to the above (conflict between peers/siblings). Table 1 shows the definition of categories inducing of sadness and examples from our sample that composed each category, followed by a few lines from the participants. The correlation was calculated between the ratings for the inductors of sadness, which was 80.76%. In regard the disagreements, there was a consensus among researchers in a total of 175 occurrences (Table 2).

The responses of parents face the question: "Tell a situation where your child was sad." and "What did you do in that situation?" and stimulus-story were classified according to reaction categories to sadness: distraction, focused on the problem, validation of emotions, punitive, minimizing (Eisenberg et al., 1996; Cassano et al., 2007; Shields et al., 2001) and disturbed (Melo, 2005). The categories "substitution" and "do nothing" emerged from this research. Table 3 presents the categories and definition on the parental reaction to sadness, and examples from our sample that composed each category, followed by speeches of participants for both the questions and the stimulus-story. The correlation for the answers on the parental reaction to sadness, both for the questions and stimulus-story, was calculated jointly for being of the same categories. We obtained matches of 83.22% and after consensus was reached, we had a total of 284 instances (Tables 4 and 5).



## Results

### 1. Elicitors of Sadness

In order to investigate the factors that, in the perception of parents, cause sorrow in the child, two questions were analyzed together: "What usually makes your child sad" and "Tell a situation where (s)he was upset." Parents could list as many reasons for sadness as they wanted. Therefore, the amount of responses to the category "elicitors of sadness" is greater than the number of participants. In some cases, they reported as a reason, for example, staying away from the parents, but in situations eliciting sadness cited another cause, for example, canceling a scheduled trip.

In Table 2 we find that both the father and the mother identified as main sadness elicitors situations involving child frustration/ban, coupled with the lack of emotional/social support. It is noteworthy that, although uncommon, some parents were unable to report episodes of sadness in children of both sexes, though the sorrow is a basic emotion present in the daily lives of all people. There was a statistically significant difference only for the "bad events" category ( $X^2 = 6.05$ ,  $p = 0.014$ ), where mothers considered more often than the fathers that such events elicit sadness in children.

### 2. Parental Reactions Facing Sorrow

To investigate how parents handle sadness of both daughter and son in everyday situations, immediately after the description of a sad situation, a question was posed: "What did you do in this situation?". Importantly, parents often described more than one reaction in the same answer, such as: "I talked to her, it was difficult for us to go back there because the project had already closed... in another possibility we would buy it, or not, I mean she has so many toys to play, it didn't need to be exactly that one." In this response the mother fit in three response categories simultaneously: reaction focused on the problem, replacement and minimization. As a result, the amount of responses for the "parental" reactions was greater than the amount of participants. Table 3 shows the description for each category within parental sadness reactions.

Parents facing the expression of sadness regarding both children from the reported cases, made more use of reactions centered on the problem, followed by minimization and distraction (Table 4). None of them made emotional validation for male children and the

percentage of this reaction was also small for the girls. Still, though with little occurrence, it is noted that some parents do nothing against the sadness of the children. There was a statistically significant difference in the use of punitive reaction between father and mother ( $X^2 = 8.23$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ), in which the father reported using more of this strategy with both children, when compared to the mother.

### 3. Stimulus-Story

We also verified the parental reaction to a stimulus-story, and the parents could list as many strategies as they wanted in their answer. As a consequence, the number of responses was greater than the amount of participants (Table 5).

It was found that the categories most used by parents for both children facing the expression of sadness related to the loss of a toy were, respectively, for father and mother, Reaction centered in Problem, Punitive Reaction and Replacement (Table 5). The father tends to use more Replacement than the mother ( $X^2 = 4.7$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ). The mother minimizes most often the sadness feeling of the children, when compared to the father ( $X^2 = 4.98$ ,  $p = 0.026$ ). There was no significant difference in the strategies used by father and mother in relation to son and daughter.

## Discussion

The most cited category as an elicitor of sadness according to parents was frustration/prohibition both for the sons and daughters. Not getting something that was desired (Melo, 2005), and feeling helpless as to change a result (Reis et al., 2015) are also elicitors of sadness. It is possible that parents notice the sadness in the children more often in situations of prohibition or frustration because they, themselves, are the agents in such events. Thus, upon being forbidden of something or having a claim denied by a parent, the child automatically expresses the according emotion, in case, the sadness, according to the perception of parents. Similarly, the second most cited category, Lack of social emotional support, is also directly related to the interaction with parents and, probably for this reason, most salient to them. That's because the main examples given by parents involved situations in which children reported sadness due to absence of parents and jealous brothers.

The mother more often identifies the category of bad events, or fights between father and mother, or

Table 1

*Elicitors of Sadness (based on Cruvinel, 2009) and Examples of the Categories, out of the Researched Sample*

Categories	Description of the category
Illness or death	Loss and health problems in them selves or others, or some animal. Examples: Someone in the family or some pet is sick or dies, start to think that parents may die: <i>"her grandmother's death"</i> (F. 09); <i>"when she gets sick"</i> (F.12); and <i>"when her guinea pig died"</i> (M.17).
Physical/verbal aggression	Destructive and violent behavior towards the child, generate the feeling of sadness. Examples: situations in which the parents/peers fight with the child: <i>"I spanked him in the toochie with that belt"</i> (M.11); and <i>"and then in the classroom there is a lot of 'Oh, that's ugly, you are so big'"</i> (M.02).
Lack of social-emotional support	Sadness is related to the feeling of little attention and affection coming from people close to the child, such as parents, siblings, friends and teachers, as well as answers that express fear of abandonment or being alone. Examples: situations suc as being away from the parents or someone they care about; parents paying more attention to the sibling; promising an outing and cancelling; not getting attention, missing playing or hanging out with friends: <i>"she sees I pay more attention to J."</i> (M. 04); <i>"...when there are games he`s trained for and I can`t go..."</i> (F. 20); <i>"When I was away for a few days"</i> (F. 25).
Bad events	Negative news, thoughts and events in general that occur on the child's day-to-day life. Examples: occasions in which the child loses or ruins a toy, witnesses fights between the parents, experiences their break-up: <i>"when I drink she gets sad"</i> (F. 04); <i>"when she loses a toy she likes very much"</i> (M. 05); <i>"If there is a fight between my husband and I"</i> (M. 18).
School environment	Happenings related to the school, such as behaving inappropriately in this environment or academic failure. Examples: Problems in the school environment, issues with homework, and grade-related problems: <i>"she was running for 'student that reads best' and ended up in second place"</i> (F. 20); <i>"doing badly in a test"</i> (F. 17).
Lack of play time	The elicitor of sadness in this case is having no activities related to playing. Examples: Having nothing to do, no one to play with: <i>"... so sometimes it happens that he goes play with a friend and they don`t play much"</i> (M. 14).
Frustration/prohibition	Expectation as to an outcome and not reaching it, as well as situations when parents forbid them to do something. Examples: What the child wanted didn`t happen, parents forbidding something and getting criticism from them: <i>"he doesn`t like to be crossed... if we call him out on something"</i> (M. 01); <i>"When we say 'no'"</i> (M. 02); <i>"she has already made up expectations and sometimes we just can`t"</i> (M. 21).
Conflict between peers/siblings	The behavior of another child, that doesn`t involve aggressiveness, being siblings or peers, bother the child leading them to a feeling of sadness. Examples: Dispute between siblings over a toy or priorities regarding some activity, conflict with friends, sibling bothers the child: <i>"this friend told her that if she got a doll like hers they wouldn`t be friends anymore"</i> (M. 25); <i>"when the brother switches the channel, when they fight over attention"</i> (F. 21).
Don`t know/don`t recall	The participant describes not remembering the reasons that made their children sad. Examples: Not knowing, not recalling, believing the child doesn`t get sad: <i>"I don`t know because I think sadness and anger get a little mixed"</i> (M. 09).

Note. M: mother; F: father.

Table 2

*Percentage and Absolute Numbers as to Categories of Elicitors of Sadness, According to the Answers of Father, Mother and Gender of the Child*

Elicitor	*Number of fathers that said it		* Number of mothers that said it		**Total of father occurrences	** Total of mother occurrences	$\chi^2$ (p) [fathers x mothers]
	Boy	Girl	Boy	Girl	Boy and Girl	Boy and Girl	
Don't know/ don't recall	19.23% (5)	11.53% (3)	11.53% (3)	11.53% (3)	9.52% (8)	6.59% (6)	0.33 (0.566)
Illness or death	7.69% (2)	11.53% (3)	11.53% (3)	19.23% (5)	5.95% (5)	8.79% (8)	0.79 (0.374)
Physical/verbal aggression	3.84% (1)	0% (0)	11.53% (3)	7.69% (2)	1.19% (1)	5.49% (5)	2.83 (0.093)
Lack of social-emotional support	19.23% (5)	30.76% (8)	30.76% (8)	38.46% (10)	15.47% (13)	19.78% (18)	1.15 (0.284)
Bad events	15.38% (4)	15.38% (4)	34.61% (9)	38.46% (10)	9.52% (8)	20.87% (19)	<b>6.05 (0.014)</b>
Frustration/prohibition	84.61% (22)	69.23% (18)	61.53% (16)	57.69% (15)	47.61% (40)	34.06% (31)	3.59 (0.058)
School environment	7.69% (2)	19.23% (5)	3.84% (1)	3.84% (1)	8.33% (7)	2.19% (2)	1.09 (0.295)
Lack of play time	0% (0)	0% (0)	3.84% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	1.09% (1)	1.01 (0.315)
Conflict between peers/siblings	0% (0)	7.69% (2)	0% (0)	3.84% (1)	2.38% (2)	1.09% (1)	0.34 (0.558)
Total	41	43	44	47	84	91	

\* Percentage value calculated regarding the whole sample.

\*\* Percentage value calculated regarding the total answers.

*Note.* Cells in bold indicate chi-square tests that demonstrate statistically significant ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) differences between fathers and mothers.

their separation, as elicitors of sadness. According to Cruvinel (2009), family discord, parental illness, instability in family or school environment, are among the situations that facilitate stress and negative emotions such as sadness. Such situations do not involve a direct interaction between the parents and the child. Thus, to realize that the child is sad because of a bad event, parents should note that this situation affected the child in some way, pay attention to how the child was affected and identify the emotion arising as sadness. Crespo (2013) found that fathers tend to employ more emotional words related to anger and discussions of this

issue, and that mothers use more words associated with sadness in talks addressing such emotion. Thus, it is plausible to assume that the mother is more attentive than the father to events that are elicitors of sadness in the children, while the father may be more aware of situations that cause anger, illustrating, according to the author, that parents feel more comfortable to discuss emotions according to the gender stereotype.

The Parental reaction strategy most used by father and mother, considering the general situations and stimulus-story, was a reaction focused on the issue. This corroborates findings in the literature showing

Table 3

*Parental Reactions to Sadness and Examples of the Categories out of the Researched Sample*

Category	Description of the category
Adaptive strategies	
Reaction focused on the problem	Consists of a talk related to the problematic situation, with the intention of resolving or reliving it. (Eisenberg et al., 1996; Cassano et al., 2007; Shields et al., 2001). Examples: investigating what happened; looking for solutions and trying to remember what the child did before the problematic situation: (*) <i>"I ask what is going on, to know the reason and talk to her"</i> (M. 06). (**) <i>I use this a lot, 'oh, lets go on a quest, try to figure out where you lost it, when you last had it. When you left where it was, who you lent it to last."</i> (F. 19).
Validation of emotions	Identifying the emotion that the child is expressing and encourage them to name it and talk about the emotional experience (Eisenberg et al., 1996; Cassano et al., 2007; Shields et al., 2001). Examples: parental expression of affection directing the child's attention and trying to comfort them: (*) <i>so I hug her, cuddle..."</i> (M. 04); <i>"try to pay attention and ask, what do you want, if you take them in your arms it's going to be chicanery..."</i> (F. 26). (**) <i>"I was going to comfort him..."</i> (F. 04).
Unadaptive strategies	
Distraction	Parental Action that softens the vehemence of the child's emotion, directing their attention towards another event so that they forget the situation that triggered the disturbing emotion (Eisenberg et al., 1996; Cassano et al., 2007; Shields et al., 2001). Examples: making another activity, distracting the child: (*) <i>"I tickle her so she'll be happy"</i> (M. 04); (**) <i>"I stall"</i> (M. 19).
Punitive reaction	Punishing, being it by adding or withdrawing something; also when parents make the child responsible for what happened or restrict the child's emotional expression (Eisenberg et al., 1996; Cassano et al., 2007; Shields et al., 2001). Examples: increasing the tone of voice, physically hurting, making them accountable for what happened: (*) <i>"I talk louder. Sometimes I spank her a little..."</i> (F. 11); (**) <i>"I tell him I can't do anything, that he has to handle it himself, he lost it, it was his responsibility"</i> (M. 06).
Minimization	Actions that diminish the importance of the child's reaction, over the expressed emotion or the issue that set it off (Eisenberg et al., 1996; Cassano et al., 2007; Shields et al., 2001). Examples: saying that the child is overreacting, that they should remember other people have it worse: (*) <i>"he has no reason to feel that way"</i> (M. 06); (**) <i>"I'll explain that this is not all that matters, there are other toys"</i> (M. 08).
Disturbed Reaction	The parents themselves experience negative emotions and a feeling of disorganization facing the negative expression of the child (Melo, 2005). Examples: being angry, annoyed, stressed out about the situation: (*) <i>"there have been times when I was talking and ended up angry at her..."</i> (M. 13); (**) <i>"I get angry because I'm attached to his things"</i> (M. 11).
Substitution	Situations in which loss is the elicitor of the emotion and parents buy or try to obtain something similar to what was lost. Examples: buying something similar. (*) <i>"we tried to buy it for him..."</i> (F. 09); (**) <i>I tried to buy a simiar one to see if it calmed him down"</i> (M. 09).
"Doing nothing"	Lack of response of the parents facing the emotional expression of the children. Examples: ignoring the sadness, getting out of the situation, doing nothing. (*) <i>"I don't do anything"</i> (F. 01); <i>"I leave it, she'll cry, and then the feeling goes away..."</i> (M. 13). (**) <i>There were no accounts in this category for the stimulus-story.</i>

Note. M: mother; F: father.

(\*) Examples from the sample of answers to the questions: "Tell a story in which your child was sad" and "What did you do in that situation?"

(\*\*) Examples of the sample regarding the stimulus-story.



Table 4

*Percentage and Absolute Numbers Regarding the Categories of Parental Reaction Facing Sadness, According to Answers from Fathers, Mothers and Gender of the Child*

Parental Reaction	*Number of fathers that said it		* Number of mothers that said it		**Total of father occurrences	** Total of mother occurrences	$\chi^2$ (p) [fathers x mothers]
	Boy	Girl	Boy	Girl	Boy and Girl	Boy and Girl	
Distraction	3.84% (1)	15.38% (4)	15.38% (4)	11.53%(3)	8.77% (5)	11.29% (7)	0.38 (0.539)
Reaction focused on the problem	53.84% (14)	53.84% (14)	65.38% (17)	73.07% (19)	49.12% (28)	58.06% (36)	2.60 (0.107)
Validation of emotions	0% (0)	7.69% (2)	0% (0)	7.69% (2)	3.50% (2)	3.22% (2)	0.00 (1.000)
Punitive reaction	23.07% (6)	15.38% (4)	3.84% (1)	0% (0)	17.54% (10)	1.61% (1)	<b>8.23 (0.004)</b>
Minimization	7.69% (2)	11.53% (3)	23.07% (6)	19.23% (5)	8.77% (5)	17.74% (11)	2.66 (0.103)
Substitution	3.84% (1)	0% (0)	3.84% (1)	3.84% (1)	1.75% (1)	3.22% (2)	0.34 (0.558)
Disturbed Reaction	3.84% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	3.84% (1)	1.75% (1)	1.61% (1)	0.00 (1.000)
Doing nothing	7.69% (2)	11.53% (3)	3.84% (1)	3.84% (1)	8.77% (5)	3.22% (2)	1.38 (0.240)
Total	27	30	30	32	57	62	

\* Percentage value calculated regarding the whole sample.

\*\* Percentage value calculated regarding the total answers.

*Note.* Cells in bold indicate chi-square tests that demonstrate statistically significant ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) differences between fathers and mothers.

the father and mother in fact tend to have positive reactions to internalizing emotions such as sadness, humiliation/shame or anxiety/fear (Melo, 2005). In addition, the school also measured the parental reaction to the emotional expression of children. Mothers with higher levels of education tend to have more problem-centered responses (Alves & Cruz, 2011) and the average education of this sample was 13.55 years. The family that expresses themselves emotionally and positively and accepts the emotional expression of their child can assist them in emotional regulation. (Morris et al., 2007).

As for parental reaction, a difference found in our sample indicated that the fathers reported using more punishment against the sadness of the children, regardless of gender. It is assumed that the father has difficulty accepting the expression of sadness of the children also because it is not easy for him to deal with sadness. Chaplin, Cole and Zahn-Waxler (2005) found that fathers of children in preschool respond to daughter's anxiety and sadness more often than they do for the son, in which event the father tends to attend to anger more often. The authors suggest that the attention given by parents to a particular emotion can lead

Tabela 5

*Percentage and Absolute Numbers Regarding the Categories of Parental Reaction Facing Sadness, According to the Stimulus-Story and Answers from Fathers, Mothers and Gender of the Child*

Parental Reaction to the stimulus-story	*Number of fathers that said it		* Number of mothers that said it		**Total of father occurrences	** Total of mother occurrences	$\chi^2$ (p) [fathers x mothers]
	Boy	Girl	Boy	Girl	Boy and Girl	Boy and Girl	
Distraction	0% (0)	0% (0)	3.84% (1)	3.84% (1)	0% (0)	2.56% (2)	2.04 (0.153)
Reaction focused on the problem	57.69% (15)	53.84% (14)	53.84% (14)	46.15% (12)	33.33% (29)	33.33% (26)	0.35 (0.556)
Validation of emotions	3.84% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	1.14% (1)	0% (0)	1.01 (0.315)
Punitive reaction	50.00% (13)	42.30% (11)	46.20% (12)	42.30% (11)	27.58% (24)	29.46% (23)	0.04 (0.844)
Minimization	0% (0)	7.69% (2)	15.38% (4)	19.23% (5)	2.29% (2)	11.53% (9)	<b>4.98 (0.026)</b>
Substitution	57.69% (15)	53.84% (14)	34.61% (9)	34.61% (9)	33.33% (29)	23.07% (18)	<b>4.70 (0.030)</b>
Disturbed Reaction	0% (0)	0% (0)	3.84% (1)	3.84% (1)	0% (0)	2.56% (2)	2.04 (0.153)
Doing nothing	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0% (0)	--
Total	44	41	41	39	85	80	

\* percentage value calculated regarding the whole sample.

\*\* percentage value calculated regarding the total answers.

*Note.* Cells in bold indicate chi-square tests that demonstrate statistically significant ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) differences between fathers and mothers.

to its increased expression. So it can be assumed that from childhood men learn to express anger, and to have lower receptivity to expressions of sadness, rarely manifest it and, later as parents, repeat the pattern learned in childhood. Chang, Schwartz, Dodge and McBride-Chang (2003) also found that the fathers acted more often with aggressiveness and punitive reaction to the emotional expression of the sons.

However, in regard to stimulus-story, both punished equally. It is possible that fathers and mothers who interpreted the loss of the toy as the child's error have suggested punitive reaction. According to

Deffenbacher (1999), when an event is perceived as avoidable, that is, if something could have been done to prevent the incident, it is common that the individual feels anger. In this case, given the assessment that the child was careless about the care for the toy, although they have been saddened by the loss, it is possible for parents to have a punitive response, focusing on the fact (loss toy) and not emotion of the child (sadness).

Please note that a simple punishment does not teach the child to handle the emotional reaction due to the significant loss of something nor does it model problem-solving strategies in the child. Parents who

behave in a more detached way and tend to ignore or ridicule the child's emotional responses, punishing them when they experience strong emotional reaction, undermine the emotional regulation of the child (Gottman et al., 1996). When parents are punitive they can teach the child to avoid their negative emotional expression, like sadness, which in turn makes possible the occurrence of inadequate expressions of emotion (Morris et al., 2007). In addition, an authoritarian parenting style, which devalues communication and prioritizes punishment, affects the development of the child's empathy (Justo, Carvalho, & Kristensen, 2014).

When considering the stimulus-story, we highlight the minimization category, taking into account that the mother showed greater use of this technique to deal with the emotion of sadness of both children. It is assumed that, upon realizing that the child is sad, the mother is sensitive and uses minimization to try to lessen the importance of the event, reminding the child of the fact that the lost toy was not the only one, and argue that now another child can use it to play. In contrast, in the study of Cassano et al. (2007) both the father and the mother responded to the sorrow of their son with behaviors that minimize emotion. It is noteworthy that minimization is a negative RE strategy, while maternal minimizing of the child's emotion was associated with lower level of social competence and a child's high level of avoidance against the emotional situation (Eisenberg et al., 1996).

Another difference found in the stimulus-story was the father more often made use of a replacement strategy on toy loss. It is assumed that, in contexts in which the loss of a toy is generating sadness and there is a possibility of repair, the father tends to employ replacement strategy as a way to mitigate, compensate or even stop the negative emotion. Please note that replacing something that was lost, hinders the development of tolerance to frustration on the part of the child. This is because the loss cannot always be reversed, and it is important to teach them to deal with such situations in a gradual way. In doing so their father or mother will transmit the notions of responsibility, and assist in the management of sadness caused by something that could have been avoided, suggesting that, at a later situation they will pay more attention to their own belongings. That's a possible strategy due to the socioeconomic level of the studied sample, however, one may question whether the parental reactions would be so in similar situations in samples with few economic resources.

The emotion validation strategy has been little used by the fathers and the mothers when facing the expression of sadness of both children. It is believed that parental beliefs about emotions and cultural aspects can mediate the strategies employed by the parents. This is because the emotional validation involves the identification of the emotion expressed by the child, talking about the emotional experience and welcoming the affective response. Therefore, it is necessary for parents to pay attention to the emotional experience of the child, which is more difficult when it comes to sadness, when compared to rage, for example. In addition, they should empathize with the child, seeking to understand them, to hear their perception about the reasons that led them to grieve in the manifested intensity. However, according to Palm et al. (2011), having lived in a hostile environment during childhood enables the development of dysfunctional beliefs about acceptance and invalidation of emotional experiences, contributing to the adoption, in adulthood, of negative reactions such as rejection, devaluation, criticism and punishment before the children's expressions of negative emotions. Therefore, it would be important to check, in addition to the strategies used against the sadness of the children, the emotional climate of the family of origin and their beliefs regarding emotions.

Finally, we see no significant difference from the strategies used by both parents for the son and daughter. This result differs from other studies as Fivush, Brotman, Buckner and Goodman (2000) which states that when discussing sad events, the father uses more emotional expressions with their daughter and Melo (2005), which asserted that parents tended to have more negative reactions to their sons than their daughters when facing their emotional expressions. It is believed that the use of a methodology to assess the interaction between parents and children involving conversation between dyads, according to the study by Fivush et al. (2000), may favor the identification of differences between the father and mother reactions as the child's sex.

### Final Considerations

In the perception of father and mother, the main sadness elicitors involve frustration / prohibition, followed by lack of emotional-social support. The mother rather than the father, point bad events as frequent sadness stimuli in their children. Both repeatedly use the reaction strategy, focused on the problem, which

is considered adaptive. However, it was also common the use of strategies that you can not adapt, as punishment, substitution and minimization, with the father punishing more than the mother, and also tending to replace the loss of a toy when the child is sad while the mother makes more use of minimization. The parents had difficulty validating the emotion of sadness of the children of both sexes and managing this emotion positively, failing to use everyday situations to promote emotional education, which leads to the assumption that children can present difficulties in RE, arising from inadaptable strategies reported by parents.

Limitations of this study involve the lack of a standardized instrument for assessment of RE in children, being it all based on parental reports. In addition, it is possible that both parents have responded according to what they believed to be socially acceptable. Not having assessed the knowledge and parental beliefs about their own emotions limits the understanding of their reactions to the children's sorrow.

Future studies should consider a methodology that involves observation of the interaction between parents and children by checking the parental emotional and linguistic expressions when facing the emotions of the children, addressing other emotions. It is also necessary to check the reciprocity between child temperament and parental responses to the child's emotions. This is because children with high levels of impulsivity and frustration and low self-control are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of negative parenting (Kiff et al., 2011). We must consider the role of other people in the child's RE, such as peers and teachers. The most appropriate parental behavior must be defined, according to age range of the child, and also seeking differences in the RE strategies adopted by parents concerning their children in emotionally challenging situations as well as using as a criterion the parents' education. Finally, determine whether training parents to deal with children's emotions improves the children's RE.

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