

Identifying Factors Shaping Parental Responses to Children's Negative Emotions

Nayelli. Muñoz¹, Camila. Torres^{2*}

¹ Department of Health Sciences, Private University of the North, Lima, Peru

² Department of Clinical Psychology, University of Chile, Santiago, Chile

* Corresponding author email address: lmorales@pucp.edu.pe

Article Info

Article type:

Original Article

How to cite this article:

Muñoz, N., & Torres, C. (2025). Identifying Factors Shaping Parental Responses to Children's Negative Emotions. *Applied Family Therapy Journal*, 6(4), 1-10.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.aftj.4407>



© 2025 the authors. Published by KMAN Publication Inc. (KMANPUB), Ontario, Canada. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to explore the individual, relational, and contextual factors that shape how parents respond to their children's negative emotions.

Methods and Materials: A qualitative design was employed to capture the lived experiences of parents in managing children's emotional challenges. Twenty-two parents from Chile participated in semi-structured interviews, focusing on their perceptions, attitudes, and practices when responding to children's negative emotions such as sadness, anger, and frustration. Participants were recruited through community centers and parenting networks, ensuring diversity in socio-demographic backgrounds. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis with the support of NVivo 14 software. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Trustworthiness was ensured through peer debriefing, reflexive memos, and constant comparison during coding.

Findings: Analysis revealed four overarching themes. (1) Emotional awareness and regulation in parents highlighted recognition of children's emotions, self-regulation strategies, empathy, cultural norms in emotional expression, and awareness of emotional contagion. (2) Parenting beliefs and attitudes encompassed views on discipline, developmental understanding, attitudes toward emotional expression, emotion-coaching roles, intergenerational patterns, and moral or religious values. (3) Contextual and social influences included family environment, societal expectations, work-life balance, socioeconomic challenges, peer and social networks, and media exposure. (4) Coping strategies in responding to children's negative emotions featured immediate reactions, long-term approaches, distraction and redirection, seeking external support, and communication techniques. Illustrative quotations underscored the variability and complexity of parental practices.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that parents' responses to children's negative emotions are multifaceted, shaped not only by individual self-regulation and beliefs but also by cultural expectations, social contexts, and available coping resources. These insights underscore the need for interventions that support parental emotional awareness, resilience, and communication skills, while addressing contextual stressors to promote more adaptive emotion socialization.

Keywords: *parental responses; negative emotions; emotion socialization; qualitative study; Chile; thematic analysis*

1. Introduction

Parenting is a complex process that extends beyond the provision of physical care to encompass the emotional socialization of children. Parents play a central role in shaping how children perceive, interpret, and regulate their emotions, particularly negative emotions such as sadness, anger, fear, and frustration. The way parents respond to these emotions has profound implications for children's socioemotional development, mental health, and interpersonal relationships throughout life (Riggs et al., 2025). In recent years, research has increasingly emphasized the importance of understanding the mechanisms through which parents manage children's negative emotional experiences, as well as the contextual and individual factors that influence parental responses.

Parental emotion socialization refers to the strategies parents use when they guide, model, or react to their children's emotional expressions. Supportive parental reactions—such as empathy, validation, and problem-solving—are associated with children's better adjustment and emotional regulation skills (Markoulaki, 2025). By contrast, non-supportive reactions, including minimization, punishment, or dismissal of negative emotions, have been linked to higher risks of internalizing and externalizing problems among children (Soydan & Akalin, 2022). These findings highlight that parents are not neutral observers but active agents in their children's emotional development. The current study builds on this literature by qualitatively exploring the factors shaping parental responses to children's negative emotions within a Chilean context.

A growing body of evidence demonstrates that parental responses are influenced by both parents' internal emotional processes and the broader socio-cultural environment. For example, parental self-awareness has been identified as a critical component in determining how effectively parents can help their children cope with difficult emotions (Post, 2024). When parents are mindful of their own feelings and behaviors, they are better positioned to provide constructive support to their children. Conversely, parental dysregulation—marked by heightened stress reactivity or difficulty managing one's own negative emotions—can undermine parents' ability to respond sensitively. Hafiz and colleagues (Hafiz et al., 2023) found that parents with greater emotional dysregulation tended to respond more harshly to their children's negative emotions, further exacerbating children's distress.

The role of parent-child attachment has also been emphasized as a key factor in the dynamics of emotional responses. Secure attachment relationships provide children with a safe base from which they can express negative emotions without fear of rejection (Kerns et al., 2023). Parents in secure relationships tend to perceive children's emotions as signals of need rather than as disruptive behavior, thus responding with empathy and guidance. However, insecure attachment patterns often predict parental tendencies to dismiss or punish emotional expressions, which may hinder children's emotion regulation skills over time (An & Kochanska, 2022).

Parental mental health is another factor shaping responses to children's emotions. Parents who experience elevated levels of depression, anxiety, or anhedonia often report less patience and reduced capacity to engage with their children's emotional needs. For instance, Takamatsu (Takamatsu, 2024) demonstrated that mothers with higher levels of anhedonia had fewer positive daily emotional experiences, which in turn diminished their ability to respond constructively to preschool children's negative affect. Similarly, Aktar et al. (Aktar et al., 2024) reported that parents with symptoms of depression or anxiety displayed altered physiological responses when confronted with children's negative emotions, suggesting a biological underpinning for less adaptive parental reactions. These findings underscore the interplay between parents' psychological states and their emotion socialization practices.

In addition to parental characteristics, children's temperamental traits strongly influence parental responses. Children with high negative affectivity or difficult temperament often elicit more punitive or less supportive parental reactions, creating a reciprocal cycle of stress within the parent-child dyad (Çelebi & Acar, 2024). At the same time, cultural contexts shape the extent to which certain emotional expressions are tolerated or suppressed. Zhang and colleagues (Zhang et al., 2021) illustrated this point in their biopsychosocial study of Chinese parents, showing that physiological responses to child frustration were mediated by cultural expectations surrounding emotional expression. Such findings remind us that parental emotion socialization must be understood within broader cultural frameworks rather than solely at the individual or family level.

The COVID-19 pandemic added further complexity to this field of inquiry by altering parenting conditions and emotional climates. Anikiej-Wiczenbach and Kaźmierczak (Anikiej-Wiczenbach & Kaźmierczak, 2022) found that

pandemic-related stress significantly affected parents' abilities to respond sensitively to infants, with increased strain reported in couple dynamics. These findings reflect how external stressors can exacerbate challenges in emotion socialization, particularly when families face prolonged uncertainty and disruption. Similarly, Pereira and colleagues (Pereira et al., 2022) conducted a cluster analysis and revealed different patterns of parental reactions to children's negative emotions within a clinical sample, demonstrating that parents' responses often cluster around specific tendencies, such as supportive versus dismissive strategies.

Parents' beliefs and perceptions about their children's conditions also influence their emotional responses. For example, Marchetti and Sawrikar (Marchetti & Sawrikar, 2023) showed that parents' illness representations of children with anorexia nervosa shaped how they engaged with their children's emotional struggles, often determining whether they approached emotions with empathy or frustration. Similarly, Legg and Rose (Legg & Rose, 2022) explored how parents themselves processed emotions through expressive writing in the context of youth sports, emphasizing that parents' own emotional well-being activities can indirectly shape their responses to their children.

Beyond the family unit, contextual influences such as parental involvement in schooling and homework have been found to significantly affect children's negative emotional experiences. Li and colleagues (Li et al., 2024) demonstrated that parent involvement in homework could either alleviate or heighten children's negative emotions, depending on the quality of parent-child communication and the degree of family responsibility shared. This highlights how parental responses are embedded in everyday routines and practices that extend beyond emotional moments to broader family interactions.

The importance of resilience in both parents and children has also been highlighted. Post (Post, 2024) argued that resilient parents, who maintain self-awareness and emotional balance, are more likely to raise resilient children who thrive even in the face of adversity. Similarly, Riggs and colleagues (Riggs et al., 2025) emphasized that parental predictors such as openness, prior experiences, and coping strategies significantly determine how parents respond to adolescents' disclosure of mental health challenges, a context where negative emotions are particularly salient.

Despite these advances, gaps remain in the literature. Much of the existing research has been conducted in Western, high-income countries, which may not fully

capture the experiences of parents in other cultural contexts. Moreover, the majority of studies have employed quantitative methodologies that, while valuable, may not adequately capture the nuanced and contextualized ways in which parents interpret and respond to their children's negative emotions. For instance, qualitative studies can shed light on the subjective experiences of parents, the meanings they ascribe to emotions, and the cultural scripts that guide their responses. By using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, it becomes possible to uncover patterns that may not be readily evident in survey-based research.

The current study addresses these gaps by exploring the factors that shape parental responses to children's negative emotions in Chile. Chile presents a particularly relevant context for such an investigation, given its diverse cultural influences and the central role of family in social life. By engaging directly with parents through in-depth qualitative interviews, this study seeks to identify how individual, relational, and contextual factors interact in shaping parental responses. The study uses NVivo software to conduct a rigorous thematic analysis, ensuring systematic coding and interpretation of data.

Ultimately, understanding how parents respond to children's negative emotions is crucial not only for developmental psychology but also for practical applications in parenting interventions, family therapy, and educational support systems. By identifying the key factors influencing parental responses, interventions can be tailored to strengthen supportive practices and reduce the likelihood of non-supportive strategies that may hinder children's emotional development. This study therefore contributes both to theory and practice by providing insights into the lived experiences of Chilean parents and the broader processes of parental emotion socialization.

The objective of this research is to identify and analyze the factors shaping parental responses to children's negative emotions through a qualitative approach with Chilean parents, thereby offering a deeper understanding of how cultural, personal, and contextual dynamics inform parenting practices.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study adopted a qualitative research design with an exploratory approach to investigate the factors that shape parental responses to children's negative emotions. The emphasis on qualitative inquiry was chosen to capture the

depth and complexity of parents' lived experiences and the meanings they attribute to their emotional interactions with their children.

Participants consisted of 22 parents residing in Chile, representing diverse socio-demographic backgrounds, including variations in age, gender, education, and family composition. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that the participants had direct and relevant experience in parenting young children and had encountered situations involving their children's negative emotions. Recruitment was conducted through community centers, parenting networks, and social media groups related to child development and family life.

2.2. Measures

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to share their perspectives in their own words while providing the researcher with opportunities to probe deeper into emerging themes. The interview protocol included open-ended questions focusing on how parents perceive, interpret, and respond to their children's negative emotions such as sadness, anger, and frustration. Follow-up prompts were used to elicit examples, clarify meanings, and encourage reflection.

Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via secure online video calls, depending on the participants' availability and preferences. Each interview lasted between 45 and 75 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent. Field notes were also taken to capture contextual observations and non-verbal cues. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning no new themes or insights were emerging from the interviews.

2.3. Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using NVivo 14 software to manage and organize the data.

Thematic analysis was applied to identify, code, and interpret patterns within the narratives. The analysis followed an iterative process beginning with initial coding of meaningful units of text, followed by the grouping of codes into categories and broader themes. Constant comparison was used throughout the analysis to refine codes and ensure consistency.

To enhance trustworthiness, coding decisions were discussed and refined in consultation with peer researchers familiar with qualitative methods. Triangulation was achieved through comparing interview data with field notes. Reflexive memos were maintained by the researcher to record analytic insights, decision-making processes, and potential biases. These steps contributed to ensuring credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings.

3. Findings and Results

The study included 22 parents from Chile, comprising 12 mothers (54.5%) and 10 fathers (45.5%). Participants' ages ranged from 28 to 47 years, with the majority between 30 and 40 years old ($n = 14$, 63.6%). Regarding educational background, 7 participants (31.8%) had completed secondary education, 10 (45.5%) held a university degree, and 5 (22.7%) reported postgraduate studies. In terms of marital status, 17 participants (77.3%) were married or cohabiting, while 5 (22.7%) were single parents. The number of children per participant varied from one to three, with most parents ($n = 13$, 59.1%) having two children. Household monthly income levels reflected a diverse socioeconomic range, with 9 participants (40.9%) identifying as middle-income, 7 (31.8%) as lower-income, and 6 (27.3%) as higher-income. This demographic distribution provided a heterogeneous sample that allowed for diverse perspectives on parental responses to children's negative emotions.

Table 1

Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts

Category (Theme)	Subcategory (Subtheme)	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Emotional Awareness and Regulation in Parents	Recognizing child's emotions	labeling feelings; noticing nonverbal cues; identifying triggers; linking behavior to emotion
	Self-regulation of parental emotions	calming strategies; delaying reaction; deep breathing; avoiding yelling; seeking space
	Parental empathy	perspective-taking; validating child's feelings; recalling own childhood emotions
	Cultural norms in emotion expression	belief in emotional control; avoiding public displays; valuing calmness; gendered expectations
	Awareness of emotional contagion	parent mood affecting child; shared stress; mirroring reactions
2. Parenting Beliefs and Attitudes	Views on discipline	setting limits; using punishment; reinforcing positive behavior; consistency vs flexibility
	Beliefs about child development	understanding age-appropriate behavior; attributing misbehavior to immaturity; expectations of self-control
	Attitudes toward emotional expression	seeing emotions as weakness; valuing openness; normalizing anger and sadness
	Role of parent in emotion coaching	guiding through discussion; modeling coping; teaching problem-solving
	Intergenerational patterns	replicating parents' practices; rejecting past harshness; mixing old and new strategies
	Moral and religious beliefs	framing emotions as sin/virtue; patience as moral duty; gratitude practices
3. Contextual and Social Influences	Family environment	spousal support; sibling interactions; shared parenting; household stress
	Social expectations	community judgment; school norms; pressure to appear "good parent"
	Work-life balance	parental fatigue; limited time; work stress interfering with patience
	Socioeconomic conditions	financial strain; housing problems; lack of childcare access
	Peer and social networks	advice from friends; influence of extended family; comparisons with other parents
4. Coping Strategies in Responding to Children's Negative Emotions	Media and technology	parenting advice online; children's screen time; exposure to role models
	Immediate responses	hugging; ignoring; scolding; offering comfort items
	Long-term strategies	routine building; emotion-focused conversations; family rituals
	Use of distraction and redirection	play; humor; changing activity; offering food
	Seeking external support	consulting professionals; attending parenting workshops; school counseling
	Communication techniques	active listening; asking questions; repeating child's words; simplifying explanations

Category 1. Emotional Awareness and Regulation in Parents

Recognizing child's emotions. Many parents emphasized the importance of identifying their children's emotions accurately. They described becoming more attentive to nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions and body language, to understand the source of distress. One mother explained, "*Sometimes my son doesn't say he is sad, but I can see it in the way he looks at the floor and refuses to eat*". Parents also connected certain behaviors with underlying emotions, noting that misbehavior often signaled frustration or sadness rather than deliberate defiance.

Self-regulation of parental emotions. Parents highlighted their struggles and strategies for managing their own emotional reactions during tense moments. Several participants admitted that anger and stress could easily escalate situations if left unchecked. As one father stated, "*If*

I react immediately, I usually regret it. I have learned to breathe, count to ten, and only then decide what to say". Others mentioned leaving the room briefly to calm down before re-engaging with the child.

Parental empathy. Empathy emerged as a central dimension of how parents responded to their children's negative emotions. Some described consciously putting themselves in their child's position to foster understanding. A mother noted, "*When my daughter cries, I try to remember how I felt as a child when no one listened. That helps me to be more patient*". This process of perspective-taking often translated into validating the child's feelings rather than minimizing them.

Cultural norms in emotion expression. Parents also described how cultural expectations shaped their handling of emotions. In Chile, many felt there was a lingering belief in controlling emotions and avoiding open displays of

vulnerability. As one father reflected, *"In my family, men were told not to cry. I don't want to repeat that with my son, but it's hard to break away from how I was raised"*. Mothers echoed the tension between teaching emotional restraint and encouraging openness.

Awareness of emotional contagion. Participants recognized that their own moods often influenced their children's emotional states. They explained how stress or fatigue could quickly spread within the household. *"If I come home angry from work, my children pick it up right away, and the evening becomes more difficult,"* one parent admitted. This awareness led some to adopt practices like pausing at the door or decompressing before interacting with their children.

Category 2. Parenting Beliefs and Attitudes

Views on discipline. Parents described differing philosophies regarding discipline when facing children's negative emotions. Some endorsed strict approaches such as punishment, while others favored limit-setting with warmth. One father explained, *"I believe in correcting my son, but I also try to explain why, not just punish"*. The balance between consistency and flexibility emerged as a recurring dilemma.

Beliefs about child development. Parents' responses were often shaped by their understanding of developmental stages. They stressed that recognizing age-appropriate behavior helped reduce frustration. As one mother stated, *"When my three-year-old throws a tantrum, I remind myself she is not being bad—she is just learning how to manage feelings"*. This perspective fostered greater patience.

Attitudes toward emotional expression. Parents varied in their attitudes toward the expression of negative emotions. Some considered emotions like anger as signs of weakness, while others viewed them as a healthy part of development. A father explained, *"I used to tell my son not to cry, but now I tell him it's okay to cry, as long as we talk about it later"*. Such shifts reflect a broader cultural movement toward validating emotional expression.

Role of parent in emotion coaching. Several participants saw themselves as active "emotion coaches," guiding children to name, discuss, and manage feelings. One mother described, *"When my daughter is angry, I sit with her and say, 'Tell me what you feel.' It takes time, but she learns to put words to her feelings"*. Others emphasized modeling coping strategies, such as problem-solving or calm communication.

Intergenerational patterns. Parents frequently reflected on how their own upbringing influenced their approaches.

Some consciously replicated their parents' strictness, while others rejected harsh practices. A mother said, *"I promised myself not to scream like my father did, but sometimes, when I lose patience, I hear his voice in mine"*. These reflections show the complex interplay between tradition and change.

Moral and religious beliefs. A minority of parents framed their emotional responses through moral or religious values, describing patience as a virtue or anger as a weakness to be overcome. As one participant remarked, *"When my child tests me, I remind myself that patience is a blessing, and I pray for calm before reacting"*.

Category 3. Contextual and Social Influences

Family environment. Family dynamics significantly shaped parental responses. Supportive spouses and cooperative siblings often eased tensions, while family stress made regulation more difficult. One mother explained, *"If my husband steps in when I am tired, the situation doesn't escalate. But when we both are exhausted, everything feels heavier"*.

Social expectations. Parents also reported that societal pressure influenced their responses to children's negative emotions. Several feared judgment from others in public spaces. *"When my child cries in the supermarket, I feel everyone is looking at me, so I get nervous and sometimes react too harshly,"* one father shared.

Work-life balance. Many participants pointed out that fatigue and work stress reduced their ability to remain patient. *"After a long day, I have little energy left, so my tolerance is lower,"* one parent admitted. This highlights the spillover effects of occupational demands on parenting practices.

Socioeconomic conditions. Financial difficulties and lack of childcare resources were also reported as factors influencing emotional responses. A mother described, *"When you are worried about paying rent, it is harder to listen calmly to a tantrum"*. Parents in lower-income households reported higher levels of stress that interfered with patience.

Peer and social networks. Some parents relied on advice and support from friends, extended family, or parent groups. *"I often ask my sister how she deals with her children's anger, and I try to learn from her,"* one participant explained. These networks provided alternative strategies and reassurance.

Media and technology. Finally, parents noted that digital resources, such as online parenting forums or social media, shaped their responses. As one father commented, *"I read articles online that say you should acknowledge the emotion"*

instead of ignoring it. I try to apply that, but it doesn't always work".

Category 4. Coping Strategies in Responding to Children's Negative Emotions

Immediate responses. Parents described a range of immediate reactions, from offering hugs to ignoring behaviors or resorting to scolding. A mother explained, *"Sometimes I just hold my son until he calms down, but other times I raise my voice without wanting to"*. These contrasting responses illustrate the variability of coping strategies.

Long-term strategies. Many parents developed long-term approaches, such as establishing routines or creating rituals that supported emotional regulation. One father noted, *"We have a bedtime talk every night where my daughter tells me what upset her that day. It helps her feel safe to share"*.

Use of distraction and redirection. Several participants mentioned using humor, play, or a change of activity to shift the child's mood. A mother shared, *"When my daughter cries, I try to make her laugh with a silly face. It doesn't solve the problem, but it breaks the tension"*.

Seeking external support. Parents also turned to external resources, including teachers, counselors, and parenting workshops. *"The school counselor gave us techniques to help our son with anger. That changed how we handle things at home,"* one parent explained.

Communication techniques. Finally, participants highlighted the role of communication, particularly active listening and reflective responses. A father stated, *"I repeat what my son says, like 'You're angry because I said no,' and he feels understood. That usually calms him down"*.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to identify the factors shaping parental responses to children's negative emotions by conducting qualitative interviews with 22 parents from Chile. Through thematic analysis, four major categories emerged: (1) emotional awareness and regulation in parents, (2) parenting beliefs and attitudes, (3) contextual and social influences, and (4) coping strategies in responding to children's negative emotions. These themes provide a nuanced understanding of how parents interpret, respond to, and manage children's difficult emotions, while highlighting the interplay between personal, relational, and cultural dimensions. In discussing these findings, it is important to

situate them within existing research to demonstrate both alignment and extension of prior knowledge.

The first theme underscored parents' need to recognize their children's emotional states and to regulate their own emotional reactions. The findings showed that parents often relied on subtle cues such as tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language to discern what their child was feeling. This aligns with prior research indicating that parental sensitivity to children's emotional cues is a foundational element of emotion socialization (Markoulaki, 2025). However, the study also revealed that many parents struggled with self-regulation, often admitting to reacting with frustration or anger before calming themselves. This resonates with Hafiz et al. (Hafiz et al., 2023), who demonstrated that parental dysregulation is a predictor of harsher responses to children's negative emotions.

Parents in this study described empathy as a strategy for bridging the gap between children's emotional needs and their own reactions. This emphasis on empathy reflects broader research linking parental empathy to supportive responses and healthier child adjustment (Kerns et al., 2023). Yet, the findings also revealed cultural ambivalence: several parents noted that Chilean social norms traditionally discouraged open displays of emotion, particularly for boys. This echoes findings from Zhang et al. (Zhang et al., 2021), who reported that parental physiological and behavioral responses to children's frustration were deeply shaped by cultural expectations regarding emotional expression. Thus, while empathy emerged as a key resource, it was filtered through cultural scripts that could either facilitate or hinder parents' capacity to respond constructively.

Parents' awareness of "emotional contagion" further reflected the recognition that their own moods strongly influenced their children's affective states. This finding supports the biopsychosocial approach suggested by Aktar et al. (Aktar et al., 2024), who showed that parental physiological responses to negative stimuli affect how children process emotions. It also complements research on parental self-awareness and resilience (Post, 2024), suggesting that parents who regulate their own emotional states can prevent negative cycles of interaction and promote resilience in their children.

The second theme revealed that parents' beliefs and attitudes about discipline, emotional expression, and their role as "emotion coaches" strongly influenced their reactions. Participants often contrasted punitive practices with supportive approaches, reflecting an ongoing negotiation between traditional discipline and contemporary

perspectives that encourage validation of emotions. This finding parallels the work of Soydan and Akalın (Soydan & Akalın, 2022), who found that maternal socialization reactions moderated children's emotional regulation and aggressive behavior.

Parental understanding of child development was also critical. Parents who recognized tantrums as developmentally normal were more likely to respond patiently, while those who viewed them as intentional misbehavior leaned toward harsher responses. This is consistent with Li et al. (Li et al., 2024), who showed that parental involvement and communication shape children's emotional responses, particularly in contexts like homework where developmental expectations play a role.

Parents' attitudes toward emotional expression varied widely, with some considering emotions as weakness while others emphasized openness. This duality mirrors findings by Pereira et al. (Pereira et al., 2022), who identified clusters of parental reactions ranging from supportive to dismissive within a clinical sample. Importantly, our findings suggest that these attitudes are not static but are actively negotiated within families, particularly when parents reflect on their own upbringing. Indeed, intergenerational patterns emerged as a strong influence: some parents consciously replicated strict practices from their childhood, while others sought to diverge by adopting more emotionally validating strategies. This reflects the multifinality discussed by An and Kochanska (An & Kochanska, 2022), who found that infants' early affectivity could lead to different trajectories depending on the attachment and parental responses they experienced.

Finally, the role of moral and religious beliefs was evident in some participants, who framed patience and forgiveness as virtues guiding their responses. This resonates with research by Marchetti and Sawrikar (Marchetti & Sawrikar, 2023), which highlighted that parents' illness representations shaped their responses to children with anorexia nervosa, emphasizing the interpretative frameworks through which parents understand their children's struggles. In our study, religion and morality served as interpretative frameworks that justified both supportive and restrictive responses, illustrating the complexity of belief systems in emotion socialization.

The third theme demonstrated how parental responses are embedded within broader contextual and social dynamics. Family environment played a central role, as supportive spouses or cooperative siblings were seen as resources that helped diffuse emotional tension, while family conflict or

exhaustion amplified stress. This is in line with the findings of Anikiej-Wiczenbach and Kaźmierczak (Anikiej-Wiczenbach & Kaźmierczak, 2022), who observed that stressors during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly strained parents' capacities to respond to infants' emotions.

Social expectations were also a major influence, particularly in public spaces where parents feared being judged for their children's behavior. These findings echo Legg and Rose (Legg & Rose, 2022), who showed how parents processed their emotions through expressive writing when dealing with the pressures of youth sports, suggesting that parents' responses are shaped by perceived external evaluation. In the Chilean context, parents often described the "eyes of the community" as a constant presence that altered their reactions in public.

Work-life balance and socioeconomic conditions further shaped parental responses. Parents frequently reported that fatigue, financial worries, and work stress lowered their tolerance for children's emotional outbursts. This observation complements Takamatsu (Takamatsu, 2024), who reported that maternal emotional depletion undermined daily emotional engagement with children. Similarly, Li et al. (Li et al., 2024) demonstrated how family responsibility mediated the effects of parental involvement on children's negative emotions, further reinforcing the impact of contextual pressures.

Finally, peer networks and media emerged as important influences on parenting practices. Parents often relied on advice from friends or online resources, sometimes adopting strategies promoted on digital platforms. This finding aligns with Riggs et al. (Riggs et al., 2025), who stressed the importance of external predictors in shaping how parents respond to adolescents' emotional disclosures. In the present study, parents' responses were not developed in isolation but co-constructed within a wider network of social interactions and informational sources.

The final theme focused on the coping strategies parents employed, ranging from immediate responses to longer-term approaches. Immediate strategies included hugging, comforting, or sometimes scolding, reflecting the diversity of parental repertoires. These findings are consistent with Pereira et al. (Pereira et al., 2022), who identified supportive and non-supportive reaction clusters among parents.

Long-term strategies such as establishing routines, maintaining daily conversations, and creating family rituals emerged as particularly effective in fostering a safe environment for children to express their emotions. This resonates with Post (Post, 2024), who emphasized the role

of resilient routines in promoting both parental and child adjustment.

The use of distraction, humor, or redirection was also highlighted, especially for younger children. Such strategies, while sometimes criticized as avoidance, can provide immediate relief and prevent escalation. Research by Çelebi and Acar (Çelebi & Acar, 2024) on child temperament and parenting stress similarly suggests that flexible strategies can help parents navigate emotionally charged moments.

Parents also described seeking external support from professionals, schools, or parenting workshops, reflecting a recognition that emotion socialization is a skill that can be learned and improved. This finding aligns with Marchetti and Sawrikar (Marchetti & Sawrikar, 2023), who highlighted the value of therapeutic engagement for parents coping with children's mental health challenges.

Finally, communication strategies such as active listening, reflective responses, and problem-solving were widely used. These approaches are consistent with Markoulaki (Markoulaki, 2025), who demonstrated that supportive parental emotion socialization significantly contributes to children's adjustment. By engaging in communication rather than suppression, parents in this study sought to teach their children to name and manage emotions, thereby enhancing regulatory skills.

5. Suggestions and Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample was limited to 22 parents from Chile, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to other cultural contexts. While qualitative research prioritizes depth over breadth, the sample size and composition may not fully capture the diversity of parental experiences in different socioeconomic or cultural groups. Second, all data were self-reported through interviews, which raises the possibility of social desirability bias, as parents may have portrayed themselves in a more favorable light. Observational methods or triangulation with children's perspectives could have enriched the findings. Third, while NVivo software facilitated systematic coding, qualitative analysis inherently involves subjective interpretation, and researcher bias cannot be fully eliminated. Finally, the cross-sectional design precluded examination of how parental responses may evolve over time or in response to changing child development stages.

Future studies could expand on these findings in several directions. Longitudinal research would be valuable to track

how parental responses to negative emotions evolve as children age, particularly across developmental transitions such as entry into adolescence. Cross-cultural studies could also shed light on how cultural scripts and societal norms shape parental emotion socialization, extending comparisons to contexts beyond Chile. Moreover, incorporating children's perspectives on how they perceive parental responses would provide a more holistic understanding of the parent-child emotional dynamic. Mixed-methods research combining qualitative interviews with quantitative measures of parental stress, child temperament, and attachment could also enhance the robustness of findings. Finally, examining the role of digital media in shaping parental strategies warrants greater attention, given the growing reliance on online resources for parenting advice.

For practitioners, the findings emphasize the importance of supporting parents in developing self-regulation skills and empathy to foster constructive responses to children's negative emotions. Parenting interventions should include components that raise awareness about cultural norms, intergenerational patterns, and contextual stressors that shape parental behavior. Schools, community centers, and healthcare providers could serve as platforms for offering workshops that teach communication strategies, active listening, and problem-solving skills. Policies that reduce parental stress—such as work-family balance initiatives and accessible mental health services—would also indirectly promote healthier emotion socialization practices. Ultimately, supporting parents in their emotional journeys will not only enhance their own well-being but also foster resilience and adaptive emotional regulation in children.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

References

- Aktar, E., Venetiki, M., Bockstaele, B. V., Giessen, D. V. d., & Pérez-Edgar, K. (2024). Pupillary Responses to Dynamic Negative Versus Positive Facial Expressions of Emotion in Children and Parents: Links to Depression and Anxiety. *Developmental Psychobiology*, 66(6). <https://doi.org/10.1002/dev.22522>
- An, D., & Kochanska, G. (2022). Sequelae of Infants' Negative Affectivity in the Contexts of Emerging Distinct Attachment Organizations: Multifinality in Mother-Child and Father-Child Dyads Across the First Year. *Development and Psychopathology*, 35(4), 2011-2027. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0954579422000669>
- Anikiej-Wiecznabach, P., & Kaźmierczak, M. (2022). The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Parenting of Infants: A Couples Study. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(24), 16883. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192416883>
- Çelebi, Ş., & Acar, İ. H. (2024). Investigating Correlates of Children's Emotional Well-being: Parenting Stress and Child Temperament. *Infant and Child Development*, 33(6). <https://doi.org/10.1002/icd.2539>
- Hafiz, M., Nelson, J. A., Patel, N. H., & Holub, S. C. (2023). Parent Dysregulation and Child Negativity in Relation to Parent Responses to Child Negative Emotions. *Family Relations*, 73(2), 737-752. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12950>
- Kerns, K. A., Kochendorfer, L. B., Obeldobel, C. A., & Brumariu, L. E. (2023). Parent-Child Attachment and Emotion Regulation Dynamics in Late Middle Childhood. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 69(1), 84-117. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mpq.2023.a909260>
- Legg, E., & Rose, J. (2022). Write It Out: Examining Recreational Youth Sport Parent Emotions Through an Expressive Writing Exercise. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 40(2). <https://doi.org/10.18666/jpra-2020-10669>
- Li, J., Liu, X., Zhu, D., & Jiang, H. (2024). Effects of Parent Involvement in Homework on Students' Negative Emotions in Chinese Students: Moderating Role of Parent-Child Communication and Mediating Role of Family Responsibility. *Behavioral Sciences*, 14(12), 1139. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14121139>
- Marchetti, D., & Sawrikar, V. (2023). Parents' Illness Representations of Their Child With Anorexia Nervosa: A Systematic Review of Qualitative Studies Using the Common-sense Model. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 57(5), 1049-1068. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eat.24081>
- Markoulaki, M. (2025). Parental Emotion Socialization and Child Adjustment in Greek Families: Supportive vs. Non-Supportive Parenting. *Children*, 12(7), 807. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children12070807>
- Pereira, A. I., Santos, C., Barros, L., Roberto, M. S., Rato, J. R., Prata, A. P., & Marques, C. (2022). Patterns of Parental Reactions to Their Children's Negative Emotions: A Cluster Analysis With a Clinical Sample. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(11), 6844. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19116844>
- Post, G. (2024). Resilient Parents; Resilient Kids: How Parental Self-Awareness Is Critical to Helping Smart Kids Thrive. *Gifted Education International*, 41(1), 92-111. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02614294241274442>
- Riggs, R. E., Rasmussen, E. E., & Wakefield, S. (2025). Exploring Predictors of Parents' Negative Emotional Response to Adolescents' Mental Illness Disclosures. *Journal of Child Health Care*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13674935251344649>
- Soydan, S., & Akalın, N. (2022). Emotional Regulation and Aggression in Children: The Regulatory Role of Turkish Mothers' Emotion Socialization Reactions. *Family Relations*, 72(4), 1709-1724. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12785>
- Takamatsu, R. (2024). Anhedonia and Daily Emotional Experiences Among Mothers of Preschool Children: An Experiential Sampling Study. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-4179805/v1>
- Zhang, X., Han, Z. R., & Gatzke-Kopp, L. M. (2021). A Biopsychosocial Approach to Emotion-Related Parenting: Physiological Responses to Child Frustration Among Urban Chinese Parents. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 35(5), 639-648. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000824>