

Bullying Prevention in Preschoolers: Mindfulness Interventions Effect on Emotion Regulation

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Background

While bullying was previously most prevalent in middle school, it is now being exhibited as early as preschool (Camodeca & Coppola, 2019). Children who are unable to regulate their emotions are more aggressive and have more negative peer interactions as compared to those who can regulate their emotions (Kelsey et al., 2017). Studies have found that children who participate in mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) showed improvements in emotion regulation. Mindfulness increases inhibitory control, flexibility, and emotional regulation (Jenkins et al., 2017; O'Toole et al., 2017).

Relevance to OT

OTs support children of all ages to successfully participate in educational experiences by building skills which promote healthy relationships and prevent barriers to learning. OTs teach strategies and introduce tools to promote emotion regulation.

Purpose

To examine the effect of MBIs on emotional regulation in preschoolers. We predicted that MBIs would positively influence ER with the overall goal of promoting healthy interactions with peers and reducing the prevalence of bullying behaviors.

Methods

Participants: Teachers and caregivers of students in two preschool classrooms who participated in virtual, group programs designed and implemented by JMU OT Program students.

Classroom A (experimental): Program based on the Zones of Regulation and included MBI activities.

Classroom B (control): Program based on the Zones of Regulation.

Table 1. Study Design

Pre-Intervention	Group Programs 4 weeks, 1x/week, 30 min/week	Post-Intervention
Classrooms A & B: Caregiver & teacher questionnaires	Classroom A: Zones + MBIs Classroom B: Zones	Classrooms A & B: Caregiver & teacher questionnaires

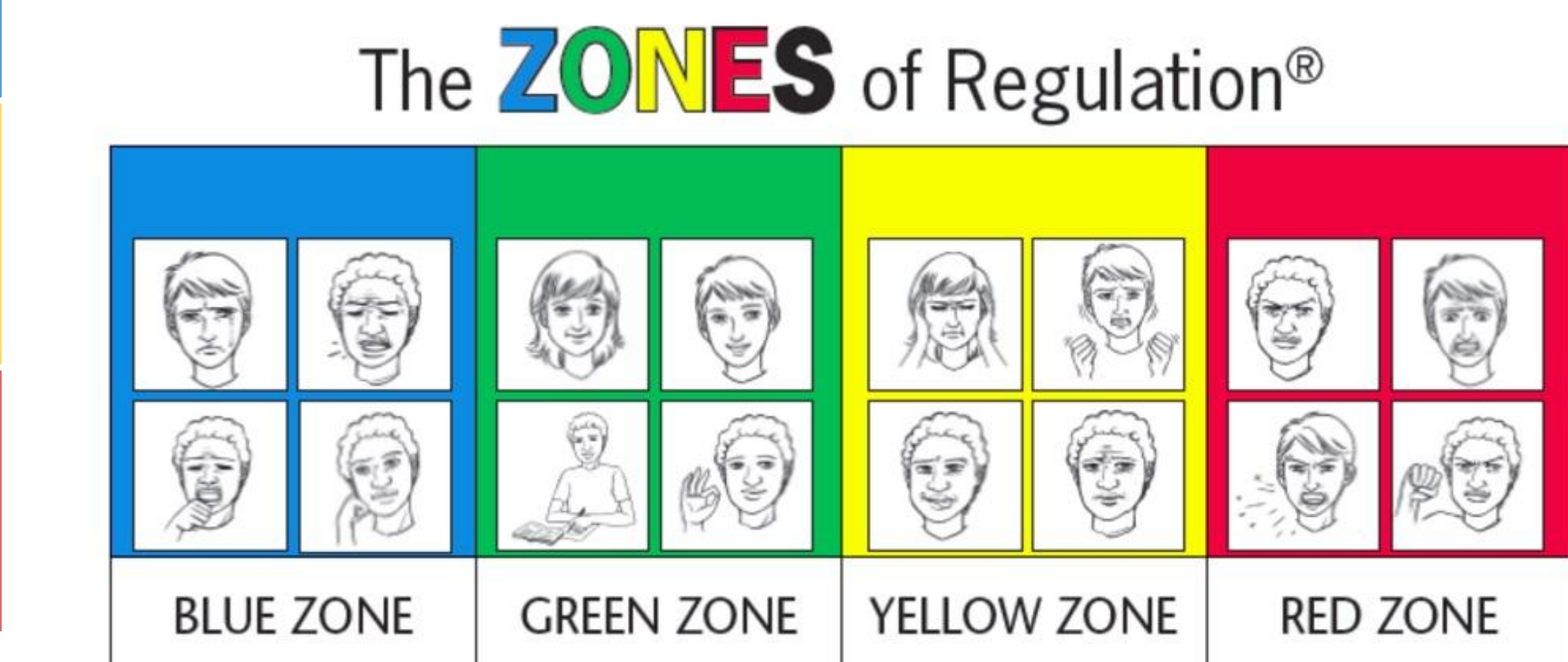
Table 2. Program Design

Week	Classroom A (Zones + MBIs)	Classroom B (Zones Only)
1	Green Zone: Happy and Body Scan Meditation	Green Zone: Happy
2	Blue Zone: Sad and Self Hug Activity	Blue Zone: Sad
3	Yellow Zone: Silly and Moving Fast & Slow	Yellow Zone: Silly
4	Red Zone: Angry and Animal Yoga	Red Zone: Angry



Key Terms

- ❖ **Bullying behaviors:** Excluding a peer from participating in a game, hitting, kicking, punching, slapping, and pinching (Tanrikulu, 2020)
- ❖ **Emotion regulation (ER):** A person's ability to effectively manage and respond to an emotional experience (Rolston & Lloyd-Richardson, n.d.)
- ❖ **Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs):** Focusing attention in activities and having a non-judgmental attitude (O'Toole et al., 2017)
- ❖ **Zones of Regulation (Zones):** A curriculum designed to teach skills in the area of self-regulation and emotional control



Results

Table 3: Teacher Perceptions of Student ER

Questionnaire Section	Classroom A (Experimental)		Classroom B (Control)	
	Pre (n=1)	Post (n=1)	Pre (n=1)	Post (n=1)
Emotion Regulation (Zones) Language	3.0	3.33	2.0	2.67
Mindfulness Strategies	3.80	3.60	2.20	2.80
Positive Behaviors	4.0	4.0	4.33	4.0
Negative Behaviors	4.0	4.50	4.75	4.75

Table 4: Caregiver Perceptions of Student ER

Questionnaire Section	Classroom A (Experimental)		Classroom B (Control)	
	Pre (n=3)	Post (n=4)	Pre (n=0)	Post (n=0)
Emotion Regulation (Zones) Language	3.89	3.57	n/a	n/a
Mindfulness Strategies	3.07	3.20	n/a	n/a
Positive Behaviors	4.44	4.27	n/a	n/a
Negative Behaviors	3.67	3.50	n/a	n/a

Numerical data represents mean of responses to likert scale questions in each category. Never=1, Rarely=2, Sometimes=3, Often=4, Very Often=5

Conclusion

The results of this study showed no positive effect of mindfulness-based interventions on emotion regulation in preschoolers. This could be due to the limitations which included limited and inconsistent parent/caregiver participation, language barriers, duration of the program, mode of program delivery (virtual only), and stressors due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Further research is recommended given evidence of the positive impact of MBI on emotion regulation supported in recent literature and the significance of OTs using evidence-based interventions when addressing emotion regulation with this population.