Dads Tuning In to Kids: Preliminary Evaluation of a Fathers' Parenting Program

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*We investigated outcomes of Dads Tuning In to Kids, a new seven-session group program targeting paternal emotion-socialization practices, which are related to children's social and emotional functioning. In a randomized control trial with 162 fathers of children between 3 and 6 years of age, intervention fathers (*n *= 87) and waitlist control fathers (*n *= 75) completed questionnaires at baseline (pre-program) and 10 weeks later (post-program). Compared to control fathers, intervention fathers statistically increased in empathy, encouragement of emotion expression, and parenting efficacy, and decreased in emotion-dismissing beliefs, dismissive reactions to children's negative emotions, and hostile parenting responses. They also reported improved child behavior. These findings offer preliminary support for this program for fathers.*

Key Words: Emotion socialization, fathers and fatherhood, parenting program, preschool children, prevention.

It is well established that parenting programs can assist in improving outcomes for children (Kaminski, Valle, Filene, & Boyle, 2008; Sanders, Kirby, Tellegen, & Day, 2014). However, this field of research has focused predominantly on mothers, despite the important role of fathers in child development (e.g., Allen & Daly, 2007; Lamb & Lewis, 2010; McWayne, Downer, Campos, & Harris, 2013). Evaluation studies of skills-based parenting programs for fathers remain sparse, and so it is not clear whether parenting programs with demonstrated efficacy in improving mothers' parenting are, or would be, similarly beneficial for fathers. The paucity of paternal research includes parenting programs focusing on emotion socialization.

Parents' emotion-socialization practices influence how children learn to understand and manage emotions, an important developmental task of early childhood (Halberstadt, Denham, & Dunsmore, 2001), and the targeting of maternal emotion socialization in parenting programs has been effective in improving child outcomes (Havighurst, Wilson, Harley, Prior, & Kehoe, 2010). In this article, we extend this area of research to fathers. We describe an adapted version of a group parenting program, Tuning In to Kids (TIK; see Havighurst & Harley, 2007), previously shown to be effective for improving emotion socialization in samples of mostly mothers (Havighurst et al., 2010; Wilson, Havighurst, & Harley, 2012). We briefly review evidence for the importance of fathers and why they should be included in programs offered to parents, then

outline how TIK was modified specifically for fathers. Finally, we report the findings from the preliminary phase of a randomized control trial evaluating the efficacy of the adapted program, Dads Tuning In to Kids (DadsTIK), in a community sample of fathers.

Theoretical Background

Emotional competence includes ways of expressing emotion, knowledge about emotion, regulation of emotion, and goal-directed use of emotions in inter- and intrapersonal situations (Denham, 1998). Acquiring the ability to understand and manage emotions is an important developmental task of early childhood and is essential for children's success in their first year at school (Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003). Compared to their peers with emotional regulation, school-aged children who have not developed these emotional skills and are unable to regulate negative affect are less able to focus attention and concentrate, and are more aggressive with peers; they also tend to encounter daily situations that require adult intervention (Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007).

Parents influence the development of children's emotional competence by modeling emotional expression, reacting to children's emotions, and assisting (or not) children in learning about their emotional responses (Denham, 1998; Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998). Gottman, Katz, and Hooven (1997) found that a supportive "emotion coaching" style of parenting is most strongly linked longitudinally with emotionally competent children. This parenting style (for both mothers and fathers) includes being aware of and accepting children's emotions, viewing children's displays of emotions as a time for intimacy and teaching, empathizing with and labeling feelings, and assisting with problem solving where necessary

(with the parent setting limits when appropriate; Gottman & DeClaire, 1997). Gottman et al. (1997) further documented that parents who supportively coach their children's emotions tend to display greater levels of warmth, be less critical of their children's emotions and behavior, and be more likely to use teaching styles that scaffold and praise their children's attempts to resolve emotion-evoking situations. In contrast, an emotion-dismissing parenting style was characterized by parents' ignoring or minimizing of child emotions, disapproving via punitive responses to negative child emotions, and having a laissez-faire style in accepting emotion, in combination with failing to provide guidance around problem solving or setting limits on child behaviors; these styles, they found, are associated with poorer child outcomes. They also concluded that all parents hold a unique metaemotion philosophy, shaped by their own family of origin, which determines their automatic responses to emotions and, in turn, shapes the messages they convey to their child about the expression, understanding, and regulation of these emotion states.

The early childhood years are an important developmental phase, when children's emotion processing, language, and cognition intersect (Izard, 2002), thus making children highly receptive to parental efforts to teach them about emotions. It is, therefore, an opportune time to target prevention programming. The TIK parenting program was developed as a prevention program targeting parents of preschool children, and it is based on research about emotional competence, as well as ideas considered part of attuned, responsive parenting (Denham, 1998; Gottman et al., 1997). A central part of the program is teaching the five steps of emotion coaching outlined by Gottman and DeClaire (1997). TIK also integrates mindfulness for parents through reflection on their metaemotion philosophy, which is intended to help parents consider

how their past family-of-origin experiences with emotions has contributed to their current beliefs about and responses to emotions. Parents develop skills for "sitting with" their own emotions and inhibiting angry responses at times when they are responding to their child's emotions (for further description of the TIK program and its theoretical framework, see Havighurst et al., 2010).

Randomized control trials of TIK found increases in parent emotion coaching and child emotion knowledge, and reductions in parent emotion dismissing and difficult child behaviors in both community and clinical samples (Havighurst et al., 2010; Havighurst et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2012). Program participants, however, were mostly mothers.

The Role of Fathers in Parenting

Although fathers spend less time than mothers do with children, they participate in a similar range of child-rearing activities, which provides them with many opportunities to influence children's skill development (Baxter, 2010). Indeed, fathers' positive and active involvement in parenting is associated with many beneficial outcomes for children. Lamb and Lewis (2010) conducted a comprehensive review on the effect of father involvement and reported that children with involved fathers have higher levels of social competence and capacity for empathy, greater self-control, higher self-esteem, more positive child–father and adolescent–father relationships, better social skills and peer relationships, more prosocial sibling interactions, increased cognitive competence, fewer school adjustment difficulties, better academic progress, and fewer behavior problems. Research continues to find new evidence that fathers matter. For example, fathers' parenting during the preschool years influences the development of child executive function

(Lucassen et al., 2015; Meuwissen & Carlson, 2015), and young children's language, cognitive, and academic skills are higher among children whose fathers read to them (Baker, Vernon-Feagans, & Investigators, 2015). The quantity and quality of father involvement in parenting young children (e.g., whether warm, nurturing, and responsive; or harsh, punitive, and unresponsive) has an impact on prosocial skills, internalizing, externalizing, and self-regulation of learning behaviors (McWayne et al., 2013).

Heightened awareness of paternal influences on children's development, particularly in combination with limited research on fathers relative to mothers, has prompted researchers to recommend that fathers be included in child and parenting studies and that targeted efforts be made to include them in the provision of parenting services (McWayne et al., 2013). The number of fathering interventions has begun to increase; however, these interventions mostly target specific high-risk groups (e.g., divorced fathers, teen fathers, incarcerated fathers), and few have been rigorously evaluated (Bronte-Tinkew, Burkhauser, & Metz, 2012). Further, programs for fathers typically support fathers' parenting involvement and aim to increase their parenting confidence rather than teach specific parenting skills that affect child outcomes (Stewart-Brown, 2006). There is evidence that skills-based parent-training programs intended for a broader population have a positive impact on fathers and their children; however, both the magnitude and the persistence of that impact are less than for mothers (Lundahl, Tollefson, Risser, & Lovejoy, 2008). This may be because interventions need to be adjusted to meet fathers' specific needs and preferences (Lundahl et al., 2008).

Fathers are considerably less likely than mothers to attend general parenting programs, but careful planning can potentially overcome many of the barriers to father participation in parenting programs. For example, these programs tend to be designed for and marketed to women rather than men, and they are often offered at times and in formats that appeal to women more than men (Fletcher, 2001). Father participation may improve if program designers consider the context of fathers' parenting and modify programs accordingly (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2012; Lundahl et al., 2008). For example, programs should attempt to enhance fathers' sense of parenting efficacy, given that higher paternal self-efficacy positively affects father involvement as well as children's social-emotional outcomes (Baxter & Smart, 2011; Giallo, Treyvaud, Cooklin, & Wade, 2012; Kwok, Ling, Leung, & Li, 2013). Fathering programs may be particularly effective if available to all fathers when their children are in the early childhood years, because fathers are more likely to remain involved with their child when they are actively involved early in their children's lives (Baxter & Smart, 2011), even if the parental relationship becomes conflictual (Ramchandani & Iles, 2014). Further, father-only child time as well as overall father involvement peaks in the preschool years (Baxter & Smart, 2011), which suggests that this is an important window of time to engage fathers in parenting skill development.

This peak in father involvement coincides with a crucial phase in the development of children's emotional competence. However, fathers tend to engage in more punitive and minimizing responses and to display fewer supportive reactions (e.g., encouraging emotion expression, problem-focused strategies) to child emotion than do mothers (Cassano, Perry-Parrish, & Zeman, 2007; Engle & McElwain, 2010). Thus, teaching fathers parenting skills

known to foster emotional development in these early years may be particularly beneficial. Other research has found that father–child play, which is typically more physical, unpredictable, and affectively stimulating than mother–child play, helps children learn to regulate their own level of stimulation, manage intense emotions, and reduce aggressive behavior (Fitzgerald, McKelvey, Schiffman, & Montanez, 2006; Parke & McDowell, 1998). Fathers' playfulness, therefore, is a valuable component of the emotion-socialization process. Offering fathers the opportunity to learn a supportive parenting style with a focus on responding to emotion while also encouraging father playfulness may be beneficial.

Adapting TIK for Fathers

To provide fathers with an opportunity to learn the emotion-socialization skills most closely linked to positive child outcomes, we developed a father-specific, slightly longer version of the TIK program, which we called Dads Tuning In to Kids (DadsTIK). In comparison with women, men report lower emotional awareness (Gottman et al., 1997; Gratz & Roemer, 2004) and higher levels of alexithymia (i.e., difficulties recognizing, processing, or describing emotions) (Levant, Hall, Williams, & Hasan, 2009), and they need more assistance in learning about emotion skills and emotion regulation (Levant, 1992). Gottman et al. (1997) warned that fathers might initially resist learning the five-step process for emotion coaching more than mothers do. Further, although the time fathers spend with children has increased in recent years, fathers still typically spend less time with their children than mothers do (Craig, Powell, & Smyth, 2014), and therefore have fewer opportunities to practice new parenting skills. Therefore, the program length of DadsTIK was expanded to allow both for more time for fathers to practice their new

parenting skills at home and for inclusion of some additional father-relevant content. The modified program was evaluated in a pilot study with a sample of 43 fathers (Wilson, Havighurst, & Harley, 2014). Further refinements were subsequently made to accommodate feedback from participating fathers.

Present Study

Participation in the TIK program increases parent emotion coaching and reduces parent emotion dismissing, and the incidence of difficult behaviors among preschool children of these parents subsequently declined; however, program participants in these studies were almost exclusively mothers (Havighurst et al., 2010; Havighurst et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2012). Our study goal was to find out whether participation in DadsTIK would have similar impacts on a community sample of fathers of preschool children; that is, we hypothesized that fathers would exhibit more emotion coaching (which includes empathy) and less emotion dismissing following participation in DadsTIK. Managing parental anger when responding to children's strong emotion and challenging behaviors is a key topic of Sessions 5 and 6; thus, we also hypothesized that angry or hostile responses toward children would decrease after participation. We also anticipated that fathers would feel more efficacious in their parenting role after completing the program than they did before starting the program. Finally, consistent with previous findings, we hypothesized that difficult behaviors would decrease among children following paternal participation.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 162 fathers of a preschool child; at the time of recruitment, the children were a mean of 4.4 years of age (range = 3.1–6.3, *SD* = 0.7), and 53.7% of them were boys. The fathers were a mean of 40.6 years of age (range = 29.5–56.0, *SD* = 4.9), and 135 (83.3%) had more than one child (range = 1–4 children). The majority (97.5%) resided with their child and the child's mother or other father (one family), and three separated or divorced fathers lived part-time with their child. English was the main language spoken at home by 95.7% of the sample; 128 fathers (79.0%) were born in Australia; 22 (13.6%) were born in North America, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, or Europe; and 12 (7.4%) were born in Asia, Africa, or the Middle East. The high school completion rate was 90.7%, and most fathers had further formal education (none, 4.9%; certificate or trade, 19.8%; college, 43.2%; graduate degree, 24.7%). Most fathers (97.5%) were employed and worked a mean of 41.8 hours per week (*SD* = 8.4); occupations were mainly managerial or professional (73.4%) but also included associate professionals (11.7%), tradesmen (4.3%), and clerical, sales, and transport workers (8.7%). Median Australian incomes reported in the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 census were AUD$64,168 for individuals and $120,120 for two-income families with children (see Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). The Australian poverty threshold for couples with two children is $49,977 (Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, 2015). Three fathers (1.2%) reported gross annual household incomes of less than $40,000, two fathers (1.2%) reported incomes in the range of $40,000–

$59,999; 33 fathers (20.2%) reported incomes in the range of $60,000–$99,999, and 124 fathers (76.5%) reported annual household incomes above $100,000.

Tuning In to Kids Parenting Program

The six-session TIK program uses sequential exercises to teach parents the skills of emotion coaching as described by Gottman and DeClaire (1997): (a) noticing the child's emotion, especially at lower intensities; (b) recognizing the expression of emotion as an opportunity for intimacy and teaching; (c) communicating empathy and acceptance of the emotion; (d) helping the child to describe the emotion verbally; and (e) if necessary, assisting with problem solving or setting appropriate limits on behavior. Parents also reflect on family-of-origin experiences and their potential influences on beliefs and responses to parent and child emotions (i.e., metaemotion). They are taught strategies for emotional self-care to assist in emotional awareness and reduce reactive angry responses to challenging child behavior. Teaching activities include psychoeducation, DVD examples of emotion coaching and dismissing, handout materials, practice exercises, role-plays, and group discussion.

Dads Tuning In to Kids Parenting Program

To adapt TIK for fathers, the program was expanded from six weekly two-hour sessions of TIK to seven sessions (bringing total program time to 14 hours) and a booster session offered six to eight weeks later. All TIK program materials were revised so that all scenarios, language, and images were father specific, and the term *parents* was substituted with *fathers* or *dads* in promotional materials. New content about the benefits of positive father involvement to children's development and the importance of fathers' play was added in the first session. In

response to feedback from fathers in the pilot study, the first session included extra time for fathers to ask specific questions about what to expect developmentally in young children; more structure was provided in role-plays, with scripts incorporating scenarios relevant to fathers; and examples contrasting emotion coaching with disapproving and laissez-faire emotional styles, as well as with dismissing responses, were provided. Throughout the DadsTIK program fathers were encouraged to read storybooks with their children (children's books were available for borrowing) as a "dad-friendly" way of scaffolding emotion discussions. Using stories to engage children in conversations about the nature, causes, and regulation of emotion has been found to improve preschoolers' emotion understanding and increase prosocial behavior (Ornaghi, Grazzani, Cherubin, Conte, & Piralli, 2014). Stories potentially are less arousing of emotions because they allow for discussion to be initially about story characters rather than the child, and stories provide more structure for fathers who were less confident in starting a conversation about emotions. Table 1 provides a summary of adaptations made to the TIK program for DadsTIK.

Procedure

Preschools within a 15-kilometer radius of the University of Melbourne (n = 34), in addition to six preschools in Geelong (the state of Victoria's largest regional city), were invited to participate. There were no refusals. Recruitment took place in waves across the four-term preschool year, with programs conducted within Terms 2, 3, and 4 for the duration of the study (2012–2014). Participating preschools were provided with posters advertising the Dads Tuning In to Kids program and distributed information about the program and research to families in

sealed envelopes marked “To Dad.” Inclusion criteria were being the father of a child enrolled in a preschool program and English-language proficiency. Interested fathers contacted the researchers, who provided further information and obtained informed consent to participate. Fathers were then mailed a baseline questionnaire. Fathers with more than one preschool child were instructed to complete the assessment in relation to the child whose behavior they found the most challenging. Following recruitment and collection of baseline (Time 1) data, preschools were randomly assigned to intervention and waitlist control conditions; the unit of randomization was preschool to avoid intervention contamination. Intervention fathers (n = 87) were invited to start the program immediately and waitlist control fathers (n = 75) were invited to start the program following a 10-month delay. Fathers were excluded from the study if they did not complete baseline data before a specified cutoff date or were unable to attend at least one of the first two program sessions. Fathers excluded from the research trial were offered the program at a later date. The study conformed to all University of Melbourne ethical requirements for research.

Intervention fathers attended one of eight 7-session programs (9–14 fathers per group) that were cofacilitated by a female and a male practitioner. Facilitators had professional qualifications in psychology, social work, or education and had completed TIK facilitator training; at least one person in each pair also was an experienced TIK program facilitator. Programs were delivered in weekly two-hour evening sessions either at the researchers’ on-site training venue or at an easily accessible community center or local library. A structured manual was used. Fidelity checklists completed by facilitators after each session indicated that 100% of

core (nonoptional) content was delivered. One father in the intervention group discontinued after Session 1, but no other participants in the intervention group dropped out of the program. Participants unable to attend a program session were provided handout materials distributed at the missed session via e-mail. When participants missed a session without prior notification, the group leader contacted him to offer a "catch-up" telephone consultation (fathers rarely took up leaders on this offer, but they reported appreciating being contacted). In terms of attendance, 38 fathers (43.7%) attended all seven program sessions, 24 fathers (27.6%) attended six sessions, 14 fathers (16.1%) attended five, seven fathers (8.0%) attended four, and three fathers (3.4%) attended three sessions.

Following the seventh session of the program, fathers from both conditions were asked to complete a Time 2 questionnaire. Questionnaires at Times 1 and 2 included self-report scales for fathers' parenting and for child behavior. Family demographic information was collected at Time 1. Time 2 questionnaires were completed by 154 (94.5%) participants.

Measures

Parent emotional style. The Parent Emotional Style Questionnaire (PESQ; Havighurst et al., 2010), an extension of the Maternal Emotional Style Questionnaire (MESQ; Lagacé-Séguin & Coplan, 2005), is a 21-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure parental emotional style. We used the five-item empathy subscale (e.g., "When my child is scared, it's an opportunity for getting close"; "When my child is angry, I take some time to try to experience this feeling with him/her") and the 10-item emotion-dismissing subscale (e.g., "Childhood is a happy-go-lucky time, not a time for feeling sad or angry"). Response options for each item

ranged from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5), and subscale scores were calculated by summing response scores; higher scores indicated more empathy and more emotion dismissal. Havighurst et al. (2010) reported good overall scale reliability in their community sample, and we found satisfactory internal reliability (Cronbach's alphas) in the present study on both the empathy (Time 1 = .73, Time 2 = .82) and the emotion-dismissing (Time 1 = .79, Time 2 = .88) subscales.

Children's negative emotions. The Children's Coping with Negative Emotions Scale (CCNES; Fabes, Eisenberg, & Bernzweig, 1990) taps emotion-coaching practices taught in DadsTIK, such as encouraging emotional expression and inhibiting negative responses to children's emotional displays. Parents rate how likely (from *very unlikely*, 1, to *very likely*, 7) they are to respond to 12 scenarios of child negative emotion in six possible ways, each of which corresponds to a theoretically derived subscale. Scenarios include situations such as the child losing a prized possession and reacting with tears. We used only the four CCNES subscales relevant to DadsTIK program content: expressive encouragement (e.g., "It's OK to cry when you feel unhappy"); minimization reactions (e.g., "He/she is over-reacting"); (c) punitive reactions (e.g., "That's what happens when you're not careful"); and (d) problem-focused reactions (e.g., "Help my child think of places he/she hasn't looked yet"). The minimization and punitive reactions subscales were correlated at r = .66 (Time 1) and .83 (Time 2), and so were summed into one total Emotion Dismissing Reactions scale. Good psychometric properties have been reported for the CCNES (Fabes, Poulin, Eisenberg, & Madden-Derdich, 2002), and Cronbach's alphas for the three subscales in the present study ranged from .84 to .93.

Hostile parenting. Four relevant items from a Hostile Parenting scale used in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (see Growing Up in Australia, 2016) were used to assess reactive angry responses to difficult child behavior. Specifically, fathers were asked how often in the previous four weeks his child had "gotten on his nerves when crying," and how often he had been angry with, had shouted at, and had lost his temper with his child. Response options ranged from *not at all* (0) to *every day* (4). Item scores were summed for a total possible range of 0–16, with higher scores indicating more hostile parenting. Cronbach's alphas for this scale were .84 at Times 1 and 2.

Parenting competence. Fathers' sense of parenting efficacy was assessed using the seven-item efficacy subscale from the Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC; Johnston & Mash, 1989), which is a commonly used questionnaire that has been validated with Australian fathers (Gilmore & Cuskelly, 2009). Example items include "Being a parent is manageable" and "Any problems are easily solved," with response options ranging from *strongly agree* (1) to *strongly disagree* (6). All items were reverse scored so that higher scores indicate greater parenting efficacy, then a total score was calculated by summing the items (possible range = 7–42). Cronbach's alphas in the present sample were .83 at both time points.

Child behavior problems. The 25-item Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 2001) is a widely used measure of child behavior problems that has good psychometric properties and is considered suitable for use with both clinical and community samples (Warnick, Bracken, & Kasl, 2008). Four subscales focused on emotional symptoms, peer relationship problems, conduct problems, and hyperactivity and inattention are added

together to generate a total difficulties score, and a fifth five-item subscale assesses prosocial behavior. The slightly modified preschool version (see SDQ, 2016), designed for parents of 3- and 4-year-old children, was used for the present study. Cronbach's alphas were .77 at Time 1 and .78 at Time 2 for the Total Difficulties score, and .65 at Time 1 and .70 at Time 2 for the prosocial subscale.

Analytic Strategy

Data were examined for missing values, normality, and outliers. Overall, at both time points there was no more than 1% missing data, and Little's (1988) test of missing completely at random was not statistically significant, indicating that the data were missing completely at random. Pearson-mean imputation was used to replace missing scale items with mean values, providing that at least 80% of the data were available. This approach keeps accurate estimates of variances and covariances, and it was used because missing data were both minimal and missing completely at random (Bono, Ried, Kimberlin, & Vogel, 2007). The variable for problem-solving reactions was nonnormally distributed and transformed using log transformation. However, analyses conducted with and without the transformed variable produced equal results, and analyses with untransformed variables are presented for ease of interpretation. Fathers who failed to return questionnaires at Time 2 (n = 8) did not differ from the rest of the sample on any of the measures, and there was no statistical difference in return rate between the intervention (n = 82; 94.3%) and waitlist control (n = 72; 96.0%) groups (see Figure 1 for participant flow). The eight fathers who failed to return Time 2 questionnaires were included only in intention-to-treat analyses.

To determine covariates (Pocock, Assmann, Enos, & Kasten, 2002), *t*-tests and chi-square analyses were conducted to examine baseline differences on demographic and outcome variables. No statistical differences were detected between groups on any of the demographic variables. However, intervention fathers reported statistically higher levels of expressive encouragement at baseline ($M = 55.94$, $SD = 11.59$) than did fathers from the waitlist control group ($M = 51.12$, $SD = 11.51$; $t(159) = 2.64$, $p = .009$, $d = 0.40$). Intervention fathers also reported statistically higher levels of problem-focused responses at baseline ($M = 66.30$, $SD = 8.72$) than did fathers from the waitlist control group ($M = 62.39$, $SD = 9.72$; $t(159) = 2.76$, $p = .006$, $d = –0.40$). Therefore, these variables were included as covariates in all analyses.

Given the data hierarchy (i.e., participants were nested in preschools), multilevel analyses using SPSS (Version 20) mixed models (MM) were used. These analyses are appropriate, considering that intraclass correlations suggested that up to 8% of variance in outcome variables was explained by preschool membership (Heck, Thomas, & Tabata, 2010). Use of MM allows for estimation of the fixed effect of condition on outcome variables while controlling for the random effect of preschool. At Step 1, model fit was determined using the Akaike information criterion (AIC) index. This showed that a restricted maximum likelihood and a variance-components covariance structure with intercept and preschool as a random effect and time as fixed best suited the data (Field, 2009). At Step 2, key variables (condition and time; each dummy coded 0 and 1) were added into the model, followed by covariates (baseline expressive encouragement and problem-focused reactions) at Step 3. As indicated by chi-square statistics for the change in –2 log likelihood, adding covariates statistically improved the model ($p = .010$)

for all outcomes (Field, 2009). Effect sizes (*d*) were calculated using the difference between the estimated means of the slopes (unstandardized *b* value) of the two groups (intervention and waitlist control over time) divided by the baseline *SD* of raw scores, equivalent to the square root of the mean squared error from analysis of variance (ANOVA), obtained from a one-way ANOVA with preschool as the group variable (Feingold, 2009). Effect sizes (*d*) greater than 0.80 are generally considered large; those equal to 0.50, moderate; and equal to 0.20, small (Cohen, 1988).

RESULTS

Table 2 shows intervention outcomes, including statistics for the interaction between time and condition. A statistically significant interaction between time and condition reflects a statistical difference in slopes for the two groups (i.e., the change over time varies according to group membership).

Intervention fathers reported substantially more empathy and expressive encouragement after than before program participation, whereas waitlist control fathers reported no meaningful changes. Intervention fathers also reported substantial reductions in emotion-dismissing beliefs and practices, as well as a smaller reduction in hostile or angry responses, after participation than before, whereas waitlist control fathers once again reported no meaningful changes. Fathers from both groups reported no meaningful change in problem-focused reactions to children's emotion expression. Compared to waitlist control fathers, intervention fathers reported small but statistically greater improvements in parenting efficacy and small but statistically greater reductions in total child behavior difficulties. Intervention fathers reported improvements in

children's prosocial skills that were slightly greater than those improvements reported by waitlist control fathers, but the difference was too small to draw statistical conclusions with the data (p = .092).

We repeated analyses using missing participants' (n = 8) baseline data for their follow-up scores to take into account intention to treat. The findings held for all variables.

Discussion

Evidence of most parenting programs' efficacy to date has been based largely or exclusively on samples of mothers. In this study, we explored whether fathers show parenting improvements following participation in a program previously found to improve the emotion-socialization skills of mothers. Using a randomized control trial, we investigated outcomes of the new Dads Tuning In to Kids program, a "father-friendly" adaptation of the evidence-based TIK program, to discover whether fathers also reduce emotion dismissing and increase emotion coaching following program participation, and whether children's difficult behaviors decrease as well.

Our findings indicate that fathers who attended DadsTIK reported improvements on a number of outcomes compared to those in the waitlist control condition. Consistent with our hypothesis and with findings using samples of predominantly mothers, fathers reported reductions in emotion-dismissing beliefs and practices, as well as increases in empathy and encouragement of emotion expression, aspects of emotion coaching targeted in the program. Empathy, or the capacity and willingness of a parent to step into their child's shoes, is a key component of emotion coaching. Father–child relationship quality may improve if fathers are taught to empathize with their children (Landreth & Lobaugh, 1998), and so DadsTIK may be a

program to consider when the father–child relationship is poor. Assessing changes in father–child relationship quality would be a valuable future avenue of inquiry.

Some studies have found that fathers engage in less parent–child emotion talk and use fewer emotion words than mothers (e.g., Aznar & Tenenbaum, 2015; Fivush, Brotman, Buckner, & Goodman, 2000). If this is so, boys may learn through paternal modeling that it is more appropriate for women than men to talk about emotions (Aznar & Tenenbaum, 2015). The concept of metaemotion allowed DadsTIK participants to interrogate long-held and deeply engrained attitudes they may have had about their own involvement, as men, in discussions of emotion, as well as to reflect on their own thoughts and feelings about various emotions in themselves and their children. Group discussions enabled fathers to process perceived links between one's own experience of being parented and current parenting, and the effect of paternal role modeling of emotion expression and emotion regulation strategies. For example, it was common for fathers to comment on the judgments or pejorative labels about expression of sadness and fear that they remembered from their own boyhood experiences; these were emotions that they often still had difficulties identifying or expressing. Sharing their stories in the supportive group environment facilitated a process in which participants seemed to gain awareness of and insights into their own emotions as they practiced the emotion coaching skills that would encourage their own children to express sadness and fear in healthy ways.

Helping children to find solutions to their problems or to set limits around behavior is encouraged in the fifth step of emotion coaching. In the literature, problem solving, or a problem-focused reaction, is generally considered supportive. In the TIK program, however, it is

considered only part of an emotionally responsive parenting style if it occurs after the child's emotion has been understood, validated, and named, and if the child is also included in finding a solution to the problem. It is not always necessary, because sometimes simply demonstrating empathy and allowing the child to express his or her emotion is sufficient to resolve the situation. Here, there was no reported change in problem-focused reactions to children's emotion expression. The measure used, the CCNES, distinguishes a problem-focused parental reaction from other possible reactions but unfortunately does not reveal to us whether it is used after the first four steps of emotion coaching have been followed, or as the first and only parental response. With no observational measure of father–child interaction (a limitation of this study), it is not clear at which point problem solving occurred. Across the sample, mean scores on this scale were quite high at Time 1 and remained high at Time 2, which suggests that in general, fathers like to use a problem-focused parenting style. DadsTIK teaches fathers not to jump straight to problem solving, so, given other findings described here, we can speculate that fathers who had attended the program were first empathizing with their child and assisting their children to regulate their emotion if feelings were high, and only then focusing on finding a solution to the problem.

An important goal of DadsTIK is to reduce angry or hostile parenting responses. Angry parenting strategies such as shouting and spanking are linked to child behavior problems in 1- to 5-year-old children (Burbach, Fox, & Nicholson, 2004) and are highly prevalent among Australian fathers (Sanders, Dittman, Keown, Farruggia, & Rose, 2010). As in TIK, the DadsTIK program content teaches strategies and skills for understanding and regulating parents'

own anger as well as children's anger. Participants are taught mindfulness techniques (e.g., short deep breathing and breath awareness strategies, noting and labeling emotions, focusing attention) to practice regularly for parent emotional well-being as well as to use these emotion regulation strategies when responding to children's emotion. Such techniques have previously been found to be particularly effective for improving aspects of fathers' parenting, such as greater emotion awareness, more positive affect, and better anger management (Coatsworth et al., 2015). As expected, fathers in the DadsTIK intervention reduced angry responses, whereas waitlist control fathers reported no change in how frequently they became angry or irritated with their child, lost their temper, or shouted. These findings suggest that the techniques taught were helpful.

The final parenting variable we assessed was fathers' self-efficacy. Feeling efficacious as a parent affects fathers' parenting involvement and child well-being (Giallo et al., 2012), and even in generally well-functioning samples, higher paternal self-efficacy is positively associated with children's social-emotional outcomes (Baxter & Smart, 2011). Consistent with our expectation, intervention fathers reported higher parenting efficacy compared with waitlist control fathers, indicating that learning new information and skills in a group program was an effective means to help these fathers gain greater parenting efficacy.

Ideally, skills taught in father-targeted programs ultimately lead to improved child outcomes. Post-program, intervention fathers reported reductions in total child behavior difficulties, whereas waitlist control fathers did not. This suggests that program content was beneficial; however, additional assessment of child behavior by other informants (e.g., mother,

teacher) is desirable to strengthen evidence for the potential of DadsTIK as a program to improve child outcomes.

Beyond its own merit, this evaluation of a potentially universal program for fathers with a community sample is noteworthy in part because there are few studies of resident fathering interventions (Holmes, Galovan, Yoshida, & Hawkins, 2010) and few quality studies of the effectiveness of universal interventions for fathers of preschool children (Magill-Evans, Harrison, Rempel, & Slater, 2006). Further, a universal approach to parenting education and programs has been endorsed for reducing the high prevalence rates of emotional and behavioral problems in Australian children that are associated, across all income groups, with suboptimal parenting (Sanders, 2008). DadsTIK was designed to fit within a universal approach to parenting support.

Limitations

Although there are numerous strengths to this study, the findings should be understood in the context of some important study limitations. We focus on two limitations in particular: a sample composition that limits the generalizability of the findings and the risk of expectancy bias that limits the trustworthiness of the findings.

The sample consisted of comparatively well-educated and middle- to high-income fathers, so outcomes reported here may not be generalizable to less educated or lower-income populations. In an Australian longitudinal national sample, however, no differences were found in warm or angry parenting according to fathers' educational attainment (Baxter & Smart, 2011). Further, although there is conflicting evidence about the relationship between fathering behaviors

and socioeconomic status, one recent meta-analysis of father involvement and child outcomes found no statistical differences across levels of socioeconomic status (McWayne et al., 2013). Future research should also examine the benefits of the program with fathers from disadvantaged communities or those with known risk factors. Similarly, it is important to note that findings might not hold for fathers from a culture that is considerably different from that of Australia with regard to gender roles, parenting, and the like.

Another limitation is that the results are based on self-reports by the fathers themselves, so reports of change are subject to expectancy bias. Thus, the results should be viewed as preliminary until they can be triangulated via observation or third-party reports. Toward that end, we are in the process of collecting data on child outcomes from mothers and teachers, and we will collect follow-up data from fathers in this sample to determine whether the reported changes in parenting are maintained into the future.

Conclusion

In this emotion-focused parenting program, fathers made meaningful shifts in their beliefs about and responses to emotions in their preschool children. Given the role fathers play in cultivating healthy social and emotional functioning in their children, these results have important implications for father-specific programs in general, and provide evidence-based support for the DadsTIK program in particular.

AUTHOR NOTE

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Table 1. *Summary of Adaptations Made to TIK Program for DadsTIK*

Program Component	Adaptation
Program length	Expanded from six sessions to seven sessions (14 hours). One booster session offered 6–8 weeks later as essential rather than optional.
Program timing	Groups were scheduled in the evenings, preferably early in the week when fathers may be less fatigued.
Promotion and recruitment	Promotional posters included the word *dads* in large bold print, photos of fathers with children in the targeted age range, and potential benefits to children, as well as the venue, planned dates, and time. Information about the program and research was distributed to families in sealed envelopes marked "To Dad." The word *parents* was substituted with *fathers* or *dads* wherever appropriate.
Program materials	All scenarios, language and images were father-specific. *Fathers* or *dads* replaced *parents* unless intentionally referring to both mothers and fathers. Photos of actual and diverse fathers and children were used in preference to drawings.
New content	Information about the benefits of positive father involvement to children's development and the importance of fathers' play was introduced in Session 1. Additional role-play scripts illustrating four emotion-related parenting styles were included. Discussion of sadness (in fathers and in children) included before introduction of topic of anger.
Modified content	Introduction of the ideas of emotional intelligence, metaemotion, and the steps of emotion coaching delayed until Session 2. Explicit encouragement throughout to read storybooks to children, and how to use these to increase emotion understanding and awareness. Role-play scripts and scenarios focused on situations commonly encountered by fathers. Content on developmental effects of criticism on children included as core rather than optional. Topic of anger spread over two sessions. Expanded information about how to set limits and deal with sibling conflict.

	Some shorter warm-up exercises included; others delayed or modified to include a child focus.
Modified activities	Extra time allowed for group discussion and questions, particularly in Session 1. More scaffolding and structuring of role-plays. Some exercises done in pairs rather than as a whole group to increase safety for expression of vulnerable emotions.

Table 2. *Multilevel Mixed-Effects Modeling: Intervention Outcomes*

		Adjusted Mean				Test of Interaction						
		Time 1		Time 2								
Measure	Condition	*M*	*SE*	*M*	*SE*	²	*SE*	*df*	*t*	*p*	95% CI	*d*
Empathy	Intervention	17.61	0.29	21.07	0.30	3.37	0.43	151.96	7.74	< .001	[2.51, 4.23]	1.11
	Control	17.38	0.32	17.47	0.33							
Expressive encouragement[a]	Intervention	54.97	1.22	67.20	1.24	10.31	1.56	154.24	6.61	< .001	[7.23, 13.39]	0.88
	Control	52.20	1.33	54.12	1.34							
Emotion-dismissing beliefs	Intervention	35.25	0.60	28.03	0.61	-7.13	0.81	150.82	-8.82	< .001	[-8.72, -5.53]	1.37
	Control	34.02	0.65	33.93	0.66							
Emotion-dismissing practices	Intervention	64.34	2.33	47.40	2.36	-15.11	2.38	152.51	-6.36	< .001	[-19.81, -10.41]	0.79
	Control	57.76	2.54	55.93	2.56							
Problem-focused practices[a]	Intervention	65.56	0.90	66.61	0.92	-0.10	1.39	147.39	-0.07	.940	[-2.84, 2.65]	0.01
	Control	63.24	0.98	64.38	0.99							
Hostile parenting	Intervention	9.48	0.37	8.40	0.37	-0.82	0.35	152.15	-2.30	.023	[-1.52, -0.11]	0.28
	Control	9.18	0.40	8.92	0.40							
Parenting efficacy	Intervention	26.13	0.56	29.30	0.58	2.05	0.68	151.00	3.01	.003	[0.70, 3.39]	0.38
	Control	27.20	0.61	28.32	0.62							
SDQ: Total difficulties	Intervention	10.54	0.59	9.01	0.60	-1.40	0.62	153.00	-2.27	.024	[-2.62, -0.18]	0.27
	Control	9.07	0.64	8.94	0.64							
SDQ: Prosocial skills	Intervention	7.04	0.20	7.51	0.21	0.42	0.25	152.12	1.70	.092	[-0.07, 0.92]	0.22
	Control	7.48	0.22	7.52	0.22							

Note. All analyses adjusted for preschool membership and variables with baseline between-groups differences.
[a]Statistically significant baseline between-groups difference.

FIGURE 1. PARTICIPANT FLOWCHART.