Spirituality in children and their parents predicts positive mental health.

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Psychology, Health Sciences
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Theoretical context

What can we do to eliminate or reduce the impact of negative childhood experiences?

What can we do to make children more resilient?

Resilience: positive functioning in the face of adversity

Developmental assets
Theoretical context: Developmental assets

Middle Childhood (8-12 years)

External assets

Constructive Use of Time

17. Creative activities—Child participates in music, art, drama, or creative writing two or more times per week.
18. Child programs—Child participates two or more times per week in cocurricular school activities or structured community programs for children.
19. Religious community—Child attends religious programs or services one or more times per week.
20. Time at home—Child spends some time most days both in high-quality interaction with parents and doing things at home other than watching TV or playing video games.

Internal assets

Positive Identity

37. Personal power—Child feels he or she has some influence over things that happen in her or his life.
38. Self-esteem—Child likes and is proud to be the person that he or she is.
39. Sense of purpose—Child sometimes thinks about what life means and whether there is a purpose for her or his life.
40. Positive view of personal future—Child is optimistic about her or his personal future.

[Search Institute, 2006]
Theoretical context: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model
Aim
Determine the impact of spirituality on parameters of psychological health in children and their parents…. and determine interactions between parental and child functioning.

Hypotheses
Spirituality will be associated with better psychological health in both parents and children.

Poorer parental psychological functioning will be associated with poorer child functioning.
Participants
92 children
• Mean age 9.8 years (sd 1.6); range 6.5-13.1 years
• 52% male

92 parents (one for each child)
• Mean age 39.5 years (sd 5.6); range 28-55 years

• 93% mothers
• 77% married or defacto
• 13% divorced
• 8% single

• Mixture of lower and middle class

Procedure
Recruited from government (non-religious) schools in urban and rural Victoria, Australia.
Measures: adult

**Spirituality** (parent)

- Anxiety
- Stress
- Loneliness
- Parenting Sense of Competence
- Depression

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**Adult Facit-Sp**
facit.org

**Depression, Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS)**
Lovibond and Lovibond (1995)

**UCLA Loneliness Scale**
Russell (1996)

**Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC)**
Gibaud-Wallston & Wandersman (1978)

**Family Assessment Device (FAD)**
Epstein, Baldwin & Bishop (1983)
Measures: child

Child Spirituality Scale (SPS)

Beck Youth Inventories
Beck, Beck, Jolly, & Steer (2005)

Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Questionnaire (LSDQ)
Cassidy & Asher (1992)
Associations between variables

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics, Pearson’s Correlations, and Cronbach’s Alphas of Variables for Child Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>CSpiritS</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>.54''</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.29''</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.21</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>BECK - Self Concept</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>- .39''</td>
<td>-.47''</td>
<td>-.41''</td>
<td>-.27''</td>
<td>-.39''</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>BECK - Anxiety</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.84''</td>
<td>.68''</td>
<td>.41''</td>
<td>.50''</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>BECK - Depression</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>.82''</td>
<td>.50''</td>
<td>.46''</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>BECK - Anger</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.67''</td>
<td>.38''</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>BECK - Disrupt. Beh.</td>
<td></td>
<td>82</td>
<td>.27''</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>LSDQ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>23.73</td>
<td>52.23</td>
<td>44.53</td>
<td>44.51</td>
<td>43.31</td>
<td>44.31</td>
<td>19.54</td>
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<tr>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: *p<.05; **p<.01; Figures in bold on diagonal represent Cronbach’s Alphas; CSpiritS=Child Spirituality Scale; LSDQ=Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Questionnaire.*
Associations between variables

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics, Pearson’s Correlations, and Cronbach’s Alphas of Variables for Parent Participants

<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
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<td>1. FACIT-Sp</td>
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<td>-0.65***</td>
<td>-0.29**</td>
<td>-0.65**</td>
<td>-0.45**</td>
<td>0.69**</td>
<td>-0.44**</td>
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<td>2. Depression</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.71**</td>
<td>0.74**</td>
<td>0.42**</td>
<td>-0.50**</td>
<td>0.43**</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Anxiety</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.59**</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>0.23*</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Stress</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.40**</td>
<td>0.56**</td>
<td>0.48**</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. UCLA</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>-0.41**</td>
<td>0.34**</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. PSOC</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>-0.45**</td>
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<td>7. FAD</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean     | 33.65 | 2.12  | 1.81  | 4.78  | 37.93 | 70.51 | 17.89 |

S.D.     | 9.4   | 2.9   | 2.9   | 3.5   | 9.3   | 10.86 | 4.5   |

Note: *p<.05; **p<.01; Figures in bold on diagonal represent Cronbach’s Alphas; FACIT-Sp = Spirituality, PSOC = Parenting Sense of Competence; FAD = Family Assessment Device; UCLA = Loneliness Scale.
Conclusions & Implications

1. Spirituality/meaning-making in both parents and children predict better mental health over a variety of indices.

2. There is partial independence of parental and child pathology by middle childhood.