

Stress reactions of parents during hospitalization and chronic illness of their child – psychological perspectives

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Agenda

1. Psychological mechanisms
2. Evidence from research
3. Practical implications

1. Psychological mechanisms

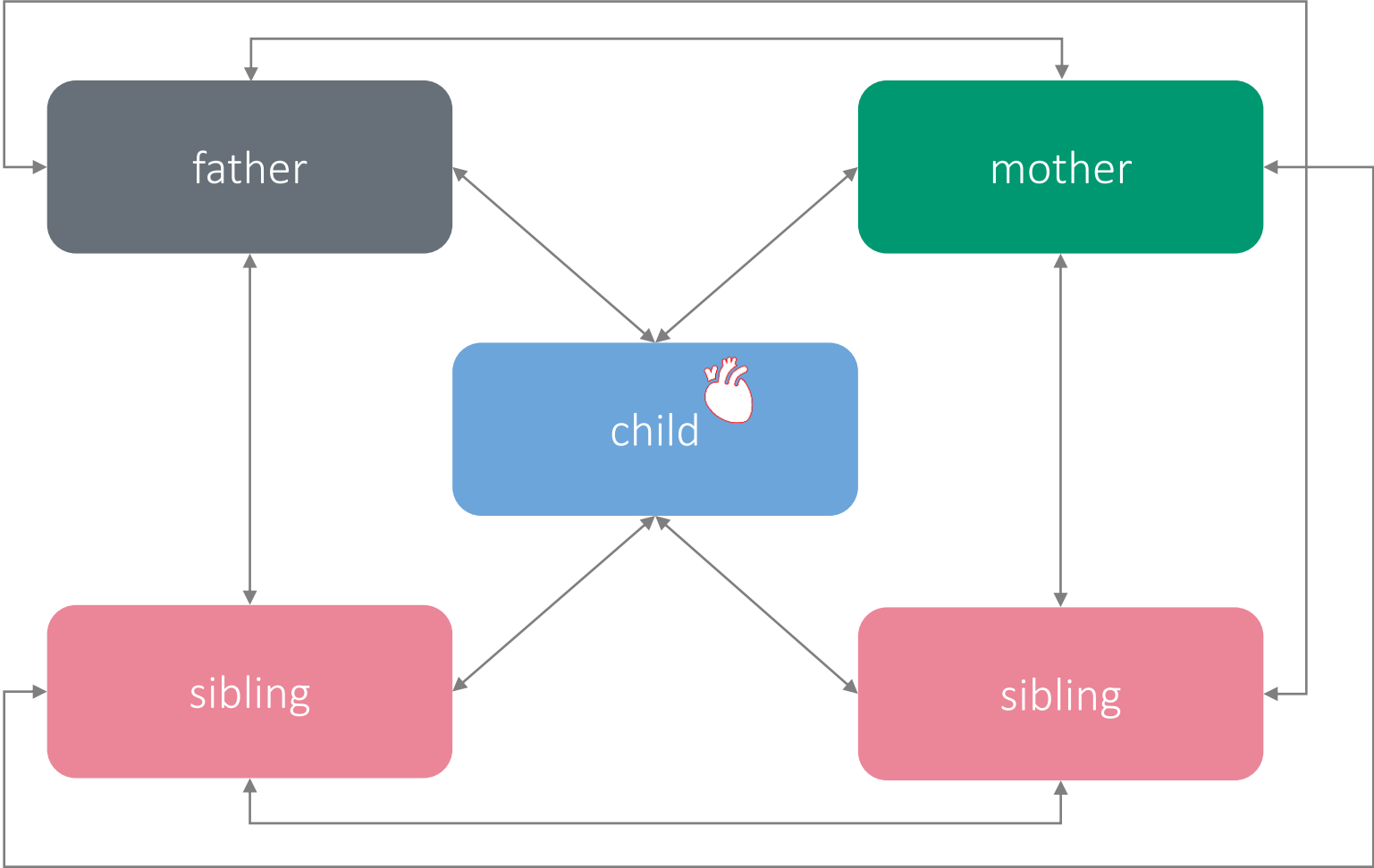
Psychological mechanisms: Lazarus and Folkman



Problem-focused coping: *managing the stressor*

Emotion-focused coping: *managing the emotional response*

Psychological mechanisms: systemic perspective



2. Evidence from research

Evidence from research: data on parents

Symptoms of depression: 25 – 50%

Trauma symptoms: up to 80%

Important predictors: Social support, prior mental health & complexity of heart disease

Trajectories: considerable variability

Coping: mothers more emotion-focused and show more behavioral disengagement

Evidence from research: effective coping

Rather positive effects:

- Proactive problem-focused coping
- Seeking and accepting emotional support
- Acceptance as cognitive strategy
- Self-distraction

Rather negative effects:

- Avoidance
- Behavioral disengagement
- Self-blame
- Sleep disturbances

Evidence from research: interventions

Psychological interventions are evidence-based, effective and recommended.
(e.g. CBT, systemic)

Improve functional coping, reduce psychological distress, and enhance quality of life.

3. Practical implications

Practical implications: tips for health professionals

Recognize and normalize

- Stress and emotional reactions are normal responses to an abnormal situation.
- Briefly naming emotions (“I have the impression that you are scared”) can foster trust and increase perceived support.

Provide structure and predictability

- Explain daily routines and procedures in simple, concrete language.
- Reduce uncertainty by summarizing what happens next or giving updates.

Practical implications: tips for health professionals

Foster parental competence

- Involve parents in care tasks when possible → strengthens control and self-efficacy.
- Acknowledge their efforts explicitly (“You’re doing a great job supporting your child”).

Support coping

- Encourage short breaks, rest, and social contact.
- Offer contact with hospital psychology and/or social support services if stress remains high.

Practical implications: tips for health professionals

Provide targeted education about congenital heart disease and treatment.

- Knowledge can reduce unnecessary worries.

Communicate as a team

- Consistent, coordinated messages from the whole care team reduce confusion and emotional overload.

4. Summary

Summary

- Parental stress is normal – but may become chronic if unaddressed.
- Knowing stress mechanisms helps identify critical processes and guide support.
- Collaboration across disciplines is key to family-centered care.
- Empathic nursing actions – structure, predictability, and validation – matter.

Questions?

Thank you.

