MINDFUL CAREGIVERS’ EXPERIENCES
OF PARENTING YOUNG CHILDREN

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by
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The purpose of this study was to explore how mindful caregivers experienced parenting young children. This was of interest because persons who practice mindfulness are thought to have an increased capacity to react more positively to stress, have more emotional awareness, and have the ability to mindfully attenuate themselves in relationships. This study documented the lived experiences of mindful parents and considered how these parents nurtured their attachment with their child or children.

The study used qualitative interviewing to examine the lived experiences of mindful parents with young children. The research questions of the study were: (a) What are the lived experiences of parents with young children, who practice being mindful in their daily lives, and (b) What are mindful parents’ perceptions of their attachments with their young children? The sample included three males and five females, all of whom identified as Caucasian and were married. Participants’ ages ranged from 32 to 60. Participants reported having at least one child at the time of the study aged between three months and six years.

The phenomenological analysis of the data resulted in six emergent themes: (a) mindful values in parenting, (b) mindful skills in parenting, (c) relationship with child, (d) awareness of the internal mindset, (e) a safe haven for the family, and (f) obstacles to
mindful parenting. Parents described infusing mindfulness values and skills into their everyday experiences with their children as a rewarding and fruitful task that helped them maximize parenting satisfaction and foster healthy relationships with their children.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“Love your child by learning the song that is in her heart
and singing it to her when she forgets.” -Anonymous

Parenting is one of the most demanding, stressful, and joyful responsibilities adults may do in their lifetime (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997; Steinberg, 2004). According to the United States Census Bureau (2010), households with children under the age of 18 made up nearly 35% of the population. Parents participate in both difficult and pleasurable experiences while raising their children. These experiences result in a lifelong opportunity for parents to learn about themselves and their parent-child relationship (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003).

Parenting can often be viewed as one of the most important functions in an adult’s life. However parents are not always well equipped to handle this important function of raising future generations. Parents often learn how to be parents to their own children through the way they were parented by their caretakers as children. Parenting choices and attitudes impact future generations’ development of relationships, self-esteem, and the ability to cope with ever-changing environmental factors (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997; Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). Therefore, the effects of parenting not only play an enormous role in children’s lives; they also dramatically influence future generations (Bowlby, 1984).

Excessive parental stress, resulting in substandard parenting in the early years, can have significant negative effects on a child’s healthy physical, emotional,
neurological, and social development (Schore, 1994). From 2005 to 2006, over 15% of children aged 4 to 17 had parents who sought guidance through their child’s school about the lack of ability to handle their child’s emotional and behavioral problems (Simpson, Cohen, Pastor, & Ruben, 2008). Overburdened parents may be less sensitive and aware of their child’s needs, due to focusing on their own stressors. A high level of stress has been associated with parental behaviors like rejection, exhibiting control over, and showing emotion towards one’s children (Belsky, 1984). Three common sources of stress that directly and indirectly influence parental functioning include: marital/intimate relationships stress, social support system stress, and employment or financial stress (Belsky, 1984). These sources and effects of stress can permeate the parent-child relationship if the caregiver does not pay close attention to the child’s needs and the parent-child attachment.

This study explored mindful parents because persons who practice mindfulness are thought to have an increased capacity to react more positively to stress, have more emotional awareness, and have the ability to mindfully attenuate themselves to relationships (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003, Dumas, 2005). This study documented the lived experiences of mindful parents and considered how parents who were mindful nurtured their attachment with their child or children. It is hoped that an exploration of how mindful parents interact with their children might increase the understanding and knowledge of what guides mindful parents in their daily lives. If appropriate, the new knowledge may then be applied to guiding other parents in mindfully relating to their children.
Purpose and Rationale

According to Bowlby (1952), attachment theory suggests the parent-child relationship has an essential attachment relationship that is needed to promote the safety and well-being of the child. This relationship is the crucial environmental factor in a child’s healthy development (Huges, 2009). Attachment theorists suggest the bond between child and parent is the most influential bond the child will have, and will help the child to learn healthy ways to experience and view the world (Ainsworth, 1976; Bowlby, 1969/1982; Feeney, 2006). Effective parental care and support help children develop stable and secure parent-child attachments. This relationship allows children to feel secure and safe to explore and learn about their environment (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Attachment to the caregiver is an innate biological need within the child that helps the child to feel safe and secure when anxieties arise.

An important area of investigation in the attachment research is the study of multigenerational systems of attachments. Parents may pass on their attachment styles through generations by habitually reacting to their children in the way their parents once did with them. This cycle recreates similar attachment styles within future generations (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Feeney, 2006; Rutter, 1995). Though most parents pass along a secure attachment, some parents pass along attachments that are insecure, leaving the child vulnerable to developmental challenges (Huges, 2009). Research on parental stress and psychopathology indicates a parent’s health and well-being greatly impacts attachment, health, and well-being of the child (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Main, 1999). Poor
or unhealthy attachments have been linked to a greater possibility for psychopathology later on in life for the child (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Main, 1999).

One way to interrupt the cycle of insecure attachments is to become consciously or knowingly aware of the present moment, or to become mindful while parenting (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003; Steinberg, 2004). Mindful parenting refers to parents who incorporate an awareness of the present moment to their parenting experience, relationship with their child, the child’s needs, as well as their own needs (Duncan, Coatsworth, & Greenburg, 2009a). This practice of mindful parenting has been shown to be a promising approach to parenting that promotes a secure attachment between parents and their child (Dumas, 2005; Siegel & Hartzell, 2003).

Mindful parenting research is a new area of mindfulness research that is focused on the parent-child interaction (Sawyer Cohen & Semple, 2010). Several studies have documented the potential benefits of teaching mindful parenting techniques as an intervention (Altmaier & Maloney, 2007; Dumas, 2005; Singh et al., 2009); however, few studies have explored mindful parents’ lived experiences of parenting in early childhood.

In the current study, qualitative interviewing was used to examine what the lived experiences are of mindful parents with young children. This study was used to deepen the understanding and knowledge of mindful parents and essence (i.e., the essential and central underlying meaning) of what it means to be a mindful parent. Recent mindful parenting research has focused on the benefits of mindfulness interventions with parents who lack skills in focusing mindfully on the parenting relationship (Altmaier & Maloney,
This study is a valuable addition to the literature because it takes the parents’ interpretations of their experiences in their natural setting and environment into full account. This study did not focus on imposing a framework to another person’s values of parenting; rather, it investigated what the parents who chose to live mindfully are experiencing in their daily lives.

**Research Questions**

The research questions for the current study focused on: (a) What are the lived experiences of parents with young children, who practice being mindful in their daily lives, and (b) What are mindful parents’ perceptions of their attachments with their young children?

**Definitions of Concepts and Terms**

*Attachment classifications:* According to attachment theory, children who experience their primary caregivers as consistent and nurturing are likely to develop secure attachment styles, whereas children who experience their caregivers as inconsistent or unavailable may be at risk for insecure attachment (Bowlby, 1980; Bowlby, 1969/1982)

*Attachment relationship:* An attachment bond is a strong and permanent emotional tie that the infant develops toward the primary caregiver (typically the mother), which is biologically rooted within all individuals for the function of protection from danger (Bowlby, 1969/1982).
Caregiving bond: The caregiving bond is the bond the parents’ have with the child, reflecting their aspiration to protect the child from dangers, and to nurture the child’s physical and emotional needs (Cassidy, 2008).

Meditation: Meditation is an active practice where an individual is intentionally conscious of his or her attention or focus from moment to moment (typically with the breath), with no attachment to the outcome (Baer, 2003). Meditation practices can be formal and informal intentional actions where an individual is aware of the present moment.

Mindful parenting: Mindful parenting is defined as mindful skills or practices used in the interpersonal and intrapersonal domains of the parent-child relationship (Duncan, 2007).

Mindfulness: Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experiences moment by moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). Brown and Ryan (2003) explained mindfulness as an inherent state of consciousness, which involves consciously attending to the individual’s experience, moment to moment. An example of not being mindful is driving to a destination while thinking about things that need to be done or happened in the past, and then arriving at your destination unsure how you got there. The opposite of being mindful is when the person is not experiencing the activity they are doing, in the present moment.
Parent: For the purposes of this study, a parent is any primary caregiver of a child including: biological parent, close relative, foster parent, and so forth. Parent is synonymous with caregiver for the purposes of this study.

Review of the Literature

The literature review is divided into three sections. The first section examines parent-child attachment theory and the historical background of attachment theory. Section two examines relevant literature and concepts on mindfulness. The third section examines the mindful parenting literature and concepts.

Attachment Theory

This section of the literature review covers the relevant background and literature on attachment theory. The theory’s history, major concepts, and classifications of attachment will be explored.

Concepts and historical background. Attachment theory was established and described in detail by the research of John Bowlby. Attachment theory’s concepts and terms were recognized and studied in the mid-1900s when John Bowlby and other theorists took an interest in how children and mothers connected. Bowlby (1969/1982) described attachment theory as an evolution of the parent-child relationship that develops and adapts over time. Attachment theorists sought to examine and describe the relational dynamics between young children and their primary caregivers.

Attachment theory is based upon the primary notion that human behavior is organized in many instinctive biological behavioral systems. Bowlby (1969/1982) and Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) focused primarily on the attachment,
exploratory, and the caregiving systems and the implications of those systems on healthy and unhealthy development and functioning. Bowlby (1969/1982) and Ainsworth et al. (1978) also took significant interest in the effects and implications of sufficient and non-sufficient parental caregiving on the functioning of the child’s attachment and exploratory systems. They asserted that only in the context of effective or sufficient primary caregiver support and care, would the child be able to develop a stable sense of security from the attachment system, as well as flexibility to explore when the exploratory system was activated (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982).

Bowlby (1969/1982) proposed that a child’s persistent need to maintain proximity to a parent or primary caregiver is attributable to the activation of an attachment behavioral system, which regulates survival and safety needs within the child. During the 1950s, this idea was controversial due to the popular belief that the child’s tie to the mother was due primarily to the need to be fed by the mother (Bowlby, 1988; Brandell & Ringel, 2007). When Bowlby (1969/1982) first developed his theory, he became aware of evidence from animal studies of a different purpose for the infant to be in close proximity to the mother. The most famous example was when Harlow (1958) observed that rhesus monkeys preferred cloth “mothers” in times of stress, even though wire mesh “mothers” actually gave them food. Bowlby (1969/1982) sought new explanations of why this phenomena was occurring in the human and animal kingdom alike, and developed a theory of attachment.

Even though Bowlby’s work is over 60 years old and at one point controversial, it is continually cited and referenced in modern research and literature as being the
foundation of attachment theory. Attachment theory is considered the dominant approach to understanding a child’s development socially, emotionally, and relationally (Schaffer, 2004). Bowlby’s work, concepts, and findings on the implications of parent-child relationship are generally accepted as accurate and useful in today’s families just as much as when he first began examining the phenomena (Berlin, Zeanah, & Lieberman, 2008; Rutter, 1995).

According to Bowlby (1969/1982), the biological functions of attachment behaviors are to ensure the survival of the species. Bowlby (1988) believed infants possess instinctual behaviors (sucking, clinging, crying, smiling, etc.) that serve to keep the mother close. It was observed that children attempt to seek out caregivers who are thought to be stronger and wiser to help protect them against dangers, due to their helplessness and vulnerabilities (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Bowlby (1969/1982) recognized the primary biological function of these learned proximity-seeking behaviors was to provide safety from danger. Other predictable outcomes learned from the interactions with caregivers were feeding, learning about the environment, and social interaction. Bowlby (1969/1982) considered infants to have a predisposition to seek proximity in times of stress, as a biological need for real or perceived safety and protection.

A basic tenet of attachment theory is that a child’s bond with at least one primary caregiver (typically the mother figure) is essential for the social, emotional, and psychological development over his or her lifetime (Bowlby, 1969/1982). When this bond is healthy or the child benefits from the relationship, it is referred to as a secure attachment. An insecure attachment, on the other hand, may result from the loss of this
attachment figure or insufficient attention or nurturing. This loss may lead to an increased chance of abnormal bereavement, resulting in disturbed development, emotional detachment, and inability to love and trust (Bowlby, 1988). Infants form the attachment relationship to the caregivers present in their lives, and it is the caregivers’ responsibility to determine the quality of the relationship.

Infants form secure attachments to consistent caregivers who are sensitive and receptive to the child’s attachment cues (Bowlby, 1969/1982). An effective caregiver (i.e., one with whom the child benefits developmentally from the relationship) engages the child in social interaction and appropriately responds to the signals and approaches of the child. The caregiver meets the needs of the child in a consistent and dependable way, and the child is noticeably soothed when comforted by the caregiver (Prior & Glaser, 2006). In infancy, primary caregivers, such as one or both parents, grandparents, foster parents, and daycare workers, serve as attachment figures. Ainsworth et al. (1978) observed securely attached infants who sought out proximity to their primary caregivers were noticeably reassured when they were in their caregivers’ presence.

Infants who have non-effective caregivers (i.e., child does not benefit developmentally from relationship) still attach to their caregivers; however, it is unlike the secure attachments in many ways. Rather than being comforted by the caregiver when fearful or anxious, the child remains unsettled and frightened after attempted soothing by the caregiver. A non-effective caregiver may not be supportive to the child’s needs and is inconsistent in providing reassurance (Bowlby, 1969/1982).
Children use caregiving relationships in a hierarchal way, ranking the relationships in order of attachment strength (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Main, 1999). A child first seeks out his or her primary caregiver, or the person to whom the child is most attached or connected. If that person is unavailable or not responding, the child will move to the second attachment caregiver and then third and so on. There are also context specific attachments, depending on the circumstance and situation. For example, a child may have an attachment figure at school and a different figure at home. In later childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, a wider variety of relationships can serve as attachment figures. For instance, friends, teachers, siblings, other relatives, and romantic partners begin to satisfy attachment needs and become the primary attachments (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

Several different concepts and terms Bowlby used are important in understanding attachment theory. The child’s connection to the caregiver is called the attachment behavioral system, the caregiver’s connection to the child is called the caregiving system, and the deactivation of the attachment system within the child is called the exploratory system (Bowlby, 1969/1982). These systems work together to help children grow and develop in their parents’ care. This section outlines how these systems function separately and together.

**The attachment behavioral system.** Bowlby (1969/1982) specified a set goal for the attachment system, which Stroufe and Waters (1977) termed “felt security,” or a sense of protection or security (p. 3). The attachment behavioral system has an objective of maintaining a bond with the accessible and available attachment figure (Bowlby,
1969/1982). The syncing of the different systems within the child and caregiver enables the needs to be met.

The cyclical movement between the attachment system and the exploratory system is sensitive to the environment and the caregiver. When the child feels safe and secure, the attachment system turns off or deactivates, activating the exploratory system. The exploratory system then activates and the child’s desire to explore the environment strengthens. When the child is then faced with a threat, real or perceived, the attachment system will again be activated, and the child is driven to seek and reestablish security from an attachment figure. Bowlby (1969/1982) used the example of a thermostat to explain the cycle of the attachment system. When a room gets too hot or cold, the thermostat automatically turns the heat up or down to adjust itself to the temperature that was previously set. Similarly, in the attachment system, when the child feels safe or scared, the attachment system adjusts down or up, depending on the situation and the state of mind of the child. Bowlby (1969/1982) described children as wanting a certain amount of proximity to their caregiver, not as a goal, rather to maintain a state of homeostasis. Main (1999) added that rather than the attachment system stopping and starting, it is continually active and monitoring the physical and psychological proximity of the caregiver.

To find homeostasis, children use internal and external cues from the environment and primary caregiver to trigger attachment behaviors. These cues set off an alarm or anxiety within children, encouraging them to seek proximity with their primary caregiver or secure base (Bowlby, 1988). Several conditions within the child activate attachment
behaviors and influence the intensity. Some examples of these internal conditions within the child can be when the child is feeling tired, hungry, sick, or in pain. The more intense emotions of fear, anxiety, illness, and fatigue increase the urgency of attachment behaviors within the child, and produce a stronger need for closeness and contact with the caregiver (Bowlby, 1988). The caregiver’s conditions and behaviors also affect attachment behaviors. Some examples of the caregiver’s conditions include various distancing behaviors such as being absent, departing, or discouraging closeness. Environmental conditions that also activate attachment behaviors are fear producing events and rejection by other children or adults (Bowlby, 1969/1982).

Once a specific condition cues the attachment system, children use certain attachment behaviors to communicate what they require in the moment or situation. Stroufe and Waters (1977) stressed there are a variety of behaviors children use when their attachment systems activate that attempt to produce the same outcome: closeness to the caregiver. Bowlby (1969/1982) observed that children use specific attachment behaviors to alert the caregivers to move physically closer to them, such as smiling, vocalizing, and movement of the hands and feet. The smile is considered to be a social tool for both mother/caregiver and child, which elicits maternal care and promotes feelings of security in the child (Bowlby, 1988). Some behaviors are more aversive in nature, such as crying or screaming. These behaviors attract the caregiver to the child to terminate or stop the behavior. Other behaviors are more active and the child physically moves toward the caregiver to initiate and fulfill the proximity.
Bowlby (1969/1982) used the analogy of a heat-seeking missile to describe the organization and needs of the attachment behavioral system. Once the missile is launched (the attachment system is activated), the child is able to navigate the environment or outside stimuli to change its path to reach the expected destination, closeness to the caregiver. In other words, the child is capable of taking in changes of the primary caregiver’s location, emotions, and behaviors, and make the necessary adjustments to their own behaviors to attempt to bring the caregiver closer.

_The exploratory system and secure base._ When the attachment system has been deactivated due to the child feeling safe and secure, the exploratory system is activated within the child. This detachment from the caregiver is considered the goal of the attachment, to help the child feel safe and secure enough to explore the world independently and confidentially (Brazelton, 1981; Mahler, 1975).

This shift to and from the exploratory system is a delicate balance that gives survival advantages by providing important information about the workings of the environment (Cassidy, 2008). It is the balance between the attachment and exploratory systems that is thought to help ensure the safety of children as they gradually learn about the environment through exploration (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Cassidy, 2008). Exploration of the environment allows children to begin to navigate and understand the world beyond their physical body and their primary caregiver.

Ainsworth (1963) and Bowlby (1969/1982, 1988) understood the attachment relationship to the parent as a secure base from which to explore the surroundings. Ainsworth et al. (1978) found infant exploration to be greater when attachment figures
were present, and assuring the child that he or she was in a safe environment. Due to this assurance, the child is then confident to go into the world to explore and investigate physical and social realms of their environment. The child’s confident investigation of his or her world is possible due to the secure base that he or she can return to, feeling welcomed, nourished, comforted, and reassured by the caregiver (Bowlby, 1988).

Bowlby (1973) described not only the physical presence of the caregiver as important for the child to begin exploring, but also the child’s belief that the caregiver will be available when needed for reunion. Children’s assurance that the caregiver is stronger, wiser, and will be there to take care of them, is a major tenet of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982). This certainty or trust is fostered by the parent’s ability to read the child’s proximity seeking behaviors and respond appropriately to those needs. The appropriate response then allows the child to depend on the availability and consistency of the caregiver (Prior & Glaser, 2006). In other words, it is up to the caregiver to respond accurately to the physical and emotional needs of the child, which then allows the child to begin to trust his or her own emotions, teaching emotional regulation and autonomy for later on in life (Bowlby, 1988).

*The caregiving system.* Bowlby (1956, 1984) also discussed the attachment system from the parent’s perspective, the caregiving system (George & Solomon, 1996). The caregiving system is parallel to the attachment system due to it being, to some degree, automatic or preprogrammed as a biological instinct within the caregiver (Bowlby, 1984). Bowlby (1984) described it as a biological urge to protect one’s young, and to ensure the survival of the species. Similar to the attachment system within the
child, the caregiving system is activated when it is perceived the child is in real or potential danger (Cassidy, 2008). Therefore, as the attachment system is in place to receive comfort, the caregiving system is present to provide comfort and safety.

The caregiving system provides comfort and safety through specific behaviors that are designed to promote proximity and comfort to the child (Cassidy, 2008). The primary behaviors exhibited by the caregiver are retrieval, recovery, and soothing. Examples of retrieval behaviors include calling, reaching, grasping, following, and restraining (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Recovery happens when the parent notices the child is farther away than comfortable, and brings the child back to a distance that is more comfortable. After retrieval or recovery of the child and removing the source of stress, caregivers then implement soothing and comforting behaviors toward children. Soothing by the caregiver is necessary to help the child calm down when he or she is fearful, anxious, sad, or upset. Soothing also plays an important role in teaching the caregiver more about the child’s needs and patterns of communication.

At times, it is challenging to read the appropriate communication from children due to the parents’ own emotions and past experiences. Bowlby (1984) noted the level of strong emotions (e.g., fear, anger, panic) within the parents that are evoked during caregiving behaviors, are often ingrained within parents from their own caregivers. The form the behaviors take are directly connected to the experiences the caregiver had early on in life, especially through their own childhood (Bowlby, 1984). These childhood experiences within the attachment relationships in the caregiver’s past serve as a filter or lens to see and interact with the world, particularly when parenting. Within the
caregiving system, caregivers respond to both their internal (hormones, cultural beliefs, emotions, physical condition, etc.) and external (work, other children, infant’s condition or status, etc.) cues to provide safety for the child (Cassidy, 2008). However, all of these internal and external cues are the subjective experience of the caregiver and can be triggered by their own past attachment behaviors. Caregivers pass on their attachment behaviors and bonds through the way they attach with their children (Bowlby, 1984).

The young child’s attachment behaviors often invoke the parent to seek proximity to the child, helping the child feel safe and protected from real or perceived danger. Both the attachment system and caregiving system are often activated simultaneously (Prior & Glaser, 2006). The powerful feeling of fear, related to real or perceived danger, is closely linked to both the attachment and caregiving systems. The intense emotion of fear is useful and necessary to ensure that the child grows and develops survival skills. The instinctual feeling of fear is used to activate both systems to ensure survival and comfort (Bowlby, 1979).

Bowlby (1969/1982) believed the caregiving, exploratory, and attachment systems to be closely related with one another; the caregiver and child work closely together to achieve a mutually comfortable proximity and distance. If the exploratory system is activated within the child in an unsafe environment, the parent’s caregiving system will often activate to keep the child close. The child trusts the caregiver to pay attention while he or she is in the environment, therefore, feeling safe to explore knowing the parent can be depended upon in time of need (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Even subtle acts of diverting attention from the child, such as looking at a newspaper or magazine while
the child is exploring, reduces the quality of the infant’s exploration in an unfamiliar situation (Sorce & Emade, 1981). Once the attachment behaviors activate and the child cries for the caregiver, oftentimes, the parent’s caregiving system also activates and attempts to soothe and comfort.

Through early interactions and experiences, children quickly learn distinctive ways of getting their attachment needs met by their caregiver. These behaviors can be sorted and classified into different patterns of attachment.

**Patterns of attachment.** Based on their collective experiences with different attachment figures, children develop discernable and specific attachment patterns to caregivers. By the age of 18 months children begin to solidify attachments with primary caregivers and use distinct ways of communicating their needs (Ainsworth, 1976; Ainsworth et al., 1978). Researchers examined these attachment behaviors to find commonalities between the various attachment styles of children toward their caregivers (Ainsworth, 1976; Ainsworth et al., 1978).

In the 1960s, Ainsworth (1976) conducted longitudinal studies on the mother-child relationship, comparing parenting styles with subsequent attachments. Ainsworth et al. (1978) created a means for assessing the parent-child attachment, called the “Strange Situation” where the mother and child (9-18 months) were in a laboratory setting that induced separations and reunions of the mother and child under high and low stress. Through this research, it became evident children use specific strategies to cope with the stress of separating from their primary caregiver, as well as get their attachment needs met.
Through the studying of parent-child interactions, Ainsworth (1976) discovered children’s attachment behaviors could be classified as organized or disorganized, as well as secure or insecure. Organized and disorganized attachments refer to the strategies children use to gain proximity to an attachment figure when their attachment system is activated (Ainsworth, 1976; Prior & Glaser, 2006). Organized attachments have clear and predictable series of responses toward the attachment figures when the child is in distress. Unlike the predictability of the organized groups, children who have disorganized attachments lack organization and predictable patterns while attempting to attain their attachment needs. On the other hand, secure and insecure attachments refer to the individual characteristics of how the child feels and responds, regarding the availability and responsiveness of the attachment figure (Ainsworth, 1976; Prior & Glaser, 2006). The primary caregiver can soothe securely attached children when their attachment system is activated, whereas insecurely attached children are not able to be soothed. The feelings of the children were determined by their verbal and nonverbal expressions when the caregiver was present or absent (Ainsworth, 1976). It is important to note that the term secure describes a subjective experience that the child feels in a given situation, rather than the physical or psychological safety that is present (Bowlby, 1973). Thus a child can feel insecure when in reality, they are safe and they can feel safe when they are actually in danger.
Within Ainsworth’s et al. (1978) research, three different organized attachment styles were discovered across cultures (See Table 1). Even though there are three organized classifications of attaching to a caregiver, only one is secure or helpful to the development of the child. Securely attached children actively seek out caregivers when distressed. These children maintain contact on reunion and are easily comforted by their caregiver. Securely attached children are more flexible and open in their attention to the attachment and their exploration system, depending on the situation they were currently experiencing (Main, Hesse, & Kaplan, 2005).

Table 1

*Categorizing Patterns of Attachment by Strategy and Pattern*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy (Ainsworth et al., 1979)</th>
<th>Secure pattern</th>
<th>Behaviors Exhibited</th>
<th>Insecure pattern</th>
<th>Behaviors Exhibited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organized</td>
<td>Secure Attachment</td>
<td>Actively sought out caregiver, was comforted by caregiver when reunited</td>
<td>Avoidant Attachment</td>
<td>Did not seek out caregiver, not comforted by caregiver when reunited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized</td>
<td>Secure Attachment</td>
<td>Actively sought out caregiver, was comforted by caregiver when reunited</td>
<td>Ambivalent Attachment</td>
<td>Overly sought out caregiver, and not comforted by caregiver reunion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorganized (Main &amp; Solomon, 1990)</td>
<td>Disorganized Attachment</td>
<td>Disorganized way of seeking caregiver, and not comforted by caregiver reunion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The other two organized attachment patterns, avoidant and ambivalent, are insecure attachments because the children cannot be comforted when reunited with their caregivers (see Table 1). Children, whose patterns are characterized as avoidant, are
disinterested during attachment interactions with caregivers and reject the caregiver upon
reunion (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Ainsworth & Wittig, 1969). Children with avoidant
attachments withdraw from attachment-related behaviors when their attachment system is
activated, and circumvent the caregiver’s affection or interactions. An example of this is
when a child’s anxiety is high due to the parent leaving, and the child continues to play
and does not outwardly show any distress while his or her facial and bodily expressions
show concern. Upon the parent’s return, the child does not make eye contact, avoids
physical proximity, and is unable to be soothed with attempted parental comfort.

Securely attached children are able to have attachment behaviors that call the caregiver
towards them for comfort, while avoidantly attached children pretend they are
comfortable under the stress. In other words, avoidantly attached children do not let the
caregiver know that they are in need of comfort or safety due to the patterns that were
established early on in their relationship.

On the other hand, children with ambivalent attachments present as extremely
distressed by the separation from their caregiver, yet then are difficult to soothe on
reunion and resist their mother’s comfort (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Ainsworth & Wittig,
1969). Children with ambivalent attachments tended to rely heavily on attachment
evoking behaviors. These children are not able to self soothe or be calm even with
caregivers present. An example of this attachment is when a child is distressed due to a
parent leaving, and they are crying, screaming, and will not play or explore. When the
caregiver returns, the child is unable to be soothed by the caregiver and continues to cry
and desire closeness, continually exhibiting attachment seeking behaviors.
After further research and examination of videos of the parents and their children participating in the Strange Situation, Main and Solomon (1990) discovered a fourth pattern of attachment, the disorganized/disoriented attachment (see Table 1). The children’s behavior patterns did not fit into any of the above classifications due to the abnormal characteristics and inconsistent ways they attempted to get their needs met when the attachment system was activated. These children lacked a consistent and logical strategy for dealing with stress and anxiety of separation (Main & Solomon, 1990). Children with disorganized/disoriented attachments display both avoidant and ambivalent styles of attachment, and seek closeness to their caregivers in strange and bizarre ways (Main & Solomon, 1990). Often the children have contradictory behavior patterns such as strong attachment behaviors suddenly followed by avoidance, dazed, or violent behavior. Other children show bizarre body movements that are mistimed (stumbling for no reason), misdirected or incomplete movements (a child moving away from the caregiver instead of toward the caregiver when their attachment system was evoked), and freezing or still movements (underwater movements). The children in this classification also rapidly change their thought, affect, and behavior when their attachment system is aroused (Main & Solomon, 1990).

Once attachments could be categorized and understood, researchers began investigating typical patterns of attachments found throughout different parenting styles. A meta-analysis by van Ijzendoorn, Schuengel, and Bakersman-Kranenburg (1999) examined nearly 80 studies, 48 conducted in the United States and 32 conducted in eight other countries. In the 80 studies examined for the meta-analysis, there were over 6,000
parent-child dyads, with over 2,000 children that were diagnosed with an insecure attachment. Through this analysis, it was demonstrated that 62% of parent-child dyads were securely attached, 15% were avoidantly attached, 9% were ambivalently attached, and 15% were disorganized. Upon further investigation of the disorganized attachment, it was found that 77% of these children came from maltreating or abusive parents, 19% came from depressed mothers, and 34% came from low socio economic status (van Ijzendoorn et al., 1999). Therefore, the majority of children were securely attached with their caregivers; however, the ones who had disorganized attachments mostly came from maltreating home environments.

According to Bowlby (1969/1982, 1988), attachment relationships are flexible and are sensitive to change in the environment within the early years of life. Within the first two years of children’s lives, their attachment patterns are flexible; if caregivers change the way they treat the child, the attachment patterns will change accordingly (Bowlby, 1988). However, if the environment does not change, the attachment patterns will be consistent over time.

Weinfield, Whaley, and Egeland (2004) demonstrated Bowlby’s (1988) concepts through a longitudinal study, known as the Minnesota study, which investigated the continuity of attachment from infancy to young adulthood (19 years of age) in high-risk samples. Weinfield et al. (2004) defined the high-risk sample as children who had disorganized attachment in early childhood. Findings from this study showed that 86% of the high-risk participants who had disorganized attachment patterns in infancy also had disorganized attachment patterns as young adults (Weinfield et al., 2004). The research
demonstrated high-risk participants were more likely to be insecure on the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) and less likely to be autonomous and stable as an adult (Weinfield et al., 2004).

Through this study, Weinfield et al. (2004) was able to deduce meaningful information by categorizing participants at infancy and at 19 years of age into four groups where they found several comparisons (child attachment-adult attachment: being secure-secure, secure-insecure, insecure-insecure, insecure-secure). The “secure-secure” group reported considerably fewer periods of high stress in life, than the “secure-insecure” group. The “secure-secure” group also experienced better family involvement and functioning in early adolescents than the “secure-insecure” group. That is, children and adolescents from secure attachments showed less difficulty, stress, and major concerns in their lives, than children who had secure attachments and then changed to insecure attachments emerging into adulthood. In contrast, the “insecure-insecure” group was considerably more likely to have experienced early maltreatment or neglect than the “insecure-secure” group. Later on in childhood (age 6), the “insecure-secure” group had a safer more stable home than the “insecure-insecure” individuals. These findings supported the notion that attachment patterns endure over time if not interrupted. However, the research also suggested that attachment pattern are adaptive, environmentally sensitive, and relationally influenced (Weinfield et al., 2004).

**Summary of attachment.** Attachment theory originated in the mid 1900s from the research of John Bowlby and several others interested in the fundamental relationship between the mother and the child. Bowlby noticed the biological and evolutionary
functions of the attachment relationship, and investigated how the child’s attachment behaviors influenced the relationship. The child’s attachment system activates in times of stress, anxiety, and fear, which can be real or perceived, from internal or external stimuli. When the child is comforted and feels secured by a primary caregiver, his or her exploratory system is activated and the child desires to move around the environment, exploring physical, social, and emotional stimuli. Detachment from the parent is seen as the end result of the attachment system, because the child gains confidence and greater autonomy through his or her exploration (Brazelton, 1981; Mahler, 1975). In the exploratory system, the caregivers are seen as a secure base for children, as they explore their surroundings. The attachment and exploratory systems work closely together, activating and deactivating in sync with the child’s needs (Bowlby, 1984).

Ainsworth’s (1976) investigations on the patterns children use to get their needs met resulted in three types of classifications: secure, avoidant, and ambivalent. After further investigation of Ainsworth’s work, Main and Solomon (1990) found another behavior pattern that did not fit with the others, a disorganized attachment. Adding to the knowledge of the above attachment types, Weinfield et al. (2004) demonstrated that these attachment relationships from childhood endured overtime if not interrupted.

Furthermore, attachment relationships are essential in forming the necessary foundations for healthy development. Attachment relationships help children learn about themselves, their environments, and intimate relationships. Secure attachments are necessary for children to learn emotional regulation, self-reliance, resiliency, social skills, communication and language skills, empathy, self-worth, and intellectual development in
childhood (Cassidy, 2008; Stroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005). The positive effects of secure attachments are evident throughout childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

In contrast, persons with insecure, disorganized attachments tend to rigidly control their environment in order to create some sense of safety and security in their lives (Bowlby, 1969/1982). These children not only lack the positive benefits of a secure attachment, they are also at significant risk for further psychological problems in adolescence and adulthood including: short attention span, hyperactivity, aggression, anxiety, depression, and dissociation (Stroufe et al., 2005).

Consequently, it is essential that parents are active participants in forming attachments with their children. Parents who are more aware of themselves and their children are better equipped to manage the stress of parenting and child rearing (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). Mindfulness techniques and skills have shown to be one way parents can become more aware of the present moment within parenting (Altmaier & Maloney, 2007; Dumas, 2005; Singh et al., 2009). Mindful parenting is a new area of research, focused on being aware of the present moment in the context of the parent child relationship (Duncan et al., 2009a). However, before mindful parenting is explored, it is necessary to understand the concepts of mindfulness and its origins.

**Origins of Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is a concept at the center of Buddhist meditations, teachings, practices, and traditions (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Thera, 1962). The concepts of mindfulness began as a core teaching of the Buddha and were traditionally described by the Sanskrit
The word dharma, meaning the way things are (Gunaratana, 2002; Hanh, 1999). Dharma is the first person experience of joy and suffering in human beings. The practice of mindfulness can be traced back 2,500 years to the Theravada school of Buddhism and the practice of vipassana, or insight meditation (Thera, 1962). Considered to be one of the oldest Buddhist practices, vipassana was derived from the Buddha’s own teachings and practices. Vipassana is a form of mental training intended to teach an individual to observe the world in an entirely different way than traditionally experienced (Gunaratana, 2002). Vipassana is a purposeful and gradual cultivation of mindfulness that requires one’s attention and guides one to carefully examine aspects of his or her own experiences in the present moment. The practice of vipassana cultivates an individual’s unique way of perceiving ordinary things as they are occurring, otherwise known as being mindful. This mental training helps individuals to ignore the constant impulses of their mind, and to experience with clarity and precision, what is in fact happening in the present moment.

The concepts of mindfulness originated from Buddhist traditions; however, it can also be understood as a universal truth or experience that all humans can experience regardless of spirituality or religious beliefs (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Kabat-Zinn described mindfulness as a practical phenomenological description of the mind, and the potential release from joy and suffering. It is also believed that mindfulness is based upon the training and cultivation of the mind and heart in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Paying attention and slowing down the present moment is not specific to Buddhism; it has been utilized in many religious traditions throughout history (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). The
universality and applicability of the concepts made it popular to integrate mindfulness into the western medical and mental health fields.

Western mental health practices have adopted mindfulness as an approach for increasing awareness, and helping clients respond to mental processes that contribute to emotional and behavioral problems (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). It is through this awareness that people have learned the difference between actual experiences (thoughts, emotions, sensations, etc.) and experiences that have been altered by previous perceptions, concerns, and worries. Mindfulness has also been known to promote neuroplasticity within the brain, having shown to lead to modifications in the areas of the brain that are associated with empathy and self-observation (Lazar et al., 2005). Western researchers and practitioners who have introduced mindfulness concepts into the mental health field teach them independently from their religious origins, allowing the practices to be accessible for a variety of mental and physical benefits (Kabat-Zinn, 1982; Linehan, 1993).

**Concepts of mindfulness.** Mindfulness is a simple yet complex concept that has been difficult for scholars to define, due to the subjective experience that is inherent to a state of being. Scholars believed the challenge of defining mindfulness is that the practice is rooted internally within a person, and relies upon a purely phenomenological understanding of the experience (Gunaratana, 2002; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). In spite of the challenge of describing the phenomenon, mindfulness is most commonly defined as purposely, nonjudgmentally, and non-reactively paying attention in a specific way to the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 2005), or “bringing one’s complete attention to the
present experience on a moment-to-moment basis” (Marlatt & Kristeller, 1999, p. 68). The focused attention during an intentional mindfulness experience nurtures greater awareness, clarity, and acceptance of the present moment, which helps individuals see life unfolding in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). The practice of mindfulness can bring insight and awareness of positive and negative thoughts, allowing a practicing individual a place to consciously observe and experience the present moment, rather than automatically react to thoughts and emotions (Hanh, 2001).

To understand how paying attention mindfully to the present moment can positively impacts individuals’ lives, Gunaratana (2002), a Buddhist monk and scholar, discussed the human experience as being fraught with suffering, frustration, fear, and pressure from everyday life experiences. Humans are excited and feel joy from new and pleasurable experiences then quickly get burdened by the next experience of life. Pleasure dissolves quickly into frustration, anxiety, and fear about the next unknown experience. Without knowing, individuals are caught in a cycle of automatic, unconscious thoughts that are repetitive and reactive toward their environment. Gunaratana described this pattern as the “if only” pattern where people would just be happy if only they could get a new job, more money, a different spouse, and so forth (p. 9). However, once the next object, feeling, or status is obtained, the newness fades and individuals return to where they began in the first place, unsatisfied. With awareness and conscious thought for the present moment, humans encounter the newness of even the smallest experiences. They are able to find a new satisfaction within every unfolding moment, resulting in a more satisfied and fulfilled life (Gunaratana, 2002). The
remainder of this section explores the layers of essential attitudinal components of mindfulness practice.

**Awareness.** Awareness is a fundamental component of mindful practices. Awareness is the focused attention, by our senses, to the inner and outer experiences, as they are happening in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Roemer & Orsillo, 2008). Awareness can also be thought of as the process of sustained attention or the ability to maintain a state of concentration over a period of time (Bishop et al., 2004). Mindful awareness is the consequence of such attention, resulting in self-knowing. During mindful practices individuals use the skills of sustained attention and awareness to explore their internal and external world in the present moment (Bishop et al., 2004). The difference between sustained attention and simply paying attention to any particular event is the intentional nature of focusing one’s attention. For example, during mindfulness practice, individuals might purposefully focus their awareness toward their internal and external happenings, and specifically notice their breath entering and exiting the body. The key difference is the intentional focused awareness in the present moment on the breath, rather than the accidental moment while still concentrating on other activities.

The awareness sought by mindfulness practices includes openness, receptiveness, curiosity, and nonjudgmental attitude (Allen, Blashki, & Gullone, 2006). Mindful awareness places an emphasis on observing and accepting aspects as they are, without trying to change or manipulate them. The practice of not judging or evaluating one’s current thoughts or emotions is known as nonjudgmental acceptance.
**Nonjudgmental acceptance.** Observing internal and external stimuli as an impartial witness, or with nonjudgmental acceptance, is another fundamental aspect of mindful practice (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). In other words, nonjudgmental acceptance is an experience that enters an individual’s consciousness that is carefully observed and not evaluated as good or bad, healthy or sick, important or trivial (Marlatt & Kristeller, 1999). This impartial stance enables the observation of internal and external events, as they are occurring, closer to the natural state of the event, rather than being filtered through the mind and previous experiences. In order to gain control or awareness of judgmental thoughts, individuals must first become aware of the thoughts, or have metacognition of their own internal process.

When individuals begin practicing mindfulness and paying attention to their own mind, it is common to discover that most experiences are fraught with judgment and evaluation of almost everything noticed. It is often surprising to know that humans label and categorize almost everything seen or experienced (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Individuals categorize their thoughts and feelings about the current situation within the framework of previous biases, experiences, and beliefs. These categorizations of things, people, and events are then evaluated as good, bad, or neutral, due to the feelings evoked during the experience. Judgments tend to be uninformed personal opinions based upon limited knowledge about a subject area (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). An example of a judgmental experience may come from the awareness of a sensation in the body, which becomes worse after noticing and labeling it in the mind as “painful” and “bad.” The labeling of “pain” may begin to trigger past feelings or thoughts of similar pain, and the individual is
convinced that something bad is happening with the body. Rather than just being aware of the sensations, it has been layered with judgment and evaluation, causing the individual stress and anxiety and magnifying the unwanted sensations. Oftentimes, judgments about experiences are unavoidable due to the human nature of examining and investigating events (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). However, it is the judgment of the stimuli that is limiting the person from full experiences of situations, sensations, or emotions. The judgments and evaluations become habits, often locking individuals into unconscious reactions to even new occurrences.

Mindfulness practice assists in the awareness of these judgments and allows for further focus on the event, rather than the occurrence with added beliefs or notions. Mindfulness has the ability to defuse negative, aggressive emotions, not by suppressing or indulging them, but by accepting them with openness and compassion (Sogyal, 1999). Mindfulness allows individuals the freedom to be aware of the evaluations happening, and the ability to make conscious choices about their thoughts and emotions of an experience. This self-monitoring allows for more of an observational attitude that pays careful attention to the present moment (Marlatt & Kristeller, 1999). The easiest way to change individuals’ thoughts is to begin noticing them in the present moment as they are happening.

**Present moment.** The present moment is essential to mindfulness, due to everything only happening in the here and now (Gunaratana, 2002; Kabat-Zinn, 2005). The concept of the present moment (or this immediate instance) can be understood as the only moment in which one is actually living (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). Even though this
concept appears obvious, it is challenging for most to comprehend and utilize in everyday living.

When one begins to pay attention to what the mind is doing, it becomes clearer that he or she is often spending most of the time thinking of occurrences from the past, or what may happen in the future. This time spent in automatic thinking about the past or future is known as “escaping” the unpleasant and even pleasant experiences of the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 238). In these automatic conscious and unconscious attempts to escape the current experience, most people live in perpetual longing for something else to come along. Mindfulness skills give the advantage of allowing individuals to notice the thoughts and emotions as they are, therefore, permitting a distance between the emotions and thoughts, and the individual having them (Marlatt & Kristeller, 1999). It is not about avoiding the thoughts and emotions; rather, it is loosening their automaticity and to enabling individuals to observe the emotions and thoughts as they occur. This shift does not aim to change the thoughts and emotions; it attempts to change the attitude or relationship toward the thoughts and emotions (Marlatt & Kristeller, 1999). It is essential to focus on what is happening in the present to begin to recognize and appreciate the changing dynamics in and outside the body.

The breath. Staying in the present moment proves to be extremely difficult due to the mind continually needing a mental object to focus upon (Gunaratana, 2002). Within mindfulness practice, the breath is a constant, accessible, and inconspicuous guide to bring one into present moment awareness (Gunaratana, 2002; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). It is not difficult for the mind to find the breath and begin centering the individual in the here
and now. A side effect of tracking the breath is most often relaxation of the mind and body. The breath is one thing that easily connects the inner experience of an individual to the outside environment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

The breath can be utilized by simply being conscious of it entering and exiting the body. The individual recognizes that he or she is breathing and all the experiences that stem from that awareness. Often it does not take long to recognize the attention has shifted from thinking about past challenges or future stressors to the intricate details of the present moment (Gunaratana, 2002).

*The beginners’ mind.* The skill of the “beginner’s mind” focuses on the individual being open to new experiences that the present moment brings to the awareness and not characterizing them as experienced before (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 35). Again, this is another way to break the automatic thought cycle that prevents individuals from seeing events without bias. An example of the beginner’s mind would be when an individual is experiencing something brand new like seeing the ocean for the first time. The individual can usually remember certain physical sensations, smells, and emotions, due to the freshness and novelty of the experience. Those details are harder to distinguish when the person has frequently seen the ocean for several years. The beginner’s mind is a skill or concept that is utilized to help an individual see and experience the mindfulness exercises as new each time (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). This skill is particularly helpful when practicing formal meditation techniques such as sitting meditation, yoga, or body scan. The beginner’s mind skill allows the individual to be free from expectations based on
past experiences, thus deepening the experience of the meditation techniques being used (Kabat-Zinn, 2005).

Meditation. Meditation is another practice often thought of with regards to mindfulness. Meditation is the distinct and intentional self-regulation of an individual’s attention from moment to moment (Baer, 2003). In other words, it is the personal practice of intentional concentration on one thing (Gunaratana, 2002). Often, it is common to use the phrase mindfulness meditation because it translates as reflective awareness, meaning intentional personal awareness reflecting on the present moment (Gunaratana, 2002). Mindfulness differs from meditation given that mindfulness is seen as the outcome or goal of meditation. Mindfulness is the awareness that evolves through forms of meditation. Meditation is one path to becoming more mindful or aware of internal and external experiences, on a regular basis.

Meditation is practiced to help purify the mind of excess information by helping to calm or monitor the thoughts, feelings, and senses. It also helps to develop a clearer understanding of the current moment (Gunaratana, 2002). This action teaches individuals how to examine the perceptual process with greater precision and accuracy (Gunaratana, 2002). An analogy of a mountain lake can be used to explain how meditation effects perceptions of reality. With turbulent and agitated waters, choppy waves distort the reflection of the mountain into something that is almost unrecognizable. However, when the water is calm and flat, the water accurately can reflect the mountain and all the details of the landscape. The mountain, in this analogy, is the experiences of the environment or self, and the water is the thoughts. When thoughts are turbulent and unsettled, they
distort the view of internal and external experiences. When thoughts are calm and clear, it is easier to perceive experiences as they truly are. Meditation helps to still the mind and calm the thoughts, which helps to reduce tension, fear, and worry (Gunaratana, 2002).

Often meditation is thought of as synonymous with relaxation. In meditation and mindfulness, relaxation is actually the side effect rather than the end goal (Gunaratana, 2002). Vipassana meditation seeks awareness and insight into an individual’s life as the goal. However, individuals who practice meditation often do feel a deep sense of bliss and relaxation due to the mind only focusing on one item or area of thought, rather than multiple areas when not meditating (Gunaratana, 2002).

There are several different exercises and techniques that all have meditative qualities to help quiet and center the mind. Some of the techniques are used by intentionally focusing on the thoughts, sensations, and emotions happening inside the body. Other techniques use outside events such as sounds, sensations, or light to focus on the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).

The act of meditation is one of formal and informal practices. Formal meditative practices involve mindful meditative movements and periods of meditation throughout the day (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 1994). Sitting meditation, walking meditation, yoga, and body scans are examples of formal meditations. These exercises involve consciously focusing on the breath while participating in specific meditative postures. Informal practices incorporate mindful awareness in everyday activities, for example washing dishes, brushing your teeth, and walking (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 1994). These everyday
activities can be done with conscious awareness and attention. Meditative exercises are used as a vehicle to a state of mindfulness or being mindful of the present moment.

**Mindfulness based interventions.** Mental heath professionals and researchers argued that the cultivation of mindfulness may be beneficial to people who are suffering from a wide range of problems and disorders. In the 1990s, John Kabat-Zinn created a mindfulness-based treatment approach to treat patients who appeared to be untreatable by Western medical practices (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Many other mindfulness-based treatment approaches have surfaced to also treat a wide variety of mental and physical illnesses. By conceptualizing mindfulness aspects and traditions without the spiritual foundations, skills were taught to increase well-being and reduce suffering in the Western populations (Baer, 2006).

Being independent from the original religious implications, mindfulness is now a part of several therapeutic interventions in Western culture. These approaches are currently being studied in numerous medical and mental health fields in both national and international settings. Mindfulness concepts are being applied to a wide range of populations to treat many disorders, ranging from everyday stress of life to severe problems of personality disorders and pain (Baer, 2003). Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR; Kabat-Zinn, 1990) and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002) are interventions built around the concepts of mindfulness that include both formal and informal practices. These interventions use formal meditative practices to enhance one’s mindfulness and increase well-being. Specific practices include sitting meditation, body scan, Hatha yoga, walking meditation,
and everyday mindfulness. MBSR was originally created in behavioral medicine for patients with chronic pain and stress related conditions (Kabat-Zinn, 1982, 1990). It is now used to treat a wide range of problems and disorders such as cancer, eating disorders, depression, and couples dissatisfaction (Carlson, Specca, Patel, & Goodey, 2003; Carson, Carson, Gill, & Baucom, 2004; Kristeller & Hallett, 1999; Ramel, Goldin, Carmona, & McQuaid, 2004).

MBCT (Segal et al., 2002) is based on the MBSR program and uses many of the same practices and skills. However, MBCT focuses more on the cognitions and the nature of depression, rather than stress (Baer, 2006). Teasdale, Segal, and Williams (1995) proposed that the skills of attention control, taught in mindfulness meditation are helpful in preventing depression relapse. Research found the MBCT program to be effective in treating individuals with 3 or more previous depressive episodes, who have relapsed (Ma & Teasdale, 2004; Teasdale et al., 2000).

On the other hand, dialectal behavioral therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1993) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT; Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999) are mindfulness-infused treatments that emphasize primarily shorter and less formal practices of mindfulness skills. Both ACT and DBT are considered to be therapies that incorporate mindfulness skills rather than being based primarily off mindfulness concepts (Baer, 2006). DBT is a multi-faceted treatment approach based upon the dialectical worldview that emphasizes the balance and integration of opposing ideas, where the central dialectic is the integration of acceptance and change (Linehan, 1993). Mindfulness skills are threaded throughout the program, within the context of synthesizing acceptance and
change. Several studies have shown the effectiveness of DBT as an intervention, particularly in groups of individuals diagnosed with borderline personality disorder (Bohus, Haaf, & Simms, 2004; Koons et al., 2001; Linehan, Armstrong, Suarez, Allmon, & Heard, 1991; Linehan et al., 2002; Lynch, Morse, Mendelson, & Robins, 2003).

ACT (Hayes et al., 1999) is a general approach to psychotherapy that can be applied to a wide range of problems and disorders. It incorporates skills in behavior-change process, mindfulness, and acceptance. Mindfulness and acceptance skills are used to facilitate behavior change in an individual, to help life feel more meaningful, and lived to the personal values of the individual. ACT teaches psychological flexibly to accept the present moment as it is, while acting in accordance with one’s chosen values (Hayes et al., 1999). There have been a number of studies suggesting the effectiveness of acceptance and mindfulness in the treatment of anxiety and other mood related disorders (Orsillo, Roemer, & Barlow, 2003; Roemer & Orsillo, 2002; Teasdale et al., 2002).

Baer (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of the mindfulness studies to date, and concluded there are few well-designed studies on the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions for mental health problems. Baer ascertained that many of the studies lack an adequate control group, have small sample sizes, and have inadequate evaluation of the integrity of the treatment. However, mindfulness as an intervention also suggests great promise for having positive effects with a variety of populations and concerns. With that, Baer concluded that 74% of individuals that obtained mindfulness based intervention for problems, such as depression and anxiety, had more of a reduction of
symptoms than those receiving other treatments or no treatment. The meta-analysis concluded that mindfulness-based interventions seemed to have at least a medium effect size (Cohen’s d = 59) and that the research on mindfulness has positive findings thus far and is warranted for further research.

**Summary of mindfulness.** Several facets of mindfulness are necessary to understand when examining its goal of purposely, nonjudgmentally, and non-reactively, paying attention in a specific way to the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 2005). Fundamental to the core concepts of mindfulness are awareness and nonjudgmental acceptance. To support an individual become more mindful, there are a variety of skills and concepts helpful toward the acceptance of the present moment: meditation, the breath, and the beginner’s mind. All of skills and concepts are directed toward helping the individual become more aware of the present moment experience, therefore, alleviating the continual wanting or stressing about the past or future events. Giving the mind a necessary rest enables the individual to be more satisfied with all of life’s experiences and circumstances.

The mindfulness-based interventions discussed were the most prevalent in literature to date. Both MBSR and MBCT utilized mindfulness concepts and interventions as a base for healing and growth of their participants. More formal types of meditative practices teach mindfulness concepts to participants, while on the other hand, ACT and DBT utilize mindfulness concepts as skills rather than as the foundation of the treatment.
Mindful Parenting

The exploration of mindfulness has been of great interest to many mental health researchers, scholars, and clinicians. Due to the positive effects mindfulness has demonstrated with adult populations, there has been an increasing interest in how mindfulness-based interventions may also benefit children and parents alike. Mindful parenting practices bring mindful attention to the parent-child relationship and interactions, much like mindfulness brings awareness to the relationship with one’s self. Mindfulness-based parenting interventions and theories have an interpersonal focus; they give specific attention to the parent-child relationship and functioning, while simultaneously focusing on the individual’s intrapersonal states (Coatsworth, Duncan, Greenberg, & Nix, 2010). This section explores the concepts and definitions of mindful parenting, and the relevant research studies that examined the effectiveness and various treatment interventions. Lastly, the literature that applied both attachment and mindfulness concepts is explored.

Concepts and definitions. The concepts of mindful parenting have been addressed both descriptively and theoretically in recent literature. Some of the earliest documented work in mindful parenting has been by Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (1997), who believed that mindfulness would enhance parenting by helping parents become aware of their own personal feelings and needs, therefore, becoming more responsive to children’s needs and in parent-child interactions. It is important to understand this style of parenting is not about a disagreement or conflict free parenting relationship; rather, it
focuses on the moment-to-moment awareness of the parent’s and child’s explicit behaviors and subjective experience to enhance the quality of the relationship.

Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (1997) explored three foundational aspects of mindful parenting: sovereignty, empathy, and acceptance. Sovereignty within the mindful parenting context means acknowledging the child has authority or power over themselves (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997). By allowing a child the freedom to experience the world in his or her own way, the child understands, utilizes, and respects his or her own ideas, experiences, and emotions. This does not mean children should be given the freedom to do whatever they want, rather, they should be given the respect and dignity to be their own “true selves” to experience the world (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997, p. 50). For example, instead of responding with anger when a child is frustrated about not getting his or her way, the mindful parent responds with understanding that these feelings are the child’s own, and appreciates the challenging emotions of disappointment and frustration the child is experiencing. Rather than attempting to change children into what they want, it is necessary for mindful parents to recognize who their children are and honor them for their individuality and own processes in the world.

In order for parents to respect the sovereignty of their children in challenging situations, Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (1997) believed the mindful parent utilizes the second foundational aspect of empathy. Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn noted empathy from the parent is not just within the emotional domain, but also within cognitive functioning (i.e., being empathic about a child’s way of thinking) and development (i.e., being aware of their
developmental stage) as well. Often, parents find it easier to empathize when a child is hurt or in pain; however, it is much more difficult when the child is yelling, screaming, throwing objects, or has differing opinions from the caregiver (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997). Moments like these are opportunities to understand children’s points of view and allow them the freedom to experience their world. Empathy requires the mindful parents’ purposeful attention to the present moment of their own thoughts and emotions, so they are able to separate their personal experience from the child’s experience.

Acceptance is closely related to both sovereignty and empathy, in that it is an understanding that things are the way they are, whether that way is desired or not (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997). Mindful parents work toward demonstrating acceptance of their children’s true selves, individual desires, thoughts, emotions, and perspectives. Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn believed acceptance is feasible through respecting the children’s sovereignty and empathizing with their experiences. Together, these three foundations helped to establish mindful parenting.

In more recent literature, Duncan et al. (2009a) added layers and complexity to Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn’s (1997) understanding of mindful parenting. Duncan et al. (2009a) asserted that:

Incorporating mindful awareness into parenting interactions, can allow parents to stop and fundamentally shift their awareness in order to view their present moment parenting experience within the context of the long-term relationship that
they have their child, as well as attend to the child’s needs, while exercising self
regulation and wise choice in their actions. (p. 256)

Furthermore, there is an inherent automaticity involved with parenting, and incorporating
awareness into the present moment gives the parent ability to make choices not readily
available to them. These choices become apparent when the awareness of themselves,
and their own experience in the moment, produces clarity. This pause enables parents to
conceptualize moments with their children in the larger context and duration of the
relationship, allowing them to make choices based upon their goals and values as parents,
rather than unconscious patterns (Duncan et al., 2009a).

Mindful parenting is essentially about bringing the qualities of awareness, low
reactivity, and acceptance to not only the parent’s internal and external states, but the
children’s present states as well (Coatsworth et al., 2010). This takes both intrapersonal
and interpersonal awareness (Siegel, 2007). The intrapersonal aspects of mindfulness in
parenting consist of the internal knowledge of the parents’ values, judgments, beliefs, and
expectations of their children, themselves, and parenting (Coatsworth et al., 2010).
Siegel (2007) described a term “self attunement” as a form of self-awareness, where the
parent can use mindfulness practices to become more aware of what is happening inside
themselves, so they can develop those skills for interpersonal relationships. When
mindful, parents are reflecting on a higher level of awareness about their actions and
feelings. Within the interpersonal aspects of mindful parenting, parents are fully present
when interacting with their children in ways that convey compassion, empathy, and
acceptance (Coatsworth et al., 2010).
Duncan et al. (2009a) created a theoretical model of mindful parenting that suggests parents who remain aware and accepting of their child’s needs, create a family environment that allows for more enduring fulfillment and satisfaction within the relationship. Duncan et al. noted five dimensions necessary to the mindful parent-child relationship: “listening with full attention, nonjudgmental acceptance of self and child, emotional awareness of self and child, self-regulation in parenting relationship, and compassion for self and child” (p. 258). Although many of these concepts are similar to the concepts in the previous section, these dimensions are explored in further depth within the context of the parent-child relationship.

The listening with full awareness dimension combines listening with quality focused attention and awareness that goes beyond the spoken words that are shared between parent and child (Duncan et al., 2009a). This necessitates parental sensitivity, essential in a young child’s life, which allows the parent to interpret cues about the needs of the child (Ainsworth et al., 1978). When the child is older, this sensitivity is necessary to understand both the verbal and nonverbal communication the child is offering (e.g., facial gestures, body language, tone of voice), to effectively identify the intended meaning (Duncan et al., 2009a). By bringing their full attention to these interactions, parents perceive the child’s feelings and thoughts more clearly, which in turn may decrease conflict and disagreements (Hastings & Grusec, 1998).

The next dimension of nonjudgmental acceptance of self and child involves parents being consciously aware of their expectations that may influence parent-child interactions (Duncan et al., 2009a). Parental perceptions of their children’s
characteristics and capabilities influence the parents’ expectations for their children’s potential, values, and behaviors (Jacobs, Chhin, & Shaver, 2005). It is with these known and unknown perceptions of children and self, that unrealistic or unproductive expectations are projected. These judgments can get in the way of feeling good about their own parenting and their children’s behaviors and personal characteristics. Mindful parents work toward awareness of these judgments and acceptance of what is. Again, this does not mean the parent relinquishes responsibility of discipline and guidance; rather, it means an acceptance of what is happening at the present moment based on a clear understanding of the situation (Duncan et al., 2009a). The clear understanding is free from judgments and allows for the full awareness of the experience.

To assist mindful parents in viewing experiences free from judgments, the dimension of emotional awareness of self and child is key. As stated previously, a person’s awareness of his or her emotional states is a fundamental aspect of mindfulness. Within mindful parenting, the emphasis of focusing on the child and parent’s internal states centers on the parent being aware of the strong emotions that arise and the triggers that causes them. Duncan et al. (2009a) stated emotional awareness and identification are foundational to mindful parenting because strong emotions have powerful influences that trigger automatic reactions within adults. These automatic reactions stem back to childhood and the way parents were treated as children (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Being aware of these emotional states and triggers not only models healthy emotional intelligence for children, it gives control back to parents to choose the reactions they want. In the parents’ own understanding of their emotions, they are more likely to
understand the child’s strong emotions and help the child through the challenging or emotional experience.

Being aware of internal states implies an element of self-regulation within the parent-child relationship. The dimension of self-regulation in the parenting relationship involves low reactivity to natural or typical child behavior, which is achieved through self-control in accordance to the parenting values (Duncan et al., 2009a). It is not expected that mindful parents do not feel or display strong or difficult emotions; however, parents create a necessary pause between their emotions and actions in interactions with their children. To further illustrate this, Duncan et al. (2009a) referenced literature from Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinard (1998) that had demonstrated links between parents who are more tolerant and supportive of their children’s emotional displays, both positive and negative, and higher socially and emotionally competent children. Self-regulation and emotional awareness within parents promotes a learning environment for children to identify and express their own feelings and self-regulation abilities (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997).

During the everyday challenges of parenting children, the compassion for self and child is the final dimension of Duncan’s et al. (2009a) model of mindful parenting. It is through the compassion for one’s child that mindful parents feel the desire to meet appropriate needs of the child and comfort the child when he or she is troubled (Duncan et al., 2009a). Due to the parent’s sensitivity toward and understanding of their child’s situation, children of mindful parents may feel a greater sense of positive emotions and support. The authors believed that parents who have self-compassion would be less harsh
and critical toward their own parenting challenges, and be more forgiving toward their efforts (Duncan et al., 2009a). It is also believed that parents with self-compassion would avoid self-blame for parenting difficulties and disappointments in children’s actions or behaviors. Mindful parents work toward acceptance of things as they are, and understanding in life’s many inconceivable situations. Through self-evaluations and perceptions, parents have significant influence on the parent-child relationship (Teti & Gelfand, 1991). Further exploration by Coleman and Karraker (2003) demonstrated that parents, who are more confident in their abilities to handle challenging parental interactions, interact with their children in ways that promote healthy developmental functioning. Compassion for self and child can lead a mindful parent to a greater acceptance of the efforts made rather than concentrating on the specific outcomes and errors in parenting (Duncan et al. 2009a).

Interventions and relevant research. In recent mindfulness literature, there has been a surge of conceptual and research based investigations that have explored mindfulness concepts being applied to parenting. Due to the novelty of mindfulness within parenting, many of the ideas to date have not been empirically researched or validated; rather, many of the ideas are in the exploratory phase. In a discussion of the most recent mindful parenting literature, several conceptual and implemented mindful parenting programs, as well as specific interventions are explored in the following section.

In 2012, Harnett and Dawe reviewed published studies from several databases that evaluated mindfulness-based interventions targeting children, adolescents, and
families since 2009. They reported identifying 24 studies. Through this search, Harnett and Dawe found that mindfulness-based interventions are an important part in discussing therapeutic techniques, however, are lacking methodologically rigorous studies. The researchers concluded that the mindfulness-based therapeutic technique have shown to have beneficial impact on a range of different variables with children, adolescents, and families, but there needs a greater understanding of the mechanisms of change.

In addressing mindfulness in parenting, The Mindful Parenting Program (MPP; Placone-Wiley, 2002) is a parenting intervention model that incorporated mindfulness, breathing, and body awareness exercises to strengthen the parent-child connectedness. This 6-week group is intended to enhance a parent’s self-awareness, mindfulness, and intentionally in responding to the child’s needs (Placone-Wiley, 2002). MPP teaches parents to identify hurtful interactions (e.g., emotional withdrawal or projecting anger) that may result in a disconnection in the relationship (Altmaier & Maloney, 2007). Altmaier and Maloney found an increase in mindfulness among the 12 recently divorced parents of preschool children that participated in the MPP. Researchers conducted a pre-post test design that assessed change by mindfulness measures as well as an in home observational data (Altmaier & Maloney, 2007). It was hypothesized the participant’s parent-child connectedness would increase as a result of the MPP; however through the self-reports on parental stress and behavioral observations, those findings did not emerge through the study (Altmaier & Maloney, 2007). Moreover, it was concluded that an increase in mindfulness did not result in an increase in parent-child connectedness. The authors did report that the parents received parental benefits from the training due to an
increase in mindfulness (Altmaier & Maloney, 2007) as being associated with other critical qualities of parenting including empathy, positive affect, and self-esteem (Brown & Ryan, 2004). Altmaier and Maloney (2007) believed that with continued use of mindfulness skills, the parents would be able to learn how to translate and generalize their acquisition of mindfulness skills into the parent-child relationship.

Another mindful parenting group by Reynolds (2003) was interested in mother-infant dyads in a group setting. Reynolds facilitated mindful parenting groups based on the premises of attachment theory. The author drew from the following attachment theory assumptions: a secure attachment bond is necessary for healthy child development, security in a child’s attachment is strongly influenced by a mother’s capacity to reflect on their emotional states, and a healthy attachment is the core prevention of psychopathology in later life (Reynolds, 2003). In this non-clinical population, Reynolds conducted several 8-week groups where parents learned to play with, and attended to both physical and emotional needs, of their infant. In the groups, parents were encouraged to slow down to observe and participate at the pace of their infant, to increase the attentive awareness to all aspects of the child and the time spent. The facilitator provided a place to explore and support conditions for mindfully reflecting and further understanding of attachment needs of the child (Reynolds, 2003). Reynolds provided clinical vignettes to explore these concepts further, however, there were no clinical interventions or research conducted at this time.

Exploring the interpersonal processes of mindfulness, Duncan, Coatsworth, and Greenburg (2009b) infused an already established parenting program, Strengthening
Families Program: For Parent and Youth 10-14 (SFP; Molgaard, Kumpfer, & Fleming, 2001) with mindfulness principles and practices. Duncan et al.’s (2009a) previously explored model of mindful parenting was built into the SFP program and this study investigated the applicability of the new model (Duncan et al., 2009b). After a 7-week pilot study of the adapted SFP, results suggested the intervention was easily administered, accepted by participants, and produced positive benefits for family functioning (Duncan et al., 2009b).

Coatsworth et al. (2010) built upon Duncan’s et al. (2009b) study by conducting a randomized examination of 65 families who participated in the adapted version of the SFP. The researchers investigated the mindful parenting intervention’s usefulness, helpfulness, and outcomes of restoring the parent-child relationship (Coatsworth et al., 2010). Results of the pre-post analysis of the mother and youth reports showed the adaptive version of the SFP to be as effective as the original version on child management practices. Results also showed an increase in levels of parents’ mindfulness and parent-child quality interactions post group (Coatsworth et al., 2010). The authors suggested that adding mindful parenting qualities to preexisting programs, enhances the effectiveness of programs that help families during the transition to adolescence (Coatsworth et al., 2010).

Another study explored the effects of an already established mindfulness intervention on the parents’ well-being and relationships with their children (Bailie, Kuyken, & Sonnenberg, 2012). Researchers explored the use of the mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) intervention with parents who were suffering from a history of
recurrent depression. Bailie et al. (2012) saw deficiencies in other parenting interventions that focused only on the relationships with child and child’s behavior. These interventions did not address the parent’s intrapersonal needs. Bailie et al. examined 16 parents who had a history of depression who underwent an 8-week MBCT training. Participants had four follow-up interviews that spanned over a year. Through the exploration of the parents who maintained their practice of the MBCT skills for a year, five themes emerged from the data: emotional reactivity and regulation, empathy and acceptance, involvement, emotional availability and comfort, and recognition of own needs (Bailie et al., 2012). The authors speculated that training parents in mindfulness techniques increased their long-term ability to manage and their emotions, communicate their needs, and increase emotional availability with their children (Bailie et al., 2012).

**Mindfulness-based parenting interventions and specific populations.** Several authors have explored and theorized about mindfulness-based parenting interventions that have focused on specific disorders and family issues. The literature examined, gives a depiction of the links between the adults’ mindfulness and the effects it has on the family or close systems with which they are involved. Many of the studies and conceptual articles are mindfulness-based parenting interventions, specifically for parents of children with autism, disruptive behaviors, and developmental disabilities. This is an important and promising area of research due to the parents of these children often reporting higher levels of mood disorders and stress, than parents of typically developing children (Sawyer Cohen & Semple, 2010).
Dumas (2005) created a mindful parenting model named Mindfulness-Based Parent Training (MBPT) for parents with disruptive children. Dumas generated the MBPT model to help reduce the rigid and automatic maladaptive behaviors within parent-child interactions. MBPT was based on the premise that it is the poor parent-child relationship patterns established in the family system that perpetuate the challenges and stress (Dumas, 2005). Automaticity can be both helpful and unhelpful, depending on whether the family is in positive automatic thinking patterns or negative automatic thinking patterns (Dumas, 2005). Positive family thought patterns promote healthy coping, pro-social behaviors, and mutual problem solving, whereas negative family thinking patterns lead to feelings of blame, helplessness, and withdrawal (Dumas, 2005).

The MBPT model suggests there are three strategies to decrease the negative automatic pattern in families of disruptive children; facilitative listening, distancing, and motivated action plans (MAPs; Dumas, 2005). Facilitative listening refers to encouraging parents to listen and reflect on children’s experiences and concerns, while simultaneously attending to their own immediate thoughts and feelings. This skill teaches parents acknowledgement and acceptance of things out of their control, while teaching them to focus on the things they can control, their feelings. Within MBPT, parents also learn the skill of distancing, or learning how to distance themselves from their negative emotional states and inner dialogue (Dumas, 2005). This creates a psychological detachment between the over learned ways coping and reacting. The MAPs are devised to help parents choose effective goals for themselves and their children to devise specific and effective plans to reach those goals (Dumas, 2005). In his
article, Dumas did not report any research having been done, however, comparing and contrasting MBPT to the primary parenting intervention for disruptive children, behavioral parent training (BPT), and concluded both are useful at different times in the parenting process.

Others examined the effects of a mindfulness-based parenting intervention on aggression, noncompliance, and self-injury in children with autism (Singh et al., 2006b). In this study, three mothers completed an individualized 12-week training on mindfulness; no specific parent training was involved in the training. After a 52-week mindfulness practice phase, results demonstrated a discernible improvement in parents’ satisfaction in parenting from baseline. Through the year of observational data, the researchers also observed a clear decrease from baseline in noncompliance, aggression, and self-injury in the children (Singh et al., 2006b). Singh et al. stated that these positive changes may be a result of a change in the way people relate to their environment, rather than learning new parenting skills.

Singh et al. (2007) replicated and extended the findings from the Singh’s et al. (2006b) study for further examination of the phenomena. The intervention was the same personalized 12-week mindfulness training, which did not include any parent training or focus. Singh et al. (2007) studied the effects of a mindfulness intervention with four mothers of children with developmental disabilities who exhibited aggressive behaviors and social limitations. Again, the results were similar in that there was an increase in the parents’ mindfulness and satisfaction in the parent-child relationships. The parent-child interactions were more positive after the parents’ mindfulness treatment and the parents
reported lowered stress. The children also demonstrated a decrease in aggressive behavior and an increase in social skills. Singh et al. (2007) believed the mindfulness training produced transformational change within the parents that generalized into the relationship with their children. Therefore, through the parents’ increased mindfulness, the children were able to absorb some of the benefits of their parents who were being more mindful in their everyday lives.

Due to the unique challenges parents of children with autism often possess, Blackledge and Hayes (2006) examined the effects that mindfulness training had on this population. Over a two-day workshop in acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), 20 non-clinic referred parents were taught mindfulness-orientated skills, participated in group discussions, and participated in experiential exercises (Blackledge & Hayes, 2006). The participants were given several different assessments to gain a clear understanding of their before and after status. Results suggested that ACT had promise in helping parents better adjust to their difficulties in raising their children with autism (Blackledge & Hayes, 2006).

Similar to Blackledge and Hayes (2006), Lloyd and Hastings (2008) conducted a study on the characteristics of mothers with children with intellectual disabilities. In the study of 91 mothers, the researchers studied the psychological variables (acceptance, mindfulness, and avoidant coping) that may help to explain the differences in maternal distress with this population. Lloyd and Hastings used a cross-sectional, longitudinal design to broaden the investigation of maternal distress, and related therapeutic interventions. Results indicated that mothers who were generally more accepting also
reported less anxiety, depression, and stress. Mindfulness was not significantly related to maternal distress, and avoidant coping was only positively associated with depression. Lloyd and Hastings concluded that acceptance could be a characteristic that can help explain some of the difference in maternal distress of children with intellectual disabilities.

Another study addressed Mindfulness Training (MT) and its effects on parents and teachers of children with special needs (Benn, Akiva, Arel, & Roeser, 2012). In this randomized controlled study, the participants, 32 parents and 38 teachers, participated in a 5-week MT that utilized the SMART-in Education (Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques) program (Cullen & Wallace, 2010), a curriculum that teaches similar components of MBSR. Overall, results showed that the participants, who received the MT, had a significant reduction in “stress and anxiety and an increase in mindfulness, self compassion, and personal growth” (p. 1483; Benn et al., 2012). There was also an increase in empathic concerns and forgiveness as well as an increase in caregivers’ competence specific to teaching after a 2-month follow-up. Benn et al. (2012) inferred that the participants became more aware and reflective of their standard responses and emotional triggers, and learned how to “disengage and recover” at a quicker pace from challenging situations with the children.

Unlike the MBPT and mindfulness interventions that primarily work on changing the levels of mindfulness within the parent only (Blackledge & Hayes, 2006; Singh et al, 2006b; Singh et al., 2007), others explored mindfulness training for both the parents and their children diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD; Singh et
Singh et al. (2009) used a multiple baseline design across two mother-child dyads. The participants were given an individualized 12-week mindfulness training that covered mindfulness practice and theory, as well as cognitive and behavioral strategies. In this study, the researchers found that by giving the parents mindfulness training, there was enhanced compliance from their children with ADHD (Singh et al., 2009). The children were also given a similar mindfulness training that increased their compliance further and sustained this increase in compliance over a 24-week follow up period. Similar to the previous studies, the parents also reported an increase in satisfaction with parent-child interactions as well as pleasure in parenting (Singh et al., 2006b; Singh et al., 2007; Singh et al., 2009).

Similar to Singh et al. (2009), Bögels, Hoogstad, van Dun, de Schutter, and Restifo (2008) explored how mindfulness training benefited both the adolescents with externalizing behaviors (ADHD, oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorder, autism spectrum disorders) and their parents. In this study, 14 clinically referred adolescents participated in an 8-week MBCT training, while their parents simultaneously underwent similar training that highlighted mindful parenting concepts (Bögels et al., 2008). Results found that compared to the waitlist control group, the children self-reported substantial improvements with their personal goals they had set during the group, internal and external complaints, concentration problems, happiness, and mindful awareness (Bögels et al., 2008). Further, the parents confirmed the same improvements within the children, as well as improvements in their own personal goals they had also set for themselves during the group. These results were obtained by a pretest posttest design where the
families were assessed eight weeks after the intervention group concluded. Bögels et al. established that consistent with mindfulness theory, children’s increased awareness, due to training, helped to developed long-term improvements in externalizing problems.

Due to the exploratory research that has been present in the area of mindful parenting, similar concepts have been used to explore the effects on other close relationships. Researchers explored the effects of mindfulness training on participants who worked as caregivers for individuals with medical and physical conditions and severe intellectual disabilities (Singh et al., 2010). Singh et al. measured levels of happiness displayed by three such caregivers during an 8-week mindfulness training, as well as 16 weeks after the training. The participants received training during their regularly scheduled workdays. The researchers explored whether the mindfulness learned on the job, would transfer to the participants’ personal interactions with their own children. As other previously mentioned studies, the caregivers’ children’s noncompliance with their mothers’ requests significantly decreased from baseline (Singh et al., 2010). The authors concluded that the increase in the mindful parenting that increased the children’s compliance was possibly due to the indirect mindfulness training the mothers received at their job. It was speculated that mindfulness training goes beyond the specific skills that are contingent to certain environments (Singh et al., 2010) and transformational change occurs within individuals due to mindfulness training (Singh et al., 2006a). This generalization may be due to the nonjudgmental acceptance of positive and negative behaviors of not only the individuals at their job, but others they interact with as well (Singh et al., 2010). It was also suggested that the caregivers’
increased mindfulness may result in an increased responsiveness to those in their care, whether at the job or at home. With calm responsiveness to situations, staff members were able to adapt their behaviors into an effortless way of life (Singh et al., 2006a).

Unlike other studies that focused on specific mindfulness interventions with mothers’ and how it affects children’s functioning (Singh et al., 2006b; Singh et al., 2007; Singh et al., 2010; Singh et al., 2009), this study examined if fathers’ mindfulness levels, without specific mindfulness training, were correlated with more involvement with their children who had intellectual disabilities (MacDonald & Hastings, 2008). The researchers analyzed 105 participants’ measures on mindfulness and involvement in childcare, and found there to be a correlation between fathers who reported to be more mindful, and fathers who reported to be more involved with parenting roles and responsibilities of their children with developmental disabilities (MacDonald & Hastings, 2008). MacDonald and Hastings suggested that through their research, they believed mindfulness-based interventions may increase parental involvement with children who have intellectual disabilities, and suggested further research.

Mindfulness training appears to have many positive effects on those who are practicing it as well as “positive spillover effects” on those important in their lives (Singh et al., 2006b, p. 174). The changes in the mindful person’s life appears to improve the overall quality of life for both the person and others they are closely involved with (Gunaratana, 2002). Research on mindfulness has demonstrated a generalized effect on the parent who both understands the philosophy behind the practice and regularly employs the practice (Blackledge & Hayes, 2006; Singh et al., 2006b; Singh et al., 2007;
Singh et al., 2010). Even though the specifics of the generalization process of mindfulness skills are still somewhat unknown, it is clear that the skills and concepts of mindfulness within parenting have shown to improve parental satisfaction and children’s behavior problems.

**Mindfulness, child birthing, and early parenting.** Mindfulness aspects have also been utilized within the child birthing process and early parenting to help mothers manage the discomfort of pregnancy and labor pain, as well as the stress and anxiety of childbirth and parenting. It is commonly known that stress and negative mood have an increased risk for complications in the childbirth process, and may interfere in the mother-infant attachment process (Vieten & Astin, 2008). Vieten and Astin explored the effects of a mindfulness-based intervention on reducing stress and improving mood in pregnancy and early postpartum. Participants in the study completed an 8-week Mindful Motherhood program that was based on MBSR, MBCT, and ACT concepts, specifically tailoring the interventions to match the mothers’ challenges and awareness levels (Vieten & Astin, 2008). The authors compared 31 women to a control group and found there to be significant reduction in anxiety and negative affect during pregnancy in the women who participated in the Mindful Motherhood program. Findings suggest there is potential for reducing depression and improving positive affect in postpartum with mindfulness programs; however, further research is warranted (Vieten & Astin, 2008).

Other researchers explored the Mindfulness-Based Childbirth and Parenting program (MBCP; Duncan & Bardacke, 2010), adapted from MBSR, for women in their third trimester of pregnancy. According to the authors, MBCP was developed to
decrease stress, and promote family health and wellness through the practice of mindfulness during pregnancy, childbirth, and early parenting (Duncan & Bardacke, 2010). Through a pilot study, Duncan and Bardacke investigated the MBCP program with 27 pregnant women who participated in a 10-week session format, specifically focusing on formal and informal mindfulness practices. Results indicated that from pre to post group, there was a statistically significant increase in mindfulness and positive emotions, as well as a decrease in depression, anxiety, and negative emotions in the participants (Duncan & Bardacke, 2010). The participants also reported many benefits regarding their emotional well-being and the quality of relationship with their child (Duncan & Bardacke, 2010). Duncan and Bardacke speculated that learning mindfulness techniques in the prenatal period can help women’s coping skills for stress management and early bonding between mother and child.

Fisher, Hauck, Bayes, and Byrne (2012) discussed participants’ experiences of a pilot program called mindfulness-based childbirth education (MBCE) in a qualitative study of 12 pregnant women and 7 birth partners. The participants attended MBCE, an 8-week course that is a “combination of skills based antenatal education and MBSR” for both mothers and partners. In this qualitative study, the participants shared their experiences of the MBCE in two 45-minute focus groups. Results showed that participants experienced both a sense of “empowerment” and “community” after participating in the program. Fisher et al. stated that participants felt notions of empowerment toward the birth process and a sense of a being in a “community of like minded parents.” Fisher et al. found that participants were able to face birthing with a
sense of empowerment and a reduced sense of the need control of the birthing experience, and be in the present moment with their child and partner.

Unlike those who looked primarily at prenatal mindfulness, Perez-Blasco, Viguer, and Rodrigo (2013) were interested in mindfulness-based interventions for breast-feeding mothers. The researchers developed and tested an 8-week mindfulness-based intervention based on teaching new mothers (birth to age 2) self-efficacy, mindfulness, self-compassion, life satisfaction, and happiness. In this randomized control study of 26 participants with a pre and post measurement, Perez-Blasco et al. found an increase in several dimensions in the participants. Results indicated that the mothers in the treatment group scored significantly higher with self-efficacy, mindfulness, and self-compassion. Participants also showed significantly less stress, anxiety, and distress (Perez-Blasco et al., 2013). Researchers concluded that a mindfulness-based intervention for breast feeding mothers during the postpartum and early parenting periods showed to have significantly benefited their psychological well-being.

**Mindfulness and attachment.** When considering the bond between the primary caregiver and child, studies have emerged exploring the relationship of mindfulness levels and attachment. This section explores conceptual work, documented studies on the parent-child attachment, as well as marital and adult attachments.

In a conceptual article, Snyder, Shaprio, and Treleaven (2012) explored the different facets and possible links of attachment theory and mindfulness. In this article, the authors made connections between the established literature of attachment theory and the promising field of mindfulness to help promote the characteristics known to be
associated with healthy attachments. Specifically, the authors focused on the attachment literature concentrating on the mother’s ability for “self regulation and connection (e.g., attunement)” and the positive association of those qualities with children’s health, well-being, and developmental outcomes. Snyder et al. also highlighted how mindfulness literature has shown promising research in mindful parenting, demonstrating that an increase in mindfulness as been associated with an increase in emotional regulation and decrease in stress and anxiety. Through their examination of the literature, Snyder et al. proposed for more “exploratory and empirical research” into the dynamic relationship between mindfulness and attachment, in both the maternal and children’s well-being and development. They suggested more research in the areas that focus on symptom reduction, as well as potential “positive and beneficial qualities” that are promoted with a mindful parenting practice (Snyder et al., 2012).

Another investigation explored the amount of thought related comments the parents made with their children (i.e., mind mindedness) and the correlation of the parent-child attachment. The term “mind-mindedness” refers to mothers’ ability to treat infants as though they had a mind, rather than something with needs that only requires satisfaction (Meins, Ferynghough, Fradely, & Tuckey, 2001, p. 638). Similar to Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn’s (1997) sovereignty, empathy, and acceptance of mindful parenting, mind-mindedness includes the parents’ appropriate responsiveness to the infants’ interests and initiations, encouragement of autonomy, and mind-related comments. To illustrate mind-mindedness, an example statement would be “you are thinking about what to do with that ball.” In the study, Meins et al. (2001) explored the
mind-mindedness of parents and the parent-child attachments between 71 mothers and their 6 month-old infants. Meins et al. (2001) found there to be a strong link between a mother’s ability to have appropriate thought-related comments toward the infant and higher rates of secure attachments.

To investigate this further, Lundy (2003) explored 24 sets of parents and their 6-month-old infants, and their ability and appropriateness of being mind-minded. The researcher was interested in the mothers’ and specifically the fathers’ ability for thought related comments and the attachment relationships with their children (Lundy, 2003). Results suggested that for both the mothers and fathers, the overall frequency of appropriate thought related comments significantly predicted secure parent-child attachments (Lundy, 2003). The author suggested that parents who have better perspective taking make more thought related comments with their infants, thus helping the attachment relationship and the child’s ability for strong social skills and appropriate childhood development (Lundy, 2003).

Due to the proposed benefits of mindfulness as an inherent trait within all humans, another study investigated the relationships between mindfulness, spousal attachment, and marital satisfaction (Jones, Welton, Oliver, & Thoburn, 2011). Jones et al. discussed mindfulness as a trait or a way of being, rather than something only acquired through training and meditation practices. The sample of 104 married adults aged 19–66 participants were recruited from online networking and advertising. The participants were given three assessments that examined mindfulness as a trait, marital satisfaction, and spousal attachment. After a multiple regression analysis of the battery,
results suggested a significant relationship between trait mindfulness and marital satisfaction within the participants (Jones et al., 2011). Findings also corroborated other studies in the positive associations of mindfulness toward partner and romantic relationship health (Jones et al., 2011).

**Mindful parenting summary.** In review, this section covered many of the fundamental aspects of defining and conceptualizing mindful parenting and recent literature exploring the effectiveness and applicability of mindful parenting interventions and groups. Mindful parenting is a new area of mindfulness research that has been conceptualized as a way of parenting that increases healthy family dynamics and functioning. Unlike mindfulness that primarily focuses on only the intrapersonal aspects of an individual, mindful parenting also focuses on relational aspects of the parent-child relationship. Mindful parenting recognizes various dynamics within the parent-child relationship such as sovereignty, empathy, and acceptance (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997). The mindful parenting techniques of nonjudgmental acceptance, self-awareness, and emotional regulation attempt to help the parent lower some of the automaticity of parenting, thus creating more space between the parent’s emotions and actions (Coatsworth et al. 2010).

Due to the effectiveness mindfulness-based interventions has demonstrated with adults, several mindfulness-based parenting programs have been adopted. Current literature on mindful parenting has examples of interventions and programs that have demonstrated the applicability and effectiveness of mindful parenting techniques. Some of the interventions were specifically designed for mindful parenting purposes
(Plaone-Wiley, 2002; Reynolds, 2003), while others used already established intervention models and applied mindfulness to the parent-child relationship (Bailie et al., 2012; Coatsworth et al., 2010; Duncan et al., 2009b). A growing number of studies have utilized mindful parenting techniques with specific populations of parents of children with autism, disruptive behaviors, and developmental disabilities. In these studies, mindful parenting techniques have demonstrated an increase in parental satisfaction, positive family interactions, and child compliance (Blackledge & Hayes, 2006; Bögels et al., 2008; Singh et al., 2006b; Singh et al., 2007; Singh et al., 2009). Mindfulness techniques also have proven to be beneficial to families who participate in mindful parenting programs that were expecting a child (Duncan & Bardacke, 2010; Vieten & Astin 2008).

The concepts of mindfulness have also been explored when correlated with attachment relationships. It is documented that the more mindful a parent is about the cognitions an infant has, the more likely the child will have a secure attachment (Lundy, 2003). It was also demonstrated that mindfulness as a trait, established better marital satisfaction and spousal attachment (Jones et al., 2011).

**A Chapter in Review**

Three main concepts have been discussed in the literature review: attachment theory, mindfulness, and mindful parenting. Attachment theory is based on the idea that a child draws a primary caregiver close to be ensured safety and comfort when needed. From this secure base (primary caregivers), children also seek to explore their surroundings for healthy social, cognitive, and emotional development. When children’s
needs are met with adequate and sensitive parenting, they have more potential to develop and grow into healthy functioning adults. When the child does not get adequate parental nurturing, there is an increased risk in psychopathology later on in life.

Recent studies suggest there is a link between parents, who are mindful of themselves and their children’s needs, and parents and children’s happiness and satisfaction with themselves and the parent-child relationship. Being mindful or focused on the present moment with nonjudgmental acceptance, within the parent-child relationship allows the parent to have more options for actions and thoughts, rather than reacting to the first emotion present. Attachment theorists believe that the way parents learn how to be a parent is mostly through their own nurturing in their childhood. This idea is important on several levels due to the permanency of the parent-child relationship. Mindful parenting has been suggested to be one way to control automaticity in parenting, by allowing parents to live according to their values and wants for their children, rather than reacting based on first instinct.
CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter, the scholarly literature of attachment, mindfulness, and mindful parenting was summarized. The importance of the attachment relationship between child and parent is essential to healthy functioning as an adult (Bowlby, 1969/1982). It has been suggested that mindful parenting, or reflecting on and awareness of the present moment within the parent-child relationship, may enhance the parent and child satisfaction within the relationship (Altmaier & Maloney, 2007; Dumas, 2005; Singh et al., 2009). Because little is understood about the subjective experiences of parents who chose to live mindfully, this study sought to answer the research questions: (a) What are the lived experiences of parents with young children, who practice being mindful in their daily lives; and (b) What are mindful parents’ perceptions of their attachments with their young children?

This chapter provides an overview of the methodical procedures used for this study. Specifically, this chapter explores design, phenomenological interviewing, description of the researcher, participants and setting, sampling procedure, procedures, data analysis, and trustworthiness.

Rationale for Design

Qualitative research focuses on the subjective, lived experience of human beings in their natural environment. For the current study, a qualitative research design was chosen because of the ability the researcher has to explore the subjective areas of the human experience. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) believed qualitative researchers “study
things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in
terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). The naturalistic approach to
qualitative research lends itself well to exploring areas of mindful parents’ personal
practices, experiences, and processes as well as the meanings attributed to them.
Moustakas (1994) explained that qualitative research focuses on “the wholeness of the
experience” (p. 21) and is open to receive the richness of data with all of its complexities
and inherent value. In essence, the function of qualitative research is to inquire, expand,
and explore subjects not clearly understood by quantifiable definitions (Creswell, 2007).

Because the experiences of mindfulness and parenting are unique to every
individual, qualitative research was useful for understanding the uncharted areas of these
subjective experiences. Previous studies on mindful parenting have ignored the personal
experience of mindful parents, focusing instead on the effects of implementing an
intervention. This study used a qualitative approach to explore and describe the
phenomena of mindful parenting. The researcher explored the lived experiences of
parents with young children who are practicing mindfulness in their daily lives as well as
how the attachment between child and parent is experienced by parents.

A phenomenological framework was chosen to help describe the phenomena of
parents who practice being mindful parents in their daily lives. Due to the interpretative
nature of qualitative research, a specific structure was necessary in collecting, reporting,
and analyzing the data.
Phenomenological Methodology

Phenomenological qualitative research “describes meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). Phenomenological research focuses on describing what participants have in common when experiencing an occurrence that is universally understood by all. Phenomenological researchers seek to understand topics and describe the “universal essence” (Creswell, 2007, p. 60) of the phenomena occurring for the participants. This essence is what constitutes the perceptions of the human world, and makes a phenomenon the “thing” that it is (Husserl, 1952). Phenomenological researchers collect data from individuals who have experienced the phenomena under study, and work to develop a description of the essence of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994).

One area of difference from other qualitative methods is that phenomenology focuses on the participants’ meaning of the experience, rather than the overt behaviors observed (Polkinghorne, 1989). The aim of phenomenological research is to understand and determine what an experience means to the individual having that experience (Van Manen, 1990). To get at this kind of description, phenomenological researchers are more interested in “what” and “how” questions, as opposed to “why” questions (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological researchers use descriptive methods during their interviewing to encourage the personal voice of the participants to be heard, as well as to provide clear and accurate description of the phenomena experienced (Moustakas, 1994).
The use of descriptive techniques helps to clarify the underlying essence of the human experience and behaviors (Polkinghorne, 1989). This is done so the human experience is not reduced to single elements and the underlying structures are understood in the way they were intended in the context. Then, the overall results of the research are expressed in a rich textural description of the experience (Polkinghorne, 1989). Creswell (2007) noted that phenomenology is a descriptive and interpretative process in which the researcher is a mediator between the different meanings of lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990).

Moustakas (1994) illustrated the procedures that take place during this method of research and Creswell (2007) described them as follows. The researcher begins by determining the research problem or identifying the phenomena of interest. Epoche or bracketing is used next to demonstrate the researcher’s work to set aside his or her own experiences and perspectives toward the phenomena. In the practice of bracketing, the researcher discusses his or her feelings and thoughts about the phenomena to deepen awareness and minimize the biases held; this is done before the interviews and during the analysis of data. The researcher then selects participants who have a shared experience of the phenomena being studied. Data collection consists of multiple in-depth interviews, with 5 to 25 participants. The researcher analyzes the interview data by finding significant statements and dividing them into similar themes; Moustakas (1994) called this step horizontalization. The significant statements are then placed together and clusters of meaning are developed. Finally, the clusters of meaning or themes are used to
write a textural description, in which the participants’ experiences of the phenomenon are articulated to convey the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2007).

Phenomenological methodology was chosen because the researcher believed it to be the best way to answer the research questions posed. This study explored the experiences of mindful parents, with an emphasis on their core beliefs, experiences, and values. Because little understanding exists about how parents who practice mindfulness interact with their children and themselves, phenomenological methodology provided a strong foundation for that discovery.

**Description of the Researcher**

Hatch (2002) suggested it is necessary for researchers to explore their previous notions of the phenomena before conducting research. Therefore, background information, previous experiences, formal and informal education, and other preconceived notions of the researcher are explored in this section.

The researcher is a Caucasian female in the candidacy phase of a CACREP accredited doctoral degree program in Counselor Education and Supervision. The researcher earned a Bachelor of Science degree, with a major in applied developmental psychology. During this time, the researcher worked with foster children in an emergency foster care placement agency as a caregiver to the children. While working towards a Master of Arts degree in Community Counseling, she was a counseling intern at a community agency that specialized in children and families. There, the researcher counseled children and their caregivers for over a year. During the researcher’s doctoral program, she worked at a Reggio Emila inspired preschool for three years. Later in her
doctoral program, the researcher also worked as a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) at a clinical mental health agency, specializing in counseling children, families, and adults.

While earning her master’s degree, the researcher became interested in attachment theory and began looking at her clinical and professional practice through an attachment theory lens. During her professional experiences working with families and children, the researcher witnessed several different parenting approaches and attitudes. These experiences created a curiosity in the researcher about parent-child relationships and the attachment bond between child and primary caregiver.

In the beginning of her doctoral program, the researcher was introduced to the concepts and practices of mindfulness. She explored mindfulness techniques as a clinical tool and also began applying them in her personal life. The researcher attended a mindfulness training that discussed the theory and research behind mindfulness as a concept and clinical intervention. This training was a two-day training on mindfulness-based stress reduction theory and applicability. The training explored how mindfulness affects the brain and body, and mindfulness as a psychotherapy intervention. The researcher then attended an 8-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course that helped to solidify the theory learned, into a daily practice. This training focused on how to utilize mindfulness meditation practices in everyday life to reduce stress and suffering. While completing this study, the researcher continued to use meditation and mindfulness practices in her daily life.
While working with children and families and enhancing her knowledge in mindfulness, the researcher formed several assumptions regarding the practice of mindfulness and parenting. One assumption the researcher recognized was that mindfulness meditation lowers stress, anxiety, and depression when practiced consistently. This assumption formed because the researcher experienced a decrease in personal stress and anxiety, and experienced beneficial aspects such as improved coping skills, concentration, and emotional regulation. The second assumption held by the researcher was that parents of young children are under considerable amounts of stress on a daily basis. While working with parents and children, the researcher often witnessed parents under substantial stress. Talking with parents, the researcher discovered that this stress impacted parents’ self-care and their relationships with their children. The third assumption held by the researcher was that some parents were coping with the stress of parenting more effectively than others, and these parents appeared to be happier and more content in their relationships with their children. The fourth assumption of the researcher was that parents, who are flexible, nonjudgmental, and compassionate toward themselves and their children, may have better relationships with their children. The researcher made this assumption after observing and interacting with parents who had healthy coping skills in place to deal with the stress of parenting. The fifth assumption of the researcher was that practicing mindfulness trains parents to develop characteristics of flexibility, nonjudgmental acceptance, and compassion. The researcher made this assumption due to her experiences with mindfulness and by becoming familiar with the research supporting mindfulness. The sixth assumption held by the researcher was that
parents who are mindful may feel more satisfied and effective regarding themselves as a person and a parent. It is also believed that the individuals’ self-efficacy may increase the ability to be the kind of parent they would like to be. This assumption made by the researcher was from experience in working with various families with varying degrees of self-efficacy and mindfulness, and the supporting literature reviewed about mindful parenting.

In order for these previous experiences and assumptions to be utilized and monitored while conducting this study, the researcher used a reflexivity journal and bracketing. The researcher did this alongside the interviews and data analysis to document thoughts, feelings, and interpretations about the research (Creswell, 2007).

**Participants and Setting**

As suggested for phenomenological research, the researcher specifically used criterion sampling to obtain participants who have experience and knowledge about the phenomena of mindful parenting (Creswell, 2007; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). To gather participants for this study, a mindful parent was defined as (a) the parent reported being interested in the concepts of mindfulness, (b) the parent reported currently or previously attending the Mindful Parenting Program at the Insight Meditation of Cleveland, and/or knowledge in mindful parenting concepts, and (c) the parent reported applying mindfulness skills to their parenting. To be eligible for this study, participants also needed to be the primary caregiver of a child or children between three months to six years of age. This age range was chosen because of the developmental window of
attachment between the parent and child. This window of attachment begins to develop at birth and solidifies near ages five and six (Bowlby, 1969/1982).

Criteria were established to assist the researcher in finding participants who had experience (parenting a young child) and knowledge (the Mindful Parenting Program or affiliation with Insight Meditation of Cleveland) in the area of mindful parenting in early childhood (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Experience and knowledge about mindful parenting were critical for participants to have, these attributes allowed the researcher to investigate the experience of mindful parents rather than another phenomenon (Colaizzi, 1978; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The researcher did not discriminate between biological parents, adoptive parents, and other family members (such as grandparents or siblings) who were raising a child. Participants were not excluded from the study based on gender, religious conviction, ethnicity, race, or sexual orientation.

**Mindful Parenting Program**

To gather participants who met the criteria, the researcher made contact with the director of the Insight Meditation of Cleveland (IMC). The IMC is an organization in place for individuals interested in various practices of meditation and mindfulness. The organization’s core intention is to create a place for interested individuals to gather together and practice insight (or vipassana) meditation (“Insight Meditation of Cleveland,” n.d.). The IMC offers classes, retreats, groups, and meditation sessions for its interested members. The classes and groups are free for interested individuals, and the retreats are at a cost. The IMC does not have its own building, rather, meets in the community and local public places in the Cleveland area, for the individuals attending the
groups. The IMC has several different individuals affiliated with the center who teach and facilitate the various groups and classes.

The IMC offers a specific group titled the Mindful Parenting Program. The group was designed to provide a place where parents can come to learn about mindfulness and how to incorporate mindfulness skills in their parenting practices and parent-child relationships. The group’s original format that began in Summer 2011 was designed to run for four weeks and cover a set curriculum of mindful parenting theory and techniques each week. In this program, parents of all aged children were welcomed; however, mostly parents with children between the ages of two and five came to the group (personal communication, April 19, 2012). The director of the IMC (also a leader of the Mindful Parenting Program) had about 25 participants interested in attending the group, however, struggled to find a location and time for all interested parents to meet. After assessing the challenges of the participants, the group leaders made a decision to begin the group again, with a new format and meeting schedule in hopes to better align with interested parents.

The new adjustments to the Mindful Parenting Program had begun taking effect in late spring of the following year (June 2012). The Mindful Parenting Program is an open and free group that now meets once a month at a scheduled location, and the parents attending are being provided childcare (personal communication, April 19, 2012). Similar to the previous Mindful Parenting Program’s intention, the parents attending the group participate in various activities such as discussions, lectures, meditation practices, and group activities that help parents learn how to implement mindfulness into their daily
lives. Each week, the leaders facilitate group discussions, educational conversations, and experiential exercises focused on mindful parenting (personal communication, April 19, 2012).

The Mindful Parenting Program group members became involved through participation in other groups in the IMC, the IMC website, and word of mouth through other parents. The leaders believed that about half of the members are usually very new to mindfulness and mindful parenting concepts, whereas the other half are well versed (personal communication, April 19, 2012).

The group’s leaders teach from a curriculum that focuses on informal techniques of meditation to enhance the parents’ ability to be aware of their own emotions and thoughts while interacting with their children (personal communication, April 19, 2012). The leaders reported using a current mindfulness literature base, including ideas in mindfulness and neuroscience from Dan Siegel and Rick Hanson, as well the mindful parenting concepts of Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (1997). The group members are taught basic concepts of mindfulness and mindful parenting, and given resources and support for parenting challenges (“Insight Meditation of Cleveland,” n.d.). The group members are taught to not only be in the present moment with their child, but to also be aware of what triggers or reactions they have with their children’s behaviors, to allow them to be more conscious in the parent-child interactions.

The group leaders of the Mindful Parenting Program are a married couple with a young child. One of the group leaders is the director of the IMC, and the other group
leader is the director’s wife, who has a doctorate in Social Work and has counseled children and families.

**Insight Meditation of Cleveland’s Email List**

With the permission of the director of the Insight Meditation of Cleveland, the researcher utilized the IMC’s electronic newsletter to contact interested individuals that met the requirements for participation in this study. Individuals that received the electronic newsletter were people who have had affiliation with the IMC, having shown interest in one or more of their programs (personal communication, April 19, 2012). To receive the electronic newsletter, individuals had to have requested to be on the email list of the IMC, or have participated in one or more of the IMC’s sponsored programs. The IMC sponsored several weekly meditation groups as well as frequent meditation retreats.

**Sampling Procedure**

The researcher obtained permission from Kent State University’s Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A) before beginning the sampling procedures. To gather participants for this study, the researcher obtained permission from the director of the Insight Meditation of Cleveland to recruit current and past members from the Mindful Parenting Program as well as utilize the electronic newsletter to the members of the IMC (see Appendix B).

The researcher attended two Mindful Parenting Program classes to recruit participants for the study and to experience the group atmosphere. During the groups, the researcher discussed (see Appendix C) the recruitment flyer (see Appendix D) and answered any questions group members had about the process of being a participant. To
recruit past members of the Mindful Parenting Program, the director of the IMC contacted via email, past members and provided them with the recruitment flyer for the study (see Appendix D). The participants were instructed to contact the researcher directly, either by phone or email, if interested in participation. The recruitment flyer included the title of the research project, purpose of the study, participation requirements, information about compensation, and contact information for the researcher. In the recruitment flyer, the participants were informed of the time demands of the two interviews (totaling 2.5 hours) and the two follow-up emails that would take place. Participants were also informed that at the completion of the interviews they would receive a $50.00 Visa gift card as compensation for participation in the study.

A recruitment flyer (see Appendix D) was also sent to individuals on the email list through the IMC monthly electronic newsletter. The IMC monthly electronic newsletter was a communication tool from the IMC to people interested in keeping informed about upcoming meeting with the meditation groups, mindful parenting group, and meditation retreats. The recruitment flyer used for the newsletter was identical to the recruitment flyer used for the Mindful Parenting Program, except eligibility in the research was granted if parents (a) have interest in the concepts of mindfulness, (b) have experience and/or knowledge in mindful parenting concepts, (c) are attempting to apply mindfulness skills in the parent-child relationship, and (d) have a child who is between the age of three months and six years. As with the Mindful Parenting Program recruitment, participants were instructed to contact the researcher directly, either by phone or email, if interested in participation.
Polkinghorne (1989) suggested that studies using phenomenological methodology should sample enough participants to ensure that the researcher can provide a varied and saturated experience of the phenomena under investigation. Boyd (2001) believed 2 to 10 participants are sufficient to reach saturation in phenomenological interviews. However, Moustakas (1994) stated that phenomenological research often incorporates between 5 to 25 participants. Therefore, the researcher sought to recruit 8 participants to participate in two interviews in hopes their information would saturate the data. The researcher decided that if it became evident during the data analysis that saturation was not reached, more participants would be interviewed.

The researcher continued to enlist participants until eight eligible parents agreed to participate in the study. As soon as eight participants agreed, the researcher then complied a reserve list of other interested participants. This was done in case any participants dropped out of the study in the future, or if saturation of the data was not met. If a participant and his or her partner were both interested in participation of the study, the researcher interviewed them as separate participants and interviewed them at different times.

**Procedures**

Individuals recruited from the IMC newsletter and Mindful Parenting Program initially contacted the researcher if they were interested in participating in the research study. During the initial contact, the individuals were asked four questions to determine eligibility of the study (see Appendix E). The individuals were asked the following questions to ensure the experience and knowledge of mindful parenting (see Appendix
E): (a) are you interested in the concepts of mindfulness, (b) have you attended the Mindful Parenting Program at the Insight Meditation of Cleveland or have experience and/or knowledge in mindful parenting concepts, (c) are you attempting to apply mindfulness skills in the parent-child relationship, (d) do you have a child who is between the age of three months and six years? If the individuals were eligible for the study (i.e., answered “yes” to the four eligibility questions), interviews were scheduled at a convenient day and time.

The interviews took place at several different public locations convenient for the participants. Most of the interviews took place in public libraries, in a secluded room for privacy. A few of the interviews took place at the participants’ workplace office. Before the first interview, the participants were sent the informed consent, audiotape consent, and demographic questionnaire via email to review, fill out, and bring to the first interview (see Appendices F and G). To aid in the organization of the procedures, before the research began, the researcher documented a timeline in Table 2 for the sequence of the various components of collecting the data.

The researcher attempted to maintain the sequence of the procedures while collecting the data; however, due to the various circumstances of gathering participants, the researcher’s timeline was updated. Table 3 represents the updated timeline of gathering the participants, conducting interviews, and member checking. The bolded items signify when the researcher (or the director of the IMC on behalf of the researcher) made contact with potential participants, either in person or via email.
### Table 2

**Procedural Flowchart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Weeks 2-3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IRB approval</td>
<td>Sat in a Mindful Parenting Program group and recruited participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted Insight Meditation of Cleveland’s director</td>
<td>Director of the IMC contacted past members of the MPP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Weeks 4-5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Made initial contact of participants</td>
<td>Conducted first interviews with all participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screening form over phone</td>
<td>Obtained informed consents and demographic questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set up first interview</td>
<td>Used reflexivity journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emailed informed consents and demographic questionnaire</td>
<td>Transcribed first interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks 5-7</th>
<th>Weeks 7-9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continued to transcribe first interviews</td>
<td>Conducted second interview using follow-up questions from first interview and conducted member checking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used reflexivity journal</td>
<td>of first interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewed first interview transcripts for significant statements and formulated meanings</td>
<td>Gave compensation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sent participants transcribed interviews, significant statements, and formulated meanings via email</td>
<td>Transcribed second interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set up second interview with all participants</td>
<td>Used reflexivity journal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks 9-11</th>
<th>Week 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continued to transcribe second interviews</td>
<td>Completed via email and phone, member checks of participants’ transcript of second interview, significant statements, and formulated meanings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used reflexivity journal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sent transcribed interviews, significant statements, and formulated meanings to participants for review via email</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks 13-15</th>
<th>Week 16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incorporated revisions from participants’ member checking</td>
<td>Emailed participants the final themes for final member check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continued analyzing data</td>
<td>Received via phone and email, feedback from final member check and incorporated in study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used reflexivity journal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3

**Procedural Flowchart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks 1-3 Began July 9th 2012</th>
<th>Weeks 4-6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>IRB approval</strong></td>
<td>Conducted first interviews (2 participants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contacted Insight Meditation of Cleveland’s director</strong></td>
<td>Obtained informed consents and demographic questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Director of the IMC contacted past and current members of the MPP via email</strong></td>
<td>Used reflexivity journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initial contact from participants (2 participants) and used screening form</strong></td>
<td>Transcribed first interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Set up first interviews (2 participants)</strong></td>
<td>Initial contact from participants (2 participants) and used screening form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emailed informed consents and demographic questionnaire</strong></td>
<td>Set up first interviews (2 participants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conducted first interviews (2 participants)</strong></td>
<td>Emailed informed consents and demographic questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obtained informed consents and demographic questionnaire</strong></td>
<td><strong>Used reflexivity journal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Used reflexivity journal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Transcribed first interviews</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transcribed first interviews</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reviewed first interview transcripts for significant statements and formulated meanings</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reviewed first interview transcripts for significant statements and formulated meanings</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sent participants transcribed interviews, significant statements, and formulated meanings via email</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sent participants transcribed interviews, significant statements, and formulated meanings via email</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reviewed first interview transcripts for significant statements and formulated meanings</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Director of the IMC contacted past and current members of the MPP via email</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conducted second interview and member check (1 participant)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conducted first interviews (2 participants)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Used reflexivity journal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obtained informed consents and demographic questionnaire</strong></td>
<td><strong>Transcribed first and second interviews</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Used reflexivity journal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reviewed first interview transcripts for significant statements and formulated meanings</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transcribed first interviews</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sent participants transcribed interviews, significant statements, and formulated meanings via email</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reviewed first interview transcripts for significant statements and formulated meanings</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sent participants transcribed interviews, significant statements, and formulated meanings via email</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sent participants transcribed interviews, significant statements, and formulated meanings via email</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reviewed first interview transcripts for significant statements and formulated meanings</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Director of the IMC contacted past and current members of the MPP via email</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conducted first interview (1 participant)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conducted second interview using follow-up questions from first interview, conducted member checking of first interview, and gave compensation (3 participants)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Obtained informed consents and demographic questionnaire</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transcribed second interviews</strong></td>
<td><strong>Transcribed first and second interviews</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Used reflexivity journal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Used reflexivity journal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initial contact from participant (1 participants) and used screening form</strong></td>
<td><strong>Initial contact from participant (1 participants) and used screening form</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Set up first interview (1 participants)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Set up first interview (1 participants)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emailed informed consents and demographic questionnaire</strong></td>
<td><strong>Emailed informed consents and demographic questionnaire</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Completed via email, member checks of participants’ transcript of second interview, significant statements, and formulated meanings</strong></td>
<td><strong>Incorporated revisions from participants’ member checking</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 3 (continued)

Procedural Flowchart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks 18-20</th>
<th>Week 21-23</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attended Mindful Parenting Meeting</strong></td>
<td>Conducted first interviews (2 participants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducted first interview (1 participant)</td>
<td>Obtained informed consents and demographic questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtained informed consents and demographic questionnaire</td>
<td>Conducted second interviews using follow-up questions from first interview, conducted member checking of first interview, and gave compensation (2 participant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continued to transcribe first and second interviews</td>
<td>Transcribed first and second interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used reflexivity journal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewed first interview transcripts for significant statements and formulated meanings</td>
<td>Reviewed first interview transcripts for significant statements and formulated meanings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sent participants transcribed interviews, significant statements, and formulated meanings via email</td>
<td>Sent participants transcribed interviews, significant statements, and formulated meanings via email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed via email, member checks of participants’ transcript of second interview, significant statements, and formulated meanings</td>
<td>Completed via email, member checks of participants’ transcript of second interviews, significant statements, and formulated meanings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporated revisions from participants’ member checking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Director of the IMC send out recruitment flyer in electronic monthly newsletter.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks 24-26</th>
<th>Weeks 27-29</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conducted second interview using follow-up questions from first interview, conducted member checking of first interview, and gave compensation (1 participant)</td>
<td>Conducted second interview using follow-up questions from first interview, conducted member checking of first interview, and gave compensation (1 participant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed via email, member checks of participants’ transcript of second interviews, significant statements, and formulated meanings</td>
<td>Completed via email, member checks of participants’ transcript of second interviews, significant statements, and formulated meanings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporated revisions from participants’ member checking</td>
<td>Incorporated revisions from participants’ member checking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continued analyzing data</td>
<td>Continued analyzing data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used reflexivity journal</td>
<td>Used reflexivity journal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
The researcher began the first interview by reviewing the informed consent and the audiotape consent forms (see Appendix F). Before interviewing, each of the participants gave consent to participate in the study and have their interviews audiotaped. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of the study, and that they could terminate their participation at any time during the study with no repercussions. Participants were also asked to choose a pseudonym for the researcher to use in the data analysis and results to ensure confidentiality. The participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix G), if they had not already done so, to collect the participants’ pseudonym, age, gender, marital status, current occupation, number of children, children’s age(s), ethnicity, and how long they have been practicing mindfulness and mindful parenting. The researcher gave additional time for any unanswered questions the participants may have had.

The first semi-structured interviews were scheduled for an hour and a half. The researcher utilized open-ended questions and probes to generate in-depth discussions with
the participants. In qualitative interviewing, the use of opened-ended questions involves engaging the participants in an informal conversation about the topic (Patton, 2002). These semi-structured interview questions were framed to help the participants explore the experiences of mindfulness, mindful parenting, attachment, and being a parent of a young child. The interview questions used for all participants were:

1. What does mindful parenting mean to you?
2. Tell me about your experiences as a mindful parent.
3. What is the significance of mindful parenting in your life?
4. Tell me about the bond you have with your child.

The researcher used probes to clarify, deepen, and explore the statements generated from the interview questions. Specifically, the researcher used probing questions that directed the participant’s past and present feelings and experiences, goals, implementation of mindful parenting, meanings attributed, and beliefs about the questions at hand.

At the end of the interview, the researcher received permission from the participants to send them a transcript of their interview via email. Each participant was instructed to review the transcript of his/her interview, significant statements, and formulated meanings for accuracy (see data analysis section and member checking section for more details). Participants were told that the second interview would be used for follow-up questions and to review the participants’ significant statements and meanings.

During the interviews, the researcher used a note pad to take minimal notes for follow-up questions and clarification purposes. The researcher also documented her
thoughts and reactions directly after the initial interview in a reflexivity journal. Journaling this experience allowed the researcher to reflect on the process of the interview, helped to reduce bias, and aided in the development of themes.

The researcher transcribed the participants’ interviews directly following each interview. Transcribing interview data was the first step the researcher took to understand the interview data in a deeper, more meaningful way. It also allowed the researcher to prepare for future interviews and assisted in the initial data analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The researcher kept a running memo of her thoughts and reflections during transcription, to reduce bias and aide in the initial data analysis. After transcribing, the researcher listened to the audio recordings while reading the interview transcriptions, to check for accuracy (Tiley, 2003).

After the researcher transcribed the participants’ individual interviews and identified the initial significant statements and formulated meanings (see data analysis section), the researcher sent their individual transcripts and statements to the participants, and scheduled a second interview.

During the second one-hour interviews, the researcher and participants discussed any follow-up questions the researcher or participants had from the previous interview. The follow-up questions from the researcher sought clarification, depth, and further explanation of the lived experience of mindful parents and perceived attachment with their child. The participant and researcher also reviewed the transcript from the participant’s first interview and discussed the significant statements and formulated meanings identified from the participant’s data. During this process of member checking,
the researcher asked for any corrections, feedback, and insights from the participants. Conducting member checking was an important step in demonstrating the trustworthiness of the interview data and themes collected, including the verification of inferences formed by the researcher from the previous interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking and trustworthiness are described in more detail in a later section.

To conclude the second interview, the researcher gave each participant one $50.00 ($25.00 per interview) Visa gift card as compensation for their participation in the study. The researcher also explained to the participants that they would receive future contact from the researcher (a) if saturation of the data was not met, (b) for member checking the second interview’s data, and (c) for a final member checking of the overall emergent themes from all participants.

The researcher documented thoughts and reactions soon after the second interview in a reflexivity journal. This allowed the researcher to reflect on the process of the interview and the developing emergent themes. The researcher kept a running memo of all initial thoughts and reflections while transcribing, for initial analysis and possible identification of bias. The researcher transcribed the second interviews as soon as possible after the ending of each interview. Following the transcription, the researcher listened to the audio recordings again while reading the transcriptions, to check for accuracy (Tiley, 2003).

**Data Analysis**

After transcribing the interviews, the researcher listened to the interviews while reading the transcripts several times to obtain the overall conceptualization of the
interviews (Colaizzi, 1978). This helped to ensure the overall understanding of the data in the whole context. While listening and reading the transcripts, the researcher utilized the reflexivity journal to document initial reflections, thoughts, and possible bias about the data collected.

The researcher used a phenomenological analysis procedure designed by Colaizzi (1978) and adapted and modified by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2007) to analyze the data obtained from the interviews. The analysis process was comprised of the following steps: (a) document and describe personal experiences with the phenomena under study, (b) identify participants’ significant statements that pertain to the experience, (c) formulate meanings from the significant statements and group them together into larger themes within each participant’s data; then combine all participants’ data into clusters of themes common to all participants, (d) condensing the themes down to the essence of the experience and culminations of the study, and (e) validate findings with participants and include participants final remarks (Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

After documenting the researcher’s potential bias and reflections in the reflexivity journal, the researcher examined the individual interviews of the eight participants. A list of the significant statements was then created for each individual. The significant statements were found by the researcher to have significant relevance to the study because they directly answered the interview questions, and had relevance to the experience of mindful parenting and attachment (Creswell, 2007). The researcher utilized QSR NVivo 10, a qualitative software analysis program, throughout analysis to
store, sort, and combine data from the interviews. NVivo was initially used in this process to assist the researcher in separating and highlighting significant statements from the rest of the interview. All significant statements were considered to have equal worth, and were placed into a nonrepetitive list for each individual participant (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

In the following step, the researcher formulated the meaning (i.e., importance or significance) within the significant statements about the participants’ experiences of mindful parenting and attachment. The contextual meanings are given with the statement, not in the statement; therefore, the researcher must go beyond what was said to what was meant in the context, to formulate the meanings (Colaizzi, 1978). Colaizzi referred to the researcher as needing “creative insight” (p. 59) to leap from what the participants were saying to what they were meaning in the context. The researcher made careful inferences about the original quotes, being certain not to sever the original meanings of the statements from the meaning units (Colaizzi, 1978). A two-column chart was designed by the researcher to highlight the meanings from the original statements; the participants’ quotes were in the left side column and the formulated meanings were in the right. From the participants’ distinct interview statements, the researcher formulated meanings that articulated the underlying experiences and themes for each individual (Creswell, 2007).

The formulated meanings were then grouped or clustered together with similar meanings to make themes. This was done individually for each participant before combining all of the participants’ themes together. To ensure accuracy, the participants
reviewed their individual first interview transcripts, significant statements, formulated meanings, and tentative themes. If the participants do not validate the clusters of themes, there is a risk the themes will be foreign to the original data and not be an accurate depiction of the experience of the phenomenon (Colaizzi, 1978). After returning from the second interviews where the researcher gathered follow-up information and received feedback from the participants about the first interviews’ transcriptions and themes, the new information was merged with their previous data and emergent themes. The researcher then repeated the process of member checking of their second interview via email (see Appendix H) and phone with the participants, having them review the transcript of the interviews, significant statements, formulated meanings, and tentative themes.

In the next step of analysis, the researcher combined all the participants’ like themes into several overarching themes that were representations of the experienced phenomenon. Colaizzi (1978) warned researchers to be open to whatever comes from the data, even if the themes are unexpected, in direct contradiction to another theme, or logically confounding. It is important for the researcher to rely on the tolerance for ambiguity during this phase and proceed with confidence that all themes that emerge are real and valid to the phenomena (Colaizzi, 1978). NVivo was utilized to support the researcher in finding similar and dissimilar statements, as well as sorting and combining the data. This assisted the researcher in working and reworking the themes that emerged through this process. The researcher was able to isolate emergent themes of the phenomena of mindful parenting.
Using the emergent themes, the researcher generated a comprehensive description of the phenomena of mindful parenting. This description was then reduced to the essence (i.e., the essential and central underlying meaning) of the experience, and represented the culminating aspects of being a mindful parent to a young child (Creswell, 2007).

In the last step, the researcher provided each member with a follow-up email to conduct a final member check on the combined emergent themes from all of the participants (Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell, 2007). The researcher emailed (see Appendix H) the emergent themes of mindful parents of young children. Each participant then provided feedback on the emergent themes via email or phone and the feedback was incorporated back in final themes.

**Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) helped to highlight the importance of trustworthiness or rigor in qualitative research. Instead of using the terms common to quantitative research (i.e., reliability, validity, generalizability, etc.), Lincoln and Guba used credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity to help establish quality qualitative research. The next section described how the researcher demonstrated trustworthiness in the present study.

**Credibility**

Viewing the findings and interpretations as credible is an essential part of ensuring qualitative data to be accurate and informative (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Several steps were taken in this study to ensure the data and interpretations of the participants’
information were credible. The researcher utilized Lincoln and Guba’s techniques of peer debriefing and member checking to assist in ensuring the credibility of this study.

**Peer debriefing.** Peer debriefing was an activity the researcher used to increase the credibility of the inquiry process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process involves the use of a disinterested (i.e., a person not involved with the research) peer as an individual who essentially keeps the researcher honest by asking hard questions about the methods, meanings, and interpretations of the study (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The peer debriefer served as a sounding board for the researcher to explore new ideas and get a fresh perspective on the researcher’s thoughts, feelings, and process (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). The researcher found a doctoral candidate, versed in qualitative research, who was willing to take on the role. The researcher utilized the peer debriefer to periodically check in about the process of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting the data. The peer was used to assist and discuss the researcher’s biases, working hypotheses, meanings, and emergent themes. The peer also specifically helped to corroborate and refute the researcher’s interpretations and analysis of the formulated meanings and emergent themes. Specifically, the peer was given a 3-paged section (pages 5–8) from every participant’s transcript, as well as the corresponding formulated meanings and themes to examine the researcher’s findings. If the peer disagreed, the feedback was discussed and resolved between the peer and researcher. This process was utilized for clarification of the researcher’s internal and external processes during data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). Both the peer debriefer and researcher documented each encounter for purposes
of recreating the study in the future and justifying steps of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Member checking.** Member checking was another activity utilized to increase credibility of the findings for this study. This activity is a direct test of the findings and interpretations with the participants who constructed them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba believed this to be one of the most crucial steps in establishing credibility. This activity included the researcher taking the transcripts, significant statements, formulated meanings, and emergent themes back to the participants of the study to critique the accuracy and credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher gave clear instructions about the member checking process. It was explained to the participants that their feedback and revisions are an essential part of qualitative research to help ensure the accuracy of the researcher’s interpretations of their statements.

Member checking was conducted three times during the study: after the first interview, after the second interview, and at the end of data analysis. In the study, member checking for the first two interviews was a two-fold process; the participants verified both the accuracy of the transcripts and evaluated the meanings deduced and interpretations made by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). For the final member check, the participants only reviewed and gave feedback on the emergent themes of the phenomena. The first member checking took place in person, and consisted of the participants reviewing their individual transcripts, significant statements, and formulated meanings. The second member checking took place over email and
phone. The participants reviewed the transcripts of their second interview, significant statements, formulated meanings, and emergent themes. The final member check took place over email and participants reviewed the final emergent themes after combining all participants’ individual themes together.

**Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed the ideas of transferability, dependability, and confirmability to assist in increasing trustworthiness of qualitative research. Due to the subjective nature of qualitative research, generalizability of qualitative findings cannot take place; however, transferability of the findings is appropriate under certain circumstances. This is why Lincoln and Guba suggested a thick description of the participants and environmental context is necessary. The thick description enables someone interested in making a transfer of the information to another population, to reach a conclusion about whether the association is appropriate. The thick description is demonstrated in this study by the description of the participants, the mindful parenting program, and the Insight Meditation of Cleveland.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) also discussed dependability as another way of establishing trustworthiness. They believed that through the several activities in credibility and the thick description of transferability, dependability or reliability of the data could be claimed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba stated that having multiple coders to help analyze the themes increased the dependability of the results. In this study, the researcher utilized a peer (peer debriefer) and the participants (member checking) to evaluate and alter a sample of the themes discovered. The peer debriefer
assisted the researcher by reviewing the participants’ significant statements that were formulated into meanings. The peer debriefer also corroborated or refuted portions of the participants’ individual themes and the final combined themes.

Finally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the confirmability of the findings by methods of an audit or audit trail. An audit trail is described as a way another person can see the steps taken by the researcher who conducted the study, for replication purposes. The researcher was deliberate in documenting the precise actions, thoughts, and steps taken in the research study for an audit trail. Specifically, the raw data, formulated meanings, themes, instrument, and reflexivity journal were made available to anyone interested in recreating the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Reflexivity**

One final technique utilized throughout the researcher’s process of gathering and analyzing the data was reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexivity is a procedure of self-disclosure used by the researcher to better understand his or her beliefs, understandings, and biases, and how they may shape the present research (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This journal is a place where the researcher documented information about herself and the method of collecting and analyzing the data. Lincoln and Guba suggested three reasonable areas of documentation for the researcher on a daily and as needed basis: (a) daily schedule and logistics for study, (b) personal reflections, and (c) methodological log. Being the central instrument in the study, the researcher electronically documented in a confidential file, her personal reflections, values, interests, and speculations about growing insights about the evolving study. This was essential to
help the researcher understand the data and findings more clearly. The researcher also reflected in the same journal about the method and decision making for collecting and analyzing the data. This helped to give insight to the researcher as well as to provide information about methodical decisions for the audit trail. This process was an essential way for the researcher to explore what was happening personally and professionally while conducting the study.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed the researcher’s methodology for the present study. The two main research questions for this study were: (a) What are the lived experiences of parents with young children, who practice being mindful in their daily lives; and (b) What are mindful parents’ perceptions of their attachments with their young children? A phenomenological approach to data collection and analysis was chosen to help the researcher explore the lived experiences of parents with young children who were practicing mindfulness in their daily lives, as well as how the attachment between child and parent are experienced by parents. The next chapter describes the findings of this research study.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

This chapter discusses the results of this phenomenological study of the lived experiences of mindful parents with young children. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the participants of this study, discuss organization of the data, and provide an overview of the emergent themes. Two questions that guided this research were: (a) What are the lived experiences of parents with young children, who practice being mindful in their daily lives? (b) What are mindful parents’ perceptions of their attachments with their young children? The data resulted in 6 themes: (a) mindful values in parenting, (b) mindful skills in parenting, (c) relationship with child, (d) awareness of the internal mindset, (e) a safe haven for the family, and (f) obstacles to mindful parenting, that described the participants’ experiences of mindfully parenting young children.

Participants

This research study explored the experiences of eight participants who identified themselves as mindful parents. The sample included three males and five females, all of whom identified as Caucasian and married. Participants’ ages ranged from 32 to 60. Participants reported having at least one child, at the time of the study, aged between three months and six years. Six participants reported practicing mindfulness before having a child, and the other two participants reported only practicing mindfulness within the context of their parent-child relationship. Four of the participants were recruited directly from the Mindful Parent Meetings sponsored by Insight Meditation of Cleveland, whereas the other four responded to a recruitment flyer in the electronic newsletter from
the Insight Meditation of Cleveland. Each participant met the inclusion criteria of (a) interested in the concepts of mindfulness; (b) had children between three months and six years old; (c) attended the Mindful Parenting Program at the Insight Meditation of Cleveland, or self-reported experience or knowledge of mindful parenting concepts; and (d) self-reported attempts at applying mindfulness skills within the parent-child relationship.

The following section describes each participant in the order in which they were interviewed during the data collection process. This section gives a portrait of the participants’ demographic information and participation during the interview. Table 4 offers a summary of the demographic information obtained from each participant. To aid confidentiality, all participants chose a pseudonym to be referred to for the study.

Violette

Violette, a 38-year-old Caucasian female, described herself as a “stay at home mom” who previously worked full time in human resources before choosing to stay home full time with her children. At the time of the interview, she had two children, aged 2 and 5, and was married to their father. Violette reported practicing mindfulness for nearly 20 years, and had incorporated mindfulness into parenting with her first child who was born 5 years ago. Violette was interested and engaged in the subject of mindfulness and mindful parenting, as evidenced by her involvement in the mindful parenting group, the lengthy interview discussions, and bringing in her own books to refer to in the interview. Violette also created her own diagram (displayed in theme 5) that she shared with the researcher in her second interview, demonstrating her view of using mindfulness within
parenting. Violette was open and exploratory while discussing the interview questions and often reflected on her schooling, books she had read, and her own experiences as a parent.

Table 4

Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Children’s Ages (in years)</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Current Occupation</th>
<th>Martial Status</th>
<th>Years Practicing Mindfulness and Mindful Parenting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violette</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5, 2</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Stay at home mom</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>20 years 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>8 years 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33, 29, 3</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Director of Engineering</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>15 years 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>8 years 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josie</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6, 4, 2, 6mths</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Mental Health Therapist</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0 years 5.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricardo</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6, 4, 2, 6mths</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Manager Transportation</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0 years 5.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>University professor</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>8 years 2.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6, 2.5</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Research Assistant Professor</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>6.5 years 6 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Angela

Angela, a 42-year-old Caucasian female, described herself as a “housewife” who previously worked full time in a highly competitive business environment before
choosing to stay home full time with her child. At the time of the interview, she had one child who was 3 years old and was married to the child’s father. Angela reported practicing mindfulness for over 8 years and incorporated mindfulness into her parenting practices since her child was born. Angela was enthusiastic about the subject matter of the interview, evidenced by the extended interviews and engagement in the mindful parenting group. Angela was engaged and thoughtful in the interview discussions, often giving personal examples of the topic at hand. She reported being very involved and conscious about her family’s health, particularly regarding food purchasing and consumption. Angela also reported practicing yoga and mindful exercises regularly, and that yoga was a major aspect of her well-being.

Jack

Jack, a 60-year-old Caucasian male, reported working full-time as a director of engineering. At the time of the study, Jack had three children aged 33, 29, and 3 and was married to his youngest child’s mother. Jack reported having practiced mindfulness for over 15 years, and incorporated mindfulness practices into his parenting since his last son was born 3 years ago. Jack reported that during his studies of mindfulness over the years, he became a meditation instructor, and also has a personal daily meditation practice. Jack showed interest in participation in this study evidenced by the consistent and enthusiastic communication about the topic via email as well as during the interviews. During communication with the researcher, Jack shared that mindful parenting was an important subject to him, and that he was excited research was being done on “such an important
Jack was thoughtful and engaged during the interviews and often shared personal examples from his own practices as a parent and a meditation teacher.

**Karen**

Karen, a 45-year-old Caucasian female, described her daily activities as a “homemaker.” Karen has a Ph.D. in Social Work, and previously worked as a psychotherapist and researcher. At the time of the study, Karen had one child who was 3 years old and was married to the child’s father. Karen reported practicing mindfulness for the past 8 years, and incorporated it into her parenting since her child was born. Karen reported being involved in teaching meditation and mindfulness in the community, as well as has a personal daily practice of meditation. Karen shared that she was personally very interested in the topic of mindful parenting and often wished there was a larger community of mindful parents to help support each other in parenting their children mindfully.

**Josie**

Josie, a 32-year-old Caucasian female, worked full-time as a mental health counselor for a community agency. At the time of the study, Josie had four children aged 6, 4, 2, and 6 months, and was married to their father. Josie reported that she had not practiced mindfulness outside of incorporating it in her parenting-child relationship; therefore in Table 4, she had 0 years of practicing mindfulness, and 5.5 years of practicing mindful parenting. Josie reported she began using mindfulness skills within her parenting a little after her first child was born, about 5.5 years ago. Even though Josie had not attended mindful parenting meetings, she was eager and enthusiastic to be a
part of the study as evidenced by the quick response to the recruitment flyer and setting up interview times. Being a participant in the study was important to her as evidenced by her dedication to the interview times and member checking, even though she has an extremely busy schedule with work and raising four children. During the interviews, Josie was articulate and open to sharing personal and professional examples on the topic, and felt passionate about parenting her four young children mindfully.

**Ricardo**

Ricardo, a 34-year-old Caucasian male, worked full-time as a transportation manager for a midsized city. At the time of the study, Ricardo had four children, aged 6, 4, 2, and 6 months, and was married to their mother. Ricardo reported never practicing mindfulness before incorporating it into his parenting practices a little after his first child was born 5.5 years ago. Ricardo reported that he had not practiced mindfulness outside of incorporating it in his parent-child relationship; therefore in Table 4, he had 0 years of practicing mindfulness, and 5.5 years of practicing mindful parenting. Ricardo shared that he was uneasy calling his parenting style “mindful parenting” because “it is just what I have always done.” Ricardo shared that he thought he and his wife had been some of the first parents to use these certain skills with their family, until his wife told him that what they were doing as parents was being mindful of the children and the relationship with them. During the interviews, Ricardo was engaged and open as evidenced by sharing many personal examples from his family life. The interviews lasted a shorter amount of time than other participants’ interviews; however, they were abundant with personal examples of parenting his children mindfully.
Fred

Fred, a 33-year-old Caucasian male, worked full-time as university professor for a local university. At the time of the interview, Fred had one child who was 2.5 years old and was married to the child’s mother. Fred reported that he had practiced mindfulness for 8 years and incorporated it into his parenting since his child was born. Fred reported learning about the Zen Buddhists’ traditions and meditations, and also read many books on mindfulness and parenting. Fred also shared a list of resources with the researcher about the different mindfulness and parenting books he mentioned in the interviews. Fred was cooperative with the interview process and was thoughtful and open about the topics as evidenced by his personal examples shared from his life during the interview.

Eleanor

Eleanor, a 39-year-old Caucasian female, worked part-time as a research assistant professor at a local university. At the time of the interview, Eleanor had two children, aged 6 and 2.5 years of age, and was married to their father. Eleanor reported learning about practicing mindfulness while she was pregnant; she therefore reported 6.5 years for beginning both mindfulness and mindful parenting. Eleanor reported being an avid reader of mindfulness concepts and literature, and used meditation and yoga for a daily mindfulness practice. Eleanor was enthusiastic and articulate about the subject, as evidenced by the personal examples shared during extended interviews.

Summary of Participants

All of the participants were invested in the subject of mindfulness in parenting as evidenced by their response to the recruitment flyer and fulfilling their full participation
in the research. Each participant took his or her role as a participant seriously by maintaining regular and consistent contact with the researcher via email. All of the participants made time in their demanding schedules of parenting young children to schedule and attend both interviews, as well as participate in member checking and follow up emails. The participants responded to the researcher’s emails in a timely manner, and were apologetic when they were delayed in returning emails with the researcher.

During the interviews, the participants voluntarily shared many quality examples and experiences of being mindful while parenting, often showing vulnerability in discussing many personal topics about parenting and being a member of a family. Some of the participants’ styles of communicating about the interview topics were demonstrated through personal examples and stories of their experiences. On the other hand, other participants were more comfortable speaking in terms of important concepts they learned through what they had read, been taught, or believed. Although each participant had his or her own subjective experiences of being a mindful parent to share with the researcher, through data analysis it was evident that there were many shared experiences of the phenomenon. The remainder of the chapter explores the commonalities of the beliefs and experiences of the participants.

**Summary of Results**

This section explores the qualitative results that emerged from the participants’ data. Specifically, this section addresses how the researcher arrived at the major themes and categories of data followed by a description of the themes, categories, and
subcategories, and a summary of the chapter. The six emergent themes were: (a) mindful values in parenting, (b) mindful skills in parenting, (c) relationship with child, (d) awareness of the internal mindset, (e) a safe haven for the family, and (f) obstacles to mindful parenting (see Table 5).

**Overview of the Emergent Themes**

The first emergent theme, mindful values in parenting, described the participants’ shared values within parenting. The values that emerged from the data described how the participants viewed their children in a respectful and sovereign way, wanting to interact with their children with intention and in the present moment. The second emergent theme of mindful skills in parenting described the participants’ mindfulness skills while interacting with their children. The skills implemented by the participants focused on being attuned with their child’s emotions and needs, and viewing the child as a guide to help them be parents. The third emergent theme of relationship with child discussed the relationship and bond the participants had with their children, and how the participants experienced the parent-child relationship. The fourth emergent theme discussed participants’ awareness of their internal mindset and how self-awareness was an essential tool of mindful parenting. The fifth emergent theme, safe haven for the family, discussed the participants’ desires to structure their family environment in a way that facilitated mindful parenting. Participants described the various ways they practiced self-care strategies, used support systems in their environments, and were aware of cultural influences and technology near their family. The sixth theme, obstacles to mindful
parenting, described the challenges and sacrifices that impacted parents’ mindful interactions with their children.

Table 5

Outline of Emergent Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 1: Mindful Values in Parenting</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Moment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sovereignty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility and Unattached View</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 2: Mindful Skills in Parenting</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a Model and Guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attune to Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s Been a Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness as a Lens for Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 3: Relationship with Child</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy and Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Perfect Fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affection and Bond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embracing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship over Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 4: Awareness of the Internal Mindset</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residue from Childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion for Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 5: A Safe Haven for the Family</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Care Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child’s School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Aspects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme 6: Obstacles to Mindful Parenting</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrifices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The open-ended exploratory nature of the original research questions for the study helped to arrive at six emergent themes. The themes explored the first research question in depth with many concrete and explicit experiences about the participants’ experiences of being mindful with young children. For example, participants explicitly stated experiences they had as a mindful parent such as Karen “feeling respect for who my child is” and Josie “reflecting on my own stuff as a parent.” The six themes gave new light into the subjective experiences of being parents who interact with their children mindfully. The themes also addressed the second research question in several different ways. Specifically, the second research question was addressed through Theme 3: the relationship with the children, by participants discussing their experiences of the relationship. The second research question was also answered through implicit messages within the experiences parents had with their children. Participants often found it difficult to describe their feelings about their children, often stating things similar to Jack “it is hard to put into words,” and Josie “I don’t, I mean it’s just so amazing.”

**Theme 1: Mindful Values in Parenting**

Participants revealed that they held many fundamental values that guided how they parented and interacted with their young children. The categories within this theme of mindful values in parenting include: (a) present moment, (b) sovereignty, (c) intentional, (d) acceptance, (e) flexibility and unattached view, and (f) family unit (see Table 6). These categories helped to describe the basic understanding and beliefs that participants had about parenting their children and how they viewed child development. The participants established that they were intentional and mindful while interacting with
their children, and reported having respect and compassion for their children. The following categories describe the thoughts and interactions of the participants, and the importance of their values while parenting.

Table 6

*Outline of Theme 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 1: Mindful Values in Parenting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Present Moment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Sovereignty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Intentional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Flexibility and Unattached View</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) Family Unit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Present moment.** The participants stating that being in the present moment was essential when interacting with their children. Participants described present moment as a fundamental value that helped them understand and enjoy their children and the role of parenting. Most participants said that being in the here and now was a foundational concept to their practice of mindfulness and was applied to their parent-child relationship.

Participants often explained that as a parent, they made conscious attempts not to think about the past or what needed to happen in the future, and to just be with their child in the present moment. Participants expressed that this ability to be in the present moment was challenging, but when practiced, became much easier. Karen described an experience she had earlier (the day of the interview) with her son when she noticed that
her mind was running from thought to thought aimlessly. Karen described refocusing her mind to the present moment while on an outing to the park:

I could feel myself being like “ah man” [I need or could be doing other things] but I didn’t really have to be anywhere except here [the interview], I had plenty of time. So I was able to call that to mind, you really don’t have to be anywhere, this is kind of a beautiful day, and he had to miss school, so this is a nice way to spend it.

Karen described how she was able to observe herself worrying about being certain places at certain times, and how that was impacting her enjoyment of her time with her son. She then was able to redirect her mind to the present moment with her son and enjoyed their time together.

Participants expressed how important it was for them to be fully present with their children. As Jack described what mindful parenting was to him, he shared, “the key one is paying attention.” He continued, “that’s probably the key piece to it, being attentive to what’s true in the present moment.” Participants saw the present moment as the most valuable and fulfilling place to have interactions with their children. Violette stated that being mindful or being in the present moment with her child was important because she saw her role as a parent as fleeting:

You know that is why it is so important to choose, as a parent, to be mindful. So that during this relatively short period of time, I have the confidence to just be with that child . . . mindful, and to help give them the skills that are needed, this transcends a lot of external influences.
To Violette, being mindful in her parenting gave her the confidence and skills to be in the here and now with her children, and to really get to know her children while they are young.

Eleanor shared an experience where instead of listening to her family or being embarrassed in the situation when her child was having an emotional reaction, she listened to what her child needed in the moment:

I just held him tightly, and we talked about families and we talked about activities, as he was coming back like, not really caring about what anybody else around me was needing or wanting... . . . But what he needed was to be away from that situation at that moment. Like he needed a, he was melting down, he was freaking out. And to be able to put my kid’s needs first and be totally present to what he needed, that was challenging.

Eleanor described how she purposefully took the time to ensure her child’s well-being during a stressful event for him. She described how being in the moment with him helped him cope and be comforted.

Many of the participants explained how being in the present moment was an important way to get to know their children. Angela described her choice to be mindful of the present moment as:

Instead of blowing through it [into another task], which you know that I am not mindful all the time, but to even have a moment to sit and watch him, and when he looks at me with such love and such trust and such... it’s just so... it’s something that is so beautiful. I think we miss a lot [learning about the child]
when we are so busy trying to keep up with the Jones’s or keep up with our inner Jones’s.

Angela described how being in the present moment with her child was calming to her, and gave her the ability to just sit and watch her son and his interests. She described being mindful in this experience as her ability to just “be” with her son, and not become distracted by other tasks. Many participants specifically shared that when they were mindful of the present moment, they were able to see different unique characteristics and qualities about their children and how their children experience the world. Fred shared, “there’s things that he does that will catch me, when he’ll smile at something random or laugh . . . that catches me more” while discussing ways in which he is present with his child. Fred and other participants described how they get “pulled in” the present moment by just observing their children enjoying and being so present themselves with an activity or experience.

Participants also shared about special times with their children, and how they got swept up in the moment because that was where the child was most of the time. Eleanor shared a candid moment with her daughter:

Mommy . . . and I said “yeah” in the dark, “you’re beautiful,” and again it’s one of those things that like brings me back to like . . . any, like it was just able to pull me to the present so perfectly and easily.

Participants described their understanding of being present with their children and the importance it has to the children, and themselves as well. They often described it as this place of quiet and peace, where they can really focus on their child and the true
intricacies of parenting. Participants shared that being in the present moment was an essential part to parenting mindfully and respecting the role of a parent to their children.

**Sovereignty.** Another core value addressed by all of the participants was the idea of sovereignty, or respecting the child’s autonomy and independence. All participants explored the many ways in which they wanted their children to experience autonomy and independence over themselves, their preferences, emotions, and choices. Participants expressed their ability to empathize with the children’s perspective and have a deep respect for their autonomy. Josie compared it to taste buds and that her children do not have to like certain foods because everyone’s taste buds are different; she commented, “I expect you [her children] to be respectful, but you are your own person, you don’t have to like [the] stuff that I do.” Karen shared why the values of mindful parenting and sovereignty are so important to her parenting:

So I think the mindful parenting piece or mindfulness piece, are the values I want to keep in play, and keeping them in mind is huge. Then I can act from them. Yeah, what is it that I am really trying to convey to him [her son], and is us getting to school on time really [more] important than me respecting for his independence, his sovereignty to get into his car seat by himself? I mean some days I decided yes, and I think there is a place for that . . . but I try to minimize them [instances of forcing her child].

By continually evaluating what her values were and what she wanted her child to experience, Karen was able to allow her child independence and show him the respect
she thought he deserved. The idea of showing children respect was stated several times by all of the participants.

Ricardo communicated the importance and challenge of respecting his children’s unique independent personalities:

I think that the hardest thing to being a parent is accepting [that] your kids are individual people, and they are not always what you want them to be . . . but still allowing them to be that, and not trying to force them. We try to respect, you know, their different personalities and let them be their own people.

Ricardo shared a story about his 2.5-year-old son who was eating pancakes out at a restaurant, and how he “was eating his pancakes, basically like a pie eating contest.” Ricardo and his wife had offered to help their son cut the pancakes, but his son declined and continued to eat the pancakes with his hands and to lick the plate. Ricardo wanted his son to experience his breakfast in the way that his son wanted, and tried to work with him, rather than “trying to buck it [the child’s will] all the time.”

Two participants quoted from a mindful parenting book by Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (1997) when they spoke about the respect they had for their children’s autonomy. Violette shared a segment of the book that affected her and her mindful behaviors toward her children:

If you see a child as a guest in your home, for 18 years, always give them that respect. You know how you would treat a guest in your home, and just remember that is really what they are. That doesn’t mean ignore the responsibilities . . . but
having that level of respect [for them], and I think mindfulness or my mindful
behavior is a way of showing them respect.

Violette stated that by viewing her children as autonomous guests in her home rather than
someone she has control over, she was better able to respect her children’s independence
and preferences. She shared that mindfulness skills have taught her that “I truly do not
have control over what the receiver, my child, is thinking or doing; they are definitely
individuals.”

Participants shared an idea about a foundation or structure around their family and
children, so the children can be free to be themselves within that family structure.

Angela spoke often about the importance of this foundation or structure:

He [her son] has the freedom to be himself, and what does that look like for him?

He gets to explore that. So I feel like when I am more mindful, then I, it’s like I
get out of his way. He’s not mine, you know what I mean? I feel like I am
supposed to be on the sidelines, helping guide him through life.

Angela spoke often of the structure (e.g., food, toys, limited electronics and television,
people) for her family, and how she was very mindful about setting up the structure, so
then her child can be free to explore things within those boundaries. Most of the
participants described the idea that parents have the ability to set up a foundation or
structure around the child so the child could then explore what he or she wanted. This
was important to the participants so their children would not be exposed to things of
which the parents did not approve, such as technology or television. Instead, children
could explore the safe and child-appropriate things however they wanted. Fred shared
that “we are definitely conscious of putting a lot of structure in place for him to then be free within.” This idea of minimizing outside influences was a very strong topic for most of the participants and is discussed in more detail in Theme 3; however, it is also relevant in discussing the sovereignty of the child. Participants were conscious about setting up the structure for their family, and recognizing their own influence over their children was another aspect of sovereignty for their children.

Another notion that was revisited many times through the interviews was the idea that in order to help children get to know themselves, parents have to get out of their way. Angela made reference to this several times in her interviews, how she did not want to control every experience her son had; rather “I want him to explore and find what he loves. Let him tell me, and not the other way around. So that is part of me getting out of the way.” Participants agreed that respecting the sovereignty of the child means being aware of when your child is exploring something, and to stand aside while the child is learning and investigating the environment. To do this, the participants shared that they were intentional about their actions when parenting their young child.

**Intentional.** The value of being intentional was discussed by most of the participants in the study. The participants disclosed many situations during which they were intentional and deliberate when responding to and interacting with their children. Participants described intentionality as not reacting with automatic and mindless responses, but rather being mindful and aware of the present moment interactions with their children, and having thoughtful intentions behind their parenting behaviors. Eleanor spoke about her process of making herself clearer to her children, rather than just
assuming that her children knew what she was thinking and being “just on autopilot.” To Eleanor, she recognized that she wanted to be more overt and clear to her children about what she was doing during that moment, rather than assuming her children knew what she was doing or what she needed. To help her in doing this with her children, Eleanor stated:

Like you kind of come back to the present, and sometimes you need to take a breath and sometimes you need to revisit and question and just . . . the mindfulness ultimately. It’s like, you know, intentionally [reflecting] and how am I doing . . . checking in. Being that, being very clear on who you want to be and who you want your kids to be, what you what them to learn from you.

To Eleanor, it was important for her to continually revisit her values and foundations of mindfulness, and what kind of parent and model she wanted to be. She was intentional about checking in with herself and implementing thoughtful interactions and intentions towards her children.

Violette described the essence of mindfulness as being intentional; “mindfulness gives you the gift of being aware and conscious of everything that you are doing, so that you are not just continually making rash decisions based upon external influences.” Most of the participants expressed the desire to be conscious and have thoughtful interactions with their children rather than reacting automatically or inappropriately.

The idea about being deliberate throughout the day was also very important to Angela, so much so that she developed a ritual to help her intentions:
There are many times in the day I have to stop or go into the bathroom, if I am in a public situation and I am having negative thoughts, I excuse myself from myself and go into the bathroom and set an intention. I wash my hands and start over, or I start the morning before I get out of bed. I set the intention and I just kind of set myself aside. So I try to be less robotic throughout my day, and I set these intentions of being peaceful, loving, kind, authentic, and clear. I mean I do that on a daily basis, sometimes all day long [laughs].

Angela was very clear about wanting that awareness and distance from herself and the negative place that she was in, so that then she could be intentional about what she was doing and feeling. Certain rituals helped her to be present and stay centered on her values in parenting and how she wanted to be as a person. Karen utilized her awareness within herself to know when she was having a difficult time to “kind of reset my intentions, you know, like oh man, I am not really feeling very patient around him [her son] right now and maybe I can think for a minute about what is my intention.”

Participants utilized their awareness of thoughts and feelings to know when they were reactionary in a situation with their children, and attempted to reframe and go forward with more intention.

A few participants discussed how intentions could sometimes be construed as something different than just wanting the best outcome for the situation. Fred saw intention as a complex idea that needed to be balanced between your intention of how things should go, and then the acceptance of letting things happen as they should. Fred shared:
So intentionality is a complex thing for me because part of my mindfulness is about setting the intention to be more mindful, but sometimes, I mean it would be, it is easy to have those intentions become, like, corrosive. So it’s like my intention is to play nicely with my son, and if he doesn’t want to play, “no we are going to play . . .” So I try to have the intention to be mindful, but not to sort of drive the situation.

A few participants were conscious about discussing the drawbacks of intentions, and how sometimes being stubborn in wanting things to go a certain way inhibited their acceptance of allowing things to unfold naturally.

Acceptance. All participants described acceptance, or the acknowledgment of a situation happening at that moment without trying to change it, as another important value in parenting. This category arose often as participants discussed the importance of letting go of their expectations, concerns, and worries that were getting in the way of their parenting values. Participants shared the importance of being able to trust in the natural flow of events in parenting and accepting what is happening next. Angela spoke of her ability to trust the process of situations rather than fear them, stating:

Be able to let go and trust the process of life. I think that being mindful, and having that as a tool allows me to trust in the process, natural organic process of life. Instead of trying to control every step of the way, so that big scary world out there is less scary.

Participants spoke of the fears that were present for them as parents, and how those fears, if not regulated, could increase the need for control over their children. Participants saw
and practiced the value of acceptance as a mindset to help balance their need to control how things are going to turn out.

Eleanor shared specifically about the difficulty of accepting what is happening in the moment, due to the unpredictability of parenting young children:

I think that it [acceptance] is extremely challenging with kids because life is chaotic kind of all the time. It is changing all the time and there is nothing predictable, and there is nothing that, if you are a person that is into control, making and planning, kids do not do that.

Participants articulated that children were often unpredictable and discussed how that impacted parenting on a daily basis. Participants shared that acceptance of this unpredictability was helpful in being a better person and parent. Josie embraced the idea of accepting change:

I don’t think anything is constant in life. It is a part of the fun I think, it’s the part of the fun to hear about these people [her children] and hear what is going on in their head and how they view the world, I mean it’s [change] just constant.

Josie shared her ability to enjoy the daily changes in her children because it gave her the chance to get to know her children on a deeper level and worry less about control of what was happening.

Jack often spoke about the concept of “spaciousness” for his life, family, and son, and how acceptance of the space around him was essential to his parenting. Jack shared an example of dinner plans he made for later on that day. He stated that if something fell
through like the babysitter got sick or the other couple could not make it, and he and his wife stayed home instead of going to dinner, that would be the best thing. Jack stated:

Whatever happens in that space is okay . . . so it’s not like the space has to be filled with a particular thing. What’s true, that’s the best thing for that space. It’s not giving up [anything] to parent that way.

Jack expressed that “in a way, it is kind of a gift,” to parent in a way of complete acceptance of everything. Jack shared that it was important to him to be able to accept all things happening as the best thing possible, and to enjoy and experience all of the moments no matter what they are.

**Flexibility and unattached view.** Participants spoke often about the importance of being flexible in situations and having an unattached view of the outcome while parenting. This category was based on the participants’ discussions of their ability and desire to adjust to what was happening with their child, rather than going forward with what they thought should be happening in that moment. Eleanor reflected changing and being flexible in her parenting style:

You’ve got to follow your gut. You’ve got to go with the flow. You’ve got to be flexible. You’ve got to look back, admit when you’re wrong. Fix it. Do it over. Do it differently next time. Be there, don’t keep following the same crappy patterns that you saw, or that come more easily.

Eleanor saw flexibility in parenting as being able to do things differently next time if you did not like how it turned out the first time and learning from past insights and mistakes.
Fred, saw the importance of flexibility in parenting style through the ever-changing needs of his son’s eating habits:

I mean just sort of realizing there’s a bigger pattern over time that makes a difference and . . . every moment is not make or break . . . change is always going to happen. He’ll eat this for a few days and then he won’t want it anymore.

Participants reported that being flexible in light of the changing needs of the child was important in staying calm in stressful and frustrating situations, and helpful in being unattached to a particular outcome of the child or situation.

Participants also shared about the need for flexibility when considering the child’s changing development over time. Participants saw the need for changing with the children as they grew and developed. Ricardo discussed his ability to adjust and be flexible over time to his children’s developing individual personalities. “I had to adjust my expectation, because they [his children] didn’t know what I wanted them to be, and I wouldn’t change them now, because I know that they are better than I would have imagined.” The concept of being flexible to children’s developing interests and personalities was something that many participants acknowledged as one of their favorite parts of parenting, and helped inspire them to keep learning about their children as they change.

Participants reflected on the significance of having an unattached view, or letting go of expectations, as an advantage. This helped them be happier and more satisfied parents and people. Jack reflected on his experience raising his first two, now grown
children without the skills of mindfulness and shared about this experience with his youngest son:

Yeah, it’s much less complicated. Much simpler . . . like the expectations of what is supposed to happen now. Which I remember with my two older kids, I didn’t have a mindfulness practice at all, expecting “well he’s this age, he should be doing A, B, and C,” and trying to get them to do certain things that I felt that was the time they needed to learn this, and it wasn’t! Looking back on it, it wasn’t! If it was, they would have done it.

Jack had the unique circumstance to have parented his first two children without any skills of mindfulness, and then by the time he had his youngest child, he was steeped in mindfulness theory and practices. According to Jack, parenting his youngest son had been much easier and straightforward for him, due to his ability to disengage himself from the outcomes and expectations of what his child should and should not be doing.

Jack learned that whatever stage the child was in at the moment was the right stage, and he learned how to follow his child’s lead. Karen saw having an unattached view as the crux of mindfulness as she was able to “watch all those stories and not let my story in about ‘well that’s pink, and that’s for girls,’ and feeling like I’m giving a more balanced response around his [her son’s] choice.” Participants discussed that watching their thoughts about what should be, with an unattached view, helped them to respond to their children in the way they wanted, rather than listening to outside messages applied to their family.
**Family unit.** Several participants discussed their value of spending time with their family and how the family time was special, enjoyable, and sacred. Jack stated the term “family unit” while discussing the meaningful and necessary relationships between him, his wife, and their son, and how the relationships between all members of their family are “all blended together.” Josie shared her experience of spending time with her children:

My mentality is that our kids are not a burden; our kids are a privilege. I am happy to hang out with them; I enjoy spending time with them. So it makes family time easier, because it’s like I am hanging out with my friends. I don’t consider them my friends, but I consider them people I like to be with.

One common belief for Josie was that her family members were her favorite people to hang out with and she did not feel burdened by the responsibilities of parenting. She saw parenting as an opportunity to spend time with people she loved and cared about. Josie stated that she and her husband often laugh about their family not needing a big house because “we are on the couch, and there is a long row that can fit like 12 people, and sometimes we are all on the same cushion!”

Participants often spoke of the special rituals and practices their families had in place that demonstrated the love and intimacy of their family. Eleanor shared an example of her family time ritual:

We instituted it in the last month or two, it’s where we will all gather and lay in our bed at the end of the day and read together, and that has been so nice. Because then we are just all coming together and we are not like one parent is
doing something else, but all four of us lay in our king sized bed and just snuggle and read.

Participants discussed how their families valued spending time together doing certain rituals and how they came to depend on that time with their children as a necessary thing that they treasured.

Ricardo shared the ritual, goal, and value he held about spending quality time with his family during certain times every week:

For me, that would be the goal is that we are setting some sort of family expectation and that is what we do. You know, we have our certain traditions we do, weekly Fridays and Sundays we try to have family time, we try to do different things and they [the children] get upset when we don’t have them, so it’s good.

Ricardo discussed an agreement his family had about spending time together, and shared that the children really look forward to and are disappointed and upset if that time together is disturbed. Eleanor shared her experience of distancing herself from work to be able to spend more time with her children. “I will not go to conferences anymore . . . before my son was born, I made a very conscious decision, unless we are all going, I’m not going.” Eleanor decided that her family spending time together set precedence over professional obligations. Participants discussed that spending quality time with their family was an important value to them as mindful parents and it became something both the parents and children cherished.

In summary, Theme 1 discussed the participants’ mindful values in parenting as described in the interviews. The values the participants held were ideas and frameworks
of how they viewed their children, parenting, and family. It was important to the
participants to respect the sovereignty of the child, as well as be intentional while
interacting with their child. Participants also discussed the significance of acceptance
and flexibility in parenting. Lastly, participants established their view of family unit as
family time being a source of enjoyment and pleasure. Now that the groundwork of
values has been established, the skills and activities of the participants are discussed next.

**Theme 2: Mindful Skills in Parenting**

The participants discussed the variety of mindful skills they used while parenting
their young children. The second theme, mindful skills in parenting, had several
categories: (a) parenting strategies, (b) being a model and guide, (c) attune to child, (d)
it’s been a process, and (e) mindfulness as a lens for life (see Table 7). The participants
shared ideas and skills they implemented surrounding disciplining, teaching, and dealing
with the common challenges of parenting young children. These skills were
contemplated, and applied in the daily practices of the participants’ mindful parenting.

Table 7

*Outline of Theme 2*

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<th>Theme 2: Mindful Skills in Parenting</th>
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<td>(a) Parenting Strategies</td>
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<td>(e) Mindfulness as a Lens for Life</td>
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Parenting strategies. In this category, all participants described their thoughts and implementation of mindfulness skills into their parenting interactions with their children. Even though the participants utilized a variety of different skills that worked within their own families, there were many overlapping ideas and concepts the participants shared.

One concept that was prevalent through most of the participants’ interviews was the idea of keeping calm while disciplining or interacting with your child. Participants described using mindfulness skills as a way for them to react in a developmentally appropriate way in stressful situations with their child. Violette shared an example of when her 2.5-year-old daughter heard the sounds of an ambulance while she was in a group of children outside near the street. A few moments later, her daughter then saw a white truck coming down the street and began turning toward it in an attempt to walk toward the vehicle, thinking it was the ambulance. Violette shared:

Obviously you are going to stop her from running in the road and being a non-mindful parent would actually come across as being very insensitive and not being aware of what her little mind was looking for. . . . She’s not a 38-year-old adult who knows better, she is 2½! So being mindful is the kindest, most compassionate way you can be a parent . . . and it also gives you an opportunity to teach as a form of actual discipline; not to just be overly authoritative and never give them reasons that are age appropriate.

Violette and other participants saw their mindful parenting strategies as a way to help them appropriately react in a situation, and know how to discipline or teach their children
at developmentally appropriate age levels. Violette was aware that her child was interested in the ambulance sounds, but also saw she might be thinking that the white truck coming down the street was the ambulance. Rather than being frustrated or upset at her daughter for almost going in the street because of an interest, Violette used the experience as a moment to stay calm and teach her daughter. Violette was aware of where her child was and what she might be thinking, and that understanding helped her react mindfully in the situation. Participants often discussed the importance of and their ability to empathize and understand their children rather than expect their children to know and understand what the parent wanted or how the world works. Jack spoke of an example of when his son did not want to brush his teeth, and he began to notice his own frustration levels rise:

In my background, “I needed to get to work,” and my own experience with this, that’s one of my flags that tells me “pay attention” because here’s a situation where wills go different ways. There is this little will [his son’s will], which gets closed off . . . and then there is my will which is “get to work, let’s do our stuff, I know you are 3 but you should act like you are 30, let’s get this all done.”

Jack discussed joining with his son where he was in the moment, to then help his son do the things that needed to be done, rather than get frustrated because his son was not doing what he (Jack) wanted. Participants often explicitly discussed the importance and benefits in knowing the developmental levels of their children, and utilizing patience and understanding when communicating with their children.
Participants shared that being mindful of their children’s perspective and needs often resulted in being happier people and parents with more appropriate ways to handle the stressors of parenting. Jack believed that parenting with awareness “was a much more comfortable way to parent, with fewer battles, and many fewer stressful times.” Karen saw using mindfulness skills within her parenting as “well, I am definitely happier [laughs] as a person and a parent. I like feeling like I am a more skillful parent, often reacting in more appropriate ways.” Eleanor shared a tender example of a time when her daughter had a difficult time going to bed. Eleanor began to feel frustrated about her daughter still being awake:

And so with my daughter I was feeling a little agitated, and I said, “okay, you know what . . . let’s go do some yoga,” ’cause that’s kinda what I was gonna do next anyway, and I was trying to have some time to do some yoga.

Eleanor noticed her frustration growing in the situation because of a plan that she wanted to do next. So rather then forcing her child to do something that was not going easily, Eleanor invited her daughter to then do yoga with her instead. She described a very wonderful, mindful evening with her daughter, rather than a fight before bedtime.

Eleanor reflected on her mindful parenting strategies and choices.

Here are some choices; here are a couple of things that I can keep using to keep from getting worked up. There are techniques you can use, if you really practice them, to not get worked up and scream at your kids. You can teach them something in a moment, and have them learn it and not have it become a power struggle.
Eleanor utilized her mindfulness skills to help be the parent that she wanted to be, and as a way to be an appropriate model or guide for her children.

**Being a model and guide.** Participants often described themselves as guides for their children and models of mindfulness principles in their parenting practices. Participants spoke about modeling mindfulness, kindness, and compassionate practices that their children learn and experience through them. Violette shared, “I think that showing yourself compassion is a conscious skill that you are also teaching your own kids.” While reflecting on being a guide for her children, Eleanor stated:

I think that being a guide, this whole thing about not doing too much for them, modeling for them, talking to them . . . it’s important to be kind to others and then being careful when they [her children] are being not so kind with each other, to not bring about shame to them. Being careful.

Eleanor recognized that modeling for her children was a helpful way her children learned what was important, as well as not shaming them when they were doing something wrong. As a guide for her children, Eleanor was careful and considerate when teaching and disciplining them.

Josie used her relationship with her husband, as a model for how to treat people and family members. Josie spoke about her marital relationship as “being very transparent, we openly talk in front of the kids.” Josie believed that her children were learning important skills by watching their relationship; “we try to model that [respectful] behavior, and it’s natural for us, it’s not like we are trying to be perfect for the kids or anything, it’s just who we are.” Josie modeled and guided her children through her
relationship, knowing that was where her children would learn how to communicate and respect one another.

Karen saw mindful parenting as a place for self-improvement as well as good modeling for her son to see that people can continually work on themselves and change for the better:

We [parents] are going to be doing something; you might as well make it skillful. Either I continue to wear the rut in my mind that I have an addiction to chocolate or I am going to take another path. Not only am I doing it for myself for my own personal development, I want my son to see that, I want him to see “oh we can keep changing!”

Similar to Karen, Jack believed mindful parenting “provided good role modeling for [my son] on how to be,” sharing that as a father, he is teaching his son “how to deal with life stressors and how to deal with things that don’t go your way.” Many of the participants saw an advantage of being mindful while parenting was that their child could learn many of the fundamental skills and values of mindfulness from the relationship with the parent, while simultaneously understanding and attuning to the needs of the child.

Attune to child. Participants described attuning to their children as a valuable tool and skill that helped the participants get to know their children on the children’s level, and be more attentive to their needs in the moment. Participants saw their ability to attune to their children’s needs was more effective when they were more mindful or thoughtful in situations. Angela stated:
When I am mindful, I can get down on [her son’s name] level and say wherever he is at in his process of getting ready, “do you need help, or do you want to do it on your own?” versus saying to him “what are you doing, get your clothes on!” Angela noticed that she was able to attune to her child more when she was thoughtful in situations, rather than an automatic response of being less patient and kind when helping her son. Participants discussed that when they were on their child’s level, there was less resistance and tension and the child was more able to participate in what the parent needed.

Participants often noted that when their children were more stressed, they too felt more stressed and uncomfortable. Similarly, when the parents were calm and understanding, their children were less stressed and had an easier time going along with what was needed. Jack shared an example of helping his son get ready in the morning:

He [his son] was playing with a couple cars, so what I decided to do was to tune to him, where he was in the moment, and to what was going on for him in that moment. He was playing with his cars, so washing his hands and brushing his teeth was probably the furthest thing from his mind . . . I asked him “how about we take your cars . . . and see if they can come and watch you wash your hands and brush your teeth.” And he said “yeah” so we drove them to the bathroom and parked them beside the sink and he washed his hands. Jack shared this example as an instance of when he utilized the present moment to attune to his son, and gently help him with what needed to be done next. Rather than forcing him to brush his teeth and wash his hands, Jack was aware of where his son’s mindset
was, and then utilized that to teach his son about hygiene while still feeling in control and respected. Jack was explicit in this example about the interaction being a fluid and natural situation with his son that stemmed from respecting his son’s sovereignty, rather than a corrosive and manipulating maneuver to get the child to do something.

This concept of embracing children where they are was also important to Ricardo stating:

You can spend your whole life trying to force them into something that they are never going to achieve, or try to at least embrace who they are, embrace who they are and help them grow from there. So that kind of goes into respecting who they are.

Ricardo believed in acceptance of who his children are, and letting them teach him about how he can best help and love them, rather than have expectations about what they should do. Participants described attuning to their children as a process that developed over time of respecting their children in the moment and using the skills of mindfulness to react in ways they value with their children.

**It’s been a process.** Several participants described that learning to use mindfulness skills within the parent-child relationship was something that needed continual revisions and reminders within themselves. Like any skill that develops over time, some participants reported that being mindful with their children did not come effortlessly, and they frequently used reminders and assistance to aid them in being mindful with their children. Participants shared that when they became aware of their patience lowering and frustrations rising with their children, they would often read a
segment of a book, meditate, talk to a mindful friend, participate in yoga, or practice something that helped them align with their values of parenting. Eleanor shared the awareness of her need to be continually learning and examining mindful ways to interact with her children: “It’s more of a revision and kind of adding to my toolbox, and reminding myself that I do have to come back . . . I really think it’s just a process.”

Eleanor had a sense of compassion for herself when she needed to revisit mindfulness concepts, because it was ultimately for the benefit of her children to refrain from certain paths of thoughts and emotions. Eleanor shared:

That’s why I continue to revisit the readings . . . because if you are tired, your resources are a little low, and your patience is spent, it’s easy to say things like, “do you need a time out, I’m taking away your candy, we are not reading a book, I am throwing that toy in the trash if you don’t shape up!” These kinds of things that are like “what just came out of my mouth? Ahh!” But sometimes they are the easiest things that come to you, and so, it’s just a practice.

Eleanor and other participants shared the difficulty in being mindful all of the time, and how it was easy to say and do things that were not mindful when upset or frustrated. Eleanor was intentional about being compassionate toward herself, and knew that being mindful would always be a continual process.

Karen spoke about using mindful parenting concepts in her parenting as something “we are working towards [being mindful all the time] and you don’t always reach your goal, but even when you don’t, you know it’s there” to keep coming back to
and find again when needed. Violette shared that she will continue to work on her mindfulness skills and never really be done working and learning because:

Mindfulness teaches you that it is okay; it’s the process. And I will pretty much suck at being mindful until I die at the age of 92. . . . I will just be scratching the surface of being mindful at that point; it’s just the process.

Participants acknowledged that they have to continue to work towards being mindful because there will always be something new to be aware of, both internally and externally, and especially while their children are young and continually changing.

**Mindfulness as a lens for life.** Several participants shared their value of having a mindful lens, and how they saw being mindful flowed through all aspects of their lives. Participants discussed how it was helpful to practice being mindful and aware during all experiences of life rather than only during parenting. Eleanor shared that having a mindful lens for all of life was essential:

Because taking those skills, [bringing] mindful parenting into regular life is key.

Anytime that there is a thing at work, or I have to publish this paper, or this grant is running out, or I feel judgment or whatever. . . . You know, stepping back and questioning those assumptions . . . “How much baggage am I bringing to that moment as a parent, as a worker, as a wife?”

Using mindfulness skills and concepts was helpful for Eleanor because it brought a sense of well-being to her roles as a parent, a wife, and a professional.

Fred shared that mindfulness skills and concepts were helpful to him in coping with balancing the stressors of being a professor with his personal life:
It is stressful. It’s kind of a way to . . . live with the stress, and just being a professional at all . . . or maybe just being a person in the world is stressful. It’s hard. So this is the way that I can cope with life.

Participants expressed that being mindful was a part of them, and they attempted to be mindful during all experiences in their life.

Jack stated that he actively practiced mindfulness before his youngest son came, “so he came into my life, when I already had a pretty strong mindfulness practice as the core of my life, so it made sense to parent that way.” Being mindful before Jack had his son helped him to transition mindfulness concepts into his parenting. Generalizing the mindfulness concepts and skills was something that many participants valued in their daily life.

As the data suggested from this theme, participants implemented mindful skills in parenting their children, in a variety of different ways that best fit their family.

Participants implemented certain parenting strategies and skills that helped them to interact mindfully with children, strategies such as attuning to their children, and modeling or guiding mindful behavior for their children. Participants also described mindful parenting as a process that needed continual revisiting to help live in accordance with their parenting values. Participants also saw that mindfulness was not something they used only in their parenting, but was present in all areas of their lives. The next theme discussed the participants’ thoughts and feelings about the relationships with their children.
**Theme 3: Relationship With Child**

Participants often spoke of the relationship with their child as one main reason or motivation for being mindful with their child. In this third theme of relationship with child, participants described their impressions and qualities of the relationship. When asked specifically to describe the relationship with their child, participants often portrayed it as something that was so tender and sacred, that they often found it difficult to describe into words. Participants used phrases and words like love, bond, trust, affection, intimacy, and cuddling when speaking about the relationships they have with their children. The concepts within this theme overlapped other categories throughout this section due to mindful parenting being primarily parent-child relationship oriented. However, this theme arose as a distinct theme due to the importance of addressing the parent-child relationship characteristics as demonstrated in the interviews. Two categories of affection and intimacy and several subcategories emerged through interviews demonstrating the participants’ impressions of the relationship with their children (see Table 8).

**Appreciation.** Participants in the study expressed an appreciation for being parents and for their relationship with their children. The three subcategories of gratitude, empathy and understanding, and the perfect fit helped to describe and demonstrate the appreciation felt by the participants about the relationship with their child.
**Gratitude.** Most participants specifically expressed gratitude when talking about their relationship with their children. Eleanor shared what it was like for her when reuniting with her children in the morning after sleeping, stating:

Reuniting is lovely . . . they’re [her children] my favorite people. . . . Like there’s nothing I love better than first thing in the morning, sometimes they’ll both climb into bed with us, with one on one side, and one on the other, and I just snuggle them, and think, “oh God, I’m so lucky. I’m just so grateful for my life.”

Eleanor mentioned several times throughout the interviews the importance for her to remember to be “grateful and recognize it” whenever possible about her life and children.

Karen shared her appreciation and gratitude for being a parent because “we had difficulty conceiving, so just having him was huge.” Karen continued on to reflect on how her life would have been very different if she had not had her son, and how “I am grateful . . . of the challenges that it [parenting] brings and the things I learn from it.”
Participants often described their relationships in unique ways, however, they were shared feelings of appreciation and gratitude for what they had.

Violette described her relationship with her children as a “caring reciprocity” where she and her children shared a mutual “love” and “bond” with each other. Violette expressed her gratitude for being able to stay home with the children during the day, and the time she gets to spend bonding with them, sharing:

You know you just sort of want to hug them or be with them, or just sit. And if they want to just watch something on TV, I just kind of just stop and sit with them. So there is a lot of that type of bonding with them.

The appreciation Violette shared was that she can be there for her children when they are learning new things and living their day to day lives, and build the bond and relationship they have with each other.

**Empathy and understanding.** Participants also demonstrated appreciation for their relationships through their empathy and understanding of their children. Participants shared that understanding the child’s worldview and interests helped them to grow the relationship and appreciation for their child. Participants illustrated their relationships with their children when they were talking about times they genuinely understood and empathized with their children’s experiences. Angela shared her experience of seeing the world through her son’s eyes:

Yeah, he [her son] just loves life. [He is] just so enamored like “ahhhh! Look at that!” When he looks at a bug, and I just have to look at him, and observe him.
He is just being, and you see all this love . . . It’s such a wonderful thing to bear
witness to.

Angela enjoyed seeing the world through her son’s eyes, and developing the relationship
with him by knowing his interests and experiences. Similar to Angela, Fred shared an
enjoyable experience when bonding with his son:

Just watching him experience the world, just totally everything is so interesting,
that watching his light turn on is what I really like. He’s really into dinosaurs and
he has all these dinosaur magnets that he takes from the living room and runs and
sticks on our garage door. . . . Just that enthusiasm, I think it’s really fun.

Having younger children, participants often shared that getting to know their children
was more through observations rather than conversations with their children. Having a
few older children, Josie shared that by having conversations and interactions with her
children about what they are feeling and experiencing, “they [her children] tell me who
they are. I get that relationship with them. I get that bond, I feel like we have a strong
bond.”

**The perfect fit.** Lastly, in the category of appreciation, was the idea of the child
designed as “the perfect fit” for the parent. When describing her relationship with her
son, Angela shared:

I feel like he is the perfect child for me . . . He cracks me up . . . He teases me, it’s
like he is the perfect partner in that. He’s funny, he’s cool, I mean all the qualities
that I would pick in someone I would want to hang out with. I don’t know if I am
saying that because he is my son, but I just enjoy him.
Many participants made mention of this idea that they had a special bond with their child and how their child felt different and better to them than other children. Josie eloquently stated this idea:

Oh I love it, I like the cuddliness, I just like affection. It just feels different than another little kid, like a work kid... I don’t love them like my own kid. They are something special, they are warmer, their hands are mine, they feel right. Other kids aren’t appealing to me. Because they are mine I get them, I know them. So I don’t have that same affection towards other kids, just mine.

Participants expressed that there was something special and unique about their children that they appreciated, and how that was an essential part of building a relationship with their children. Similar to what Josie had described, many participants also shared about the importance of affection and intimacy within their relationship with their children.

**Affection and bond.** Participants expressed that touching, affection, and love were large parts of the relationship with their child. In unique and subjective ways, each participant described what it feels like to love and be loved by their child. Three subcategories emerged to help demonstrate this category; intimacy, embracing, and relationship down the road.

**Intimacy.** A sense of intimacy was another way of understanding how participants described and felt about their relationship with their children. Many participants actually became quite emotional and had difficulties describing this very personal and tender bond they have with their child. Jack expressed the relationship with his son as existing in the “space” together:
It’s really beautiful. It’s um, I get emotional when I think about that. Yeah, it’s like there is one of us, feels like there is one of us. Not all the time . . . but yeah, it’s sort of like we dissolve into each other and there is only one, that’s the best way to describe it . . . it’s a very intimate thing.

Jack went on to share about a particular image of that affection in the middle of the night where:

I held him [his son] against me like this [motions holding him gently against his chest], skin to skin, in the middle of the night. There’s moments of caring in that little quiet body, holding him against me, he will wake up and put his arms around my neck.

Jack remembered the tenderness in those moments with his son, and the love that was shared during the nightly routine of getting out of bed to use the bathroom.

Other participants demonstrated intimacy through the subjective process of having their own children, and getting to know them. Josie shared her experience of the parent-child relationship:

I don’t even know how to describe it! I mean, I think people have said, you don’t know until you have one. Nobody can tell you how you feel about your kids. It’s scary and wonderful. And you know your motherly instinct says to hover over them and be helicopter parents, but you can’t! I don’t think it is appropriate. So trust in them, and believe in them, and get to know them. Give them lots of hugs and kisses, because they love it!
Josie described her bond with her children as one to endure over time, that is both difficult and wonderful at the same time. She described her family as very “lovey and cuddly,” and saw that getting to know her children in an intimate way was an important aspect of the parent-child relationship. Similar to Josie, participants described their bonding with their children through the intimate and special times they shared getting to know each other.

**Embracing.** Participants often spoke about cuddling, touching, and hugging as a large part of the relationship with their children. Eleanor described her family’s affection as:

I’m really happy to say it [her family] is very close. I tell my husband all the time that they are so cuddly and how lucky we are to have such cuddly children. And you know they will climb up on my lap and snuggle just about anytime. Like they will stop what they’re doing if that’s a possibility for me to that [cuddle] at any moment. They hug each other, they are very loving with each other too.

Embracing and affection was something most participants described as a part of the relationship with the child that they both enjoyed very much.

Embracing was also a way for participants and children to communicate love and affection. When asked about her relationship or bond she had with her child, Karen shared:

I’m going to cry, yeah, it’s hard to put into words, um, yeah, its wordless. It’s beyond that, it’s connection. You know at night, just before he is going to sleep . . . we cuddle up and he puts his hand on my cheek, and I put my hand on
his cheek and he smiles and he just makes sure that I see him smiling and how happy he is, and you know we say goodnight.

Karen described those moments as “tender moments” that she fondly remembers about her relationship and how they are “priceless and precious” to her. Violette described her relationship with her children:

With my two children, well it’s very cuddly and very warm, and very wonderful . . . You know I’ve got a 2½ year old and a 5 year old and they nuzzle. They are like, I have had a dog as a pet before, and it’s very similar, it’s hilarious how similar they are!

To Violette, the cuddling and affection from her children reminded her fondly of the affection from a beloved pet dog, how “they hug you and [then] sort of roughhouse with you.”

Other participants mentioned that they often build their relationship and show affection and touch with their children through play. Fred shared that “I think our bond it really through play,” and activities together, and how they enjoyed “rough housing, playing, and singing songs.” A few participants made specific mention that due to the developmental level and needs of the children, they were able to bond with their children more through play and getting to know what the children’s interests are and meeting them there.

**Relationship over time.** Participants also described bonding with their children in terms of the long-term relationship. To Ricardo, the bond he was developing with his
children was meant to endure over time, and that was a focus in building the current relationships with his children:

So I think based on what I hope to be true, that the approach [mindful parenting], because you don’t know until you get there [children are grown], that the approach we are taking with the openness and trying to talk about everything, and allowing them to have a voice, translates into a stronger bond where we [the parents] are trusted in that.

It was important to Ricardo that the relationship and bond that he was creating with his children was based on openness and trust, so that in the future when the relationships are more strained (e.g., fights, teenage years), the relationship would be strong and sustainable. Josie also shared her desire for a longstanding, strong relationship with her children that could withstand anything through openness and trust, stating:

Yeah, I could totally botch them [her children] up, but I hope that we would have a good enough relationship through being mindful and attentive that they would be like, “you know what, when I was 5 you said this, and it has been bothering me.” I would feel hurt if they didn’t tell me.

Josie and other participants shared that they wanted their children to feel safe and heard in the relationship, and that the children would trust the parents to be there through it all. Eleanor felt it was “my responsibility as a parent to help these small people grow up feeling safe and secure, and fulfilling who they are.” Participants felt responsible for establishing a relationship early that would endure over time and continue to grow and develop with the children.
In summary, Theme 3 described the participants’ experiences of the relationship and bond with the child. In the first category, participants described feelings of appreciation for their children through gratitude for the relationship they had with them. They also shared the empathy and understanding that comes with the relationship as well as how their children feel like “the perfect fit” for them. The second category described the affection and bond participants experienced with their children, and their sense of intimacy in the relationship with their children. Participants also described the bond as filled with embracing and touching, and one that is intended to endure over time. To be conscious and aware of the parent-child relationship and bond, participants shared that it is important to first understand and be knowledgeable of what is happening in their internal mindset while parenting.

**Theme 4: Awareness of the Internal Mindset**

The fourth theme that emerged from the data was awareness of the internal mindset or self-awareness and understanding within the participants. The idea of self-introspection was a key aspect of the participants’ experiences of mindfully parenting their young children. All of the participants shared several instances when they had become aware of the thoughts and emotions they were experiencing while parenting, and how that awareness impacted their interactions with their children. Many saw self-reflection as an essential tool when mindfully parenting their young children. Participants shared that being able to have understanding and compassion for what was happening inside their own bodies helped them maintain their parenting values and skills while interacting in a mindful way with their children. Within this theme, three
categories emerged: (a) self-awareness, (b) residue from childhood, and (c) self-compassion (see Table 9). This theme discussed many of the participants’ experiences as mindful parents and also addressed many of the concepts of the attachment relationships with their children.

Table 9

Outline of Theme 4

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Theme 4: Awareness of the Internal Mindset</th>
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<tr>
<td>(a) Self-Awareness</td>
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<td>(b) Residue from Childhood</td>
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<td>(c) Compassion for Self</td>
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**Self-awareness.** All of the participants spoke in detail of their internal awareness of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors while parenting. During the interviews, participants shared this awareness of themselves both implicitly (in reflections during the interview) and explicitly (sharing a story of their awareness). The participants reflected their self-awareness in a variety of ways; however, all participants had commonalities in the importance of understanding how their thoughts and emotions affected them, and how this awareness was an essential aspect in parenting young children.

Participants saw self-awareness and mindfulness skills as tools to help themselves emotionally regulate during parenting and life situations. Jack believed that “becoming aware of what was going on in here [points to his chest] really works, amazingly so . . . and it’s the only thing I have ever found that worked” to help him be happy and satisfied.
in life. Fred explored how self-awareness affected him: “just to have some self-awareness and to know how to achieve some calm if necessary [when stressed] . . . I think that a lot of self-awareness and self-reflectiveness is necessary to experience joy and happiness in our culture.” Fred described that being aware of what was happening inside himself was a way to not get caught up in his emotions or thoughts at the time. Fred continued by sharing an example of awareness of his own anxiety when putting his son to bed. He was getting increasingly more anxious about not getting enough sleep for work the next day, and the challenge of swaddling his colicky infant son. Fred reflected on the moment: “I realized, okay, I am treating him like a ragdoll right now, so I went to my wife.” Fred was aware of his emotions in a stressful situation with his son and chose to distance himself and ask for help from his wife when he was emotional and tired.

Participants described many different ways they became aware of their internal mindset at any given time. Jack described his moments of awareness as flags:

I think for me, there’s a lot of, I will call them flags, that’s kind of what happens. When there’s less ease, less sense of well-being, it’s sort of a notice to me, a tap on the shoulder to pay attention. And just throughout the day, and parenting is no different than anything else, it’s just like a little tap on the shoulder saying “pay attention here.” So when I do [listen to the notice], you know, what’s really true or truer maybe seems to present itself.

Jack was able to recognize the “flags” within himself by being aware they existed in the first place; he then was able to do something different than just react automatically.
Participants spoke often about their ability to understand when their stress levels were rising, and that awareness gave them the freedom to consciously decide what to do next.

Similar to Jack, Karen described her ability to spot her “big red flags” within herself by understanding that when she feels ignored she gets triggered or upset. Karen shared an example of her son ignoring her, and her first reaction was “oh my gosh, what a brat, I can’t believe he’s ignoring me.” She then shared that once she caught herself, she was then able to “change my story about the situation” because “I think for me, those kinds of reactions are big red flags that say I really need to look at this; I really need to spend some time with this and decipher what this is really about.” Karen shared that she worked hard to catch herself and reflect on that awareness, rather than take it out on her son. Karen shared that she was working on a concept called integration, based upon an idea by Siegel and Hartzell (2003), stating “that my goal as a mindful parent is to figure out what those things are, [and to] integrate them into my life so I can have that awareness.” Karen shared that she is currently working on being aware of those triggers or flags, to then learn how to incorporate them, so they do not have the same impact on her. Participants stated that the ability to notice the “flags” within your body while interacting with children took a certain amount of trust in your body, and the ability to listen or read the cues within yourself.

Lastly, participants spoke regularly of how their self-awareness helped to minimize unintended negative influence on their children. Josie shared:

I mean it’s important to nurture your children and appreciate them for the individuals they are, and to be aware of your own issues as a parent. I feel like
everything you do is impactful to your child, so being aware of that [one’s issues],
and how they impact your child, and how interactions with your child can often
impact you.

Participants often described the importance of knowing their own “issues,” or triggers as
a parent, to minimize unintended impact those triggers may have on children.
Participants expressed their hope of not passing on their fears and difficulties to their
children, and many claimed that it happened less frequently when more self-aware. Jack
stated that awareness of self is not a superficial fix; “it goes to the root of the issue,
whereas everything else is sort of decorating the prison of the self.” Eleanor shared about
her continual internal introspection in her parenting interactions. “I think if you are
reflective, you go why did I do that? Is this because of my baggage? Do I have work
there? Am I following blindly these things society says we should be doing?”
Participants were intentional about personal introspection, especially when it came to
what they were carrying over into their parenting from their own childhood.

**Residue from childhood.** Another segment of self-introspection participants
shared was their awareness of experiences that had impacted them during their own
childhood. Participants reflected on their own interactions with their parents as children
that impacted them as parents.

Participants described experiences from their childhood as triggers they would
like to be aware, so their children are not unintentionally impacted. Karen shared: “So
keeping your word, or consistency, I think that was something that my mom probably
struggled with when I was growing up. So I have that residue, it’s really thick residue
Karen used the term “residue” to describe the experiences of what she carried with her from her childhood and early experiences. Other participants referred to this as their “baggage” or “issues” from their childhood that interfered or impacted the way they interacted with their children. Eleanor also reflected on her childhood:

But I look back at my own childhood and I had such a troubled mother who was depressed, and also you know a victim of domestic violence and divorce. My parents separated by the time that I was 5... So these are a lot of my issues I recognize and I don’t want to repeat them. I want to be careful and be the parent that I want to be, and the person I want to be in this world.

Eleanor and many other participants articulated the importance of being aware of things in their past, to try new things with their children and not repeat unwanted behaviors. Ricardo described that the behavior he was practicing with his children “Was all new to me, because I grew up where you would sit and just not talk about, because nobody wanted to hear about it anyway.” Participants described the parts of their childhood that were the most challenging were lessons for them on how to be mindful of their behaviors and do things differently with their children.

Similar to the category discussed previously, it’s been a process, participants shared that self-awareness was never something to be fully achieved; rather, it was a process waiting to be revisited as more life experiences arose. Jack spoke about his growing awareness of his past and present triggers and reported that by paying attention to his internal “flags,” he could have an effect or influence over them:
How many things do I not know about in my history, [that] could be looming behind shadows and waiting to present themselves . . . So those karma forces or the baggage or whatever you want to call them that are at work, and looming in the background, I think have an influence on them.

Participants discussed that by continually reflecting on their experiences, they were more aware of the “baggage” that may surface, and continue to learn and grow from the past known and unknown experiences.

Karen shared about the benefits of understanding influences from childhood, stating:

So that I [as a parent] am holding a mirror up for my son, and it’s not completely clouded with my own psychological issues and history . . . So it’s a way, however you do it, of checking those issues and realizing that they are yours and you don’t need to pass them on to your child. So if I am overreacting to something, I can usually trace it back to some issue of my childhood.

Participants described the importance of continually revisiting and noticing the influences of their own child-parent relationships as children to help them react mindfully as parents.

Participants described the importance of being aware of these experiences, to then be intentional with their own children rather than reacting automatically. Karen and several other participants shared that being a mindful parent often meant being aware of things from their childhood, and trying to clear up the “mirror” they then hold up for their own children. Participants described the process of wanting to be a clearer, more
centered place for their children to then find their (children’s) own way rather than aspects from their (parent’s) own childhood. Angela discussed the impact of her mother:

Because I think I am just wired or raised to serve. My mom was a stay at home mother, she had four kids and it was all about her kids to her depletion, and she is very anxious, and I am wired like that . . . So she is an example of what I don’t want to do, and other things that I really admire.

Angela reflected on the impact of her mother on her personality and anxiety. She and other participants saw things they want to be different with their families, as well as things they would like to replicate. In learning more about themselves, participants shared different aspects of compassion toward themselves and the work they were doing for their children.

**Compassion for self.** As a part of self-awareness, participants reflected upon compassion for themselves while discussing their experiences as a mindful parent. Several participants shared the importance and challenges of being kind, caring, and compassionate toward themselves and the hard work they were doing as parents for their children. Violette shared her struggle:

I do not feel that being compassionate toward myself is all that easy. In talking among friends I think a lot of us feel the same way . . . My kids are always counting on me . . . you feel this responsibility, and so you tend to be a little bit harder on yourself and not as forgiving for your mistakes, you catch yourself saying “I’m 38, I should have known better.”
Participants shared their awareness about the compassion for themselves, stating that it was not something that came easily to them; rather, it was something they were intentionally working on and practicing on a daily basis. Eleanor stated:

I’m trying really hard. Sometimes I’m not really good at being compassionate to myself, but I think I’m working on it, and it sounds like I am doing okay. So that’s my work, being compassionate to myself and realizing that I’m doing, at least with my parenting for sure, I feel like I’m pretty compassionate towards myself . . . I have these children looking up to me, I’m responsible for them and it is a crazy responsibility, but I am it.

Eleanor struggled with compassion toward herself; however, through the feedback from her children and her experiences as a parent, she knew that she was doing the best she could as a parent and she was proud of that.

Participants discussed the continual challenge of being as compassionate and forgiving to themselves as they would be to their children and other loved ones. Many of the participants believed self-compassion was a key piece of living mindfully. Karen saw that compassion for self was a “beautiful byproduct” of being mindful in her daily life and that it helped to balance the negativity surrounding her in her environment. While discussing compassion for self, Karen shared her insights and reflections:

I really hated that phrase about being your own best friend, it always made me gag, and I never got it. And then in recent years, I got it, at least in a way that works for me. Which is like, “oh if my friend came to me with this issue, I wouldn’t have these judgments;” I really wouldn’t. I would be really
compassionate with her about her struggles, and so I think the idea is to turn that on yourself, so it’s pretty cool.

Participants shared that the investment in themselves and their inner resources was worth it, because in the end, they and their children benefited from these practices. Participants shared that the things they did for themselves were valuable and helped make them happier and healthier people and parents.

The above experiences reflected participants’ viewpoints of their own self-reflections and awareness. Participants discussed, both implicitly and explicitly, self-awareness several different ways, and saw that this awareness of their own internal thoughts and emotions was an essential ingredient of parenting mindfully. Participants also discussed the difficulty in being compassionate with themselves as they are parenting, and admitted there were great benefits in that practice.

**Theme 5: A Safe Haven for the Family**

The fifth overarching theme that emerged from the data was an idea about the participants creating a safe haven or the structuring their environment to be conducive for mindful interactions within the family. This theme was prevalent across all of the participants, and related to the research question addressing the subjective experiences of mindful parents. Creating a safe haven was illustrated in Angela’s first interview:

I think mindful parenting to me is creating a structure of what we feel is best for the highest good for our family . . . To be mindful, present, aware, conscious about what enters our core, what gets in and what doesn’t get in, and if it gets in how will we handle it.
Many participants described specific strategies for creating a safe haven, and these strategies are described within the following categories: (a) self-care strategies, (b) support systems, (c) child’s school, (d) cultural influences, (e) technology, and (f) health aspects (see Table 10). Through the following categories, the participants illustrated the dynamics between mindful interactions and the surrounding environment.

Table 10

Outline of Theme 5

Theme 5: A Safe Haven for the Family

(a) Self-Care Strategies
(b) Support Systems
(c) Child’s School
(d) Cultural Influences
(e) Technology
(f) Health Aspects

Self-care strategies. When discussing mindful parenting, most participants were explicit about the importance in taking time out for themselves to help them be more mindful with their children. Participants described their own self-care as something that helped to create the kind of environment or safe haven they wanted for their children. Participants saw that the more mindful they were, the more able they were able to create a mindful environment for their family because, as Josie stated, the parents are “the foundation” for their families. Many participants described that the mindful environment they wanted to create for their families needed to start with themselves being in a mindful place.
Participants discussed the many practices they did to promote that mindfulness and awareness within themselves. Angela shared:

When I do yoga and when I meditate, and sometimes that is the same thing, that nurtures me to be a more mindful person. I’m not going to be mindful without practicing something mindful . . . You have to exercise that muscle, and that’s what I do.

Angela and several others shared that when they participated in mindful practices on a regular basis, they were able to be a more mindful person with their family. Angela continued by sharing that when she is more mindful, she can understand her child better: “I don’t know how or where I can sense it, but I can sense the emotions, I can empathize without mirroring, if I am centered.” Mindful yoga and meditation practices helped Angela be more centered or aware of her emotions while interacting with her child. She knew that she needed more self-care strategies when she was becoming upset when her child was upset.

Several participants shared that they utilized mindfulness readings and literature as self-care practices. They explained that by reading and educating themselves, they were able to maintain their mindfulness and a sense of calm within their parenting.

Eleanor shared her desire to continually read mindfulness literature that supported her mindfulness:

I need the reminders. I go “where is my Buddhism for Mothers book?” Because that has a lot of stuff in it that helps me be more aware, and really go back to the specifics of parenting young children . . . [I ask myself], “how do I come back to
that [those ideas] as a parent in a way that makes me not ashamed of my behavior.”

Similarly, Violette shared a time when she needed a moment to regroup and realign with her values: “Let me take myself out of the situation and what are some of the teachings that might actually help me.” Participants shared that they were intentional about utilizing education and mindful readings as means for self-care strategies to help promote mindfulness within their family environment.

Participants discussed that doing self-care or purposeful activities that helped them to be mindful was needed on a daily basis to establish and maintain the kind of environment they wanted for their family. Eleanor stated:

I’ve got to work on it every day, and I’ve got to figure out what to do for myself. Do I get to read for a few minutes before bed, do I get to do a little yoga before I go to bed? You know, can I work some time in for myself? What do I need and balancing that with everybody else.

Eleanor was aware that doing something for herself on nearly a daily basis was necessary for her to be the kind of parent, wife, and person she wanted to be.

Several participants shared that they valued the time they spent on themselves, and that they were just as important as everyone else in the family and deserved to get their needs met too. Josie shared her thoughts on self-care:

I mean, I think being mindful is also being mindful that you have your own life. I mean you are your own person. So I think you have to balance that you have
these kids, but you also have you, you are the foundation of your family. So
being inattentive to yourself that’s not good for them.

Josie saw herself as the foundation of her family, and viewed self-care as a necessary
precedent for her family, and be the kind of mother she wanted to be.

The idea of balance surfaced with many participants, as well as the importance of
maintaining a balanced life between their needs and their children’s needs. During her
second interview, Violette created a diagram that illustrated the idea of balance, and how
“mindfulness tends to fall like fertilizer, it lands where it is needed, and it’s a very good
way to continually bring it back into balance.” Violette gave permission for her diagram
to be shown in this document to illustrate her ideas of mindful parenting. She displayed
mindfulness as the key ingredient in helping the parent to hear the feedback that the child
was giving on what they needed in the moment, to “restore a healthy parent/child
balance” (see Figure 1).

A few participants discussed the challenge in finding time for self-care while
parenting very young children. Karen and others stated that parenting young children
tends to be time consuming and demanding, and it was often difficult to find time for
themselves. Karen shared about her adaptive meditation practices since becoming a
mother:

Because there was a lot of time where it wasn’t even that [a period of sitting
meditation], it was 9 breaths or whatever I could fit in, because the needs are just
so great from children. I think practicing [mindfulness] is very different than
sitting and meditating for 20 minutes, everyday. . . . It doesn’t have to be [a
What causes imbalance on the “feedback side”?
- Parent does not hear feedback that all is okay due to out of normal range of anxiety (chemical imbalance).
- Parent does not hear feedback that all is okay due to too high stress level and fatigue.
- Modern lifestyle pervades pathway between child and parent (independent and fast transportation; work schedule).
- Social media pervades pathway between child and parent (TV; Twitter/Facebook; hand held devices [iPhone]).
  - Parent never hears that all is okay because…
    - Distracted by devices or
    - Reading/Listening to worrisome streaming news or because
    - Online social networking has replaced much in-person friend and family time.
    - Child, too, is immersed in TV show and does not realize hungry/cold/sleepy.

What causes imbalance on the “anxiety/stress side”?
- Anxiety levels are increasing likely due to rapid-pace modern lifestyle; disconnect between family and friends; heavily processed food diet and low exercise levels (drive everywhere, little walking).
- Stress levels are increasing likely due to increased worrying about personal finances; increased exposure to advertising = need to purchase more products; social status comfort levels uncertain due to rapid change in technology influence/social media.

Mindfulness Meditation Practice helps restore a healthy parent/child balance. The factors causing imbalance are simply seen for what they are and the practitioner is not thrown off balance. Most of the factors causing an imbalance cannot readily be changed and, perhaps, should not be changed. A mindfulness practice puts “padding” where it’s needed most to help soften “the blow” of the negative factors. This is an essential practice for parents of young children to help balance quickly changing demands. As well, practicing mindful parenting is a living example for young children to watch as they begin to understand, cope and develop life skills. In the end, mindful parents will have more internal resources to make wiser and kinder decisions for their own young children as well as other children in their lives.

*Figure 1. Violette’s diagram*
formal] sitting [meditation] practice every day to be mindful or do meditation even.

Karen expressed that her meditation practices are no longer the formal practices she once had; rather, she adapted them to being a mother and found ways to be mindful in more informal practices. Karen stated that she used the everyday experiences with her child as a mindful practice and found that to be just as valuable as a regular meditation practice. She continued to share that some of her meditation teachers state that they do not even “sit everyday, just because of their busy lives or whatever . . . and that sitting is not necessarily what makes a meditation practice.” Karen believed that meditation practices were the moments she came back to her breath, or moments of being purposefully mindful in an interaction with her child. Karen shared that the purpose of a mindfulness practice was “to find ways to apply the practice to your daily life.” Participants described self-care as a necessity in their lives and found personalized ways to apply it directly to their life and environment.

**Support systems.** The next category explored the support systems or people in the participants’ lives that sustained and enhanced their mindful parenting practices. The support systems were people in the participants’ lives who helped them to create a more mindful environment or safe haven for themselves and their family. Participants often spoke about these supports as essential piece to a mindful family environment. Many of the participants mentioned that it was their partner (wife or husband) who was their main support for their mindful practices. Jack shared his experience about his wife who mindfully co-parents their son:
I love at the end of the day, to hear what he [his son] did during the day, what she [his wife] did with him during the day, and sometimes it’s just a reflection of what happened during the day, and other times there’s some issues that came up or something that was a struggle for her or him . . . To be able to connect with those things, I think is a key part of mindful parenting. So yes, as an individual, I work at mindfulness with him. As a couple, it’s a core part, probably the foundation of our parenting together, because it’s so foundational for both of us.

Jack shared the importance that his wife practices mindful parenting as well, and how they connect over sharing their experiences with each other about their son. Josie shared that her husband is the one who supports her mindful parenting practices:

He just does that same thing, he gets it . . . We both have the same philosophy in parenting, and we are both kind of still coming up with new ideas of how, what to do with our kids. We reflect with them, they are important to us . . . So it’s just nice that he gets it.

To Josie and other participants, their partner’s ability to also mindfully parent their children was a large part of their support for mindful parenting and the greater context of creating a mindful environment. Participants described that being aligned in this way helped to keep both parents on the same page with their parenting and supporting one another when things were difficult.

Fred shared that he and his wife had an unspoken communication, where when one gets frustrated when interacting with their child, the other gently steps in and helps out: “We usually make a good team with stuff like that, where one person is relaxed . . .
and the other person is getting out of shape, sort of tag so the other person can [go and] relax.” Several participants discussed the importance of good nonverbal and verbal communication with their partner, and how beneficial it was for them to be able to call upon him or her when frustrated or angry during a situation with their child. The other partner could then handle the situation with a calmer understanding. Jack shared that because of this understanding between him and his wife, it was okay to “step in, it’s wordless, it just happens now.”

Participants also discussed the support they received from friendships with other mindful parents. Karen shared her experience with mindful friendships:

Support system, so it’s different calling someone as a friend who is trying to mindfully raise their children too, than it would be to just call a friend who doesn’t know what I am talking about. They understand you, you know, total support.

Karen acknowledged the difference between a friend who is also trying to mindfully raise their children and one who is not, and stated that she felt more understood and supported by another mindful parent. Similar to Karen, Eleanor considered herself to be very lucky to have “amassed an amazingly wonderful support group around us. I have two best friends here that are very similar moms to me.” She discussed her friendships as essential supports to her mindful parenting:

There is just not much to hide, like we don’t have to worry about pretenses with each other, and we just talk . . . and I can trust them to give me the advice that I would want to hear, and not like “here’s what to do.”
Karen and Eleanor both shared about the importance of having a support system of other mindful parents as friends because they could easily share about what is happening with them, and feel understood. The participants that had mindful supports shared their gratitude toward those supports, because they knew of the difficulties in finding other parents who shared similar values.

Participants also shared their need of support for this style of parenting and how oftentimes it can be isolating and discouraging and can weaken a family’s mindful environment if not supported. Participants reported that they felt like they are doing something very different than most other parents with whom they come in contact.

Karen continued to reflect on mindful parenting friendships:

> I think that finding other parents that are trying to raise their kids in the same way is also a challenge, which is . . . partly, out of selfish motivation why we started the group. . . . I think that we have been really fortunate to have the parents [group participants] that we have, because we feel a connection and supported.

Karen and others shared about the challenges they had in finding like-minded parents and family members who valued the same style of parenting. To find supports in her community, Karen stated that she helped to create the mindful parenting group in hopes of meeting other parents who were trying to raise their children mindfully. Participants stated that they connected well with other mindful parents, in a way that felt more supportive and connective, than parents who were not parenting mindfully. This support was valuable to the participants, to help them establish a community and home environment of mindful interactions for themselves and their family.
**Child’s school.** In helping to create a safe haven for their family that extends outside their home, participants also discussed the importance of their child’s school. Participants described their preschool or childcare preference as a mindful choice for them. They shared about the importance of being thoughtful and deliberate about their child’s learning environment, and where their children would spend their time outside of their home. Participants stated that their preschool was a financial sacrifice, but was an important investment because it was for their children’s education. Angela shared about her process in choosing her son’s school and how her family has made considerable sacrifices (e.g., drive time, financial, family criticism) for her son to attend the school that she saw as a best fit, stating: “I mean, that was a very mindful process of, how to make it [school’s name] work, it’s because it fits our core . . . I feel very intentional about how we live.” Angela chose that particular school because of the aligned values in children’s autonomy and respect, and the benefit to her child’s education. Eleanor shared about her experience in choosing her children’s school:

I mean we chose a Montessori school for my son. It is the prefect fit, it’s lovely.

It costs more money than we would want . . . it’s expensive, but it is worth every penny, and my son is thriving. I can’t wait for my daughter to go.

Ricardo, Josie, and Karen also shared the importance in being mindful about the child’s school, and it was something they took very seriously. Participants believed in the importance of creating a safe and healthy environment for their children to learn and grow outside the home.
**Cultural influences.** Participants described different cultural influences as something they often considered when thinking about a safe haven for their family. Most of the participants shared their caution and sometimes disapproval of contemporary cultural influences prevalent throughout society, especially toward children. Examples of influences on their children that were addressed included: television, advertisements, cartoon characters, food, and toys. Participants discussed the importance of giving their children values and experiences that were oftentimes very different from what the predominant culture was endorsing. Fred stated a reason for his mindful parenting was to offset some of the cultural influences on his child because “I tend to see our culture as very toxic, especially for children.” He continued to share that he saw mindful strategies within parenting as “trying to provide some kind of antidote to that [toxic culture] at home . . . [That] is mostly what I am looking for.” Fred and many other participants strove to provide a culture at home or a safe haven that was believed to be more conducive to the developmental and emotional needs of their young children.

Participants believed that they needed to protect and safeguard their children from the influence of the prevalent culture. Karen shared:

I mean our culture is not healthy, so sometimes that’s hard. You know, people are like rolling their eyes at, you know, the way that you want to not have a violent toy or your interpreting the violent toy as something playful like catch instead of bombing someone on a pirate ship. That kind of stuff . . . you know we don’t think we are going to protect him from that stuff forever; we just want to do it for
as long as we can. So his foundation is solid and he can learn about all of that stuff from a solid foundation.

All of the participants shared that they worked to control the environment by setting limits on various things with which their child regularly came in contact like toys and technology. Violette shared her experiences of some of the cultural influence in a single moment:

So when the TV is on and the kids are playing with a toy, and one’s trying to talk and then the phone rings and the text message bleep comes through, and then the light changed, and the person next to you [in their car] has their radio going, and the wind is coming in here. If you are aware too much is going on, then get out of the situation. Again, this is why mindfulness is so important in today’s age, because I think a lot of us force ourselves to just stay in that and wonder why we are often sick and tired, when in reality you were just paying attention to what was actually happening all at once!

Violette and other participants shared their perspective that contemporary culture was particularly fast paced and technology oriented. Participants described the difficulty for them as parents when they were trying to stay in the present moment or align with their parenting values. They also saw the fast-paced, technology-oriented culture as non-beneficial and sometimes damaging for their young developing child to take in and understand.

Technology. Similar to the category of cultural influences, all of the participants discussed the relationship and influence related to technology and mindful parenting. All
of the participants took extra steps and precautions to limit technology, mostly television, for their young children. Participants often saw television as an unnecessary thing for their young children, and would rather have their children learn or do something inspired by their imagination and developmental skill level. Jack shared:

We don’t have television in our home, by choice, and it’s not that I think television is bad, I just don’t know if a 3-year-old’s brain benefits from television . . . Until our son was 2 years old, we didn’t have any kind of information feed like that. Now we will let him watch . . . these little 10-minute Curious George videos . . . So the goal is not to keep him from those things, but rather to allow him to develop these things as they seem natural for him. So the result is that his playing is very communal, very interactive . . . he is very imaginative; he is just doing it by himself.

Jack and other participants expressed their concern for what their children were being exposed to through television, and believed that their children could learn more through human interaction rather than interaction with the television. Jack continued:

Children naturally develop emotional capacity and learn what their emotions are like. When you are watching television and being exposed to things that are really done by adults, who don’t really understand what’s going on inside a child’s brain, and you look at some of them [television shows] and they are done for adults. Is it really necessary to inject those kinds of things into that kind of brain before it’s asking for them?
Jack and many other participants were conscious of the developmental stages of their children. Participants reported being conscious of what kinds of technology their children were exposed to, and made deliberate choices about what was beneficial or constructive for them. Angela stated that when her family was over at a relative’s house and all of the other children were watching television, instead of allowing her child to sit with the rest of the children and watch a developmentally inappropriate show, she tried to “find ways to distract them [the children] by going outside.”

Participants shared that they were careful in their selection of what their children watched and were exposed to in technology. Violette shared:

I filter through what they watch, like violence. I don’t trust those TV ratings because violence is a big thing. Like that is not very mindful, like thinking that you should shoot somebody, or hit somebody. That is not respectful. I don’t want them to be desensitized to that.

The participants discussed that they were careful about what things their children were exposed to and whether it reinforced what they wanted their children to learn. Participants reported being sensitive to what programs were on the television, and often censoring their children from shows that other children typically watch to align with their parenting values.

Most of the participants also shared the importance of limiting technology for themselves while with their family. They shared that limiting this technology was an important part in being mindful, present, and attentive with their children. Fred shared:
I mean one of my big goals for mindfulness for myself is sort of to be completely present in the moment and for parenting even more so. It’s like, it’s a working parent with a double career household; we don’t get to see him all that much. [When] those moment come rather than, “hey, leave me alone for a second so I can do this or this or this,” try to reduce that as much as possible and be present when I am with him, not checking the phone or things like that.

Josie also shared that when she was practicing staying in the moment with her children, she tried to minimize technology: “Like I don’t check my email on the weekends; I don’t usually talk to my friends on the phone, we also limit TV, video games and all of that.” This boundary on the amount of technology their children were exposed to was something that was important to all of the participants, and they all took an active role in limiting and discerning what was important for their child.

Health aspects. Lastly, the participants discussed the health aspects of their children, or being intentional and deliberate about the foods their children consumed. Several participants discussed the conscious choices of food for their children and viewed their diet as being a mindful part of their parenting. Angela was deliberate in discussing her concern about her son’s diet, and spoke about the care that went into preparing food for her son. She shared, “We eat in a very specific way, we do not eat junk food . . . because I want to be mindful about what we are putting in our bodies.” Angela and other participants explored their mindful choices about healthy food for their family. Jack shared that his home is specifically set up to be conducive for his son’s needs and that
“during meal times, we are aware of his diet. He doesn’t know what McDonalds is. He’s never been there. So he is not eating a lot of fast food, and those types of things.”

Participants discussed the benefits of healthy food for their children, and how they are trying to establish good patterns of eating while they are young. Fred discussed how his wife was a pediatrician and how she is “a little intense about organic food” and how they try to provide their son with only organic fruits and vegetables while at home and that their son intentionally does not get candy, sweets, or juice. Participants were intentional with their children, not only about the type of environment that surrounds them in and outside their home, but with the food they put into their bodies as well.

In the above section, participants described examples of how they were conscious about creating a safe haven, or mindful environment for their children. Participants discussed various self-care practices that were important to their well-being as the foundation to their family. Participants described the importance of having support systems that encouraged their mindful parenting practices, and also communicated the importance of monitoring cultural influences and technology. Participants also discussed how being conscious about the child’s schooling and health were important parts of mindfully parenting their young children. The next section discusses the participants’ views on challenges and obstacles to their mindful parenting.

**Theme 6: Obstacles to Mindful Parenting**

In the final theme, the participants discussed some of the obstacles, difficulties, and sacrifices made to mindfully parent their young children. This theme was addressed by all of the participants as they reflected on their daily experiences of parenting.
Participants often shared that the examples they shared were sometimes “best case scenario,” explaining that to be mindful, self-awareness, and conscious during their parenting at all times was unrealistic. At times, the participants qualified their statements about their daily practices of mindful parenting by stating that they were talking in “ideal terms” and “it is not always like this.” To understand this theme further, two categories are explored: (a) challenges, and (b) sacrifices (see Table 1). Participants spoke about the challenges of employing mindful techniques and the daily obstacles that they overcame to parent mindfully.

Table 1

Outline of Theme 6

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<th>Theme 6: Obstacles to Mindful Parenting</th>
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<td>(a) Challenges</td>
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<td>(b) Sacrifices</td>
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**Challenges.** Participants often spoke of the times in their lives that presented a challenge to mindfully parenting their young children. Participants reported that family schedules, health concerns, and the demands of multiple children were some examples of the major obstacles to mindful parenting.

Many of the participants commented on the stress of their family’s schedule, often stating that being somewhere at a particular time was an especially difficult period for mindful interactions with their children. Angela shared:
When I have to do all this stuff, when we have our to-do lists, when we have to be somewhere, when we scheduled things, I am much less mindful. I have a lot more attachments towards what he [her son] is doing or saying.

Angela stated that when she is on a scheduled and needs to be somewhere, she found herself to be more attached to the outcome of what her child is doing and saying, rather than accepting him for where he is. Angela and other participants observed that when they were concerned about where they are going next and being on a certain time schedule, they were much less mindful of their child’s emotions, and more focused on getting somewhere.

Participants shared that the time demands of raising a family with young children was challenging and very time consuming and that the time demands of their schedule often took their attention off being mindful in the moment. Eleanor shared:

I have a lot of things that I do, and I think all of us do. You are busy and when you don’t have the resources and you are tired, and it’s difficult to balance it all. And so when you have fewer resources inside of you, it is easier to slip into patterns that you are not proud of [as a parent].

Eleanor commented that when her family’s schedule was very full, it was more challenging for her to be mindful of herself and what her children needed. When busy and stressed, she found it easier to practice old patterns of parenting that are not mindful or aligned with her values.

Participants discussed that their physical and emotional health affected their ability to parent mindfully. Jack reflected on his barriers for mindful interactions with his
son: “It depends on the situation, the day, and all the other things. I think there are factors like my mood, and my own frame of mind. Am I worn down when interacting with him?” Jack and several other participants discussed their physical and emotional health as barriers that impaired their ability for mindful interactions. Karen shared her main challenge had been a physical change within herself; she reported that perimenopause was a “huge challenge” for her. Karen reported her need to adjust to her often unpredictable and erratic emotions and the challenges of that with a young child. Karen recognized that “it’s difficult being in my mid-40s with a 3-year-old,” and expressed concerns about how much her health had impacted her parenting.

Participants also described having multiple children and the demands from different family members as an obstacle. Participants shared about the difficulty with having to mindfully interact with all of their children at the same time, due to the different needs of each child. Ricardo shared that one challenge to his mindful parenting was the ranging needs and time demands of his multiple children:

They are all trying to do different things, so sometimes you have to pick the one [child] that gets the most attention . . . and at the end of the day, not everything can be a 45 minute conversation with each child.

It was important to Ricardo to have those meaningful conversations with his children and he shared the difficulty in equally distributing his time with all of the children. Josie commented: “It’s hard on a daily basis, I mean I have four kids, and to really nurture that [mindful interactions] is a challenge.” Eleanor also shared similar difficulties, stating: “So it’s constant, and then when you have more that one, it’s like what does each one
need, and where do my needs come in?” Participants shared the challenges of mindfully parenting multiple children and balancing the needs of the family with their own needs. Participants reflected on the challenges that were in their lives, and how obstacles and sacrifices are a common occurrence in parenting.

**Sacrifices.** Several participants discussed the many difficult choices and sacrifices they made to mindfully parent their children. The sacrifices were important to the participants, in that they were essential to interacting with their children mindfully. Angela discussed her choice to be a stay at home mother, because she was giving an unbalanced amount of time toward her career, rather than her family. She described that period of her life as “talk about mindless on steroids.” Angela came to the realization that she was not being mindful of herself or her son while working: “I felt like a crazy person . . . and I quit.” She shared how much of a struggle it was for her to transition into a stay at home mom, but how worthwhile it was for her and her family. Eleanor also shared that her job was often infringing on her ability to be the type of mother she wanted to be, stating:

I made a very conscious choice; I got off the tenure track. I did a lot of things because I felt like the lifestyle that I wanted for my life and for my family, once I had kids, it was not compatible with what was needed to be successful on the tenure track.

Josie also shared about the sacrifices she made with her education, employment, and friendships, stating: “I want to be with my children while they are young and give them memorable experiences” rather than work full time, or finish her education. She also
commented how “I have lost girlfriends because I don’t really want to go out for girls’ night” and that her priorities revolve around the relationships with her children.

In Theme 6, participants described everyday experiences that were obstacles to mindfully interacting with children. Participants discussed the challenges of time demands and schedules, and how that influenced their ability to be mindful with their children. Participants shared how their own health concerns as well as being pulled in many different directions challenged their awareness of children’s needs. Participants also spoke of the many sacrifices they made to uphold their values of mindfully interacting with their children, and how they took their role as parents seriously.

**Chapter Summary**

In summary, this chapter reviewed the description of the participants, a brief overview of the data analysis, and a detailed description of the six themes. The themes helped to answer this study’s research questions of (a) What are the lived experiences of parents with young children who practice being mindful in their daily lives, and (b) What are mindful parents’ perceptions of their attachments with their young children? The themes helped to answer the research questions by highlighting the specific experiences the participants had while parenting mindfully. Participants described their values in mindful parenting and how they used the present moment, sovereignty, intentionality, acceptance, and flexibility within themselves while interacting with their children. Participants also described the mindful skills they utilized while parenting and how they attuned to their children to help them in situations. They implemented mindful behaviors into their parenting strategies, often being a model or guide for their children.
Specifically addressing research question 2, participants described their relationship with their children as being filled with appreciation and affection. Participants often saw their children as the perfect fit for them, and felt a great sense of intimacy when connecting with them. Participants recognized self-awareness as an essential part in parenting their children mindfully, and being aware of the triggers from their past while having compassion for themselves. Participants explored their experiences in trying to create a safe haven for their family by monitoring their own mindfulness and support systems, as well as the types of cultural influences allowed into their home and in child’s outside environment. Finally, participants addressed the everyday obstacles and sacrifices that often can impair their ability to be mindful with their children. The following chapter explores how this study’s results compare with relevant research, as well as explores implications for counseling, counseling education, and future research studies.
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this current study was to explore the daily experiences of mindful parents. Parents own personal perspective and experience was absent from previous investigations of mindful parenting. Prior investigations relied heavily on quantitative methodologies of mindful parenting interventions, focusing on outcomes of interventions rather than what parents, who considered themselves to be mindful, were experiencing while parenting. Two questions that guided this research project were:

1. What are the lived experiences of parents with young children, who practice being mindful in their daily lives?
2. What are mindful parents’ perceptions of their attachments with their young children?

In this chapter, the data are interpreted and conceptualized in relation to the scholarly literature. Implications for the field of counseling and counselor education are considered. Limitations and directions for future research are also discussed.

Interpretations of the Findings and Research Questions

The research questions were answered within the six major themes that were supported by the participants’ interview data: (a) mindful values in parenting, (b) mindful skills in parenting, (c) relationship with child, (d) awareness of the internal mindset, (e) a safe haven for the family, (f) obstacles to mindful parenting (see Table 5).

The first research question examined the lived experiences of parents with young children, who practice being mindful in their daily lives. The six themes that emerged
from the interview data explored, in depth, the essence of the lived experiences of mindful parents. Through the interviews, participants gave detailed introspections into their daily lives with their children. The researcher and participants then explored together how mindfulness was intertwined into these experiences and how participants utilized mindfulness in interactions with their children. These findings were gathered through explicit language used by the participants during the interviews. The first theme of mindful values in parenting discussed how the participants experienced the fundamental values held while parenting their children. Participants valued being in the present moment and being intentional with their child, as well as accepting of experiences and of their children as they were. Participants described valuing the sovereignty of their child, being flexible and having an unattached view, and saw the family unit as a place they fit perfectly within.

The second theme, mindful skills in parenting, discussed participants’ experience of implementing mindful strategies while parenting. Participants described how they incorporated mindfulness into their parenting approaches, attuned to their child’s needs, and a modeled mindfulness for the child. Participants also noticed that using mindfulness skills during parenting was a process that needed continual practice. The third theme, relationship with the child, discussed the participants’ experiences of appreciation and empathy for their child, and how their child was “the perfect fit” for them. Participants described experiencing their relationship with their child as full of affection and intimacy, as well as enduring over time. In the fourth theme, awareness of the internal mindset, self-awareness was something that all participants valued and saw as an essential part of
mindful parenting. They also discussed the importance of reflecting on their own childhood and utilizing self-compassion in the awareness. Participants discussed their experience of creating safe haven or a mindful environment in the fifth theme, through recognizing areas within themselves and their environment that they desired to be intentional and mindful. In the sixth theme, participants discussed the obstacles and sacrifices that were present for them while practicing mindful parenting.

In addressing the second research question of mindful parents’ perceptions of their attachments with their young children, the researcher isolated experiences from the interview data related to the parent-child attachment relationship. Discovering the perception of attachment was difficult due to the intimate and often hard to verbalize nature of the relationship between parent and child. Only being able to capture the attachment relationship was an unforeseen challenge while addressing the second research question. Rather than direct and explicit statements from the participants, data concerning the perception of attachment were gathered through implicit and subtle comments by participant’s discussing their experiences of mindful parenting.

In addressing the second research question, there was a significant overlap with the themes that addressed the first research question. Specifically themes that answered the second research question contained elements that addressed the participants’ relationship with their child. Themes one and two, mindful values in parenting and mindful skills in parenting, addressed the attachment relationship through the participants’ intentional emotional regulation while interacting with their children, and participants’ ability to attune and respond to the growing needs of their child. This was
important because being sensitive and receptive to the needs of the child is essential to the attachment relationship. Theme three, relationship with child, contained descriptions of how the participants viewed their relationship with their children. Empathy and understanding of the child, viewing the child as a perfect fit, and recognition of the intimate bond between parent and child illustrated the participants’ awareness of the bond with their child and that they were continually monitoring and repairing the relationship when needed. Theme four, awareness of the internal mindset, described participants’ ability to know themselves and regulate their emotional states in order to not pass forward unhelpful or unhealthy attachment patterns. Through this awareness, participants were able to emotionally regulate their intense feelings, thus allowing them to be more present within the parent-child relationship. Lastly theme five, safe haven for the family, explored how participants structured their family’s home environment to support attachment and exploratory behaviors. This was important because the participants viewed it as their responsibility to provide developmentally appropriate and safe environments for their child to freely explore within.

The above themes illustrated that participants were aware and continually working to strengthen the relationship with their children. The attachment relationship was seen as a priority for parents and they made decisions during parenting that mutually benefited the relationship, themselves, and the child. Below is a more detailed investigation into the themes and categories of the study, along with how the study’s findings were supported by the current mindful parenting and attachment literature and how the study adds unique contributions to the literature.
Mindful Values in Parenting

Within this first theme, mindful values in parenting, participants described how they viewed parenting and their interactions with their children. Participants discussed their values in the categories of present moment, sovereignty, intentional, acceptance, flexibility and unattached view, family unit. Findings suggested that implementing these foundational values helped the participants to interact with their children in ways they found meaningful and beneficial to the relationship and the children’s development. These values were described as approaches participants used for being happy and healthy in their parenting interactions, and helped to nurture happy and healthy children. Literature supported the participants’ viewpoint in that mindful awareness had been found to promote a deeper sense of well-being, simply by being present with whatever is happening in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). The interview data suggested that participants utilized these mindful values as a foundation to support their mindful parenting strategies, and that these values assisted them in being the kind of parent they wanted to be. Steinberg (2004) also supported the idea that being a mindful parent was about being intentional and conscious during decision making in parenting and reacting in ways the parents intended. Participants believed that these foundational values helped them interact and guide their children mindfully, and supported their efforts in creating positive interactions with their children.

Present moment. Foundational to the participants’ values in parenting, was interacting with their children with present moment awareness. Mindfulness is often described as the awareness that develops through purposefully paying attention to the
present moment, nonjudgmentally (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Through the interview data, participants explained that parenting from the present moment was a foundational concept because it allowed them to build the kind of relationship that helped their children feel understood and respected. Findings suggested it was important for the participants to make conscious attempts to help their children feel heard and understood, and participants reported the above task to be easier while focused in the present moment. Fisher et al. (2012) supported this idea reporting parents in their study were more able to be in the present moment with their children and partner with a mindfulness practice. This study’s participants discussed that being in the present moment allowed them to listen and to be in tune with what their children were experiencing, rather than being self-conscious, automatic, or overly emotional about their experiences of their young children. Scholarly literature supported the notion that mindful parents are less automatic and more intentional in the parenting process, helping to support a healthy parenting relationship (Dumas, 2005).

Literature also supported the participants’ experiences, stating that being mindful can help “fundamentally shift” (Duncan et al., 2009a, p. 256) perspectives of parents, allowing them to see a parenting moment within the larger context of the long term relationship and wisely attend to the child’s needs. Participants reported that by being more aware of the present moment during challenging interactions, they were able to soothe their children and support them emotionally when comfort was needed. Duncan et al. (2009a) supported participants’ experiences, stating that present moment awareness gives parents the ability to understand different perspectives and see choices that are not
readily available. Findings suggested mindful awareness in the present moment assisted participants’ understanding of their children’s perspectives and emotions at a given time, as well as awareness of their own emotional stated while parenting. This perspective and understanding assisted the participants’ conscious and intentional choices made when interacting with their children.

Participants also discussed valuing present moment awareness in parenting interactions because it helped them to slow down, and really get to know their child’s preferences and unique characteristics. Findings suggested this slowing allowed participants to get to know and understand their child on a deeper level and work to build a strong relationship with their child. Scholarly literature echoed this idea of being more present and less automatically reactive with children, allowing parents to foster a more satisfying and better relationship with their children (Altmaier & Maloney, 2007; Dumas, 2005; Singh et al., 2009).

**Sovereignty.** Another value essential to the participants’ experiences of parenting was sovereignty, or respecting the child’s autonomy over their own (parents’) preferences, emotions, and choices. Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (1997) stated that sovereignty is a central premise to mindful parenting because it allows the child to experience the world in his or her own way, and develop an inward strength to interact the world. Findings suggested this value was very important for the relationship between parent and child because participants wanted their child to feel respected and valued as an individual in their family. Steinberg (2004) supported the notion that parents should give the same considerations and kindness to children, as you would to someone you just
meet. Meaning to speak to children politely, listen when children are communicating, and respect their opinions in parenting interactions (Steinberg, 2004). Literature stated that these open interactions allowed for respect to be a reciprocal process between parent and children, allowing both parties to give, feel, and receive respect in the relationship (Duncan et al., 2009a; Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997; Steinberg, 2004).

A few participants highlighted an analogy found in Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn’s (1997) work, that suggested viewing children as a guest in your home for 18 years. Seeing the child as a sovereign temporary guest in your home assisted the participants in learning more about the child with curiosity and kindness, rather than with expectations and a sense of control over the child. Findings suggested participants strove to value their children’s individual personalities and preferences, allowing the children to teach the parents about themselves, rather than the parents teaching the children who they were. Literature supported the participants’ experiences of striving for a balanced mix of autonomy and regulations in the parenting relationship, advocating for respecting the children’s autonomy (Steinberg, 2004). With a greater sense of control and self-knowledge, children can begin to understand their own thoughts, emotions, and preferences, allowing them to develop a strong sense of confidence and self-efficacy (Steinberg, 2004).

**Intentional.** Findings suggested being intentional and deliberate during parenting interactions was another foundational value of mindful parenting. Through the interview data, participants illustrated the importance of being intentional as not reacting with automatic and mindless responses, rather, with awareness and thoughtfulness toward the
experiences with their children. Mindful parenting literature supported the participants’ experiences, reporting that being mindful and intentional created more space between thought and action, allowing the parents to act in accordance with parenting values, rather than reacting automatically and hastily (Bishop et al., 2004; Dumas, 2005; Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). Siegel and Hartzell described the process as taking “low road” versus “high road” (p. 154) capabilities in our minds. Whereas, reacting with little awareness would be operating from the low road (lower mode processing in the brain, e.g., overly emotional, impulsive, reactionary), and high road functioning (high mode processing in the brain, e.g., rational, reflective, intentional) is acting with self-awareness and deliberateness (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). Literature supports that this metacognitive activity or mindful awareness, allowed parents to create a pause between the initial reaction and the moment of responding, helping parents to be more intentional about their interactions with their young child (Duncan et al., 2009a; Dumas, 2004; Siegel & Hartzell, 2003).

Snyder et al. (2012) put intentionality in perspective, suggesting that the emotional regulation gained through the metacognitive awareness of self while interacting with children can decrease stress and anxiety in the parent-child relationship. Furthermore, a decrease in stress and anxiety in the parent-child relationship and parent emotional regulation is also associated with healthy parent-child attachments (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003; Snyder et al., 2012). Participants saw the value of being intentional in the relationship and the implications this had with the connection with their child. Findings suggested participants also recognized when they were not acting out of intention and
were able to adjust and change what they were doing with their children to then be more intentional once again. During the interviews, participants discussed the value of having deliberate and meaningful interactions with their children because it helped them to foster a strong relationship with their child that had foundational aspects of respect and acceptance.

**Acceptance.** Findings suggested participants’ believed acceptance to be another foundational value in mindful parenting. Participants discussed the importance of letting go of their expectations, concerns, control, and worries that got in the way of their parenting values and positive interactions with their children. Findings suggested participants valued trusting in the natural flow of events and accepting what was happening next rather than concerned about fears and worries. Scholarly literature supported their experiences, stating that mindful parenting is about bringing in qualities of self awareness, low reactivity in emotional situations, and acceptance of the internal and external states of both parent and child (Coatsworth et al., 2010). Acceptance was seen as an active process where parents intentionally take in all that is happening within themselves and the child, and accepts it, as it is occurring, without judgment (Duncan et al., 2009a; Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997).

Participants also discussed the importance of acceptance and being flexible to the changing needs of the children, and to the normal challenges that are inherent when parenting young children. Duncan et al. (2009a) supported this by stating that mindful parenting involves nonjudgmental acceptance of the experiences and challenges of parenting, accepting them as a healthy part of life. Participants described learning how
being aware of the emotional states within themselves and their children, helped them to be able to manage their fears and desire for control, and be able to enjoy their parenting interactions more. Lloyd and Hastings (2008) described acceptance as an important aspect of parenting because parents who were more accepting, reported less anxiety, depression, and stress.

**Flexibility and unattached view.** Related to acceptance, participants also discussed the value of being flexible and having an unattached view to whatever was happening in the present moment. Through the interview data, this was described as the participants’ ability to adjust and be flexible to what was actually happening, rather than going forward with their expectations of what they thought they should be experiencing with their child. Fisher et al. (2012) supported participants’ experiences in their study of pregnant women and children, stating that with a mindfulness practice, pregnant women and their partners were able to face birth and parenting with a reduced sense of needing to control when they adopted more flexibility in their expectations and views.

The findings suggested the participants noticed the need for flexibility and having an unattached view of the outcome to be especially important in the areas of the children changing developmentally over time. Steinberg (2004) also viewed the developmental changes of children, as an area that needed parenting adaptations and flexibility, stating what works for parenting preschoolers will not work for parenting adolescents. Steinberg (2004) also commented on the significance of adjusting parenting skills to the needs of the child. Attachment literature suggested that parents’ ability to attune, regulate, and
appropriately respond to the growing needs of the developing child results in healthier attachments (Bowlby, 1988).

Participants reported that this ability to be flexible and less attached to an outcome of a situation increased their positive feelings toward their children and the tasks of parenting. Brown and Ryan (2004) discussed the benefits of mindfulness and stated that mindful practices can enhance critical parenting qualities including empathy, positive affect, and self-esteem. This aligns with the participants’ experience of having more enjoyable interactions with their children.

**Family unit.** Participants shared how they often saw their family as people they enjoyed spending time with, and that their family time was special, sacred, and pleasurable. Participants described creating positive family rituals that promoted pleasurable parent child interactions. The category of family unit illustrated how viewing family time as pleasurable and rewarding for parents and children often reinforced positive family interactions. Finding from this study suggested that the rituals and positive family interactions helped both themselves and their children look forward to future family time together. These reinforcing thought patterns can be understood as automaticity, or automatic thinking patterns. Dumas (2005) explored how the process of automaticity could be both helpful and unhelpful, depending on whether the family is in positive automatic thinking pattern or negative automatic thinking pattern. Similar to the participants’ value and positivity toward family time, Dumas (2005) reported that positive family thought patterns promoted healthy coping, pro-social behaviors, and mutual problem solving, whereas negative family thinking patterns lead to feelings of
blame, helplessness, and withdrawal. Therefore, the participants’ foundational affirming beliefs about family could be a beneficial pattern, helping to maintain and cultivating more positivity toward the family unit.

Findings suggested that through focusing on the present moment, acting with intention, being accepting, and having flexibility, the participants were able to support an enjoyable family atmosphere. Participants were intentional and involved in creating special family rituals that showed each other the care and loved shared within the family, thus perpetuating the positive feelings within their family.

**Mindful Skills in Parenting**

Throughout the interviews, participants reported intentionally implementing mindful skills within their parenting interactions especially when disciplining, teaching, and handling common parenting challenges. This study’s findings suggested participants used these skills to help them interact with their child mindfully, and to help foster the kind of relationship they wanted with their children. Findings suggested it was important to the participants to act skillfully during parenting interactions, while aligning with their parenting values of respecting and honoring the child. Within this second theme, the categories of parenting strategies, being a model and a guide, attune to child, it’s been a process, mindfulness as a lens for life, explored the mindful skills the participants utilized in their daily lives.

**Parenting strategies.** The first category of parenting strategies explores the participants’ discussions of utilizing mindfulness skills within their parenting interactions to help keep calm and react in a way that was developmentally appropriate for their child.
Results from the interviews suggested this was important to the participants because it allowed them to interact with their children in a way that was intentional, rather than overly emotional, hasty, or mindless. Implementing mindfulness into parenting interactions and strategies has been identified as one way that parents can have better emotional regulation and control when stressed or handling difficult situations with children (Bailie et al., 2012; Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). Literature supported the participants’ experiences, stating that a mindfulness practice in parenting may increase parents’ self-regulation and lower reactivity to the child’s developmentally appropriate behaviors (Duncan et al., 2009a). Participants reported that being mindful in stressful situations helped them to teach and communicate more effectively with their child, rather than overreacting or using harsh discipline. Overreaction is an important aspect of parenting to monitor; research findings suggest that being more tolerant of children’s emotional displays, both positive and negative, helps children become more socially and emotionally competent (Eisenberg et al., 1998).

Findings in this study suggested that implementing mindfulness skills within parenting approaches helped the participants to feel happier and more satisfied in the parenting relationship. Participants discussed implementing mindfulness strategies, such as being present moment focused and understanding where the child was in the moment, helped create an environment of understanding and calm, rather than fighting and confusion between parent and child. Scholarly literature supported the participants’ experiences, suggesting that by bringing full attention to parental interactions, parents can perceive their child’s feelings and thoughts more clearly, which in turn, may decrease
conflict and disagreements (Hastings & Grusec, 1998). Scholarly literature reported that using mindfulness skills during parenting practices was associated with higher levels of parenting satisfaction, as well as increased compliance, non-aggression, and social skills in children with developmental disabilities (Singh et al., 2006b; Singh et al., 2007). It was thought that using mindful strategies in parenting increased the parents’ ability for empathic understanding and forgiveness; helping parents learn more about their emotional triggers and disengage more quickly when stressed (Benn et al., 2012).

**Being a model and guide.** The ability to disengage from emotional triggers during parenting interactions was one way participants described modeling healthy behaviors and emotional regulation for their children. Through the findings in this study, it was evident that participants found it important to be a model and guide for their children. Participants discussed that by using mindfulness skills in parenting, they were modeling helpful skills for their children such as compassion, healthy relationships, mindfulness, emotional regulation, and self-awareness and improvement. Researchers studying the effects of mindful parenting have suggested that mindfulness training in parents can have transforming effects within the parent that can influence the parent-child relationship (Singh et al., 2006b; Singh et al., 2007). Singh et al. (2007) reported that participants’ children in their study had improved behaviors and compliance with their caregivers, without any direct training or treatment. Only the parents of their study had mindfulness training; however, the children also showed marked improvements and benefits from parents’ mindfulness (Singh et al., 2007). Participants in this current study were deliberate in modeling and guiding their children in the use of mindfulness skills,
and literature supports the idea that the children benefit from the parents’ practice of mindfulness.

**Attune to the child.** Findings from this study suggest that attuning to the child was another skill participants utilized while interacting with their young children. Participants discussed the importance in attuning to their children’s thoughts and emotions during parenting interactions. This assisted the participants to then understand where their child was emotionally and cognitively, and helped them be able to respectfully comfort or guide their child into the next activity or experience. Findings from participants’ interviews suggested that this required a degree of sensitivity and empathy from the parents to understand and acknowledge where the child was in the moment and what the child needed. Attachment literature reported that infants form secure attachments with caregivers who are sensitive and receptive to their child’s cues (Bowlby, 1969/1982). As the child grows, it becomes important for the parent to read and respond appropriately to the child’s signals and cues, and attend to the child’s needs in the moment. Bowlby (1969/1982) described an effective caregiver as someone who responds to the child’s needs and cues, and therefore the child will benefit developmentally from the relationship. The effective caregiver meets the needs of the child in a consistent and dependable way, and the child is noticeably soothed when comforted by the caregiver (Prior & Glaser, 2006).

Participants described that when they attuned to the children where they were, their children were more likely to be calm in the situation or respond appropriately to whatever was requested of them at the time. Participants also described that when they
themselves were not calm, or mindful of their children’s mindset or emotions, their children were more likely to be upset or disagree with what was taking place. Duncan et al. (2009a) described what the participants experienced as “listening with full awareness” (p. 258). This skill combines listening with quality focused attention and awareness that goes beyond the spoken words that are shared between parent and child (Duncan et al., 2009a). This listening practice requires parental sensitivity and empathy, which is essential to the parent-child relationship, to then allow the parent to interpret cues about the needs of the child (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Meins et al. (2001) found a strong link between the mother’s ability to have appropriate thought-related comments (i.e., understand what the child is thinking) and higher rates of secure attachments. Therefore, parents who are more aware and attuned with their children’s emotions and cognitions are more likely to have secure attachment relationships with their children.

It’s been a process. Participants in this study described these mindful parenting skills as knowledge and approaches that needed to be continually evolving and growing with the child and emerging parenting experiences. In this category, participants described the continual work and practice that is needed in implementing mindfulness values and skills into parenting, and that the parent does not have to be perfect and get it right every time. Siegel and Hartzell (2003) reported that parental awareness of the “ruptures” (p. 185) in the parenting relationship (e.g., misunderstandings or breakdowns in communication with the child) are essential in allowing the parent to begin the process of “repairing” (p. 185) the relationship with the child. This aligns with participants’ interview data that discussed attempting to revisit and adjust their parenting strategies and
mindfulness skills. Participants sought to revise what they felt was not working and when they were less mindful. Participants and literature discussed the importance of becoming aware when something is not working and adjusting, to restore the collaborative, nurturing relationship with the child (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997; Siegel & Hartzell, 2003).

Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (1997) reverberate the notion that mindfulness is considered a “practice” (p. 107), not something that is just a philosophy or something that is ever achieved or accomplished. The practice of mindful parenting is about intentionally remembering to be in the present moment with the child rather than reacting from an automatic place or unhelpful skills (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997).

Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (1997) stated that as soon as the parent begins attending to the feelings of being lost, that is the moment they are no longer lost.

The interview data also suggested that participants endeavored to have a non-judgmental attitude toward revisiting mindfulness literature or doing things that helped them get back on track with mindfully relating to their child. Siegel and Hartzell (2003) stated that compassion for self is an essential part of helping parents change their behaviors without shame or guilt, knowing that it is just a part of the parenting process.

**Mindfulness as a lens for life.** The last skill that emerged from the participants’ interview data was extending their mindfulness to all activities in their life. Findings suggested that mindfulness as a lens for life was a skill that helped participants not only be mindful while parenting, but helped them be mindful in a variety of situations and interactions in their lives. Participants discussed the importance in being mindful at work
and in their significant relationships as a way to help them cope with stressors in life. Scholarly literature supported the participants’ experiences, suggesting mindfulness can have a generalizing effect that can affect the quality of life of the person practicing it, as well as others to whom they are closely related (Blackledge & Hayes, 2006; Singh et al., 2006b; Singh et al., 2007; Singh et al., 2010). Participants reported that applying mindfulness skills to all areas of their lives helped to reduce their overall stress, and gave them better coping skills to handle the challenges in their lives.

**Relationship With Child**

As a part of their experiences as mindful parents, participants expressed the importance of the relationship with their child. Participants described the relationship with their children as a central motivation for parenting mindfully. When participants described their relationships, they often used words such as love, bond, trust, affection, intimacy, and cuddling in their description. Two categories of appreciation and affection and several subcategories emerged from the interview data of participants’ impressions of their relationship with their child.

**Appreciation.** Findings suggest that the feeling of appreciation was a major part of how the participants viewed and experienced their relationships with their children. Three subcategories emerged within the category of appreciation: gratitude, empathy and understanding, and the perfect fit. During the interviews, participants discussed a sense of gratitude when thinking about the relationship with their children. Findings suggested that it was during mindful moments with their children that participants were able to be more grateful and feel more gratitude toward their children and parenting experiences.
Participants also discussed that while mindful, they were able to understand and have more empathic interactions with their children, which helped nurture appreciation for their child. Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (1997) expressed empathy as a foundational part of mindful parenting, due to the importance of understanding the child’s emotional, cognitive, and developmental needs and functioning. Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn expressed that empathy is essential during parenting because it allows parents to attune to the child’s unique point of view and helps parents understand the child’s needs in the present moment (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997). Empathy and understanding are also associated with secure parent-child attachments, thus enabling the child to benefit and learn from the relationship with the caregiver (Bowlby, 1973; Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). Bowlby (1973) asserted that empathic responses by caregivers do not create ongoing dependence; rather they allow for the building of empathy and emotional regulation within growing children. Scholarly research echoed the importance of appropriate responsiveness and empathy to young children, reporting strong links between understanding and responding to the child’s thoughts, and higher rates of secure attachments (Meins et al., 2001).

Scholarly research also demonstrated that the cultivation of mindfulness was associated with long-term increases of empathy in parents. Bailie et al. (2012) found parents to have an increased sense of empathy and acceptance over a year after the MBCT training for those who maintained their practice of mindfulness. Benn et al. (2012) also found an increase in empathic concerns and forgiveness among their participants (parents and teachers who received mindfulness training). Other researchers
have demonstrated alterations in the brain that are related to empathy and self-observation with a mindfulness practice, meaning that mindfulness was associated with changes in the brain that allowed for greater capability to understand yourself and others (Lazar et al., 2005). Scholarly literature supported the participants’ experiences of parenting, with regards to an increased sense of empathy and the importance of empathy and understanding on the parent-child relationship (Bailie et al., 2012; Benn et al., 2012). Findings from this study suggested that participants viewed empathy as an essential piece in parenting because it assisted them in their responsiveness to the specific needs of their children and ability to cultivate appreciation in their relationship.

Additionally, participants in this study described their children as “the perfect fit” for them. Interview data suggested that participants recognized being in sync with their child, and that they matched the specific needs and characteristics of their child. This “perfect fit” also allowed for appreciation of their child’s unique and special attributes. Participants expressed appreciation for the distinct qualities of their children that fit and aligned with the parent naturally. This was an important aspect of the relationship with the child, due to the participants’ acknowledgments of the special connection they had with their child. Attachment literature supported the participants’ experiences, stating that in a secure attachment, both the attachment system within the child and the caregiving system within the parent, work together to meet the needs of the child (Bowlby, 1969/1982). The two systems are in sync with each other to help the parent and child read and deliver the right cues between each other, creating a satisfying relationship for both parties (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Findings from this study suggested participants
saw this as an essential component to the relationship or bond with their children, and a characteristic of their parent-child relationship.

**Affection and bond.** Findings from this study also recognized the category of affection and bond, as fundamental components to the relationship between the mindful parents and their children. Three subcategories emerged from the data: intimacy, embracing, and relationship over time. Within these subcategories, participants explored experiences in their relationship that discussed affection and bonding with their child.

During the interviews, participants were asked specifically about their experiences of the relationship with their child. Oftentimes, the participants had difficulties putting their relationship or bond into words, and became emotional while recalling memories that highlighted their relationship. Many participants shared moments with their children that they described as intimate and deeply personal. Viewing the participants’ experiences through an attachment lens, the intense emotions and difficulties describing interactions with their children may have stemmed from their own attachment systems that were unconscious or innate (Bowlby, 1988; Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). This sense of intimacy and connection with their children is thought of as deeply personal; parents often respond from instinctual patterns they learned as young children (Bowlby, 1988). Participants described a sense of intimacy when recalling their bond with their child, stating experiences like “dissolving into each other” and “I don’t even know how to describe it, it’s other worldly.” Bowlby (1951) supported the participants’ experiences, stating that infants and young children should experience relationships with caregivers that are “warm, intimate, and continuous” (p. 13).
Similarly to the feelings of intimacy, participants also discussed the importance of affection and touch within the relationship with their child. Participants described valuing embrace and touch as a part of the relationship with their children and saw physical contact as a fundamental way to be present with their children. Findings suggested participants viewed touch as a way to communicate and concentrate on the relationship with their children. Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (1997) highlighted the importance of touch, stating that being mindful of the child and his or her needs can give mindful parents the ability to know when children are needing to be comforted, touched, or embraced. Steinberg (2004) also reported that physical touch was not only essential for an infant, but also essential to a growing child. Touch not only brings comfort and support to an upset child, it stimulates physical growth, health, and healing (Steinberg, 2004). It is as beneficial to the parent as it is for the child, helping the parent to feel an increased emotional attachment to the young child (Steinberg, 2004). Literature reported the importance of being deliberate and mindful when embracing children, allowing both the parent and the child to benefit long term from the physical interaction with each other (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997; Steinberg, 2004).

Lastly, in the third theme of relationship with children, findings suggested that participants consciously thought about the bond with their children as one that develops and endures over time. Participants’ interview data suggested that parents’ longstanding relationship with their child was an important part in the mindful parenting approaches they are practicing with their young children. Mindful parenting literature suggested that incorporating mindful awareness in the parent child relationship can have lasting impacts,
helping the child and parent to feel more satisfaction in the relationship, and have more enduring and healthy relationships long term (Duncan et al., 2009a). Findings suggested that participants experienced the relationship with their children as warm and affectionate, often focusing on the bond they were creating with their young child as one that will develop and mature over time.

**Awareness of the Internal Mindset**

Along with values, skills, and relationship, participants’ interview data described awareness of the internal mindset or self-awareness, as a fundamental part of the mindful parenting experiences. Findings suggested that participants were intentionally reflective about their own emotions, thoughts, behaviors, and past experiences. Three categories emerged from the findings: self-awareness, residue from childhood, and compassion for self.

**Self-awareness.** Findings from this study suggested participants’ experienced and intentionally participated in self-awareness, or self-understanding and reflection. From the interview data, it was suggested that participants had an active process in identifying, understanding, and reflecting on their own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors during parenting interactions. Participants discussed using “flags” and triggers” that came up for them to assist in further understanding of themselves, thus allowing them to react with less automaticity with their children. Coatsworth et al. (2010) described mindful parenting as using both interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of parenting, stressing the importance of understanding the personal experiences occurring within the parent. Not only is it important to identify and understand the inner attitudes, beliefs, and
expectations, it is also important how the parent responds to those experiences (Coatsworth et al., 2010; Duncan et al., 2009a; Siegel, 2007). Siegel (2007) described the term “self attunement” as a form of self-awareness, where the parent can use mindfulness practices to become more aware of what is happening inside themselves, so they can develop those skills for interpersonal relationships.

Parenting is highly influenced by the emotional experiences of parents, and the parents’ ability to reflect or be aware of these emotional states is an essential piece to reacting mindfully in parenting interactions (Coatsworth et al., 2010). Similarly, Duncan et al. (2009a) reported emotional awareness and identification as essential components of mindful parenting because of the powerful influence that strong emotions can have on the automatic reactions within adults. Being mindful of intrapersonal experiences was associated with being more aware of these emotional triggers, helping to make responses less automatic (Coatsworth et al., 2010; Duncan et al., 2009a; Dumas, 2005).

Similar to the scholarly literature, participants discussed the importance of self-awareness experiences and practices because it allowed them to be more emotionally aware and less reactive with their children. Bailie et al. (2012) found comparable results in their qualitative study on the impacts of MBCT on parents. The researchers found parents who practiced mindfulness reported the ability to recognize their emotions and then use mindfulness skills to regulate their intense emotions like sadness and anger when interacting with their children (Bailie et al., 2012). Corresponding to findings from Bailie et al., participants in this study reported self-awareness as a way to minimize unintended negative effects from the triggers on their children.
One important factor in parents’ ability for self-awareness to minimize triggers from their past, is the idea of intergenerational transmission of attachment styles (Bowlby, 1988; Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). Due to the intimate interactions between mother (or parent) and infant, it is believed that parents inherently pass on similar attachment patterns to their children that they once experienced in their own childhood (Bowlby, 1988; Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). Attachment theorists believe the course of attachment patterns are never entirely fixed within an individual, and that adults have the chance to “earn” a secure attachment style over time (Bowlby, 1988; Siegel, 2007; Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). Two important factors in people who have earned security in adolescents and adulthood are supportive relationships and ability for self-understanding (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). Through nurturing relationships, adults can begin to make sense of their pasts, and compose a coherent story or description of their life and past experiences. This new story requires a level of self-reflection and is considered to be a marker of secure attachments (Bowlby, 1988; Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). A mindful practice is one way to help develop and nurture self-awareness (Duncan et al., 2009a; Snyder et al., 2012), thus helping the parent to pass on a secure attachment pattern. Siegel (2007) suggested that mindfulness may be used as a way to first develop that necessary healthy relationship with yourself, so you can then nurture a healthy relationship with others.

Residue from childhood. Within the next category, participants in this study specifically examined their early experiences as children or their residue from childhood. Findings from this study suggest participants had awareness of their strong emotional
reactions and triggers, which were often reflective of the influences their own childhood experiences had on their emotions and reactions. Bowlby (1984) supported the participants’ experiences, stating that strong emotions like fear, panic, and anger are often ingrained in adults from their own childhood experiences. The emotional reactions of the parents were directly connected to the experiences they had early on in life, especially during their own childhood (Bowlby, 1984). These childhood experiences within the attachment relationships of the caregiver’s past served as a lens or filter to see and interact with the world through, particularly when parenting. Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (1997) stated the purpose of investigating these past experiences was to minimize the unintended impact that these strong emotions could have on the child and the parent-child relationship. Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn encouraged parents to “educate themselves” (p. 352) on their past experiences, and to allow the painful and difficult experiences of childhood to be known and accepted.

Findings from this study suggested participants were reflective about their experiences as children, and to how those experiences intentionally and unintentionally may have influence over their parenting practices. Participants’ interview data suggested that they were intentional about parenting in a different manner than how they were parented as children. Findings suggested that participants reflected on how the parent-child relationship felt to them as children and attempted to change the patterns they did not find to be helpful. Scholarly literature supported participants’ experiences, examining the significance in awareness of emotional triggers and how that can positively influence the ability to change automatic reactions with children (Ainsworth et
al., 1978; Dumas, 2005). Being aware of these emotional states and triggers not only models healthy emotional intelligence for children; but also gives control back to parents to choose the reactions they want (Duncan et al., 2009a).

**Compassion for self.** Another aspect that participants in this study found to be important for awareness of the internal mindset was compassion for self. Findings from this study suggested participants reflected on compassion for self as an important and often challenging aspect of parenting. Through the interview data, participants expressed compassion for self as a necessary part of self-awareness and mindful parenting. Findings suggested attempts at compassion for self, allowed participants to grow, to keep trying new things as parents, and to not get stuck in self doubt and fear. Participants discussed compassion for self as a “beautiful byproduct” that often arrived from having a mindfulness practice. Benn et al. (2012) supported participants’ experiences of self-compassion, suggesting that mindfulness training for parents and educators of special needs children increased “positive psychological functioning” (p. 1483), as evidenced by greater self compassion and personal growth over time. The authors speculated that as individuals began to become aware of their mental experiences, they were then able to let go of their negative self-judgments and ruminations (Benn et al., 2012; Segal et al., 2002).

Duncan et al. (2009a) supported the idea of compassion for self by implementing it into their model of mindful parenting. The authors believed that parents who had greater self-compassion would be less harsh and critical toward their own parenting challenges, and be more forgiving toward their efforts (Duncan et al., 2009a). It is also
believed that parents with self-compassion could avoid self-blame for parenting difficulties and disappointments in children’s actions or behaviors (Duncan et al., 2009a). Further exploration by Coleman and Karraker (2003) demonstrated that parents, who were more confident in their abilities to handle challenging parental interactions, interacted with their children in ways that promote healthy developmental functioning. Findings from this study suggested that participants who practiced compassion for self were benefiting not only themselves and their well-being, but their children’s ongoing healthy development and well-being.

**A Safe Haven for the Family**

In the fifth theme, a safe haven for the family, participants discussed how they structured their environment to be conducive to mindful interactions within the family. Findings from this study suggest that participants were intentional about creating an environment around their family that generated more mindful interactions. Steinberg (2004) reported children need a “safe haven” (p. 42), or a place to go where they feel safe and secure to be themselves, as a respite from stressors like school and friends. Participants discussed multiple ways they set up a safe haven for their family to be nurtured, protected, and fulfilled in ways that align with their parenting values. Several subcategories emerged within the interview data: self-care strategies, support systems, child’s school, cultural influences, technology, and health aspects.

**Self-care strategies.** Many of the participants discussed the importance of self-care strategies, because they were the “foundation” for their family’s mindful interactions. Findings suggest that participants were intentional about participating in a
variety of self-care activities, and were therefore more able to be mindful and aware during interactions with their families. Snyder et al. (2012) supported the participants’ experiences, stating that caregivers, who are more able to understand their internal experiences and history, can better regulate their own emotions, “providing a beneficial environment in which to develop a secure attachment relationship” (p. 715). From the interview data, it was discovered that participants valued self-care activities such as meditation, yoga, reading mindfulness literature, and informal meditative practices.

Previous studies reported training parents on mindfulness techniques from formalized mindfulness based trainings such as ACT (Blackledge & Hayes, 2006; Lloyd & Hastings, 2008), MBSR (Duncan & Bardacke, 2010; Fisher et al., 2012; Singh et al., 2006b; Singh et al., 2010), MBCT (Bailie et al., 2012; Bögels et al., 2008), MBPT (Dumas, 2005), MT (Benn et al., 2012), or a combination of various types of mindfulness trainings (MBSR, MBCT, ACT; Vieten & Astin, 2008). Even though many of the trainings differed slightly in their subject matter, most taught various aspects of mindfulness practices such as meditation, awareness of thoughts, body scan, yoga, and informal meditation practices to help solidify the concepts of mindfulness. Most trainings take place anywhere between 8–12 weeks, to allow sufficient time for a mindfulness practice to develop. Similar to participants in this study, many mindfulness trainings consist of a variety of mindfulness activities to help parents experience mindfulness, rather than just talking or reading about mindfulness. Findings from this study suggested participants utilized frequent mindfulness activities to help them be more mindful in their daily lives, and incorporated mindfulness into their self-care routine.
Participants in this study reported valuing self-care strategies as an important practice, to help combat the stress and fatigue of parenting young children. They saw the value in continuing daily rituals that help them feel more centered and balanced, rather than depleting themselves for their sake of their family and work. Findings suggest participants saw the value in taking care of their own needs alongside the needs of their family. Scholarly literature supported participants’ experiences, stating that parents who participated in MBCT training described improvements in recognizing their own needs, and endorsed the benefits of taking time out for self-care (Bailie et al., 2012). Additionally, parents also saw the importance of communicating these needs to their children and families (Bailie et al., 2012). Bailie et al. speculated that the shift in the importance of self-care activities might be due to the parents’ ability to become more aware of the mental states of themselves and their children, and notice when they were being less mindful.

**Support systems.** Another aspect participants discussed concerning creating a mindful environment for their family was the influence of support systems. Findings from this study suggested participants utilized various people in their lives to help them sustain and enhance their mindful parenting practices. Through the interview data, it was discovered that most participants found the largest support for their mindful parenting came from their spouse. Participants described valuing their spouses’ ability to be mindful while parenting, and also to be a support to them in their own mindful parenting efforts. Participants discussed the helpfulness of the “team effort” it took raising children. Steinberg (2004) reported that one major component of creating a safe haven
was creating a positive “emotional climate” (p. 43) for the family. The author reported that the relationship between the parents has the most influence over the emotional climate of the home and through the relationship of the parents, children learn healthy ways to interact with persons inside and outside the family (Steinberg, 2004).

Throughout the interviews, participants also discussed the importance of finding support from like-minded parents. Participants discussed the benefits of having a community of mindful parents, as well as the challenges of finding these types of supports. Participants described being negatively affected when friends and family were not supportive to them in their mindful parenting efforts. In their study of pregnant women, Fisher et al. (2012) found similar results, stating that parents especially valued having a “community of like minded parents” (p. 8) to relate to and bond with during the time of childbirth and parenting. It was through this community that parents felt supported in their mindfulness efforts and felt a sense of connection to other parents in similar situations (Fisher et al., 2012). Fisher et al. (2012) reported that the relationships built within the class sustained well beyond the length of the prenatal class, and resulted in helpful supports and friendships. In alignment with the findings from the participants in this study, a mindful parenting practice seems to develop over time, and often takes diligent work to cultivate and maintain. Additionally, parents can help enrich mindful parenting practices through gathering and maintaining a strong support system.

Child’s school. In helping to create a mindful environment for their children, participants described being intentional about choosing what learning environment their child had and where they spent time outside of the home. Participants discussed the
importance of deciding where their children attended school because it was where their children spent the majority of their time outside of the home. Findings suggest participants saw this as an important decision, where they intentionally chose a setting for their children that was consistent with their parenting values. Participants often shared that they sacrificed both time and money to have their children in a school setting that extended and supported their idea of a mindful and enriching environment. Findings suggested participants were intentional about creating a mindful environment for their children, both in and outside their home.

**Cultural influences.** Another area participants reported being mindful of creating a safe haven was being intentional about monitoring cultural influences and technology around their children. Findings from this study suggested participants were mindful about what kinds of contemporary and cultural aspects their children came in contact with on a daily basis. For example, participants discussed the importance of monitoring what kinds of toys their children played with, television shows watched, video games played, contact with electronics, and controlling exposure to advertisements and cartoon characters. Several participants reported believing that the predominant culture surrounding their children was “unhealthy” and “toxic,” and reported that it was their role to protect their children from being inundated by influences that did not align with their parenting values. Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (1997) also expressed similar views, stating the value of creating the:

Home as a haven, a refuge from bombardment of outside stimuli, a place in which our own values set the tone and can have a tempering, broadening, and deepening
effect on what we perceive as the often superficial, frenetic, and materialistic values of the dominate culture. (p. 233)

Findings suggested participants wanted to have firm boundaries around what their young child was exposed to, specifically limiting contact with ideas, things, and concepts that were not developmentally helpful or appropriate. Aligning with Steinberg’s (2004) view of safe haven, or a place children can feel safe and secure to be themselves, participants in this study viewed their home as a place of respite where their young children can be free from exposure to events and objects that are not developmentally supportive. Through the interview data, it was evident that participants saw it valuable to create a conscious boundary around what was inside (e.g., television, toys, food, etc.) their home and what was not, so that their children could then explore freely within their own home without feeling the parents’ trepidation.

Steinberg (2004) corroborated this type of structure, referring to an idea of “preapprove(ing) your child’s choices” (p. 110) as a way to minimize conflict and increase your child’s sense of exploration and independence. These concepts of exploration and independence are fundamental to a secure attachment relationship between child and parent (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Cassidy, 2008). When children feel safe and secure within an environment, they can explore and learn about themselves and their environment, thus preparing their exploratory system (Brazelton, 1981; Mahler, 1975). Likewise, parents also have to feel that the environment is safe (physically and emotionally) for the child to explore freely, or their caregiving system may become activated by real or perceived threats, inhibiting the child’s exploration (Cassidy, 2008).
Participants in this study reported consciously arranging their environments to be developmentally helpful for young children, which helped to lower their (the parents’) anxiety, thus supporting the attachment, exploratory, and caregiving systems to work in alignment with one another.

**Technology.** Findings also suggested participants cared about minimizing technology for their children as well as themselves. Through the interviews, participants discussed the importance of monitoring developmentally inappropriate television and technology for their children. Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (1997) also warned of the dangers of inappropriate technology mediums in children’s lives, cautioning parents to be in an active role when exposing children to media, making sure to monitor closely what kinds of messages, emotions, and attitudes children are receiving from technological sources. Findings suggested participants also monitored their personal use of technology (e.g., television, cell phones, computers) as well. Participants viewed their own personal use of technology as interfering with their mindful interactions with their children, and made intentional choices about limiting technology when around their children.

**Health aspects.** Participants discussed diet as another way to be mindful while parenting. Similar to limiting cultural influences and technology, food was another avenue participants saw as important part in their daily life, and worthy of consideration and thoughtfulness. Through the interview data, it was discussed that participants wanted to provide their children with nutritious and healthy food, as well as limiting foods that were not developmentally appropriate for their children’s young bodies. Findings suggested that participants thought about their children in a holistic manner, wanting to
provide their children an environment that is not only supportive to the developing mind, but a healthy body as well.

**Obstacles to Mindful Parenting**

In the final theme, obstacles to mindful parenting, participants discussed some of the obstacles, difficulties, and sacrifices they made to mindfully parent their young children. Participants addressed some of the obstacles in two categories: challenges and sacrifices. Findings suggest participants were thoughtful and candid about their own personal limitations to parenting, and how being mindful can present challenges to other areas of their lives.

**Challenges.** Within the interview data, it was discovered that participants would often clarify some of their statements about parenting mindfully as happening in the “best case scenario” and “it’s not always like this.” Specifically, participants discussed that having multiple children, personal health concerns, and family time demands and schedules limited their opportunities for mindful interactions with their children. These types of challenges were common among the participants’ experiences, and were difficult moments in their parenting practices. Understanding the limitations and challenges of being mindful while parenting, highlights the participants’ ability to self-reflect about their own personal limitations and the complications of mindful parenting. These findings highlight the importance self care and compassion, allowing the participant to notice and reflect on the limitations, and then compassionately let go of the expectations of being consistently mindful. Kabat-Zinn and Kabat-Zinn (1997) shared about the importance of understanding the expectations parents had for themselves and their
children, and how those expectations are another place to be mindful. The authors suggested that it is within this awareness of these expectations that parents can identify what is truly taking place, what is out of their control, and what is being made worse by the judgment of it (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 1997). Participants in this study intentionally choose to be mindful with their children, and were also aware of the limitations and obstacles to being a mindful parent.

**Sacrifices.** Findings also suggest that participants in the study were perceptive to the sacrifices they made in order to parent in accordance with their values. Many participants documented that they had to sacrifice work, friends, money, or time to mindfully be with their children. A few of the female participants described their decision to stay at home with their children, rather than prioritizing their occupation or working full time. Findings suggested participants were intentional and conscious about their choices and sacrifices made for raising their children in a way that supported mindful interactions. Participants discussed the importance of being genuine to themselves and to the environment they wanted for their children, and were willing to make sacrifices to provide that for their children.

These challenges and sacrifices are important concepts to take into account, because they highlight the areas that may have been in common for parents to feel ineffectual or incompetent while mindfully parenting. Being aware of particularly challenging aspects of mindful parenting allows for greater areas of self-awareness and compassion. Knowing which areas of mindful parenting were difficult for other like-minded parents helps beginning mindful parents to embrace the difficulty.
Implications

The findings of the current research not only contribute to the counseling literature, but also have implications for professionals in counselor education and the counseling profession. In this section, implications for counselors and counselor educators are discussed.

Implications for Counseling

The findings from this study and connections to current literature regarding mindful parenting practices and experiences contain multiple implications for the counseling profession. Unlike other studies that examined mindful parenting through interventions, this study explored what mindful parents were experiencing and implementing on a daily basis with their children. Provided that this phenomenological research study produced results obtained from a specific group of mindful parents, the conclusions reached may not be applicable to broader parenting populations. Rather, this study’s results may be viewed as a springboard into additional conversations and applications of mindful parenting practices for counselors who work with parents, children, and families.

Counselors who work in mental health and school settings are in an optimal position to focus on the implementation of mindful parenting strategies. Counselors who work with children and their families would be in an ideal position to begin implementing these mindful parenting concepts into individual and family counseling sessions or specific mindful parenting groups. The current research supports the importance of the parents’ development of mindfulness skills and the potential benefits of the
implementation of those skills in the parent-child relationship. This study may provide a framework of foundational mindful parenting practices that counselors and parents could utilize to enhance their parent-child interactions and parental satisfaction. An illustration of one type of implementation of mindful parenting practices gained from this research can be found in Table 12. The table illustrated one way the material can be applied into a clinical setting, by stating some of the main points from each theme, and a potential application of the information.

The material found in Table 12 can be delivered through several different means. The professional counselor can serve as a consultant, delivering the information on an organizational level for individuals interested in the application of mindful parenting skills. Stakeholders for this might include fellow counselors, parents in the community, school teachers, and administrators. Another way the material may be delivered is through direct client services, such as infusing it into individual and family sessions. Creating mindful parenting groups for clients and their families may be another way the application of information may be useful. School counselors working in early educational settings could lead mindful parenting groups for interested caretakers of children in their schools. Case managers and early educational professionals can also utilize this material for preventive care in serving expectant couples and new parents.
Table 12

**Application of Findings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Why is it important</th>
<th>How do you implement it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mindful values in parenting</td>
<td>Findings from this study suggested that participants often utilized their values about children and parenting as a place to return to when overwhelmed or stressed by parenting demands.</td>
<td>Counselors may find it helpful to begin working with parents to establish their foundational values and attitudes toward children and parenting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindful skills in parenting</td>
<td>Findings from this study suggested that participants utilized mindfulness practices during daily parenting interactions such as disciplining and caretaking. Additionally, participants reported utilizing mindfulness skills to help them interact with their child in developmentally appropriate ways.</td>
<td>Counselors can help parents to be more mindful of the child’s affect, cognitive, and behavioral domains, allowing parents to attune to where the child is in the moment. Counselors can also assist parents in understanding and adjusting to their own child’s developmental stages and behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with child</td>
<td>Findings from this study suggested participants viewed their relationship with their child as the medium through which they interacted with their child. Being mindfully aware of the relationship helped participants to monitor, strengthen, and repair the connection and bond to their child.</td>
<td>Counselors can help parents to infuse more positive thoughts such as gratitude and empathy into their relationship with their child. Counselors can also help parents strengthen the relationship with their child through affectionate touch and intimate loving rituals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of the internal mindset</td>
<td>Findings from this study suggested participants found it important to reflect on their thoughts, emotions, and previous childhood experiences. This self-reflection benefited parents in developing an awareness of self when interacting with child, allowing them to be more intentional in parenting interactions.</td>
<td>Counselors may find it beneficial to assist parents in their own personal self-reflection, and to assist them in reflecting on how the interactions they are having with their children are consistent with their parenting values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe haven for the family</td>
<td>Findings from this study suggested participants felt it was important to structure an environment within their home, school, and community that helped facilitate mindful interactions with their family. This allowed parents to feel more trusting of their child’s environment, allowing the child to safely explore their surroundings.</td>
<td>Counselors may find it beneficial to help parents evaluate their self-care strategies and access to their support systems. Additionally, counselors can help clients explore their child’s environment (e.g., access to technology, cultural influences, school, diet) to help make those influences consistent with their parenting values.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12 (continued)

Application of Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Why is it important</th>
<th>How do you implement it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles to mindful parenting</td>
<td>Findings from this study suggested participants attempted to implement compassion for self when they encountered challenges to mindful parenting practices. Understanding that mindful parenting is a process and not an end goal helped parents refocus on their parenting values.</td>
<td>Counselors may find it beneficial to help parents become aware of the known obstacles to mindful parenting and assist them in becoming aware of their own personal challenges and develop strategies to realign with their parenting values.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Implications for Counselor Education

Counselor educators are continually looking to infuse research-based counseling interventions into core counseling curriculum. One potential application of this study’s findings could be to infuse it into counseling children and adolescent courses. The 2009 standards of the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP; SC. M.5.) highlight counselor educators’ responsibilities regarding the knowledge of strategies and methods for working with parents, guardians, families, and communities to empower them to act on behalf of their children. Therefore, CACREP has suggested that incorporating parental education while counseling children is an integral portion of the counseling process. Outlining interventions that impact parents, and thus impact children, may give students a holistic conceptualization of the counseling children in their environment.
Specifically, incorporating Table 12, applications of findings, could be done over several class periods. First, students could study material that details the attachment relationship. Specific attention may be given about the attachment system, exploratory system, and caregiving system, outlining the importance in the parent-child relationship. Second, an overview of mindfulness literature and its application to the counseling process could be discussed and experienced. Educators could have students participate in several mindfulness activities, such as meditation, body scan, informal mindfulness, and yoga. Finally, students may be given an overview of the mindful parenting literature and be challenged to explore ways to implement these concepts into a counseling session or psychoeducational group. Students may also be given time to demonstrate and explore mindful parenting interventions during class activities.

**Research Limitations**

One limitation of this study was the participants were drawn from a relatively wealthy portion of the local community. Participants tended to be well educated and were currently employed or had previous employment. Several participants described themselves as stay at home parents or worked part-time.

Another limitation of the study was the lack of diversity represented in the participants. All of the participants recruited identified as Caucasian. Additionally, all participants were married and living with their partner. This sample enjoyed privileges during parenting that not all parents have available. It remains to be determined if mindful parenting practices would be as effective or highly endorsed by parents who may
work full time, are single parents, have greater financial and mobility stressors, and are less educated.

This study also sampled participants who did not report significant parenting or child concerns. It remains to be determined if mindful parenting practices would be as applicable with populations of parents and children seeking mental health services for developmental, physical, emotional, or social concerns. Future research needs to be conducted on this topic to explore its applicability to new populations.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Although this research contributed to the literature by providing an understanding of mindful parents and their experiences in their daily lives with young children, it did not examine the outcomes or effectiveness of mindful parenting. One means of exploring the effectiveness of mindful parenting could be by creating a mindful parenting psychoeducational group. This group would allow participants to learn the essential values and skills associated with mindful parenting practices. A direction for future research could be to measure the happiness of the above mindful parenting group by evaluating parental satisfaction before and after intervention and at determined intervals in the future. Additionally, future researchers can investigate parental ratings of problematic child concerns and observe if decreases are observed post treatment.

Future researchers may also evaluate the effectiveness of mindful parenting with populations that have had limited exposure to mindfulness. Examining how these parents alter their parenting strategies or child rearing environment after attending a mindful parenting program based on these concepts may be of interest, as it may help to
determine the most useful aspects of the program and add support to its utility with
diverse populations.

Conclusion

In summary this research project aimed to explore how mindful parents experienced parenting young children. The following themes were found when mindful parents discussed their parenting experience: (a) mindful values in parenting, (b) mindful skills in parenting, (c) relationship with child, (d) awareness of the internal mindset, (e) a safe haven for the family, (f) obstacles to mindful parenting. Mindful parents were found to establish mindfulness values into their core parenting skills. Participants described valuing awareness of what they were doing with their child and an intentionality of actions within the parent child relationship. Furthermore, parents described that they saw infusing their mindfulness values and skills into their everyday experiences with their children was a rewarding and fruitful task that helped them maximize parenting satisfaction and foster a healthy relationship with their child.
APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
Appendix A

Human Subjects Review Board Approval

Title of Study:
Mindful Caregivers' Experiences of Parenting Young Children.

Purpose of Study:
The purpose of this qualitative research study is to gain further understanding of the subjective experience of caregivers who choose to be mindful parents in their everyday lives.

Procedures of Study:
Participants will fill out a demographic questionnaire, giving basic demographic information about self and history of mindfulness. Participants will be asked to participate in 2 interviews, totaling 2.5 hours, at a convenient time and place. During the first interview (1.5 hours long) participants will have opportunity to reflect on their experiences of being a parent who implements mindful parenting into their daily life. Examples of questions include: “What does mindful parenting mean to you?” and “Tell me about your experiences as a mindful parent.”

During the second (1-hour long) interview, the participant will be asked follow-up questions from the first interview. The researcher will seek clarification and further information about mindful parenting. Participants will be asked to participate in checking the accuracy of the data gathered and themes deduced from the previous interview. Participants will also be asked to check the data and themes two more times via email and phone.

Privacy and Confidentiality:
The participants’ informed consents, interviews, questionnaires, and demographic data will be stored in a locked confidential place only accessed by the researcher. The interviews will be audiotaped and destroyed at the end of the research project. All information will be kept confidential and be reported only using pseudonyms. The findings of this research will be published in a doctoral dissertation in Counselor Education and Supervision, submitted to scholarly journals, and submitted for presentation at state, regional, or national conferences.

Benefits and Risks of the Study:
The potential benefits of participating in this study may include participants to have the opportunity to explore thoughts and feelings about their parenting. At times, it is helpful and often rewarding to talk through and discuss topics with a skilled and educated interviewer. Parents may feel good after talking about their children and their parenting. Another potential benefit is this study will contribute to scholarly literature of mindfulness and parenting, in hopes of shedding light on this inner experience. There is potential for this work to help other parents explore being mindful with their children.
There are no anticipated risks beyond those encountered in everyday life, however, there is potential for participants to have uncomfortable feelings after discussing their parenting with the interviewer. It may be challenging to discuss personal information with a stranger. If any question is uncomfortable or painful, the participant is free to not answer that question. Participation in this study is completely voluntary; participants may stop involvement in the study at any time, without any negative consequences.

**Compensation:**
The participant will receive $50.00 Visa gift card ($25.00 per interview) for participation in the two interviews and two follow-up phone calls.

**Voluntary Participation:**
Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You will be informed of any new, relevant information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to continue your study participation.

**Contact Information:**
If you want to know more about this research project, please call Kristin Stewart Yates, at 330-906-3865. You are free to also contact the two dissertation advisors, Dr. Jane Cox (330-672-0698) and Dr. Jason McGlothlin (330-672-0716). The project has been approved by Kent State University. If you have questions about Kent State University's rules for research, please call (330-672-2704). You will get a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sincerely,

Kristin E. Stewart Yates, M.A., PC
Doctoral Candidate

CONSENT STATEMENT(S)
I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.
APPENDIX C

Audiotape Consent Form

Mindful Caregivers' Experiences of Parenting Young Children

Kristin Stewart Yates

I agree to participate in audiotaped interviews about Mindful Caregivers' Experiences of Parenting Young Children for the purposes of data analysis. I agree that Kristin Stewart Yates may audiotape this interview. The date, time and place of the interview will be mutually agreed upon.

_________________________   _____________
Signature                Date

I have been told that I have the right to hear the audiotapes before they are used. I have decided that I:

   _______ want to hear the tapes _______ do not want to hear the tapes

Sign below if you do not want to hear the tapes. If you want to hear the tapes, you will be asked to sign after hearing them.

_________________________   _____________
Signature                Date

Kristin Stewart Yates may / may not (circle one) use the audiotapes made of me. The original tapes or copies may be used for:

   _______ this research project _______ publication _______ presentation at professional meetings

_________________________   _____________
Signature                Date

School of Lifespan Development and Educational Sciences
Counseling and Human Development Services • Educational Psychology • Gerontology
Human Development and Family Studies • Instructional Technology
Rehabilitation Counseling • School Psychology • Special Education
P.O. Box 5190 • Kent, Ohio 44242-0591
330-672-2294 • Fax: 330-672-2512 • www.ehhs.kent.edu/ldes/
APPENDIX B

LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM INSIGHT IMC
Appendix B

Letter of Approval from IMC

Dear Kristin,

This email is sent to confirm that you have permission to contact and collect information from participants in the Mindful Parenting Program that is offered through Insight Meditation of Cleveland. We will facilitate the communication between you and the program participants by contacting them initially with information that you provide regarding your research needs. We will then ask the interested program participants to contact you directly to become involved in your research.

We are pleased to be able to assist you in the valuable research that you are doing, Kristin, and to do whatever we can to assist parents to be more mindful. Please let me know if you need anything else from us or if we can assist in any way.

With kind regards,
John

John Cunningham
Meditation Teacher
Insight Meditation of Cleveland
john@imcleveland.org
www.imcleveland.org
216-407-2809
APPENDIX C

SCRIPT FOR MINDFUL PARENTING PROGRAM MEETINGS
Appendix C

Script for Mindful Parenting Program Meetings

Script used during recruitment in Mindful Parenting Program meetings

Hello, My name is Kristin Stewart Yates and I am a doctoral candidate from Kent State University. Thanks for letting me join your group today. John and Laurie invited me here today because I am currently seeking participants for my study titled Mindful Caregivers’ Experiences of Parenting Young Children, to explore the subjective experiences of caregivers who actively participate in mindful parenting activities in their daily lives. To be eligible for this study, you must (a) be interested in the concepts of mindfulness, (b) have attended the Mindful Parenting Program at the Insight Meditation of Cleveland, (c) be attempting to apply mindfulness skills in the parent-child relationship, (d) have a child who is between the age of three months and six years.

If eligible, you will be asked to complete in 2 interviews, totaling 2.5 hours, at convenient times and places. You will also participate in two follow up phone calls and emails for member checking the information gathered in the interviews. The voluntary, confidential interviews will consist of open-ended questions about your experiences of being a mindful parent. A $50.00 Visa gift card will be given for participation. If you are interested, please contact me directly, or give this form (hold up form) back to me at the end of the meeting.

Does anyone have any questions at this time?

Thanks for your consideration.
APPENDIX D

RECRUITMENT FLYER
Appendix D

Recruitment Flyer

Recruitment Flyer for Mindful Parenting Program Meetings

Hello, My name is Kristin Stewart Yates and I am a doctoral candidate from Kent State University. I am currently seeking participants for my study titled *Mindful Caregivers’ Experiences of Parenting Young Children*, to explore the subjective experiences of caregivers who actively participate in mindful parenting activities in their daily lives. To be eligible for this study, participants must (a) be interested in the concepts of mindfulness, (b) have attended the Mindful Parenting Program at the Insight Meditation of Cleveland, (c) be attempting to apply mindfulness skills in the parent-child relationship, (d) have a child who is between the age of three months and six years. Participants will be asked to complete in 2 interviews, totaling 2.5 hours, at convenient times and places for them. Participants will also participate in two follow up phone calls and emails for member checking the information gathered in the interviews. The confidential interviews will consist of open-ended questions about your experiences of being a mindful parent. A $50.00 Visa gift card will be given for participation. If you are interested, please contact the researcher directly to set up the first interview or give this form back to the researcher directly with the following information filled out.

**Name:**

**Contact Information:**

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me at any time for clarification or questions.

Kristin Stewart Yates M.A., PC
Doctoral Candidate
Kent State University
Kstewa18@kent.edu or (330) 906-3865
Recruitment Flyer for Mindful Parenting Program’s Email

Hello, My name is Kristin Stewart Yates and I am a doctoral candidate from Kent State University. I am currently seeking participants for my study titled *Mindful Caregivers’ Experiences of Parenting Young Children*, to explore the subjective experiences of caregivers who actively participate in mindful parenting activities in their daily lives. To be eligible for this study, participants must:

(a) Be interested in the concepts of mindfulness
(b) Have attended the Mindful Parenting Program at the Insight Meditation of Cleveland
(c) Be attempting to apply mindfulness skills in the parent-child relationship
(d) Have a child who is between the age of three months and six years.

Participants will be asked to complete in 2 interviews, totaling 2.5 hours, at convenient times and places for them. Participants will also participate in two follow up phone calls and emails for member checking the information gathered in the interviews. The confidential interviews will consist of open-ended questions about your experiences of being a mindful parent. A $50.00 Visa gift card will be given for participation. If you are interested, please contact the researcher directly at kstewa18@kent.edu or (330) 906-3865.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me at any time for clarification or questions.

Kristin Stewart Yates M.A., PC
Doctoral Candidate
Kent State University
Kstewa18@kent.edu or (330) 906-3865
APPENDIX E

ELIGIBILITY QUESTIONNAIRE
Appendix E

Eligibility Questionnaire

Mindful Caregivers’ Experiences of Parenting Young Children

To ensure all participants in this study have knowledge and experience with the phenomenon under study, please answer a few questions.

1. Are you interested in the concepts of mindfulness? Y/N

2. Have you attended the Mindful Parenting Program at the Insight Meditation of Cleveland? Y/N

3. Are you attempting to apply mindfulness skills in the parent-child relationship? Y/N

4. Do you have a child that is between the age of three months and six years? Y/N
APPENDIX F

INFORMED CONSENT
Appendix F

Informed Consent

Title of Study:
Mindful Caregivers’ Experiences of Parenting Young Children.

Purpose of Study:
The purpose of this qualitative research study is to gain further understanding of the subjective experience of caregivers who choose to be mindful parents in their everyday lives.

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Privacy and Confidentiality:
The participants’ informed consents, interviews, questionnaires, and demographic data will be stored in a locked confidential place only accessed by the researcher. The interviews will be audiotaped and destroyed at the end of the research project. All information will be kept confidential and be reported only using pseudonyms. The findings of this research will be published in a doctoral dissertation in Counselor Education and Supervision, submitted to scholarly journals, and submitted for presentation at state, regional, or national conferences.

Benefits and Risks of the Study:
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mindfulness and parenting, in hopes of shedding light on this inner experience. There is potential for this work to help other parents explore being mindful with their children.

There are no anticipated risks beyond those encountered in everyday life, however, there is potential for participants to have uncomfortable feelings after discussing their parenting with the interviewer. It may be challenging to discuss personal information with a stranger. If any question is uncomfortable or painful, the participant is free to not answer that question. Participation in this study is completely voluntary; participants may stop involvement in the study at any time, without any negative consequences.

**Compensation:**
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**Voluntary Participation:**
Taking part in this research study is entirely up to you. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You will be informed of any new, relevant information that may affect your health, welfare, or willingness to continue your study participation.

**Contact information:**
If you want to know more about this research project, please call Kristin Stewart Yates, at 330-906-3865. You are free to also contact the two dissertation advisors, Dr. Jane Cox (330-672-0698) and Dr. Jason McGlothlin (330-672-0716). The project has been approved by Kent State University. If you have questions about Kent State University’s rules for research, please call (330-672-2704). You will get a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sincerely,

Kristin E. Stewart Yates, M.A., PC
Doctoral Candidate

**CONSENT STATEMENT(S)**
I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

________________________________________________________________________
Signature                                      Date
Audiotape Consent Form
Mindful Caregivers’ Experiences of Parenting Young Children
Kristin Stewart Yates

I agree to participate in audiotaped interviews about Mindful Caregivers’ Experiences of Parenting Young Children for the purposes of data analysis. I agree that Kristin Stewart Yates may audiotape this interview. The date, time and place of the interview will be mutually agreed upon.

_____________________________  ______________
Signature                                      Date

I have been told that I have the right to hear the audiotapes before they are used. I have decided that I:

_____want to hear the tapes _____do not want to hear the tapes

Sign below if you do not want to hear the tapes. If you want to hear the tapes, you will be asked to sign after hearing them.

_____________________________  ______________
Signature                                      Date

Kristin Stewart Yates may / may not (circle one) use the audiotapes made of me. The original tapes or copies may be used for:

_____this research project _____publication _____presentation at professional meetings

_____________________________  ______________
Signature                                      Date
Appendix G

Demographic Questionnaire

Instructions: This questionnaire is designed to gather important information about you. All answers will remain confidential. Please do not write your name on this form. Your answers may be explored further during the first interview. Thank you.

1. Participant’s pseudonym chosen: ________________________________

2. Age: __________________________________________________________

3. Gender: ________________________________________________________

4. Marital Status: _________________________________________________

5. Current Occupation: _____________________________________________

6. Number of children: _____________________________________________

7. Children’s age: _________________________________________________

8. Ethnicity: _____________________________________________________

9. How long have you been practicing mindfulness and mindful parenting: ________

____________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX H

EMAILS FOR MEMBER CHECKING
Hello Research Participant,

Thank you again for participating in the study, Mindful Caregivers’ Experiences of Parenting Young Children. As stated in the second interview, you are asked to review your interview’s transcript, tentative and themes. As before, please review themes and feel free to add, change, or delete anything that does not appear to fit with the theme discussed. Your participation is a necessary step to ensure that the researcher is making accurate conclusions from the data gathered.

Please feel free to contact me at any time with questions or concerns. I will be in contact soon to set up a time to speak briefly on the phone to discuss your feedback.

Thank you again for your time

Kristin Stewart Yates
Kstewa18@kent.edu
330-906-3865
Hello Research Participant,

Thank you again for participating in the study, Mindful Caregivers’ Experiences of Parenting Young Children. As stated in the second interview, you are asked to review the final emergent themes of all the participants combined. As before, please review themes and feel free to add, change, or delete anything that does not appear to fit with the theme discussed. Your participation is a necessary step to ensure that the researcher is making accurate conclusions from the data gathered.

Please feel free to contact me at any time with questions or concerns. I will be in contact soon to set up a time to speak briefly on the phone to discuss your feedback.

Thank you again for your time.

Kristin Stewart Yates
Kstewa18@kent.edu
330-906-3865
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


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