



Parental Expectations and Children's Executive Function

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Introduction

- Executive function (EF) encompasses a set of higher order cognitive processes, including attentional control, rule manipulation, and inhibitory control, that are involved in goal-directed behavior.
- Executive function skills make substantial leaps during the preschool years.
- Individual differences in EF predict children's cognitive and social development.
- Parenting influences development of children's EF skills.

Objectives

- Develop a measure of parental rules and expectations.
- Examine the relationship between parental expectations and children's executive function.

Hypotheses

- Parents of 6-year-olds will enforce rules and expectations more frequently than parents of 4-year olds.
- The more frequently parents enforce rules and expectations, the better their child will perform on measures of executive function.

Method

Participants

- 35 6 year-olds (15 male, 20 female)
- 35 4 year-olds (16 male, 19 female)

Measures

Parental:

- Family Information Questionnaire
- Child Behavior Questionnaire with Executive Function (CBQ-EF)
- Rules and Expectations Questionnaire (Version 1)

Lab Tasks included Theory of Mind Toolbox, Forward Digit Span/Backward Digit Span, DCCS Toolbox, Flanker Toolbox & Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test.

Rules and Expectations Questionnaire: Pilot Version

The pilot version of the REQ was developed based on previous research and the helpful input of lab members.

- Responses were coded on a 1-4 Likert scale (1 = Never, 4 = Always); some items were reversed.
- Children received a mean score of 20 of the items
- Prior to analyses, 5 items were removed due to either poor consistency with other items or low variance.

Results

Table 1. REQ and Children's Age

	REQ Score
	M(SD)
4 year olds (n = 34)	3.23 (0.31)
6 year olds (n = 34)	3.25 (0.28)
t-score	-0.22 (ns)

Table 2. Correlations Between REQ and CBQ-EF

	REQ Score
CBQ-EF Subscale	.26*
Controlling for:	
Child's Age (in months)	.25*
4 year olds (n = 32)	
CBQ-EF Subscale	.21 (ns)
6 year olds (n = 28)	
CBQ-EF Subscale	.36*

*p<.05.

Conclusion

- There is a modest relationship between parental rules and children's EF skills, but this relationship may be moderated by age.
- The current REQ does not effectively measure differences in parental rules based on child age.
- Introducing a wider variety of EF tasks may reveal more important relationships among EF and parental rules.

The REQ was revised in order to better measure different aspects of parental rules and expectations.

Rules and Expectations Questionnaire: Version 2

- Version 2 comprises two-part items that examine:

- The *frequency* of enforcement (coded on a 4-point Likert scale [1 = Never and 4 = Always]; some items reversed).
- Whether parents expect rules to be followed *with or without a reminder* (i.e., internalization of rules; coded as 1 = Yes, 0 = No).

Current Study

Hypotheses

- Children of parents who enforce rules with *moderate frequency* will have better EF skills than children with parents who enforce rules infrequently or very frequently.
- Parents of 6-year-olds will expect their child to remember more rules *on his or her own* than will parents of 4-year-olds.
- Parents' expected internalization of rules will relate to their child's EF skills.

Preliminary Results

Table 3. REQ2 and Children's Age

	Frequency of Enforcement	Number Rules Expected "On His/Her Own"
	M(SD)	M(SD)
4 year olds (n = 26)	3.17 (0.29)	10.23 (7.10)
6 year olds (n = 15)	3.25 (0.27)	15.07 (3.08)
t-score	-0.77 (ns)	-2.50*

*p<.05

Table 4. Correlations Between REQ2 and CBQ-EF

	Frequency of Enforcement	Number Rules Expected "On His/Her Own"
CBQ-EF Subscale	.19 (ns)	.42***
Controlling for:		
Child's Age (in months)	.18 (ns)	.38**
4 year olds (n = 26)		
CBQ-EF Subscale	.24 (ns)	.38*
6 year olds (n = 13)		
CBQ-EF Subscale	.03(ns)	.43 ^a

***p<.005. **p<.01. *p<.05. ^ap<.07

References

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