

PARENTAL MIND-MINDEDNESS IN CLINICAL POPULATIONS

 Dr Fionnuala Larkin

Collaborators: Prof. Elizabeth Meins, Dr Yujin Lee, Dr Sarah Fishburn, Dr Emma Hayiou-Thomas, Dr Ying Wang, Dr Janine Oostenbroek.

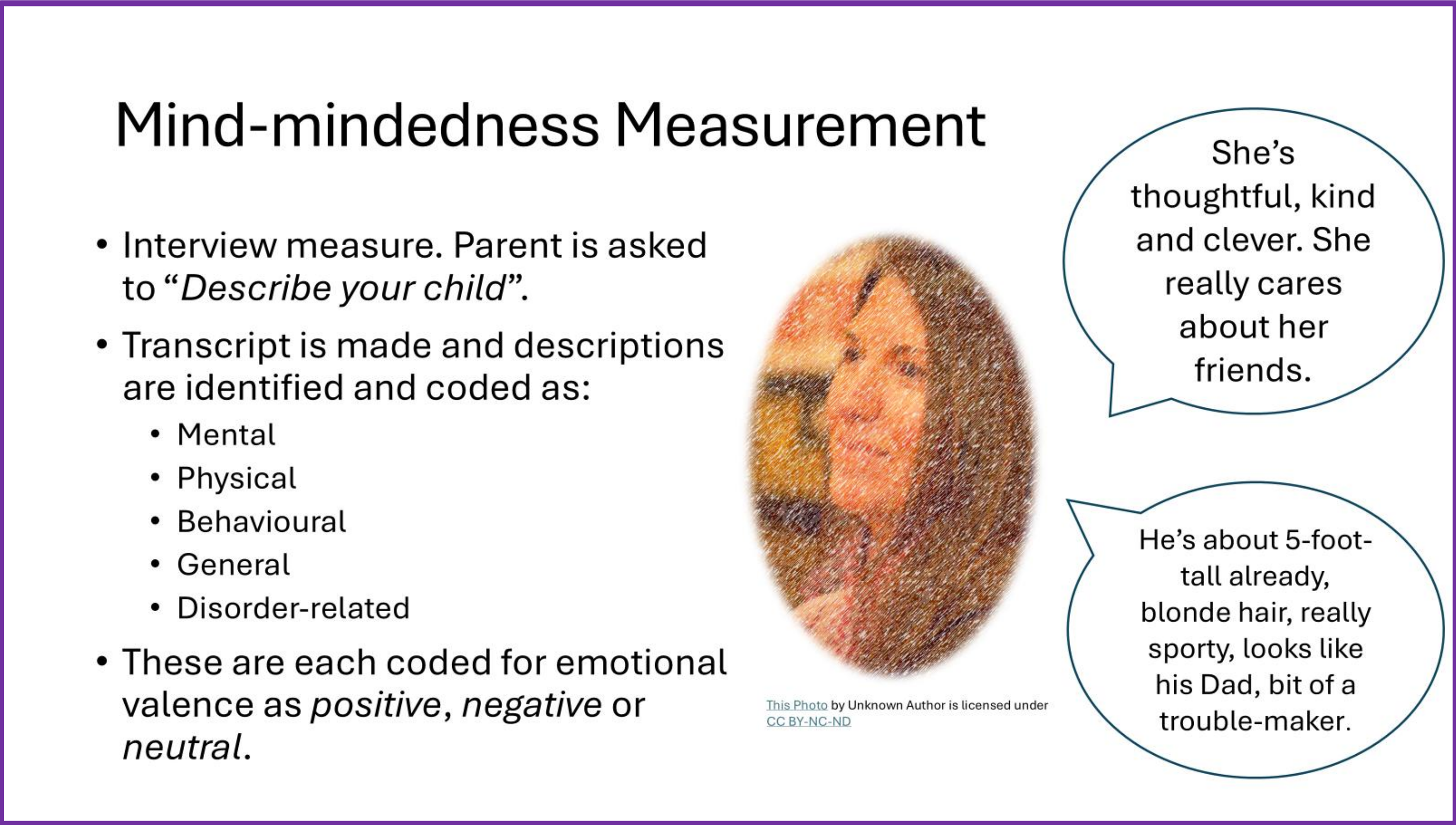
WHAT DID WE DO?

Mind-mindedness is the tendency for a caregiver to conceptualise their child in terms of their mental states. Higher, positive mind-mindedness has been found to relate to lower stress in parents in the general population.

We explored mind-mindedness in parents of children with developmental disorders (1) and emotional / behavioural disorders (2). These studies yielded the following insights:

- When asked to describe their child (see Figure 1 below), parents used fewer positive mental descriptions (e.g. kind, loving, clever) and more negative mental descriptions (e.g. manipulative, frustrated, nervous) of children with disorders compared to typically-developing children.
- More positive and less negative mental descriptions both predicted lower parenting stress, over and above how positive or negative the other descriptions were.
- More positive mind-mindedness in the clinical group was associated with lower parental stress, higher closeness and lower conflict in the relationship.
- Positive mind-mindedness related to parental stress via its association with parent-child relationship quality (closeness and conflict).

Figure 1



Promoting positive mind-mindedness in parents of children in clinical settings may improve parental stress and parent-child relationships.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Findings suggest that more positive and less negative mind-mindedness (e.g., describing the child as loving, clever, creative, kind, thoughtful) —and not a positive view of the child in general (e.g., as lovely, well-behaved, beautiful, fun) — may offer protection when difficulties arise, that is, when parental distress levels and/or child difficulties are elevated.

Retaining or encouraging a positive view of the child’s psychology and reducing negative attributions may be particularly helpful to parents when tensions or stressors arise.

Mind-mindedness is amenable to change, as demonstrated through a smartphone-facilitated intervention (3, 4).

Therefore, interventions to promote mind-mindedness in clinical settings (e.g. primary care, child and adolescent mental health, disability) are warranted. Work is ongoing to develop resources for clinicians.

(1) Larkin, F., Hayiou-Thomas, M. E., Arshad, Z., Leonard, M., Williams, F. J., Katseniou, N., Malouta, R. N., Marshall, C. R. P., Diamantopoulou, M., Tang, E., Mani, S., & Meins, E. (2021). Mind-Mindedness and Stress in Parents of Children with Developmental Disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 51(2), 600–612. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04570-9>
(2) Larkin, F., Fishburn, S., Lee, Y., & Meins, E. (2025). Relations between Mind-mindedness, Stress, and Parent-Child Relationship Quality in Parents of Children with a History of Mental Health or Behavioral Difficulties. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*. (in press).
(3) Larkin, F., Oostenbroek, J., Lee, Y., Hayward, E., & Meins, E. (2019). Proof of concept of a smartphone app to support delivery of an intervention to facilitate mothers' mind-mindedness. *PloS One*. <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0220948>.
(4) Larkin, F., Oostenbroek, J., Lee, Y., Hayward, E., Fernandez, A., Wang, Y., Mitchell, A., Li, L.Y., Meins, E. (2023). A smartphone app effectively facilitates mothers' mind-mindedness: A randomized controlled trial. *Child Development*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.14039>

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