Which Parenting Skills Count Most?
A Large-Scale Internet Study

Robert Epstein (re@aibrt.org), Priyanka Nanayakkara,
and Ronald E. Robertson
American Institute for Behavioral Research and Technology

SUMMARY

Data obtained from a diverse online sample of 10,629 parents in 39 countries (mainly the U.S. and Canada) who took an online test of parenting competencies were analyzed in order to rank order 10 competencies that have been shown in empirical studies to have value in parenting. The competencies were: Autonomy and Independence, Behavior Management, Education and Learning, Healthy Lifestyle, Life Skills, Love and Affection, Relationship Skills, Religion and Spirituality, Safety, and Stress Management. Internal consistency reliability was high, and total scores were moderately predictive of a number of self-reported parenting outcomes: parent-child relationship quality (Spearman's $\rho = 0.43$), parents' ratings of their own parenting abilities ($\rho = 0.41$), happiness of children ($\rho = 0.36$), health of children ($\rho = 0.24$), and success of children ($\rho = 0.28$). Effects were found for gender (with females slightly outscoring males) and education level, but not for age, race, number of children, or whether subjects had ever been divorced. An effect was also found for sexual orientation, with gays and lesbians outscoring straights, bisexuals, and people identifying as "others." Eleven parenting professionals were recruited in a double-blind procedure to assess content validity. Experts rated the value of the competencies and the appropriateness of the test items fairly highly, with Love and Affection emerging as the most highly-rated competency and Religion and Spirituality as the lowest-rated competency. Regression analyses were used to rank order the competencies according to how well they predicted desired outcomes. Love and Affection was the best predictor of three parenting outcomes: relationship with children, happiness of children, and health of children. Education and Learning was the best predictor of success of children, while self-reported parenting ability was best predicted by the Stress Management competency. Total scores on the test were correlated with the number of hours of parenting training subjects reported, and test scores for subjects who had had such training were significantly higher than scores for subjects who had not had such training. Our results support the view that parenting can be broken down into trainable competencies and may provide some guidance regarding how such training should be conducted.