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Mindful Parenting and Emotion Regulation in Early Childhood: A Relational Process Perspective from a Systematic Review

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Abstract

Research on mindful parenting, caregiver emotion regulation, and children's emotion regulation has expanded, yet the literature remains fragmented, especially in early childhood and across non-Western settings. Many studies treat these constructs as separate variables and therefore provide limited clarity on how they are linked within everyday caregiving relationships. This systematic literature review examined how mindful parenting, maternal emotion regulation, and children's emotion regulation have been connected in recent scholarship on early childhood caregiving. Guided by PRISMA 2020, the review searched Scopus, ScienceDirect, Wiley Online Library, and Frontiers in Psychology for studies published between 2019 and 2024. Ten eligible studies were included and interpreted through narrative thematic synthesis. The findings suggest that mindful parenting is more convincingly understood as a relational orientation shaping the emotional climate of caregiving than as a discrete technique. Maternal emotion regulation emerges as an interactional mechanism operating through modeling, responsiveness, emotion socialization, and co-regulation, while children's regulatory development appears within broader systems of attachment, executive functioning, and socio-emotional competence. The evidence, however, remains uneven. Variability in study design, modest effect sizes, reliance on cross-sectional and self-report data, and the continued dominance of Western samples indicate that these pathways are context-sensitive rather than universally causal. This review advances a relational process perspective that refines family-based models of emotion regulation and contributes to global debates on parenting and child development by showing why culturally responsive interpretations are necessary when translating evidence across diverse caregiving contexts.

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Introduction

The ability to regulate emotions during early childhood plays a foundational role in shaping children's social relationships, academic readiness, and long-term mental well-being (Bjørk et al., 2022). During this developmental period, children begin to acquire strategies for processing emotional experiences, interpreting social cues, and managing stress, while still depending substantially on caregivers to regulate emotional arousal in everyday interactions (Sansone, 2024). Because these regulatory capacities are closely linked to socio-emotional development and early adjustment, research has increasingly examined the family conditions that support or constrain their emergence, including the role of parenting styles (Korucu et al., 2022).

Among contemporary parenting approaches, mindful parenting has been increasingly discussed as a potentially important framework for children's emotional development. It emphasizes present-moment awareness, non-judgmental acceptance, emotional attunement, and compassionate responsiveness to children's needs (Wong et al., 2019). In early childhood caregiving, such practices may strengthen caregivers' sensitivity to children's emotional cues while also supporting their own capacity for stress management and emotion regulation in daily interactions (Burgdorf et al., 2022). This issue is especially significant in relation to mothers, who



often remain primary caregivers in early childhood and whose emotional availability and regulatory capacities shape the quality of children's early emotional experiences (Hong et al., 2024).

The relationship among mindful parenting, maternal emotion regulation, and children's emotion regulation can be more clearly understood through an integrated theoretical lens. Attachment theory suggests that emotionally responsive and sensitive caregiving fosters secure relationships that provide the basis for children's emotional safety and regulatory development (Bowlby, 1973, 1990). Emotion socialization theory further explains that children acquire emotion regulation through parental modeling, emotional coaching, and parental responses to emotional expressions (Morris et al., 2007; Thompson & Meyer, 2007). From this perspective, maternal emotion regulation becomes a key relational mechanism through which mindful parenting may be translated into children's developing regulatory capacities. Complementing these perspectives, self-regulation frameworks conceptualize emotion regulation as a dynamic process involving cognitive, behavioral, and emotional control that, in early childhood, remains strongly shaped by external regulation from caregivers (Gross, 2014; Gross & Ford, 2024).

Existing empirical studies broadly support the relevance of these relational processes, but they do so in uneven and differently framed ways. Mothers who regulate their emotions more effectively are more likely to respond to children's emotional expressions with patience and understanding, thereby supporting children's capacity to recognize, process, and manage emotions in everyday interactions (Hong et al., 2024). Similarly, mindful parenting has been associated with greater maternal responsiveness during emotionally charged situations, creating repeated opportunities for children to learn adaptive regulation through co-regulated interactions (Bjørk et al., 2022). At the same time, children's emotion regulation is linked to wider developmental outcomes, including social understanding, cooperative engagement, empathy, prosocial behavior, school readiness, and academic adjustment (McClelland et al., 2007; Rademacher & Koglin, 2019; Ornaghi et al., 2019; Korucu et al., 2022). Intervention evidence also suggests that mindful parenting programs may strengthen parent-child emotional interaction and reduce parental stress, thereby indirectly supporting more adaptive child outcomes (Kakhki et al., 2022; Sansone, 2024).

Even so, the literature remains analytically fragmented. Many studies examine parenting stress, maternal emotion regulation, mindful parenting, or children's emotional outcomes as separate constructs rather than as interrelated processes within early caregiving relationships. Although the findings often point in a similar direction, they do not always clarify how these variables connect, through which mechanisms, or under what developmental and contextual conditions such connections become meaningful. Research on parental emotion socialization has shown that children tend to model emotional expressions and regulatory strategies from caregivers, and that different parental emotion socialization profiles are associated with different child outcomes (King et al., 2023). Yet a more integrated synthesis of how mindful parenting and maternal emotion regulation jointly shape children's emotion regulation in early childhood remains limited. Existing studies therefore provide important evidence, but still only a partial understanding of the relational mechanisms involved.

This limitation matters because the developmental stakes are high, yet the pathways are not straightforward. Evidence suggests that mindful parenting is associated with reduced parenting stress and enhanced emotional responsiveness (Wong et al., 2019), and that maternal emotion regulation serves as a primary template through which children learn adaptive self-regulation skills (King et al., 2023). Indonesian studies further indicate that maternal emotion regulation is not determined solely by employment status, as working and non-working mothers may show comparable levels of emotional regulation (Khairunnisa et al., 2024), while intervention-based efforts have shown potential to reduce parenting stress and strengthen emotional availability within parent-child interactions (Rinaldi & Putra, 2023). Additional intervention and process-oriented studies also suggest that strengthening parental mindfulness and emotional regulation may improve mother-child relationship quality

(Burgdorf et al., 2022), whereas maternal emotion dysregulation has been associated with increased irritability in young children (Cave-Freeman et al., 2022). Taken together, these findings point to the importance of relational mechanisms, but they do not yet resolve how those mechanisms should be interpreted across studies.

The need for a more integrated and context-sensitive synthesis becomes even more pressing in relation to Indonesia. Parenting practices in Indonesia have often emphasized obedience, emotional restraint, and hierarchical parent–child relations within broader collectivist cultural frameworks (Kiling-Bunga et al., 2020; Sumargi et al., 2014). Although more emotionally responsive and mindful parenting approaches have gained attention in recent years, their enactment remains shaped by cultural norms, socioeconomic conditions, and unequal access to parenting education (Sumargi et al., 2014; Tomlinson & Andina, 2015). Studies conducted in Indonesia suggest that mindful parenting interventions can enhance maternal empathy and emotional responsiveness (Puspitasari et al., 2022; Saraswati et al., 2018). However, structural constraints, including limited access to evidence-based parenting programs and variation in parental educational resources, may restrict the broader uptake of such approaches (Tomlinson & Andina, 2015). This means that non-Western contexts such as Indonesia should not be treated merely as sites of application, but as important contexts for examining how relational mechanisms may be shaped, enabled, or constrained by socio-cultural conditions.

In response to these gaps, the present study conducts a systematic literature review to synthesize current evidence on the interrelationships among mindful parenting, maternal emotion regulation, and children’s emotion regulation in early childhood. Specifically, this review addresses the following research questions:

- RQ1: How does mindful parenting function as a relational mechanism that supports maternal emotion regulation in early childhood caregiving?
- RQ2: How does maternal emotion regulation contribute to the development of children’s emotion regulation through parent-child interaction processes?
- RQ3: What relational patterns, benefits, and contextual challenges emerge from the literature regarding mindful parenting and emotion regulation, particularly within diverse cultural settings such as Indonesia?

By integrating theoretical perspectives and empirical findings, this review aims not merely to summarize associations but to clarify the relational processes through which parenting orientation, maternal regulation, and children’s emotional development have been connected in the literature. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to the refinement of family-based emotion regulation models and to provide evidence-informed implications for parenting interventions, family mental health policy, and early childhood education practice.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize research on the interrelationships among mindful parenting, parental emotion regulation, and children’s emotion regulation in early childhood. The review was guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework in order to enhance procedural transparency, consistency in study selection, and clarity in the reporting of identification, screening, eligibility, and synthesis stages. The design was developed in response to the fragmented character of the literature, in which mindful parenting, caregiver regulation, and children’s emotional outcomes are frequently examined as separate constructs rather than as interrelated relational processes. Accordingly, the review was intended not only to summarize findings, but also to clarify how these constructs have been conceptually linked across studies and how those links have been interpreted within early caregiving relationships.

A structured review protocol guided the search, screening, appraisal, and synthesis processes. The review focused on studies published between 2019 and 2024 in order to capture recent developments in parenting, emotion regulation, and early childhood socio-emotional

research. Because the literature in this area is methodologically heterogeneous, including cross-sectional, intervention, longitudinal, and review-based studies, a narrative thematic synthesis was considered more appropriate than a statistical meta-analysis. This design allowed the review to preserve contextual nuance while still producing an analytically coherent account of how parenting orientation, caregiver regulatory capacity, and children’s developing emotional competence have been connected in the literature.

Search Strategy

A structured search was conducted between October 6 and October 26, 2024. Digital searches were carried out across four sources: Scopus, ScienceDirect, Wiley Online Library, and Frontiers in Psychology. These sources were selected because they provide substantial coverage of peer-reviewed work in psychology, education, child development, and family studies. Mendeley was used as a reference management tool to organize records and remove duplicates, but it was not treated as a search database.

The search strategy was organized around three core constructs central to the review: mindful parenting, parental or maternal emotion regulation, and children’s emotion regulation in early childhood. Boolean operators (AND, OR), phrase searching, and construct-based combinations were used to improve conceptual relevance and reduce retrieval of unrelated studies. Search strings were adapted to the search format and indexing characteristics of each source, as presented in Table 1. Although the wording of search strings varied across platforms, the search logic remained constant: to identify studies addressing parenting orientation, caregiver emotion regulation, and child emotional development within family or early childhood contexts.

Table 1. Database Search

Search Directory	Search String
Scopus	“mindful parenting” AND “emotion regulation” AND children
ScienceDirect	mindful parenting AND emotional regulation mother AND early childhood
Wiley	mindful parenting AND emotion regulation mother AND early childhood OR children
Frontiers	mindful parenting AND emotion regulation mother AND early childhood

To improve relevance, several filters were applied during the search process. Results were limited to publications from 2019 to 2024, peer-reviewed journal articles, and subject areas related primarily to psychology and education. Open-access filters were used when helpful during initial screening, although non-open-access studies were also retained when accessible and relevant. No restriction was placed on research design because the review aimed to capture both process-oriented and outcome-oriented evidence across diverse methodological traditions.

The initial search yielded 48,718 records. After the application of predefined filters and duplicate removal, 274 records remained for title and abstract screening. Of these, 264 were excluded on the basis of relevance and eligibility criteria, leaving 10 studies for inclusion in the final synthesis. Reference lists of selected articles were also checked manually to identify potentially relevant studies not captured through electronic searching. Screening was conducted using predefined criteria and a structured decision log to improve consistency across inclusion and exclusion decisions. The overall identification and screening process is presented in Figure 1.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established prior to screening in order to ensure conceptual alignment and procedural consistency. Studies were included if they met the following conditions: they were published between 2019 and 2024, written in English, published as peer-reviewed journal articles, and focused on parenting, emotion regulation, or related early childhood relational processes. Primary empirical studies were prioritized because

they provided the main evidence base for the review. However, directly relevant review articles were also retained when they offered integrative insight into the relational links among mindful parenting, caregiver regulation, and children’s emotional development, and were used to strengthen conceptual interpretation rather than replace primary evidence.

The review prioritized studies involving mothers and young children in early childhood settings. However, to remain consistent with the available literature and with the final body of included studies, articles were also retained when they involved broader parent samples, included fathers alongside mothers, or reported age ranges extending beyond 3 to 8 years, provided that the central analysis remained relevant to early childhood emotional development and parent–child relational processes. This broader operationalization was necessary because several studies with strong conceptual relevance did not fit a narrowly bounded maternal-only or age-exclusive definition, yet still contributed directly to the review questions.

Methodological adequacy was considered during screening and appraisal. Included studies were expected to report their research design, sample characteristics, instruments or procedures, and analytic approach with sufficient clarity to support interpretation. Studies were excluded if they lacked conceptual relevance, focused exclusively on clinical or psychiatric disorders without broader relevance to emotion regulation in normative caregiving or educational contexts, or did not address at least one of the focal constructs. Geographical diversity was not used as a strict inclusion requirement, but studies from different cultural contexts were retained where they offered analytically relevant insight into how parenting and emotion regulation processes may vary across settings.

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication Timeframe	Articles published from 2019 to 2024.	Studies published before 2019.
Language of Publication	Published in English.	Non-English publications.
Type of Source	Peer-reviewed journal articles, including empirical studies and directly relevant review articles.	Books, dissertations, theses, editorials, opinion pieces, and conference proceedings.
Research Quality	Clearly defined research design, transparent data collection and analysis procedures, adequate sample description, and explicit reporting of findings.	Unclear research design, insufficient methodological detail, inadequate sample reporting, or unsupported conclusions.
Disciplinary Focus	Focused on psychology, education, child development, or family studies.	Outside the relevant disciplinary fields.
Thematic Relevance	Examines mindful parenting, parental emotion regulation, child emotion regulation, or their relational connections in parenting or early childhood contexts.	Does not address the focal constructs or their relational relevance.
Target Population	Involves mothers, parents, or parent–child dyads with relevance to early childhood emotional development.	Focuses entirely on unrelated populations or developmental stages with no clear relevance to early childhood.
Geographical Coverage	Conducted in diverse cultural contexts and offering transferable insight into parenting and emotion regulation.	Highly specific settings without conceptual relevance to the review questions.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

After screening, 10 studies met the eligibility criteria and were included in the final synthesis. Data extraction was conducted using a structured framework to ensure consistency across studies. For each article, the following information was recorded: author and year, country,

research design, participant characteristics, measurement instruments or procedures, focal variables, and principal findings relevant to relational processes of emotion regulation. Data extraction was organized in a way that allowed comparison not only of outcomes, but also of how each study conceptualized the relationship among parenting orientation, caregiver regulatory processes, and child emotional development.

In addition to extraction, a structured methodological appraisal was conducted to support interpretive rigor. The appraisal considered four domains: clarity of research design, adequacy of sample description, transparency of measurement or procedural detail, and clarity of analytic reporting. Studies that did not meet minimum standards of methodological clarity were excluded during screening. For the final set of included studies, appraisal was used to guide interpretive weighting rather than to calculate formal scores or to eliminate studies solely on the basis of design type. This was important because the review included methodologically diverse studies and sought conceptual synthesis rather than effect-size aggregation.

Given the heterogeneity of the included studies, a thematic narrative synthesis was used. The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, recurrent concepts were identified across studies, including emotional attunement, parenting stress, co-regulation, emotion socialization, behavioral synchrony, and child regulatory outcomes. Second, these concepts were grouped into broader categories on the basis of conceptual similarity and theoretical relevance. Third, the categories were refined through iterative comparison in order to develop an integrated interpretation across study types, participant groups, and cultural contexts.

The synthesis was informed by the theoretical framework outlined in the Introduction, especially attachment theory, emotion socialization theory, and self-regulation frameworks. These perspectives were used not to predetermine the findings, but to support interpretation of how parenting orientation, caregiver regulation, and children's emotional development were connected in the literature. This process resulted in three overarching themes: mindful parenting as a relational framework, parental or maternal emotion regulation as a core mechanism, and developmental outcomes in children's emotion regulation. These themes structured the presentation of findings in the Results section and informed the interpretive arguments developed in the Discussion.

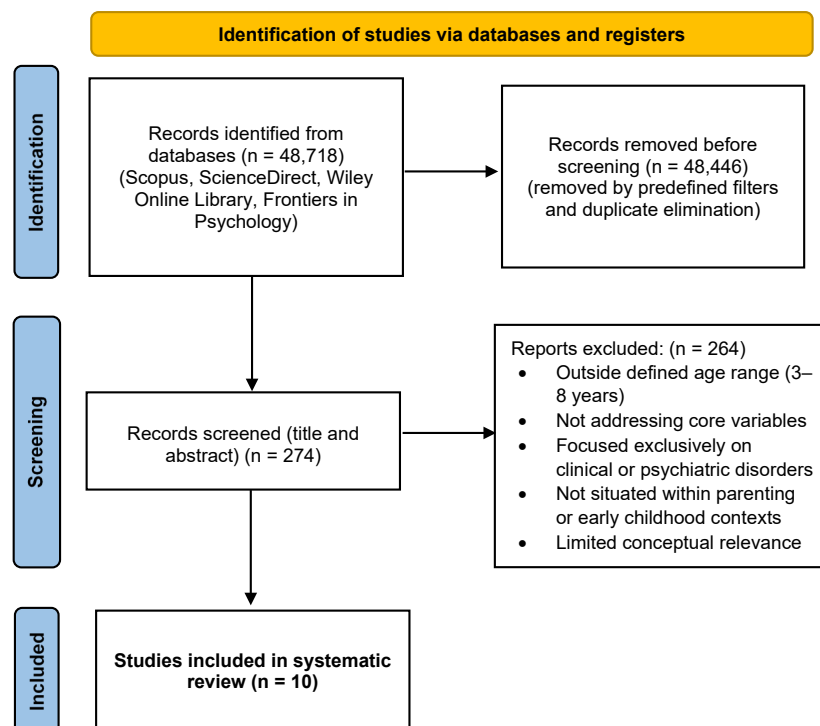


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram of study selection process.

Result

Following the screening and eligibility process, ten studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the final synthesis. The thematic narrative synthesis identified three overarching themes across the reviewed literature: (1) mindful parenting as a relational framework, (2) maternal emotion regulation as a core mechanism, and (3) developmental outcomes in children's emotion regulation. These themes guided the organization and interpretation of the findings presented below.

Theme 1: Mindful Parenting as a Relational Framework

Across the reviewed studies, mindful parenting consistently emerged as a relational framework that shapes the emotional climate within mother–child interactions. Rather than functioning solely as a behavioral technique, mindful parenting was conceptualized as a pattern of present-focused awareness, emotional attunement, and non-reactive responding that influences everyday caregiving dynamics.

Intervention-based studies demonstrated that structured mindful parenting programs reduced parental stress and improved interaction quality. For instance, Kakhki et al. (2022) reported that mothers who completed an eight-week mindful parenting training program showed significant reductions in parenting stress and improvements in the positive aspects of mother–child interactions, including greater closeness and reduced conflict. Similarly, Burgdorf et al. (2022) found that participation in a mindful parenting intervention led to moderate reductions in parenting stress and improvements in children's internalizing symptoms, particularly among school-aged children, indicating the potential value of mindful parenting for families concerned about child internalizing problems.

Emotion-coaching interventions also reinforced relational aspects central to mindful parenting. Both Bølstad et al. (2021) and Bjørk et al. (2022) found that programs grounded in emotional awareness, validation, and supportive emotion talk reliably enhanced parental emotional responsiveness and coaching behaviors. Although improvements in children's self-regulation or emotion-related outcomes were not always statistically significant within short follow-up periods, consistent gains in parental emotion coaching indicate strengthened parent–child emotional connection.

Cross-sectional evidence also reinforces the relational nature of mindful parenting. Wong et al. (2019) found that higher levels of maternal mindful parenting significantly predicted children's prosocial social decision-making, specifically greater sharing in cooperative contexts, while showing no associations with children's individual decision-making behaviors. These findings suggest that mindful parenting functions as a relational process that cultivates emotional presence, attunement, and responsiveness within the caregiving environment, thereby supporting children's capacity to engage prosocially with others.

The conceptual centrality of mindful parenting is further reinforced by Sansone (2024), whose narrative review synthesizes evidence indicating that present-centered awareness, emotional non-reactivity, and compassionate engagement consistently support both parental emotion regulation and children's emotional development. This synthesis underscores mindful parenting as a relational orientation rather than a discrete intervention technique.

Theme 2: Maternal Emotion Regulation as a Core Mechanism

A second major theme highlighted maternal emotion regulation as a central mechanism shaping children's emotional development within relational contexts. Across studies, mothers' regulatory capacities were treated as active components influencing the quality of interaction and the emotional environment in which children develop.

Cave-Freeman et al. (2022) found that maternal emotion dysregulation was significantly, though modestly, associated with higher levels of child irritability. This finding suggests that parental regulatory difficulties may increase children's vulnerability to emotional reactivity, even if the magnitude of association is not large. Rather than indicating direct causation, the results point to maternal regulation as a contributing factor within broader relational dynamics.



Hong et al. (2024) examined maternal effortful control and observed that higher maternal regulatory capacity was associated with greater mother–child behavioral similarity during cooperative tasks. This behavioral synchrony suggests that better regulated mothers may help establish relational conditions that support children’s emerging self-regulatory behaviors. In this sense, maternal regulation appears to function indirectly by shaping the interactional context rather than directly determining child outcomes.

Research grounded in emotion socialization theory further clarifies the role of parental regulation within broader socialization patterns. King et al. (2023) identified three distinct parental emotion socialization profiles: emotion coaching, emotion dismissing, and emotion disengaged, each characterized by specific constellations of beliefs, regulatory tendencies, and emotion-related parenting practices. These profiles demonstrated strong construct validity and were consistent across parent gender and child age. Importantly, the findings underscore that parents’ own emotion regulation capacities are embedded within broader socialization orientations, which collectively shape the emotional climate in which children learn and practice emotion-related skills.

The evidence positions maternal emotion regulation as a relational mechanism that operates through interactional processes, behavioral modeling, and emotion socialization practices.

Theme 3: Developmental Outcomes in Children’s Emotion Regulation

The third theme addressed developmental outcomes associated with children’s emotion regulation and related competencies. Rather than treating emotion regulation as an isolated construct, the reviewed studies situated it within broader domains of academic readiness, social competence, and relational security.

Korucu et al. (2022) demonstrated that preschool children’s self-regulation was positively associated with both pre-academic skills and socio-emotional competence. Children’s self-regulation is captured as a general factor encompassing executive, behavioral, and emotional regulatory components. Executive function showed unique predictive contributions to academic and socio-emotional outcomes, whereas emotion regulation uniquely predicted socio-emotional competence. These findings suggest that different regulatory components may play distinct roles in shaping developmental trajectories.

Fernandes et al. (2021) found that early attachment security predicted children’s emotion regulation at age five, with particularly strong effects observed in the father–child relationship. The strongest outcomes emerged when considering the combined security of both parent–child relationships. Secure and emotionally responsive caregiving from either parent plays a crucial role in children’s development and can help protect them from future difficulties in regulating their emotions.

Findings from interaction-based studies present a more nuanced picture. Hong et al. (2024) showed that mothers with higher effortful control displayed greater behavioral synchrony with their children during observed interactions. However, this synchrony did not predict children’s own effortful control, suggesting that relational coordination alone may not directly translate into measurable regulatory capacities. In contrast, Wong et al. (2019) demonstrated that mindful parenting practices were associated with enhanced social decision-making in children, particularly increased prosocial sharing in cooperative contexts. Conversely, (Cave-Freeman et al., 2022) reported that maternal emotion-regulation difficulties were significantly associated with heightened irritability in young children, highlighting potential developmental vulnerabilities linked to dysregulated caregiving.

These findings indicate that multiple relational and developmental influences shape children’s emotion regulation in early childhood. Children’s regulatory capacities are embedded within attachment relationships, parental regulation patterns, and interactional processes, while also contributing to broader academic and socio-emotional outcomes.

Relational Synthesis Across Themes

Across the three themes, a recurring relational pattern comes into view. Mindful parenting does not stand apart from the wider emotional life of caregiving, and maternal emotion regulation is not well captured as a fixed trait operating in the background. The literature instead points to an unfolding process in which parenting orientation, caregiver regulation, and child development remain closely entangled. What matters is less a single variable than the quality of the emotional conditions created in everyday interaction. From this perspective, children's emotion regulation develops within a relational field rather than through a simple one-directional pathway.

Mindful parenting appears to matter first by shaping the climate of interaction between mother and child. The studies reviewed associate it with emotional presence, lower reactivity, and more supportive engagement in daily life. Intervention findings suggest reductions in parenting stress and improvements in interaction quality, while cross-sectional studies link it to prosocial child behavior. Read together, these findings imply that mindful parenting works less as a discrete technique than as an orientation that alters the emotional texture of caregiving. Its significance lies in how it reorganizes ordinary exchanges rather than in producing immediate and uniform developmental effects.

Maternal emotion regulation becomes especially important within that relational climate. The evidence suggests that it influences behavioral synchrony, emotion socialization, and children's vulnerability to irritability. Even so, the studies do not support a neat causal chain in which maternal regulation directly determines child outcomes. Its effects seem to operate through modeling, validation, co-regulation, and repeated interactional patterns that gradually shape children's emotional learning. What emerges, then, is an indirect and mediated process rather than a straightforward transmission of competence from mother to child.

Children's emotion regulation must also be understood within broader developmental systems. The reviewed studies connect it not only to parenting, but also to attachment security, executive functioning, and socio-emotional competence. This wider framing helps explain why regulatory outcomes vary across studies and do not always appear in the same form or with the same strength. A more convincing interpretation is that regulatory development is sustained through repeated experiences of emotionally responsive care within broader relational and developmental contexts. The overall synthesis therefore points to a layered, probabilistic, and context-sensitive process rather than a deterministic model of parental influence.

Table 3. Literature Matrix

Author & Title	Purpose & Design	Target Group & Age	Strategies / Sub-Categories	Results
Wong et al. (2019). Mindful parenting: A key pathway to children's decision-making.	To examine how mindful parenting influences children's individual and social decision-making. Cross-sectional, quantitative design.	63 mother-child dyads, children aged 4–6 years.	Mindful parenting measured via IM-P questionnaire. Decision-making assessed through behavioral sharing and choice tasks.	Mindful parenting supports children in making better decisions in social sharing contexts, though not in personal decision-making. Highlights the role of mindfulness in shaping social-emotional development.
Bølstad et al. (2021). Effects of an emotion socialization intervention on parent and child outcomes: A pilot study of Tuning in to Kids in Norway.	To evaluate the effects of the TIK emotion coaching program on parenting and child behavior. Mixed-methods pilot intervention.	Parents of preschool-aged children (around 5–6 years).	TIK framework: 5 steps of emotion coaching. Pre-post evaluations of emotion socialization practices.	The <i>Tuning into Kids</i> program enhanced parents' emotional coaching skills and reduced child behavioral problems. However, no significant improvement was seen in children's emotional regulation,

Author & Title	Purpose & Design	Target Group & Age	Strategies / Sub-Categories	Results
Burgdorf et al. (2022). A pilot evaluation of a mindful parenting program.	To assess feasibility and outcomes of a mindful parenting intervention for parents of children with internalizing problems. Pre-post RCT design.	Parents (mothers/fathers) of children aged 3–18 years.	8-week Mindful Parenting Program adapted from MBSR/MBCT. Measures of mindfulness, parenting stress, and child internalizing symptoms.	possibly due to the short evaluation timeframe. Mindful parenting intervention decreased parenting stress and reduced children's internalizing problems (e.g., anxiety). The study showed strong feasibility with high participation rates.
Cave-Freeman et al. (2022). The role of maternal emotion regulation in early childhood irritability.	To examine maternal emotion regulation and child irritability in early childhood. Cross-sectional correlational design.	Mothers and their children aged 1 month to 5 years.	Maternal emotion regulation (DERS-SF), child emotion regulation (PACER), irritability levels.	Maternal emotion dysregulation was closely linked to increased child irritability. Parental emotion regulation had more influence than child self-regulation, underlining its foundational role.
Kakhki et al. (2022). Effectiveness of mindful parenting training on parenting stress and mother-child interactions.	To test the effectiveness of mindful parenting training on parenting stress and interaction quality. Experimental pre-post control group design.	Mothers of preschoolers (children ~6 years old).	8 weekly mindful parenting training sessions. Measures: Parenting Stress Index, Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire.	Training mothers in mindful parenting improved the emotional climate of mother-child interactions, reduced maternal stress, and helped children develop better emotion regulation.
Korucu et al. (2022). Preschool children's self-regulation skills and school readiness.	To explore components of self-regulation and their relationship to social-emotional and academic skills. Cross-sectional design.	Preschool children aged around 4 years.	EF tasks (Dimensional Change Card Sort), Behavioral regulation (Head-Toes-Knees-Shoulders), ER Checklist.	Children's self-regulation skills were positively linked to school readiness and emotional-social adjustment. Behavioral regulation was highlighted as a key developmental skill.
Fernandes et al. (2021). Early parent-child attachment and children's emotion regulation: A longitudinal study.	To investigate long-term effects of parent-child attachment on children's ER. Longitudinal design (children aged 3 and 5 years).	Portuguese children and parents (both mothers and fathers).	Attachment Q-Set (AQS), Classroom Emotion Regulation Checklist.	Secure attachment with both parents (or even just the father) predicted better emotional regulation by age 5. Demonstrated the value of parental emotional bonds.
Bjørk et al. (2022). Enhancing children's emotion understanding: Tuning in to Kids in Norwegian preschools.	To test the effect of the TIK program on parental socialization and child emotion understanding. Pre-post design.	36 parents and children (~5.9 years) in Norway.	Emotion socialization (CCNES), child emotion understanding (TEC). TIK intervention.	After a parenting program, parents became more emotionally supportive. However, improvements in children's emotional understanding occurred in both the intervention and control groups,

Author & Title	Purpose & Design	Target Group & Age	Strategies / Sub-Categories	Results
Hong et al. (2024). Mother–Child Interaction Similarity: Links to Child Effortful Control and Maternal Emotion Regulation.	To explore the association between mother–child interaction similarity, child effortful control, and maternal ER. Cross-sectional study.	46 mother–child dyads, children aged 3–6 years (mean ~4.9).	Observed synchrony in behavior/emotion. Effortful control (parent report), maternal ER (self-report).	suggesting age-related development. Mindful parenting strengthened children's emotion regulation by improving parental emotion regulation, reducing stress, and enhancing emotional closeness in interactions.
Sansone, A. (2024). Mindful Parenting as a Central Role in Child Emotional Regulation: A Literature Review.	To synthesize findings on mindful parenting's role in child ER. Systematic narrative review.	Parents (primarily mothers); children from infancy to adolescence.	Components of mindful parenting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present-centered awareness • Compassion • Emotional non-reactivity. 	Mindful parenting promotes child ER through better parental ER and relationship quality. Reduces parenting stress and supports positive parenting.

Discussion

This review set out to clarify how mindful parenting, maternal emotion regulation, and children's emotion regulation have been connected in the literature on early childhood caregiving. Read across the reviewed studies, these constructs do not behave like separate variables linked by a simple sequence of cause and effect. What appears more consistently is a layered relational process in which emotional attunement, parental responsiveness, co-regulation, and emotion socialization shape the conditions under which children's regulatory capacities gradually emerge. Seen from that angle, mindful parenting is better understood not simply as a technique or intervention label, but as a relational orientation that may influence the emotional climate of caregiving. Even so, the evidence does not justify strong deterministic claims. The pathways described across studies vary in strength, depend on interactional processes, and are shaped by developmental timing and socio-cultural conditions. That is why a relational process perspective offers a more adequate interpretive frame than a linear model in which one parenting input is assumed to produce one child outcome.

The evidence reviewed here suggests that mindful parenting matters less as an isolated practice than as a way of reorganizing everyday emotional encounters between parent and child. Attachment theory helps illuminate this point because mindful parenting, when understood as emotional availability, reduced reactivity, and present-centered engagement, may support the sense of security that children need in emotionally demanding interactions (Bowlby, 1973, 1990; Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2021; Wong et al., 2019). Intervention studies also point in this direction. Reductions in parenting stress and improvements in interaction quality indicate that mindful parenting may stabilize the relational conditions in which emotional learning takes place (Burgdorf et al., 2022; Kakhki et al., 2022). Yet the literature also warns against too rapid a conclusion. Gains in parental mindfulness or emotion coaching did not consistently produce immediate improvements in children's measurable regulatory outcomes, especially in short-term designs (Bølstad et al., 2021; Bjørk et al., 2022). This pattern matters because it suggests that changes in family emotional processes may become visible before changes in child-level indicators do. In other words, mindful parenting may first alter the texture of caregiving before its developmental implications become easier to detect.

The place of maternal emotion regulation becomes clearer when the literature is read through emotion socialization theory. Children do not learn regulation in abstraction. They learn it through repeated exposure to how adults respond to emotional strain, how feelings are named and validated, and how dysregulation is contained or escalated in everyday interaction

(Morris et al., 2007; Thompson & Meyer, 2007). Several studies reinforce this point. Distinct parental emotion socialization profiles are associated with different child emotional outcomes, which suggests that regulation is embedded in broader relational orientations rather than reducible to isolated behaviors (King et al., 2023). Maternal dysregulation has likewise been linked to higher child irritability, pointing less to direct transmission than to relational vulnerability in the caregiving environment (Cave-Freeman et al., 2022). Hong et al. (2024) showed that stronger maternal effortful control was associated with greater behavioral synchrony during mother-child interaction, although synchrony itself did not directly predict children's own regulatory capacities. That finding is worth pausing over. It implies that emotional coordination within interaction may be important without being sufficient on its own. Maternal regulation seems to work indirectly, through modeling, validation, co-regulation, and patterned interaction, rather than through straightforward transfer of competence from mother to child (Bell, 2020; Zeytinoglu et al., 2017).

Children's emotion regulation also needs to be understood within a broader developmental frame. The studies reviewed do not present regulation as a narrow or self-contained skill. Instead, it appears intertwined with executive functioning, social competence, prosocial behavior, and academic readiness (Gross, 2014; Gross & Ford, 2024; Korucu et al., 2022). That broader framing helps explain why the effects of mindful parenting do not always show up in the same form across studies. In one case, children of mothers practicing mindful parenting showed stronger prosocial sharing in cooperative situations, but this did not extend to all individual decision-making tasks (Wong et al., 2019). Elsewhere, secure attachment predicted stronger emotion regulation, and Fernandes et al. (2021) further suggested that this security is not exclusively maternal because paternal attachment also matters. Such findings complicate any attempt to reduce children's regulation to a single parenting variable. A more credible reading is that regulatory development takes shape through repeated relational exchanges within wider developmental systems, not through one direct behavioral route.

Integrating the Evidence: Toward a Relational Process Perspective

What, then, does this body of work contribute when read as a whole? Its main value lies in showing that mindful parenting, maternal regulation, and child emotional outcomes are better treated as parts of one relational process than as three separate research domains. Mindful parenting can be read as a relational orientation marked by awareness, non-reactivity, and emotional attunement that influences the climate of caregiving (Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2021). Within that climate, maternal emotion regulation operates as an active mechanism through which emotions are modeled, discussed, validated, and managed in daily life (Morris et al., 2007; Cave-Freeman et al., 2022; Hong et al., 2024; King et al., 2023). Children's regulatory capacities, in turn, emerge gradually through those interactions while also being shaped by attachment security, executive functioning, and the broader developmental ecology in which caregiving occurs (Fernandes et al., 2021; Gross, 2014; Korucu et al., 2022).

This perspective helps explain not only why the literature finds promise in mindful parenting, but also why the evidence remains uneven. A relational lens makes sense of studies that report improvements in parenting stress, emotional responsiveness, or coaching without parallel short-term gains in child regulation (Bølstad et al., 2021; Bjørk et al., 2022; Burgdorf et al., 2022). It also helps temper the interpretation of cross-sectional associations between parental variables and child outcomes, which may be meaningful without being strongly causal or universally generalizable (Cave-Freeman et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2019). The more plausible conclusion is not that mindful parenting automatically produces child regulation, but that it may reshape the relational conditions within which emotional learning becomes more likely. From this standpoint, the contribution of the review is not to confirm a single pathway, but to show that the pathway itself is layered, mediated, and contingent.

Variability, Methodological Limits, and Contextual Qualification

Any strong reading of these findings must be moderated by the limits of the evidence base. The studies differ in design, outcome focus, and analytic strategy, and those differences matter. Intervention studies often reported reduced parenting stress and improved emotion coaching or interaction quality (Bølstad et al., 2021; Burgdorf et al., 2022; Kakhki et al., 2022), yet child-level regulatory effects were far less consistent, particularly where follow-up periods were short (Bjørk et al., 2022). Cross-sectional studies identified meaningful associations between parental variables and child outcomes, but such designs cannot settle questions of temporal direction or developmental sequencing (Cave-Freeman et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2019). Some effects were also small to moderate, which suggests that maternal regulation should be located within a broader developmental ecology rather than elevated into a singular explanation.

Methodological constraints reinforce that caution. Many studies relied on parent self-report measures such as the IM-P, DERS, and effortful control questionnaires, raising familiar concerns about shared method variance and social desirability bias when parent and child variables are reported by the same informant. Several studies also worked with modest samples, which may limit statistical stability and broader generalizability. Brief intervention windows and limited follow-up make it difficult to determine whether reported improvements endure. The evidence base is culturally uneven as well. Although the review draws on studies from multiple countries, Western populations remain disproportionately represented. That imbalance narrows the transferability of claims and makes culturally confident conclusions harder to defend. The small number of included studies further indicates that this remains a developing field rather than a settled body of evidence. Publication bias also cannot be dismissed, especially if intervention studies with positive results are more likely to reach publication. A similar narrowing occurs through the dominance of mother-focused samples, even though Fernandes et al. (2021) point toward the relevance of fathers and broader parental configurations.

These limitations become especially important when the discussion turns to Indonesia. Parenting in Indonesia is shaped by expectations of respect, hierarchy, emotional restraint, and social harmony, all of which influence how emotions are expressed, modeled, and responded to within family life (Sumargi et al., 2014; Morris et al., 2007). Yet those constraints do not tell the whole story. Relational values such as *gotong royong* and collective responsibility may also support forms of attentiveness and mutual responsiveness that resonate with some dimensions of mindful parenting, even if they are not articulated through the same vocabulary found in Western literature (Tomlinson & Andina, 2015). This tension is analytically important. It suggests that mindful parenting should not be treated as a portable formula that travels unchanged across settings. Its meaning and effects depend on how it intersects with local moral expectations, everyday caregiving routines, and wider structural pressures.

Those wider pressures are not peripheral. Maternal regulation is shaped not only by individual capacity but by employment demands, socioeconomic strain, urbanization, uneven access to parenting education, and limited mental health support. Where extended family support weakens, emotional and practical responsibility may become more concentrated on mothers, intensifying the strain of daily caregiving (Sumargi et al., 2014). Gina and Fitriani (2022) reported that working mothers under high parenting stress displayed lower emotion regulation, illustrating how structural burden can enter directly into interactional life. Parenting programs in Indonesia also remain uneven in design and access. Although adapted evidence-based models such as Triple P have shown promise, many initiatives are still not systematically grounded in established theoretical frameworks, and implementation remains regionally unequal (Kiling-Bunga et al., 2020; Sumargi et al., 2014). This matters because when structured support is limited, caregivers may rely largely on inherited practice and personal experience, producing considerable variation in how emotions are named, discussed, and regulated at home. In that sense, the Indonesian material does more than add local color. It shows why relational pathways must be read as context-sensitive rather than universal.

Implications for Intervention, Policy, and Future Research

Once the evidence is read in this more qualified way, the implications become clearer. On the theoretical side, the review supports a more integrated understanding of family-based emotion regulation in which attachment processes, mindful parenting, and emotion socialization are treated as mutually informing rather than competing explanations (Bowlby, 1973, 1990; Morris et al., 2007; Kabat-Zinn & Kabat-Zinn, 2021). That integration matters because it shifts attention away from isolated parenting behaviors and toward the relational conditions through which emotional learning becomes possible.

The practical lesson is equally important. Efforts to improve children's emotion regulation are likely to remain limited if they focus only on child behavior while neglecting caregiver regulation. The intervention literature reviewed here suggests that emotional awareness, reduced reactivity, and stronger emotion coaching may help create more stable relational conditions for children's learning (Burgdorf et al., 2022; Kakhki et al., 2022). What follows is not a simple endorsement of mindfulness programs, but a more specific point: caregiver regulation should be treated as a central target of intervention because it shapes the emotional medium in which children's regulatory capacities develop.

A similar caution applies to policy. In Indonesia especially, parenting support is unlikely to be effective if framed as the transfer of a decontextualized model. More promising approaches would align with locally valued relational norms, connect with community-based early childhood services, and strengthen support for maternal mental health and family well-being. Mindful parenting, in this sense, is more productively framed as one possible way of deepening emotional responsiveness within existing relational traditions than as a replacement for them.

Future research still has considerable work to do. Longer-term studies are needed to examine whether changes in parental mindfulness and regulation translate into sustained developmental outcomes for children. Multi-informant and observational designs would help reduce dependence on shared self-report measures. Studies that include fathers and broader caregiving systems are also needed, as are inquiries into how socioeconomic stress, parental mental health, and access to parenting education shape emotional processes within families. Cross-cultural comparative research will be especially valuable for testing whether the relational process perspective proposed here holds across diverse settings or whether its contours shift more fundamentally than the current literature allows us to see. The present evidence does not justify sweeping causal claims, but it does justify a more careful conclusion: emotion regulation in early childhood develops through layered relational processes, and the significance of mindful parenting lies in how it may help organize those processes rather than in any single uniform effect it can be assumed to produce.

Conclusion

This review examined how mindful parenting, maternal emotion regulation, and children's emotion regulation have been connected in the literature on early childhood caregiving. The synthesis suggests that these relationships are better understood as part of a layered relational process than as a simple sequence of direct effects. Mindful parenting appears less as a discrete behavioral technique than as a relational orientation that may shape the emotional climate of caregiving, while maternal emotion regulation emerges as an interactional mechanism working through modeling, responsiveness, and co-regulation. Children's regulatory development, in turn, appears to take shape within broader relational and developmental systems rather than as the product of any single parenting variable.

The review also indicates that these pathways should be interpreted with caution. The available evidence remains limited in scope and uneven in design, with variation in methodological approach, modest effect sizes, reliance on cross-sectional and self-report data, and continued overrepresentation of Western samples. These constraints make it difficult to sustain strong causal claims or to assume that the same relational processes operate in identical ways across contexts. What the review offers, therefore, is not confirmation of a universal model,

but a more analytically grounded account of how parenting orientation, caregiver regulation, and child emotional development may be linked under particular relational and contextual conditions.

These considerations carry implications for both scholarship and practice. Future research would benefit from longitudinal, multi-informant, and cross-cultural designs that can clarify how these processes unfold over time and across diverse family settings, while also moving beyond mother-exclusive models to include fathers and wider caregiving configurations. In practical terms, efforts to support children's emotion regulation are likely to be stronger when they address caregiver regulation and the emotional conditions of caregiving rather than focusing narrowly on child behavior alone. Taken together, the review points toward a more cautious but more productive conclusion: the significance of mindful parenting lies not in any automatic developmental effect, but in its possible role in shaping the relational conditions through which children's emotion regulation gradually develops.

Declarations

Author Contribution Statement

Robiah Al Adawiyah: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Project administration. Noviana Mustapa: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. Sri Tatminingsih: Methodology, Validation, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. Ika Budi Maryatun: Formal analysis, Validation, Writing – review & editing. Musakkid Himphinit: Conceptualization, Validation, Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

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Additional Information

No additional information is available for this paper at this time.

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