Bedtime Resistance and Parenting in Early Childhood: 
A Self-Determination Perspective

by

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Abstract

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Difficulty getting ready for bed and settling at bedtime, commonly referred to as bedtime resistance, are prevalent problems in early childhood (Goodlin-Jones, Tang, Liu, & Anders, 2009; Johnson, 1991). Despite an abundance of previous research, few studies have considered the role of emergent developmental process in the context of bedtime resistance. The current study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between parenting practices and bedtime resistance in early childhood from a developmental perspective. Specifically, bedtime parenting practices were examined from a self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) perspective and children’s bedtime behaviours were conceptualized within a differentiated model of compliance and noncompliance. Two instruments were developed to capture these constructs and their psychometric properties were examined. One hundred thirty-one caregivers completed a series of online questionnaires about their parenting practices and children’s behaviours. Findings provided preliminary evidence for the validity and reliability of the two newly constructed measures. Analyses revealed that child age was associated with how children respond to caregivers at bedtime. Although parenting practices were associated with less sophisticated forms of bedtime noncompliance, child age did not significantly moderate these relationships. Findings highlight the importance of examining bedtime resistance from a developmental perspective and the need for future research in this area.