

# Associations among co-parenting, parental play and toddlers' socio-emotional competencies

## Background

Coparenting is defined as the quality of coordination that exists between two individuals who adopt parenting roles within the family system (McHale, Kuerston-Hogan, Lauretti, & Rasmussen, 2000).

Broader family-level processes such as the coparenting relationship have been identified as a crucial context (in addition to dyadic parent-child relationships) within which children develop (Minuchin, 1985).

It is important as it involves two individuals responsible for raising a child who provide a socio-emotional context for family interactions that influence children's socio-emotional adjustment (McHale & Rasmussen, 1998).

Coparenting is more proximally related parenting behaviours compared to the marital relationship (Bearss & Eyberg, 1998; McHale & Rasmussen, 1998).

## Rationale

Why study coparenting in relation to parental play and toddlers' socio-emotional competencies?

Coparenting is a risk mechanism that mediates the link between couple relationship and parenting and which provides a stronger understanding of the aetiology of child behaviour.

A more modifiable target for intervention as compared to the overall couple relationship.

Parents tend to interact with young children through play. As such, one mechanism that can explain the link between coparenting and child socio-emotional development is parental play and language use during play.

Children's socio-emotional competencies can be predicted by parental play behaviours (MacDonald and Parke, 1984; Cabrera, Kerberg, Malin & Aldoney, 2017).

Investigation of coparental influences on such crucial parenting behaviours has been neglected in past research.

## Research questions

- 1) Do parental play behaviours and language vary by parent gender and dyadic and triadic contexts?
- 2) After controlling for family and child demographics, does coparenting quality relate to parental play behaviours and language use in triadic contexts?
- 3) How are parental play behaviours and language use associated with toddlers' socio-emotional competencies?
- 4) Is coparenting directly associated with toddlers' socio-emotional competencies or is this relationship mediated by parental play and language use during play?

## Method

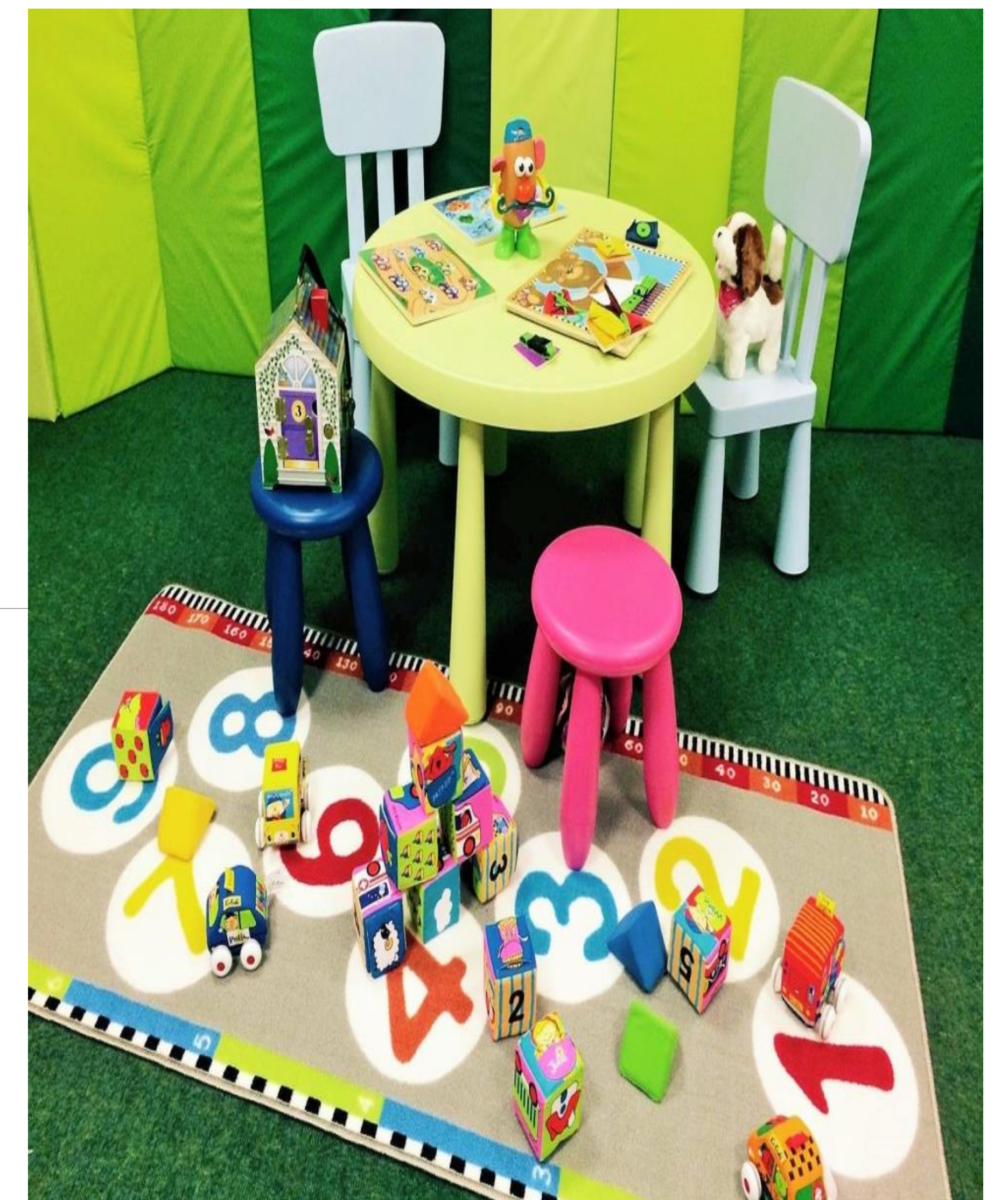
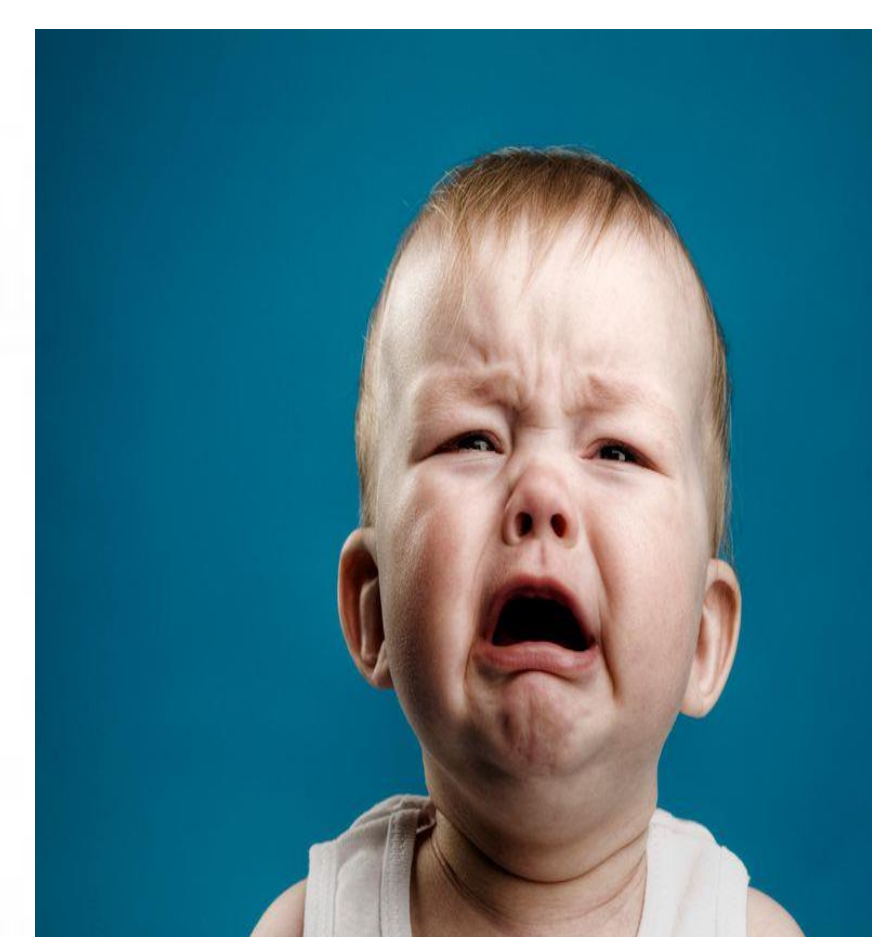
Observation sessions include two dyadic parent-child play sessions (free-play and structured) and one triadic play (free-play and structured) interaction.

The coparenting relationship is measured through real-time triadic parent-child interactions.

Parent play behaviours and language assessed within dyadic and coparenting contexts using coding schemes designed specifically for this study.

Toddlers' socio-emotional competencies assessed using Bayley Scales of Infant Development (BSID).

Toddlers' self-regulation skills assessed through real-time observations of parent-child interactions using a coding scheme adapted from Meuwissen and Carlson (2019).



## Practical implications

Promoting more supportive coparental relationships during the transition to parenthood as well as during the toddlerhood and early childhood years.

To inform policy-makers, decision-makers, parents, educators and researchers about the importance of enhancing father involvement with young children by including fathers in parenting and coparenting programmes (including non-resident fathers).

Developing programmes for enhancing awareness of shared parenting among young parents and parents from low-income backgrounds as well as divorced couples.

## References

- Minuchin, P. (1985). Families and Individual Development: Provocations from the Field of Family Therapy. *Child Development*, 56(2), 289. doi:10.2307/1129720
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