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Positive parenting support during family reunification

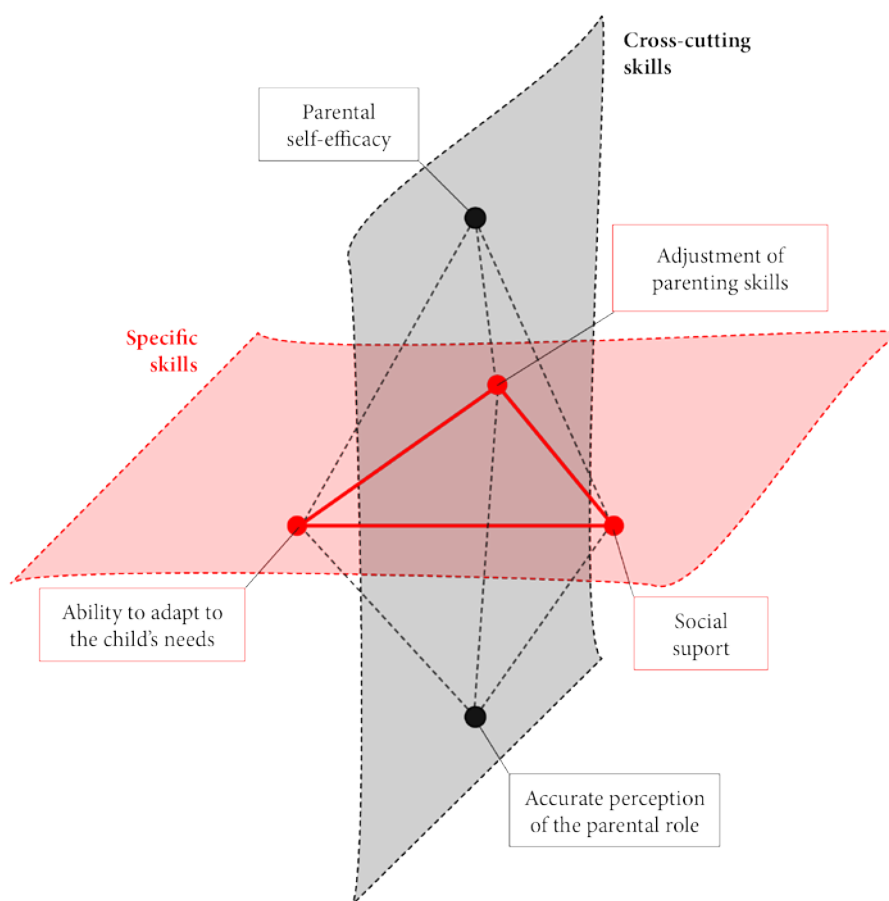
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Abstract

This article presents the results of a qualitative study that explores parenting skills when a child returns home after a period of foster care in the child protection system. There were a total of 135 participants, including 63 child protection professionals, 42 parents and 30 children and adolescents. The data were analysed using content analysis submitted to peer review.

Triangulating the voices of children with the input of parents and professionals rendered it possible to identify needs for the consolidation of family reunification in five dimensions: adjustment of parenting skills, adaptation to the needs of the child, social support, more accurate perception of one's role, and parental self-efficacy.

These findings suggest particular characteristics in the development of both generally applicable skills and skills specific to positive parenting that can improve the chances of a successful reunification process.



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Keywords: positive parenting, family reunification, child protection, parenting skills, social support, parental self-efficacy

1 experience their parental role, allows parents to feel like active, capable actors who are
2 satisfied with their parental role (Máiquez, Rodrigo, Capote, & Vermaes, 2000). Upon
3 family reunification, two of the skills that compose parental agency are relevant:
4 *accurate perception of the parental role and parental self-efficacy.*

5 An accurate perception of the parental role enhances understanding of the reasons that
6 led to the separation and the changes that occurred to achieve reunification. A factor
7 contributing to success is that the family perceive the changes that have led to
8 reunification with regard to three distinct areas: (a) changes in the family context, the
9 social support it receives and environmental factors; (b) changes in parenting skills to
10 respond appropriately to the children's needs; and (c) changes related to improvement
11 in the children's quality of life and well-being. Balsells et al. (2013), determined that this
12 role perception is acquired gradually throughout the process of foster care and
13 reunification. At first, families blame contextual aspects for the separation; in the
14 reunification stage, however, they begin to realize how their improved parenting skills
15 are among the factors that render reunification possible. This provides a glimpse into
16 how a progressive awareness of the problem occurs (López & Del Valle, 2013; Palacios
17 & Amorós, 2006).

18 Lietz and Strength (2011) believed that during the reunification stage, parental self-
19 efficacy implies that the parents have a clear awareness of the progress that has enabled
20 their children to return home. Those authors posited that families recognize the changes
21 that have rendered reunification possible and that they have feelings of positive
22 reinforcement regarding those changes (a positive view of the situation). In this sense,
23 Osterling and Han (2011) spoke of the families' perseverance throughout the process as
24 a factor that strengthens the reunification as well as their self-assessment and personal
25 determination to preserve the gains once they are reunited. Similarly, according to
26 Rodrigo and Byrne (2011) on the factors that develop positive parenting, enhancing
27 certain factors such as the level of internal control and self-efficacy helps families
28 acquire a greater awareness of progress and a sense that these factors rely, in part, on
29 their own efforts. According to Lietz and Strength (2011), the meanings families
30 attribute to their experiences strengthen them and give them confidence in themselves.
31 To this end, families must transform their initial fear and view their experience as
32 positive and as an opportunity to improve the situation. Self-confidence and the
33 recognition of their own worth and the worth of other family members add a sense of
34 identity to the family and help preserve the family unit as it strives to remain together
35 (Del Valle, Bravo, & López, 2009; Del Valle & Fuertes, 2007; Osterling & Han, 2011;
36 Thomas, Chenot, & Reifel, 2005).

37 Another factor identified in the literature as key to the success of reunification is that
38 parents must become re-acquainted with their children again to adapt to their changing
39 needs. Stephens et al. (2017) observed that returning children were described as being
40 'new people' whom the parents needed to learn about. This newness was sometimes
41 connected to the length of time their children spent in foster care; at times, their
42 children returned to the home at a different developmental stage from when they left,
43 with new standards and daily routines. Actively involving the children in this process is
44 another need identified by research: giving sons and daughters a greater voice and a
45 more prominent role in the process of family reunification engenders better adjustment
46 and adaptability in their parents (Balsells et al., 2013).

1 Social support is another key element in the process of reunification, particularly during
2 this phase of the child's return home. The amount of support different family members
3 receive to positively address this new period of becoming re-acquainted and re-
4 establishing family life is associated with lower rates of return to the child protection
5 system (Farmer & Wijedasa, 2013). Kimberlin et al. (2009) observed that lack of social
6 support is a risk factor for successful reunification (Barth, Weigensberg, Fisher, Fetrow,
7 & Green, 2008). Lin (2014) reinforced these ideas, demonstrating that a lack of different
8 types of support hinders caregivers' ability to care for the children and prevents the
9 children from achieving permanency outcomes. Thomas, Chenot, and Reifel (2005)
10 noted the importance of support because negative effects may present a risk to family
11 stability, particularly for children.

12 Finally, the literature described differing aspects of parenting skills among parents at the
13 time their sons and daughters return home. Festinger (1996) observed that there is a
14 relation between the success of family reunification and parents' skill at managing
15 communication with their sons and daughters, understanding the developmental stage
16 they are negotiating, and establishing balanced discipline. Because inadequate
17 communication between parents and children can create conflict, it is essential that the
18 various family members learn and adjust their communication skills. Both mothers and
19 fathers acquiring and having parenting skills to meet the needs of their children during
20 the reunification process and other characteristics related to the child (young age, need
21 for protection, etc.), to the biological family (psychosocial characteristics, parenting
22 skills), or to the foster care or protective services (type of foster care, economic aid,
23 duration of foster care, etc.) help guarantee long-term family stability (Kimberlin et al.,
24 2009).

25 The academic literature has highlighted the key role of certain elements in
26 strengthening parenting in the reunited family; parents' and children's voices and
27 perspectives are rarely observed during the reunification. Although they compose one-
28 half of this vital caretaking equation, their needs, concerns, and expertise from their
29 perspective surrounding reunification remain largely unheard. Effectively silenced,
30 parents and children lose the opportunity to participate in an area that concerns those
31 most important to them (Stephens et al., 2017).

32 This article presents the results of a study that explores parenting skills at the time of
33 family reunification through the voices of the protagonists. To hear the voices of those
34 directly involved, an effort has been made to include the input of adolescents and young
35 people because of their ability to discuss these topics, to inquire about their childhood
36 and foster care experiences, and to triangulate these data with the input of parents and
37 professionals.

38

39 **METHODOLOGY**

40 **Qualitative research**

41 The design of the investigation is qualitative with descriptive and explanatory purposes.
42 The perspective focused on parents, children and professionals as experts in (Stolz,
43 Brandon, Wallace, & Roberson, 2013) the reunification process and essential to its
44 improvement. This methodological design was deemed necessary to deepen and better

1 understand the role of social support in the processes of families in the child protection
2 system (Lin, 2014). The design is based on conducting focus groups and semi-structured
3 interviews to multi-informants: professionals, parents and children.

4 **Participants**

5 The total sample included 135 people and comprised 42 parents in child welfare plans
6 or recently reunited (for less than one year), 63 childcare professionals and 30 children
7 and adolescents who had undergone a foster process, whether kinship or residential.

8 Focus group participants were selected according to different criteria. For parents, the
9 criteria were a) families who were already reunited with their children or expecting a
10 return in one or two months, b) families who fulfilled or were fulfilling a reunification
11 plan, c) willingness and collaboration with professionals, and d) different characteristics
12 of age and family structure. For professionals, the criteria were a) working in child
13 protection services, b) representing different disciplines that composed the professional
14 teams: psychologists, teachers, social workers, educators, and c) experience in
15 residential foster care or kinship care. For children and adolescents, the criteria were a)
16 being between 12 and 20 years and belonging to selected biological families, b) spending
17 at least a year in care (foster care or residential care) or in kinship care, and c) having no
18 physical, mental or sensory disability and to be able to follow the focus group.

19 Of the final sample, 76.2% of the parents were women and 23.8% men. Thirty-four of
20 them represented reunited families, and four were not reunited. Of the childcare
21 professionals, 20 were social educators, 10 were pedagogues, 20 were psychologists and
22 13 were social workers. Of the professionals, 74.6% were women and 25.4% men;
23 25.80% were between 25 and 35 years old, 45.16% between 36 and 45, and 29.04% over
24 46 years old. Of these, 33 worked in biological family intervention, 16 in residential
25 foster care intervention, and 5 in kinship care intervention. Of the children and
26 teenagers, 21 were reunified, and 9 were not reunified; 53.3% were girls, and 46.7%
27 were boys; and 17% were between 6 and 12 years old, 56% were between 12 and 18
28 years old, and 27% were adults.

29 **Focus group procedure**

30 To gather the data, the focus group technique and semi-structured interviews were used
31 according to written criteria. This technique has been considered appropriate for use
32 with vulnerable population groups (Ayón & Quiroz Villa, 2013), particularly families in
33 the child protection system (Balsells et al., 2011) as well as with professionals who work
34 with families (Stolz et al., 2013). Three tools were used to gather the data: (1)
35 identification card with the participant's basic data, (2) guidelines for questions for the
36 development of the discussion group or semi-structured interview, and (3) a summary
37 card for the discussion group in which aspects related to the development of the group
38 were registered: date, duration of foster care, place, motivation, cohesion, atmosphere,
39 group dynamics and how the questions worked.

40 Eighteen interviews and 22 discussion groups were conducted. Two researchers from
41 the team travelled to each office of the social services experts; one researcher was the
42 moderator, and the other was in charge of logistics and recording the discussion
43 according to the written criteria. Each discussion group and interview was recorded with
44 the agreement of those present and included a confidentiality agreement.

1 **Data analysis**

2 The analysis focused on five dimensions: (1) adjustment of parenting skills, (2) adapting
3 to the child's needs, (3) social support, (4) accurate perception of the parental role, and
4 (5) parental self-efficacy that are considered important for a successful reunification
5 process as their children return to the home. Content analysis was used to analyse the
6 information by the preparation of codes to be evaluated by different judges.

7 Bottom-up content analysis was applied: the first stage of analysis was textual, selecting
8 paragraphs, fragments and significant quotes from the transcription papers. The second
9 stage was conceptual, identifying categories and subcategories that could be inter-
10 related. Both stages were subjected to peer review, and categories and subcategories
11 were defined when data reached saturation. The categories are considered saturated
12 when: (1) no new data that emerge in a category, (2) the category is well developed and
13 shows variation and (3) the relationship between the categories are established and are
14 validated.

15 The software Atlas.ti 6.0 was used for the qualitative data processing. A Hermeneutic
16 Unit Editor was created in which the literal transcriptions of the focus group and
17 interviews (primary documents) were included. Each category was assigned a code
18 (code), and textual notes were included (memos). A conceptual network (network) was
19 created to analyse the data as a basis for the connections established between the codes
20 of the hermeneutic unit.

21

22 **RESULTS**

23 The richness of the results stems from the ability to record the direct voices of
24 adolescents and young people recounting their childhood experiences with foster care
25 and triangulating their input with that of parents and professionals. The results of the
26 research are around the five dimensions that favour the process of family reunification.
27 We can observe the relationship between the specific dimensions (adjustment of
28 parenting skills, ability to adapt to the child's needs and social support) and the cross-
29 cutting skills (accurate perception on the parental role and parental self-efficacy)
30 represented in the figure 1.

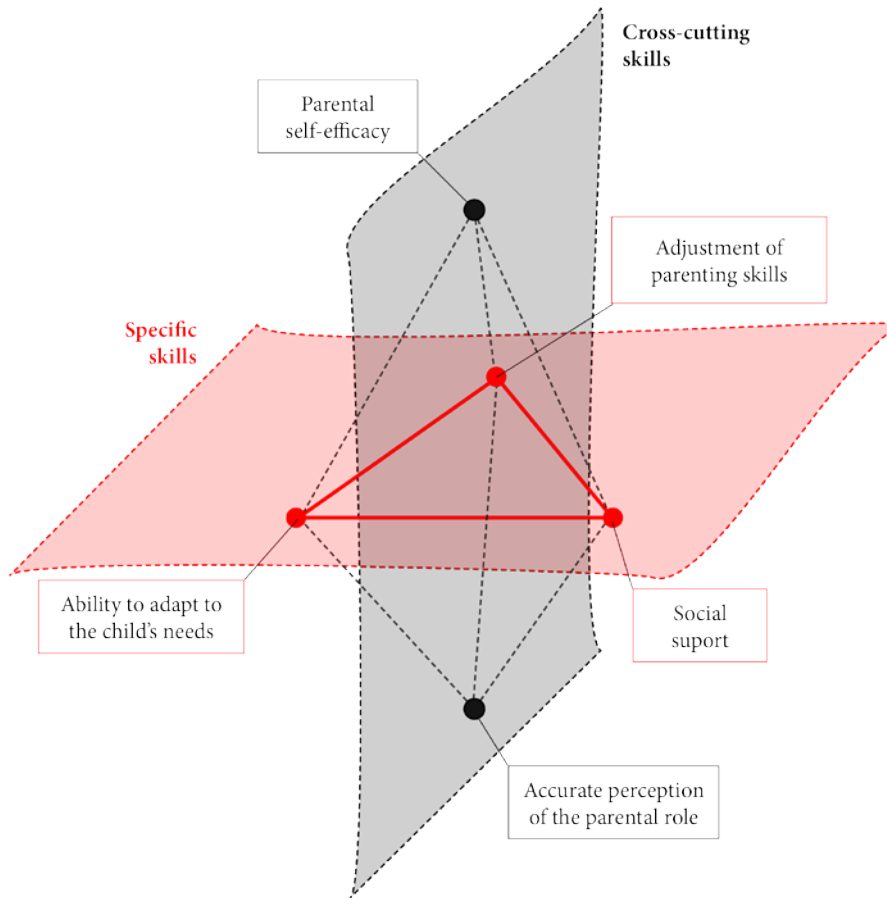


Figure 1: dimensions that favour the process of family reunification

Adjusting parenting and educational skills to the new family circumstances

Upon the child's return home, there is a need to adjust parenting skills to achieve optimum development for the child, primarily with regard to education, establishing rules and boundaries, and coexistence based on communication and affection among family members. These are specific parenting and educational skills that render it possible to re-establish daily life.

Family accounts relate how after a period of separation, parents have a greater awareness that the reunification will require knowing how to establish rules, speak in a more relaxed tone, adjust their parental roles, spend more time with their children, communicate and play with them more, be more understanding, be less reliant on them, and have better communication with their schools.

Of all of these skills, communication between parents and children is the most indispensable element to generate positive responses to potential conflicts that may arise.

For parents, that they be more understanding and know how to listen, and when there's a situation to discuss, that they let us talk. (Children's discussion group)

Adaptability to the children's needs

1 Changes in the children upon their return home may be observed in two areas: changes
2 in their habits and routines learned in their foster family or centre and developmental
3 changes.

4 While separated from their parents, the children lived with other people and were
5 exposed to different rules, customs, lifestyles and dynamics of daily life. The results
6 indicate how aspects related to order, meals, the division of tasks, schedules, etc., are
7 part of the daily life to which children have become accustomed and that require
8 realignment and acceptance by all family members to restore a positive dynamic.

9 In addition, children and adolescents' developmental stages and, consequently, their
10 needs changed since they were separated from their biological families and entered the
11 child protection system.

12 *You're in the centre and you have your schedules, and of course, you get back home*
13 *(...) and you don't go to bed at 9:30 anymore because you're with your mother who*
14 *has never been with you and you try to convince her to let you go to bed later.*
15 *(Children's discussion group)*

16 The results demonstrate how, depending on the children's age, parents must adjust
17 their parenting skills in the process of consolidating the family reunification. Parents of
18 younger children must make an even greater effort to adapt; older children participate
19 in the adaptation process, gradually taking on a leading role.

20 *Preparation [is needed] because they were seven years old when they left, and*
21 *when they come back home, they are fourteen, but you still think they are seven.*
22 *(Parents' discussion group)*

23 **Social support**

24 A recurring point in the discussion of all participants was the need for support and
25 monitoring by the formal network of the child protection system and the formal network
26 of community services during the process of family reunification. Several areas of need
27 were identified: formal assistance in developing parenting skills, overcoming personal
28 difficulties, and resolving structural needs.

29 It has been observed that after a period of separation, readjusting child-raising skills to
30 fit changes in the children and the new family circumstances can pose a challenge during
31 this phase of reunification. All participants believed that there was a need for formal
32 support in responding to these adjustments.

33 With regard to personal difficulties, parents' addictions and other problems have often
34 been overcome by the time the child returns home although the fragility caused by
35 personal difficulties and the critical moment of the homecoming warrant formal support
36 from the health, psychological, social, educational and employment services.

37 Finally, the results indicate a need for support to ensure a stable and secure
38 environment for children because families often face ongoing employment, housing and
39 economic difficulties.

40 *Proyecto Hombre is like a home to me; it has helped me in every way, and even*
41 *now, if I have a problem I can call them for support. (Parents' discussion group)*

1 *Help from the school has been tremendous. He kept attending the same school*
2 *while in foster care. I took him out a year early and put him in a school with a*
3 *family-like environment, and they sure have helped me very, very much. I'm really*
4 *grateful to them. (Parents' discussion group)*

5 *It is important to see reunification as a continuum, not as something isolated. The*
6 *current view is to see it as a rupture. (Professionals' discussion group)*

7 For needs of a structural nature, the results indicate how participants also resorted to
8 the informal network, particularly to the extended family.

9 In the same manner, having a partner provides support in the face of personal and
10 emotional difficulties; it also promotes co-parenting and stability for the return home.

11 *My partner, because if I hadn't had her, they would never have returned the child*
12 *to me, since I work in the hotel industry more than 12 hours a day. (Parents'*
13 *discussion group)*

14 ***Accurate perception of parental role to understand the changes that enabled family*** 15 ***reunification***

16 Perception of the parental role developed gradually; families gradually came to
17 understand and assimilate their responsibility for their child's welfare, the
18 improvements needed in their own skills, and the changes in the psychosocial context.
19 Their perception of their own parenting became clearer throughout the process. The
20 results indicate how parents evolved from focusing on the contextual difficulties to
21 admitting shortcomings in their parenting skills and in their ability to meet their
22 children's specific needs. Notably, the study observed that children tended to remain
23 invisible in some of the parents' accounts, which emphasized their own improvements
24 as parents but not their children's improvements.

25 *My fear is not now because he are 12 years old and I can still handle him as I want,*
26 *but when he will be older, the situation might be different. So I want to prepare*
27 *myself psychologically and I want help, to see how I can do it better. (Parents'*
28 *discussion group)*

29 Expectations with regard to family interaction play an important role in shaping that
30 interaction. When parents and children have an accurate perception of their roles, it is
31 easier to pass through the various stages of the homecoming: the honeymoon, the crisis
32 and the stabilization. An accurate perception of roles thus appears to be a specific need
33 during this stage.

34 *My parents changed a lot, I saw that during the weekends, when I was going [at*
35 *home] and all the things were better than before (Childrens' discussion group)*

36 ***Parental self-efficacy enables a positive experience with awareness of progress***

37 The results indicated how families had different levels of parental self-efficacy,
38 understood to be the awareness of progress and the feelings of positive reinforcement
39 that progress provides. A majority of the families were aware of the changes and
40 progress they made throughout the process. They indicated progress in the
41 development of parenting skills as well as changes to contextual aspects that favoured
42 a more stable environment for their children. With regard to parenting skills, parents
43 reported learning a great deal and demonstrated changes related to the establishment

1 and monitoring of child-raising standards, skills of assertive communication, shared
2 responsibility for raising the children, recognition and satisfaction with the parental role,
3 capacity for self-assessment, and shared leisure time with the family. There were
4 contextual factors such as better organization of housework or greater job stability.

5 *I've reflected, I've seen my failures, and I've done a lot to fix them. I mean, look, I*
6 *try a little harder at work, I've focused more on my son, I've shared more with him,*
7 *I spend more time with him...* (Parents' discussion group)

8 However, in some cases this awareness of progress was not valued as a result of family
9 efforts. Sometimes, families were not as aware or did not value their role as protagonists
10 in the changes made, attributing them to external factors such as religion, luck, or even
11 forgetting what occurred.

12 *After the homecoming, it seemed like absolutely nothing had happened.* (Parents'
13 discussion group)

14 *See...I leave everything in God's hands...and may God prevail.* (Parents' discussion
15 group)

16 Another finding was associated with the children's role in the awareness of progress. A
17 common practice in the child protection system is to exclude small children from
18 decisions and information relating to the progress of their families, presumably for their
19 protection. In this sense, a two-way interpretation of parenting questions practices that
20 fail to include children as active participants in this type of process. In the same manner,
21 awareness of family progress requires the involvement of all family members, regardless
22 of their age, rather than only the adults.

23 *One has to take into account that after a certain age, the child also has to be*
24 *included as a participant.* (Professionals' discussion group)

26 **DISCUSSION**

27 Parenting skills are an essential element of family reunification. Authors such as
28 Delfabbro, Fernandez, McCormick and Kettler (2013) cited these skills as a predictor of
29 family reunification. However, this study contributes to the literature in different ways:
30 the parenting approach highlights a broader view of skills. This approach underscores
31 the influence of children on parenting and the influence of social and contextual support
32 as well as integrating the ecosystem levels of the family with parental practices. This is
33 particularly relevant because it demonstrates that "the situation of vulnerability is not
34 an anomaly for some parents, but the result of improper parenting practices" (Rodrigo,
35 2015).

36 This study includes the perspectives of all those involved in the process of family
37 reunification (parents, children and professionals). This triangulated view contributes to
38 broadening knowledge and sharpening the focus on the specific needs identified,
39 particularly the importance of giving children a voice both in the processes of protection
40 and in studies that affect them. Children must be able to express themselves and convey
41 their points of view (Goodyer, 2014; Mateos, Vaquero, Balsells, & Ponce, 2017; Nybell,
42 2013).

1 Although the positive parenting approach remains nascent in the child protection
2 system, the results of this study enable an examination of situations of abuse, neglect
3 and abandonment from a less "pathological" perspective and an understanding that
4 situations of distress are also the result of improper parenting practices. The findings
5 demonstrated a series of general or training skills, such as caring for and interacting with
6 sons and daughters (Budd & Holdsworth, 1996) as parenting skills that are required for
7 mothers and fathers to render homecoming and reunification possible (Austin, Anthony,
8 & Kimberlin, 2008; Maluccio & Ainsworth, 2003).

9 In this manner, the need to acquire parenting skills to provide affection, control or
10 stimulation for one's children is associated with the prevention of abuse and neglect but
11 also with teaching parents the skills required to raise their children well. According to
12 Festinger (1996), there is a relation between the success of family reunification and
13 parents' skills in managing communication with their children, understanding the
14 developmental stage the children are undergoing, and establishing balanced discipline.
15 Communication between parents and children is essential. The needs associated with
16 communication can increase at the moment of homecoming because a long time has
17 elapsed during which the family has not lived together.

18 With regard to parental agency, the findings suggest substantive and differing aspects
19 in the development of skills for the consolidation of the family, the restoration of family
20 life, and the natural balance of relations. The findings have demonstrated that in the
21 final state of family reunification (Balsells, Pastor, Mateos, Vaquero, & Urrea, 2015), the
22 accurate perception of the parental role and parental self-efficacy were associated with
23 awareness of the changes that rendered the homecoming possible. Concurring with the
24 contributions of Lietz and Strength (2011), Schofield and Ward (2011) and Ellingsen
25 (2011) underscored the importance of all family members understanding the family
26 situation so that as each member perceives his or her role more accurately, the
27 likelihood of successful reunification increases.

28 The significant commitment of the family also emerged as a key element in the process
29 of reunification. Thomas et al. (2005) observed how the positivity, adaptability,
30 confidence, security, and autonomy of the parents related to positive processes of
31 reunification. All of this suggests adjustments in how parents perceive their role, and
32 this factor must be considered for its practical implications in family interventions.
33 Intervention with these families should focus on improving and consolidating this
34 awareness of change. It follows from this that it is necessary to focus on self-efficacy,
35 internal control, and parents' awareness of their skills (Arranz Freijo et al., 2017; Rodrigo
36 & Byrne, 2011). This is key to exercising positive parenting in contexts of risk and severe
37 risk. In short, perception of the parental role is a crucial aspect in parenting and includes
38 the perception that changes depend on oneself (internal control) and a perception that
39 one is capable of making these changes (Rodrigo & Byrne, 2011) as well as personal
40 determination to preserve the changes following reunification (Osterling & Han, 2011).

41 One of the factors cited by Kimberlin and others (2009) to consolidate family
42 reunification is parents' acquisition of parenting skills to meet the specific needs of their
43 children. This coincides with findings that suggested that educational practices can be
44 adapted to the new needs of the children, closely related to the developmental changes
45 that the child has undergone during the period of foster care. In addition to adapting to
46 these changes, there is a need to adjust to the new customs and routines that the

1 children adopted in the foster family or residential facility (Balsells et al., 2013). These
2 processes of adjusting and adapting educational competencies to the children's new
3 needs require new types of support. Rock, Michelson, Thomson, and Day (2015)
4 indicated the diversity of social support and the benefits of integrating formal and
5 informal support as strategies necessary to respond to the needs of parents and children
6 during this stage. Giallo, Treyvaud, Cooklin, and Wade (2013) observed that parents in
7 poor quality relationships and with greater social support needs may have fewer
8 personal resources available to engage in play and learning activities with their children.
9 In turn, Coyl, Newland, and Freeman (2010) previously noted that parents who sought
10 social support, particularly family support, were more likely to be involved with their
11 children and were less likely to use physical punishment as a discipline strategy with
12 their children. Families require support and monitoring during reunification (Balsells,
13 Pastor, Molina, Fuentes-Pelaez, & Vázquez, 2016; Berrick, Cohen, & Anthony, 2011; Lee,
14 Hwang, Socha, Pau, & Shaw, 2012) because they require assistance developing
15 parenting skills and overcoming the personal difficulties and structural challenges posed
16 by the new stage. Ongoing formal and informal support is an important element of
17 assistance during the family reunification and homecoming stage to ensure its success
18 and prevent cases of re-entry into the child protection system (Lietz, Lacasse, &
19 Cacciatore, 2011). In this sense, there is an obvious need to change the perception that
20 reunification marks a closure or a break in the view of the participants. Connection to
21 social support networks is one of the elements that promotes success in reunification;
22 the networks are a safety system that works to prevent relapses and strengthens the
23 capabilities of the family system (Lee et al., 2012).

24 **Implications for practice**

25 The complexity and uniqueness observed in parenting skills during a child's return home
26 after a period of foster care suggests important implications for practice. First, it is
27 apparent that in addition to specific parenting skills at each stage of this process
28 (Balsells, Pastor, Amorós, et al., 2015), it is advisable to combine this intervention with
29 programmes of more general parenting skills to address child-raising skills and include
30 families in general support (Álvarez, Padilla, Byrne, Máiquez, & Rodrigo, 2015; Amorós,
31 Fuentes-Peláez, Mateos, & Pastor, 2011; Martín-Quintana et al., 2009; Oliva et al., 2007;
32 Rodríguez, Martín-Quintana, & Rodrigo, 2015). A second implication for practice is the
33 use of group methodologies to teach skills. This methodology helps develop parental
34 agency (Rodrigo, 2012) and offers a space for strengthening the formal and informal
35 networks through which the family shares experiences and spaces with others
36 undergoing similar situations (Balsells, Pastor, Mateos, et al., 2015).

37 **Limitations**

38 One limitation of the study was the difficulty for children to talk about their experiences.
39 First of all because children do not always have enough maturity or verbal skills to talk
40 about complex ideas, especially if it is about their process of fostering and family
41 reunification. Second, because sometimes it is emotionally hard experiences. Therefore,
42 when children talk about these experiences with people they do not know, it can lead
43 to blockages when they have to explain certain personal circumstances during an
44 interview or discussion group. In this sense, methodological data collection strategies
45 such as arts-based participatory research can help children's participation.

1 Despite this fact, the voices of children, parents and professionals allow us to identify
2 needs during foster care and reunification process in five dimensions (adjustment of
3 parenting skills, adaptation to the needs of the child, social support, more accurate
4 perception of one's role, and parental self-efficacy) to favour the consolidation of family.
5 Findings suggest this dimensions are on two different levels cross-cutting skills and
6 specific skills. However, future research should analyse deeply the relationship among
7 this dimensions, in order to know better parenting skills involved in reunification
8 processes.

9

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14 **DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS**

15 The author(s) declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research,
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17