Overview
The purpose of this study was to examine whether emotion regulation mediated the link between parenting styles and child social adjustment among children between the ages of seven and fifteen years old from disadvantaged neighborhoods.

A number of studies have established the importance of responsive parenting, including parental support (e.g., warmth, affection, encouragement) in the development of prosocial behavior in children. Conversely, lax parental control, or parental permissiveness, may increase the risk for antisocial behavior through inadequate socialization.

Moreover, research has highlighted the potential of emotion regulation to foster prosocial behavior. Anger is a key emotion that can be managed by anger regulation where a child is able to respond to the anger in ways that acknowledge the emotion while managing it in socially-acceptable ways (e.g., controlling one’s temper). Alternatively, one can respond to anger with anger reactivity, or acting out (e.g., slamming doors). Notably, anger regulation has been linked to child prosocial behavior, whereas anger reactivity has been found to be associated with child antisocial behavior.

There is evidence in the literature which demonstrated links between parenting and child emotion regulation. For example,
parents who use supportive parenting may be more effective at guiding their children toward effective emotion regulation, whereas permissive parenting may lead to anger reactivity.

Method

Sample: The sample included 84 children from Boys and Girls clubs from the Tulsa area. Of the sample, 41.7% were female and the majority were African American (64.3%). Participants reported living in a low-income neighborhood with high frequency of violence and crime.

Measures: The Alabama Parenting Questionnaire was used to assess parental support and permissive discipline strategies. The Children’s Anger Management Scales were used to assess child anger reactivity and regulation. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires as well as the Relational Aggression Questionnaire were used to assess children’s social adjustment in terms of prosocial and antisocial behaviors.

Analysis: Path analysis (via structural equation modeling) was used to examine whether positive and negative parenting were directly and indirectly (via emotion regulation) related to prosocial behavior antisocial behavior.

Results & Discussion

The results indicated that high levels of supportive parenting were related to high levels of child prosocial behavior. Moreover, permissive parenting was positively and significantly related to child antisocial behavior.

The findings also demonstrated that emotion regulation significantly mediated the link between parenting and child adjustment with evidence of unique pathways. For example, parental support (but not permissive discipline) was directly and indirectly related to child prosocial behavior via child emotion regulation. In contrast, permissive discipline (but not parental support) was directly and indirectly related to child antisocial behavior via child anger reactivity.

A promising area of intervention is to foster the development of effective anger regulation while minimizing anger reactivity among children from low-income and dangerous neighborhoods. By learning effective emotion regulation strategies, youth will be able to enhance prosocial behavior and decrease antisocial behavior. Interventionists, service providers, and extension specialists also could focus their energies on teaching parents effective socialization techniques. For example, this study suggests that active and supportive mothers and fathers may be more effective at facilitating both adaptive emotion regulation and positive and prosocial child behavior.