Tenth Edition

Parent-Child Relations

An Introduction to Parenting

Jerry J. Bigner | Clara Gerhardt

TENTH EDITION

PARENT–CHILD RELATIONS

An Introduction to Parenting

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Dedication

To our children and their children, who hold the promise of becoming the future generations of parents.

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About the Authors

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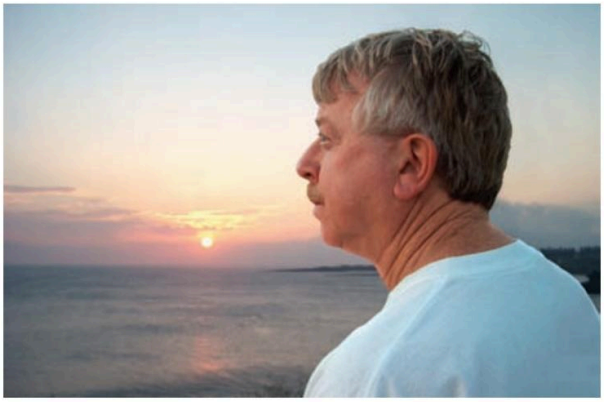
Clara Gerhardt, MBA, Ph.D., is professor and past chair of the Department of Human Development and Family Science at Samford University. She is a clinical psychologist and a licensed marriage and family therapist, as well as a certified family life educator. Among her many publications, she contributed a number of entries to the *Encyclopedia of Family Studies* (Wiley, 2016). She documented the history of family therapy in two book chapters. She writes a regular guest column for a publication of the National Council on Family Relations and serves as contributing editor for one of their publications.

Dr. Gerhardt has twice served as chair of a State Board of Examiners in Psychology. She teaches university courses on parenting, counseling foundations, and multicultural perspectives. As an internship supervisor she mentors child life and preschool education specialists.

Dr. Gerhardt has professionally presented on six continents, traveled to over 60 countries, and speaks five languages fluently.

Her practical training is constantly updated by being a parent and a grandparent.



The Lifespan of a Parenting Textbook

Tribute to Jerry J. Bigner, PhD. (1944–2011)
by Clara Gerhardt

On my bookshelf are nine editions of the same textbook: *Parent-Child Relations: An Introduction to Parenting*. The first edition was published in the seventies and is a very slim volume. It contains cartoons pertaining to parenting challenges, some a little quaint if viewed almost half a century later. The author of this textbook was Dr. Jerry Bigner, my respected friend and colleague. He conceived the text while in his late twenties and while working as a Human Development and Family Studies Professor, at Colorado State University. He nurtured the book much like a parent nurtures a child. Looking at the nine editions, I see the progression of the book through its own childhood, adolescence, and eventually a sophisticated and fully matured text. After almost 50 years, it is now in its tenth edition and somewhat of a classic.

What makes the nine earlier editions particularly interesting is that that they tell the story of the development of parenting as a special area of interest, but importantly this occurs against the backdrop of the field of Family Science in general. With each new edition, the slow societal changes become more apparent as they affect parents and their families. We become observers not only of the changes of women's roles in society, but also of how men respond to these shifts as their own roles within and outside the family unit are implicated. In one of the later editions, a dedicated chapter on cultural perspectives appeared; parenting should be viewed respecting unique cultural nuances. Increased gender equality and flexible roles within families become more visible.

Dr. Bigner was known for his clear support of human diversity in all its expressions. He was the senior editor of the *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*. It was congruent for him to lend his voice in support of diversity as it occurs and is expressed in parenting and family life. He introduced a chapter on family formation and parenting in same-sex couples, long before this was a topic for discourse in a parenting text.

The text is as familiar to me as the palm of my hand. After all, I have been involved with it since its sixth edition. Like a flashbulb moment I remember where I was when the sad news of Dr. Bigner's death reached me. I was on the Isle of Wight, off the coast of England. In the months before his death, Dr. Bigner and I had frequent discussions about the parenting textbook; its future, how it should adapt and reflect all the changes occurring in society at large and in families in particular. He had made sure he was backing up his work; not on a computer hard drive but by anchoring it in my mind.

Dr. Bigner was a role model to family life educators and over his lifetime his teaching influenced thousands of students. As we present the tenth edition, it seems apt to end with the very last paragraph from the ninth edition: "As we are educating the next generation of parent educators, we hope that they, too, will venture toward securing improved outcomes for children and their parents. After all, public wisdom tells us that there is no better investment than allocating appropriate resources to our children, who, in turn, hold the promise of becoming the next generation of parents." (Gerhardt, In: Bigner & Gerhardt, 2014, p. 348).

"Public wisdom tells us that there is no better investment than allocating appropriate resources to our children, who, in turn, hold the promise of becoming the next generation of parents."
Gerhardt, In: Bigner & Gerhardt, 2014

Preface

NEW TO THIS EDITION

The tenth edition of *Parent–Child Relations* has been dramatically restructured and extensively revised. About 80% of the material was entirely rewritten, and a new test bank was created. The chapters were reconceived. The three sections highlight the context, the developmental process, and the challenges of parent–child relations.

The fifteen chapters provide a suitable format for a typical semester, and the material has been carefully focused to meet the educational requirements of students in parenting.

Two new chapters were added covering family law as it pertains to parenting (Chapter 5) and family composition and dynamics as it influences parenting (Chapter 11). Sections of other chapters were refocused. To make space for these new additions the transition to parenthood, pregnancy, and birth were consolidated into one chapter, and adolescence and teens as parents were merged. Historical and cultural influences were discussed in one chapter as they are intertwined. Theoretical underpinnings were expanded.

Current topics that were incorporated or expanded: coparenting, the effects of globalization on families, only children, military families, fragile families, interrupted parenting, parental rights and privileges, legal concerns, ethics and parenting, intergenerational families, grandparents fulfilling parental roles, diversity within families in terms of roles and function, shifts in gender and parental roles, strengths and resilience within families, and aspirations toward better outcomes.

We trimmed superfluous and repetitive information and added up-to-date research. About 800 current resources were incorporated in an overhauled bibliography, researched by a team of seven qualified research assistants well versed in the field.

The test bank was rewritten to reflect the new structure and emphasis of the 10th edition.

Other new additions were cultural snapshots highlighting diversity, as well as relevant reflections by experts to illustrate pertinent points. We paid special attention to our reviewers, who pointed us in new directions with their valuable and insightful suggestions.

A team of about a dozen subject experts proofed their specific areas of expertise for currency and correctness. Additionally:

- **Frequently Asked Questions** allow students to see parenting concerns through the eyes of a parent or a therapist.
- **Cultural Snapshots** highlight diversity in parenting practices.
- **Learning outcomes** are logically echoed in the focus points within the text and the chapter-end summaries re-address the learning outcomes to come full circle.
- **Website suggestions** contain focus areas so that topics can be researched independently despite websites being dynamic and changing.
- **Glossaries** elaborate concepts and phrases highlighted within the text.

SUPPLEMENTS TO THE TEXT

Instructors will be pleased that their favorite topics may be included during lectures to supplement the text. The following online supplements are available to instructors and can be downloaded at www.pearsonhighered.com:

- **Online Instructor's Manual.** This manual provides a variety of resources that support the text, including notes from the author regarding each chapter, suggestions for supplementary lecture topics, and a listing of audiovisual materials that illustrate chapter concepts.
- **Online Test Bank.** The *Test Bank* features evaluation items, such as true–false and multiple choice.
- **Online PowerPoint® Slides.** PowerPoint presentations accompany each chapter of the text. These slides can be customized by adding comments.
- **Computerized Test Bank Software.** Known as TestGen, this computerized test bank software gives instructors electronic access to the Test Bank items, allowing them to create customized exams. TestGen is available in a dual Macintosh and PC/Windows version.
- **Course Management.** The assessment items in the Test Bank are also available in WebCT and Blackboard formats.
- The supplementary materials for this text have undergone major restructuring to lighten the instructor's load.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It takes many musicians to perform a symphony. For any creative endeavor, there is a wide net of people who inspire, support, and simply create the space so that the project can be completed. I had an entire team, not all mentioned by name, guiding and encouraging me. I'd like to express my profound admiration for the next generation of parents, who showed me how they juggle families and careers while parenting respectfully and selflessly.

Some inspired me through their exemplary parenting, shared their expertise and enthusiasm, or poured me endless cups of tea for courage and creativity. In random order, they include: Claire and Edward Gottschalk, Martin and Erika Grotepass, Paul Gerhardt and Jenine Schmidt, Andrew Gerhardt; additionally, the Doctors Christi Gerhardt, Tatum McArthur, David Gerhardt, David Shipley, Christina Ochsenbauer, Irva Hayward, Mary Sue Baldwin, Deborah Burks, Jo King, Jan Robbertze, Jeanie Box, Kristie Chandler, and Celeste Hill. Two inspiring pre-school educators are Marlene Giessen and Melanie Luedders; your dedication touched the lives of many children and their parents. Importantly, my siblings Dr. Frans Grotepass and Dr. Hanna Grotepass. In memory of the late Dr. Willem Grotepass and Dr. Dan Sandifer-Stech; they taught me much about families and life, each in their own way.

Samford University has been the academic home which nurtured and supported me. I am deeply indebted to my colleagues and a truly inspiring team of research assistants. They scoured articles, captured references, found up-to-date graphs and information, and so much more. The fact that 80% of this book was rewritten and about 800 current references were added was made possible by their diligence. Katrina Brown Aliffi (who was a research assistant for the 9th edition), Nicole Smith and Madeline Shipley Llewellyn have Master's degrees and are experts in their own right. These three researchers responded to numerous queries and revisions, while also cheering on the team toward the finish line. My appreciation to Lily Leath, Lindsay Smith, and Caroline Tudor Reed; graduates in Human Development and Family Science who were involved in the early revisions. Some contributors chose to remain anonymous; know that I value your work and I thank you.

As expert readers and contributors I thank the following (alphabetically): Dr. Joe Ackerson, Dr. Sarah Bowers, Matthew Bunt, Marisa Dempsey, as well as the Doctors Ginger Frost, Christi Gerhardt, Bryan Johnson, Walt Johnson, Tatum McArthur, Kelly Ross-Davis, Jenine Schmidt, Dale Wisely, and Patti Wood. Duane Farnell contributed in making Dr. Bigner's dreams for future editions a reality. For generously sharing her photographs and her vision, my gratitude extends to award-winning photographer Carolyn Sherer. To Claire Gottschalk, Industrial Designer, who created the family related logos and virtually all illustrations: My heartfelt appreciation for your support, vision, and artistic contributions.

The thoughtful insights and comments of the reviewers are greatly appreciated: Your insight and expertise guided me toward new directions and improved the overall outcome.

The editors at Pearson were my compass and anchor: Senior Acquisitions Editor Julie Peters and Managing Content Producer Megan Moffo, as well as the entire Pearson team responsible for editing and production, ultimately guided this book to a safe harbor.

Lastly, I convey my love to my inner circle—my husband, Michael, and our children, their spouses, and our grandchildren. They are the ones who turned me into a parent and a grandparent, the most important and rewarding learning school of all.

Brief Contents

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PART I

The Context of Parent–Child Relations

In some ways, we are all parenting experts. We have personally felt the effects of parental and coparental influences. We carry these experiences with us for life. We know about that most sacred of bonds, the one that remains with us forever; as we have been parented or coparented within the diverse context of contemporary family life.

In an ideal scenario, we have been at the receiving end of our parents' and coparents' good intentions. We were the object of their hopes and dreams; we may have witnessed their challenges and sacrifices. In reality, we may have been cared for, but not all of these relationships may have amounted to loving or constructive interactions.

Not all parents can or want to parent.

Not all children take the extended opportunities.

Not all parent–child relationships have successful outcomes.

There are many nuances in the quality of the *caretaker–care taken* configuration. We take it for granted that children are lovingly parented, but the reality is more complicated. Parenting can challenge us like nothing else. It can bring immense joy; disappointment and bitter tears are the flipside of that coin. If these relationships seem like an occasional endurance test, learning from what has worked for others may increase our fitness level to run the (co)parenting race gracefully and with good outcomes.

For as much as parents *parent*, the children do something in return; parents and their progeny do things to each other. It occurs against the backdrop of family histories. Parenting goes forward and backward in time; it crosses generations. We parent in the context of social, educational, and biological influences—factors that limit or enhance our effectiveness. There are many visible and invisible threads that set the loom—the influences we may be aware of, as well as the somewhat imperceptible ones.

(*continued*)

Parenting and the caring dimensions it represents has the potential for being one of life's greatest joys and ongoing gifts. As students of parent–child relations, we are particularly privileged to be close to the stage, where we can observe, encourage, and cheer on the actors partaking in one of life's true dramas, and where we can become part of the audience eavesdropping on the many dialogues that occur within the sacred space of the family.

"Parents are the architects of the system."

Virginia Satir (1916–1988), American Family Therapist

CHAPTER 1

The Evolving Context of Parenting

Learning Outcomes

After completing this chapter, you should be able to

1. Explain why parenthood is so central in our lives.
2. Identify the context and roles of coparents.
3. Formulate the current views that support formal parenting education.
4. Describe the dimensions of the parenthood role.
5. Illustrate the influences contributing to the parenting style.
6. Specify the social factors affecting parenthood.
7. Review the various family forms and structures.

PARENTHOOD

Children represent our hopes for the future. Children will enter times that parents will not be able to access. The way we treat our offspring is a reflection of our own goals and aspirations. Parent–child relations form the central threads of our lives, as we are touched by their potential and promise. They may be the relationships we have with our own parents in our family-of-origin; alternatively they could be the relationships we have with our children. Either way, there is always a parental connection to be found in our histories, our anticipated futures, and in our present relationships.

The parent–child bond is unique in its biological foundations and in its psychological meanings. For children, this essential relationship ensures survival and helps shape destinies. For adults, it can be one of the most fulfilling human experiences and a challenging opportunity for personal growth and development. Children make us vulnerable and children push us toward greater strengths. In short: one of the most significant and intimate relationships among humans is that between parent and child.

Societies are defined by how they invest in their youngest members. In our society, the parenting role is associated with several different concepts. Originally, the idea of parenthood referred singularly to the prominent aspect of sexual reproduction. Our society, like all others, values the function of reproduction within a family setting because, traditionally, this was the only way to sustain the population: *"Put succinctly, parents create people"* (Bornstein, 2012, p. ix).

Families are formed in various ways and the diversity in family form and function attest to this. Advances in medical technology allow for assisted reproduction, yet the traditional manner of family formation is the most frequently occurring variation. Initial family formation is followed by years of careful supervision of the offspring.

Other ideas are also embedded in our society's concept of **parenthood**—namely, that parents are responsible for nurturing, teaching, and acting as guardians for their children until they reach the age of legal maturity. This extended timespan of providing care for children is unique among most species. Human infants and children have a prolonged period of dependency on adults, partly because of the length of time it takes for maturation of the brain and the complexity of the skills that have to be attained (Dunsworth, 2016).

Parents are considered to be a child's principal teachers. This instructional function and the responsibility given to parents by society to prepare children for adulthood is referred to as *socialization*, or learning how to conform to the conventional ways of behavior in society. Parents serve as educators for their children by teaching them the essential skills needed to survive in society, including social, cultural, and religious values. As the child becomes older, the parents are supported by educational and social institutions that complement and expand on this initial parent–child relationship.

Parents are expected to help children learn the basic rules of social functioning and to impart values to guide the behavior and decisions of their offspring. This is facilitated by the bonding and attachment between parents and children and this unquestioning loyalty will provide the motivation and reason for a kinship-based loyalty that has virtually no parallels.

Focus Point. In our society the concept of parenthood implies that parents are responsible for nurturing, teaching, socializing, and acting as guardians for their children until they reach the age of legal maturity.

COPARENTING

Coparents can come in various guises and in several contexts. It refers to the people who team up or *collaborate to parent*. Think about the word *cooperate*. It contains the prefix *co*, meaning that it is an activity that we do together or jointly, where we share our resources: in short, where we collaborate. It is much more than an extended form of child care. It is a very legitimate form of parenting and can occur in many settings. It can have legal implications concerning parental rights and responsibilities.

Two factors distinguish coparenting from other serious and ongoing commitments to children. The first is the ability to make decisions for the child, which, hopefully, contribute to the child's well-being. In other words, the coparent can make things happen for the child; there is financial, legal, educational, health-care or other responsibility that places the coparent in an *executive role*, where this parental figure can and should take charge. The coparent may have "ultimate decision-making authority for the child" (McHale & Lindahl, 2011, p. 17).

The second factor has to do with the relationship. Ideally there is an *emotional investment*, a mutual bonding and caring. Not only does the coparent have a serious interest and commitment to the child, but the child has formed or is forming a significant relationship in return. There is "central attachment and socialization" with the coparent (McHale & Lindahl, 2011, p. 17). Ideally coparents are emotionally involved with the children they coparent.

At the heart of coparenting lies the ongoing commitment to a child's well-being in a parental-like manner. Coparents can be biological parents in binuclear

families who take on parenting roles from two different households because of divorce or separation. Coparents can be adults who significantly support parents in the parenting role, or may take over the parenting role for an absent or incapacitated parent. In this way, grandparents, supportive family members, friends, and foster parents could act as coparents if they take on permanent and semi-permanent roles with a serious commitment to a child's upbringing. They carry the child's interests at heart and become a significant force in the child's life in a relationship that is ongoing and enduring.

The adults could have a biological link to the child, but they need not have this connection. For instance, parents and stepparents in a post-divorce situation may coparent. Same-sex couples may coparent. Unmarried parents may coparent from two different households. Foster parents could coparent occasionally with a biological parent. The term *co-parenting* has also been used to describe the roles of a married couple in raising the children, although both parents need not be biological parents, as well as of members of intact families fulfilling these roles (Rodriguez & Helms, 2016, p. 437). In short, the role of coparenting has a lot of flexibility, and just as any other significant relationship, the quality of the coparenting can vary to reflect a continuum of attitudes ranging from collaborative and supportive to outright uncollaborative and unsupportive. Nuances of antagonism, cohesion, and balance can all find a varying presence in this unique connection between people who coparent, as well as in the quality of their parenting relationships. In other words, the unhealthy variants of coparenting have undermining agendas, whereas healthy coparental collaborations carry the best interests of the child at heart. Parents post-divorce may find it difficult to separate the concerns that precipitated their divorce from the parental collaboration that has to occur in constructive coparenting. Compatibility between the persons coparenting, as well as educational level and understanding of parenting requirements are all contributory factors in determining the quality of coparenting relationships and outcomes (Rodriguez & Helms, 2016, p. 439)

In summary, "[co]parenting is an enterprise undertaken by two or more adults who together take on the care and upbringing of children for whom they share responsibility" (McHale & Lindahl, 2011, p. 3). The authors elaborate: "This joint enterprise serves children best when each of the coparenting adults is capable of seeing and responding to the child as a separate person with feelings and needs different from their own and when the adults find ways to work together to co-create a structure that adequately protects and nurtures the child" (2011, p. 16).

Coparenting alliances which are healthy and support children in a constructive manner are important because, in contemporary society, family form and function are in flux. The former predictable blueprint of what a typical family looks like is being challenged. Families in transition may necessitate coparenting arrangements, ranging from the conventional to the unconventional. The outcome is important, and can be found in the quality of care the children in these family configurations receive. Coparenting has become a very legitimate caretaking system that was born out of the need to ensure constructive outcomes for parenting challenges while also keeping the best interests of the child in mind (McHale & Lindahl, 2011). It also implies that every child should ideally have the right of access to a parent or parents who will support the child through the tender years toward independence, and beyond.

Another earlier definition is: "Coparenting refers to parents' agreement and communication about how their child should be raised as well as supportiveness of each other's parenting efforts" (McHale, 1995). Importantly the coparental relationship should continue for the sake of the child, even if the parents are no longer on the same page concerning other aspects of their lives (Goldberg, 2015). Research by Goldberg (2015) indicated that the quality of the coparental relationship tended to indicate the willingness and responsibility a nonresident father may display toward financial obligations such as child support. Constructive and mutually supportive coparental arrangements have better outcomes for the children as well as the participating coparents.

Not all coparenting arrangements have happy and constructive outcomes, because frequently the coparenting responsibilities may have been precipitated by disagreement and incompatibility followed by separation or divorce. The factors which broke up the relationship can continue to influence attempts at collaborative parenting. In a study of fathers who participated in interviews for 'Parents and Children Together' (PACT), about two thirds of the fathers stated that their coparenting relationships with their coparenting partners (mothers of their children) were either conflict-ridden or distant and disengaged. Fathers mentioned the presence of arguments, verbal disagreements, and not being on the same page concerning parenting goals and

outcomes. Often cooperation was lacking or limited. On the positive side, a third of the fathers felt that as far as the parenting of their children was concerned, they managed to have collaborative and cooperative relationships with the other coparent; usually the child's mother (Holcomb et al., 2015).

Much of coparenting can be seen through the lens of a **parental dyad**, where two parents are involved. If for any reason those two parents no longer reside in the same home, or require ongoing serious support in their parenting roles, coparenting comes into play. With greater awareness of variations of family form and function in different cultural contexts, it is appropriate to expand the notion of coparenting beyond the parental dyad as found in **nuclear families** (McHale et al., 2012). The actors taking lead roles in the parenting can be stepparents, grandparents, same-sex partners, extended family members, and other significant attachment figures.

With so many possibilities, where do we delineate the boundaries of coparental relationships? One useful approach is to look at it in terms of the *executive subsystem*, a term originally coined by Minuchin in 1974 (McHale et al., 2012, p. 76). The persons making the ongoing and truly relevant decisions that affect the child's well-being, and who provide the emotional and physical support and means to carry them through, may well be identified as the coparents. Additionally this can (but need not) overlap with formal and legal designations, such as being a child's guardian, or adoptive parent.

The original meaning references part of the intentions of the "Rights of the Child" manifesto of 1959 (UNICEF. n.d, 1959/1990), whereby a child should be able to have continued access to a parent or both parents, despite the difficulties that these parental figures may have in other dimensions of their mutual relationship.

A parent should be able to remain a parent to their child, whatever challenges the future may hold.

Focus Point. Coparents take on permanent and semi-permanent roles with a serious commitment to a child's upbringing. Coparents are characterized by two lead factors: Coparents have executive function and an emotional attachment/commitment to the children they coparent.

PARENTING EDUCATION

"Owning a piano, does not make the pianist." This saying from folklore references a touchy subject: complex skills have to be painstakingly internalized to become our own. The rare Stradivarius violin may document ownership on the insurance papers, but coaxing melodies from it demands a multi-layered blend of talent, musicality, training, practice, and then some. Ownership does not transfer mastery. Likewise for parenting. Becoming a parent does not magically endow us with the gifts that will support a constructive and meaningful lifelong relationship with a child. We may already be in possession of key qualities which promise successful outcomes, but it is not a given. In all likelihood parenting and coparenting in various dimensions will prove to be amongst the most demanding yet also most rewarding tasks we undertake.

When we reflect on our own childhood experiences, several questions come to mind: Why did our parents behave and react the way they did? What would we do differently if we were in their shoes? Are there lessons to be learned that will make us better parents? Are there best practices that we can follow to ensure optimal outcomes?

The need for some formal parenting guidelines has been valued by anxious parents wanting to do the best for their children. A few pediatricians penned best sellers to fill the void. This included the legendary book by Dr. Benjamin Spock, *Baby and Child Care*, published in 1946. The fact that this book was so popular indicated the desire of parents to know more about the topic and to seek information from experts. A much older relic of guidance for parents appeared in a book first published in 1701 and now residing in the archives of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. It has the promising title: "The School of Manners, or Rules for Childrens Behaviour." It contains advice for children in terms of qualities that can be equally aspired to more than 300 years later (Garretson, 1701/1983, p. 25):

- "Imitate not the wicked"
- "Be desirous of Learning"
- "Be always cleanly" (Written in 1701).

Jozef Polc/123RF.com

Parenting focuses on nurturing children's growth and development to facilitate socialization and ultimately effective functioning as adults. Parenthood is a developmental role, which changes in response to the needs of the children.

Our society goes to great lengths to train people for most vocational roles. A license indicating training and competence is required for a range of activities and vocations. Many teenagers line up with great urgency at the drivers licensing office on the morning of their 16th birthday. They do not want to miss a minute of this rite of passage. In the United States, the privilege to learn to drive a car is part of the ritual of celebrating this milestone birthday, as it also represents the promise of mobility and independence. Other than for special circumstances such as foster parenting, no state or federal statute requires individuals to have training or preparation to become parents, or to practice parenting, even though the stakes are high and the effects are long lasting. Public policy and family law have entered the debate concerning the well-being of children by providing legislation and processes that serve in the best interests of the child, especially in those instances where parents flounder in their duties.

The media provide us with realistic as well as idealistic versions of the challenges of these unique relationships. Sometimes parenthood is portrayed as a happily-ever-after story. But we are not so naïve as to believe that the majority of parents and children have smooth interactions, or that children will invariably turn out well if they have good parents. We know that greater forces are at work and that parents are not solely responsible for their children's character, personality, and achievements upon attaining maturity.

Learning about parenting in formal coursework, observing parents and children interact in natural settings, and hearing parents share their experiences may contribute to an authentic and balanced understanding of parenthood. Although most parents could profit from learning new ways to be effective in their role, there are so many seemingly conflicting guidelines concerning parenting that it is hard to separate the wheat from the chaff. Researchers continue to make progress toward helping parents find more effective ways of parenting and raising children to become competent adults, while parenting programs are formally assessed regarding efficacy. Experts continue to study parent–child interactions in the hopes of gaining a clearer understanding of how this relationship changes over time and is altered in certain social contexts. They look at the dynamics of parent–child relations and try to distill the essence. Even so, we see the pendulum swing, and our current slightly indulgent parenting practices form a contrast to stricter authoritarian approaches of a century ago.

Contemporary ideas about the nature of parent–child relations are the result of years of social evolution

and many historical changes. Our concept of the relationship between a parent and a child contains numerous complex meanings. These in turn influence an adult's decision to become a parent and also shape the subsequent parenting behavior. Disconcerting events occurring in families and in contemporary society underline the urgency of preparing parents and coparents to ensure that they are competent in their roles.

The qualities inherent in parenting relationships can benefit or harm a child's development. The prevalence of destructive behaviors in adulthood is traced to family-of-origin experiences in which poor and ineffective parenting may have played a major role (Murphy, 2014). Family experts are concerned about the effects of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of children by their parents and close family. Poor preparation for parenthood, inadequate social support, lack of adequate skills for coping with the stresses of parenting, and resource-depleted environments all interact to put families at risk (Thompson, 2015b).

Relationships between parents and children are complex and varied. Parenthood is described as a *developmental role* that changes over time, usually in response to the changing developmental needs of children. In a parenting course, we try to describe the many interacting factors, from individual through to greater societal influences, that contribute to the outcomes of raising children. By recognizing and understanding some of the patterns and learning techniques and approaching parenting as a skill set that can be expanded, parent-child relations can become more rewarding for all participants. Biological parenthood is not a prerequisite; there are many paths toward a caring relationship. We can use these skills in any responsible coparenting relationship involving children and adolescents, and in a variety of professions.

Comprehensive Resources

- **Encyclopedia of Family Studies**
  A comprehensive scholarly resource pertaining to families, presented in four volumes. Topics are arranged alphabetically and authored by leading experts in their respective fields.

  Shehan, C. L. (Ed.). (2016). *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Family Studies*. Wiley Blackwell.

  Shehan, C. L. (Ed.). (2016, March). *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Family Studies*. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/book/10.1002/9781119085621. Online Version.
- **Handbook of Life-Span Development**
  A comprehensive scholarly resource pertaining to lifespan presented in two volumes:
  - Cognition, Biology and Methods
  - Social and Emotional Development

  Lamb, M. E. & Freund, A. M. (Eds.) (2010). *The Handbook of Life-Span Development*. Wiley.
- **Handbook of Parenting**
  A comprehensive scholarly resource pertaining to parenting.
  The five volumes cover the following areas:
  - Children and Parenting
  - Biology and Ecology of Parenting
  - Being and Becoming a Parent
  - Social Conditions and Applied Parenting
  - Practical Issues in Parenting

  Bornstein, Marc H. (Ed). (2012). *Handbook of Parenting*. 2nd ed. NY: Taylor & Francis/Psychology Press.

  Under the editorial leadership of Marc Bornstein of the *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development* (www.nichd.nih.gov), dozens of leading researchers in the field of parenting contributed.
- **The Sage Handbook of Child Research**
  Melton, G. B., Ben-Arieh, A., Cashmore, J., Goodman, G. S. & Worley, N. K. (2014). *The Sage Handbook of Child Research*. Sage.
- **Evidence-Based Practice in Infant and Early Childhood Psychology**
  Mowder, B. A., Rubinson, F. & Yasik, A. E. (2009). *Evidence-Based Practice in Infant and Early Childhood Psychology*. Wiley.

  The above two comprehensive volumes focus predominantly on childhood.

Parenting Reflection 1–1

At the outset and before having studied parent–child relations, what topics would you include in a course for first-time parents? What qualities would you encourage parents to display? What are some things that you would recommend in terms of parenting?

Focus Point. As parents raise children, they begin to understand their children's developmental needs and become more effective and responsible in their roles as parents. Parents can improve their skills and parenting outcomes by being exposed to research and outcome-based parenting education. Parenting occurs within the milieu of the family system, as well as social and cultural contexts. Contemporary ideas on parenting roles ideally reflect current best practices.

DIMENSIONS OF THE PARENTING ROLE

The relationship between parents and children is one of the cornerstones of human existence, largely because of its biological basis. It is an essential part of our society, and society requires the addition of new members in order to continue. The unique bond between parents and their children can be examined from an ecological perspective.

Ecology is an interdisciplinary branch of biology that examines the *interrelationships* between organisms and their environment (Kagitcibasi, 2013). Behavioral scientists have placed an ecological perspective on human development and social behavior. Using this approach, the developmental changes in individuals, families, and other social groups take place within the context of interactions with changing environmental systems and bidirectional influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Kerr, Stattin, & Özdemir, 2012). Various environments and contexts influence and shape behavior; parents assume different roles that influence their behaviors as parents. This same ecological perspective is used in the context of describing dimensions of the parenting role.

Family as a System

The family can be perceived as a system. The relationship between parents and children is a subsystem of the larger social system that we call a family. One model for understanding family group functioning is the **family systems theory**. This approach falls within an ecological context (Becvar & Becvar, 2013; Kagitcibasi, 2013). Family systems theory describes family functioning in ways that resemble other systems found in nature, such as the solar system and ecological systems. Everyday functioning takes place in a family, rules evolve to govern the behavior of members, roles are assigned to regulate behavior, and these roles relate to family goals. Family groups strive to maintain stability over time and adapt rules, behaviors, roles, and goals. Family members experience developmental changes, resolve interpersonal conflicts, and confront crises in ways that enhance effective functioning of the system.

Several subsystems co-exist within a larger family system, such as the relationship of the parents versus those of the siblings. A **subsystem** is a microcosm of the larger family system that mirrors the functioning of this group. The same principles and concepts that explain the functioning of the larger family system relate to how subsystems, including the parent–child subsystem, function.

The main priority of the parent–child relationship is to nurture children toward maturity. The parental role is sensitive and responsive to changes within the family system. For example, when one adult is removed from the family through divorce or death, the remaining adult's quality and style of parenting change. The parenthood role is also heavily influenced by factors arising from the larger environment on the family system.

Bidirectional Relationship

The parent–child relationship is **bidirectional**, as described in the by now classic work of Ambert (2001). The flow of influence goes both ways (Kerr et al., 2012). This means that adults and children influence each other.

Children's behavior and development contribute to the quality and scope of parental interactions. As children experience developmental changes, parents change their behavior and adapt by changing the rules, the ways they interact with their children, and their goals for child rearing. For example a baby is parented differently than an adolescent is parented. Interactions between parents and children evolve in tandem with children's

developmental changes. Similarly, children respond to changes in parenting behavior in ways that help them achieve the developmental tasks appropriate for their particular life span stage.

Until several decades ago, the relationship between parent and child was described as a **unidirectional** model of socialization (Ambert, 2001; Kuczynski & Mol, 2015). In this model, the adult assumes the role of a teacher who is responsible for encouraging appropriate behavior patterns, values, and attitudes that prepare the child for effective participation in society upon reaching maturity. The child's role is that of being an active learner. According to the model, the flow of information is solely from parent to child. Clearly, the unidirectional model features the adult as having significant power over the child. In contrast, the subordinated child lacks social power. In the past, these were the accepted roles for parents and children, and they received strong support.

Developmental and Lifespan Pursuit

Parenthood is a **developmental** role that can continue over the **lifespan**. Unlike most adult social roles, parenting behavior and interactions must adapt to the developmental changes in children. Changes arising from a parent's own personal development affect the caregiving behavior. The age and developmental status of both the parent and the child affect the nature and context of the relationship at any point in time. Parenting also continues throughout the lifespan although the nature of the relationship will constantly morph to allow for changes in the participants. Initially parents are very protective of their as yet helpless offspring. Physical care may dominate. As the lifespan continues parents age and the offspring become capable adults. At some stage the roles flip when the parents may become frail and dependent, and their own children take on the roles of caretakers.

Social Construct

Parenthood is a social construct, which means that it is influenced by values that are transmitted culturally and in social contexts. The parental role is a social institution based on complex values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors that focus on procreation and the need to care for the young (Noddings, 2013). People who are not parents can also experience the parenting role—for instance, through coparenting. Coparents are significant persons within a system who collaborate and contribute to the parenting of a child (McHale & Lindahl, 2011; Sterrett et al., 2013).

The role of the parent is universally understood by diverse groups. Every society, culture, and subculture defines appropriate behavior for parents. Some cultural groups may allocate a higher moral stature to parents. On the other hand, some couples make a conscious choice to remain child-free, and these individual choices are respected without affecting their status within a given community.

Parenting Reflection 1–2

Should parents raise their children using identical methods, styles, and approaches? What effects would such uniformity in child rearing have on adult outcomes?

Focus Point. Current approaches describe the parent–child relationship as bidirectional, meaning that a child is acknowledged as an active participant and contributor to the relationship. Each person influences the behavior of the other. By contrast, parent–child relationships were traditionally and historically described as unidirectional; that is, the adult had complete jurisdiction, power, and control over the relationship. The parenting role can be characterized by four dimensions:

- **Family as a System.** The family systems theory describes parenthood as a subsystem of the larger social system of the family and within an ecological context.
- **Bidirectional Relationship.** Both parents and children actively participate in a bidirectional interaction with mutual influence.
- **Developmental and Lifespan.** Parenting is a *developmental* role and a *lifespan* pursuit: both parent and child undergo developmental changes with time and life span progressions. This continues throughout a lifetime.
- **Social Construct.** Parenthood is a *social construct*. The parental role is a social institution based on complex values, beliefs, norms, and behavior.

INFLUENCES IN THE PARENTING STYLE

Several factors contribute to how people see themselves as parents, and how they behave in this role. A number of themes merge into a workable blueprint that guides the parenting-role behavior. It is as if someone takes the pieces of a puzzle, manages to perceive how they all fit together, and puts them together into a completed object (See Figure 1–2).

Some factors that contribute to an adult's concept of parenting behavior come from past experiences. New ideas are added as the person gains experience in parenting children. The child makes contributions as well, just by who they are and the kind of care they require. Family ecological factors, attitudes about discipline, and an individual's past experiences all influence parenting styles (Pfefferbaum, Jacobs, Houston, & Griffin, 2015).

The factors that combine to influence a parenting style and form a parenting blueprint include the following (See Figure 1–1):

1. ***Family-of-origin influences.*** The model of parental behavior experienced in the family of origin.
2. ***Sociocultural influences.*** Social class, background, values, beliefs, education.
3. ***Bidirectional influences.*** The ways children and parents influence each other.
4. ***Developmental time.*** Synchrony of parental style and child's developmental stage.
5. ***Personality, temperament.*** Factors that are unique to parent and child.
6. ***Family structure.*** Family composition and membership.

Family-of-Origin Influences

One of the major influences in how we parent comes from observing our own parents and close caregivers. We use them as models for how to act (Sigel, McGillicuddy-DeLisi, & Goodnow, 2014). The perceptions we have about how we were raised influence how we approach our own children. Adults who are satisfied with their own upbringing tend to duplicate some of the parenting styles of their own parents.

Unpleasant memories from childhood may be the motivator to drastically change one's parenting style and not emulate one's parents. For example, the child who was somewhat neglected and whose parents never attended any sporting events, may make a distinct effort to be available when their own children require support.

The experiences we have in our childhood provide a blueprint for a number of interactional patterns in adulthood (Galvin, Braithwaite, & Bylund, 2015). There are several sources for this blueprint:

- The goals our parents had for our growth and development.
- The model of parenthood we observed from our parents' behavior.
- The influence of parenting models that were handed down inter-generationally.

The parenting blueprint we assimilate may not be helpful when the time comes to assume the role ourselves. It may be inappropriate or unrealistic because circumstances in our family of origin may not resemble those in our current family.

Not every family system is healthy or well-adjusted. For example, a parent may be affected by addiction disorders, by mental or emotional disturbances, or by living conditions that hamper the ability to parent. Most attempt to hide the emotional pain that results from their inability to function healthily. When this occurs, the adult may adopt parenting behaviors (possibly learned from their own parental models) and assign roles to the children that mirror those in their family of origin, even if these roles are dysfunctional. What affects one person in a family system affects everyone to some degree. Patterns for coping with the stress of an unhealthy family of origin tend to carry over into future generations.

FIGURE 1–1. Interacting factors influencing parental style.

Based on observations of numerous adults acting as parents, several models of parenting behavior have been developed that illustrate how an unhealthy family of origin influences a person's own patterns of parenting (Koerner & Schrodt, 2014). There is never a pure assimilation of one particular model into a person's potential parenting behavior; instead, a composite of behaviors is taken from the various models.

Sociocultural Influences

Numerous studies have reported considerable variations among socioeconomic groups and the ways that children are reared. Values and outcomes may vary greatly, for instance from valuing education highly to discouraging girls from going to school. This can set the trajectory for the future of that child.

Generally there appear to be more similarities than differences in child rearing. This has been somewhat attributed to media presentations of middle-class values, and that more families in developed countries can achieve a middle-class lifestyle through education and rewarding employment. The potential for children's mental growth may be influenced by the differences in language use and teaching styles in the parental home. The middle-class values placed on education and academic achievement may result in patterns of interaction that promote children's problem-solving skills.

Parental behavioral styles are partly guided by the value systems of their social class. Each group maintains essentially the same intention to support children's growth and development, but the styles between groups may differ. Middle-class parents tend to value social achievement, encourage children to acquire knowledge, and expect independence early in their children's lives. Lower socioeconomic groups may have the same intentions, but immediate problems and challenges linked to income potential and the effects of poverty may cloud the good intentions parents have for their children. These differences in values may translate to differences in child-rearing patterns.

Family ecological factors, such as the level of family income (poverty level vs. middle class), ethnic identity, or type of family structure, influence parenting styles. See Figure 1–2 and Figure 1–3 to see how the family structural dynamics have changed over time. These factors also affect a family's ability to provide equipment and services, such as medical or dental care, clothing, and food, which, in turn, influences the quality and nature of the interactions. In this way, parents' goals for their child-rearing efforts may be tempered by a variety of family ecological factors.

Bidirectional Influences

Traditionally, children are seen as learners who require numerous learning opportunities to prepare them for adulthood. They undergo intensive socialization efforts. Typically, the adult assumes the role of teacher and the child the role of learner. This configuration can contain elements of a unidirectional model of socialization, unless the child is encouraged to be an active and participatory learner.

Children are viewed as being in need of adults' protection and they are dependent on parents for a long period. The relationship between parent and child is one in which the social power of the adult is unlikely to be questioned. The greater physical size and strength of adults also contributes to their power over children. In extreme situations where parental intentions are harmful to the child, the child becomes a victim. Some adults destructively use power to control and manipulate, rather than facilitate children's growth and development (Hoffman, 2013).

Family systems theory describes interactions within family relationships that have a reciprocal effect on participants. In some semi-symbiotic relationships, parental health, resources, and aspirations can be influenced by the demands of the child. An instance could be if a parent takes care of a child with special needs, but is not able to access sufficient support from other members of the family and of their immediate social systems. This could contribute to parental burn-out, presenting in less than optimal parenting.

Developmental Time

Parenting style should be congruent and match the child's developmental level. For example, the parenting style during infancy focuses on providing round-the-clock care to meet the infant's needs. When families have several different-aged children, parenting styles must still match each child's developmental level. The child has needs, but so does the parent. For example,

parents may have to juggle the demands of their children while also finding ways to maintain job responsibilities. As children gain autonomy, parental styles should allow for this autonomy to blossom in an age appropriate manner. Typically, attitudes guiding parenting behavior can be expected to shift with the changing developmental needs of children.

On a macrosystemic level, the timespan within which we live and the historical and social events of that period can influence the backdrop against which parenting occurs. Bronfenbrenner (1979) refers to these influences as the Chronosystem; events that occur together in time, that occur in synchronicity. For example, if children are part of a refugee generation, the traumatic events of involuntary migration will also influence the parenting they experience.

Personality and Temperament

Parents typically try to actively meet the needs of their children. This ensures the likelihood of the survival of the children and promises the rewards of best outcomes. How the parents meet these needs, and what they perceive as being most important, may relate strongly to the socialization goals as well as cultural practices. There are inherent differences, not only between the children but also between the parents. Parents who have several children often express their amazement that the children may have the same parents yet turn out so differently. Each individual is unique. Even identical twins reveal subtle differences (Claridge, Canter, & Hume, 2013). This can be ascribed to the "nature" part of the nature-nurture formula. Once we add different environmental influences, the disparities may become even more pronounced.

The research by Bell and colleagues points toward the influence of parental temperament on parenting behavior (Garstein, Bell, & Calkins, 201; Lusby, Goodman, Yeung, Bell, & Stowe, 2016). Parental temperament can play a moderating role in parent-child relations. Nurturing behavior of parents toward their infants could be affected in mothers who suffered from perinatal depression (Lusby et al., 2016), although the intensity that the babies were exposed to was also of importance. The effects of maternal depression could be mitigated by coparental influences. If constructive nurturing behavior occurred within the family system, even during the time a mother was dealing with perinatal and postpartum depression, these other nurturing relationships could minimize the effects on the infant. Supporting the mother toward health and dealing with her depression constructively remain important goals for the family system.

The Neurobiology of Human Attachments. The research on subtle, and possibly epigenetic, influences that may promote the expression of nurturing behavior, reveal complex and interacting factors at work. The role of the hormone oxytocin is increasingly implicated as exerting influence in nurturing and bonding behavior (Feldman, 2017). Parenting integrates the functioning of two neural networks, namely cortical-paralimbic structures which are associated with emotional processing, and cortical circuits which support social understanding. As parents spend time with children and are involved in active childcare, their caregiving experiences become more pronounced. The influences of hormones and how these shape brain behavior and expression are implicated (Abraham, Hendler, Shapira-Lichter, Kanat-Maymon, Zagoory-Sharon, & Feldman, 2014). The research, especially by Feldman and colleagues (Feldman, 2017; Feldman, Monakhov, Pratt, & Ebstein, 2016) points toward the hormonal influences in the brain and ultimately in attachment, nurturing, and parenting behavior. These hormonal influences also are noted in the subtle differences between mothers and fathers as they pertain to parenting (Kim et al., 2014).

Family Structure

Family size and family membership plays a significant role in parenting behavior. Families can be very diverse. They can be three generational families, single parent families, or blended families to mention a few variations on the theme. The effects of being a single child or the youngest child with much older siblings, have been well documented, as this places much attention on the child, with varying outcomes (Claridge & Canter 1973/2013). Family size has shrunk over the past decades, and the overwhelming responsibilities of having a family with a dozen kids is almost unthinkable in developed countries considering our current contexts. Refer to Figure 1–2.

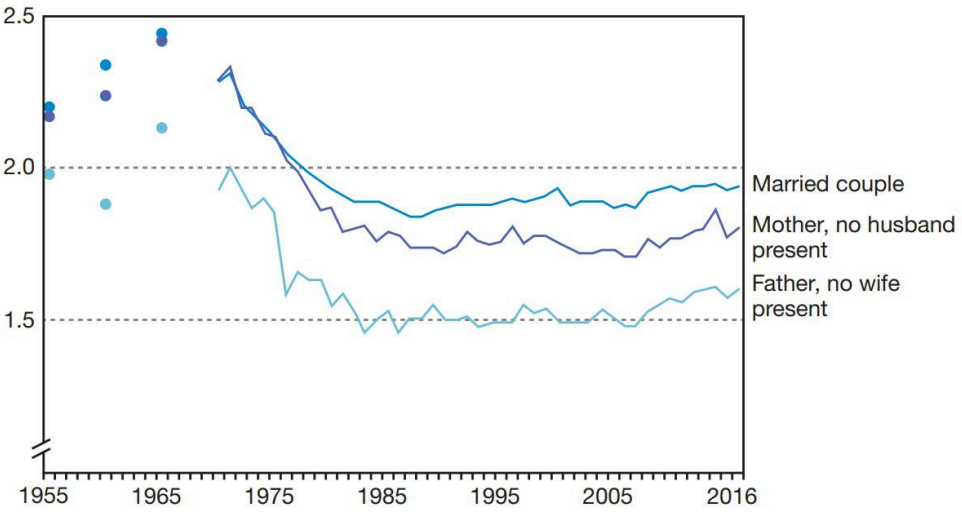


FIGURE 1–2. Average number of own children per family (for families with children under 18), 1955–2016.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 1955, 1960, 1965 and 1970 to 2016.

Parenting Reflection 1–3

Consider how your own disciplinary style could be influenced by various interacting factors. Would you or wouldn't you adopt the disciplinary style that you experienced in your own youth? Justify your choice.

Focus Point. Parenting styles reflect the interaction between individuals and their child-rearing goals.

SOCIAL FACTORS AFFECTING PARENTHOOD

Throughout the 20th century and beyond, child-rearing approaches gradually eased up from restrictive and authoritarian to increasingly permissive. As the more punitive approaches decreased, physical punishment was discouraged. As children were studied in a developmental context, numerous child-rearing experts offered detailed, at times conflicting, child-rearing advice.

Family form and function can vary greatly. Many roads can lead to good parenting outcomes, just as many family forms can harbor and shelter their members in optimal ways. This historic photo, taken in 1905, depicts Jakob Mittelstadt, right, his wife and their eight children at New York's Ellis Island, just after the family arrived in New York.

This original photo can be found at North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND. source: https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/articles/newspapers/news/ellis_island.html

Source: Sherman, A. F. & Mesenhöeller, P. (2005). Augustus F. Sherman: Ellis Island Portraits 1905–1920. Reading, P.A.: Aperture.

The emphasis became more psychological, inspired by techniques and concepts from developmental, clinical, and counseling psychology. Behavior modification based on positive reinforcement or reward became popular, especially in educational contexts and in managing certain behavior clusters, such as attention deficit disorders.

A number of contemporary social issues impact parent–child relations directly or indirectly. The larger society affects individuals and families to some degree, and the reverse is true as well with a bidirectional influence. Some of these issues are controversial and can be divisive in nature.

- The roles of both genders are evolving and are sustained by the gender equality movement. Social conditions in many arenas cause major ripple effects. Current parents attest to the shared economic roles of partners, closely linked to shared parenting roles.
- Societal issues pertaining to public education, violence, addiction disorders, economic challenges, and the like, have far-reaching effects on childhood and family life. Resource-strapped families are raising children in poverty, and employment and educational prospects for young adults can be challenging.
- A significant turning point in American culture occurred after September 11, 2001 (9/11). Worldwide terrorist acts have become more prevalent. Military families, and especially the children in these families, have been deeply affected by deployment and war-related issues.
- The increasing presence of the World Wide Web via personal electronic devices and the influence of social media, have caused a ripple effect in changing communication patterns, education, and endless other areas of family life in a paradigm shift unlike anything previously experienced in history. Information overload and less real-life face time with significant others are phenomena linked to the digital age.
- Privacy issues have become a serious concern, as information from the digital world is mined and publicly accessible. This in turn has led to discussions concerning privacy that adolescents demand from their parents, and privacy between spouses.
- The continuing debates surrounding family formation choices, general civil rights, legal and illegal immigration, displacement of refugee families, and the like continue.

Focus Point. Social changes including greater gender equality, education, scientific and technological advances, expanding civil rights, and more, filter through to the family in a systemic manner, and contribute to family changes in form, function, and structure.

DIVERSITY IN FAMILY FORMS AND STRUCTURES

In our increasingly complex society, the family is an important source of stability, refuge and shelter. We have become more conscious of the diversity in our society; there is endless variety based on factors such as age, race, sexual orientation, special needs, and ethnic group identity, to name a few. With increased respect for diversity and the acquisition of multicultural competence in our personal and professional lives, we know that each group has its own strengths. As Americans we can find many threads that connect us in one common fabric, including our desire to pursue happiness. This noble goal is referenced in the U.S. Constitution. As Nobel Laureate Maya Angelou has so poignantly expressed in her poem "Human Family" (1995), in which she states that as humans, we are more similar than we are dissimilar.

These social changes are reflected in contemporary family life in America. For example, a trend reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.) is an increase in the number of nonfamily households and a decrease in the number of family households. In 1970, 70% of all American households were family households (at least two persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption), while today, these kinds of households are diminishing. Social relationships, such as divorce, families-of-choice, and families with same-sex parents, have changed the face of the American family. Families have changed in size, structure, form, and function and diversity is the norm.

In family forms and functions we concentrate on the configuration of the family. Even so, we cannot discuss every variant contained in our society and, therefore, within families, because members can belong to many different groups simultaneously. Most of the family forms discussed in this text are typically found in mainstream developed and developing countries. We acknowledge that there may be relatively isolated groups, especially in anthropological contexts, where variations occur. These small groups may represent rarer family forms; for instance polygamy; which involves marriage with multiple wives or husbands simultaneously.

To highlight every type of family where parents and children can claim membership would amount to cataloging differences, whereas we are trying to focus on unifying family trends. In this section, we focus on the predominant family types or structures that include children. Some of these variations may include:

- Two opposite-sex adults who are cohabiting or with an intact marriage and their children.
- Two same-sex adults, married or cohabiting, and their children.
- Single-parent adults and their children.
- Blended families composed of two opposite-sex adults who have remarried and the children of one or both.
- Renested families composed of adult parents and their adult children who have returned to the home.
- Custodial (co-resident) grandparent–grandchild families.
- Families of choice: not necessarily biologically related but cohabiting.

Family complexity may be linked to child well-being. Even so, it is not always intuitive and can present differently across family structures (Brown, Manning, & Stykes, 2015). Simply stated, this could mean that a specific family form need not be consistently linked to positive or negative outcomes. In the end, the quality of the relationships within a specific family form, combined with their social support systems and other resources, seem to be the crucial determinants of outcomes in terms of child well-being. Many roads can lead to good parenting outcomes, just as many family forms can harbor and shelter their members in optimal ways.

Two-Parent Families

Traditionally, families are thought to be composed of two opposite-sex, married adults and their children. For generations, this family form was considered the ideal, normative family form in which to produce and raise children to maturity. In contemporary family life there

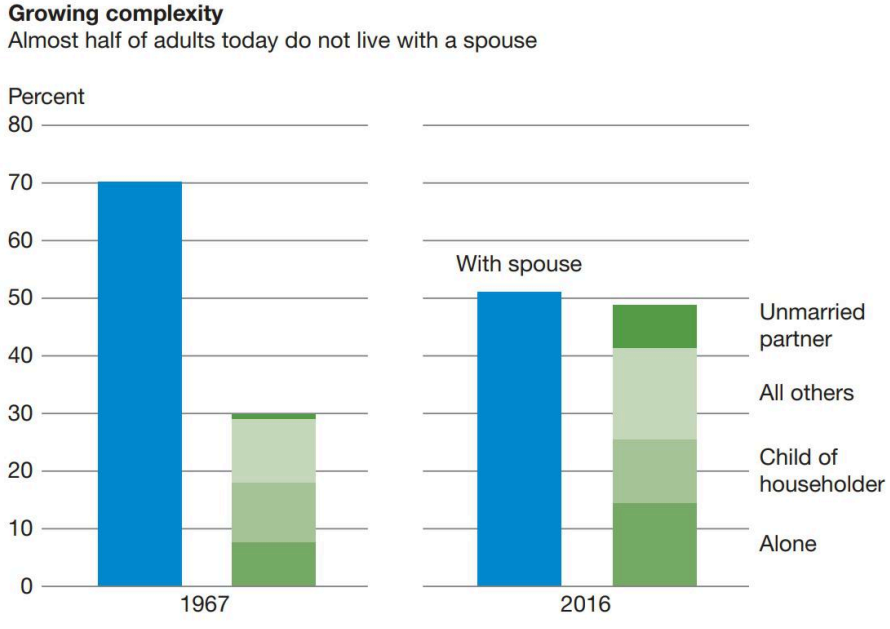


FIGURE 1–3. Living arrangements of adults 18 and over showing growing complexity: Almost half of adults today do not live with a spouse (Data up to 2014).

Source: Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 1967–2016.

are many variations on the theme. Cohabiting couples with children, and same-sex couples and their children, whether married or cohabiting, form family units facing similar joys and challenges.

With gender equality on the forefront, there has been a welcome move toward *dual parenting*, with the implication that both parents will contribute whatever the parenting situation demands, regardless of traditional gender role stereotypes. In *dual-income* families, the ideal would be that all tasks are shared, from income-producing work and household-related labor, to the nurturing and raising of the offspring (Kotila, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Kamp Dush, 2013). In practice, this is not necessarily true. Dual-income families may have blurred traditional gender role divisions. Dual parenting ideally implies that both parents will contribute equally, responding to what the specific situations may demand, rather than giving a response based on traditional gender roles, even though each parent may bring different strengths to the parent–child relationship.

Androgynous parenting is sometimes used to describe roles that are either gender neutral or that are performed by the opposite-sex parent from the one who stereotypically assumes the role. An example would be strengthening the nurturing aspect of fathers, whereas in the previous century, mothers were the primary nurturers. The blurring of gender roles in the parenting context, specifically, can enhance a greater sense of gender equality in the children. Members of Generations X and Y are more likely to be *dual centric* or *family centric*, meaning that they emphasize work and family *equally*, actively planning to allocate sufficient time to family life. These are the cohorts who were born in the 1970s and 1980s (Dawson, Sharma, Irving, Marcus, & Chirico, 2015; Kray, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2002).

Much of the information on parent–child relations is derived from research based on individuals living in two-parent families. As such, it continues to be the predominant family form in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). In the general population, this family form is declining. This decline is often attributed to changes in attitudes that have made adult *cohabitation*, or living together without benefit of marriage, and divorce less stigmatized and more acceptable throughout American society (Wagner, Schmid, & Weiβ, 2015). In addition, the downward trend in two-parent families is contrasted with the upward trend in single-parent families in the United States.

Despite the decline in this traditional form of family, most children in the United States experience growing up with two parents (Vespa, Lewis, & Kreider, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Many adult couples choose to cohabit rather than marry, while raising the children of either or both partners (Richards, Rothblum, Beauchaine, & Balsam, 2016). From the statistics it is apparent that:

- The number of adults who cohabit rather than marry is increasing (Lofquist, Lugaila, O'Connell, & Feliz, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016; Vespa, Lewis, & Kreider, 2013).
- The nature of the relationship of a cohabiting couple closely resembles that of a married couple. The couple can face risk of separation and distress, similar to marriage partnerships (Manning, 2015).
- Cohabitation does not necessarily lead to marriage (Rose-Greenland & Smock, 2013).
- About one in nine cohabiting couples is in a same-sex partnership (Carl, 2012).

See Figure 1–4.

Single-Parent and Binuclear Families

One of the more common types of families in the United States today is composed of one adult parent and one or more children under age 18. Whether headed by a man or a woman, this unit is called a single-parent family. A **binuclear** family refers to children who have *access to two families*, usually as a result of parental divorce.

The number of single-parent families, whether by necessity or by choice, is increasing more rapidly than any other family form. It may be as a result of divorce, although many unmarried women choose to have children and express the wish to remain single by choice. In 2010, there were about 75 million minor children ages 0 to 17 in the United States. About two thirds of the youngsters were living in dual parent households, while a third lived in single parent set-ups. The number of children living with both parents decreased by about 10 percent between 1980 and 2010. Older children were less likely to live with two parents. Of the

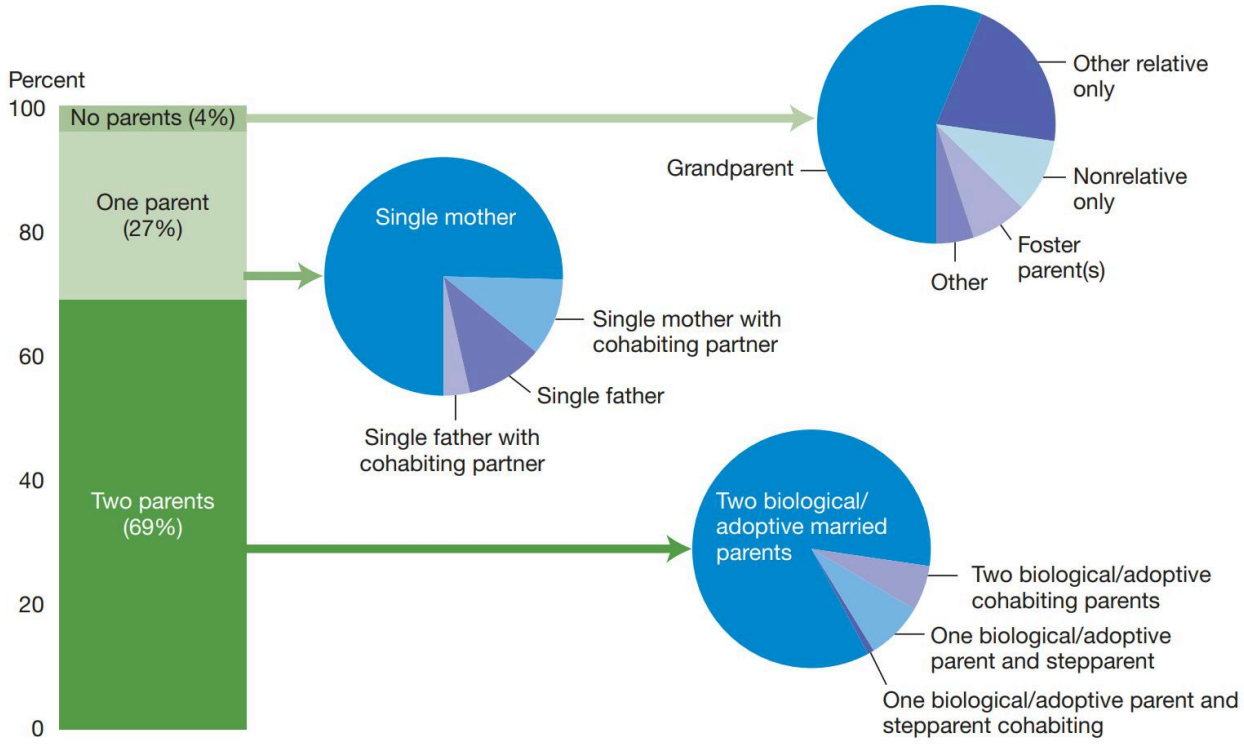


FIGURE 1–4. Percentage of children ages 0-17 living in various family arrangements, 2015.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

children in single-parent households in 2010, 23 percent lived only with their mother, 3 percent lived only with their father, and 4 percent lived with neither parent (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2015).

Single-parent families accounted for about 26 percent of all families with children in 2010. Single-parent families are more prevalent among African Americans as a group (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

A single-parent family is created through (1) divorce, desertion, or separation of the adults; (2) the death of one adult; or (3) having a child while unmarried. The most common means is through divorce. The vast majority of single-parent families are headed by women because U.S. courts typically award full physical custody of younger children to the mother, while also considering the best interests of the child.

Quality of life is a major issue for many single-parent families (Mikonnen et al., 2016). Any type of disruption in family life can produce a crisis, and divorce is one of the most stressful experiences of adulthood. It can also be traumatic for children. Although divorce has become commonplace, it is a crisis event that forces many short- and long-range adjustments.

The experience of being a single parent differs for women and men. Women generally expect to have financial difficulties, and there are significantly more children who live in poverty because they live in a single-parent family headed by a woman (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2015). The implications for children growing up in single-parent families, especially those headed by mothers, can be serious. While most studies report that children generally fare well while living in a single-parent family, those who live in poverty are at greater risk for problems at school, teen parenthood, unemployment, and lower wages when entering the labor force.

Life is not easy for most single-parent families. Yet many persons choose divorce over an unhappy relationship, even though a multitude of difficult adjustments are inevitable. This type of family arrangement can be more efficient and harmonious than a household marked

by tensions and strife between the adults, especially if abuse is part of the scenario. Same-sex married couples may face similar stressors of divorce (LeBlanc, Frost, & Wight, 2015).

Parenting Reflection 1–4

You have been elected mayor of a large city, having run your campaign on social reform. What are some of the things that you can do in your official capacity to improve the quality of life for single-parent families?

Blended Families

Blended families are formed when at least one of the adult partners remarries or when a couple cohabit and children are involved. Because the vast majority of single-parent families are headed by women, the person usually filling the vacant adult role in the new blended family is a man (Nixon & Hadfield, 2016). He may or may not have been divorced and may have children of his own. Same-sex couples can also choose to live in blended families while being married or while cohabiting.

Remarriage is popular, although these relationships have a higher risk of ending in divorce than first marriages (Carl, 2012; Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014). The median length of first marriages in the United States is about 7 years. Most persons who divorce remarry within 3 years. Second marriages tend to last about the same length as first marriages. It is unusual for an individual to have been married three times or more. Blended families, by definition, involve the children of one or both remarried partners, although many remarried couples have at least one child from this new union (Aughinbaugh, Robles, & Sun, 2013).

Popular perception holds that blended family life is highly problematic for all involved. Researchers have found that this family form may be no better or worse than other family forms, although the challenges are unique. These challenges include dealing with a complicated extended family network, difficulty in establishing stepparenting roles, and the unique developmental tasks associated with forming a new and cohesive family identity (Zeleznikow & Zeleznikow, 2015).

Families With Renested Adult Children

Families with renested adult children are a modern phenomenon. The renested family emerges when children who have been launched into independence return home to their family of origin. Young adult children, or emerging adults, are also referred to as *boomerang kids* (South & Lei, 2015). Some estimates suggest that more than 60 percent of all young adults between age 18 and 30 will, at some time, return to their family of origin to live temporarily. It is estimated that about 56 percent of men and 43 percent of women between age 18 and 24 live with one or both parents (Vespa, Lewis, & Kreider, 2013). During extended economic downturns, these numbers tend to increase.

The phenomenon of *renested* families occurs primarily when young adult children experience some type of transitional life crisis, such as job loss or divorce, and turn to their families for support. Young adults in stable partnerships are less likely to return home, whereas single moms are more likely to return to the parental base (Hayford & Guzzo, 2016). Some renested families are formed when adult children return to their elderly parents' homes to care for them, while others need grandparental support in raising their own children, especially if they are single parents.

Renested families need to adapt and respond to the development of a young adult. Family rules may need to be changed and new boundaries established as parents and emerging adults adapt to new ways of managing family life. The kind of arrangements derived will involve new definitions of family relationships that reduce the social power of the parents. Parents feel more positive about the arrangement when their boomerang kids reciprocate by contributing to the household financially and in kind, and are respectful of family rules. It is beneficial to all parties if the adult children can maintain their autonomy, even while returning to the parental home (Tanner & Arnett, 2016).

The *sandwich generation* refers to adults who are looking after their own parents, as well as their offspring; they are the middle generation with a generation on each side (Bogan, 2015).

Kinship Families

Custodial Grandparents and Grandchildren. Increasingly American grandparents may be faced with the responsibility of raising their grandchildren,

and possibly providing some financial support for their own children. Typically grandchildren live in grandparent-maintained households, although it can include extended family members who are caring for related children. In 1970, in the United States, there were about 2.2 million of these households. By 2010, this number reached about 7 percent, or 4.9 million children living with a grandparent. A breakdown of these figures indicates that about half of the children in grandparent-maintained households are Caucasian, followed by about a quarter African American and just under 20 percent Hispanic/Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

The family that encompasses *three generations* faces special challenges. For the grandchildren, there may be very real reasons why their biological parents cannot raise them. The lives of the grandparents are also transformed in unexpected ways, with considerable financial stressors accompanying their ongoing responsibilities. A significant number of grandparents find themselves overburdened and overwhelmed, especially if the children display behavioral issues or if the grandparents have failing health. The scenario is more positive if the grandparents are healthy, coping, and have the resources to fulfill this variation of the parenting role. For some, it adds meaning to their lives in a joyful and rewarding manner. Even so, postponement of having children may mean that grandparenthood arrives at a later age (Margolis, 2016).

The grandmother maintains the household in the majority of these families, and may be more likely to retire in order to invest time in the grandchildren than a grandfather would (Wiese, Burk, & Jaeckel, 2016). Co-resident grandparent–grandchild families are typically created when parents experience some type of personal problem that prevents them from effectively fulfilling their caregiving role. Examples of such debilitating personal problems include incarceration, addiction and related disorders, child abuse, chronic physical or emotional illness, or even death. Grandparents may step in to assume custody and provide a stable environment rather than the children being placed in foster care. Even so, grandmothers and grandfathers may perceive these challenges differently; depending on how involved they had been with their own jobs and whether they saw retirement in a positive or a negative light (Wiese et al., 2016).

Co-resident families face unique challenges. Grandparents may take on their roles when they are older than when their parents before them claimed the title of grandparent. They may not be as healthy and as able to fulfill a parenting role (Margolis, 2016). Many grandparents, while acting compassionately, find that their plans for a serene retirement must be postponed or abandoned to provide for their grandchildren. Others have to apply for public assistance because of increased expenses challenging an already-limited fixed income. The grandchildren may display problems related to parental divorce, addiction disorders, and inconsistent parenting behavior. Grandparents in co-resident households are more likely to be poor with the associated negative effects. Providing for the educational needs of grandchildren may be difficult if their own education was incomplete. And they may be unsure how to guide the children's educational experiences in a more digitalized world (Choi, Sprang, & Eslinger, 2016).

Focus Point. Diversity, in structure and form, are principle characteristics of contemporary American families. Significant variations in the ways that families are defined and how they are composed reflect changes occurring in the larger society. This in turn affects the parenting role. The influences can be bidirectional.

Families of Choice

The term *family of choice* denotes family formation not exclusively relying on shared genetics, or legal parental status. Family members choose to function as a family and this is the term often favored in same-sex unions. The concept "family" and what that implies is continuously evolving in response to and in interaction with societal and other demands. Additionally, created and assigned kinship roles represent variations in the family bonds. In single parent families, cohabiting and repartnered unions, same sex unions including persons identifying themselves as LGBT, and LGBTQ, as well as transnational families; the expression of a family of creation can be varied, even ambiguous (Cherlin, 2012; Gerhardt, 2016b). Common wisdom tells us that we can choose our friends, but we cannot choose our families. In families of choice these options are expanded.

Cultural Historic Snapshot 1–1

Children in the Civil War

Amidst the devastation of war, children forfeit their childhoods.

As fathers joined the military action during the Civil War in America (1861–1865), women and children waged their own battles sustaining the home front, as they were fighting for survival. Children would help with farming responsibilities, looked after younger siblings, sewed, made soap and candles, or scavenged for food. When their teachers joined the war effort, educations were interrupted, unless children were homeschooled. Here are some authentic reflections by children from this time:

"I was ten years old today. I did not have a cake; times are too hard. I hope that by my next birthday there will be peace in our land."

(Carrie Berry from Atlanta, Georgia)

"We are starving. As soon as enough of us get together we are going to take the bakeries and each of us will take a loaf of bread. That is little enough for the government to give us after it has taken all our men."

(Anonymous child from Richmond)

"In these few months my childhood had slipped away from me. Necessity, human obligations, family pride and patriotism had taken entire possession of my little emaciated body."

(Celine Fremaux from Baton Rouge, Louisiana)

> Children on the Civil War homefront encountered trials, hardships, and violence that forced them to grow up quickly amidst a nation at war with itself . . . [Children] comprised a much bigger portion of the US population in 1860 than in the 21st century, with persons under age 19 making up nearly half of the population (compared to less than 25% today). . . . Many soldiers on both sides invoked the future of their children as to why the war should be fought . . . A number of children took up arms with their elders and served as enlisted soldiers or regimental musicians. While we don't know how many children enlisted during the Civil War, we do know that around 48 soldiers who were under the age of 18 won the Congressional Medal of Honor for their bravery and service. (Schwartz, retrieved 2017)

Source: Marcie Schwartz, Children of the Civil War. Civil War Trust. Retrieved from: http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/children-in-the-civil-war/

Military Families

"Soldiers may go to war as individuals but they come from families that are impacted by their deployment" (Myers-Walls, & Myers-Bowman, 2015, p. 2038). Military families face unique challenges, which may be even more pronounced in families with two serving members. Deployed military mothers are a fairly recent phenomenon. During deployment, military families share some of the stressors and challenges with families who function as single-parent units, but they are also subjected to a military environment that, in some ways, is a world of its own. While deployed, parenting from a distance and maintaining family cohesion, is challenging. Simultaneously, the deployed soldier is also forming a surrogate family with similarly deployed colleagues. Military life (even without deployment) is characterized by some unique qualities that affect marital and family functioning and are closely related to parenting and child rearing. If one person from a family unit is deployed, it affects that entire unit, and the ripple effects are extensive (Oshri., Lucier-Greer, O'Neal, Arnold, Mancini, & Ford, 2015).

In an important review article that provided meta-analyses of studies spanning a decade ending in 2013, Yablonsky and co-authors shed light on themes relevant to military families (Yablonsky, Barbero, & Richardson, 2016). About 2.2 million U.S. service men and women are on active duty, and the number of spouses and children affected number three million. Based on figures released by the U.S. Department of Defense in 2013,

about 200,000 persons were actively deployed at that time (Yablonsky et al., 2016). If one includes extended family, millions of Americans have experienced the deployment of a family member.

The cycle and transitions around deployment contain stressors of their own. This cycle contains the stages of pre-deployment, deployment, post deployment and possible re-deployment. Each stage contains particular stressors for the affected children and spouses as well as the deployed individual (DeVoe & Ross, 2012). Military personnel, as well as their families, face significant adjustment when the family member returns from deployment. There may be post-traumatic stress to deal with, the possibility of an injury is a reality, and the entire family has to readjust and rebalance to find a new equilibrium (Willerton, MacDermid Wadsworth, & Riggs, 2011). For some of the families, this adjustment cycle and its subsequent challenges is repeated with redeployment. According to Yablonsky and her co-researchers (Yablonsky et al., 2016), each phase of the cycle can have its own tasks and outcomes:

- ***Pre-deployment*** phase. Getting ready, facing uncertainty and some emotional distancing.
- ***Deployment*** phase. Staying engaged by connecting with own family and finding a support or surrogate family in the deployed setting.
- ***Transposement*** during deployment. This refers to the altering of the family; taking on new roles, challenges of communication.
- ***Post-deployment.*** Reintegrating with own family. Requires understanding, appreciation, and renewed family bonding (Yablonsky et al., 2016).

Considering that the period of deployment averages about 15 months, the spouses and children in these families are under a significant strain for extended periods of time. They worry about the safety of the family member who is deployed, and they suffer from what has been called *ambiguous loss*, which is the temporary loss of a family member combined with the risks, threats, and vulnerabilities associated with injury and permanent loss of life (Yablonsky et al., 2016). Whether we concentrate on the qualities of temporary single-parent households or the characteristics of long distance parenting, these families face stressors that affect many areas of family functioning, and seem to increase with repeated deployment (Lucier-Greer, Arnold, Mancini, Ford, & Bryant, 2015).

The sustaining and positive factors in these families are the strength and stability of the marriage relationship, combined with their social connectedness to a network of supportive and significant others, such as friends, family, and other military spouses and their families (Saltzman, Lester, Milburn, Woodward, & Stein, 2016). In the work of Karney and Crown (2011), it was found that, paradoxically, deployment increased the stability of many military marriages, but there are many variables that contradict generalizations because marital stability varies according to gender, race, length of deployment, and age at the time of marriage. To quote Karney and Crown: "In short, for the vast majority of the U.S. military, the longer that a service member was deployed while married, the *lower* the subsequent risk of marital dissolution. In these groups, deployment appears to enhance the stability of the marriage. The beneficial outcomes in terms of marital stability seem to increase with length of deployment" (2011, p. 37).

Although the marriage itself may be stable, multiple and prolonged deployments appear to escalate general family related difficulties, and there can be cumulative risks (Lucier-Greer et al., 2015). Ross (2016) found that despite the relative stability of military marriages, the female service members faced almost double the risk of marital breakup as compared with their male counterparts. Soldiers who return with post-combat mental health problems affect the entire family, which can precipitate poor adjustment in the children of these families. Major depression, PTSD, and generalized anxiety can affect as many as one in five soldiers (Ross, 2016).

Clearly, the excellent support networks of the military and the social cohesiveness of military families contribute to *emotional resilience*. The communities' capacity and ability to support military families is crucial in positive outcomes, as well as in providing support for the children in these challenging situations (Oshri. Lucier-Greer, O'Neal, Arnold, Mancini, & Ford, 2015). As civilians, we should understand that there is an immense positive power contained in our expressions of care, support, and appreciation toward military families. Their well-being is also the concern of the greater community, even though the military has built excellent and exemplary support systems and provides expertise in many areas of social concern. The numbers of children involved are large; the cohort represents about two million children, who have to deal with potentially traumatic challenges such

Support networks of the military and the social cohesiveness of military families contribute to their emotional resilience. The military family also faces specific challenges associated with each phase of the deployment cycle—pre-deployment, deployment, transposement and post deployment.

asseparation from a parent and the potential risk to that parent (Wadsworth et al., 2016).

There are several priorities for research about military families and subsequent integration of research findings (Willerton et al., 2011; Yablonsky et al., 2016):

- The deployment cycle; specifically pre-, during, and post deployment, and how one phase affects the next can benefit from further research attention.
- Studying marital and family relationships longitudinally; including deployed mothers, non-partnered mothers, dual military couples, and same-sex couples.
- Studying the effects of deployment on child well-being and parent–child relationships, especially in different service contexts, as the sub-cultures can vary.
- Studying the renegotiation process in military families as they readapt after deployment.
- Examining coping with the psychological and physical wounds of combat, and subsequent transitions.
- Studying the impact of help-seeking behavior in soldiers who are not partnered, as well as help-seeking behavior of related family members.
- Communication styles and modes during these various transitional phases, and especially during deployment.

The support provided to military families can expand and benefit from research findings. Among some of the recommendations are the use of systemic and evidence-based approaches and the power of education to inform and to teach as this will have a trickle-down effect. Information and best practices that are being dispersed more widely snowball in reaching their target audiences. Service members, as well as their spouses, require information and training to safeguard the psychological health of their children and to optimize parent–child relations.

Ethnography: Diverse Family Forms

The family forms described previously are those typically found in developed nations. In remote and fairly isolated contexts, typically described in anthropological studies, other variations on the marriage and family theme exist. Some variations include the following:

Polygamy involves a marriage that may include several adults. Polygamy falls under the umbrella term *polyamory*, which literally means loving several persons or partners. There are specific variations; for example, the family form of a man and several wives is called *polygyny*, literally meaning "many" linked to the Greek root of the word *gyny* meaning woman or female, the same root as found in "gynecology." When a woman is partnered by

several husbands simultaneously, it is referred to as *polyandry*. Here the Greek root of the word is "andro," the same root as found in the word describing "androgens" or hormones typically associated with males (Nanda & Warms, 2014, pp. 176–178).

Other variations are endogamous and exogamous marriages; the first require marriages between members of the same group, the latter requires the opposite, namely that the marriage partner does not belong to the same group.

Morganatic Marriage. In certain ingenious cultural and historic contexts, novel ways were found to manage the typical rights and privileges associated with marital unions. Some marriages had to do with transference of power, privilege, titles, property, and rights, especially in noble, powerful, or rich families. A morganatic marriage described two persons who did not have the same social class or rank, for instance a royal marrying a "commoner." In morganatic marriages ways were found to avoid some of the legal rights and responsibilities accompanying marriage. In contemporary societies these practices are typically not legally sanctioned. To prevent certain assets being transferred to the wife at marriage, the marriage was called a "left-hand marriage" where the husband held the wife's hand with his own left hand during the ceremony. As the right hand was thought to be the dominant hand, using his left hand lessened the marriage for all intents of inheritance of privilege or power, such as royal titles. Thus a left-hand wife had minimal or no rights, whereas a right-hand wife (usually the first wife) was entitled to the privileges associated with her husband's rank (Körner, 2016). Nelson Mandela's father, who was a chief of the Thembu tribe in Southern Africa, married his first wife and she could access his rank and his title. In some circles, this marriage to his first wife was thought to be a "right-hand marriage" and the three subsequent marriages were thought to represent "left-hand marriages." (See Cultural Snapshot 1–1.)

Problems and challenges with succession rights were documented in several royal families and have altered the course of history. The current Royal Family in Britain may have been totally different had Edward VIII not abdicated in December 1936 to marry American divorcee Wallis Simpson. Family form and function in terms of access to the throne, were most definitely affected in major ways.

Cultural Snapshot 1–2

Father of a Nation

Family forms vary and are strongly influenced by cultural and religious practices. Family forms and function are transitioning in response to changing norms and cultural practices. What may have been a symbol of status or power a century ago may not convey the same message in more recent contexts. Looking at the family history of Nobel Peace Prize winner, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela (1918–2013), some of these cultural and historical differences are apparent. Mandela's father was a chief and a person of high status in his Thembu tribal community. Mandela's father had four wives. Mandela was born in Mvezo village as one of four children by the same parental dyad. Mandela's father had a total of 13 children with his four wives. Further offspring from Mandela's father were his three half brothers and six half sisters.

Nelson Mandela's family of procreation was large as well. He was married three times. From his first marriage four children were born, of whom two reached adulthood. Another two children were born from his second marriage. When Mandela married Graca Machel, her two stepchildren and two biological children from her former marriage joined the large extended family linked to Nelson Mandela. Mandela has 17 grandchildren and many great grandchildren.

Nelson Mandela is lovingly called "Madiba" by the South African nation, a word denoting respect and admiration. It is a name from the Thembu clan, who speak Xhosa, and references Mandela's ancestry. Mandela has at times been credited as "*parenting a nation*."

Based on: Mandela, Nelson. (1994). *The Long Walk to Freedom*. London: Little, Brown & Company and on information displayed at the Mandela Museum, near Qunu, South Africa (nelsonmandelamuseum.org.za/).

In most developed countries, variations on marriage with simultaneous commitments to multiple partners are typically not legal or sanctioned by the mainstream societal values or legal systems. There are also strict taboos and incest rules against marrying very close family members who are related by blood, and this is illegal in virtually all cultural and societal contexts.

(Based on: Körner, A. (2016). "Heirs and their wives: Setting the scene for Umbertian Italy. Chapt. 3, pp.38–52. In: Mehrkens, H. & Lorenz F. (Eds). *Sons and Heirs: succession and culture in nineteenth century Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan.)

FAMILY WELL-BEING

The quality of the relationships within diverse families is a key indicator of overall well-being. Making value judgments about one particular family form or configuration over another is not a constructive exercise. Sometimes families choose their composition, but more often than not, life's seemingly haphazard challenges contribute strongly to the configurations. One single mom freed herself with courage and determination from an intensely abusive relationship. She stated: "This was not the life script I had envisioned for myself or my family, but this is what it is. I am determined to give my children the best upbringing I can, no matter the sacrifices."

The relevance lies in how well the members of the family are functioning within their particular family group. Family *wellness* is affected by so many factors, from the economic to the emotional. An entire range of resources are required to ensure that the family unit avoids the pitfalls of becoming a fragile family.

The comments by sociologist Judith Stacey take on a timeless quality. Her perspective on the diversity of family forms seems to endure two decades after it was written:

> The most careful studies and the most careful researchers confirm what most of us know from our own lives: The quality of any family's relationships and resources readily trumps its formal structure or form. Access to economic, educational, and social resources; the quality and consistency of parental nurturance, guidance, and responsibility; and the degree of domestic harmony, conflict, and hostility affect child development and welfare far more substantially than does the particular number, gender, sexual orientation, and marital status of parents or the family structure in which children are reared. (Stacey, 1998a, p. 80)

CHAPTER FOCUS POINTS

Parenthood

- In our society the concept of parenthood implies that parents are responsible for nurturing, teaching, socializing, and acting as guardians for their children until they reach the age of legal maturity.

Coparents

- Coparents take on permanent and semi-permanent roles with a serious commitment to a child's upbringing. Coparents are characterized by two lead factors: Coparents have executive function and an emotional attachment/commitment to the children they coparent.

Parenting Education

- As parents raise children, they begin to understand their children's developmental needs, and become more effective and responsible in their roles as parents. Parents can improve their skills and parenting outcomes by being exposed to research and outcome-based parenting education. Parenting occurs in the milieu of a family system, and within social and cultural contexts. Contemporary ideas on parenting roles ideally reflect current best practices.

Dimensions of the Parenthood Role

- Current approaches describe the parent–child relationship as bidirectional, meaning that a child is acknowledged as an active participant and contributor to the relationship. Each person influences the behavior of the other. By contrast, parent-child relationships were traditionally and historically described as unidirectional; that is, the adult had complete jurisdiction, power, and control over the relationship. The parenting role can be characterized by four dimensions:
  - *Family as a System*. The family systems theory describes parenthood as a subsystem of the larger social system of the family and within an ecological context.
  - *Bidirectional Relationship*. Both parents and children actively participate in a bidirectional interaction with mutual influence.

- *Developmental and Lifespan*. Parenting is a developmental role and a lifespan pursuit: both parent and child undergo developmental changes with time and life span progressions. This continues throughout a lifetime.
- *Social Construct*. Parenthood is a social construct. The parental role is a social institution based on complex values, beliefs, norms, and behavior.

Influences in the Parenting Styles

- Several overlapping influences contribute to the nature and context of an adult's potential behavior as a parent and influence the configuration of the adopted parenting style. Parenting styles reflect the interaction between individuals and their child-rearing goals.

Social Factors Affecting Parenthood

- Social changes, including greater gender equality, education, scientific and technological advances, expanding civil rights, and more, filter through to the family in a systemic manner and contribute to family changes in form, function, and structure.

Diversity in Family Forms and Structures

- Diversity, in structure and form, are principal characteristic of contemporary American families. Significant variations in the ways that families are defined and how they are composed reflect changes occurring in the larger society. This in turn affects the parenting role. The influences can be bidirectional.

USEFUL WEBSITES

Websites are dynamic and change

Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
www.acf.hhs.gov
Children and youth

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
www.aacap.org
Family resources

American Academy of Pediatrics
www.aap.org
Resources for parents, health advisories, 'Blueprint for Children' report

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov
Healthy living recommendations

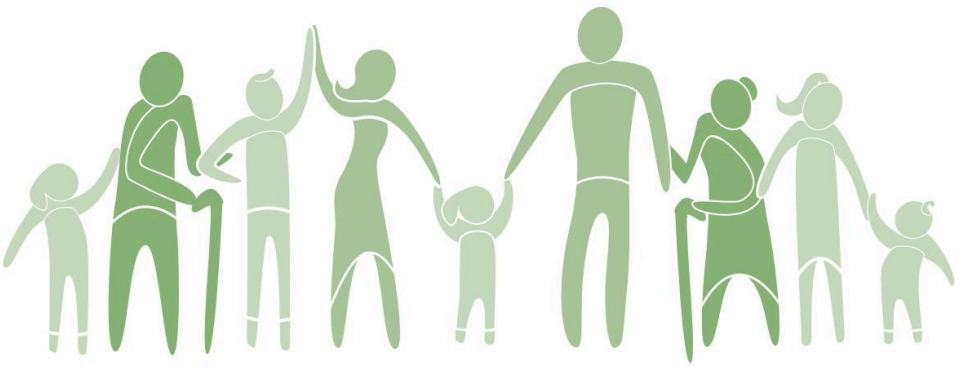
Military Child Education Coalition
http://www.militarychild.org/
Research and resources for military families

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
www.nichd.nih.gov
Research-based information and resources: health of children, adults, families, and communities

National Institutes of Health
www.nih.gov
Health information and research on environmental influences on child health

CHAPTER 2

Parenting Approaches



Learning Outcomes

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Identify the parent–child relationship as being the core of parenting.
2. Summarize a parent's role as the primary teacher.
3. Illustrate the characteristics of appropriate discipline.
4. Distinguish between positive and negative forms of discipline, including the legitimate concerns surrounding corporal punishment.
5. Describe the four main parenting styles and their implications.
6. Illustrate the Parenting Circumplex Model, by means of a diagram.
7. Assess the role that context plays in the implementation of parenting practices.
8. Evaluate the common elements of evidence-based parenting programs.
9. Explain the effectiveness of positive parental discipline.

THE PARENTING RELATIONSHIP

At the core of parenting lies the relationship. This is the essential point of departure. Almost everything we expect from a constructive, trusting, and sustaining human interaction is equally applicable to a parent–child relationship. Treat your child with the same respect, dignity, compassion, and love with which you would like to be treated. It is reflected as a core truth in philosophical reflections and in major world religions. Treat your neighbor like yourself. Do unto others what you would like to be done unto you.

The many opinions concerning the best way to raise children can seem like a big fluffy ball of wool, distracting us from the essence. Try unraveling the ball of wool—it ends up with a simple beginning; a parent–child relationship. More than that, ideally it comes from a place where there is true concern for the others' well-being, or the legal wording: "In the best interests of the child." As parents, our first concern should be to do no harm, just as the ethical guidelines caution us in the helping professions: "*First of all, do no harm.*"

If the central theme concerns relationship building, we need effective communication and listening skills. Similar to good partnerships and marriages, parents and children need to know how to negotiate respectfully, where and how to put boundaries in place, how to participate in the lifelong back and forth of the unique and intimate dialogue between a parent and a child. We have to listen actively. Slowing down to truly focus on our two-year-old, lays the foundation for the exchanges during adolescence. Warmth needs to be displayed; it is part of the nurture component that feeds and sustains the relationship. Relationship-based care practices in infant and toddler care emphasize continuity of caretakers in early developmental contexts, supporting relationship formation and maintenance.

We have borrowed and appropriated information from psychology and the helping professions in general. We have learned from psycho-therapeutic approaches. The study of human motivation has shaped our understanding. Human developmental theory showed us that we are parenting a person who is in flux, changing and evolving over the lifespan. Our interactions need to reflect and respond to these non-static qualities.

The trends in parenting approaches and programs reflect the trends in psychology. For this reason, the theories are relevant, as they show us the underpinnings that lead to a particular approach. They reveal how thinking about children and their caretakers has shifted and changed over the decades. Parenting approaches also reflect what is going on systemically in society at large. A major war, an economic downturn, an influx of refugees; these macro-systemic events trickle down and are echoed, however faintly, in the one-on-one relationships within a family. There are some swings in the pendulum. We leave behind us a history of overly strict, punitive, and authoritarian parenting, while we are moving towards more democratic relationships, based on best practices.

If we consider the evolving parent–child relationship, birth marks a point of extreme dependence and vulnerability for the newborn infant. The power differential is dramatically unequal. The adult is responsible and in control. Factors that should facilitate this caring and nurturing role is the innate instinct to protect our young, and that we want to care for our children as we are heavily vested in their well-being which also represents our own hopes for the future (Children's Defense Fund, n.d.).

As children develop, they will master one task after another, until ultimately they are launched into emerging adulthood and beyond. The bulk of the responsibility has shifted from the parent to the child, as the next generation speeds towards autonomy and independence, while their parents wonder how the kids grew up in what seemed like the blink of an eye. History will repeat itself, one parent–child relationship after the other, linking backwards and forwards in time to become part of the very fabric of society.

Parenting Reflection 2–1

Parenting occurs in the many contexts in which children grow and develop. Reflect on the needs that unify us as parents—what we universally share in our parenting efforts, regardless of ethnicity, culture, or origin.

Focus Point. The parent–child relationship is the foundation of parenting. This relationship is dynamic and constantly evolving as both parents and children grow and mature. Our knowledge of psychology and human development provides insight into patterns of interaction that lead to positive outcomes.

PARENTS AS TEACHERS

Parents remain responsible for the core of the teaching and learning process; ethics, the value and respect for learning, the attitude towards responsibility and work, and the nuances of what happens between people in relationships. The modeling that occurs day in and day out as children observe their parents may be one of the most powerful yet under-recognized schools of life. These are impactful learning and teaching opportunities and as parents we need to be cognizant of what we gift our children; intentionally as well as inadvertently. In many ways we are our children's first teachers.

Parents have always taught their offspring the skills and knowledge they believe children will need to function effectively as adults. Even so we have outsourced much of the formal education, and parents are supported by educational institutions in a process that lasts a decade or two, but continues both formally and informally for a lifetime.

From ancient times to the present, societies have recognized that parents are their children's first and most important teachers. Long before public school systems were established, parents held the responsibility for training and teaching their children the essential skills and knowledge to become effectively functioning adults. Our cultural traditions are society's way of transmitting customs, values, and beliefs that have served the elders well. It is a form of education. While formal educational functions have been taken on by other agents, society has never relinquished the socialization responsibilities of parents in equipping children with basic skills and knowledge.

Comparing past and present, parenting challenges have shifted. Until very recently, infant mortality took a disconcertingly high toll. The vulnerability we feel when our children are threatened remains a constant and different challenges take their place in the gallery of parental concerns and fears.

The dilemma lies in distinguishing what children truly need in order to flourish, as opposed to what may be perceived as a peripheral luxury. Because it is a moving target that is influenced and determined by context, it is not possible to find the panacea promising good outcomes for all. Parenting and the various systems within which it occurs is subject to many variables. No one size fits all.

It is practically impossible to know what type of occupation children will hold in the future. The vast advances in science and technology make it difficult for us to predict the challenges of the future world. We can make educated guesses, but we do not know. People in developed countries require years of education and training to become competent in an occupation or a profession. Typically, parenting is not held to the same formalities. Preparing the next generation to cope emotionally and to perfect social and interpersonal skills is usually a matter of trial and error. Parents have to be role models of values that will have meaning and usefulness to their children when they are grown, regardless of the changes in society. These may include:

- Integrity that will guide appropriate civic, ethical, and law-abiding behavior.
- Self efficacy and the ability to attain goals and objectives, including an education.
- Interpersonal and coping skills.
- Respecting the needs of others, as well as one's own.

The childhood experiences of today's parents differ from those that their children will encounter in the future. Additionally, the isolated nuclear family system has few outside supports to assist in its child-rearing efforts. According to the respected historical voices in the field of parenting (Bronfenbrenner, 1985; Kagan, 1976), children generally need several core processes to take place, and remarkably little has changed since these, by now historical, recommendations.

- To feel valued by parents and a few significant adults, such as a teacher or a relative.
- To develop their own personal attitudes, values, and opinions in order to become autonomous.
- To develop and master skills and abilities that are valued by society.
- To love and to be able to accept love from others, which includes forming secure attachments.

Parental competency requires knowledge of a variety of approaches for guiding children toward adulthood. Parental love and nurture of children is important for their healthy growth and development. Being a competent and effective parent requires additional skills. There are a number of strategies and parenting styles that focus

In addition to providing a loving and nurturing structured environment, parents also foster ethics, communicate value and respect for learning, and teach the skills and knowledge children need as they grow into adults.

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on fostering the emotional needs and character development of both parents and children. Some strategies are therapeutic, some attempt to resolve conflicts between parents and children and teach interpersonal skills, and some propose a warm, nurturing approach to parent–child interactions.

Rather than offering a recipe for child rearing, these strategies and parenting styles provide parents with skills for raising children to become competent adults.

Focus Point. As a child's first teacher, a parent is charged to instill values and attitudes that guide children on their journey towards autonomy and adulthood. There are many approaches that parents can follow to become competent teachers and effective socializers. Practicing a variety of these strategies enhances the effectiveness of parenting and improves the quality of parent–child interactions.

Cultural Snapshot 2–1

The Wide Spectrum of the Human Family

In virtually all societies, people group together and form families which are recognized as a specific social form. But not all societies, or all families, look alike or function in similar fashion. A herdsman in East Africa for instance, may regard a very large group of people as kin; large referring to several hundred. Some may be related through the bloodline others by marriage. The Hopi, located primarily in northern Arizona, include married daughters and their offspring as part of the family. Once sons marry they form family entities of their own, and are not regarded as close relatives in the way the majority of North Americans may define that term (Based on: Ferraro & Andreatta, 2014).

"They live at impossible altitudes on the roof of the world, in the extreme north lashed by freezing winds, in baking deserts where they trek from one oasis to another and in the equatorial jungle where the sunlight has difficulty reaching the ground: these are the peoples of the world, the holders of cultural rather than genetic differences, civilizations whose lives follow a rhythm different to that of the industrialized world. They are human groups and societies in continual evolution, with an extraordinary capacity for interchange, which leads to the infinite number of variants that together we refer to as Humanity" (Ferrera, 2005, Back cover).

Among the Gallong people in Arunachal Pradesh, India, the family is patriarchal and patrilineal, which also implies that the oldest son will inherit once the father dies. Occasionally polygamy occurs. These extended families live together, typically in a long house, which is subdivided to accommodate the individual smaller or nuclear family units. Those who live together also share their meals. If a female member of the household is widowed, she goes to live with her younger son. The way a new family unit signals their independence from the rest of the clan, is that they light their own fire and eat separately (Based on Ferrera, 2005).

> "The Gallong claim they are descended from the Heaven and the Earth, the two primordial gods from whom the entire universe resulted after a number of divine generations ..." (Ferrera, 2005, p. 147).

Sources: Ferraro, Gary & Andreatta, Susan. (2014). *Cultural Anthropology: An Applied Perspective*. 10th ed. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.

Ferrera, Mirella (2003). *Peoples of the World*. Vercelli, Italy: Whitestar.

APPROPRIATE DISCIPLINE

Discipline in the context of child rearing should have the positive meaning of instructional *guidance*. For discipline to be effective, parents need to view it in light of the term's original and positive meaning. The term **discipline** contains the root of the Latin verb *discere*, meaning "to learn." It is found in Middle English and is used in the context of instruction. A derivative of the term is *disciple*, which means "pupil" or "student."

The following pertain to appropriate discipline:

- Effective discipline should be developmentally appropriate.
- Steer children towards appropriate behavioral choices.
- Encourage internalization of rules, values, and beliefs.
- Strengthen self-regulation and self-efficacy.
- Guide social skills, facilitating work and social interactions.
- Actions should be positive, reasonable, and temperate.
- Consistency as well as flexibility, are relevant.
- Discipline provides structure by developing rules within a family system.

If we can shape and guide children through positive and respectful actions, it is our hope that we can minimize the harsh and humiliating practices that can be disrespectful to a child. Appropriate guidance is preferable to punishment after the fact. Good guidance should be like the navigating devices in our cars. At the first hint of an error the computer modulated voice will pipe in: "Recalculating route." Ideally our interventions should be ongoing and small; they should be based on respectfully guiding and encouraging behavior towards the right direction. If we can convey that we value the developing individual, it paves the royal road towards that person valuing themselves. The bonus will be that this contributes incrementally towards a good self-concept; one of the cornerstone gifts a parent can facilitate.

These practices are equally applicable to all those professionals working with children and youth: child care professionals, educators, the helping professions in general.

Process and Content

The *process* of parenting refers to the general ebb-and-flow of the parent–child relationship. The qualities that define the relationship are also the qualities that describe the process. It is the vessel that contains the specifics. For instance, the process between two people can be respectful or it can be disrespectful; to use but two dimensions. In reality, relationships are multidimensional and complex.

The *content* refers to specifics. It is how we metaphorically color between the lines, how we fill the vessel. Specifics could refer to the exact bedtime ritual for a child, the specifics of the menu. Basically, it is the detail that makes up the whole. These details are important, in that, added together they set the tone of the relationship which is then expressed in the process. For example, if we are irritable about every detail in our interactions with our children, we can express that in a moment of making a derogatory remark, or not caring about the food we pack in their lunch boxes. But the countless little things that accumulate express how we feel about that relationship. The content contributes to the process.

All's not lost if we get one of those details wrong. As parents and caregivers we are fallible, and at times we suffer from overload, so unintentionally we are definitely going to get a number of the details wrong. But importantly, if the process is good, if our ongoing relationship with the child is positive, then the relationship is in credit,

even though the occasional lapse can occur. We can still move forward. Donald Winnicott (1896–1971) was an English pediatrician and a psychoanalyst. He coined the concept of "good-enough parenting" and he said:

> "The good-enough mother ... starts off with an almost complete adaptation to her infant's needs, and as time proceeds she adapts less and less completely, gradually, according to the infant's growing ability to deal with her failure" (Winnicott, 1953).

By *good-enough* we presume he implied that the general process was the intention and practice of good parenting, even as perfection is unattainable; we are, after all, human, and parents can burn-out and despair. We know about the realities of *caregiver despair*. Winnicott also acknowledged the progression of the lifespan, which altered the parenting relationship in a bidirectional manner.

There is a tipping point though. If our relationship consists only of negative input, stacked and multiplied day after day, then the process of the relationship is at risk. Gottman (1994) from a marriage and family therapy context, described qualities such as criticism, contempt, stonewalling, and defensiveness, that ultimately destroy a relationship. He referred to them as the four horsemen, and they tend to usher in destruction. In small doses they may seduce us into thinking they are handy weapons in an interpersonal duel. But they do some immediate harm, and in ongoing large dosages they become sufficiently toxic that they jeopardize and possibly destroy the relationship. Neglectful parenting, in its many forms and expressions, can claim as its victim a vulnerable and defenseless child; something responsible grown-ups should never have on their conscience.

Just as in any other interpersonal relationships, parents and children bring their unique personalities to the table. There is no single perfect way of parenting, just as there is no single perfect way of sustaining a marriage or a relationship. It is about the *process* of the relationship; that has to be mutually respectful and constructive. The *content* of how that happens will vary from one parenting relationship to another. As the proverb states: Many paths lead to Rome. There are also many paths towards a fulfilling and sustaining relationship between a parent and a child.

Positive Self Esteem

Parents have many responsibilities, but one of the central roles is in supporting the development of positive self-esteem and related good self-concept in the developing child. This quality will direct and influence many related facets of the child's functioning.

Parents should be the *guardians* of their children, in that they look after their welfare. The word guardian contains the root "*guard,*" which implies that we watch over and ensure the safety of the person concerned. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word is derived from the Old French "*garden*"; and is also of Germanic origin, as in the noun "*warden.*" As guardians we are not only responsible for the physical and emotional wellbeing of those entrusted to us. We have to actively contribute to supporting the unfolding of a total person, allowing potential to be realized so that children can become the best persons they can be. The image that the child has of himself will form the basis of self-confidence, aspirational goals, and many related endeavors with far reaching effects.

The *process* should serve this outcome. Every time the *content* is negative, we chip away at the self-concept of a developing person. We are slowly and in very small increments doing harm. It may be a one-off occasion for which we can apologize, but as guardians of children we need to be mindful of the ongoing process of shaping an individual. Negative comments are remembered much longer than positive remarks, and the potency of a negative and hurtful remark is thought to have at least four times the power as compared to a positive utterance. Negatives sting more and they are remembered longer.

In the classic French fairy tale by Charles Perrault (1628–1703), with the title "Diamonds and Toads," two sisters fall under the spell of a fairy. The girl who uttered good thoughts had diamonds and pearls cascade from her mouth. The girl with the poisonous tongue released toads and snakes into the world. It is more effective to guide through positive input, as that sets the tone for mutually respectful and supportive interactions. Modeling by setting a good example is a powerful way of shaping behavior.

Nurture and Structure

Combining appropriate nurture and structure are the cornerstones of good parenting.

Nurture relates to all the ways in which we demonstrate love, not only for others but also for ourselves. Nurturing involves touching, noticing, and caring in healthy ways; being appropriately responsive. Nurture and care can be expressed in several variations and often overlaps. Discipline is most effective when provided to children within a nurturing or caring atmosphere. By nurturing their children, parents show them that they are loved unconditionally and are lovable. Nurture involves true concern for the other's well-being and expressing that constructive emotion.

Structure is provided through the internalized boundaries and controls that people acquire through socialization experiences that guide their behavior. Parents provide structure by providing these socialization experiences, instruction, limits, and rules that support self-disciplined actions. When applied appropriately, rules provide children with a sense of protection and foster a sense of trust and security. Parents teach children rules that are rational and that outline the boundaries of acceptable behavior. These boundaries contribute to expanding emotional regulation and internalizing self-discipline.

"Successful parenting is an authoritative balance of love and limits."

(Larzelere & Kuhn, 2016, p. 1551)

Responsive and Responsible Care

Responsive care is expressed when a parent determines what a child's needs are, but this determination can only occur because of the feedback loop between parent and child. The parent acts in a trusting and loving manner that generates a sense of trust. It involves noticing and listening to the child and understanding the cues and requests that the child offers. An example would be when the parent notices the child is getting overtired and initiates the bedtime routine, even though the child protests. The parent asserts the right to implement the intervention that is appropriate while considering the best interests of the child. Another example would be the parent who notices that the child is running a fever, and responds by giving the medically indicated intervention or seeking professional help.

Ideally both parent and child interact in an ongoing bidirectional manner and the parent is sensitive to the needs of the child. The care is derived from love that is unconditional. This means that love is given freely, without expectations, limits, or measure. The parent's message to the child is "I love you because you are who you are."

Unconditional love and acceptance does not mean that negative or harmful behavior is sanctioned and condoned. Instead there is a clear differentiation between the unacceptable behavior, and the unconditional respect for the person. This means that if little Sven scribbles on the white leather couch with an indelible marker, we express our frustration by clearly pointing out that the couch is not the drawing board. Clearly, we do not want a reoccurrence of the event so we need to guide and point out the boundaries. "This behavior is unacceptable because it destroys the couch that we all like to sit on. If you want to draw, use the paper on your drawing board." This is a more constructive approach that also guides towards a solution. Commentaries about the bad character and meanness of the child are inappropriate, as this situation is about the act of drawing in an inappropriate place. It should not be a judgment of character.

Constructive Guidance

The goal of constructive and respectful parental guidance is to foster an understanding of the child. It becomes an extension of the relationship. Knowing the guidelines regarding acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and their consequences in well-functioning families is helpful. In healthy family systems, there are negotiable rules. Children in healthy families learn that the rules are for their protection and freedom. They know that they can talk with their parents about making occasional exceptions to the rules. Rules can be negotiable and non-negotiable. Non-negotiable rules typically involve situations that ensure the safety of the child. Each family system must develop its own rules, policies, and values regarding child rearing and socialization. These evolve from and depend on many factors, such as personalities, family of origin, values, financial and social status, and the number and birth order of the children. Some common guidelines for parents are:

- ***Equifinality as it applies to discipline.*** The concept of equifinality from family systems theory implies that families attain similar goals in different and varied ways. Different methods for socializing children may still lead to the same outcomes, namely children who will grow up to hold similar values and attitudes. A variety of techniques and practices support socialization. There is no single disciplinary program that will meet all parenting goals.
- ***Empathy: Connecting with feelings and motivations.*** The goal is for the parent to enter the child's world, to gain an understanding of a child's feelings and motivations. The parent can be attentive to a child's verbal and nonverbal communications and reflect the feelings. This process is based on compassion and empathy. Misbehavior may be a learned response or action that is logical at a particular time. Parents who attempt to understand their children in a loving, noncritical way will feel less overwhelmed. Parents will be more rational and encourage children to think before they act in a developmentally appropriate manner. Empathy supports problem solving, as opposed to angry outbursts.

- ***Explaining and reasoning.*** Reasoning, combined with non-abusive approaches (e.g., withdrawal of privileges), are effective interventions. These guide children to comply with parental wishes. Developmentally appropriate reasoning is the key. Immediateness of the reasoning is relevant as the child can then associate the explanation with the situation. The intervention should be in proportion to the behavior being guided. Usually, if there is a good relationship between parent and child, an explanation may suffice.
- ***Consistency*** of the disciplinary approach helps children control their actions and can support emotional regulation. Consistency takes effort, but it provides structure in the form of predictability, and siblings will know and expect fairness in that similar situations will be met with similar disciplinary approaches.
- ***Positive reinforcement*** and other constructive methods are viewed as desirable in shaping behavior. Appropriate and sincere praise and acknowledgment of the effort invested in a task are powerful. Parents may require an expanded skill set to implement these successfully. Current approaches caution against overuse of hollow and meaningless praise in a uniform manner that does not match the situation or effort concerned. The semi-automatic praise of "Good job" risks becoming meaningless if overused.
- ***Facilitate appropriate autonomy.*** Children require opportunities to reason and make age appropriate choices. Granting the right to make appropriate personal decisions and to experience the consequences fosters responsibility. The parent's role is to help generate alternatives without supplying all of the answers, options, or solutions all of the time. The term scaffolding is also used in this context. Decisions must be age- and context appropriate and always keep the safety and well-being of the child in mind. The parent who makes all decisions and accepts all the responsibility fosters dependency rather than autonomy. By making their own decisions and living with the results, children learn to differentiate themselves from others and to establish personal boundaries. Decisions can initially be relatively small such as: "Would you like to wear the brown or the blue shirt."
- ***Foster appropriate individuality.*** Some family systems value sameness or rigid conformity in all members. Individual differences in values, opinions, ideas, or means of self-expression respect the uniqueness of each family member. Children should be treated fairly and consistently, while also respecting their individuality. Children, especially adolescents, may not think and act exactly like their parents or hold identical values and beliefs. The demand for sameness can destroy a child's spirit and self-perception as an autonomous human being who has the right to be unique and true to her own self.

Focus Point. Despite the common view of discipline as a form of punishment, appropriate discipline should include encouragement, positive messages, nurture, and guidance. Discipline is used to help children acquire socially appropriate behavior according to the patterns supported by their family system. Effective discipline should be moderate, developmentally appropriate, and acknowledge the particular child's needs.

Cultural Snapshot 2–2

Children are Treasured Gifts

In American Indian and Alaska Native families, children are typically seen as treasured gifts. Parents and other extended family members are charged with discovering the unique characteristics of a child at birth to determine her or his place within the tribe. For several months an infant is carefully observed to learn about his or her nature. The child's name is based on the characteristics that family members observe. Only then is the naming ceremony conducted, sometimes many months after birth.

Parents usually teach their children traditional values based on the practical application of personal belief systems. Sharing personal resources, thoughts, and knowledge is considered appropriate in interpersonal interactions. Things and people are perceived according to intrinsic rather than extrinsic traits and characteristics. Children are taught to be in touch with the rhythms of nature and to be sensitive to the needs of others.

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Aggressive acts directed at children violate the trust children have in adults. They take unfair advantage of the vulnerability and power imbalance between the generations. They are also the expression of adults who are bankrupt when it comes to constructive resources and interventions for guiding behavior. Any discipline that is performed in anger implies an irrational parent and a potentially dangerous situation for the child. Similarly, interpersonal violence (IPV) as it occurs in marital or partner relationships, emanates messages of disrespect, loss of self-regulation and control, power imbalances, and victimization.

Corporal punishment is a serious topic as it is damaging and has long range detrimental outcomes. It is a slippery slope when we deal with corporal punishment versus abuse. What parents may regard as well intended "paddling" (hitting with a flat object, like a paddle), may in reality contain all the elements of disrespect, violation of boundaries, and elements of abuse. When it occurs inside the privacy of the home, it may go unreported, but that does not make it an acceptable practice.

In 1979, Sweden became the first country to formally ban all corporal punishment. More countries followed suit and, internationally, the adoption of policies prohibiting corporal punishment is increasing. The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* advocates that all forms of corporal punishment should be ceased. Consequently in virtually all developed countries and a number of developing countries, corporal punishment is now legally prohibited. In the majority of U.S. states this practice is illegal, but the policies are not uniform throughout the United States.

In educational contexts, such as schools, corporal punishment is forbidden, and educators and childcare professionals know from their training that this practice meets with zero tolerance. In North America, children who report their parents for serious corporal punishment, can and have successfully set the cogs of the legal system in motion, with ensuing social worker home visits and probation of the parents.

In practice, even mild forms of physical punishment can easily cross the line to becoming abusive; harming the child. Add to this that parents may differ substantially in what they regard or define as mild versus serious in terms of physical punishment. Parents, especially in very traditional cultural contexts, may state that it is at their own discretion how they discipline their children and that they themselves had been disciplined in this manner.

Parents who model aggressive behavior as a means of conflict resolution are sending a message that they condone this behavior. Considering the danger physically and the negative effects on a child's self-esteem, corporal punishment should never be an option. Depending on the age, size, and strength of the child, physical vulnerability varies tremendously. The emotional scars that this behavior leaves behind are consistently powerful and often influence the victims in their choice of disciplinary approaches once they are raising their own children.

Corporal punishment can be generally described as a form of discipline often defined as the "use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain, but no injury, for the purposes of correction or control of the child's behavior" (Fréchette, Zoratti, & Romano, 2015).

Other punitive approaches aimed at the body, have varying emotional effects. Thus, forcing a child to ingest noxious substances (e.g., washing their mouths with soap

Parents who have been subjected to physical punishment or abuse as children are more likely to use spanking as a means of resolving conflict.

for telling a lie), pinching, slapping, forcing a child to remain in an uncomfortable position physically, locking them in a confined space, and the like, can be forms of punishment targeting the body. On the extreme end can be heinous acts such as burning, scalding, kicking, pinching and shaking, which clearly can cause permanent damage and represent severe maltreatment and abuse.

Parental interventions which are aggressive can lead to violent behavior in children (Sandberg, Feldhousen, & Busby, 2012). The connection between harsh physical punishment in childhood and violence in adult dating has been documented (L. G. Simons, Burt, & Simons, 2008). Adults, who were spanked by their parents, may revert to similar negative approaches in their own disciplinary actions. Spanking and other forms of physical punishment usually occur as an expression of parental anger, which can represent temporary lessened emotional control, and in turn has the potential of harming the child.

It is most unusual for a child to launch a personal attack with malicious intent. If that occurred, it may be symptomatic of larger problems within the family system or possibly signal behavioral disorders. Parents who are angry and critical when faced with misbehavior, may dictate their own solution to a problem which discounts the child. At times, adults who resort to physical and abusive disciplinary interventions have major problems themselves; some of the perpetrators may be dealing with addiction disorders which in turn influence their behavior. Clearly professional interventions are indicated, and in extreme situations parents may be declared unfit to raise their own children.

On the positive side, in developed countries, greater numbers of parents are moving away from corporal punishment as an option. Younger generations are also increasingly averse to this form of discipline. In the United States, the majority of Americans feel that corporal punishment is not a justifiable practice; not in the home nor in school settings (Downs, 2015). (Refer to Focus On 2-1: Corporal Punishment).

Parenting Reflection 2–2

Do we have the right to intervene when parents use physical punishment, especially in public? What would you say to a parent who is a stranger, and who displays this form of parenting interaction?

Focus Point. Discipline ideally should emphasize the teaching of appropriate behavior through *positive* and preferably *non-punitive* approaches. Discipline can be seen as a form of guiding behavior in which parents explore constructive ways of shaping a child's conduct. Appropriate rules and boundaries provide children with structure and teach them to internalize self-regulatory behavior.

Focus On 2–1: Corporal Punishment: Aggressive Approaches and Negative Outcomes

Consider these research findings on the effects of corporal punishment on children. The evidence strongly cautions against using spanking or other physical methods as disciplinary measures.

- Adults who spank children are likely to have been spanked by their parents as a primary means of controlling their misbehavior (Taylor et al., 2016).
- There is a very strong association between experiencing harsh, abusive, physical punishment in childhood and being a perpetrator of violence in intimate relationships in adulthood (Sandberg et al., 2012).
- The acceptance of spanking as a means of discipline varies across ethnicities, races, and cultures (Hawkins, Rabenhorst-Bell, & Hetzel-Riggin, 2015; Nadan, Spilsbury & Korbin, 2015).
- Spanking appears to be a prevalent means of child maltreatment, frequently used as a last resort in gaining children's compliance to adult wishes.

- Most spankings occur when adults are angry with children, and fail to effectively control their own emotional outbursts (Rodriguez, 2016).
- Parents who are considered abusive by mental health professionals and by the courts, consider spanking to be an acceptable means of discipline.
- Spanking is frequently used instead of positive reinforcement of desirable behavior (Gershoff, 2013).
- Using information from the fragile families study (FFCW), it was shown that spanking occurred especially in very young children through to adolescence, and that the children would subsequently externalize the behavior as in acting out aggressively themselves. The earlier this pattern was established the more likely it would persist in later life (MacKenzie, Nicklas, Brooks-Gunn & Waldfogel, 2015).
- Children who are spanked exhibit more aggressive behaviors than children who are not spanked (Gershoff, 2013). Spanking is associated with children's negative feelings of self-esteem and personal worth (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016).
- Males are more likely than females to approve of spanking children (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016).
- Spanking may produce a child's conformity to parental wishes in an immediate situation, but its long-term effects may include increased probability of deviance, including delinquency in adolescence and violent crime in adulthood (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016).
- Parents who are members of conservative and fundamentalist religious groups tend to perceive spanking (corporal punishment) as an acceptable form of discipline (Bottoms, Goodman, Tolou-Shams et al., 2015; Holden & Williamson, 2014). Even so, research concerning conservatism in the broader community and correlation to corporal punishment are not conclusive
- Social disorganization and related community factors may be more important than religious or political affiliation in predicting risky parenting behaviors such as maltreatment (Breyer & MacPhee, 2015).
- Individuals who are considered to be bullies have been subjected to physical punishment/abuse as children and have incorrectly learned that the use of physical force is an "acceptable" means of resolving conflicts with others (Zottis, Salum, Isolan, Manfro, & Heldt, 2014); note that this is not mainstream-recommended behavior.
- The use of corporal punishment (including spanking) is controversial. Over 25 countries worldwide prohibit this practice by law (Scheidegger, 2014). Harsh child punishment is also regarded as a topic that deserves to be addressed by human rights (Watkinson & Rock, 2016).

Additional resource: Downs, Jon O. (2015). Positive behavioral interventions and supports vs. corporal punishment: a literature review. *International Journal for Cross-Disciplinary Subjects in Education* (IJCDSE) 6(1): 2126–2132.

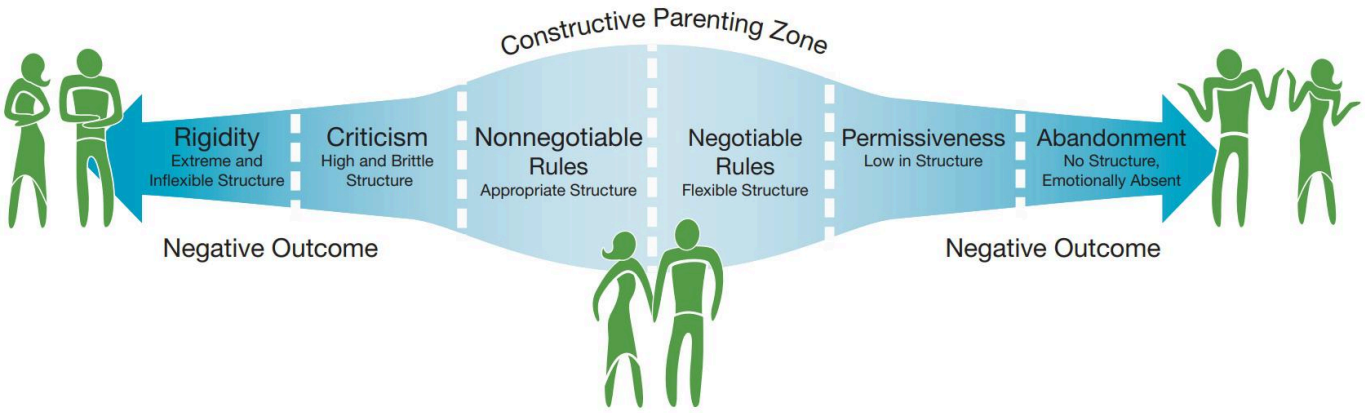


FIGURE 2–1. Continuum of structure in parenting relationships. The central shaded area represents the zone of constructive parenting behavior.

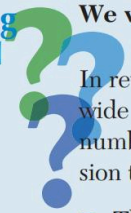
Focus On 2–2: The Continuum of Structure in Parenting Relationships

In the midrange, a constructive parenting zone is created, where balanced parenting occurs. The further we move towards both ends of the continuum, the more dysfunctional the interventions may become. The two central parenting characteristics, namely, **Nonnegotiable Rules** and **Negotiable Rules**, are patterns that support development of appropriate structure and self-regulation and are the most helpful to both children and parents. **Constructive Criticism** and appropriate **Permissiveness** can occur depending on context and the developmental stage of the child.

The pairs of parenting styles at the two opposite ends of the continuum—*Rigidity* on the left and *Abandonment* on the right—do not provide children with healthy structure and are considered to have negative effects. (Figure 2–1).

The visual model was created by Gerhardt, C., in Bigner & Gerhardt (2014, p. 85). Loosely based on concepts discussed by Clarke, J. I., & Dawson, C. (1998). *Growing Up Again: Parenting Ourselves, Parenting Our Children* (2nd ed.). Minneapolis, MN: Hazelden.

Parenting FAQ 2–1



We would like to take a formal parenting course. Any suggestions?

In reviewing parenting programs, an estimated 15,000 different parenting programs are available worldwide and in many languages. Narrowing it down to programs in English still leaves an overwhelming number of choices, adding up to hundreds of options, many of them not reputable. The following decision tree may help:

- The outcomes of a number of parenting programs have been assessed, and a brief selection is tabulated in Table 2–1 Evidence-based Parenting Programs. These programs meet stringent standards and have been tested in various population groups. There are about 50 programs that meet these requirements, and the list is growing.
- Determine the age of the child or the needs of the target group. Programs can be quite specific in addressing content areas and age groups. Among the choices are the following:
  - Programs presented by trained group leaders.
  - Programs requiring formal training and for professionals working with certain groups, such as youths with addiction and related disorders.
  - Programs intended for parents within the family context.
  - Programs requiring group sessions with other parents. These can be beneficial in forming a support group and in understanding what other parents are experiencing.
  - Programs that can be studied individually, using DVDs and print.
  - Programs based on different theoretical approaches.
- Non-evidence-based parenting programs vary tremendously in quality. Some advice may be outright harmful. For that reason, it is important to choose wisely. Look at the context of the program, check online reviews from reputable sources, and become an informed user.
- Seek guidance from people who, through their training and background, are knowledgeable and well informed—for instance, Certified Family Life Educators (CFLEs), Licensed Social Workers (LSWs), Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs), educators, and licensed psychologists.