

Parenting

IIE 366: Developmental
Psychology
Greg Francis
Lecture 33

Chapter 14: Family Relationships

Module 14.4 Maltreatment: Parent-Child Relationships Gone Awry



Children and Their Development, 4/e by Robert Kail

14.4 Maltreatment

Consequences of
Maltreatment

Causes of
Maltreatment

Preventing
Maltreatment



14.4 Consequences of Maltreatment

- When children are abused, their social, emotional, and intellectual development is often affected
 - Tend to have poor relationships with their peers
 - Too aggressive
 - Poor grades
 - Behavior problems
- As adults, children who were abused are more prone to depression and anxiety, are more likely to think about or attempt suicide, and are more likely to be abusers themselves
- Everything about development is affected and these effects do not disappear with time

14.4 Causes of Maltreatment

- There is no distinctive personality that indicates an abusive parent
- Cultural and social factors: cultural attitudes, poverty, social isolation
 - Physical punishment is prohibited in many countries
 - Often encouraged in the US
 - Countries that prohibit such activity have less child abuse
 - Poorer parents are more likely to use physical punishment
 - Socially isolated children are unable to get protection from other adults

14.4 Causes of Maltreatment

- Parental factors
 - ineffective parenting skills: inconsistent discipline, unrealistic expectations about what children can do, believe they are powerless to control children (blame other issues rather than their parenting style)
 - dysfunctional marriage
 - may have been maltreated themselves
- Child factors
 - very young: less able to regulate their behavior
 - ill children: more stress, more expense, more unpleasant behaviors
 - Stepchildren:

14.4 Preventing Maltreatment

- Change societal attitudes toward acceptable punishment
- Eliminating poverty and other stressors
- Providing parents with better parenting and coping skills and social support
- Early childhood intervention programs may help by encouraging parental involvement and providing support

Parental Style: Cause or Effect?

- A. Research often shows that authoritative parenting is associated with positive outcomes but that authoritarian parenting is associated with negative outcomes.
- B. Is parental style causing the outcome or do parents adopt a style based on children's behavior?

Longitudinal study

- Measure parental behavior early and see if it predicts children's behavior later.
- Ge & colleagues measured parental warmth & hostility by observing families in their homes (when children were in grades 7-9).
 - ♦ Then measured children's conduct problems (e.g., drinking alcohol, stealing) and depressive symptoms (e.g., feeling worthless, anxious, hopeless) in grade 10.
 - ♦ Compute correlation between variables

| | Mom's warmth | Mom's hostility | Dad's warmth | Dad's hostility |
|-----------------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Child's conduct disorder | -.09 | .28** | -.15* | .24** |
| Child's depressive symptoms | -.15* | .12* | -.16* | .10 |

Why Do Some Parents Parent Competently?

- The answer depends on a number of factors.
- Three illustrative studies show the range of issues to be considered.
 - ♦ Not exhaustive!

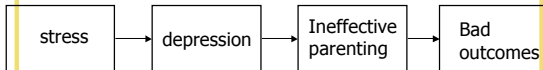
Conger et al. study

- Measured four key variables:
 - ♦ parental depression
 - » About 5% of people are depressed at any given moment in time
 - » Higher for adults than children
 - » Higher for people under stress
 - ♦ poor parenting (inconsistent discipline, use of harsh discipline)
 - ♦ parental stress (significant change in income, serious medical problem)
 - ♦ child's behavior problems (doing poorly in school, poor peer relations, conduct problems)
- Key question: How are these variables related to each other?

Results of Conger et al. study

One can use a statistical approach to identify how the variables relate to each other

Higher parental stress is associated with greater depression, which is associated with less effective parenting, which leads to less desirable outcomes for children.



Study by Wakschlag et al. (1996)

- Young mothers often depend on grandmothers to help with parenting
- Studied 96 multigenerational African-American families
 - mothers, 3-year-olds, grandmothers or grandmother figures.
- Observed mother-grandmother and mother-child interactions.
 - Videotaped while doing problem-solving tasks
 - Assessed quality of relationship by observing resolution of conflicts

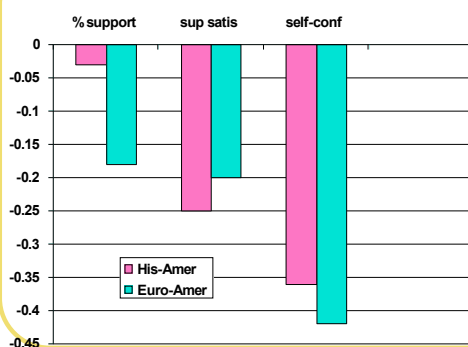
What predicted competent, authoritative parenting?

- "Individuation" in the mother-grandmother relationship
 - the mother's ease with conflict in the relationship
 - her ability to assert her separateness positively.
- Effects are strongest when grandmothers
 - lived elsewhere (not in the home)
 - were more educated
 - were biological grandmothers (not aunts, great-grandmothers, etc.)

MacPhee et al. study

- Studied 123 Hispanic-American and 244 European-American low-income families that included 2- to 5-year-old children.
- Measured
 - child-rearing practices
 - parents' confidence in their own parenting
 - characteristics of social networks including
 - » % providing emotional support
 - » parents' satisfaction with that support.

Correlations with Harsh Punishment



What Leads to Competent Parenting? Summarizing 3 Studies

- Conger et al: when parents do not have to cope with major external stresses (e.g., financial loss, illness)
- Wakschlag et al: when mothers were confident in their mother-grandmother relationships
- MacPhee et al: when parents were confident in their parenting skills

What Leads to Poor Parenting?

- There are some particular patterns of behavior that parents and children sometimes fall in to
- These can cause serious problems for a family
- Positive reinforcement trap
- Negative reinforcement trap
- Coercive process
- Tantrums
- Punishment

Positive reinforcement trap

- Parents often reinforce the very behaviors that they want reduce
- A child in a store wants a toy. The mother does not want to buy the toy, but the child begs and pleads and whines. The more tries to comfort and calm the child, but the child continues to fuss. The mother finally gives in.
 - The mother has just positively reinforced the begging, pleading, and whining of the child by
 - » First giving attention and comfort
 - » Second, giving a toy
 - The child is more likely to beg, plead and whine in the future

Positive reinforcement trap

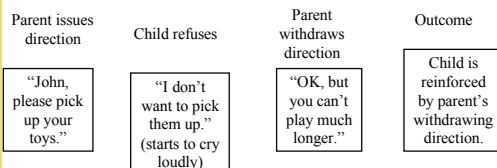
- Lots of activities lead to a positive reinforcement trap
- Repeatedly responding to a child's calls after her or she has gone to bed.
- Comforting a child when she has a tantrum.
- Giving attention to your child when he or she interrupts your conversation with another adult.
- Laughing at your child's inappropriate behavior.
- Giving your child candy in the grocery store when he starts crying.
- Letting your child sleep with you every night because he begs to do so.
- Giving your child a special dinner because she does not like what you are eating.

Negative reinforcement trap

- Parents change their behavior to avoid unpleasant behaviors from the child
 - Children learn that certain behaviors allow them to avoid things they do not want to do
- Letting a child skip his bath because he cries when you say "bath time."
- Telling a child to get out of the bathtub but, because she cries, letting her stay in longer.
- Letting your child leave an event because he begs not to stay and has a tantrum.
- Canceling the baby-sitter because your child cries when you tell her you are going out.
- Telling your child to sit quietly at the dinner table but, because he has a tantrum, letting him leave the table.

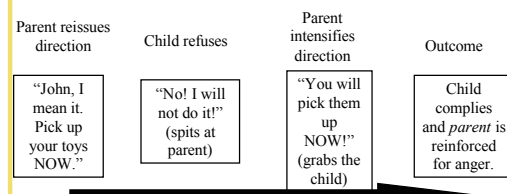
Coercive process

- Inappropriate efforts to gain control and "train" both the child and the parent
- Beginning



Coercive process

- Inappropriate efforts to gain control and "train" both the child and the parent
- Escalation



Coercive process

- The coercive process
- The behavior of *both* the child and the parent becomes more negative
- Very common for strong-willed children
- Parents usually feel that they have to choose but to dole out severe punishment to such children
 - Because the children do not listen

Tantrums

- Irrational fits
 - Screaming
 - Kicking
 - Crying
- Often lead to the negative reinforcement trap
 - To avoid embarrassment



Tantrums

- There are things a parent can do to manage a tantrum and reduce their frequency
- Don't punish the child.
- Don't reward the child.
- Stay calm and ignore the behavior to the extent possible.
- Keep the child safe.
- Isolate the child if possible.
- Don't let the disapproval of other people affect your response to the tantrum.

Punishment

- A big issue for many families is how to punish children for bad behavior
- There are many kinds of punishment
 - Spanking
 - Time-out
 - Reprimands
 - Removal of privileges
- Punishment by itself is rarely effective, and it has some risks
 - It teaches the child what *not* to do, but provides no direction about what the child *should* do
 - Punishments sometimes have to increase in severity to be effective. This can lead to child abuse.
 - Child may dislike or resent the parent and become aggressive.
 - Children can punish parents as well (revenge).
- Punishment *can* be effective if used as part of a bigger strategy



Effective Punishment

- Is preceded by a warning.
- Has a set beginning and end.
- Happens immediately.
- Occurs at maximum intensity (does not increase in intensity or duration for additional infractions).
- Is enforceable wherever your child is when the misbehavior occurs.
- Is delivered in a matter-of-fact tone.
- Is imposed every time that behavior occurs.
- Is always accompanied by acknowledgment of the appropriate behaviors he should be demonstrating.
- Physical punishment is never the only option.

Reinforcement traps

- How to break out of the reinforcement traps?
- One part is consistent discipline
- Threatening punishment and then not following through teaches a child that you are not serious
 - Often because parents exaggerate the threat (they never intend to follow-through)
- Talk about inappropriate and appropriate behaviors
- A second part is to reinforce *desired* behaviors
 - Thank a child for being well behaved in the grocery store (it doesn't matter that this should be the norm, the child is still learning what the norms are)
- Do *not* reinforce undesired behaviors
 - Do not buy the child a piece of candy just to keep them quiet

Reinforcement traps

- These are not simple rules to follow
- When a child cries to sleep with you
 - You must return the child to bed
 - Not comfort the child
- For several nights, this probably means that both you and the child will get very little sleep
 - But the child will learn that crying does not get the reward he or she desires
 - Eventually, the child learns to fall asleep by themselves

Finding the real problem

- Sometimes bad behavior is related to something else
- A child may be naughty at the dinner table
 - Fidgety
 - Play with food
 - Rude
 - Want to leave early
- This behavior may be only indirectly related to eating
 - Maybe child snacks during the day is not hungry at mealtime
 - Maybe dinner time is when the parents decide to criticize the child's academic work

Next time

- Influences outside the family