

ASPI Conference 2011

Your Competent Child

Respect-Based
Relationships

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The family as a system

"There is no such thing as an infant. There is only an infant and his mother."

Donald Winnicott, *The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship*

Parent-Child relationship

"So what does research suggest about parents' role? Overall, it suggests that parents' behavior and efforts are the most important, though not the only, influences regarding children's growth and competence."

Jane Brooks, *The Process of Parenting*

Family structure

„What matters most for children’s psychological well-being is not family type - it is the quality of family life.“

Susan Golombok, *Parenting: What really matters?*

Five reasons for focusing on relationships

1. Improved relationships within the family
2. Support of the parents, positive models
3. Improved relationships between the child and other adults - protective factor
4. Successful interventions
5. Improved relationships with peers

A) Relevant research on close relationships

“The study of insecure attachment, lost love, and failed relationships has produced significant findings that are relevant to our lives. Indeed, relationship researchers have been successful in uncovering what does not work and have attempted to teach people how to correct their relationship problems.

Nevertheless, most would agree that we all struggle with identifying the right things to do in relationships.“

C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez, *Positive Psychology*

Troubled marriages

Criticize, blame, being angry, responding with even greater anger and criticism to anger and criticism

versus

Show affection, agree, give approval

Upbringing

"We believe most of what we traditionally understand by the term upbringing is both superfluous and directly harmful. Not only is it unhealthy for children, but it also hinders adults, precluding their growth and development. Furthermore, it has a destructive influence on the quality of relationships between children and adults."

Jesper Juul, *Your Competent Child*

Secure attachment style

- sensitivity
- prompt responsiveness to distress
- moderate, appropriate stimulation
- interactional synchrony
- warmth
- involvement

Insecure attachment styles

- intrusive, excessively stimulating, controlling interaction style
- unresponsive, under-involved approach to care-giving

Authoritative parenting style

The parents exert firm control over the child's behavior but emphasize the independence and individuality in the child. They have a clear notion of present and future standards of behavior for the child, but still they are rational, flexible, and attentive to the needs and preferences of the child. The parental influence on the child's behavior happens rather through negotiation than punishment and exertion of power.

Outcome: These children become self-reliant and self-confident and explore their worlds with excitement and pleasure. They are also more likely to be self-controlled, responsible and co-operating.

Authoritarian parenting style

The parents exert firm control in an arbitrary, power-oriented way without regard for the child's individuality. The emphasis is on control without nurturance or support to achieve it.

Outcome: These children become relatively unhappy, withdrawn, inhibited, and distrustful. They often are considered socially incompetent. Repeating disapproval and insult also lead to low self-esteem.

Permissive parenting style

The parents set few limits on the child. They accept the child's impulses, granting as much freedom as possible while still maintaining safety. They love their children, but make few demands of them.

Outcome: These children become least independent and self-controlled. They seem to be immature, aimless, and uninterested in achievement.

Dialogue 1

Child: I don't want to go to bed now.

Respectful Dad: I want you to go to bed now.

Disrespectful Dad: Now be a good boy, and do as I say.

Or: Now that's enough! You go to bed when you're told to, and that's final!

Dialogue 2

Child: I don't like onion.

Respectful Dad: Aha! I like onion. I think you ought to try it.

Disrespectful Dad: Now don't be silly! You usually like onion.

Or: Now don't you be so fussy! You eat what's on your plate just like the rest of us.

Dialogue 3

Child: Daddy, I'm freezing!

Respectful Dad: Are you? I'm just fine. Well, let's see about getting you something else to put on.

Disrespectful Dad: Don't be silly. It's not cold at all. Just look at me. I've only a T-shirt on like you.

Dialogue 4

Child: Mom, I don't like my new English teacher.

Respectful Mom: Oh, that surprises me. She seems nice to me. What is it you don't like about her?

Disrespectful Mom: What's the matter now? I suppose she's insisting that you hand in your work on time.

B) Relational competence

1. Responsibility
2. Equal dignity
3. Authenticity
4. Dialogue

Responsibility

In loving relationships between two equal adults, both have equal responsibility for the quality of their interactions. It is always unethical to blame the other for what is unsatisfying.

In relationships between adults and children, the adults have the complete responsibility.

Responsibility in adult-child relationships

"It is a psychological fact that the adults in a family are solely responsible for establishing the quality of this ethos or tone. They can neither delegate this responsibility to their children nor share it with them. Children simply cannot handle this particular responsibility. They need the parents to take the lead."

Jesper Juul, *Your Competent Child*

Equal dignity

"I propose a new paradigm: Children's behavior, whether cooperative or disruptive, is just as important for the development and health of the parents as the behavior of parents is for the development and health of the children. The interaction between adults and children is a mutual learning process. The more we treat each other with equal dignity, the more we each gain."

Jesper Juul, *Your Competent Child*

Authenticity

- Transparency - show who we are
- No identification with a social role
- No theatre
- No „automatic parental answering machine“
- Personal language - I-Messages

Dialogue

"The quality of the conversation is more important for the family's wellbeing than its result."

Jesper Juul, *Your Competent Child*

Example dialogue

Casper: "Can I sleep over at Fredric's?"

Father: "No, Casper. You can't. We also want to meet you, now and then."

Father instead: "I don't think so. Is it important?"

Invitations

"I don't think that I understand... Can you try to explain a little bit more?"

"I'd like to hear why this is so important to you."

"It is difficult for me to understand that someone wants... I am really curious about it..."

"I don't know what to think about this. Please help me. Tell me why you're so much into it..."

C) Your Competent Child

"Perhaps it is the infant that learns his mother to «mother» in the very beginning of the parenthood. Perhaps it is the competent child that shows the way and triggers the answers from its close ones. Perhaps we only need to be open, intimate, emotional sensitive, and ready to attune to the child to learn being parents during the first year..."

Your Competent Child 2

"...If this is the case, we must consider the child as an individual that is intentional in his behavior, equipped with tools for communication from the beginning, and that has its ways to influence his situation and his relations."

Margareta Berg Brodén, *Mor och Barn i ingenmansland*

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"When I say that children are competent, I mean that they are in a position to teach us what we need to learn. They give us the feedback that makes it possible for us to regain our own lost competence and help us to discard our unfruitful, unloving, and self-destructive patterns of behavior."

Jesper Juul, *Your Competent Child*

Thank you!

For further information:

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