

Children's Development and Family Disruption

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Child Development

Themes of Child Development

- Nature and Nurture
- Activity level of child
- Continuity/ Discontinuity (Stages)
- Mechanisms of change
- Sociocultural context
- Individual Differences

Neural Development⁸

- Neurons = Brain cells
- Process of development
 - Myelination
 - Insulates brain cells
 - Increase efficiency
 - Neural Networking
 - Connections form with experience
 - Neural networks form
 - Pruning
 - Connections strengthened by repetition or, if not strengthened, pruned

Developmental Schedules of the Nervous System

Emotional and social growth
Physical and motor development
Language development
Cognitive skills
Receptivity to learning

Definition of Attachment

Attachment is the reciprocal, enduring relationship between adult and child resulting in mutual satisfaction.

Four Types of Attachment

- 1. Secure**
Sensitive, warm, responsive, neither intrusive nor abusive
- 2. Insecure/Ambivalent**
Inconsistent, intrusive, care giver's response meets his/her own needs

Four Types of Attachment (continued)

- 3. Insecure/Avoidant**
Slow to respond, little physical contact
- 4. Disorganized**
Confused, disoriented, unpredictable, abusive

Attachment, Regulation Theory, and Brain Function

Left brain is the Rational Brain.

Right brain is the Emotional Brain.

Optimal social and emotional child development requires expansion of the right brain.

Emotion

- Is the way information, particularly about interpersonal relations, is received and transmitted in the right brain.
- Trauma or disruption in relationships impairs the development of right brain.
- Positive attachment creates permanent connections in developing neuronal network.

Sources of Interference in Attachment

- Neglect
- Abuse
- Institutionalization
- Illness, chronic pain
- Death of a parent
- Birth of a sibling
- Inadequate child care
- Frequent moves or placements

Interference in Attachment

- Occurs on a continuum
- Severity depends on:
 - pervasiveness
 - intensity
 - duration
 - frequency
- Neglected children *internalize*
- Abused children *externalize*

Caveats to Attachment Data¹⁵

- Children can form multiple attachments
- Data are based on group information not individual
- Attachment is only one construct to consider
- Temperamental flexibility and resilience to stress of the child are important.
- Attachment is not stable over lifetime.

Temperament

Emotional reactivity

Temperament types:

- Flexible
- Feisty
- Fearful

Role in adjustment

Emotional and Social Stages of Social Development

AGE	ERIKSON
0-1	Trust
1-3	Autonomy
3-6	Initiative
6-12	Industry
12+	Identity

**Toddlers and Preschoolers:
One to Six Years of Age**

- Seek to gain autonomy
- Move from parallel play to cooperative play
- Begin to show interest in initiating their own activities
- Master early separation from their parents

School-Age Children

- Enter into competitive world
- Seek peers
- Work to achieve goals
- Experience real-life anxieties and fears
- Develop ethnic identity

**Sources of Self-Esteem for
School-Age Children**

- Academic Ability
- Social Acceptance
- Athletic Competence
- Physical Appearance
- Behavior

Needs of Children³

- Parental affection, protection, and guidance
- Feeling valued and cared for by parents
- Appropriate limit setting
- Value system that accommodates self interest to social realities
- Parental acceptance as a unique child
- Physical care responsive to the child's needs
- Parental involvement that meets the child's emotional needs

Needs of Children (cont.)

- Parents
 - who are suitable models for identification
 - who will exercise proper amount of control
 - who enforce rules
 - who differentiate child's needs and feelings from their own
 - who model handling of stress and anxiety

Parental Capacities⁶

- Capacity to care
- Capacity to protect
- Capacity for change

Parenting Tasks⁶

- Provide nurturance and physical care
- Train basic self-care in weaning, toileting, provision of solid foods
- Teach language, perceptual skills, physical skills, self-care skills for care and safety
- Provide a safe home environment

Parenting Tasks (cont.)

- Orient child to family, neighborhood, community, society and child's own feelings
- Transmit cultural goals and values
- Motivate child to accept goals
- Promote interpersonal skills, motives and modes of feeling and behaving with others
- Guide child to formulate own goals and activities

Effects of Family Disruption

Divorce Statistics

- 50% of all marriages end in divorce
- 1,000,000 children a year are affected
- >50% of children are 6 or younger
- 75% of these children are <3 years old
- 1/3 of children under 2 spend separate overnights with each parent

Effects of High Conflict Divorce

<u>STAGE</u>	<u>DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS</u>	<u>IMPACT ON DEVELOPMENT</u>
Infancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attachment • Trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attachment disorder • Poor self-regulation • Maladaptive attachment
Toddler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separation anxiety • Disruption of separation/individuation

Effects of High Conflict Divorce

<u>STAGE</u>	<u>DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS</u>	<u>IMPACT ON DEVELOPMENT</u>
Preschool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues with guilt, failure and punishment • Poor peer relations, gender identity disrupted
School-age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Splitting of self and parents • Low self-esteem • Poor achievement

Effects of High Conflict Divorce

<u>STAGE</u>	<u>DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS</u>	<u>IMPACT ON DEVELOPMENT</u>
Adolescence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identity confusion• Depressed/withdrawn or acting out behaviors
Young Adult	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intimacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adolescence protracted• Lower rate of marriage• Higher divorce rate• Passivity

Effects of High Conflict Divorce

<u>STAGE</u>	<u>DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS</u>	<u>IMPACT ON DEVELOPMENT</u>
Adult	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Generativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decision not to have children• Less protective of their own children if divorced• Less care of aging parents

Stressors of Divorce for Children¹⁰

- Lack of information about separation
- Parent conflict
- Diminished parenting
- Loss of relationships
- Economic change
- Step-parenting, blended families

Predictors of Child Adjustment^{2,10}

- Age—mixed research results
- Sex—boys, maybe
- Predivorce Adjustment
- Parental Conflict—intensity and severity
- Temperament
- Relationship with Parents

Protective Factors for Children¹⁰

- Competent custodial parent
- Active involvement of nonresident parent
- Diminished conflict

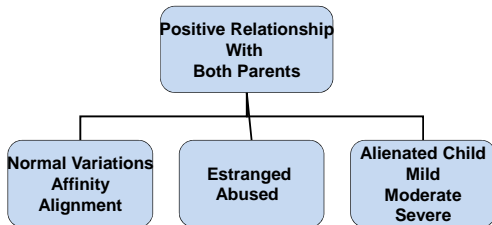
General Reactions of Children to Divorce

- Preschool
 - Anxiety
 - Regression
- School Age
 - Sadness
 - Poor school performance

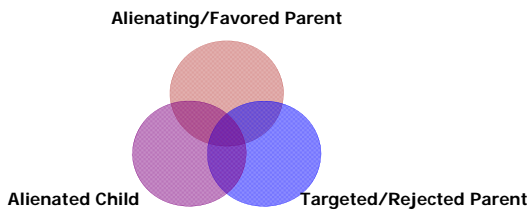
Special Issues of Divorce

- Children who resist contact—
Parental Alienation
- Intimate Partner Violence
- Relocation
- Substance Abuse
- Children with Special Needs
Illness, Autism, Developmental Delays

Children Who Resist Contact (Alienated Child)



Three Components



Developmental Reasons for Not Visiting⁵

- Ages 2 – 3
- Separation Anxiety
- Preschool
- Way not to choose
- School age
- Expressing anger
- Adolescence
- Rebellion

More Reasons for a Child's Refusal to Visit

- Fear of conflict at transition
- Resistance to parenting style
- Need to care for fragile parent
- Remarriage and stepfamilies
- Financial differential between homes

Relocation

Reasons for Relocation

- To take a better job
- To accompany a new spouse
- To move closer to family support
- To escape conflict and violence
- To deprive noncustodial parent of access

Issues for Children in Relocation

- Inability to form attachment with non-residential parent
- Inability to maintain relationship with non-residential parent
- Change as stress
- Commuting away from normal activities
- Angry parents

Parenting Plans

Legal Custody
Physical Custody

**Parent Characteristics
Promoting Joint Custody⁹**

- Empathic
- Good boundaries
- Less self-oriented
- More child focused
- Perception of parental competence
- Good adjustment of parents

**Negative Predictors of Joint
Physical Custody**

- Substance abuse
- Severe mental illness
- Some physical illness
- Coordination not possible between parents
- Discipline varies dramatically
- Intimate partner violence

Reasons for Joint Custody¹²

- Greater cooperation
Can they maintain a business-like relationship about the children?
- Greater communication about children
Can they communicate without hostility?
- Encourage real-life relationships between parents and children

Developmental Considerations

- Young children require cooperation
- Overnights do not harm young children
- Adolescents in joint custody have better adjustment
- Quality of time more important than amount of time

Pros and Cons of Infant Placement

Mother Placement Only

- Overnights cause disorganized attachment.¹⁶
- Infant needs a well-functioning adult during 1st year.¹⁴
- Attachment is the origin of emotional well-being.¹³

Father Access

- Relates to quantity and quality of early fathering behavior.¹
- Relates to greater father sensitivity later.¹
- Relates to fewer later adjustment problems.⁴

**Parenting Considerations in Plans
for Young Children¹¹**

- Attachment
 - Measurement problems
 - Meaning of term
- Access and Relationship
 - The Friendly Parent
 - Relocation
- Availability
 - Emotional
 - Physical

**Parenting Considerations
(continued)**

- Child's Temperament
 - Easy-going
- Stability
 - Emotional
 - Physical
- Level of Conflict
 - Transitions
 - Interventions

Optional Access Plans for Children

- Infancy
 - Low Conflict
 - Frequent contact, daily
 - 6 weeks-3 months, overnights
 - High Conflict
 - Contact at Day Care
 - Education of parents

Optional Access Plans for Children

- **Toddlers (1-2 years of age)**
 - Low conflict**
 - Child changes every two days
 - Parents agree on schedules
 - Child tolerates change
 - High conflict**
 - Frequent parent visits
 - One overnight per week

Optional Access Plans for Children

- **Preschool**
 - Low Conflict**
 - Rotating 2-2-3
 - With older sibling 2-2-5
 - High Conflict**
 - Same schedules if transitions are safe

Optional Access Plans for Children

- **School Age Children**
 - 2-2-5 rotating schedule
 - 7-7
 - 9-5
 - 10-4
 - 12-2

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