Children’s Development and Family Disruption

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Forensic Psychiatry Service

Goals

- Develop multidisciplinary team
- Train students in ethical and procedural considerations
- Offer relatively low cost evaluations for legal purposes

Types of Cases

- Child Custody Evaluations
- Collaborative Child Abuse and Custody Evaluations
- Parental Competency Evaluations
- Psychiatric/Psychological Evaluations
- Personal Injury Cases
Child Development

Needs of Children

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

Needs of Children (cont.)

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

- 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

Themes of Child Development

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

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

Four Types of Attachment

1. Secure Attachment
   Sensitive, warm, responsive, not intrusive and not abusive

2. Insecure/ambivalent
   Inconsistent, intrusive, parent’s response meets their own needs, not child’s

Four Types of Attachment (continued)

3. Insecure/avoidant
   Slow to respond, little physical contact

4. Disorganized attachment
   Confused, disoriented, unpredictable
Sources of Interference

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

Results of Interference

- Occurs on a continuum
- Based on pervasiveness, intensity and duration
- Frequency of interruptions
- Neglected children internalize
- Abused children externalize

Temperament

- Emotional Reactivity
- Thomas, Chess and Birch (1963)
- Flexible, feisty, and fearful
- Role in adjustment
Stages of Social Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FREUD</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>ERIKSON</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anal</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phallic</td>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latency Stage</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genital Stage</td>
<td>12+</td>
<td>Identity</td>
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School-Age Children

- Entrance into competitive world
- Importance of peers and achieving goals
- Real-life anxieties and fears
- Ethnic identity development

Sources of Self-Esteem for School-Age Children

- Academic Success
- Social Acceptance
- Athletic Competence
- Physical Appearance
- Behavior
Effects of Family Disruption

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

High Conflict Divorce

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Task</th>
<th>Impact on Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infancy Trust Attachment</td>
<td>Inconsistent availability of caregiver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toddler Autonomy</td>
<td>Poor self-regulation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maladaptive attachment</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Separation anxiety</td>
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<td>Disruption of separation/individuation</td>
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### High Conflict Divorce

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<th>Developmental Task</th>
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</table>
| Preschool Initiative | - Issues with guilt, failure and punishment  
                       - Poor peer relations, gender identity disrupted |
| School-age Industry | - Splitting of self and parents  
                       - Low self-esteem  
                       - Poor achievement |

### High Conflict Divorce

<table>
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| Adolescence Identity | - Identity confusion  
                       - Depressed/withdrawn or acting out behaviors |

### High Conflict Divorce

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| Young Adult Intimacy | - Adolescence protracted  
                       - Lower rate of marriage  
                       - Higher divorce rate  
                       - Passivity |
| Adult Generativity | - Decision not to have children  
                       - Less protective of children if divorced  
                       - Less care of aging parents |
Stressors of Divorce

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

Predictors of Adjustment

- Age
- Sex
- Predivorce Adaptation
- Parental Conflict
- Temperament
- Relationship with Parents

Protective Factors for Children

- 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

- Alienation
- Domestic Violence
- Relocation
- Substance Abuse
- Children with Special Needs

Alienated Child

- Positive Relationship With Both Parents
- Normal Variations Affinity Alignment
- Estranged Abused
- Alienated Child Mild Moderate Severe
Relocation Considerations ¹
1. Geographical Distance
2. Psychological Stability of the Relocating Parent
3. Individual Resources and Child Temperament
4. Age of the Child

Relocation Considerations (cont.)
5. Involvement by the Nonresidential Parent
6. Gatekeeping
7. Interparental Conflict and Domestic Violence
8. Recentness of Marital Separation

Parenting Plans
Studies on Young Children and Effects of Divorce

- Solomon & Biringen (2001)
  Infants with overnight visitation had more disorganized attachments
- Clarke-Stewart, et al. (2002)
  No effect of divorce on young children
  Older children (4-6) benefit from overnights

Positions on Overnights for Young Children

- Solomon & Biringen (2001)
- Lamb and Kelly (2001)
- Warshak (2000)

Parenting Considerations in Plans for Young Children

- Attachment
  - Measurement problems
  - Meaning of term
- Access and Relationship
  - The Friendly Parent
  - Relocation
- Availability
  - Emotional
  - Physical
Parenting Considerations (continued)

• Stability
  – Emotional
  – Physical
• Level of Conflict
  – Transitions
  – Interventions

Criteria for Infant Overnights

1. Attachment
2. Predivorce Distribution of Parenting Time
3. Child’s Temperament
4. Level of Parental Conflict
5. Parental Communication
6. Primary Parent’s Separation Anxiety and Lack of Trust

Criteria for Infant Overnights (cont.)

7. Parent’s Ability to Follow a Consistent Schedule
8. Gender of the Child
9. Parental Involvement
10. Age of the Child
11. Warmth of the Non-Primary Parent
Criteria for Infant Overnights
(cont.)

12. Special Needs of the Breastfeeding Infant
13. Sibling Relationships

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

- Toddlers
  - 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 safe

Optional Access Plans for Children

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

Bibliography


