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 Development

- 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
    - 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 Data\textsuperscript{15}

- 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

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
AGE & ERIKSON \\
\hline
0-1 & Trust \\
1-3 & Autonomy \\
3-6 & Initiative \\
6-12 & Industry \\
12+ & Identity \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
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 Children\(^3\)
- 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 Capacities\(^6\)
- Capacity to care
- Capacity to protect
- Capacity for change
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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE</th>
<th>DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS</th>
<th>IMPACT ON DEVELOPMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infancy</td>
<td>Attachment, Trust</td>
<td>Attachment disorder, Poor self-regulation, Maladaptive attachment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toddler</td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Separation anxiety, Disruption of separation/individuation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td>Issues with guilt, failure and punishment, Poor peer relations, gender identity disrupted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-age</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>Splitting of self and parents, Low self-esteem, Poor achievement</td>
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<td>Adolescence</td>
<td>• Identity</td>
<td>• Identity confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Depressed/withdrawn or acting out behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Adult</td>
<td>• Intimacy</td>
<td>• Adolescence protracted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Lower rate of marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Higher divorce rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Passivity</td>
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<td>Adult</td>
<td>• Generativity</td>
<td>• Decision not to have children</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Less protective of their own children if divorced</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Less care of aging parents</td>
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### Stressors of Divorce for Children

- 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 Children$^{10}$

- 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)

- Positive Relationship With Both Parents
- Normal Variations: Affinity, Alignment
- Estranged Abused
- Alienated Child: Mild, Moderate, Severe

Three Components

- Alienating/Favored Parent
- Alienated Child
- Targeted/Rejected Parent
### Developmental Reasons for Not Visiting

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

• 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 Custody\textsuperscript{12}

- 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother Placement Only</th>
<th>Father Access</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Overnights cause disorganized attachment.\textsuperscript{16}</td>
<td>- Relates to quantity and quality of early fathering behavior.\textsuperscript{1}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Infant needs a well-functioning adult during 1\textsuperscript{st} year.\textsuperscript{14}</td>
<td>- Relates to greater father sensitivity later.\textsuperscript{1}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Attachment is the origin of emotional well-being.\textsuperscript{13}</td>
<td>- Relates to fewer later adjustment problems.\textsuperscript{4}</td>
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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)

- 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
References


References (cont.)


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