

PSYCHOLOGY FOR EVERY-DAY LIVING

A NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

HINTS ON THE CHOICE OF A LIFE PARTNER.
HOW TO STOP THUMB SUCKING
HOW WORKING WOMEN CAN COPE WITH STRESSES
HOW TO MANAGE ANXIETY
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HOW TO BE HAPPY IN MARRIAGE
HOW PARENT CAN BE MORE SUCCESSFUL IN TRAINING
CHILDREN.
PRINCIPLES IN THE LEARNING OF MATHEMATICS.

Vol. I; No. 1

August, 1982

HOW PARENTS CAN BE MORE SUCCESSFUL IN TRAINING CHILDREN

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If one evaluates the social influences upon the development of individuals, one may not likely find any other with greater influence, than the family. The family, as a social unit, is usually recognized for its importance, in many roles. The psychological role of parents within the family needs to be understood by parents. Parents, in the family, cater and provide for children during the early years of development, a segment of many other roles to be performed. The methods of child rearing and the possible consequences for later adjustment, have been the focus of some researchers. There is also a growing evidence in psychiatry, that the quality of the parental care which a child receives in his earliest years, is of vital importance for the child's future mental health.

Possible questions we may ask ourselves are:

- (i) Do we as parents, provide positive experiences for our children during the early years of their development?
- (ii) Do we as parents, play the expected role in the normal development of our children?
- (iii) Do we as parents provide adequate support system to our children in later years?
- (iv) Is there healthy interaction among family members?

Parents, at the initial stage are important resources from which children build up patterns of behaviour prior to schooling. Children will form their first impression of family living in their homes. Parents, thus, have a paramount role to play in children's behaviour and usually play an important role, in the social, emotional, intellectual and personality development of their children.

Child Rearing Practices and changing conceptions. -

Around 300 B.C., Plato felt that many parents had succumbed to moral decadence of Athenian society and therefore, were unfit to raise children. Plato decided that all children would have to be separated from their parents early in life, with the state taking control of child rearing and education.

During the Dark Ages, parents were told that the mis-behaviour of their children was due to innate wickedness. The Bible was the basis for

all discussion on behaviour and development. Religious leaders called the attention of their congregations to Biblical verses such as Proverbs 13:24, Proverbs 22:15 and Proverbs 29:15. The goal was to enforce discipline. To spare the rod was to spoil the child.

From 1200 to 1700, the conception of childhood, changed from wickedness to innocence. By the beginning of the 17th century, the childhood stage which was previously considered to be of little or no significance was recognized as an important and separate stage of life. With this new conception, coupled with the enlightened Renaissance, the innocence of children was furthermore emphasized. Clergymen then began to emphasize Biblical verses such as Mathew 18:3, Mark 10:14 and Proverbs 22:6, stressing the innocence of children.

John Locke (1632 - 1704) urged parents to encourage curiosity of children, and to encourage praise and commendation instead of punishment. The revival of the inherent wickedness in children was renewed by Jonathan Edwards but Rousseau was quick to stress again, the inherent goodness in children. Others who had contributed to philosophical conception of child rearing practices from 1900 to the present include, Watson, Huxley, Gexell, Ilg and Ames, Skinner, Maslow, Neil, McConnell, Hawkins and Mc Intire to mention a few.

The Nigerian Traditional Child-Rearing Methods.

The traditional child-rearing method in the Nigerian society seems to be in line with the idea of "not sparing the rod on the child". Traditionally (and to some extent today) questioning by children, in some families, is not encouraged by some parents. Frequent questioning by children is sometimes regarded as bad manners. Fafunwa (1967) remarked that the average African parent believes that the child is to be seen, not heard, an approach which he asserted, stifles the child's curiosity and at the same time impedes the development of the child's reasoning. The Nigerian society of today, appears more complex compared to the traditional society. More parents are becoming educated, pre-school institutions which seem not to be in existence some years back, are now common in big cities. These institutions play some roles in child rearing. Other trends in the Nigerian society, today, some of which are economic, technological and political, to mention a few, seem to have their own implications on child rearing practices. In Nigeria today, there are more working mothers, there is the influence of mass media on children and the conscious efforts by governments to make the public more aware of

the needs of children, such as the International Year of the child. Various alternatives are also being suggested as to how parents can be more successful, in bringing up their children.

From other researches on children based on unbiased observation in naturalistic (real life settings) or under standardized (controlled) conditions, utilizing both, idiographic and nomothetic approaches, more scientific information have been made available.

The importance of mother and child relationship among other things was stressed.

Ribble (1945) for example, suggested that the way in which the mother handles the child in the nursing period determines whether the child will become hyperactive or inactive. Ribble further asserted that painful tension states develop readily in babies who do not have appropriate and consistent psychological mothering. Disturbance in the mother-child relationship was also observed to frequently lead to exaggerated forms of autoerotism, such as prolonged thumbsucking, retaining of stools, breath holding and a variety of automatic movements which interfere with the development of the individual. Warm mother and child relationship in the first year, is believed, to protect the child from many psychological disturbances. Maternal deprivation, partial or complete, has been observed in other studies, to have negative effect on the child. Warm, intimate and continuous relationship of child with mother or mother substitute is thus regarded as essential.

Bowlby (1951) had also observed that a child separated from his mother, goes through three phases which are :

1. The protest phase
2. Despair phase and
3. Detachment phase.

Damage due to deprivation, however, was observed to depend on

1. Age at which it begins
2. How long the deprivation persists and
3. The kind of substitute care provided.

Overprotection itself, is regarded by researchers as an unfavourable mother-child relationship. Levy (1942) noted that overprotective mothers are either indulgent (rarely impose disciplinary actions) or are domineering with the resultant effect that children of overprotective mothers remain infantile in their demands and expectations while children of the domineering mothers show a less conspicuous lack of character growth

but exhibit signs of neurosis such as shyness, fear, anxiety and are excessively submissive in behaviour.

The Role of the Father in Child Development.

The influence of the father in the family is of equal importance. The attitude of the father towards the mother has been observed to have an indirect effect on the child, during the nursing period. When the father provides love and companionship, the mother will be supported emotionally. The father image is also of importance in child rearing. The nature of the relationship between the father and the mother can lead to positive or negative experiences for the child. When the relationship is cordial, the experiences are more likely to be positive. The complex relationship of the child with the mother, father and siblings in the family affects the development of character and mental health.

Positive Activities to be Encouraged.

Parents can engage their children in various activities that can provide the children with rich experiences. The man's responsibility, needs to go beyond the mere provision of financial support to the family. Playing with children, reading with children, taking them out to explore, arranging visits to places of interests, teaching skills, helping them with tasks in the home, are ways parents may get positively involved with children.

The patience, in answering children's questions, may lead to initiative while treating questions as nuisance may lead to guilt. Parents can modify children's behaviour by reinforcing desired actions while undesirable ones are ignored. Some knowledge of child development would also be helpful.

Sources of tensions in the family

Arrival of more children in the family in some cases, may lead to tensions in the family. Even though these children are wanted, tension may arise from role assignment between the parents especially in young couples, with reference to caring for the children. Sickness in the family, such as children being sick from development problems of teething, or the beginning of school and sometimes association with "unwanted" peers are issues that could make parents feel tensed. These issues could be maturely resolved through effective communication and understanding.

Parental Involvement in Individual Decision Making

Some years back in our society and to some extent today, it could be reasonably assumed that the family and parents in particular, do in-

fluence the decisions to be made or being made by individuals within the family. For example, the choice of marital partner was previously the prerogative of the parents in some cultures. This task seems no longer, to be monopolized by parents as different marriage patterns and courtship styles have evolved. Nevertheless, parents still carry out some pre-marital advice today. Parents are also, sometimes involved in the marital relationship of their children. However, parental involvement in marital conflicts of children can have both positive and negative effects on the relationship of the couples depending on the intervention strategies employed by the parents. The extent of the influence exerted on each family member may depend on

- (i) The issue on hand
- (ii) The sex and age of the individual concerned and
- (iii) The birth-order of the individual in the family.

Some parents seem to be concerned with virtually every issue that confronts their children. However, it may be unhealthy to be overly concerned. Every one has his life to live. Parents sometimes generally tend to be less strict with boys compared to girls especially at the adolescent stage. The choice of friends and the frequency of outings are some of the issues of concern. However, with age and as the young adults attain maturity, lesser parental control is exerted, as age is usually regarded as an indication of maturity.

Parents involvement may also depend on the birth-order of the individual in the family. The eldest in the family is usually expected to show responsibility while phrases such as, "show good example", "Your brothers and sisters are watching you", are not uncommon. Parents, solely provide cues for appropriate behaviour in children prior to schooling. During the school years, peers seem to share in this parental role. The Adolescence is another stage of development that needs to be understood by parents. The young adult asserts himself, and tries to make individual decision. Caution may need to be exercised here in forcing conformity with parental wishes, as this may lead to antagonistic feelings or rebellion while some young adults could even take extreme negative steps out of frustration with serious consequences for the young adult and his parents. The importance of dialogue as this stage appears important.

The Cyclic mode of Authority in the Family

Parents, during the early years of development, exercise authority over the children. When the individual begins to mature, the authority or control by parents starts being questioned and with aging, parents tend to relax their authority more easily on issues that previously may not be overlooked. The outspoken parents now seem to accept readily or with few objections, the suggestions and thinking of their children.

In old age, the authority rests more or less, with the children who are now themselves, adults. The aging parents need our understanding and undue pressures from their children may not be helpful to them in coping with the many problems of aging.

Parenting Skills:

Suggestion of necessary skills for Parenting by Carlson and Faiber (1976) include:

- 1) Understanding Human Behaviour
- 2) The Healthy Individual
- 3) Understanding Human Personality Development
- 4) Encouragement
- 5) Logical and Natural Consequences.
- 6) Communication and
- 7) Family Council

The arguement for understanding human behaviour is to make parents understand why children behave as they do. Children, usually, behave in similar ways but for different reasons.

Most parents sometimes emphasize what they do not want their children to do (such as don't smoke, don't drink etc) but with little emphasis on the appropriate behaviours the children should acquire. Dewey (1971) enumerated the following as characteristics of the healthy individual:

- 1) Respect for the rights of others
- 2) Tolerant of others
- 3) Interested in others
- 4) Cooperate with others
- 5) Encourages others
- 6) Is courageous
- 7) Having a sense of one's worth
- 8) Has a feeling of belonging

- 9) Has socially acceptable goals
- 10) Put forth genuine effort
- 11) Meets the needs of the situation
- 12) Is willing to share rather being concerned with
 "How much can I get?" and
- 13) Thinks of "We" rather than just "I"

Parents may need to realize that life-style or personality of the individual evolves from a combination of family atmosphere and values, sex roles, family constellation (birth order) and methods of childrearing. Hence, positive experiences should be provided at appropriate times.

Encouragement of children by parents can make the children build positive self - concept and feelings of worth. Parents may need to address their children more with phrases that show faith in them. Parent's phrases should also demonstrate acceptance, focus on the children's assets and recognize the children's efforts and improvement. Carlson and Faiber (1976) observed that natural consequences (the disciplines or laws of natural world) are excellent devices as they allow the child to learn from the natural order of events. For example, if a child touches a hot object she gets burned. Logical consequences are to be used when there are no natural consequences or when danger is too great. Logical consequences are such that are logically related to the misbehaviour of the child, and these are in form of corrective measures.

Improved communication between parents and children is an essential skill in healthy relationship. Gordon (1975) observed that nine out of ten parents conservatively miscommunicate or communicate in destructive ways, to both children and youths.

Through regularly scheduled meetings, family council can also deal with all family business. The family council has been observed to encourage expression of feelings, increase honest sharing and provides opportunity for members to air their views. As parents have paramount influence on children's behaviour, they need to learn and understand appropriate and effective procedures for raising responsible children in today's complex society of ours.

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