Child, Family, and Community

Rebecca Laff, Cindy Stephens, and Wendy Ruiz

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Authored and compiled by Rebecca Laff, Cindy Stephens, and Wendy Ruiz

Peer Reviewed by Jennifer Paris

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CHAPTER 1: THEORIES THAT HELP US WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH FAMILIES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe how theories connect us to families
- Explain how theories provide a foundation for our work with families
- Identify how we connect with families through the application of theory
- Apply the Bio-Ecological Theory and the Family Systems Theory to our work with children and families

THEORIES DEVELOPED FOR IDENTIFYING FAMILY DYNAMICS

Over the years, researchers have developed theories that provide us with the context in which to work effectively with the families that we serve in an early childhood setting. These theories have been developed by researchers with a variety of areas of emphasis, from family therapists to gerontologists to child development specialists. They provide Social Scientists with a foundation of how to best work with families in various settings.

In this chapter, we will provide more context of two theories: Bio ecological Systems Theory and Family Systems Theory. While there are many other theories that can provide us with information about the structure and personality of families, these two specific theories are best suited in our work as early childhood professionals.

Bio-Ecological Systems Theory

The Bio-Ecological Systems theory is a core theory used by early childhood professionals to help explain influences on children and their families. Urie Bronfenbrenner developed this theory to explain the various influences that a child meets in their environment. The various parts of their environment include the “settings” or the “ecologies” that surround the child (ex. Family, peers, schools, communities, sociocultural belief systems, policies, economy, events that happen over time) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

The model is able to account for multiple face-to-face environments, or settings, within the

microsystem of a person (for example, family, school, peers); how relations between settings (mesosystem) can affect what happens within them (for example, interactions between school and family); and how settings within which the individuals have no direct presence (exo- and macrosystem) can affect settings in their microsystems (for example, how parents' experiences at their workplace affect their relationships within the family) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Thus, this model allows the analysis of the lives of people, "living organisms whose bio psychological characteristics, both as a species and as individuals, have as much to do with their development as do the environments in which they live their lives" (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p. 8).[1]

The diagram below shows the bi-directional nature in which these systems influence each other. That means that each system influences another system. While this may seem a bit complicated, let us use the example below as a way to tease out what this means and how this may help us to support the families that we will serve in early childhood programs.

Taylor was born in Korea and adopted by two men who have been married for 5 years. They have a stable relationship and have always dreamed of becoming parents. They decided to pursue international adoption because they have friends who adopted from Korea and they felt that this option was a wonderful way to start a family.

Taylor came home at 3 months old. While she was waiting to join her forever family, a Foster Family in Korea cared for her. While they wanted to go to Korea to pick her up, the policy of the adoption agency they used, was for someone to bring the child to the adoptive family. They waited eagerly at the airport for Taylor's arrival. Along with her two dads, were their families (their parents and siblings) who also were excited to have a new baby join their loving and supportive family.

In the beginning, Taylor seemed to be a bit hesitant to engage with her dads. She would allow them to care for her basic needs and to hold and cuddle her. She appeared to be content, yet she would not make eye contact with them. This was a bit distressing for them and they were worried that something may be wrong. They remained consistent and about a month later, she began to make eye contact, coo and smile when they would interact, and melt into their arms when they held her.

As committed fathers, one of them decided that they would stay home and be the primary caregiver while the other father worked outside of the home. They wanted to make sure that Taylor had the very best beginning to her life, especially since she joined their family in a non-traditional way. Their plan was to send her to preschool when she was 3 and then they would both work to make sure that they had the financial strength to provide Taylor with the very

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best in life.

Taylor joined their family during a time of civil unrest. There was much divisiveness in the United States. The racial tension occurring was of deep concern to them. In addition, their families were very accepting of their marriage and their raising a child, but they did experience tension in their community at large. They had concerns about how this may influence Taylor's development.

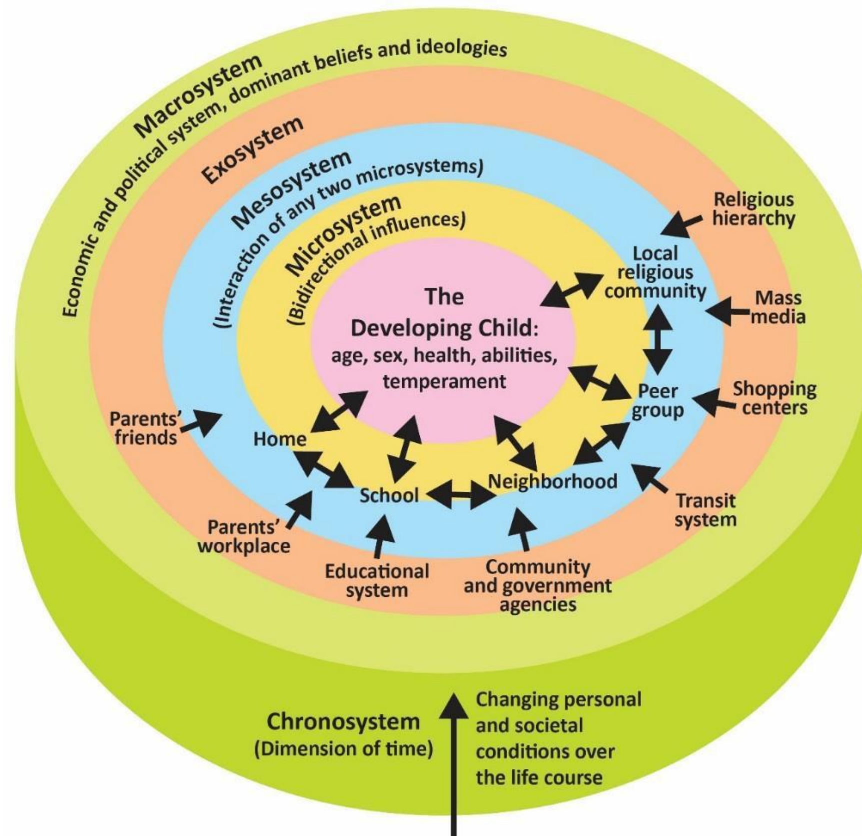

Figure 1.1 - Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.[2]

As you read the definitions of each of the systems below, try to reflect on how Taylor may be influenced by the various systems that she will experience.

Microsystem

Microsystems influence a child directly. These are the people with whom the child interacts such as parents, peers, and teachers. The relationship between individuals and those around them need to be considered. What influences will Taylor experience in having two dads – one

[2] Image by Ian Joslin is licensed under CC BY 4.0

of whom is dedicated to being her primary caregiver for the first 3 years of her life?

Mesosystem

Mesosystems are interactions between those surrounding the individual. The relationship between parents and schools, for example will indirectly affect the child. What experiences may Taylor have once she goes to school in her community?

Exosystem

Larger institutions such as the mass media or the healthcare system are referred to as the exosystem. These have an impact on families, peers, and schools who operate under policies and regulations found in these institutions. As mentioned in the example of Taylor, same sex marriage is not completely accepted in her community. How may that influence her development?

Macrosystem

We find cultural values and beliefs at the level of macrosystems. These larger ideals and expectations inform institutions that will ultimately influence the individual. How may the diversity of the values and beliefs influence Taylor's development?

Chronosystem

All of this happens in an historical context referred to as the chronosystem. Cultural values change over time, as do policies of educational institutions or governments in certain political climates. Development occurs at a point in time (2). Noting the civil unrest that is happening as Taylor joins her forever family, how may that influence her development?

The Bioecological Model by Bronfenbrenner looked at patterns of development across time as well as the interactions between the development of the child and the environment. The implications of the Model include the social and political policies and practices affecting children, families, and parenting. The Bioecological Model as depicted in Figure 1.1 serves as a visual organizer to both summarize and unpack key concepts and themes as they related to individual development, teaching and learning, and educational practices. As teachers and educators strive to become evidence-based practitioners, the goal of applying this theory is to understand the theoretical and research foundations that inform our work in supporting children's well-being, our teaching and learning practices, and to identify and use other factors/resources such as parents, family, peers, to provide positive influence on children's learning and development.[3]

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Pause to reflect

Thinking about the example of Taylor, what experiences do you think may influence her development? How might this theory provide you with the guidance you need to support both Taylor and her dads? Is there anything else you may need to know?

Family Systems Theory

In gaining an opportunity to have more context about families, the Family Systems Theory has proven to be very helpful. Family Systems Theory (from the work of Ackerman, Jackson, Minuchin, and Bowen) comes under the Functional Theory umbrella and shares the functional approach of considering the dysfunctions and functions of complex groups and organizations.

Family Systems Theory claims that the family is understood best by conceptualizing it as a complex, dynamic, and changing collection of parts, subsystems and family members. Much like a mechanic would interface with the computer system of a broken down car to diagnose which systems are broken (transmission, electric, fuel, etc.) to repair it, a therapist or researcher would interact with family members to diagnose how and where the systems of the family are working and where they are in need of repair or intervention. [4]

In the article entitled, "Understanding Families: Applying Family Systems Theory to Early Childhood Practice" by Linda Garris Christian, she states that family systems theory can explain why members of a family behave the way they do in a given situation. She identifies the six characteristics that make up the theory collectively.

The six characteristics are:

1. Boundaries – relates to limit, togetherness and separateness—what or who is "in" or "out of" the family.
2. Roles – in all families individuals members have roles, those roles may include – peacemaker, clown, rescuer, victim, these roles can be carried over into work, school, and social settings.
3. Rules – a set of standards, laws, or traditions that tell us how to live in relation to each other, they are often embedded in a cultural context; therefore, they can contribute to the feeling of cultural discontinuity that some children experience at school.
4. Hierarchy – this refers to who holds the decision making, control, and power in the family, each time the family composition changes, there is a shift in where family members are in their hierarchy.
5. Climate – this is about the emotional and physical environment of the family.
6. Equilibrium – the refers to the balance or imbalance that exists in the family, consistency in families can be difficult to maintain, but it is critical to children's

[4] Intimate Relationships and Families by Ron Hammond and Paul Cheney is licensed under CC BY 4.0 (pg. 5-11)

development that they have a sense of security and trust to maintain healthy development.[5]

Embedded in our module is the full article that you will be required to read. The article is full of ideas that help to integrate this theory into our practices with children and families. You may want to return to the pause to reflect after you have read the article.

Pause to reflect

How might you apply the six characteristics in this theory to your family of origin? What more do you need to know about this theory to help you to support children and families in your early learning environment? How could you apply it to Taylor's family?

IN SUMMARY

This chapter examined two very important theories in the field of early childhood education – Bio-Ecological Systems Theory and Family Systems Theory. The focus on these two theories is to help us in applying what we are learning to create supportive and engaging environments for the children and families that we serve.

The next chapter will help us with the socialization processes that occur for children and families within the context of peer relationships, schooling, places of employment, government institutions and policies, and the media.

Quotable

"Some families are created in different ways, but are still in every way a family."[6]

[5] Understanding Families: Applying Family Systems Theory to Early Childhood Practice" by Linda Garris Christian

[6] www.socialstepmom.com

CHAPTER 2: HOW CHILDREN LEARN ABOUT AND UNDERSTAND THEIR WORLD

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe how families socialize children
- Explain how peers influence socialization
- Explain how schools socialize students
- Explore the ways places of employment are an agent of socialization
- Explore how government institutions and policies influence socialization
- Explore how mass media influences the socialization of children

AGENTS OF SOCIALIZATION

Socialization is the manner used to internalize the norms and ideas of a society, and helps maintain social and cultural continuity. It is the way children learn about and begin to understand the world they live in. This develops as children interact with various "agencies" in their lives. The following categories of socialization that are most commonly used follow over the next few pages.

Family

Family is the first and most important agent of socialization. Mothers and fathers, siblings and grandparents, and other members of the extended family, all teach a child what he or she needs to know. For example, they show the child how to use objects (such as clothes, computers, eating utensils, books, bikes); how to relate to others (some as "family," others as "friends," still others as "strangers" or "teachers" or "neighbors"); and how the world works (what is "real" and what is "imagined"). As you are aware, either from your own experience as a child or from your role in helping to raise a child, socialization includes teaching and learning about many ideas and concepts that frame how the child will view the world.

Part of the reason we turn out much like our parents, for better or worse, is that our families are such an important part of our socialization process. When we are born, our primary caregivers can be one or both of our parents, whether by birth or adoption. For several years, we have more contact with them than with any other adults. Because this contact occurs in our most formative years, the interactions we have with our families and

the messages they teach us can have a profound impact on our lives.

Figure 2.1 - The family is perhaps the most important agent of socialization for children. Parents' values and behavior patterns profoundly influence those of their daughters and sons.[7]

Keep in mind, however, that families do not socialize children in a vacuum. Many social factors affect the way a family raises its children. For example, we can use our imagination to recognize that individual behaviors are affected by the historical period in which they take place. Sixty years ago, it would not have been considered especially strict for a father to hit his son with a wooden spoon or a belt if he misbehaved, but today that same action in some places might be considered child abuse.

Sociologists recognize that race, social class, religion, and other societal factors play an important role in family socialization. Families may socialize for obedience and conformity, judgment, creativity, and problem solving, depending on the values they hold. Children may also be socialized to abide by gender norms, perceptions of race, and class-related behaviors.

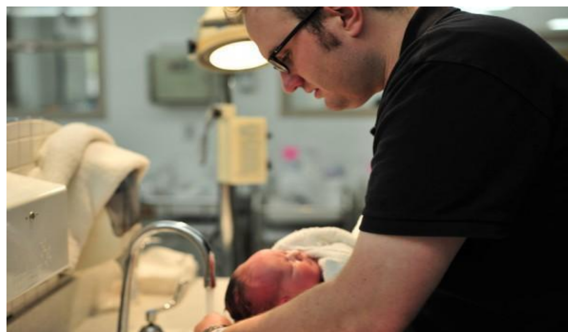

Figure 2.2 - The socialized roles of dads (and moms) vary by society.[8]

In Sweden, for instance, stay-at-home fathers are an accepted part of the social landscape. A government policy provides subsidized time off work—480 days for families with newborns—with the option of the paid leave being shared between mothers and fathers. As one stay-at-home dad says, being home to take care of his baby son "is a real fatherly thing to do. I think

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[7] Image by Randen Pederson is licensed under CC BY 2.0
[8] Image by Nate Grigg is licensed under CC BY 2.0

that's very masculine" (Associated Press 2011). Close to 90 percent of Swedish fathers use their paternity leave (about 340,000 dads); on average, they take seven weeks per birth (The Economist, 2014). How do U.S. policies—and our society's expected genderroles—compare?

How will Swedish children raised this way be socialized to parental gender norms? How might that be different from parental gender norms in the United States?

Pause to Reflect

How has your family influenced your process of socialization? How have those influences had an affect on you either in a positive or negative way?

Understanding Racial Socialization

In a society that is still racially prejudiced, African American parents continue to find it necessary to teach their children about African American culture and to prepare them for the bias and discrimination they can expect to encounter. Scholars in sociology and other disciplines have studied this process of racial socialization. One of their most interesting findings is that African American parents differ in the degree of racial socialization they practice: some parents emphasize African American identity and racial prejudice to a considerable degree, while other parents mention these topics to their children only minimally. The reasons for these differences have remained unclear.

Sociologist Jason E. Shelton (2008) analyzed data from a national random sample of African Americans to determine these reasons, in what he called "one of the most comprehensive analyses to date of racial socialization strategies among African Americans" (p. 237). Among other questions, respondents were asked whether "in raising your children, have you done or told them things to help them know what it means to be Black." They were also asked whether "there are any other things you've done or told your children to help them know how to get along with White people."

In his major results, Shelton found that respondents were more likely to practice racial socialization if they were older, female, and living outside the South; if they perceived that racial discrimination was a growing problem and were members of civil rights or other organizations aimed at helping African Americans; and if they had higher incomes.

These results led Shelton to conclude that "African Americans are not a culturally monolithic group," as they differ in "the parental lessons they impart to their children about race relations" (2008, p. 253). Further, the parents who do practice racial socialization "do so in order to demystify and empower their offspring to seize opportunities in the larger society" (p. 253).

Shelton's study helps us to understand the factors accounting for differences in racial socialization by African American parents, and it also helps us understand that the parents who do attempt to make their children aware of U.S. race relations are merely trying, as most parents do, to help their children get ahead in life. By increasing our understanding of these matters, Shelton's research has helped make a difference.

The ways in which our parents socialize us depend on many factors, two of the most important of which are our parents' social class and our own biological sex. Melvin Kohn (1965, 1977) found that working-class and middle-class parents tend to socialize their children differently. Kohn reasoned that working-class parents tend to hold factory and other jobs in which they have little autonomy and instead are told what to do and how to do it. In such jobs, obedience is an important value, lest the workers be punished for not doing their jobs correctly. Working-class parents, Kohn thought, should thus emphasize obedience and respect for authority as they raise their children, and they should favor spanking as a primary way of disciplining their kids when they disobey. In contrast, middle-class parents tend to hold white- collar jobs where autonomy and independent judgment are valued and workers get ahead by being creative. These parents should emphasize independence as they raise their children and should be less likely than working-class parents to spank their kids when they disobey.

If parents' social class influences how they raise their children, it is also true that the sex of their children affects how their parents socialize them. Many studies find that parents raise their daughters and sons quite differently as they interact with them from birth. Parents help their girls learn how to act and think "like girls," and they help their boys learn how to act and think "like boys." That is, they help their daughters and sons learn their gender (Wood, 2009).

For example, they are gentler with their daughters and rougher with their sons. They give their girls dolls to play with, and their boys' guns. Girls may be made of "sugar and spice and everything nice" and boys something quite different. When families hold on to traditional gender roles, they communicate their expectations of their children based on the sex they were assigned at birth. To the extent, this is true, our gender stems much more from socialization than from biological differences between the sexes, or so many sociologists assume. Recent research suggests that our gender is both physical and cognitive. This will be covered more extensively in Chapter 4 – How Does Gender Influence Children, Families and Communities.

Peers

Children are naturally interested in other children their own age and possibly a bit older. In the early years, families have much more control over whom their child socializes with. Most often, children play with the children of the family and friends of their parents. Families choose the early learning environment their children will attend. When their children make friends, their

families often arrange the play date that may involve after school activities together. Most families encourage peer relationships for their children.

Peer relationships are an important part of how children see themselves in relation to others. They are exposed to different ideas, culture, perspectives, values, and a myriad of other social experiences that may not be a part of their family daily experiences.

As early childhood professionals, it is our role to support children's healthy socialization process. We do this by creating an environment that supports interaction, problem solving, and social connection. The way we set up an art experience, with four chairs around a table, indicates that children can come together to engage with that experience. The way in which we provide meals for children, by sitting together with them and have social exchanges, models ways in which we communicate. This is sometimes referred to as the "hidden curriculum", however, quality early childhood professionals intentionally set their environment up to support and engage children in social interchange.

As children grow, they begin to have more autonomy about choosing their friends. While families may still have knowledge about who their child is interacting with, children often play with each other away from the adults. This is a part of healthy development, as children need opportunities to define themselves with their peers.

Often families may have concerns about the influences of peers on their children. When a positive influence is usually more acceptable. What is most interesting is that children influence each other. Part of empowering children is to help them to make decisions, in this case, about who they are and whom they feel most comfortable to socialize with. This helps them to identify the ways in which that may affect them. Children who are given the opportunity to make choice and to analyze those choices, are far better prepared to carry that decision-making process throughout their life's journey. Of course, it is the responsibility of their families to make sure they are safe and making positive choices, but it is through peer interaction that children can begin to figure this out as they grow and develop. [9]

Pause to Reflect

What role did peers play in your development? What are some ways that you were influenced by your peers? How are you still influenced by others?

School

In early learning environments, while there are learning experiences designed to meet the

[9] Sociology - Module 3: Socialization and Interaction by Lumen Learning is licensed under CC BY 4.0

needs and interests of the children, the most important part of the curriculum is to support children's healthy socialization with each other. The focus is on their emotional and social development while engaging with experiences that engage their cognitive development. In this way, an early learning environment supports all areas of development in balance.

Early learning professionals, what is most critical is that children learn how to relate to each other, to gain empathy and understand, to respect different perspectives, to embrace diversity and to support all of the children in their care through this process.

As children grow, school may look a bit different. As soon as they turn five, they are "ready for kindergarten." While kindergarten used to be more like the preschool environment (the notion of kindergarten from Froebel was "a child's garden"), today, kindergarten is more about academics and less about play. School sets the foundation for lifelong learning. When children are provided with developmentally appropriate settings, it is more likely that children will enjoy school and the opportunities it affords them for socialization.

Most U.S. children spend about seven hours a day, 180 days a year, in school, which makes it hard to deny the importance school has on their socialization (U.S. Department of Education 2004). Students are not in school only to study math, reading, science, and other subjects as schools also serve a latent function in society by socializing children into behaviors like practicing teamwork, following a schedule, and using textbooks.

School and classroom rituals, led by teachers serving as role models and leaders, regularly reinforce what society expects from children. Sociologists describe this aspect of schools as the hidden curriculum, the informal teaching done by schools. (This is often referred to as the temporal environment).

Figure 2.3 - What hidden curriculum might be at play in this elementary classroom?[10]

For example, in the United States, schools have built a sense of competition into the way we award grades and the way teachers evaluate students (Bowles and Gintis 1976). When children participate in a relay race or a math contest, they learn there are winners and losers in society. When children are required to work together on a project, they practice

[10] Image by USAG- Humphreys is licensed under CC BY 2.0

teamwork with other people in cooperative situations. The hidden curriculum prepares children for the adult world

(as this is often the intention). Children learn how to deal with bureaucracy, rules, expectations, waiting their turn, and sitting still for hours during the day. The latent functions of teamwork and dealing with bureaucracy are features of U.S. culture. Schools in different cultures socialize children differently in order to prepare them to function well in those cultures.

While this may be the way in which schools view their role, recently we have begun to see how this may be harmful to children. During the COVID 19 pandemic, we are seeing the harm that children and families are experiencing when the only focus on education is academics. The most common complaint from children and families is that their children need social experiences with their peers. It will be interesting to see what happens once children return to the school setting. Will our schools go back to status quo or will they be able to reimagine how they can engage children in not only the academics of school, but also the important social aspects that we get when we live in community?

Schools also socialize children by teaching them about citizenship and national pride. In the United States, children are taught to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Most school districts require classes about U.S. history and geography. As academic understanding of history evolves, textbooks in the United States have been scrutinized and revised to update attitudes toward other cultures as well as perspectives on historical events; thus, children are socialized to a different national or world history than earlier textbooks may have done. For example, information about the mistreatment of African Americans and Native American Indians more accurately reflects those events than in textbooks of the past.

Pause to Reflect

What are some examples of "hidden curriculum" that you experienced? How did it influence you then and now? Share any books that you read (either assigned or personal choice) that might have influenced any thoughts or ideas that you had as a child or teenager. How did they influence you now and then?

Controversial Textbooks

On August 13, 2001, twenty South Korean men gathered in Seoul. Each chopped off one of his own fingers because of textbooks. These men took drastic measures to protest eight middle school textbooks approved by Tokyo for use in Japanese middle schools. According to the Korean government (and other East Asian nations), the textbooks glossed over negative events in Japan's history at the expense of other Asian countries.

In the early 1900s, Japan was one of Asia's more aggressive nations. For instance, it held Korea as a colony between 1910 and 1945. Today, Koreans argue that the Japanese are whitewashing that colonial history through these textbooks. One major criticism is that they do not mention that, during World War II, the Japanese forced Korean women into sexual slavery. The textbooks describe the women as having been "drafted" to work, a euphemism that downplays the brutality of what actually occurred. Some Japanese textbooks dismiss an important Korean independence demonstration in 1919 as a "riot." In reality, Japanese soldiers attacked peaceful demonstrators, leaving roughly 6,000 dead and 15,000 wounded (Crampton 2002).

Although it may seem extreme that people are so enraged about how events are described in a textbook that they would resort to dismemberment, the protest affirms that textbooks are a significant tool of socialization in state-run education systems.

The Workplace

Just as children spend much of their day at school, many U.S. adults at some point invest a significant amount of time at a place of employment. Although socialized into their culture since birth, workers require new socialization into a workplace, in terms of both material culture (such as how to operate the copy machine) and nonmaterial culture (such as whether it is okay to speak directly to the boss or how to share the refrigerator).

Different Workplaces

A factory

An office

Emergency workers

Figure 2.4 - There are a variety of work environments that people must become socialized to and are socialized by.[11]

[11] Factory: Image on pxhere

Different jobs require different types of socialization. In the past, many people worked a single job until retirement. Today, the trend is to switch jobs at least once a decade. Between the ages of eighteen and forty-six, the average baby boomer of the younger set held 11.3 different jobs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). This means that people become socialized to, and socialized by, a variety of work environments.

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Government

Although we do not think about it, many of the rites of passage people go through today are based on age norms established by the government. In mainstream America, to be defined as an "adult" usually means you are eighteen years old, the age at which a person becomes legally responsible for him- or herself. In addition, sixty-five years old is the start of "old age" since most people become eligible for senior benefits at that point.

Each time we embark on one of these new categories—senior, adult, taxpayer—we are socialized into our new role. Seniors must learn the ropes of Medicare, Social Security benefits, and senior shopping discounts. When U.S. males turn eighteen, they must register with the Selective Service System within thirty days and entered into a database for possible military service. These government dictates mark the points at which we require socialization into a new category.

Mass Media

Mass media distribute impersonal information to a wide audience, via television, newspapers, radio, and the Internet. With the average person spending over four hours a day in front of the television (and children averaging even more screen time), media greatly influences social norms (Roberts, Foehr, and Rideout 2005). People learn about objects of material culture (like new technology and transportation options), as well as nonmaterial culture—what is true (beliefs), what is important (values), and what is expected (norms).

Office: Image by Lyncconf Games is licensed under CC BY 2.0
Emergency workers: Image by Spapa003 is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0

Girls and Movies

Pixar is one of the largest producers of children's movies in the world and has released large box office draws, such as Toy Story, Cars, The Incredibles, and Up. What Pixar has never before produced is a movie with a female lead role. This changed with Pixar's movie Brave, which was released in 2012. Before Brave, women in Pixar served as supporting characters and love interests. In Up, for example, the only human female character dies within the first ten minutes of the film. For the millions of girls watching Pixar films, there are few strong characters or roles for them to relate to. If they do not see possible versions of themselves, they may come to view women as secondary to the lives of men.

The animated films of Pixar's parent company, Disney, have many female lead roles. Disney is well known for films with female leads, such as Snow White, Cinderella, The Little Mermaid, and Mulan. Many of Disney's movies star a female, and she is nearly always a princess figure. If she is not a princess to begin with, she typically ends the movie by marrying a prince or, in the case of Mulan, a military general. Although not all "princesses" in Disney movies play a passive role in their lives, they typically find themselves needing to be rescued by a man, and the happy ending they all search for includes marriage.

Alongside this prevalence of princesses, many parents are expressing concern about the culture of princesses that Disney has created. Peggy Orenstein addresses this problem in her popular book, Cinderella Ate My Daughter. Orenstein wonders why every little girl is expected to be a "princess" and why pink has become an all-consuming obsession for many young girls. Another mother wondered what she did wrong when her three-year-old daughter refused to do "nonprincessy" things, including running and jumping. The effects of this princess culture can have negative consequences for girls throughout life. An early emphasis on beauty and sexiness can lead to eating disorders, low self-esteem, and risky sexual behavior among older girls. [12]

Pause to Reflect

What movies or TV shows affected you as a child? How did they influence your social norms and values? How did they have an influence on your identity?

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IN SUMMARY

In this chapter, we have looked at the various socializing elements that influence our social identities. We explored a bit about family, peers, school, the workplace, government institutions and policies, and mass media. In the next chapter, we will explore another part of our identity development – culture. We will define what it is and why it is important.

CHAPTER 3: WHAT IS CULTURE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe culture and society
- Identify culture
- Explain ethnocentrism and xenocentrism
- Explore values and beliefs of culture
- Explore norms, symbols, language in culture

INTRODUCTION

What are the rules when you pass an acquaintance at school, work, in the grocery store, or in the mall? Generally, we do not consider all of the intricacies of the rules of behavior. We may simply say, “Hello!” and ask, “How was your weekend?” or some other trivial question meant to be a friendly greeting. Typically we do not embrace or even touch the individual. In the United States we have unspoken rules about physical space and we may be viewed with scorn if we were to break those rules. However, we all adhere to various rules and standards that are created and maintained in culture.

Figure 3.1 - How would you greet someone at the grocery store?[13]

These rules and expectations have meaning, and there are ways in which we may violate those rules and expectations when we are not a part of navigating the cultural landscape. Consider what may happen if you stopped and informed everyone who said, “Hi, how are you?” exactly how you were doing that day, and in detail.

[13] Image by Staff Sgt. Stephanie ManchaReleased is in the public domain

You may be greeted with a quizzical look. Perhaps in a different culture the question would be more literal, and it may require a response. On the other hand, if you are having coffee with a good friend, perhaps that question would warrant a more detailed response. These examples are all aspects of culture, which is shared beliefs, values, and practices, that participants must learn. Sociologically, we examine in what situation and context certain behavior is expected, and in which situations perhaps it is not. These rules are created and enforced by people who interact and share culture.

In everyday conversation, people rarely distinguish between the terms culture and society, but the terms have slightly different meanings, and the distinction is important to a sociologist. A society describes a group of people who share a community and a culture. By "community," sociologists refer to a definable region—as small as a neighborhood (Brooklyn, or "the east side of town"), as large as a country (Ethiopia, the United States, or Nepal), or somewhere in between (in the United States, this might include someone who identifies with Southern or Midwestern society). To clarify, a culture represents the beliefs and practices of a group, while society represents the people who share those beliefs and practices. Neither society nor culture could exist without the other. In this chapter, we examine the relationship between culture and society in greater detail and pay special attention to the elements and forces that shape culture, including diversity and cultural changes. A final discussion touches on the different theoretical perspectives from which sociologists research culture.

WHAT IS CULTURE?

Humans are social creatures. Since the dawn of Homo sapiens nearly 250,000 years ago, people have grouped together into communities in order to survive. Living together, people form common habits and behaviors—from specific methods of childrearing to preferred techniques for obtaining food. In modern-day Paris, many people shop daily at outdoor markets to pick up what they need for their evening meal, buying cheese, meat, and vegetables from different specialty stalls. In the United States, the majority of people shop once a week at supermarkets, filling large carts to the brim. How would a Parisian perceive U.S. shopping behaviors that Americans take for granted?

Almost every human behavior, from shopping to marriage to expressions of feelings, is learned. In the United States, people tend to view marriage as a choice between two people, based on mutual feelings of love. In other nations and in other times, marriages have been arranged through an intricate process of interviews and negotiations between entire families, or in other cases, through a direct system, such as a "mail order bride." To someone raised in New York City, the marriage customs of a family from Nigeria may seem strange or even wrong. Conversely, someone from a traditional Kolkata family might be perplexed with the idea of romantic love as the foundation for marriage and lifelong commitment. In other words, the way in which people view marriage depends largely on what they have been taught.

Figure 3.2 - The man in the middle of this picture is presenting his sister, the bride, to her groom.[14]

Behavior based on learned customs is not a bad thing. Being familiar with unwritten rules helps people feel secure and "normal." Most people want to live their daily lives confident that their behaviors will not be challenged or disrupted. But even an action as seemingly simple as commuting to work evidences a great deal of cultural propriety.

Take the case of going to work on public transportation. Whether people are commuting in Dublin, Cairo, Mumbai, or San Francisco, many behaviors will be the same, but significant differences also arise between cultures. Typically, a passenger will find a marked bus stop or station, wait for his bus or train, pay an agent before or after boarding, and quietly take a seat if one is available. But when boarding a bus in Cairo, passengers might have to run, because buses there often do not come to a full stop to take on patrons. Dublin bus riders would be expected to extend an arm to indicate that they want the bus to stop for them. And when boarding a commuter train in Mumbai, passengers must squeeze into overstuffed cars amid a lot of pushing and shoving on the crowded platforms. That kind of behavior would be considered the height of rudeness in the United States, but in Mumbai it reflects the daily challenges of getting around on a train system that is taxed to capacity.

In this example of commuting, culture consists of thoughts (expectations about personal space, for example) and tangible things (bus stops, trains, and seating capacity). Material culture refers to the objects or belongings of a group of people. Metro passes and bus tokens are part of material culture, as are automobiles, stores, and the physical structures where people worship. Nonmaterial culture, in contrast, consists of the ideas, attitudes, and beliefs of a society.

Material and nonmaterial aspects of culture are linked, and physical objects often symbolize cultural ideas. A metro pass is a material object, but it represents a form of nonmaterial culture, namely, capitalism, and the acceptance of paying for transportation. Clothing, hairstyles, and jewelry are part of material culture, but the appropriateness of wearing certain clothing for specific events reflects nonmaterial culture. A school building belongs to material culture, but

[14] Image by Yann Forget is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

the teaching methods and educational standards are part of education's nonmaterial culture. These material and nonmaterial aspects of culture can vary subtly from region to region. As people travel farther afield, moving from different regions to entirely different parts of the world, certain material and nonmaterial aspects of culture become dramatically unfamiliar. What happens when we encounter different cultures? As we interact with cultures other than our own, we become more aware of the differences and commonalities between others' worlds and our own.

Cultural Universals

Often, a comparison of one culture to another will reveal obvious differences. But all cultures also share common elements. Cultural universals are patterns or traits that are globally common to all societies. One example of a cultural universal is the family unit: every human society recognizes a family structure that regulates sexual reproduction and the care of children. Even so, how that family unit is defined and how it functions vary. In many Asian cultures, for example, family members from all generations commonly live together in one household. In these cultures, young adults continue to live in the extended household family structure until they marry and join their spouse's household, or they may remain and raise their nuclear family within the extended family's homestead. In the United States, by contrast, individuals are expected to leave home and live independently for a period before forming a family unit that consists of parents and their offspring. Other cultural universals include customs like funeral rites, weddings, and celebrations of births. However, each culture may view the ceremonies quite differently.

Pause to Reflect

What is the cultural norm in your family unit regarding who you live with and when, or even if, you are expected to establish your own home?

Anthropologist George Murdock first recognized the existence of cultural universals while studying systems of kinship around the world. Murdock found that cultural universals often revolve around basic human survival, such as finding food, clothing, and shelter, or around shared human experiences, such as birth and death or illness and healing. Through his research, Murdock identified other universals including language, the concept of personal names, and, interestingly, jokes. Humor seems to be a universal way to release tensions and create a sense of unity among people (Murdock 1949). Sociologists consider humor necessary to human interaction because it helps individuals navigate otherwise tense situations.[15]

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Ethnocentrism and Xenocentrism

Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism

Despite how much humans have in common, cultural differences are far more prevalent than cultural universals. For example, while all cultures have language, analysis of particular language structures and conversational etiquette reveal tremendous differences. In some Middle Eastern cultures, it is common to stand close to others in conversation. North Americans keep more distance and maintain a large "personal space." Even something as simple as eating and drinking varies greatly from culture to culture. If your professor comes into an early morning class holding a mug of liquid, what do you assume she is drinking? In the United States, it's most likely filled with coffee, not Earl Grey tea, a favorite in England, or Yak Butter tea, a staple in Tibet.

Figure 3.4 - It's not just what we eat, but where and how we eat that can differ.[16]

The way cuisines vary across cultures fascinates many people. Some travelers pride themselves on their willingness to try unfamiliar foods, like celebrated food writer Anthony Bourdain, while others return home expressing gratitude for their native culture's fare. Often, people in the United States express disgust at other cultures' cuisine and think that it's gross to eat meat from a dog or guinea pig, for example, while they don't question their own habit of eating cows or pigs. Such attitudes are an example of ethnocentrism, or evaluating and judging another culture based on how it compares to one's own cultural norms. Ethnocentrism, as sociologist William Graham Sumner (1906) described the term, involves a belief or attitude that one's own culture is better than all others. Almost everyone is a little bit ethnocentric. For example, Americans tend to say that people from England drive on the "wrong" side of the road, rather than on the "other" side. Someone from a country where dog meat is standard fare might find it off-putting to see a dog in a French restaurant—not on the menu, but as a pet and patron's companion. A good example of ethnocentrism is referring to parts of Asia as the "Far East." One might question, "Far east of where?"

A high level of appreciation for one's own culture can be healthy; a shared sense of community

[16] Image on left: Image is in the public domain
Image in middle: Image by miramurphy is licensed under CC BY 2.0
Image on right: Image by Staff Sgt. Monik Phan is in the public domain

pride, for example, connects people in a society. But ethnocentrism can lead to disdain or dislike for other cultures and could cause misunderstanding and conflict. People with the best intentions sometimes travel to a society to “help” its people, because they see them as uneducated or backward—essentially inferior. In reality, these travelers are guilty of **cultural imperialism**, the deliberate imposition of one’s own cultural values on another culture.

Europe’s colonial expansion, begun in the sixteenth century, was often accompanied by a severe cultural imperialism. European colonizers often viewed the people in the lands they colonized as uncultured savages who were in need of European governance, dress, religion, and other cultural practices. A more modern example of cultural imperialism may include the work of international aid agencies who introduce agricultural methods and plant species from developed countries while overlooking indigenous varieties and agricultural approaches that are better suited to the particular region.

Ethnocentrism can be so strong that when confronted with all of the differences of a new culture, one may experience disorientation and frustration. In sociology, we call this **culture shock**. A traveler from Chicago might find the nightly silence of rural Montana unsettling, not peaceful. An exchange student from China might be annoyed by the constant interruptions in class as other students ask questions—a practice that is considered rude in China. Perhaps the Chicago traveler was initially captivated with Montana’s quiet beauty and the Chinese student was originally excited to see a U.S.-style classroom firsthand. But as they experience unanticipated differences from their own culture, their excitement gives way to discomfort and doubts about how to behave appropriately in the new situ situation. Eventually, as people learn more about a culture, they recover from culture shock.

Pause to Reflect

Have you ever experienced culture shock, if so when and where?

Culture shock may appear because people aren’t always expecting cultural differences. Anthropologist Ken Barger (1971) discovered this when he conducted a participatory observation in an Inuit community in the Canadian Arctic. Originally from Indiana, Barger hesitated when invited to join a local snowshoe race. He knew he’d never hold his own against these experts. Sure enough, he finished last, to his mortification. But the tribal members congratulated him, saying, “You really tried!” In Barger’s own culture, he had learned to value victory. To the Inuit people, winning was enjoyable, but their culture valued survival skills essential to their environment: how hard someone tried could mean the difference between life and death. Over the course of his stay, Barger participated in caribou hunts, learned how to take shelter in winter storms, and sometimes went days with little or no food to share among tribal members. Trying hard and working together, two nonmaterial values, were indeed much more important than winning.

During his time with the Inuit tribe, Barger learned to engage in cultural relativism. Cultural relativism is the practice of assessing a culture by its own standards rather than viewing it through the lens of one's own culture. Practicing cultural relativism requires an open mind and a willingness to consider, and even adapt to new values and norms. However, indiscriminately embracing everything about a new culture is not always possible. Even the most culturally relativist people from egalitarian societies—ones in which women have political rights and control over their own bodies—would question whether the widespread practice of female genital mutilation in countries such as Ethiopia and Sudan should be accepted as a part of cultural tradition. Sociologists attempting to engage in cultural relativism, then, may struggle to reconcile aspects of their own culture with aspects of a culture that they are studying.

Sometimes when people attempt to rectify feelings of ethnocentrism and develop cultural relativism, they swing too far to the other end of the spectrum. Xenocentrism is the opposite of ethnocentrism, and refers to the belief that another culture is superior to one's own. (The Greek root word *xeno*, pronounced "ZEE-no," means "stranger" or "foreign guest.") An exchange student who goes home after a semester abroad or a sociologist who returns from the field may find it difficult to associate with the values of their own culture after having experienced what they deem a more upright or nobler way of living.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for sociologists studying different cultures is the matter of keeping a perspective. It is impossible for anyone to keep all cultural biases at bay; the best we can do is strive to be aware of them. Pride in one's own culture doesn't have to lead to imposing its values on others. And an appreciation for another culture shouldn't preclude individuals from studying it with a critical eye.[17]

Overcoming Culture Shock[18]

During her summer vacation, Caitlin flew from Chicago to Madrid to visit Maria, the exchange student she'd befriended the previous semester. In the airport, she heard rapid, musical Spanish being spoken all around her. Exciting as it was, she felt isolated and disconnected. Maria's mother kissed Caitlin on both cheeks when she greeted her. Her imposing father kept his distance. Caitlin was half asleep by the time supper was served—at 10 p.m.! Maria's family sat at the table for hours, speaking loudly, gesturing, and arguing about politics, a taboo dinner subject in Caitlin's house. They served wine and toasted their honored guest. Caitlin had trouble interpreting her hosts' facial expressions, and didn't realize she should make the next toast. That night, Caitlin crawled into a strange bed, wishing she hadn't come. She missed her home and felt overwhelmed by the new

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[18] Sociology - Module 2: Culture and Society by Lumen Learning references Introduction to Sociology 2e by OpenStax, which is licensed under CC BY 4.0

customs, language, and surroundings. She'd studied Spanish in school for years—why hadn't it prepared her for this?

What Caitlin hadn't realized was that people depend not only on spoken words but also on subtle cues like gestures and facial expressions, to communicate. Cultural norms accompany even the smallest nonverbal signals (DuBois 1951). They help people know when to shake hands, where to sit, how to converse, and even when to laugh. We relate to others through a shared set of cultural norms, and ordinarily, we take them for granted.

For this reason, culture shock is often associated with traveling abroad, although it can happen in one's own country, state, or even hometown. Anthropologist Kalervo Oberg (1960) is credited with first coining the term "culture shock." In his studies, Oberg found that most people found encountering a new culture to be exciting at first. But bit by bit, they became stressed by interacting with people from a different culture who spoke another language and used different regional expressions. There was new food to digest, new daily schedules to follow, and new rules of etiquette to learn. Living with this constant stress can make people feel incompetent and insecure. People react to frustration in a new culture, Oberg found, by initially rejecting it and glorifying one's own culture. An American visiting Italy might long for a "real" pizza or complain about the unsafe driving habits of Italians compared to people in the United States.

It helps to remember that culture is learned. Everyone is ethnocentric to an extent, and identifying with one's own country is natural.

Caitlin's shock was minor compared to that of her friends Dayar and Mahlika, a Turkish couple living in married student housing on campus. And it was nothing like that of her classmate Sanai. Sanai had been forced to flee war-torn Bosnia with her family when she was fifteen. After two weeks in Spain, Caitlin had developed a bit more compassion and understanding for what those people had gone through. She understood that adjusting to a new culture takes time. It can take weeks or months to recover from culture shock, and it can take years to fully adjust to living in a new culture.

By the end of Caitlin's trip, she'd made new lifelong friends. She'd stepped out of her comfort zone. She'd learned a lot about Spain, but she'd also discovered a lot about herself and her own culture.

VALUES AND BELIEFS

The first, and perhaps most crucial, elements of culture we will discuss are its values and beliefs. Values are a culture's standard for discerning what is good and just in society. Values are deeply embedded and critical for transmitting and teaching a culture's beliefs. Beliefs are the tenets or convictions that people hold to be true. Individuals in a society have specific beliefs, but they also share collective values. To illustrate the difference, Americans commonly believe in the American Dream—that anyone who works hard enough will be successful and wealthy. Underlying this belief is the American value that wealth is good and important.

Values help shape a society by suggesting what is good and bad, beautiful and ugly, sought or avoided. Consider the value that the United States places upon youth. Children represent innocence and purity, while a youthful adult appearance signifies sexuality. Shaped by this value, individuals spend millions of dollars each year on cosmetic products and surgeries to look young and beautiful. The United States also has an individualistic culture, meaning people place a high value on individuality and independence. In contrast, many other cultures are collectivist, meaning the welfare of the group and group relationships are a primary value.

Living up to a culture's values can be difficult. It's easy to value good health, but it's hard to quit smoking. Marital monogamy is valued, but many spouses engage in infidelity. Cultural diversity and equal opportunities for all people are valued in the United States, yet the country's highest political offices have been dominated by white men.

Values often suggest how people should behave, but they don't accurately reflect how people do behave. Values portray an ideal culture, the standards society would like to embrace and live up to. But ideal culture differs from real culture, the way society actually is, based on what occurs and exists. In an ideal culture, there would be no traffic accidents, murders, poverty, or racial tension. But in real culture, police officers, lawmakers, educators, and social workers constantly strive to prevent or repair those accidents, crimes, and injustices. American teenagers are encouraged to value celibacy. However, the number of unplanned pregnancies among teens reveals that not only is the ideal hard to live up to, but the value alone is not enough to spare teenagers the potential consequences of having sex.

One way societies strive to put values into action is through rewards, sanctions, and punishments. When people observe the norms of society and uphold its values, they are often rewarded. A boy who helps an elderly woman board a bus may receive a smile and a "thank you." A business manager who raises profit margins may receive a quarterly bonus. People sanction certain behaviors by giving their support, approval, or permission, or by instilling formal actions of disapproval and nonsupport. Sanctions are a form of social control, a way to encourage conformity to cultural norms. Sometimes people conform to norms in anticipation or expectation of positive sanctions: good grades, for instance, may mean praise from parents and teachers. From a criminal justice perspective, properly used social control is also inexpensive crime control. Utilizing social control approaches pushes most people to conform

to societal rules, regardless of whether authority figures (such as law enforcement) are present.

Figure 3.5 - What social rewards might this boy who is sharing his toys with his younger sibling receive?[19]

When people go against a society's values, they are punished. A boy who shoves an elderly woman aside to board the bus first may receive frowns or even a scolding from other passengers. A business manager who drives away customers will likely be fired. Breaking norms and rejecting values can lead to cultural sanctions such as earning a negative label—lazy, no-good bum—or to legal sanctions, such as traffic tickets, fines, or imprisonment.

Figure 3.6 - In many parts of Africa and the Middle East, it is considered normal for men to hold hands in friendship. How would Americans react to these two soldiers? (Photo courtesy of Geordie Mott/Wikimedia Commons)[20]

Values are not static; they vary across time and between groups as people evaluate, debate, and change collective societal beliefs. Values also vary from culture to culture. For example, cultures differ in their values about what kinds of physical closeness are appropriate in public. It's rare to see two male friends or coworkers holding hands in the United States where that

[19] Image by rbalouria on Pixabay

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behavior often symbolizes romantic feelings. But in many nations, masculine physical intimacy is considered natural in public. This difference in cultural values came to light when people reacted to photos of former president George W. Bush holding hands with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia in 2005. A simple gesture, such as hand-holding, carries great symbolic differences across cultures.[21]

Pause to Reflect

What is a value you have?

NORMS, SYMBOLS, AND LANGUAGE

Norms

So far, the examples in this chapter have often described how people are expected to behave in certain situations—for example, when buying food or boarding a bus. These examples describe the visible and invisible rules of conduct through which societies are structured, or what sociologists call norms. Norms define how to behave in accordance with what a society has defined as good, right, and important, and most members of the society adhere to them.

Formal norms are established, written rules. They are behaviors worked out and agreed upon in order to suit and serve the most people. Laws are formal norms, but so are employee manuals, college entrance exam requirements, and "no running" signs at swimming pools. Formal norms are the most specific and clearly stated of the various types of norms, and they are the most strictly enforced. But even formal norms are enforced to varying degrees and are reflected in cultural values.

For example, money is highly valued in the United States, so monetary crimes are punished. It's against the law to rob a bank, and banks go to great lengths to prevent such crimes. People safeguard valuable possessions and install antitheft devices to protect homes and cars. A less strictly enforced social norm is driving while intoxicated. While it's against the law to drive drunk, drinking is for the most part an acceptable social behavior. And though there are laws to punish drunk driving, there are few systems in place to prevent the crime. These examples show a range of enforcement in formal norms.

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Figure 3.7 - Obeying the speed limit is also an example of the range of enforcement of formal norms.[22]

There are plenty of formal norms, but the list of informal norms—casual behaviors that are generally and widely conformed to—is longer. People learn informal norms by observation, imitation, and general socialization. Some informal norms are taught directly—"Kiss your Aunt Edna" or "Use your napkin"—while others are learned by observation, including observations of the consequences when someone else violates a norm. But although informal norms define personal interactions, they extend into other systems as well. In the United States, there are informal norms regarding behavior at fast food restaurants. Customers line up to order their food and leave when they are done. They don't sit down at a table with strangers, sing loudly as they prepare their condiments, or nap in a booth. Most people don't commit even benign breaches of informal norms. Informal norms dictate appropriate behaviors without the need of written rules.

Breaching Experiments

Sociologist Harold Garfinkel (1917–2011) studied people's customs in order to find out how societal rules and norms not only influenced behavior but also shaped social order. He believed that members of society together create a social order (Weber 2011). His resulting book, Studies in Ethnomethodology, published in 1967, discusses people's assumptions about the social makeup of their communities.

One of Garfinkel's research methods was known as a "breaching experiment," in which the researcher behaves in a socially awkward manner in order to test the sociological concepts of social norms and conformity. The participants are not aware an experiment is in progress. If the breach is successful, however, these "innocent bystanders" will respond in some way. For example, if the experimenter is, say, a man in a business suit, and he skips down the sidewalk or hops on one foot, the passersby are likely to stare at him with surprised expressions on their faces. But the experimenter does not simply "act weird" in public. Rather, the point is to

[22] Image is in the public domain

deviate from a specific social norm in a small way, to subtly break some form of social etiquette, and see what happens.

To conduct his ethnomethodology, Garfinkel deliberately imposed strange behaviors on unknowing people. Then he observed their responses. He suspected that odd behaviors would shatter conventional expectations, but he wasn't sure how. For example, he set up a simple game of tic-tac-toe. One player was asked beforehand to mark Xs and Os not in the boxes but on the lines dividing the spaces instead. The other player, in the dark about the study, was flabbergasted and did not know how to continue. The second player's reactions of outrage, anger, puzzlement, or other emotions illustrated the existence of cultural norms that constitute social life. These cultural norms play an important role. They let us know how to behave around each other and how to feel comfortable in our community.

There are many rules about speaking with strangers in public. It's OK to tell a woman you like her shoes. It's not OK to ask if you can try them on. It's OK to stand in line behind someone at the ATM. It's not OK to look over his shoulder as he makes his transaction. It's OK to sit beside someone on a crowded bus. It's weird to sit beside a stranger in a half-empty bus.

For some breaches, the researcher directly engages with innocent bystanders. An experimenter might strike up a conversation in a public bathroom, where it's common to respect each other's privacy so fiercely as to ignore other people's presence. In a grocery store, an experimenter might take a food item out of another person's grocery cart, saying, "That looks good! I think I'll try it." An experimenter might sit down at a table with others in a fast food restaurant or follow someone around a museum and study the same paintings. In those cases, the bystanders are pressured to respond, and their discomfort illustrates how much we depend on social norms. Breaching experiments uncover and explore the many unwritten social rules we live by.[23]

Norms may be further classified as either mores or folkways. Mores (mor-ays) are norms that embody the moral views and principles of a group. Violating them can have serious consequences. The strongest mores are legally protected with laws or other formal norms. In the United States, for instance, murder is considered immoral, and it's punishable by law (a formal norm). But more often, mores are judged and guarded by public sentiment (an informal norm). People who violate mores are seen as shameful. They can even be shunned or banned from some groups. The mores of the U.S. school system require that a student's writing be in

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the student's own words or use special forms (such as quotation marks and a whole system of citation) for crediting other writers. Writing another person's words as if they are one's own has a name—plagiarism. The consequences for violating this norm are severe and usually result in expulsion.

Unlike mores, folkways are norms without any moral underpinnings. Rather, folkways direct appropriate behavior in the day-to-day practices and expressions of a culture. They indicate whether to shake hands or kiss on the cheek when greeting another person. They specify whether to wear a tie and blazer or a T-shirt and sandals to an event. In Canada, women can smile and say hello to men on the street. In Egypt, that's not acceptable. In regions in the southern United States, bumping into an acquaintance means stopping to chat. It's considered rude not to, no matter how busy one is. In other regions, people guard their privacy and value time efficiency. A simple nod of the head is enough. Other accepted folkways in the United States may include holding the door open for a stranger or giving someone a gift on their birthday. The rules regarding these folkways may change from culture to culture.

Many folkways are actions we take for granted. People need to act without thinking in order to get seamlessly through daily routines; they can't stop and analyze every action (Sumner 1906). Those who experience culture shock may find that it subsides as they learn the new culture's folkways and are able to move through their daily routines more smoothly. Folkways might be small manners, learned by observation and imitated, but they are by no means trivial. Like mores and laws, these norms help people negotiate their daily lives within a given culture.[24]

Pause to Reflect

Explain the difference between folkways and mores.

ATTITUDES

Although we might use the term in a different way in our everyday life ("Hey, he's really got an attitude!"), social psychologists reserve the term attitude to refer to our relatively enduring evaluation of something, where the something is called the attitude object. The attitude object might be a person, a product, or a social group (Albarracín, Johnson, & Zanna, 2005; Wood, 2000). In this section we will consider the nature and strength of attitudes and the conditions under which attitudes best predict our behaviors.

Attitudes Are Evaluations

When we say that attitudes are evaluations, we mean that they involve a preference for or

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against the attitude object, as commonly expressed in such terms as prefer, like, dislike, hate, and love. When we express our attitudes—for instance, when we say, “I love Cheerios,” “I hate snakes,” “I’m crazy about Bill,” or “I like Italians”—we are expressing the relationship (either positive or negative) between the self and an attitude object. Statements such as these make it clear that attitudes are an important part of the self-concept—attitudes tie the self-concept to the attitude object, and so our attitudes are an essential part of “us.”

Every human being holds thousands of attitudes, including those about family and friends, political parties and political figures, abortion rights and terrorism, preferences for music, and much more. Each of our attitudes has its own unique characteristics, and no two attitudes come to us or influence us in quite the same way. Research has found that some of our attitudes are inherited, at least in part, via genetic transmission from our parents (Olson, Vernon, Harris, & Jang, 2001). Other attitudes are learned mostly through direct and indirect experiences with the attitude objects (De Houwer, Thomas, & Baeyens, 2001). We may like to ride roller coasters in part because our genetic code has given us a thrill-loving personality and in part because we’ve had some really great times on roller coasters in the past. Still other attitudes are learned via the media (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2003; Levina, Waldo, & Fitzgerald, 2000) or through our interactions with friends (Poteat, 2007). Some of our attitudes are shared by others (most of us like sugar, fear snakes, and are disgusted by cockroaches), whereas other attitudes—such as our preferences for different styles of music or art—are more individualized.

Table 3.1 “Heritability of Some Attitudes” shows some of the attitudes that have been found to be the most highly heritable (i.e. most strongly determined by genetic variation among people). These attitudes form earlier and are stronger and more resistant to change than others (Bourgeois, 2002), although it is not yet known why some attitudes are more genetically determined than are others.

Table 3.1 - Heritability of Some Attitudes

Attitude	Heritability
Abortion on demand	0.54
Roller coaster rides	0.52
Death penalty for murder	0.5
Open-door immigration	0.46
Organized religion	0.45
Doing athletic activities	0.44

Attitude	Heritability
Voluntary euthanasia	0.44
Capitalism	0.39
Playing chess	0.38
Reading books	0.37
Exercising	0.36
Education	0.32
Big parties	0.32
Smoking	0.31
Being the center of attention	0.28
Getting along well with other people	0.28
Wearing clothes that draw attention	0.24
Sweets	0.22
Public speaking	0.2
Castration as punishment for sex crimes	0.17
Loud music	0.11
Looking my best at all times	0.1
Doing crossword puzzles	0.02
Separate roles for men and women	0
Making racial discrimination illegal	0
Playing organized sports	0
Playing bingo	0
Easy access to birth control	0
Being the leader of groups	0

Attitude	Heritability
Being assertive	0

Ranked from most heritable to least heritable. Data are from Olson, Vernon, Harris, and Jang (2001).

Our attitudes are made up of cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. Consider my own attitude toward chocolate ice cream, which is very positive and always has been, as far as I can remember.

In terms of affect:

I LOVE it!

In terms of behavior:

I frequently eat chocolate ice cream.

In terms of cognitions:

Chocolate ice cream has a smooth texture and a rich, strong taste.

My attitude toward chocolate ice cream is composed of affect, behavior, and cognition.

Although most attitudes are determined by cognition, affect, and behavior, there is nevertheless variability in this regard across people and across attitudes. Some attitudes are more likely to be based on beliefs, some more likely to be based on feelings, and some more likely to be based on behaviors. I would say that my attitude toward chocolate ice cream is in large part determined by affect—although I can describe its taste, mostly I just like it. My attitudes toward my Toyota Corolla and my home air conditioner, on the other hand, are more cognitive. I don't really like them so much as I admire their positive features (the Toyota gets good gas mileage and the air conditioner keeps me cool on hot summer days). Still other of my attitudes are based more on behavior—I feel like I've learned to like my neighbors because I've done favors for them over the years (which they have returned) and these helpful behaviors on my part have, at least in part, led me to develop a positive attitude toward them.

Different people may hold attitudes toward the same attitude object for different reasons. Some people voted for Barack Obama in the 2008 elections because they like his policies ("he's working for the middle class"; "he wants to increase automobile fuel efficiency"), whereas others voted for (or against) him because they just liked (or disliked) him. Although you might think that cognition would be more important in this regard, political scientists have shown that many voting decisions are made primarily on the basis of affect. Indeed, it is fair to say that the affective component of attitudes is generally the strongest and most important (Abelson, Kinder, Peters, & Fiske, 1981; Stangor, Sullivan, & Ford, 1991).

Human beings hold attitudes because they are useful. Particularly, our attitudes enable us to determine, often very quickly and effortlessly, which behaviors to engage in, which people to approach or avoid, and even which products to buy (Duckworth, Bargh, Garcia, & Chaiken, 2002; Maio & Olson, 2000). You can imagine that making quick decisions about what to avoid (for example, snake = bad ⟶ run away) or to approach (blueberries = good ⟶ eat) has had substantial value in our evolutionary experience.

Because attitudes are evaluations, they can be assessed using any of the normal measuring techniques used by social psychologists (Banaji & Heiphetz, 2010). Attitudes are frequently assessed using self-report measures, but they can also be assessed more indirectly using measures of arousal and facial expressions (Mendes, 2008) as well as implicit measures of cognition, such as the Implicit Association Test (IAT). Attitudes can also be seen in the brain by using neuroimaging techniques. This research has found that our attitudes, like most of our social knowledge, are stored primarily in the prefrontal cortex but that the amygdala is important in emotional attitudes, particularly those associated with fear (Cunningham, Raye, & Johnson, 2004; Cunningham & Zelazo, 2007; van den Bos, McClure, Harris, Fiske, & Cohen, 2007). Attitudes can be activated extremely quickly—often within one fifth of a second after we see an attitude object (Handy, Smilek, Geiger, Liu, & Schooler, 2010).

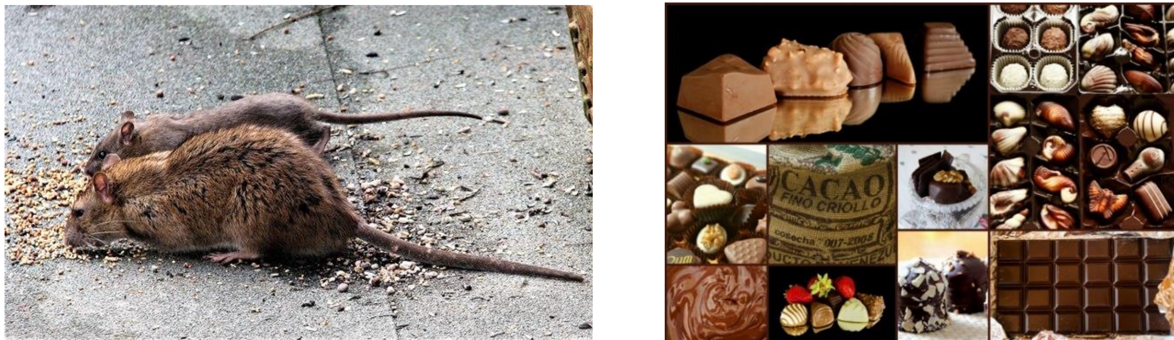

Figure 3.8 - How quickly were your attitudes activated when you saw these pictures?[25]

Pause to Reflect

Name one attitude you have that is very strong.

When Do Our Attitudes Guide Our Behavior?

Social psychologists (as well as advertisers, marketers, and politicians) are particularly interested in the behavioral aspect of attitudes. Because it is normal that the ABCs of our attitudes are at least somewhat consistent, our behavior tends to follow from our affect and

[25] Rats: Image by Patrick Roper is licensed under this CC BY-SA 2.0
Chocolate: Image is in the public domain

cognition. If I determine that you have more positive cognitions about and more positive affect toward Cheerios than Frosted Flakes, then I will naturally predict (and probably be correct when I do so) that you'll be more likely to buy Cheerios than Frosted Flakes when you go to the market. Furthermore, if I can do something to make your thoughts or feelings toward Frosted Flakes more positive, then your likelihood of buying that cereal instead of the other will also increase.

The principle of attitude consistency (that for any given attitude object, the ABCs of affect, behavior, and cognition are normally in line with each other) thus predicts that our attitudes (for instance, as measured via a self-report measure) are likely to guide behavior. Supporting this idea, meta-analyses have found that there is a significant and substantial positive correlation among the different components of attitudes, and that attitudes expressed on self-report measures do predict behavior (Glasman & Albarracín, 2006).

Although there is generally consistency between attitudes and behavior, the relationship is stronger in certain situations, for certain people, and for certain attitudes (Wicker, 1969). The theory of planned behavior, developed by Martin Fishbein and Izek Ajzen (Ajzen, 1991; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), outlined many of the important variables that affected the attitude-behavior relationship, and some of these factors are summarized in the list that follows this paragraph. It may not surprise you to hear that attitudes that are strong, in the sense that they are expressed quickly and confidently, predict our behavior better than do weak attitudes (Fazio, Powell, & Williams, 1989; Glasman & Albarracín, 2006). For example, Farc and Sagarin (2009) found that people who could more quickly complete questionnaires about their attitudes toward the politicians George Bush and John Kerry were also more likely to vote for the candidate that they had more positive attitudes toward in the 2004 presidential elections. The relationship between the responses on the questionnaires and voting behavior was weaker for those who completed the items more slowly.

- When attitudes are strong, rather than weak
- When we have a strong intention to perform the behavior
- When the attitude and the behavior both occur in similar social situations
- When the same components of the attitude (either affect or cognition) are accessible when the attitude is assessed and when the behavior is performed
- When the attitudes are measured at a specific, rather than a general, level
- For low self-monitors (rather than for high self-monitors)
- Attitudes only predict behaviors well under certain conditions and for some people. The preceding list summarizes the factors that create a strong attitude-behavior relationship.

People who have strong attitudes toward an attitude object are also likely to have strong intentions to act on their attitudes, and the intention to engage in an activity is a strong predictor of behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Imagine for a moment that your friend Sharina is trying to decide whether to recycle her used laptop batteries or just throw them away. We

know that her attitude toward recycling is positive—she thinks she should do it—but we also know that recycling takes work. It's much easier to just throw the batteries away. Only if Sharina has a strong attitude toward recycling will she then have the necessary strong intentions to engage in the behavior that will make her recycle her batteries even when it is difficult to do.

The match between the social situations in which the attitudes are expressed and the behaviors are engaged in also matters, such that there is a greater attitude-behavior correlation when the social situations match. Imagine for a minute the case of Magritte, a 16-year-old high school student. Magritte tells her parents that she hates the idea of smoking cigarettes. Magritte's negative attitude toward smoking seems to be a strong one because she's thought a lot about it—she believes that cigarettes are dirty, expensive, and unhealthy. But how sure are you that Magritte's attitude will predict her behavior? Would you be willing to bet that she'd never try smoking when she's out with her friends?

You can see that the problem here is that Magritte's attitude is being expressed in one social situation (when she is with her parents) whereas the behavior (trying a cigarette) is going to occur in a very different social situation (when she is out with her friends). The relevant social norms are of course much different in the two situations. Magritte's friends might be able to convince her to try smoking, despite her initial negative attitude, when they entice her with peer pressure. Behaviors are more likely to be consistent with attitudes when the social situation in which the behavior occurs is similar to the situation in which the attitude is expressed (Ajzen, 1991; LaPiere, 1936).

Attitude-Behavior Consistency

Another variable that has an important influence on attitude-behavior consistency is the current cognitive accessibility of the underlying affective and cognitive components of the attitude. For example, if we assess the attitude in a situation in which people are thinking primarily about the attitude object in cognitive terms, and yet the behavior is performed in a situation in which the affective components of the attitude are more accessible, then the attitude-behavior relationship will be weak. Wilson and Schooler (1991) showed a similar type of effect by first choosing attitudes that they expected would be primarily determined by affect—attitudes toward five different types of strawberry jam. Then they asked a sample of college students to taste each of the jams. While they were tasting, one-half of the participants were instructed to think about the cognitive aspects of their attitudes to these jams—that is, to focus on the reasons they held their attitudes, whereas the other half of the participants were not given these instructions. Then all the students completed measures of their attitudes toward each of the jams.

Wilson and his colleagues then assessed the extent to which the attitudes expressed by the students correlated with taste ratings of the five jams as indicated by experts at Consumer Reports. They found that the attitudes expressed by the students correlated significantly higher with the expert ratings for the participants who had not listed their cognitions first. Wilson and his colleagues argued that this occurred because our liking of jams is primarily affectively determined—we either like them or we don't. And the students who simply rated the jams used their feelings to make their judgments. On the other hand, the students who were asked to list their thoughts about the jams had some extra information to use in making their judgments, but it was information that was not actually useful. Therefore, when these students used their thoughts about the jam to make the judgments, their judgments were less valid.

MacDonald, Zanna, and Fong (1996) showed male college students a video of two other college students, Mike and Rebecca, who were out on a date. However, according to random assignment to conditions, half of the men were shown the video while sober and the other half viewed the video after they had had several alcoholic drinks. In the video, Mike and Rebecca go to the campus bar and drink and dance. They then go to Rebecca's room, where they end up kissing passionately. Mike says that he doesn't have any condoms, but Rebecca says that she is on the pill.

At this point the film clip ends, and the male participants are asked about their likely behaviors if they had been Mike. Although all men indicated that having unprotected sex in this situation was foolish and irresponsible, the men who had been drinking alcohol were more likely to indicate that they would engage in sexual intercourse with Rebecca even without a condom. One interpretation of this study is that sexual behavior is determined by both cognitive factors ("I know that it is important to practice safe sex and so I should use a condom") and affective factors ("sex is enjoyable, I don't want to wait"). When the students were intoxicated at the time the behavior was to be performed, it seems likely the affective component of the attitude was a more important determinant of behavior than was the cognitive component.[26]

One other type of "match" that has an important influence on the attitude-behavior relationship concerns how we measure the attitude and behavior. Attitudes predict behavior better when the attitude is measured at a level that is similar to the behavior to be predicted. Normally, the behavior is specific, so it is better to measure the attitude at a specific level too. For instance, if we measure cognitions at a very general level ("do you think it is important to

[26] Principles of Social Psychology by University of Minnesota is licensed under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

use condoms?"; "are you a religious person?") we will not be as successful at predicting actual behaviors as we will be if we ask the question more specifically, at the level of behavior we are interested in predicting ("do you think you will use a condom the next time you have sex?"; "how frequently do you expect to attend church in the next month?"). In general, more specific questions are better predictors of specific behaviors, and thus if we wish to accurately predict behaviors, we should remember to attempt to measure specific attitudes. One example of this principle is shown in the figure below. Davidson and Jaccard (1979) found that they were much better able to predict whether women actually used birth control when they assessed the attitude at a more specific level.

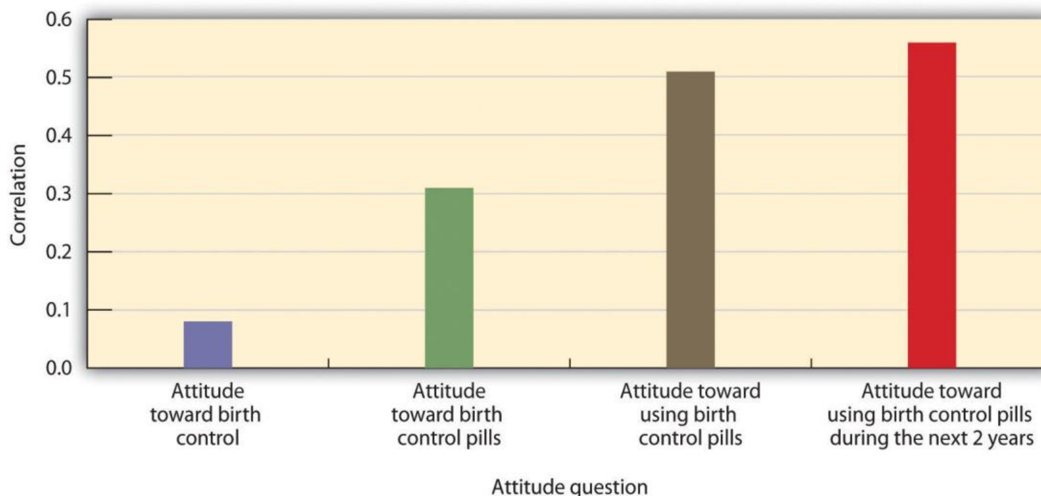

Figure 3.9 - Attitudes that are measured using more specific questions are more highly correlated with behavior than are attitudes measured using less specific questions. Data are from Davidson and Jaccard (1979).[27]

Attitudes also predict behavior better for some people than for others. Self-monitoring refers to individual differences in the tendency to attend to social cues and to adjust one's behavior to one's social environment. To return to our example of Magritte, you might wonder whether she is the type of person who is likely to be persuaded by peer pressure because she is particularly concerned with being liked by others. If she is, then she's probably more likely to want to fit in with whatever her friends are doing, and she might try a cigarette if her friends offer herone.

On the other hand, if Magritte is not particularly concerned about following the social norms of her friends, then she'll more likely be able to resist the persuasion. High self-monitors are those who tend to attempt to blend into the social situation in order to be liked; low self-monitors are those who are less likely to do so. You can see that, because they allow the social situation to influence their behaviors, the relationship between attitudes and behavior will be weaker for high self-monitors than it is for low self-monitors (Kraus, 1995).[28]

[27] Principles of Social Psychology by University of Minnesota is licensed under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
[28] Principles of Social Psychology by University of Minnesota is licensed under a CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

CHAPTER 4: HOW DOES GENDER INFLUENCE CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Differentiate sex and gender.
- Describe how gender is a social construct.
- Explain the development of gender differences.
- Recognize gender as a socializing agent.
- Explain sexual orientation.
- Identify challenges that LGBT families and children may face.

UNDERSTANDING SEX AND GENDER

Although the terms *sex* and *gender* are sometimes used interchangeably and do in fact complement each other, they nonetheless refer to different aspects of what it means to be a woman or man in any society.

Sex refers to the anatomical and other biological differences between females and males that are determined at the moment of conception and develop in the womb and throughout childhood and adolescence. Females, of course, have two X chromosomes, while males have one X chromosome and one Y chromosome. From this basic genetic difference spring other biological differences. We have found that there are variations of the sex chromosomes, but typically we only use XX – female and XY- male.

When babies are born, they are assigned a gender based on their biological sex—male babies are assigned as boys, female babies are assigned as girls, and intersex babies are born with sex characteristics that do not fit the typical definitions for male or female bodies, and are usually relegated into one gender category or another. Scholars generally regard gender as a social construct, meaning that it doesn't exist naturally but is instead a concept that is created by cultural and societal norms. From birth, children are socialized to conform to certain gender roles based on their biological sex and the gender to which they are assigned.[29]

[29] Intersex by Wikipedia is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

GENDER ROLES & GENDER STEREOTYPES

Gender roles, refers to a society's expectations of people's behavior and attitudes based on whether they are females or males. Understood in this way, gender, like race, is a *social construct*. How we think and behave as females and males is not etched in stone by our biology but rather is a result of how society expects us to think and behave based on what sex we are. As we grow up, we learn these expectations as we develop our gender identity, and our beliefs about ourselves as females or males.

These expectations are called *femininity* and *masculinity*. Femininity refers to the cultural expectations we have of girls and women, while masculinity refers to the expectations we have of boys and men. A familiar nursery rhyme nicely summarizes these two sets of traits:

> *What are little boys made of?*
> *Snips and snails,*
> *And puppy dog tails,*
> *That's what little boys are made of.*
> *What are little girls made of?*
> *Sugar and spice,*
> *And everything nice,*
> *That's what little girls are made of.*

As this nursery rhyme suggests, our traditional notions of femininity and masculinity indicate that we think females and males are fundamentally different from each other.

Figure 4.1 - Infant girls traditionally wear pink, while infant boys wear blue. This color difference reflects the different cultural expectations we have for babies based on their (biological) sex.[30]

The attitudes and expectations surrounding gender roles are not typically based on any inherent or natural gender differences, but on **gender stereotypes**, or oversimplified notions about the attitudes, traits, and behavior patterns of males and females. We engage in gender stereotyping when we do things like making the assumption that a teenage babysitter is

[30] Image by mgeejnr on Pixabay

female.

While it is somewhat acceptable for women to take on a narrow range of masculine characteristics without repercussions (such as dressing in traditionally male clothing), men are rarely able to take on more feminine characteristics (such as wearing skirts) without the risk of harassment or violence. This threat of punishment for stepping outside of gender norms is especially true for those who do not identify as male or female.

Pause to Reflect

As a child, what toys did you play with? Were these toy selections at all influenced by your parents, the media, or friends? Why or why not?

SOCIALIZATION AND GENDER

Previous sections identified several agents of socialization, including the family, peers, schools, the mass media, and religion. While that chapter's discussion focused on these agents' impact on socialization in general, ample evidence of their impact on gender-role socialization also exists. Such socialization helps boys and girls develop their gender identity (Andersen & Hysock, 2009).

The Family

Socialization into gender roles begins in infancy, as almost from the moment of birth parents begin to socialize their children as boys or girls without even knowing it (Begley, 2009; Eliot, 2009). Many studies document this process (Lindsey, 2011). Parents commonly describe their infant daughters as pretty, soft, and delicate and their infant sons as strong, active, and alert, even though neutral observers find no such gender differences among infants when they do not know the infants' sex. From infancy on, parents play with and otherwise interact with their daughters and sons differently. They play more roughly with their sons—for example, by throwing them up in the air or by gently wrestling with them—and more quietly with their daughters. When their infant or toddler daughters cry, they warmly comfort them, but they tend to let their sons cry longer and to comfort them less. They give their girls dolls to play with and their boys "action figures" and toy guns. While these gender differences in socialization are probably smaller now than a generation ago, they certainly continue to exist. Go into a large toy store and you will see pink aisles of dolls and cooking sets and blue aisles of action figures, toy guns, and related items.

Peers

Peer influences also encourage gender socialization. As they reach school age, children begin to play different games based on their gender (see the "Sociology Making a Difference" box). Boys tend to play sports and other competitive team games governed by inflexible rules and

relatively large numbers of roles, while girls tend to play smaller, cooperative games such as hopscotch and jumping rope with fewer and more flexible rules. Although girls are much more involved in sports now than a generation ago, these gender differences in their play as youngsters persist and continue to reinforce gender roles. For example, they encourage competitiveness in boys and cooperation and trust among girls. Boys who are not competitive risk being called "sissy" or other words by their peers. The patterns we see in adult males and females thus have their roots in their play as young children (King, Miles, & Kniska, 1991).

Gender Differences in Children's Play and Games

In considering the debate, discussed in the text, between biology and sociology over the origins of gender roles, some widely cited studies by sociologists over gender differences in children's play and games provide important evidence for the importance of socialization.

Janet Lever (1978) studied fifth-grade children in three different communities in Connecticut. She watched them play and otherwise interact in school and also had the children keep diaries of their play and games outside school. One of her central aims was to determine how complex the two sexes' play and games were in terms of such factors as number of rules, specialization of roles, and size of the group playing. In all of these respects, Lever found that boys' play and games were typically more complex than girls' play and games. She attributed these differences to socialization by parents, teachers, and other adults and argued that the complexity of boys' play and games helped them to be better able than girls to learn important social skills such as dealing with rules and coordinating actions to achieve goals.

Meanwhile, Barrie Thorne (1993) spent many months in two different working-class communities in California and Michigan observing fourth and fifth graders sit in class and lunchrooms and play on the school playgrounds. Most children were white, but several were African American or Latino. As you might expect, the girls and boys she observed usually played separately from each other, and the one-sex groups in which they played were very important for the development of their gender identity, with boys tending to play team sports and other competitive games and girls tending to play cooperative games such as jump rope. These differences led Thorne to conclude that gender-role socialization stems not only from practices by adults but also from the children's own activities without adult involvement. When boys and girls did interact, it was often "girls against the boys" or vice versa in classroom spelling contests and in games such as tag. Thorne concluded that these "us against them" contests helped the children learn that boys and girls are two different and antagonistic sexes and that gender itself is antagonistic, even if there were

also moments when both sexes interacted on the playground in more relaxed, noncompetitive situations. Boys also tended to disrupt girls' games more than the reverse and in this manner both exerted and learned dominance over females. In all of these ways, children were not just the passive recipients of gender-role socialization from adults (their teachers), but they also played an active role in ensuring that such socialization occurred.

The studies by Lever and Thorne were among the first to emphasize the importance of children's play and peer relationships for gender socialization. They also called attention to the importance of the traits and values learned through such socialization for outcomes later in life. The rise in team sports opportunities for girls in the years since Lever and Thorne did their research is a welcome development that addresses the concerns expressed in their studies, but young children continue to play in the ways that Lever and Thorne found. To the extent children's play has the consequences just listed, and to the extent these consequences impede full gender inequality, these sociological studies suggest the need for teachers, parents, and other adults to help organize children's play that is more egalitarian along the lines discussed by Lever, Thorne, and other scholars. In this way, their sociological work has helped to make a difference and promises to continue to do so.

Schools

School is yet another agent of gender socialization (Klein, 2007). First and foremost, school playgrounds provide a location for the gender-linked play activities just described to occur. Second, and perhaps more important, teachers at all levels treat their female and male students differently in subtle ways of which they are probably not aware. They tend to call on boys more often to answer questions in class and to praise them more when they give the right answer. They also give boys more feedback about their assignments and other schoolwork (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). At all grade levels, many textbooks and other books still portray people in gender- stereotyped ways. It is true that the newer books do less of this than older ones, but the newer books still contain some stereotypes, and the older books are still used in many schools, especially those that cannot afford to buy newer volumes.

Mass Media

Figure 4.2 - Women's magazines reinforce the view that women need to be slender and wear many cosmetics in order to be considered beautiful.[31]

Gender socialization also occurs through the mass media (Dow & Wood, 2006). On children's television shows, the major characters are male. On Nickelodeon, for example, the very popular SpongeBob SquarePants is a male, as are his pet snail, Gary; his best friend, Patrick Star; their neighbor, Squidward Tentacles; and SpongeBob's employer, Eugene Crabs. Of the major characters in Bikini Bottom, only Sandy Cheeks is a female.

As for adults' prime-time television, more men than women continue to fill more major roles in weekly shows, despite notable women's roles in shows such as *The Good Wife* and *Grey's Anatomy*. Women are also often portrayed as unintelligent or frivolous individuals who are there more for their looks than for anything else. Television commercials reinforce this image (Yoder, Christopher, & Holmes, 2008).

Cosmetics ads abound, suggesting not only that a major task for women is to look good but also that their sense of self-worth stems from looking good. Other commercials show women becoming ecstatic over achieving a clean floor or sparkling laundry. Judging from the world of television commercials, then, women's chief goals in life are to look good and to have a clean house. At the same time, men's chief goals, judging from many commercials, are to drink beer and drive cars.

Women's and men's magazines reinforce these gender images (Milillo, 2008). Most of the magazines intended for teenaged girls and adult women are filled with pictures of thin, beautiful models, advice on dieting, cosmetics ads, and articles on how to win and please your man. Conversely, the magazines intended for teenaged boys and men are filled with ads and articles on cars and sports, advice on how to succeed in careers and other endeavors, and pictures of thin, beautiful (and sometimes nude) women. These magazine images again suggest that women's chief goals are to look good and to please men and that men's chief goals are to succeed, win over women, and live life in the fast lane.

[31] Image by Photo Editing Services Tucia.com is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Religion

Another agent of socialization, religion, also contributes to traditional gender stereotypes. Many traditional interpretations of the Bible yield the message that women are subservient to men (Tanenbaum, 2009). This message begins in Genesis, where the first human is Adam, and Eve was made from one of his ribs. The major figures in the rest of the Bible are men, and women are for the most part depicted as wives, mothers, temptresses, and prostitutes; they are praised for their roles as wives and mothers and condemned for their other roles. More generally, women are constantly depicted as the property of men. The Ten Commandments includes a neighbor's wife with his house, ox, and other objects as things not to be coveted (Exodus 20:17), and many biblical passages say explicitly that women belong to men, such as this one from the New Testament:

> Wives be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church. As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. (Ephesians 5:22–24)

This discussion suggests that religious people should believe in traditional gender views more than less religious people, and research confirms this relationship (Morgan, 1988). To illustrate this, the figure below shows the relationship in the General Social Survey between frequency of prayer and the view that "it is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family." People who pray more often are more likely to accept this traditional view of gender roles.

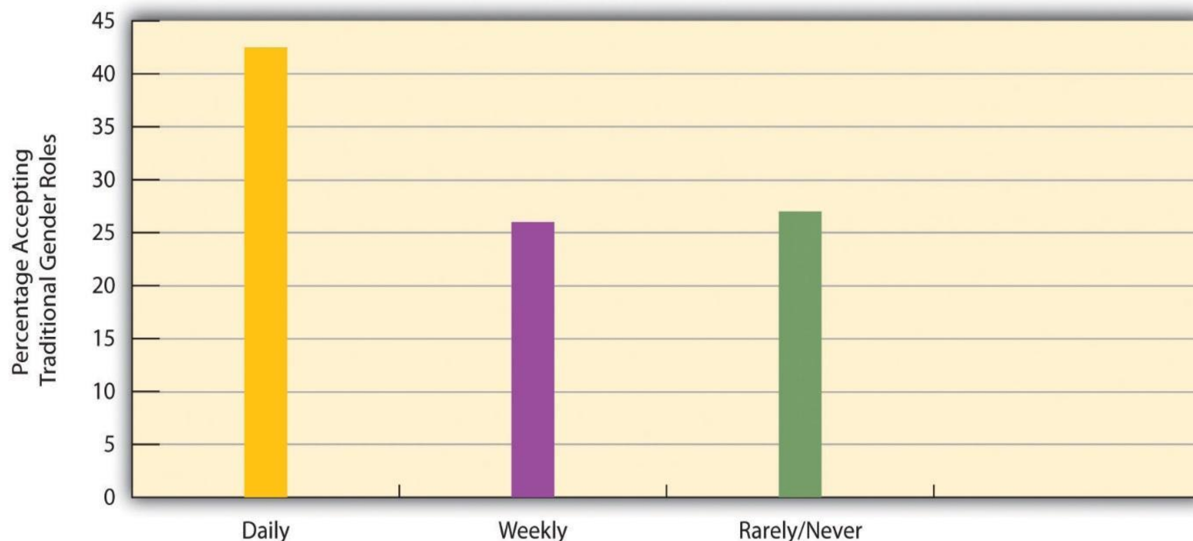

Figure 4.3 - Percentage agreeing that "it is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family."[32]

[32] Data from General Social Survey, 2008.

GENDER IDENTITY & GENDER EXPRESSION

A person's subjective experience of their own gender and how it develops, or gender identity, is a topic of much debate. It is the extent to which one identifies with a particular gender; it is a person's individual sense and subjective experience of being a man, a woman, or other gender. It is often shaped early in life and consists primarily of the acceptance (or non-acceptance) of one's membership into a gender category. In most societies, there is a basic division between gender attributes assigned to males and females. In all societies, however, some individuals do not identify with some (or all) of the aspects of gender that are assigned to their biological sex.

Those that identify with the gender that corresponds to the sex assigned to them at birth (for example, they are assigned female at birth and continue to identify as a girl, and later a woman) are called cisgender. In many Western cultures, individuals who identify with a gender that is different from their biological sex (for example, they are assigned female at birth but feel inwardly that they are a boy or a gender other than a girl) are called transgender. Some transgender individuals, if they have access to resources and medical care, choose to alter their bodies through medical interventions such as surgery and hormonal therapy so that their physical being is better aligned with their gender identity.

Recent terms such as "genderqueer," "genderfluid," "gender variant," "androgynous," "agender," and "gender nonconforming" are used by individuals who do not identify within the gender binary as either a man or a woman. Instead, they identify as existing somewhere along a spectrum or continuum of genders, or outside of the spectrum altogether, often in a way that is continuously evolving.

The Gender Continuum

Viewing gender as a continuum allows us to perceive the rich diversity of genders, from trans- and cisgender to gender queer and agender. Most Western societies operate on the idea that gender is a **binary**, that there are essentially only two genders (men and women) based on two sexes (male and female), and that everyone must fit one or the other. This social dichotomy enforces conformance to the ideals of masculinity and femininity in all aspects of gender and sex—gender identity, gender expression, and biological sex.

According to supporters of **queer theory**, gender identity is not a rigid or static identity but can continue to evolve and change over time. Queer theory developed in response to the perceived limitations of the way in which identities are thought to become consolidated or stabilized (for instance, gay or straight), and theorists constructed *queerness* in an attempt to resist this. In this way, the theory attempts to maintain a critique rather than define a specific identity. While "queer" defies a simple definition, the term is often used to convey an identity that is not rigidly developed but is instead fluid and changing.[33]

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[33] Boundless Psychology - Gender and Sexuality references Curation and Revision by Boundless Psychology, which is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0

The Genderbread Person

In 2012, Sam Killerman created the Genderbread Person as an infographic to break down gender identity, gender expression, biological sex, and sexual orientation.[34] In 2018, he updated it to version 2.0 to be more accurate, and inclusive.[35]

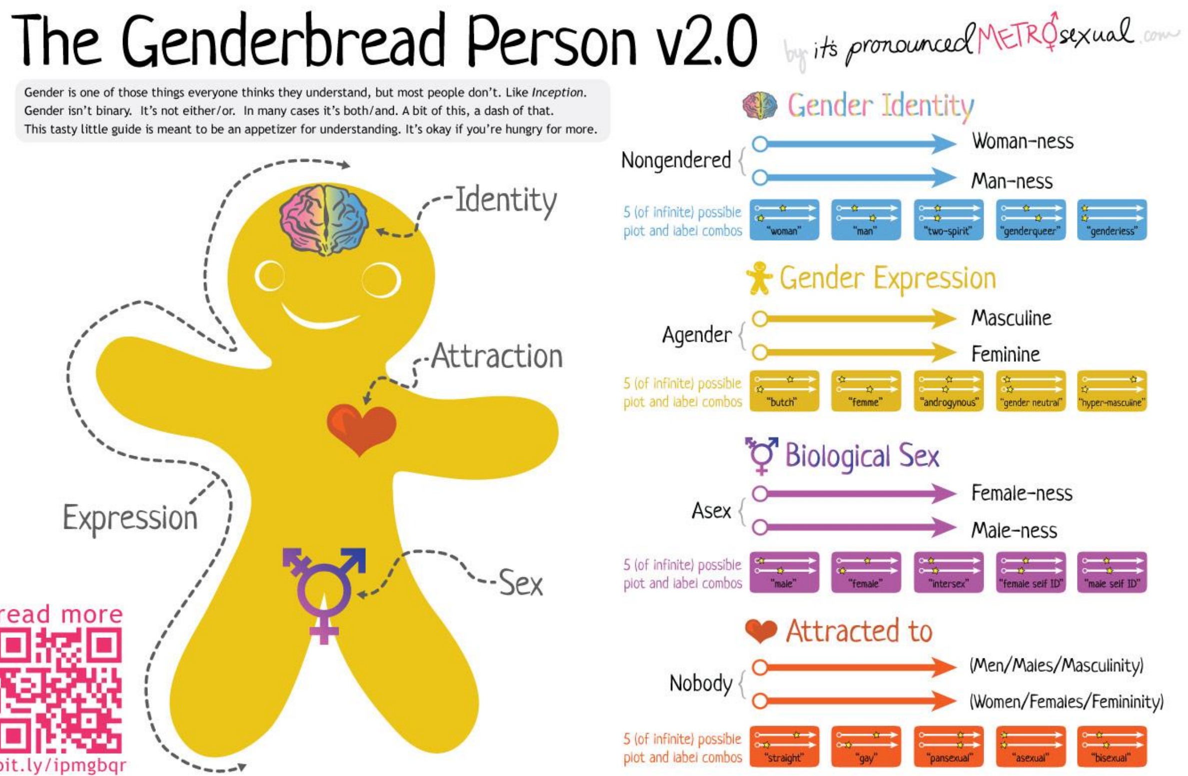

Figure 4.4 - The Genderbread Person explains gender identity, gender expression, biological sex, and sexual orientation.[36]

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[34] The Genderbread Person by Sam Killermann is in the public domain

[35] The Genderbread Person v2.0 by Sam Killermann is in the public domain

[36] Image by it's pronounced METROsexual

Trans Parenting

There is little to no visibility or public support through pregnancy and parenting resources directed towards Trans parents. In the case of Trans individuals who desire to become parents and to be legally recognized as mothers or fathers of their children, courts often refuse to legally acknowledge such roles because of biological discrimination.

Figure 4.5 Ferndando Machado and Diane Rodriguez, who are both transgender, with their son Sununun.[37]

Transgender or Gender Non-Conforming Children

Children, who do not feel that they are the gender they were assigned at birth, deserve a bit of special attention in this discussion about gender. "Gender identity and expression are central to the way we see ourselves and engage in the world around us. This is certainly true of transgender and gender-expansive children and teens, for whom family support is absolutely critical" (Human Right Campaign, 2019).[38]

Transgender issues manifest at different times in life in different individuals. In most cases of gender dysphoria, the condition is often apparent in early childhood, when such a child may express behavior incongruent with and dissatisfaction related to their assigned gender. However, many of these children experience rejection because of their differences and quickly attempt to repress them. Therefore, people who see these children regularly may be unaware that they are unhappy as members of their assigned gender.

Family acceptance among transgender children predicts an increase in greater self-esteem, social support, and general health status. It also protects against depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation and behaviors. Parents' access to information is critical in aiding and advocating for transgender youth.

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[37] Image by Ceoti is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0

[38] The Human Rights Campaign (2019).Transgender Children & Youth: Understanding the Basics. Retrieved from https://www.hrc.org/resources/transgender-children-and-youth-understanding-the-basics

A safe school climate is essential for transgender, gender dysphoric, and gender non-conforming children, who likely experience stress and anxiety due to their desire to transition or display themselves as a different gender. While many schools have become more accepting and allow children to express their desired gender identity, current research shows that there is an increased amount of harassment, bullying, indifference by school staff, and antigay victimization towards transgender and gender non-conforming youth.[39]

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

A person's sexual orientation is their emotional and sexual attraction to a particular sex or gender. A continuing pattern of romantic or sexual attraction (or a combination of these) to persons of a given sex or gender. According to the American Psychological Association (APA) (2016), sexual orientation also refers to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions.

Some specific orientation is defined in many ways, including:

- Heterosexuality: attraction to the opposite sex/gender
- same-sex attraction: previously referred to as homosexuality, which is an outdated term that many people find offensive because it was previously classified as a mental illness
- bisexuality, polysexuality, or pansexuality: attraction to two, multiple, or all sexes/genders respectively
- asexuality: no sexual attraction to any sex/gender

Sexual Orientation on a Continuum

Sexuality researcher Alfred Kinsey was among the first to conceptualize sexuality as a continuum rather than a strict dichotomy of gay or straight. To classify this continuum of heterosexuality and homosexuality, Kinsey et al. (1948) created a seven-point rating scale that ranged from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual. Research done over several decades has supported this idea that sexual orientation ranges along a continuum, from exclusive attraction to the opposite sex/gender to exclusive attraction to the same sex/gender (Carroll, 2016).

A more contemporary look at sexual orientation as infinite variations of attraction. A closer examination of The Genderbread Person v2.0 introduced earlier in the chapter illustrates this:

[39] Transgender youth by Wikipedia is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

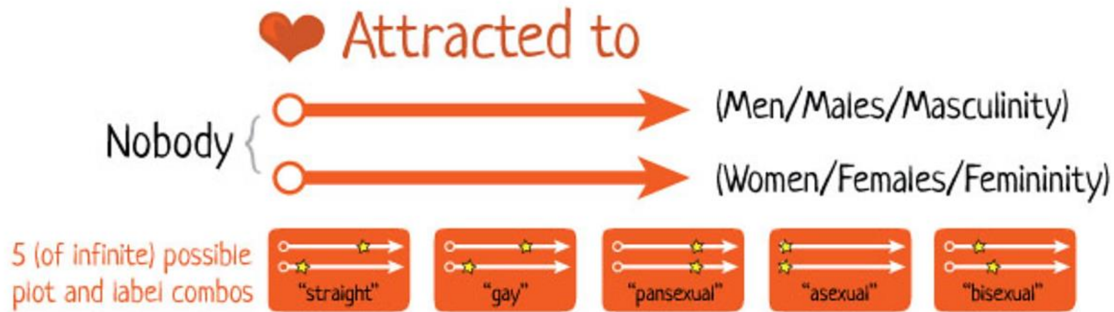


Figure 4.6 - A spectrum of sexual orientation.[40]

Development of Sexual Orientation

According to current scientific understanding, individuals are usually aware of their sexual orientation between middle childhood and early adolescence. However, this is not always the case, and some do not become aware of their sexual orientation until much later in life. It is not necessary to participate in sexual activity to be aware of these emotional, romantic, and physical attractions; people can be celibate and still recognize their sexual orientation. Some researchers argue that sexual orientation is not static and inborn, but is instead fluid and changeable throughout the lifespan.

There is no scientific consensus regarding the exact reasons why an individual holds a particular sexual orientation. Research has examined possible biological, developmental, social, and cultural influences on sexual orientation, but there has been no evidence that links sexual orientation to one factor (APA, 2016). Biological explanations, that include genetics, hormones, and birth order, will be explored further. Excess or deficient exposure to hormones during prenatal development has also been theorized as an explanation for sexual orientation. One-third of females exposed to abnormal amounts of prenatal androgens, a condition called congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH), identify as bisexual or lesbian (Cohen-Bendahan, van de Beek, & Berenbaum, 2005). In contrast, too little exposure to prenatal androgens may affect male sexual orientation (Carlson, 2011).

Sexual Orientation Discrimination

The United States is heteronormative, meaning that society supports heterosexuality as the norm. Consider, for example, that homosexuals are often asked, "When did you know you were gay?" but heterosexuals are rarely asked, "When did you know you were straight?" (Ryle, 2011). Living in a culture that privileges heterosexuality has a significant impact on the ways in which non-heterosexual people are able to develop and express their sexuality.

Open identification of one's sexual orientation may be hindered by homophobia, which encompasses a range of negative attitudes and feelings toward homosexuality or people who

[40] Image by it's pronounced METROsexual

are identified or perceived as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT). It can be expressed as antipathy, contempt, prejudice, aversion, or hatred; it may be based on irrational fear and is sometimes related to religious beliefs (Carroll, 2016). Homophobia is observable in critical and hostile behavior, such as discrimination and violence on the basis of sexual orientations that are non- heterosexual. Recognized types of homophobia include institutionalized homophobia, such as religious and state-sponsored homophobia, and internalized homophobia in which people with same-sex attractions internalize, or believe, society's negative views and/or hatred of themselves.

Gay, lesbian, and bisexual people regularly experience stigma, harassment, discrimination, and violence based on their sexual orientation (Carroll, 2016). Research has shown that gay, lesbian, and bisexual teenagers are at a higher risk of depression and suicide due to exclusion from social groups, rejection from peers and family, and negative media portrayals of homosexuals (Bauermeister et al., 2010). Discrimination can occur in the workplace, in housing, at schools, and in numerous public settings. Much of this discrimination is based on stereotypes and misinformation. Major policies to prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation have only come into effect in the United States in the last few years.[41]

LGBT Parenting

LGBT parenting refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people raising one or more children as parents or foster care parents. This includes: children raised by same-sex couples (same-sex parenting), children raised by single LGBT parents, and children raised by an opposite-sex couple where at least one partner is LGBT. LGBT people can become parents through various means including current or former relationships, co-parenting, adoption, donor insemination, reciprocal IVF, and surrogacy.

Figure 4.7 - Here is an example of the 33% of female same-sex families that choose to become parents[42]

[41] Lifespan Development: A Psychological Perspective by Martha Lally and Suzanne Valentine-French is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 3.0;
Boundless Psychology - Gender and Sexuality references Curation and Revision by Boundless Psychology, which is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0

[42] Image by stepaniehaynes is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people are parents. In the 2000 U.S. Census, for example, 33 percent of female same-sex couple households and 22 percent of male same-sex couple households reported at least one child under the age of 18 living in the home. As of 2005, an estimated 270,313 children in the United States live in households headed by same-sex couples.[43]

Scientific research consistently shows that gay and lesbian parents are as fit and capable as heterosexual parents, and their children are as psychologically healthy and well-adjusted as those reared by heterosexual parents despite the reality that considerable legal discrimination and inequity remain significant challenges for these families. Major associations of mental health professionals in the U.S., Canada, and Australia have not identified credible empirical research that suggests otherwise.

Children of LGBT parents do not have any differences in their gender role behaviors in comparison to those observed in heterosexual family structures. In fact, a study by Bos and Sandfort (2009) also revealed that children raised by same-sex couples felt less pressured to follow gender stereotypes. However, children may struggle with negative attitudes about their parents from the harassment they may encounter by living in society.

Pause to Reflect

What challenges might LGBT families face? What role might early childhood educators and their programs play in supporting these families?

IN SUMMARY

This chapter focused on how gender influences children, families, and communities. The role of the early childhood professional is one that ensures that there is support for all children and families that are served by the teacher and the program the child is enrolled in. As noted, we have become a bit more progressive in our attitudes about gender identity, but we are in no way out of the woods as gender stereotypes still exist and can be of potential harm to children, families, and communities.

In the next chapter we will explore, in more depth, what is a family and what is our role in ensuring that all families feel a sense of belonging.

[43] LGBT parenting by Wikipedia is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0

CHAPTER 5: WHAT IS A FAMILY?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Investigate the diversity of families.
- Investigate romantic relationships and marriage through the lens of culture.

INTRODUCTION

We know that humans are social beings. We make friends, live in communities, and connect to acquaintances through shared interests. In recent times, social media has become a new way for people to connect with childhood peers, friends of friends, and even strangers.
Perhaps nothing is more central to the social world than the concept of family. Our families represent our earliest relationships and—often—our most enduring ones. In this module, you will learn about the diversity of families and our roles in supporting and valuing all of the children and families that we will serve. This helps to shape our perspectives and our interactions with all families in our role as early childhood professionals.

WHAT IS A FAMILY?

Pause to Reflect

What does family mean to you? Whom do you think of when you think of your definition of a family? Do you see your family represented in the dominant culture? Think about how that may influence your ideas and shape the way in which you interact with families.

In J.K. Rowling's famous Harry Potter novels, the boy magician lives in a cupboard under the stairs. His unfortunate situation is the result of his wizarding parents who were killed in a duel, causing the young Potter to be subsequently shipped off to live with his cruel aunt and uncle. Although family may not be the central theme of these wand and sorcery novels, Harry's example raises a compelling question: what, exactly, counts as family?

The dictionary definition of a family is as follows:
Family noun (plural families)

1. (treated as singular or plural) a group consisting of parents and children living together in a household.
    a. A group of people related to one another by blood or marriage.
2. “friends and family can provide support”

Synonyms: relatives, relations, blood relations, family members, kin, next of kin, kinsfolk, kinsmen, kinswomen, kindred, one's (own) flesh and blood, connections

Figure 5.1 - A traditional family has a somewhat narrow definition that includes only relationships of blood, marriage, and occasionally adoption. More recently, in many societies, the definition of family has expanded. A modern family may include less traditional variations based on strong commitment and emotional ties.[44]

Another term we hear is family values – (sometimes-referred to as familial values) which are traditional or cultural values that pertain to the family's structure, function, roles, beliefs, attitude and ideals. If you investigate further, you will also find that this encompasses ideas that are traditionally learned within a family such as those of high moral standards and discipline. Which definition makes most sense to you? How you view family and family values shapes the way in which you will build relationships with the children and families that you will serve as an early childhood professional. This is why it is important/critical for us to learn about and examine/reflect on our views as early childhood professionals.

In modern times, we have criticized the traditional definition of family in that it has too narrow of a scope. Modern families—especially those in industrialized societies—exist in many forms, including the single parent family, foster families, same-sex couples, childfree families, and many other variations from traditional norms. Common to each of these family forms is commitment, caring, and close emotional ties—that increasingly define the characteristics of family (Benokraitis, 2015). The changing definition of family has come about, in part, because of factors such as divorce and re-marriage. In many cases, people do not grow up with their family of origin, but become part of a stepfamily or blended family. Whether a single parent, joint, or two-parent family, a person's family of origin, or the family into which he or she is born, generally acts as the social context for young children learning about relationships.

According to Bowen (1978), each person has a role to play in his or her family, and each role comes with certain rules and expectations. We explored his system of rules and roles

[44] Image by the California Department of Education is used with permission

in Chapter 1. The goal for the family is stability: rules and expectations that work for all. When the role of one member of the family changes, so do the rules and expectations. Such changes ripple through the family and cause each member to adjust his or her own role and expectations to compensate for the change.

Figure 5.2 - There are many variations of modern families, including blended or stepfamilies where two families combine. In a combined family the roles of individuals may be different than in their original family of orientation.[45]

Family roles assigned by gender is one of the factors created by societal norms. Traditional roles have historically placed housekeeping and childrearing squarely in the realm of women's responsibilities, while men seen as protectors and as providers of resources including money bear the burden of that responsibility. Increasingly, families are changing these traditional roles by women working outside the home and men contributing more with domestic and childrearing responsibilities. Despite this shift toward creating a more egalitarian family structure, women still tend to do more housekeeping and child rearing tasks than men in the family, known as the second shift (Hochschild & Machung, 2012).

Interestingly, parental roles have an impact on the ambitions of their children. Croft and her colleagues (2014) examined the beliefs of more than 300 children. The researchers discovered that when fathers endorsed equal sharing of household duties and when mothers were more workplace oriented it influenced how their daughters thought. In both cases, daughters were more likely to have ambitions toward working outside the home and working in less gender-stereotyped professions.[46]

The Diversity of Today's Families

The landscape of families has changed considerably over the last few decades. It is not that diverse families have never existed; it is that in today's society, we are making places at the

[45] Image by Doc List is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0
[46] The Family by Joel A. Muraco is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

table for this diversity. The images that we used to see of families, on television, in magazines, on billboards, and other media images portrayed the typical family as a mother, father, two children (usually one male child and one female child) that lived in a house with a white picket fence. Today, we elevate and value diverse families. Here are some of the family structures today:

Figure 5.3 This was how we tended to think of families in the past.[47]

Dual parent family

This is often referred to as a mother and father raising children. However, if we think about the diversity of families this could include same sex parents as they are also raising children together.

Single parent (either by choice or through divorce)

This could be a male or female parent who either wants to be a parent and doesn't have a partner to create a child with or is raising children on their own due to divorce. Often, we think of single parents as female, but today as we continue to form acceptance of family structures, they are males who are also choosing to form a family on their own or raise their children (from divorce) on their own.

Grandparents or other relatives raising children (relatives can also be non-related family members who are close to the child(ren))

Children whose parents are not able to care for them (for whatever reason), may be raised by their maternal or paternal grandparents or may be raised by extended family members including those family members that are not related biologically.

Teen parents

Today it is more acceptable for teens who become pregnant to raise a child. Sometimes they

[47] Image on pxhere is licensed under CC0

may do this together or separate. Sometimes they may do this with the help of their families. Teens who become pregnant while still in high school are often able to return to school and there are programs on high school campuses where teens may bring their child. They may receive parenting classes in addition to their high school curriculum.

Adoptive families (including transracial adoption)

Families who are not able to conceive a child on their own may choose adoption. While this tends to be most common, there are families who consciously choose adoption over procreation as well as decide to add to their family through adoption. In any case, forming a family through adoption is a choice that is not taken lightly. There are many options in forming your family through adoption. You can choose to have an open or closed adoption. Open adoption refers to having a continued relationship with the birth parent(s) to just knowing who the birthparents are and everything in between. Closed adoption means that the family does not have access to birthparent(s) information. In addition, families may choose to adopt a child of the same race or of another race.

Foster families

Children placed in temporary care due to extenuating circumstances involving their family of origin are often placed in homes that licensed to care for children. The adults who foster these children must go through strict protocols in order to care for these vulnerable children. The most common name for this arrangement is fostering, but you may also hear them described as resource families. In these cases, it is the intent to reunite the children with their family of origin whenever possible. When this is not possible, the children are placed in the system to be adopted. The foster family may decide to adopt the children or another family may adopt the children. It is always the intent to find a permanent arrangement for children whenever possible, as we know that stability has better outcomes for children.

Families with same sex parents

Same sex couples, whether two men or two women, may choose to form a family and raise the children together. There are many ways in which they may decide to form their family. They may adopt, they may use reproductive technology, or they may use egg or sperm donors. In the case where two women are choosing to form a family, they may decide to have one of them become pregnant and give birth to their child. According to recent research into children raised by same sex parents, there is evidence to suggest that since these children are planned, they often have better outcomes than originally was believed.

Bi-racial/Multi-racial families

These are children who are raised by parents from two different races, including parents who may be bi-racial themselves. This also includes multi-racial families. Society is becoming more acceptable of diversity within families, which provides children with better outcomes.

Families with multi-religious/faith beliefs

There are children today raised in multi-religious homes. This means that each parent may have different faiths/religions. They may choose one faith/religion or the other or both in raising their children.

Children with an incarcerated parent(s)

Sometimes children are raised by one parent while the other parent is incarcerated. This can be complicated for the family as the parent may spend some time away and then return home. While the parent who is incarcerated is away, the family structure changes. Each time the parent goes away and comes back it adds to this confusion. Sometimes, children whose parent(s) are incarcerated may live in foster care or resource home while their parent is away and be returned to the parent upon their release, if it is safe for the child to do so.

Unmarried parents who are raising children

Today, many parents are deciding not to marry but to raise children. The only difference is that they do not have a legal marriage license; however, their family structure is the same as dual parent families whether opposite sex or same sex.

Transgender parents raising children

This refers to two ways in which children may be raised by a transgender parent or parents. A parent may transition after already having children with someone of the opposite sex or they may transition prior to having a child and decide they want to parent.

Blended families

A blended family can be two different parents that come together each bringing their children from a previous relationship with them. Sometimes the parents that come together with children from a previous relationship may also decide to have a child together.

Families formed through reproductive technology

Today we have sophisticated medical advances to help parents who are infertile to become pregnant and give birth to their biological child as well as to use the biological material from someone else and carry that fertilized embryo to term. There are a variety of reproductive technologies that are available to families. This is often at a huge financial cost to the families, as most medical insurance companies do not cover the medical expenses of becoming pregnant.

First time older parents

Today it is becoming more common for men and women to have children in their 30’s, 40’s, and even older.

Families who experience homeless

We know that some children are raised without a stable home. The family may be living in their car, living in a hotel, a homeless shelter, or living in multiple dwellings also known as couch surfing. Families experiencing homelessness may be due to the loss of a job/steady income, being employed by making minimal wages that do not provide the means necessary to sustain housing (and other basic necessities), or other issues that may complicate the family's ability to sustain a stable place to live. Families do not always share their homeless status as there is often shame and embarrassment that society places on these families.

Families with children who have developmental delays and disabilities

This refers to families who have a child or children with developmental delays and/or disabilities. These delays/disabilities are varied. There also may be typically developing children in the family as well. This often places a burden on families, not only because of the time needed to care for a child who is not typically developing, but because society often misinterprets children who display behaviors that may be viewed as inappropriate.

Families raising their children in a culture not their own and in which English is not the primary language

This refers to families who may have immigrated here and whose children were either born in their country of origin or born in the United States. This duality of cultures can create problems for the child and their family if societal expectations are that the family enculturate to the dominant culture. This results in children feeling shame about their family when they should feel pride in their family of origin.

Pause to Reflect

In reviewing all of the families above, how do you see your role in supporting these families in your early childhood environments? What level of comfort do you have? What may be challenging for you? What are some strategies you could use to help you in working on your biases?

In reviewing all of the families above, it is evident that children exist in many different family structures. It is our responsibility as early childhood professionals, to provide supportive and inclusive interactions, relationships and environments to each family in our early childhood programs. This can be accomplished through our ability to be open, inviting and to listening to what the families in our program need from us to feel a sense of belonging.

VALUING FAMILIES

What we know today, is that families do not have to be a certain way to create healthy children. In our field, we have many conversations about valuing families. What does it mean to value something or someone? The dictionary definition says that it means to regard something,

to give it the importance it deserves, and to communicate that value by our own attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs.

As we have discovered in previous chapters, not only are human beings complex, but their family structures share that same complexity. How do we meet the needs of every family when our context may be limited to our own family structure? Here are some questions that may help to guide you:

1. How can I learn more about that family?
2. What kinds of opportunities can I provide for families to be a part of their child's classroom experience?
3. How can I help all families feel connected, respected, and valued?
4. What judgements/assumptions do I have about different family structures? How do those judgements/assumptions get in the way of me connecting with all of my families?
5. What are the best strategies for helping children and their families navigate their differences?

We address these and many other questions throughout this course in order to foster cultural humility (often referred to as Cultural Responsiveness). This attitude allows us to be open to all possibilities to connect with the families we will serve throughout our career in early childhood.

Our premiere organization for early care professionals, National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) includes being culturally sensitive to the families we serve in their position statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP).

The following are the three components of Developmentally Appropriate Practices:

1. What is known about child development and learning—referring to knowledge of age-related characteristics that permits general predictions about what experiences are likely to best promote children's learning and development.
2. What is known about each child as an individual—referring to what practitioners learn about each child that has implications for how best to adapt and be responsive to that individual variation.
3. What is known about the social and cultural contexts in which children live— referring to the values, expectations, and behavioral and linguistic conventions that shape children's lives at home and in their communities that practitioners must strive to understand in order to ensure that learning experiences in the program or school are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for each child and family.

HOW FAMILIES DEVELOP

Our families are so familiar to us that we can sometimes take for granted the idea that families develop over time. Nuclear families, those core units of parents and children, do not simply pop into being. The parents meet one another, they court or date one another, and they make the

decision to have children. Even then, the family does not quit changing. Children grow up and leave home and the roles shift yet again.

Intimacy

Figure 5.3 - According to Attachment Theory, the type of care that we receive as infants can have a significant influence on the intimate relationships that we have as adults.[48]

In a psychological sense, families begin with intimacy. The need for intimacy, or close relationships with others, is universal. We seek out close and meaningful relationships over the course of our lives. What our adult intimate relationships look like actually stems from infancy and our relationship with our primary caregivers (historically thought to be our mothers)—a process of development described by attachment theory. According to attachment theory, different styles of care giving result in different relationship "attachments." For example, responsive mothers— mothers who soothe their crying infants—produce infants who have secure attachments (Ainsworth, 1973; Bowlby 1969). About 60% of all children are "securely attached." As adults, secure individuals rely on their working models—concepts of how relationships operate—that were created in infancy, because of the interactions with their primary caregiver, to foster happy and healthy adult intimate relationships. Securely attached adults feel comfortable being depended on and depending on others.

As you might imagine, inconsistent or dismissive parents also influence the attachment style of their infants (Ainsworth, 1973), but in a different direction. In early studies on attachment style, infants were observed interacting with their caregivers, followed by being separated from them, then finally reunited. About 20% of the observed children were "resistant," meaning they were anxious even before, and especially during, the separation; and 20% were "avoidant,"

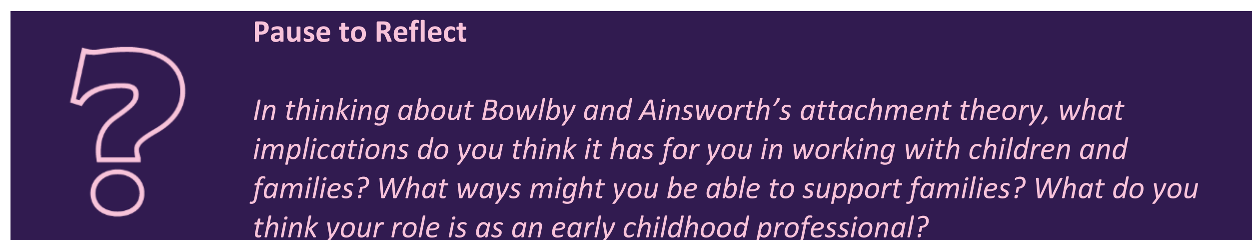
[48] Image by Muriel HEARD-COLLIER is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

meaning they actively avoided their caregiver after separation (i.e., ignoring the mother when they were reunited). These early attachment patterns can affect the way people relate to one another in adulthood. **Anxious-resistant** adults worry that others do not love them, and they often become frustrated or angry when their needs go unmet. **Anxious-avoidant** adults will appear not to care much about their intimate relationships, and are uncomfortable being depended on or depending on others themselves.

Table 5.1 - Early Attachment and Adult Intimacy

Attachment Style	Description
Secure	"I find it relatively easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them having them depend on me. I don't often worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me."
Anxious-avoidant	"I am somewhat comfortable being close to others; I find it difficult to trust them completely, difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous when anyone gets too close, and often, love partners want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being."
Anxious-resistant	"I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner does not really love me or will not want to stay with me. I want to merge completely with another person, and this desire sometimes scares people away."

The good news is that our attachment can change. It is not easy, but it is possible for anyone to "recover" a secure attachment. The process often requires the help of a supportive and dependable other, and for the insecure person to achieve coherence—the realization that his or her upbringing is not a permanent reflection of character or a reflection of the world at large, nor does it bar him or her from being worthy of love or others of being trustworthy (Treboux, Crowell, & Waters, 2004).



Pause to Reflect

In thinking about Bowlby and Ainsworth's attachment theory, what implications do you think it has for you in working with children and families? What ways might you be able to support families? What do you think your role is as an early childhood professional?

Dating, Courtship, and Cohabitation

One major difference in the way people find a partner these days is the way we use technology to both expand and restrict the marriage market—the process by which potential partners compare assets and liabilities of available prospects and choose the best option (Benokraitis, 2015). Comparing marriage to a market might sound unromantic, but think of it as a way to

illustrate how people seek out attractive qualities in a mate. Modern technology has allowed us to expand our "market" by allowing us to search for potential partners all over the world—as opposed to the days when people mostly relied on local dating pools. Technology also allows us to filter out undesirable (albeit available) prospects at the outset, based on factors such as shared interests, age, and other features.

The use of filters to find the most desirable partner is a common practice, resulting in people marrying others very similar to themselves—a concept called homogamy; the opposite is known as heterogamy (Burgess & Wallin, 1943). In his comparison of educational homogamy in 55 countries, Smits (2003) found strong support for higher-educated people marrying other highly educated people. As such, education appears to be a strong filter people use to help them select a mate. The most common filters we use—or, put another way, the characteristics we focus on most in potential mates—are age, race, social status, and religion (Regan, 2008). Other filters we use include compatibility, physical attractiveness (we tend to pick people who are as attractive as we are), and proximity (for practical reasons, we often pick people close to us) (Klenke-Hamel & Janda, 1980).

In many countries, technology is increasingly used to help single people find each other, and this may be especially true of older adults who are divorced or widowed, as there are few societally structured activities for older singles. For example, younger people in school are usually surrounded with many potential dating partners of a similar age and background. As we get older, this is less true, as we focus on our careers and find ourselves surrounded by co-workers of various ages, marital statuses, and backgrounds.

Figure 5.4 - In some countries, many people are coupled and committed to marriage through arrangements made by parents or professional marriage brokers.[49]

In some cultures, however, it is common for the families of young people to do the work of finding a partner for them. For example, the Shanghai Marriage Market refers to the People's Park in Shanghai, China—a place where parents of unmarried adults meet on weekends to trade information about their children in attempts to find suitable spouses for them (Bolsover,

[49] Image by [Ananabanana] is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

2011). In India, the marriage market refers to the use of marriage brokers or marriage bureaus to pair eligible singles together (Trivedi, 2013). To many Westerners, the idea of arranged marriage can seem puzzling. It can appear to take the romance out of the equation and violate values about personal freedom. On the other hand, some people in favor of arranged marriage argue that parents are able to make more mature decisions than young people are.

While such intrusions may seem inappropriate based on your upbringing, for many people of the world such help is expected, even appreciated. In India for example, "parental arranged marriages are largely preferred to other forms of marital choices" (Ramsheena & Gundemeda, 2015, p. 138). Of course, one's religious and social caste plays a role in determining how involved family may be.

In terms of other notable shifts in attitude seen around the world, there is increased document of cohabitation. Cohabitation is defined as an arrangement in which two people who are romantically involved, live together even though they are not married (Prinz, 1995). Cohabitation is common in many countries, with the Scandinavian nations of Iceland, Sweden, and Norway reporting the highest percentages, and more traditional countries like India, China, and Japan reporting low percentages (DeRose, 2011). In countries where cohabitation is increasingly common, there has been speculation as to whether or not cohabitation is now part of the natural developmental progression of romantic relationships: dating and courtship, then cohabitation, engagement, and finally marriage. However, while many cohabitating arrangements ultimately lead to marriage, many do not.

Engagement and Marriage

Figure 5.5 - While marriage is common across cultures, the details such as "How" and "When" are often quite different. Now the "Who" of marriage is experiencing an important change as laws are updated in a growing number of countries and states to give same-sex couples the same rights and benefits through marriage as heterosexual couples.[50]

Most people will marry in their lifetime. In the majority of countries, 80% of men and women

[50] Image by Bart Vis is licensed under CC BY 2.0

have been married by the age of 49 (United Nations, 2013). Despite how common marriage remains, it has undergone some interesting shifts in recent times. Around the world, people are tending to get married later in life or, increasingly, not at all. People in more developed countries (e.g., Nordic and Western Europe), for instance, marry later in life—at an average age of 30 years. This is very different than, for example, the economically developing country of Afghanistan, which has one of the lowest average-age statistics for marriage—at 20.2 years (United Nations, 2013). Another shift seen around the world is a gender gap in terms of age when people get married. In every country, men marry later than women. Since the 1970's, the average age of marriage for women has increased from 21.8 to 24.7 years. Men have seen a similar increase in age at first marriage.

As illustrated, the courtship process can vary greatly around the world. So too can an engagement—a formal agreement to get married. Some of these differences are small, such as on which hand an engagement ring is worn. In many countries it is worn on the left, but in Russia, Germany, Norway, and India, women wear their ring on their right. There are also more overt differences, such as who makes the proposal. In India and Pakistan, it is not uncommon for the family of the groom to propose to the family of the bride, with little to no involvement from the bride and groom themselves. In most Western industrialized countries, it is traditional for the male to propose to the female.

Pause to Reflect

What types of engagement traditions, practices, and rituals are common where you are from? How are they changing? Why is it important for early childhood professionals to have exposure to the various engagement and marriage practices? Do you see yourself reflected in these practices?

Deciding to have Children

Many factors need to be taken into account when deciding to have children. While you may think that it is inevitable that you will have children, they are couples who decide that having a child is not for them. Of course, you will not be working with childless or childfree couples; however, this is another societal expectation that can sometimes plague those who make a conscious decision not to bring a child into this world or may not be able to conceive a child and may not want to form their family through adoption.

Increasingly, families are postponing or not having children. As more young people pursue their education and careers, age at first marriage has increased; similarly, so has the age at which people become parents. The average age for first-time mothers is 25 in the United States (up from 21 in 1970), 29.4 in Switzerland, and 29.2 in Japan (Matthews & Hamilton, 2014).

The decision to become a parent needs to be thoroughly examined by the couple or the single person who wants to become a parent. There are positives and negatives associated with

becoming a parent, and taking those into consideration prepares adults in being the best parent they can be.

Many parents report that having children increases their well-being (White & Dolan, 2009). However, that does not mean that is the same for everybody. Researchers have also found that parents, compared to their non-parent peers, are more positive about their lives (Nelson, Kushlev, English, Dunn, & Lyubomirsky, 2013). On the other hand, researchers have also found that parents, compared to non-parents, are more likely to be depressed, report lower levels of marital quality, and feel like their relationship with their partner is more businesslike than intimate (Walker, 2011). While these findings provide us with some interesting things to ponder, becoming a parent is a personal choice and the role of the early childhood professional is to support all of the children and families that you will serve during your career. [51]

IN SUMMARY

This chapter examined the diversity of families. You were given an opportunity to pause and reflect on some critical ideas that will help you to be mindful of how our perspectives (biases), experiences, and beliefs shape the way in which we interact and form relationships with others.

In the next chapter, we will examine parenting, specifically styles of parenting, the developmental stages of parenting, parental influences, and issues that parents may be faced with in their journey of parenthood.

Quotable

"Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." – Maya Angelou

[51] The Family by Joel A. Muraco is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

CHAPTER 6: A CLOSER LOOK AT PARENTING

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify different styles of parenting
- Explore how styles of parenting have an influence on children and their families
- Investigate the development of parents using Galinsky's stages of parenting
- Analyze the various influences on parenting
- Identify the four types of childhood abuse
- Identify our ethical responsibilities, using NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct, when we suspect a child is experiencing abuse
- Explore how trauma impacts early childhood experiences

PARENTING STYLES

Developmental psychologists have been interested in how parents influence the development of children's social and emotional competence since the 1920s. One of the most robust approaches to this area is the study of what has been called "parenting style." This chapter defines styles of parenting, explores the four types of styles of parenting, and provides context on how the styles of parenting influence the parent/child relationship.

Parenting Style Defined

Parenting is a complex activity that includes many specific behaviors that work individually and together to influence child outcomes. Although specific parenting behaviors, such as spanking or reading to your child aloud, may influence the development of the child, looking at any specific behavior in isolation may be misleading. Many writers have noted that specific parenting practices are less important in predicting child well-being than is the broad pattern of parenting. Most researchers who attempt to describe this broad parental milieu rely on Diana Baumrind's concept of parenting style. The construct of parenting style is used to capture normal variations in parents' attempts to control and socialize their children (Baumrind, 1991). Two points are critical in understanding this definition. First, parenting style is meant to describe normal variations in parenting. In other words, the parenting style typology Baumrind developed should not be understood to include deviant parenting, such as might be observed in abusive or neglectful homes. Second, Baumrind assumes that normal parenting revolves around issues of control. Although parents may differ in how they try to control or socialize their children and the extent to which they do so, it is assumed that the primary role of all parents is to influence, teach, and control their children.

Figure 6.1 - How parents interact with their children relates to their parenting style[52]

Parenting style captures two important elements of parenting: parental responsiveness and parental demandingness (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Parental responsiveness (also referred to as parental warmth or supportiveness) refers to "the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to children's special needs and demands" (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). Parental demandingness (also referred to as behavioral control) refers to "the claims parents make on children to become integrated into the family, by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys" (Baumrind, 1991, pp. 61- 62).

Baumrind's Four Parenting Styles in Depth

Categorizing parents according to whether they are high or low on parental demandingness and responsiveness creates a typology of four parenting styles: permissive, authoritarian, authoritative, and uninvolved (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Each of these parenting styles reflects different naturally occurring patterns of parental values, practices, and behaviors (Baumrind, 1991) and a distinct balance of responsiveness and demandingness.

[52] Image by Army Medicine is licensed under CC BY 2.0

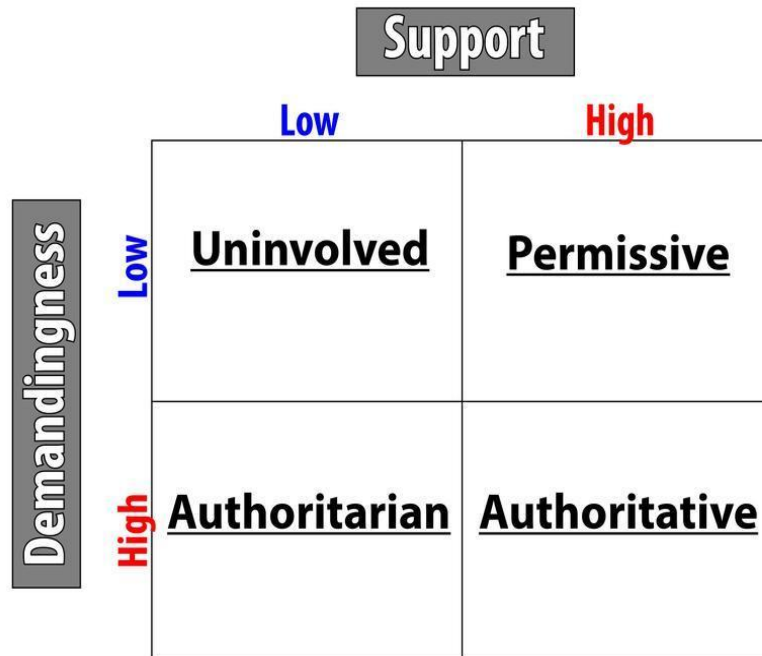


Figure 6.2 - Four parenting styles. Other, less advantageous parenting styles include authoritarian (in contrast to authorit*ative*), permissive, and uninvolved.[53]

- Permissive parents (also referred to as "indulgent" or "nondirective") "are more responsive than they are demanding. They are nontraditional and lenient, do not require mature behavior, allow considerable self-regulation, and avoid confrontation" (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). Indulgent parents may be further divided into two types: democratic parents, who, though lenient, are more conscientious, engaged, and committed to the child, and nondirective parents who provide very little guidance to their child.
- Authoritarian parents are highly demanding and directive, but not responsive. "They are obedience- and status-oriented, and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation" (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). These parents provide well-ordered and structured environments with clearly stated rules. Authoritarian parents can be divided into two types: nonauthoritarian-directive, who are directive, but not intrusive or autocratic in their use of power, and authoritarian-directive, who are highly intrusive.
- Authoritative parents are both demanding and responsive. "They monitor and impart clear standards for their children's conduct. They are assertive, but not intrusive and restrictive. Their disciplinary methods are supportive, rather than punitive. They want their children to be assertive as well as socially responsible, and self-regulated as well as cooperative" (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62).

[53] Image from Tavassolie, T., Dudding, S., Madigan, A. L., Thorvardarson, E., & Winsler, A. (2016). Differences in perceived parenting style between mothers and fathers: Implications for child outcomes and marital conflict. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. doi: 10.1007/s10826-016-0376-y

- Uninvolved parents are low in both responsiveness and demandingness. In extreme cases, this parenting style might encompass both rejecting-neglecting and neglectful parents, although most parents of this type fall within the normal range. Because parenting style is a typology, rather than a linear combination of responsiveness and demandingness, each parenting style is more than and different from the sum of its parts (Baumrind, 1991).

In addition to differing on responsiveness and demandingness, the parenting styles also differ in the extent to which they are characterized by a third dimension: psychological control. Psychological control "refers to control attempts that intrude into the psychological and emotional development of the child" (Barber, 1996, p. 3296) through use of parenting practices such as guilt induction, withdrawal of love, or shaming. One key difference between authoritarian and authoritative parenting is in the dimension of psychological control. Both authoritarian and authoritative parents place high demands on their children and expect their children to behave appropriately and obey parental rules. Authoritarian parents, however, also expect their children to accept their judgments, values, and goals without questioning. In contrast, authoritative parents are more open to give and take with their children and make greater use of explanations. Thus, although authoritative and authoritarian parents are equally high in behavioral control, authoritative parents tend to be low in psychological control, while authoritarian parents tend to be high.

How This May Influence the Development of Children

Parenting style has been found to predict child well-being in the domains of social competence, academic performance, psychosocial development, and problem behavior. Research in the United States, based on parent interviews, child reports, and parent observations consistently find:

- Children and adolescents whose parents are authoritative rate themselves and are rated by objective measures as more socially and emotionally competent than those whose parents are nonauthoritative (Baumrind, 1991; Weiss & Schwarz, 1996; Miller et al., 1993).
- Children and adolescents whose parents are uninvolved perform most poorly in all domains.
- In general, parental responsiveness predicts social competence and psychosocial functioning, while parental demandingness is associated with emotional competence and behavioral control (i.e., academic performance and deviance). These findings indicate:
    - Children and adolescents from authoritarian families (high in demandingness, but low in responsiveness) tend to perform moderately well in school and be uninvolved in problem behavior, but they have poorer social skills, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of depression.
    - Children and adolescents from indulgent homes (high in responsiveness, low in

demandingness) are more likely to be involved in problem behavior and perform less well in school, but they have higher self-esteem, better social skills, and lower levels of depression.

In reviewing the literature on parenting style, one is struck by the consistency with which authoritative upbringing is associated with both emotional and social competence and lower levels of problem behavior in both boys and girls at all developmental stages. The benefits of authoritative parenting and the detrimental effects of uninvolved parenting are evident as early as the preschool years and continue throughout adolescence and into early adulthood. Although specific differences can be found in the competence evidenced by each group, the largest differences are found between children whose parents are unengaged and their peers with more involved parents.

Figure 6.3 - Children benefit from involved parents[54]

Differences between children from authoritative homes and their peers are equally consistent, but somewhat smaller (Weiss & Schwarz, 1996). Just as authoritative parents appear to be able to balance their conformity demands with their respect for their children's individuality, so children from authoritative homes appear to be able to balance the claims of external conformity and achievement demands with their need for individuation and autonomy.[55]

A word of caution as we use Baumarind's research on styles of parenting. Her research done in the 90's bases it's finding on specific cultural groups that primarily focus on independence as the norm rather than collectivism. Independence in this context refers to the role of each family member being independent from each other. The use of the term collectivism refers to the notion that families are interdependent or rather they rely on one another to survive. In cultures that value the collective nature of a family, how may these styles of parenting be less useful in our work with families?

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[54] Image is licensed under CC0

[55] Parenting Style and Its Correlates. ERIC Digest. is in the public domain

Another Way of Looking at Parenting Styles

Lemasters and Defrain (1989) offer another model of parenting. This model is interesting because it looks more closely at the motivations of the parent and suggests that parenting styles are often designed to meet the psychological needs of the parent rather than the developmental needs of the child.[56]

Table 6.1 - Lemasters and Defain Parenting Styles[57]

Style	Description	Possible Outcomes
Martyr	Will do anything for the child; even tasks that the child should do for himself or herself; may use all they do for the child to guilt the child into compliance	Child learns to be dependent and manipulative
Pal	Wants to be the child's friend; lets children do what they want and focuses mostly on being entertaining and fun; sets few limits	Child may have little self-discipline and may try to test limits with others
Police officer/drill sergeant	Focuses primarily on making sure that the child is obedient and that the parent has full control of the child; may scold or punish child for not doing things right; struggles to allow child to grow and learn to make decisions independently	Child may have a lot of resentment toward parent that is displaced on others
Teacher-counselor	Pays a lot of attention to expert advice on parenting and who believes that as long as all of the steps are followed, the parent can rear a perfect child	Puts all responsibility of outcomes on parent
Athletic coach	Helps the child understand what needs to happen in certain situations and encourages and advises the child about how to manage these situations; does not intervene or do things for the child; sets consistent and objective rules	Child is supported and guided while they learn firsthand how to handle situations

[56] Lifespan Development - Module 5: Early Childhood by Lumen Learning references Psyc 200 Lifespan Psychology by Laura Overstreet, licensed under CC BY 4.0
[57] Lifespan Development - Module 5: Early Childhood by Lumen Learning references Psyc 200 Lifespan Psychology by Laura Overstreet, licensed under CC BY 4.0

Pause to Reflect

Which style of parenting can you relate to most? If you are a parent now, which style do you believe is your dominant style? If you are not a parent, which style do you think makes most sense for you? How did your parent's style of parenting influence you as a child, and as an adult today?

Influence of Sex, Ethnicity, or Family Type

It is important to distinguish between differences in the distribution and the correlates of parenting style in different subpopulations. Although in the United States authoritative parenting is most common among intact, middle- class families of European descent, the relationship between authoritativeness and child outcomes is quite similar across groups. There are some exceptions to this general statement, however: (1) demandingness appears to be less critical to girls' than to boys' well-being (Weiss & Schwarz, 1996), and (2) authoritative parenting predicts psychosocial outcomes and problem behaviors for adolescents in all ethnic groups studied (African-, Asian-, European-, and Hispanic Americans), but it is associated with academic performance only among European Americans and, to a lesser extent, Hispanic Americans (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992; Steinberg, Darling, & Fletcher, 1995). Chao (1994) and others (Darling & Steinberg, 1993) have argued that observed ethnic differences in the association of parenting style with child outcomes may be due to differences in social context, parenting practices, or the cultural meaning of specific dimensions of parenting style.[58]

The Development of Parents

Pause to Reflect

Think back to an emotional event you experienced as a child. How did your parents react to you? Did your parents provide lots of rules for you or let you make decisions on your own? Why do you think your parents behaved the way they did?

Psychologists have attempted to answer these questions about the influences on parents and understand why parents behave the way they do. Because parents are critical to a child's development, a great deal of research has been focused on the impact that parents have on children. Less is known, however, about the development of parents themselves and the impact of children on parents. Yet it is interesting to note, that parenting is based on relationships and all relationships are bi-directional. Nonetheless, parenting plays a major role in an adult's life.

[58] Parenting Style and Its Correlates. ERIC Digest. is in the public domain

Figure 6.4 - Parenthood has a huge impact on a person's identity, emotions, daily behaviors, and many other aspects of their lives.[59]

Parenthood is often considered a normative developmental task of adulthood. Cross-cultural studies show that adolescents around the world plan to have children. In fact, most men and women in the United States will become parents by the age of 40 years (Martinez, Daniels, & Chandra, 2012). People have children for many reasons, including emotional reasons (e.g., the emotional bond with children and the gratification the parent–child relationship brings), economic and utilitarian reasons (e.g., children provide help in the family and support in old age), and social-normative reasons (e.g., adults are expected to have children; children provide status) (Nauck, 2007).

Parenthood is undergoing changes in the United States and elsewhere in the world. Children are less likely to be living with both parents, and women in the United States have fewer children than they did previously. The average fertility rate of women in the United States was about seven children in the early 1900s and has remained relatively stable at 2.1 since the 1970s (Hamilton, Martin, & Ventura, 2011; Martinez, Daniels, & Chandra, 2012). Not only are parents having fewer children, the context of parenthood has also changed. Parenting outside of marriage has increased dramatically among most socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic groups, although college-educated women are substantially more likely to be married at the birth of a child than are mothers with less education (Dye, 2010). Parenting is occurring outside of marriage for many reasons, both economic and social. People are having children at older ages, too. Despite the fact that young people are more often delaying childbearing, most 18- to 29-year-olds want to have children and say that being a good parent is one of the most important things in life (Wang & Taylor, 2011).

[59] Image by kim881231 on Pixabay

Table 6.1 - Demographic Changes in Parenthood in the United States

Characteristic	1960	2012
Average number of children (fertility rate)	3.6[6]	2.1[2]
Percent of births to unmarried women	5%[1]	41%[3]
Median age at first marriage for women	20.8 years[5]	26.5 years[2]
Percent of adults ages 18 to 29 married	59%[4]	20%[4]

1. Ventura & Bachrach, 1999 2. Martinez, Daniels, & Chandra, 2012 3. Hamilton, Martin, & Ventura, 2012 4. Cohn, Passel, Wang, & Livingston, 2011 5. U.S. Decennial Census (1890-2000). 6. Wetzel, J. R. (1990).

Galinsky (1987) was one of the first to emphasize the development of parents themselves, how they respond to their children's development, and how they grow as parents. Parenthood is an experience that transforms one's identity as parents take on new roles. Children's growth and development force parents to change their roles. They must develop new skills and abilities in response to children's development. Galinsky identified six stages of parenthood that focus on different tasks and goals (see Table below).

Table 6.2 - Galinsky's Stages of Parenthood

Stage	Age of Child	Main Tasks and Goals
Stage 1: The Image-Making Stage	Planning for a child; Pregnancy	Consider what it means to be a parent and plan for changes to accommodate a child
Stage 2: The Nurturing Stage	Infancy	Develop attachment relationships with child and adapt to the new baby
Stage 3: The Authority Stage	Toddler and Preschool	Parents create rules and figure out how to effectively guide their children's behaviors
Stage 4: The Interpretive Stage	Middle Childhood	Parents help their children interpret their experiences with the social world beyond the family
Stage 5: The Interdependent Stage	Adolescence	Parents renegotiate their relationship with their adolescent children to allow for shared power in decision-making
Stage 6: The Departure Stage	Early Adulthood	Parents evaluate their successes and failures as parents

1. The Image-Making Stage

As prospective parents think about and form images about their roles as parents and what parenthood will bring, and prepare for the changes an infant will bring, they enter the image-

making stage. Future parents develop their ideas about what it will be like to be a parent and the type of parent they want to be. Individuals may evaluate their relationships with their own parents as a model of their roles as parents.

2. The Nurturing Stage

The second stage, the nurturing stage, occurs at the birth of the baby. A parent's main goal during this stage is to develop an attachment relationship to their baby. Parents must adapt their romantic relationships, their relationships with their other children, and with their own parents to include the new infant. Some parents feel attached to the baby immediately, but for other parents, this occurs more gradually. Parents may have imagined their infant in specific ways, but they now have to reconcile those images with their actual baby. In incorporating their relationship with their child into their other relationships, parents often have to reshape their conceptions of themselves and their identity. Parenting responsibilities are the most demanding during infancy because infants are completely dependent on caregiving.

3. The Authority Stage

The authority stage occurs when children are 2 years old until about 4 or 5 years old. In this stage, parents make decisions about how much authority to exert over their children's behavior. Parents must establish rules to guide their child's behavior and development. They have to decide how strictly they should enforce rules and what to do when rules are broken.

4. The Interpretive Stage

The interpretive stage occurs when children enter school (preschool or kindergarten) to the beginning of adolescence. Parents interpret their children's experiences as children are increasingly exposed to the world outside the family. Parents answer their children's questions, provide explanations, and determine what behaviors and values to teach. They decide what experiences to provide their children, in terms of schooling, neighborhood, and extracurricular activities. By this time, parents have experience in the parenting role and often reflect on their strengths and weaknesses as parents, review their images of parenthood, and determine how realistic they have been. Parents have to negotiate how involved to be with their children, when to step in, and when to encourage children to make choices independently.

Figure 6.5 - Parents choose what schooling opportunities to offer their children.[60]

5. The Interdependent Stage

Parents of teenagers are in the interdependent stage. They must redefine their authority and renegotiate their relationship with their adolescent as the children increasingly make decisions independent of parental control and authority. On the other hand, parents do not permit their adolescent children to have complete autonomy over their decision-making and behavior, and thus adolescents and parents must adapt their relationship to allow for greater negotiation and discussion about rules and limits.

6. The Departure Stage

During the departure stage of parenting, parents evaluate the entire experience of parenting. They prepare for their child's departure, redefine their identity as the parent of an adult child, and assess their parenting accomplishments and failures. This stage forms a transition to a new era in parents' lives. This stage usually spans a long time period from when the oldest child moves away (and often returns) until the youngest child leaves. The parenting role must be redefined as a less central role in a parent's identity.

Despite the interest in the development of parents among lay people and helping professionals, little research has examined developmental changes in parents' experience and behaviors over time. Thus, it is not clear whether these theoretical stages are generalizable to parents of different races, ages, and religions, nor do we have empirical data on the factors that influence individual differences in these stages. On a practical note, how-to books and websites geared toward parental development should be evaluated with caution, as not all advice provided is supported by research.

[60] Image by Cpl. Han Samuel is in the public domain

Figure 6.5 - When a child achieves a new level of independence and leaves the home it marks another turning point in the identity of a parent.[61]

Influences on Parenting

Parenting is a complex process in which parents and children influence one another. There are many reasons that parents behave the way they do. The multiple influences on parenting are still being explored. Proposed influences on parental behavior include 1) parent characteristics, 2) child characteristics, and 3) contextual and sociocultural characteristics (Belsky, 1984; Demick, 1999). (see Figure 6.7)

Parent Characteristics

Parents bring unique traits and qualities to the parenting relationship that affect their decisions as parents. These characteristics include the age of the parent, gender, beliefs, personality, developmental history, knowledge about parenting and child development, and mental and physical health. Parents' personalities affect parenting behaviors. Mothers and fathers who are more agreeable, conscientious, and outgoing are warmer and provide more structure to their children. Parents who are more agreeable, less anxious, and less negative also support their children's autonomy more than parents who are anxious and less agreeable (Prinzie, Stams, Dekovic, Reijntjes, & Belsky, 2009). Parents who have these personality traits appear to be better able to respond to their children positively and provide a more consistent, structured environment for their children.

Parents' developmental histories, or their experiences as children, also affect their parenting strategies. Parents may learn parenting practices from their own parents. Fathers whose own parents provided monitoring, consistent and age-appropriate discipline and warmth were more likely to provide this constructive parenting to their own children (Kerr, Capaldi, Pears, & Owen, 2009). Patterns of negative parenting and ineffective discipline also appear from one generation to the next. However, parents who are dissatisfied with their own parents' approach may be more likely to change their parenting methods with their own children.

[61] Image by State Farm is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Child Characteristics

Figure 6.6 - A child with a difficult temperament can have a significant impact on a parent.[62]

Parenting is bidirectional. Not only do parents affect their children, children influence their parents. Child characteristics, such as gender, birth order, temperament, and health status, affect parenting behaviors and roles. For example, an infant with an easy temperament may enable parents to feel more effective, as they are easily able to soothe the child and elicit smiling and cooing. On the other hand, a cranky or fussy infant elicits fewer positive reactions from his or her parents and may result in parents feeling less effective in the parenting role (Eisenberg et al., 2008). Over time, parents of more difficult children may become more punitive and less patient with their children (Clark, Kochanska, & Ready, 2000; Eisenberg et al., 1999; Kiff, Lengua, & Zalewski, 2011). Parents who have a fussy, difficult child are less satisfied with their marriages and have greater challenges in balancing work and family roles (Hyde, Else-Quest, & Goldsmith, 2004). Thus, child temperament is one of the child characteristics that influences how parents behave with their children.

Another child characteristic is the gender of the child. Parents respond differently to boys and girls. Parents often assign different household chores to their sons and daughters. Girls are more often responsible for caring for younger siblings and household chores, whereas boys are more likely to be asked to perform chores outside the home, such as mowing the lawn (Grusec, Goodnow, & Cohen, 1996). Parents also talk differently with their sons and daughters, providing more scientific explanations to their sons and using more emotion words with their daughters (Crowley, Callanan, Tenenbaum, & Allen, 2001).

Contextual Factors and Sociocultural Characteristics

The parent–child relationship does not occur in isolation. Sociocultural characteristics, including economic hardship, religion, politics, neighborhoods, schools, and social support, also influence

[62] Image by Harald Groven is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

parenting. Parents who experience economic hardship are more easily frustrated, depressed, and sad, and these emotional characteristics affect their parenting skills (Conger & Conger, 2002). Culture also influences parenting behaviors in fundamental ways. Although promoting the development of skills necessary to function effectively in one's community is a universal goal of parenting, the specific skills necessary vary widely from culture to culture. Thus, parents have different goals for their children that partially depend on their culture (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008). For example, parents vary in how much they emphasize goals for independence and individual achievements, and goals involving maintaining harmonious relationships and being embedded in a strong network of social relationships (independence vs collectivism). These differences in parental goals are influenced by culture. Other important contextual characteristics, such as the neighborhood, school, immigration status, and social networks, also affect parenting, even though these settings don't always include both the child and the parent (Brofenbrenner, 1989). For example, Latina mothers who perceived their neighborhood as more dangerous showed less warmth with their children, perhaps because of the greater stress associated with living in a threatening environment (Gonzales et al., 2011). Many contextual factors influence parenting.[63]

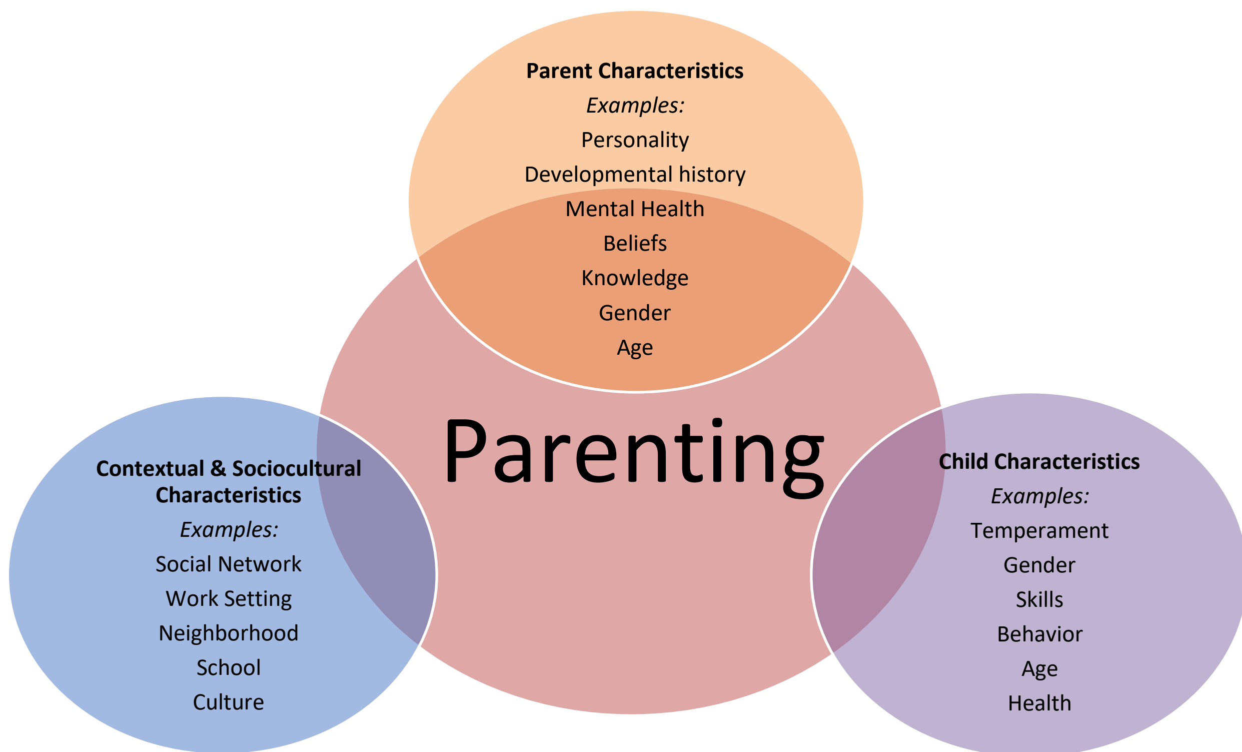

Figure 6.7 - Influences on Parenting[64]

[63] The Developing Parent by Marissa L. Diener is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0muraco
[64] The Developing Parent by Marissa L. Diener is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0muraco

Family Issues and Considerations

Divorce

Divorce refers to the legal dissolution of a marriage. Depending on societal factors, divorce may be more or less of an option for married couples. Despite popular belief, divorce rates in the United States actually declined for many years during the 1980s and 1990s, and only just recently started to climb back up—landing at just below 50% of marriages ending in divorce today (Marriage & Divorce, 2016); however, it should be noted that divorce rates increase for each subsequent marriage, and there is considerable debate about the exact divorce rate. Are there specific factors that can predict divorce? Are certain types of people or certain types of relationships more or less at risk for breaking up? Indeed, there are several factors that appear to be either risk factors or protective factors.

Pursuing education decreases the risk of divorce. So too does waiting until we are older to marry. Likewise, if our parents are still married we are less likely to divorce. Factors that increase our risk of divorce include having a child before marriage and living with multiple partners before marriage, known as serial cohabitation (cohabitation with one's expected marital partner does not appear to have the same effect). And, of course, societal and religious attitudes must also be taken into account. In societies that are more accepting of divorce, divorce rates tend to be higher. Likewise, in religions that are less accepting of divorce, divorce rates tend to be lower. See Lyngstad & Jalovaara (2010) for a more thorough discussion of divorce risk.

Table 6.3 - Divorce Factors[65]

Protective Factors	Risk Factors
• Higher levels of education • Marrying at an older age • Parents remained married • Member of religious group that is less accepting of divorce	• Children before marriage • Co-habitation • Living in a society that is accepting of divorce

If a couple does divorce, there are specific considerations they should take into account to help their children cope. Parents should reassure their children that both parents will continue to love them and that the divorce is in no way the children's fault. Parents should also encourage open communication with their children and be careful not to bias them against their "ex" or use them as a means of hurting their "ex" (Denham, 2013; Harvey & Fine, 2004; Pescosoido, 2013).

[65] The Family by Joel A. Muraco is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

Abuse

Abuse can occur in multiple forms and across all family relationships. Breiding, Basile, Smith, Black, & Mahendra (2015) define the forms of abuse as:

- Physical abuse, the use of intentional physical force to cause harm. Scratching, pushing, shoving, throwing, grabbing, biting, choking, shaking, slapping, punching, and hitting are common forms of physical abuse;
- Sexual abuse, the act of forcing someone to participate in a sex act against his or her will. Such abuse is often referred to as sexual assault or rape. A marital relationship does not grant anyone the right to demand sex or sexual activity from anyone, even a spouse;
- Psychological abuse, aggressive behavior that is intended to control someone else. Such abuse can include threats of physical or sexual abuse, manipulation, bullying, and stalking.

Abuse between partners is referred to as intimate partner violence; however, such abuse can also occur between a parent and child (child abuse), adult children and their aging parents (elder abuse), and even between siblings.

The most common form of abuse between parents and children is actually that of neglect. Neglect refers to a family's failure to provide for a child's basic physical, emotional, medical, or educational needs (DePanfilis, 2006). Harry Potter's aunt and uncle, as well as Cinderella's stepmother, could all be prosecuted for neglect in the real world.

Figure 6.8 - While physical abuse might be the easiest to see, neglect is much more common.[66]

Abuse is a complex issue, especially within families. There are many reasons people abuse others: poverty, stress, and substance abuse are common characteristics shared by people who abuse, although abuse can happen in any family. There are also many reasons adults stay in abusive relationships: (a) learned helplessness (the person who is being abused believes he or

[66] Image by Airman 1st Class Jessica H. Smith and Airman Connor J. Marth is in the public domain

she has no control over the situation); (b) the belief that the person who is doing the abusing can/will change; (c) shame, guilt, self-blame, and/or fear; and (d) economic dependence. All of these factors can play a role.

Children who experience abuse may "act out" or otherwise respond in a variety of unhealthful ways. These include acts of self-destruction, withdrawal, and aggression, as well as struggles with depression, anxiety, and academic performance. Researchers have found that the brains of children who are abused may produce higher levels of stress hormones. These hormones can lead to decreased brain development, lower stress thresholds, suppressed immune responses, and lifelong difficulties with learning and memory (Middlebrooks & Audage, 2008).[67]

We have both professional ethics and laws that dictate our role is reporting abuse. If we suspect that a child is being abused, we are mandated by law to report that to the Department of Social Services, also known as Child Protective Services. We do not have to have proof that a child is being abused, we just have to have a reasonable suspicion that the child is being harmed. Early Childhood Professionals are mandated reporters and neglecting to report abuse, may result in the early childhood professional being charged with neglect.

This is not something to take lightly. Children are vulnerable and they rely on the adults in their world to protect them. When their family is unable to do so, for various reasons, reporting this to the Department of Social Services may result in better outcomes for the child. There are awful stories of children being abruptly removed from their homes for being spanked. While this may have happened in a few cases (we don't know the full story), the aim of the Department of Social Services is to keep families together. Unless a child is at risk of being harmed, the family is provided services to help support their parenting journey. As mentioned in this chapter, parenting is a complex process and sometimes families are not adequately prepared to care for a child. This is where the partnership of the school, the Department of Social Services and the family can make the difference in the outcome of the child.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Code of Ethical Conduct provides us with guidance on how to proceed ethically when we suspect a child is being abused. The code has four sections that describe our ethical responsibilities. These are our primary ethical responsibilities as defined by the code:

- Ethical responsibilities to children
- Ethical responsibilities to families
- Ethical responsibilities to Colleagues (this includes our co-workers, employers, and employees)
- Ethical responsibilities to Community and Society

[67] The Family by Joel A. Muraco is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

The code is divided into principles and ideals. The primary principle that speaks to us is this:

P-1.1—Above all, we shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, or intimidating to children. This principle has precedence over all others in this Code. (excerpt from the NAEYC Ethical Code of Conduct)

What this is telling us is that it is our responsibility to be a part of protecting children and we must ensure that when we are aware of this happening that we intercede to assist in the child having more positive outcomes.

We also have to respect confidentiality of families when issues as this may arise. It is not our role to judge their circumstances. It is our responsibility to be compassionate and understanding so that families can be honest and to work with the program and social services to get the help they may need.

Early Childhood Centers are required to have set up a protocol that is in line with the reporting mandates of their state. It is also required that every employee attend training on child abuse and the role of the educator. While this is primarily for suspicion of abuse of children, if you suspect the parents may be in an abusive relationship, that is reportable under neglect. Even if the child is not being physically harmed, witnessing the abuse of others, is emotionally damaging to children. That is harmful to children and becomes our ethical and legal responsibility in promoting childhood well-being.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

In the 1990’s, there was a study that was conducted by Kaiser Permanente Health Centers and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. The research came out of a study that was being done by Vincent Felitti, head of Kaiser Permanente’s Department of Preventive Medicine in San Diego. He noticed that the dropout rate of participants in the obesity clinics weight loss program was about 50%. He conducted interviews with those who had left the program and discovered that a majority of the 286 people he interviewed had experienced childhood sexual abuse. With a team of researchers, he surveyed over 17,000 Kaiser Permanente patient volunteers about childhood trauma experiences. They were asked about the different types of adverse childhood experiences that had been identified in earlier research literature. That included the following:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Physical neglect
- Emotional neglect
- Exposure to domestic violence
- Household substance abuse

- Household mental illness
- Parental separation or divorce
- Incarcerated household member[68]

This research led to identifying how these experiences influence the development of children and are linked to both physical health, mental health, and substance abuse issues that arise both in childhood and in adult life. What this suggests is that it is critical that when children have adverse or traumatic experiences that they have services that can help them to deal with this in their childhood and not wait until they are adults experiencing the negative outcomes of these adverse early experiences.

Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0 – 17 years[69]):

- experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect
- witnessing violence in the home or community
- having a family member attempt or die by suicide

Also included are aspects of the child's environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding such as growing up in a household with:

- substance misuse
- mental health problems
- instability due to parental separation or household members being in jail or prison

ACEs are linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance misuse in adulthood. ACEs can also negatively impact education and job opportunities. However, ACEs can be prevented.

Table 6.4 Preventing ACEs

Strategy	Approach
Strengthen economic supports to families	• Strengthening household financial security • Family-friendly work policies
Promote social norms that protect against violence and adversity	• Public education campaigns • Legislative approaches to reduce corporal punishment • Bystander approaches • Men and boys as allies in prevention

[68] Adverse Childhood Experience Study by Wikipedia is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0
[69] Violence Prevention by the CDC is in the public domain

Strategy	Approach
Ensure a strong start for children	• Early childhood home visitation • High-quality child care • Preschool enrichment with family engagement
Teach skills	• Social-emotional learning • Safe dating and healthy relationship skill programs • Parenting skills and family relationship approaches
Connect youth to caring adults and activities	• Mentoring programs • After-school programs
Intervene to lessen immediate and long-term harms	1) Enhanced primary care 2) Victim-centered services 3) Treatment to lessen the harms of ACEs 4) Treatment to prevent problem behavior and future involvement in violence 5) Family-centered treatment for substance use disorders

Raising awareness of ACEs can help:

- Change how people think about the causes of ACEs and who could help prevent them.
- Shift the focus from individual responsibility to community solutions.
- Reduce stigma around seeking help with parenting challenges or for substance misuse, depression, or suicidal thoughts.
- Promote safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments where children live, learn, and play.[70]

Adoption

Divorce and abuse are important concerns, but not all family hurdles are negative. One example of a positive family issue is adoption. Adoption has long historical roots (it is even mentioned in the Bible) and involves taking in and raising someone else's child legally as one's own. Becoming a parent is one of the most fulfilling things a person can do (Gallup & Newport, 1990), but even with modern reproductive technologies, not all couples who would like to have children (which is still most) are able to. For these families, adoption often allows them to feel whole—by completing their family. While families who are experiencing infertility tend to make up most of the adoptions in the United States, there are families who either add to their family through adoption (meaning they have biological children and children who are adopted). In addition, there are families who decide that they want to form their family through adoption even though they may be able to conceive a child and carry that child to birth.

[70] Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences by the CDC is in the public domain

In 2013, in the United States, there were over 100,000 children in foster care (where children go when their biological or adoptive families are unable to adequately care for them) available for adoption (Soronen, 2013). In total, about 2% of the U.S. child population is adopted, either through foster care or through private domestic or international adoption (Adopted Children, 2012). Adopting a child from the foster care system is relatively inexpensive, costing $0-$2,500, with many families qualifying for state-subsidized support (Soronen, 2013).

Figure 6.9 - Adoption is an important option for creating or expanding a family. Foster care adoptions and international adoptions are both common. Regardless of why a family chooses to adopt and from where, traits such as patience, flexibility and strong problem-solving skills are desirable for adoptive parents.[71]

For years, international adoptions have been popular. In the United States, between 1999 and 2014, 256,132 international adoptions occurred, with the largest number of children coming from China (73,672) and Russia (46,113) (Intercountry Adoption, 2016). People in the United States, Spain, France, Italy, and Canada adopt the largest numbers of children (Selman, 2009). More recently, however, international adoptions have begun to decrease. One significant complication is that each country has its own set of requirements for adoption, as does each country from which an adopted child originates. As such, the adoption process can vary greatly, especially in terms of cost, and countries are able to set policies on who is able to adopt their children. For example, single, obese, or over-50 individuals are not allowed to adopt a child from China (Bartholet, 2007).

Families formed through adoption are required to have a home study before the child may become a part of their family forever. Since this is something that they choose, they have spent time thinking about why they want to add to their family through adoption. They are interviewed by someone from Social Services and must fill out an extensive application that requires both a physical and mental health exam. When there are difficulties with their children, they are more likely to seek help for their child because they have already interfaced

[71] Image by Steven Depolo is licensed under CC BY 2.0

with many professionals prior to having their child join their family forever.
Regardless of why a family chooses to adopt, traits such as flexibility, patience, strong problem-solving skills, and a willingness to identify local community resources are highly favorable for the prospective parents to possess. This is true of families who form their family through birth. Additionally, it may be helpful for adoptive parents (actually all families) to recognize that they do not have to be "perfect" parents as long as they are loving and willing to meet the unique challenges any child presents.

Parenting in Later Life

Just because children grow up does not mean their family stops being a family. The concept of family persists across the entire lifespan, but the specific roles and expectations of its members change over time. One major change comes when a child reaches adulthood and moves away. When exactly children leave home varies greatly depending on societal norms and expectations, as well as on economic conditions such as employment opportunities and affordable housing options. Some parents may experience sadness when their adult children leave the home—a situation known as Empty Nest.

Figure 6.10 - When one's children reach adulthood it doesn't mean that parenting stops. Boomerang kids and multigenerational households that include aging parents are increasingly common.[72]

Many parents are also finding that their grown children are struggling to launch into independence. It's an increasingly common story: a child goes off to college and, upon graduation, is unable to find steady employment. In such instances, a frequent outcome is for the child to return home, becoming a "boomerang kid." The boomerang generation, as the phenomenon has come to be known, refers to young adults, mostly between the ages of 25 and 34, who return home to live with their parents while they strive for stability in their lives—often in terms of finances, living arrangements, and sometimes romantic relationships. These boomerang kids can present successes and challenges. Within American families, 48% of boomerang kids report having paid rent to their parents, and 89% say they help out with household expenses—a win for everyone (Parker, 2012). On the other hand, 24% of boomerang

[72] Image by David Mulder is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0

kids report that returning home hurts their relationship with their parents (Parker, 2012). For better or for worse, the number of children returning home has been increasing around the world.

In addition to middle-aged parents spending more time, money, and energy taking care of their adult children, they are also increasingly taking care of their own aging and ailing parents.

Middle-aged people in this set of circumstances are commonly referred to as the sandwich generation (Dukhovnov & Zagheni, 2015). Of course, cultural norms and practices again come into play. In some Asian and Hispanic cultures, the expectation is that adult children are supposed to take care of aging parents and parents-in-law. In other Western cultures—cultures that emphasize individuality and self-sustainability—the expectation has historically been that elders either age in place, modifying their home and receiving services to allow them to continue to live independently, or enter long-term care facilities. However, given financial constraints, many families find themselves taking in and caring for their aging parents, increasing the number of multigenerational homes around the world.[73]

IN SUMMARY

Parenting factors include characteristics of the parent, such as gender and personality, as well as characteristics of the child, such as age. Parenting style provides a robust indicator of parenting functioning that predicts child well-being across a wide spectrum of environments and across diverse communities of children. Both parental responsiveness and parental demandingness are important components of good parenting. Furthermore, parenting influences not just a child's development, but also the development of the parent. The interaction among all these factors creates many different patterns of parenting behavior. As parents are faced with new challenges, they change their parenting strategies and construct new aspects of their identity. The goals and tasks of parents change over time as their children develop (see Schwarz et al., 1985; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Baumrind, 1991; and Barber, 1996).[74]

[73] The Family by Joel A. Muraco is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
[74] Parenting Style and Its Correlates. ERIC Digest. is in the public domain

CHAPTER 7: BUILDING TRUSTING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify the importance of building relationships between early childhood programs, the teachers, and the families to create a support system
- Describe ways programs and teachers can facilitate trusting, collaborative relationships with families
- Differentiate the difference between parent involvement from family engagement
- Protect the importance of recognizing families as having the primary role in children's lives
- Define ways for programs to empower families
- Describe effective communication strategies
- Develop strategies for successful family conferencing.

INTRODUCTION

"A growing body of research suggests that meaningful engagement of families in their children's early learning supports school readiness and later academic success" (NAEYC 2009; Henrich and Gadaire 2008; Weiss, Caspe, and Lopez 2006). Programs and teachers who strive to build genuine partnerships with the parents, guardians, and other primary caregivers at home and encourage families to become active participants in their child's early learning and development help families to become advocates for their children. "High levels of engagement often result from strong program–family partnerships that are co-constructed and characterized by trust, shared values, ongoing bidirectional communication, mutual respect, and attention to each others needs (Lopez, Kreider, and Caspe 2004; NAEYC 2009, 6).

In addition, early childhood education programs have learned that when they can effectively collaborate with families, young children benefit and families are more likely to maintain involvement with school settings across the years. By strengthening family engagement during the early years, particularly with families from diverse backgrounds, families that have children with disabilities or other special needs, and families with dual language learners, early childhood education (ECE) programs can help to reduce the achievement gap and provide positive outcomes for children.

When programs strive to build trusting, open, and collaborative relationships with families and genuinely seek the family's input to inform program planning, family members receive the message that they play a key role in their child's development and learning. In efforts to establish strong links between home and the early care and education setting, programs and teachers focus on developing strategies for family collaboration and being responsive to each family's home language.

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES

Honest, caring, understanding, and respectful exchanges with family members lead to their sharing important information with teachers that help to inform how to care and support each child's learning and development. Taking the time to find out from family members about their child's unique characteristics and needs plays an important role in providing teachers with the information needed to set up appropriate learning environments for individual children.

Establishing positive relationships with families helps to bridge children's experiences between the program and home, and it fosters children's sense of belonging in the early education setting.

Figure 7.1 - When there is a trusting relationship that values the family, it is easier for parents to trust the care of their children to early educators.[75]

Teachers view families as children's first teachers and seek their assessments of a child's needs, interests, and abilities. Different families and communities have different views and expectations of children. The effective early childhood educator recognizes, understands, and respects the values of children's families and communities and attempts to make the environment as congruent with those values as possible. In high quality early childhood programs, the teacher speaks frequently with family members and, whenever appropriate, strengthens the links between the home and program. Frequent communication between program staff and family members is important, especially when children have a disability or

[75] Image by the department of Education is used with permission

other special needs. Through collaboration with families, preschool teachers can gain insight into ways in which they can be important contributors to the child's learning and development. To support children's learning across home and school contexts, the program can encourage family participation in activities at the early care and education program.[76]

Family Engagement[77]

"Family engagement with schools has been linked to important outcomes for children of all families, including families with children who are dual language learners . . . Numerous positive developmental child outcomes have been associated with family engagement, including early literacy skills, cognitive and language development skills . . . socio–emotional skills . . . and academic achievement."

Source: State Advisory Council on Early Learning and Care 2013, Paper 4, Family Engagement, 121.

Programs and Teachers Build Relationships With Families

Programs convey an important message to families when they seek their views and collaborate with them in the care of their children. This message helps family members understand that their preferences and their concerns about the learning and development of their child are important to teachers and program leaders. When a teacher has open, honest, and understanding relationships with family members, the resulting links between the home and the early care and education setting often help their child feel safe and comfortable.

Programs

- Support the participation of all family members, being responsive to their cultural, linguistic, and economic differences, as well as to any disabilities or special needs of the children or a family member.
- Involve family members in making decisions about the program and its policies.
- Recognize and acknowledge that teen parents are still adolescents developmentally even though they are in an adult role as parents.
- Provide a way for families to give feedback to the program, such as regular evaluations or opportunities for informal discussion.
- Schedule regular meetings, social times, and other special events for families so that they can learn more about the program, get to know each other and staff members, and build a sense of community

COMMUNICATION

- Seek and consider families' views when identifying and hiring new staff members.

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- Create an area for posting information for families (daily notices, outside services, child development information, community events, and job and education opportunities).
- Encourage communication between teachers and family members at the beginning and end of each day.

Teachers

- Share a child's records with his or her family, including assessment information on the child's learning, experiences, and developmental progress.
- Learn about the different families in the program.

COMMUNICATION

- Engage in a two-way exchange of ideas, preferences, and child-rearing philosophies during the first meetings with family members, setting the tone for future communication.
- Listen, reflect, and respond when family members communicate concerns and ideas about their child.
- Initiate discussions with families to understand and resolve issues when they arise.
- Engage in communication with family members at the beginning and end of each day about the child's care, activities, interests, and moods.
- Communicate to family members that they are always welcome to visit or call to check on their child.[78]

Reflective Practice

Explore in discussions with family members both families' and teachers' assumptions about young children and how they learn.[79] This is the cycle of inquiry that is so critical to understanding the crucial partnership you are working to establish. We discuss with families their desires for their children and we listen to hear and we restate what they said to ensure there is clarity. We take what they say and we engage in solving, with them, how we, as early childhood professionals, can support their needs within the context of our programs. We provide these opportunities to all our families. When we engage in reflective practice, we gain clarity about our shared goals.

MOVING FROM PARENT INVOLVEMENT TO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Family Engagement as Parent Involvement

Parent involvement refers to parent participation in the systems and activities the early

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[79] Infant/Toddler Learning and Development Program Guidelines by the California Department of Education is used with permission

childhood education program in ways that support them as the primary educators, nurturers and advocates for individual children and for all children enrolled in the program. Parent involvement refers to opportunities for parent participation in a variety of program activities that support child and adult development, including policy and program decision-making.

Family engagement refers to ongoing, goal-directed relationships between staff and families that are mutual, culturally responsive, and that support what is best for children and families both individually and collectively. Staff and families share responsibility for the learning and development of children, the progress toward outcomes for children and families, and for parent involvement in the program. Parent involvement is a part of this larger construct of family engagement.[80]

Table 7.1 - Examples that Illustrate the Shift[81]

Parent Involvement	Family Engagement
Parent Involvement is primarily the responsibility of family services staff (or parent involvement specialists, home visitors, or transition specialists).	Family engagement is embedded in the work of all staff members, management systems and leadership priorities.
Parent involvement might revolve around outputs—for example, the number of parents who show up at a meeting.	Family engagement focuses on evidence of positive, goal directed relationships, for example, that result in family progress in one (or more) of the seven outcome areas.
Parent involvement works with a small % of families involved in leadership opportunities (policy council, parent meetings, special events).	Through ongoing relationships, family members are engaged in a variety of goal directed ways related to Parent and Family Engagement Outcomes.
Programs that involve parents collect data from children and families—for example, information about parent participation.	Programs that engage families use child and family data to improve services. These programs help families understand and use child data to support their children's progress and development.

Engaging and Collaborating with Families

Programs

- Develop and implement program policies that give families and staff members opportunities to observe and discuss children's development and behavior
- Support families by providing tools and resources that help them contribute to their children's learning.

[80] Family Engagement as Parent Involvement 2.0 by Head Start is under public domain
[81] Family Engagement as Parent Involvement 2.0 by Head Start is under public domain

- Invite families to participate formally and informally in the development, governance, and evaluation of program services and policies, as appropriate.

Teachers

- Recognize that working with families promotes children's development.
- Build relationships with families to ensure meaningful two-way collaboration, supporting the children's learning and development and helping families to understand child development.
- Attentively greet family members when they arrive and depart from the program setting, and use those opportunities to exchange information about the family's child.
- Contribute ideas and resources to promote each child's learning and development in the home and community.
- Collaborate formally and informally with families and colleagues to share observations, describe children's accomplishments, plan for children individually and as a group, and address concerns about children.
- Support families as decision makers for and educators of their children.

Figure 7.2 - Children thrive when their families are engaged and included in their early childhood education program.[82]

Home Language

Programs

- Create strategies to engage family members from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and invite family members to share goals and strategies for supporting children's home languages in the group or classroom. This may require the use of interpreters and translators

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Teachers

- Learn a few words in each child's home language, such as greetings, names of family members, words of comfort, and important objects or places. Parents and other family members can be good resources for learning their language.
- Seek and use resources to facilitate communication with family members in their home language, ensuring that all families are included.
- Actively solicit and listen to families' goals, aspirations, and concerns about their
- children's development.[83]

Culturally Sensitive Care— A Way to Build Relationships with Families[84]
"Acknowledge, Ask, and Adapt" By putting into practice the following steps for culturally responsive caregiving, you will gain the information you need to support appropriately the growth of all the children in your care.

Step 1: Acknowledge The first step is a step of recognition in which you use your growing awareness of the existence of different cultural assumptions about child development. A willingness to be open with yourself is essential to the success of this step.

Step 2: Ask The second step is an information-gathering step. The goal is to get the information you need about the parents' and your cultural beliefs and values so that you can solve the problem together during the third step. Do not rush the second step.

Step 3: Adapt In this last problem-solving step, you use the information gathered in step two to resolve conflicts caused by cultural differences and find the most effective way to support each child's growth."

Programs and Teachers Value the Primary Role of Families in Promoting Children's Development

The family is central in children's lives, as it is through their experiences with their families that children learn about themselves and the world around them (adapted from CDE 2006, 56). Family member is used to define the people who are primarily responsible for a child, including extended family members, teen parents, or foster families (text adapted from CDE 2006, 56).Programs support the healthy growth and development of the child within the context of the family by creating continuity between the home and the early care and education setting.

Programs are responsible for learning about the children's home life through communication

[83] California Preschool Program Guidelines by the California Department of Education is used with permission
[84] Infant/Toddler Learning and Development Program Guidelines by the California Department of Education is used with permission

with family members and, when possible, home visits. As part of this process, programs will learn to work with diverse family structures, including those headed by grandparents, foster families, same-sex parents, and teen parents. An essential aspect of high-quality programs is finding ways to support the growing relationship between the child and the family, and adapting to the strengths and needs of each child–family relationship (CDE 2006, 57). By getting to know families and understanding the importance of children's relationships with caregivers at home, programs and teachers can support the primary role of the family in children's learning and development.

Knowledge of Families

Programs

- Develop or adapt program policies, based on knowledge of the families and on their input and feedback, to support family engagement in the program.

Teachers

- Gather information from family members and engage in direct, effective communication to learn about family composition, values, and traditions to support the primary role of families in their children's care and education and to engage families in the early education setting.
- Learn about each family's values, beliefs, and practices by observing and engaging family members in conversation or by communicating with other staff members as appropriate.
- Find out about each family's language preferences and language goals for the child.
- Refer to and use pertinent family information when responding to needs of children and families.

Parent-Child History and Relationships

Programs

- Develop program policies that support children's relationships with their adult caregivers at home.
- Provide professional development for staff on facilitating parent–child relationships and identifying areas of concern.
- Provide resources or consultation as appropriate to address concerns related to children's relationships with adult caregivers at home.

Teachers

- Understand that all children develop in the context of relationships and that the quality of children's interactions with adult caregivers at home has an impact on child outcomes.

- Follow program policies or practices designed to support relationships between children and adult family members.
- Use a variety of techniques to facilitate and reinforce positive interaction between children and adult family members and support each adult family member's capacity to be responsive and sensitive to the child.
- Understand that culture influences approaches to nurturing young children.
- Identify concerns related to children's relationships with adult family members and follow up as appropriate.

PROGRAMS CREATE A CLIMATE IN WHICH FAMILY MEMBERS FEEL EMPOWERED AND COMFORTABLE AS ADVOCATES FOR THEIR CHILDREN

When programs and teachers engage in open, respectful communication with family members and strive to develop positive, collaborative relationships with them, family members feel included and empowered. The experience of authentically contributing to their children's experiences in preschool helps family members become advocates for their children both within the program and in interactions with other service providers. For example, they are more likely to seek or request services for their children, such as referrals to special education, when needed or appropriate.

Programs can help families with dual language learners recognize their families' cultural and linguistic strengths and learn the skills to ask for the types of services that they think will benefit their children. Families should be encouraged to share their strengths with the program and be asked to participate in joint goal setting and decision making about their children's education. The entire program benefits when educators incorporate diverse cultures, languages, and talents of families with dual language learners into the program's learning environment and curriculum. Once family members feel their contributions and opinions are valued, programs will benefit from their knowledge and experience.

Empowerment of Families

Programs

- Develop an open-door policy that encourages family members to visit the classroom or center at any time.
- Encourage families to offer recommendations for the program's structure and curriculum and to observe the ways in which their contributions are used in the setting.
- Invite families to share their areas of expertise with the teacher, other families, and the children in the program.
- Ensure all families have the opportunity to participate in a policymaking capacity or leadership role (e.g., as members of a board of directors or advisory board).

- Develop a climate statement that expresses the program's appreciation of cultural and linguistic diversity and share the statement with both staff and families.
- Invite families with young dual language learners to participate formally as part of groups that contribute to decisions for the program (e.g., boards, committees, and the like), and to share on an ongoing basis their ideas on how to support and engage with families.

Teachers

- Solicit help from family members in solving problems their child may be having in an early care and education setting.
- Invite families to volunteer regularly and to participate in activities.
- Hold conferences regularly, not just when there is a problem with the child.

Figure 7.3 - When families are welcome in the early education environment, their children thrive.[85]

PROGRAMS SUPPORT TEACHERS' RESPONSIVENESS TO THE FAMILIES' GOALS FOR THEIR CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT AND SCHOOL READINESS

The most successful opportunities for parent engagement are those that address the ideas of parents about their roles in their children's education and their sense of efficacy in helping their children to succeed in early childhood programs (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler 1997). Working with parents to define shared goals helps to strengthen the home–school partnership. In particular, when programs and teachers work to integrate school and family experiences, implement school-readiness practices, and identify strategies for school readiness and transitions, both families and their children benefit.

Researchers have found that preschoolers achieved at higher levels when families and teachers shared similar child centered beliefs and practices. Thus, it is important that programs ask all families to collaborate and participate in joint goal setting for their children, and to ask families

[85] California Preschool Program Guidelines by the California Department of Education is used with permission

with dual language learners and those families who have children with disabilities or other special needs, about effective strategies and the contexts in which their children learn best.

Integrating School and Family Experiences

Programs

- Explain the program’s philosophy on school readiness to classroom staff and families, with consideration for each child’s level of development.
- Incorporate the role of family members in facilitating their children’s transition from preschool to kindergarten.
- Ensure that families with young dual language learners are included as partners in their children’s education. Families should be consulted regarding their children’s early language learning experiences, their educational goals for their children, and the educational progress of their children.
- Ensure that families of young children with disabilities or other special needs are included as partners in their education. Families should be consulted regarding their children’s unique learning needs, their educational goals for their children, and the educational progress of their children.
- Invite families to collaborate with program staff on long-term language development and learning goals for their children. Actively recruit families to participate in classroom activities.

Teachers

- Respond to children and family members in ways that encourage them to share family experiences.
- Share information about children’s experiences in the early education setting with families.
- Support each child’s home language and culture at home and at school.
- Maintain confidentiality of family and child information as appropriate.
- Design early education environments that reflect the diverse experiences of children and families.

Implementation of School-Readiness Practices

Programs

- Collaborate with local transitional kindergarten and kindergarten programs, schools, and support staff in preparing children and families for upcoming transitions.
- Provide professional development activities for staff on school-readiness issues, including developmentally appropriate practice, communication with families, and social–emotional competence.

Teachers

- Describe the program's philosophy on school readiness and transitions.
- Engage in discussions with families about children's experiences in the group or classroom as the experiences relate to school readiness and transitions.
- Respond to questions from families or refer them to appropriate staff for inquiries related to school readiness.
- Articulate that school entry is one milestone in the context of a developmental and educational continuum.
- Include all families as partners in the education of their children with attentiveness to families whose home language is not English.

Strategies for School Readiness and Transitions

Programs

- Coordinate developmentally appropriate experiences to support children's school readiness in all developmental domains, anticipating upcoming transitions to new programs or schools.

Teachers

- Know the previous early care and education experiences of children in the group and plan for upcoming transitions to new programs or schools.
- Identify indicators of school readiness and developmental precursors of school readiness, as appropriate, for the ages of the children served.

PROGRAMS AND TEACHERS USE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES THAT REFLECT THE DIVERSITY OF FAMILIES SERVED

Honoring diversity strengthens relationships with families and children, thereby enhancing the quality of care and education for preschool children (adapted from CDE 2006, 57–58). Being responsive to cultural, linguistic, and economic differences and how these differences affect the ways in which programs and teachers communicate with families demonstrates a program's commitment to each family's unique strengths. Programs and teachers can work to enhance their communication strategies, attending carefully to individual differences in family preferences for communication.

Two-way communication strategies have been found to be particularly effective with families with dual language learners who may otherwise feel disconnected from the program. Two-way communication allows both parties to share information about the learning progress and well-being of the dual language learner and to collaborate on ways to help the child reach important learning goals. This type of communication works well during one-on-one meetings with the

teacher or in a more informal setting such as in the community or in a group setting with other families with dual language learners of similar linguistic backgrounds. Regular two-way communication may be the first step toward increasing family engagement and key to developing strong dual language learner family–program partnerships.[86]

Family/Teacher Conferencing

Our responsibility as early childhood professionals is to observe, document, and assess children's development. This provides us with information about each child to enable us to plan and implement effective curriculum, design an environment, develop a schedule/routine, and to know how to guide and support the behavior of the children in our program.

It is important that we share this information with families in a supportive and engaging way. We typically do this with formal family/teacher conferencing; however there are informal ways to communicate with families on a more daily basis. Conferences are designed to facilitate discussion with families regarding the shared goals that the teacher and the family have decided upon through the many informal communication that happens throughout the school year.

Sometimes there are difficult things that need to be communicated to families in a formal conference. It is critical that we have established a trusting, collaborative relationships with families in order to have these difficult conversations. When families know that you truly care about their child, they will be more likely to hear what you are saying and engage with you in working together to support their child's developmental needs.

Effective communication strategies are important in all the ways that we communicate with families. Conferencing is one of those ways. The following are some tips on how to have an effective conference with families.

Groundwork for Successful Conferences

- Explain purpose of the conference to family
- Plan for uninterrupted time
- Plan for private location
- Plan goals and material to be discussed
- Prepare family for their participatory role
    - Send an overview of the conference prior to meeting

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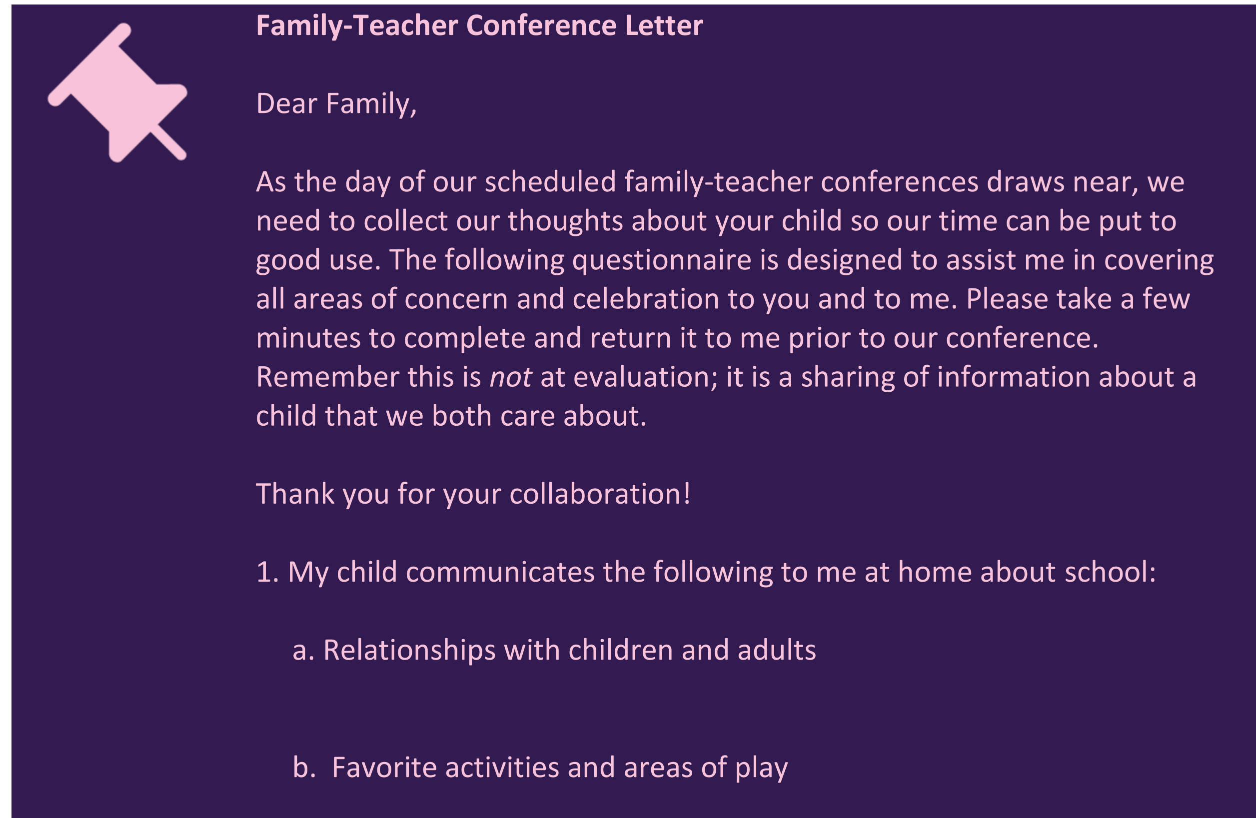
Strategies for Successful Conferences

- Help parents feel at ease
- Begin with positive attitude and comments
- Encourage parent participation
  - Listen actively – paraphrase and reflect on what family is saying
- Summarize for family
  - Provide copies of the assessment tool being used

Things to Avoid in Conferences

- Avoid using technical terminology
- Avoid the role of "expert"
- Avoid negative evaluations
- Avoid unprofessional conversation
- Avoid giving advice
- Avoid rushing into solutions

Below is an example of a Family-Teacher Conference Letter that you may want to consider using prior to meeting with the families.



Family-Teacher Conference Letter

Dear Family,

As the day of our scheduled family-teacher conferences draws near, we need to collect our thoughts about your child so our time can be put to good use. The following questionnaire is designed to assist me in covering all areas of concern and celebration to you and to me. Please take a few minutes to complete and return it to me prior to our conference. Remember this is *not* at evaluation; it is a sharing of information about a child that we both care about.

Thank you for your collaboration!

1. My child communicates the following to me at home about school:

   a. Relationships with children and adults

   b. Favorite activities and areas of play

2. I see my child's areas of strength as:

3. I feel that my child needs to develop skills in:

4. I would like to discuss or have more information on:

Have you considered the whole child – social, emotional, physical, and intellectual?

What else have you been wondering lately?

Here are some things you can use as a checklist to prepare for your conference ahead of time:

- Time scheduled
- Coverage in classroom arranged
- Staff lounge reserved
- Organization of anecdotal records and portfolio
- Handout sent for family participation
- Parent contacted for observation appointment
- List of questions prepared
- Outline of topics prepared
- Plan for opening examples
- Environment prepared – snacks, writing materials, privacy sign

Productive Family-Teacher Conferences Need

- Planning and preparation to achieve goals
- Time and privacy for discussion
- Strategies to facilitate two-way communication and sharing of information, questions, and ideas
- Respect for each participant's expertise
- A positive focus on child's progress and development.

Communication Strategies

Programs

- Provide professional development for staff on the principles of and strategies for effective communication with families.
- Ensure confidentiality and privacy in communications throughout the program.
- Develop a language and communication policy that informs families with young dual language learners on the possible modes to communicate with staff.

Teachers

- Respect each family's style and preferred method of communication and interact with families in a transparent, accountable manner.
- Interact with families in a timely and professional manner to establish relationships that encourage mutual, two-way exchange of information about children.
- Maintain confidentiality and ensure privacy in communications regarding children, families, and staff and colleagues.

Figure 7.4 - Open communication is vital to the relationships between families and teachers.[87]

Family Preferences for Communication

Programs

- Interpret and apply communication policies (as appropriate) to ensure that diverse families are included and complex situations are addressed.
- Help staff to understand and apply communication styles based on each family's expressed needs and preferences.
- Ensure that all communications are accessible and comprehensible to families (i.e., in the family's preferred language).

[87] Image by the California Department of Education is used with permission

Teachers

- Use various ways to communicate with families (e.g., active listening, e-mail and telephone contact, text messaging), depending on each family's preferences and on the situation.
- Model for families effective strategies for communicating with children, adapt strategies for communicating with children, and adapt strategies (as needed) to meet diverse language and literacy needs. [88]

IN SUMMARY

This chapter focused on how to have a trusting, collaborative relationship with families. As has been stated in many ways, this is so important to providing healthy outcomes for children. Early Childhood Professionals are responsible for creating an environment that says to families – "You belong and your ideas matter." Our attitude of inclusion and compassion help families to know how much we care about their children and their family. In chapter 8 – Welcoming and Supporting Families, we will explore ways in which to provide welcoming and supporting environments.

[88] California Preschool Program Guidelines by the California Department of Education is used with permission

CHAPTER 8: WELCOMING & SUPPORTING FAMILIES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Analyze the importance of a welcoming environment.
- Describe ways to make families feel welcome.
- Explain how programs can advocate for families.
- Define the role of community resources and how to connect families to these resources.
- Define ways in which you can collaborate with families regarding their home language

INTRODUCTION

Establishing a welcoming environment is an important aspect of fostering family engagement. “A welcoming environment implies that a program has focused efforts on maintaining an atmosphere that is inviting to families and honors their presence” (Constantino 2008, 25). In a welcoming environment, families feel that they belong and seek ways to contribute to the program. They become comfortable with exchanging information with their children’s teachers and are open to exploring ways to bring learning activities from the preschool program to home. An essential part of a welcoming environment for families with dual language learners is the program ensuring that they have opportunities to communicate in their home language.

Encouraging communication between families with dual language learners who share a home language, hiring staff members (when possible) who are able to communicate in the families’ home language, and providing translations help the families to feel welcome in the early learning environment.

A welcoming environment also benefits the children. The family members’ presence strengthens the children’s sense of comfort and belonging in the early childhood setting. For young dual language learners, seeing that the program makes it possible for family members to communicate in their home language helps the children value their home language and culture and appreciate the importance of communicating in their home language.

CREATING A WELCOMING SPACE

Programs

- Express a warm welcome by having staff and teachers greet families at the door.
- Offer a *family room, where family mem*bers can *mingle with one another and access* information about child growth and development.
- Make a private space available for families and staff to communicate with one another.
- Arrange for support so families who are dual language learners can use their home

language to communicate with teachers and other program staff members.

PROGRAMS REGULARLY PROVIDE FAMILY MEMBERS WITH INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT, WELL-BEING, AND EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES

A key to building successful partnerships with parents is to make them true partners by sharing with them the same kinds of educational information and ideas that are important to the teacher and staff. In a high-quality program, there is ongoing communication between the home and the early care and education center. As much as possible, what the children learn in the program should be supported and reinforced at home.

Family practices in the home are also important for dual language learners to learn, practice, and reinforce concepts in their home language that were initially introduced in school, such as literacy-building skills. Recent research suggests the use of families' home language is a protective factor for children of immigrant families. When some amount of the family's native language is used regularly in the home, young dual language learners show improved cognitive and social development. Thus, it is important for early learning centers to encourage learning at home in the dual language learners' home language. This may be particularly beneficial in the realm of reading and literacy-building skills.

INFORMATION ABOUT LEARNING

Programs

- Offer regular workshops for adult family members that family members help to design and implement.
- Provide resources for educating the children's family members in various media (print, audio, video) and in the home languages of the families served by the early care and education setting, if appropriate to do so.
- Provide current information about the role of the family in maintaining home language skills.

Teachers

- Inform parents regularly about the purpose and benefits of the activities in the program for their children.
- Provide information regularly to families with dual language learners about the benefits of developing both of the child's languages and promoting dual language competency.

PROGRAMS SUPPORT AND ARE ADVOCATES FOR STRONG FAMILIES

The better that families are able to meet their children's basic need for shelter, food, and clothing, the more that family members will be available to support their child's learning. Effective programs provide support to families who want it, usually by linking families with resources in the community through referrals. To support family functioning and promote resilience in families and young children, programs and teachers can establish community partnerships and identify key resources for families, connecting them to those resources considered appropriate. In particular, services that help families become self-sufficient and prevent risk of stress or at least reduce ongoing, intense stress, allow family members to become sources of support for each other. Services that promote positive, nurturing relationships among family members enable families to become more resilient and strengthen the children's capacity for learning. Once working relationships with other service providers in the community are established, early learning centers can work to ensure that families receive needed services and children experience continuity in their learning and development.

Strengthening Families: Five Protective Factors[89]
Five protective factors are the foundation of the Strengthening Families Approach: parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children. Research studies support the common sense notion that when these protective factors are well established in a family, the likelihood of child abuse and neglect diminishes. Research shows that these protective factors are also "promotive" factors that build family strengths and a family environment that promotes optimal child and youth development.

Source: Center for the Study of Social Policy, n.d.

Family Functioning

Programs

- Collaborate with staff, families, and social service providers to develop policies and procedures related to family support.
- Respond to questions or concerns from staff members or other adults and act as a professional resource.
- Provide professional development opportunities to staff on family functioning, protective and risk factors, and community resources.

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Teachers

- Articulate an understanding that families function in a variety of ways and that children or families may require support outside the program.
- Demonstrate an understanding of risk, stress, and resiliency factors related to family functioning and how to support all families appropriately.
- Take steps for further inquiry when concerns arise based on observations of a child or family.
- Communicate daily with families about children's well-being.
- Refer questions or concerns to other staff members when appropriate.
- Work with colleagues to respond to signs of risk or stress in children, as developmentally appropriate and individually meaningful.

Figure 8.1 - Your coworkers can work with you to support families that are experiencing stressors.[90]

Community Partnerships

Programs

- Establish effective relationships with partners to ensure continuity of children's learning and development.
- Maintain professional connections to community and state partners.

Teachers

- Understand the importance of community partnerships in meeting children's needs.
- Form effective partnerships and collaborations with families, professionals, and community representatives.
- Support the needs of children, their success, and their well-being by maintaining professional connections to community and state partners.

[90] Image by the California Department of Education is used with permission

Connecting Families with Resources

Programs

- Support staff and families in the referral process as appropriate.
- Work with community resources to conduct outreach or provide services to program families as appropriate.
- Anticipate families' needs for support based on knowledge of the families' circumstances or of current events that may affect them (e.g., economic climate, natural disasters).
- Identify key community resources that support program practices and family needs, including services that support families with dual language learners' communication with the program.
- Share information with colleagues and develop connections to the program.

Teachers

- Demonstrate familiarity with community resources to support children and families.
- Respond to requests from families about community resources and refer questions to appropriate staff members.
- Protect the confidentiality and privacy of families.
- Engage in conversations with families about referrals to community resources and assist in identifying or gaining access to services as needed, with consideration for the diverse linguistic and cultural experiences of families.
- Identify signs that children or families may require support outside the program, maintain documentation, and initiate closer observation or further inquiry, collaborating with families as appropriate.
- Provide resources linked to classroom instructions to assist families in supporting continued development and maintenance of the home language.

Figure 8.2 - Families experiencing food insecurity could benefit from this community resource, a food bank.[91]

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[91] Image by Airman 1st Class Jeffrey Parkinson is in the public domain

Use of Community Resources

Teachers

- Gain knowledge about the importance of community resources that can enhance professional expertise and children's learning experiences.
- Use community resources routinely to enhance their knowledge about families and services and classroom learning activities.

PROGRAMS AND TEACHERS ENGAGE FAMILIES IN SUPPORTING CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF THE HOME LANGUAGE

Programs and families with dual language learners are critical to children's language development as the sheer amount of words children hear and the richness of the speech they hear is strongly linked to their future language and literacy abilities. Thus, it is critical that programs communicate to families with dual language learners the importance of speaking to children in their home language and suggest that families seize as many opportunities as possible to engage children in conversation. Parents need to help families understand the importance of dual language learning concepts in their home language and engaging in extended language interactions in their home language. In addition, early learning centers can provide families with dual language learners with the necessary provisions and resources to teach new concepts at home in dual language learners' first language.

Home Language

Programs

- Collaborate with families and colleagues to provide a variety of ways throughout the program for young dual language learners and their families to participate.
- Model one-on-one, group, and unstructured peer-to-peer activities.
- Collaborate with families and colleagues to design an educational program
- that incorporates each child's home language(s).
- Encourage families, colleagues, and community members to use children's home language(s) and provide training or support as needed.
- Conduct ongoing evaluation of programmatic support for children's home language(s) and use data to guide program improvements.

Teachers

- Assist in offering a variety of developmentally appropriate, individually meaningful, and culturally responsive ways for dual language learners to participate in the group (CDE 2009).
- Work with colleagues to create various opportunities for dual language learners and

their families to participate in the group throughout the day.

- Demonstrate understanding that the early education setting is often the first place where dual language learners encounter English and that honoring each child's home language fosters positive social–emotional development and the child's development and learning in all other areas.
- Support home language development.
- Plan with families, colleagues, community members, and others who support children's development and learning.
- Incorporate practices that honor the role of the home language as a vital foundation in English-language development.[92]

IN SUMMARY

This chapter provided you with crucial information on how to provide welcoming and supportive environments for children and their families. The environments we set up are designed with the children and families we serve in mind. We must develop an equitable partnership that shows families that we are on this learning journey with them.

In the next chapter, we will look at creating positive goal-oriented relationships with strength-based attitudes and relationship based practices. This chapter sets the tone for creating a positive environment that helps in engaging all of the partners - the school, the classroom, the children and their families.

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CHAPTER 9: CREATING POSITIVE GOAL-ORIENTED RELATIONSHIPS WITH STRENGTHS-BASED ATTITUDES AND RELATIONSHIP-BASED PRACTICES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Define positive goal-oriented relationships.
- Identify important considerations for developing positive goal-oriented relationships.
- Explain how strength-based attitudes influence our relationships with children and families.
- Reflect on how to apply relationships-based practices.

INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of life, families are there to nurture their children to have healthy outcomes and to develop capacities they will need to be ready for school and have successful outcomes in life. Program staff share these goals and collaborate with families as they work toward these goals. Equity, inclusiveness, cultural and linguistic responsiveness, and positive goal-oriented relationships have been identified as important drivers for these outcomes.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND POSITIVE GOAL-ORIENTED RELATIONSHIPS

Positive, goal-oriented relationships develop over time through interactions between programs and families. These relationships

- are fueled by families' passion for their children
- are based on mutual respect and trust, affirm and celebrate families' cultures and language

- provide opportunities for two-way communication
- include authentic interactions that are meaningful to those who participate in them,
- often require an awareness of one's personal biases and how those biases may affect mutual respect and trust.

Figure 9.1 - Two-way communication is the foundation for relationships.[93]

Positive, goal-oriented relationships improve wellness by reducing isolation and stress for both families and staff. When these relationships focus on shared goals for children, staff and families can experience the support that comes from knowing that they all are on the same team. These relationships support the aims of equity, inclusiveness, cultural and linguistic responsiveness.

WHY DO POSITIVE GOAL-ORIENTED RELATIONSHIPS MATTER?

Positive Goal-Oriented Relationships support progress for children and families. These relationships contribute to positive parent-child relationships, a key predictor of success in early learning and healthy development. Through positive interactions with their most important caregivers, children develop skills for success in school and life. They learn how to manage their emotions and behaviors, solve problems, adjust to new situations, resolve conflicts, and prepare for healthy relationships with other adults and peers.

Healthy relationships between parents and children develop over time through a series of interactions that are primarily warm and positive. There may also be brief disconnections or misunderstandings in relationships. For example, there will be times when parents and children are not perfectly in sync. A toddler may be laughing and playing with her mother and be

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[93] Infant/Toddler Caregiving: A Guide to Culturally Sensitive Care by the California Department of Education is used with permission

surprised when her scream of delight is met with her mother's raised voice, telling her to be quieter. An older infant may be enjoying his breakfast of rice cereal but he may be confronted by an unhappy face when he smashes the cereal into his grandmother's work clothes. These temporary disconnections are natural and necessary, and they build a child's capacity for resilience and conflict resolution. As long as interactions are primarily positive, children can learn important skills from the process of reconnecting.

Disconnections and challenges can occur in our relationships with families and colleagues as well. A father arrives to find his toddler finger-painting and immediately becomes upset with the caregiver. He is in a hurry and does not have time to change her clothes. A mother is frustrated that her child is not making more progress learning her numbers and letters and blames the caregivers. Imperfect interactions help us learn how to tolerate discomfort and how to resolve challenges. These are important skills for building strong partnerships.

Positive relationships between parents and providers are important as families make progress toward other goals, such as improved health and safety, increased financial stability, and enhanced leadership skills. Strong partnerships can provide a safe place where families can explore their hopes, share their challenges, and let us know how we can help. Staff, community partners, and peers can be resources as families decide what is important to them and how to turn their goals into realities. Parents help us enhance their children's learning and healthy development. When we focus on families' strengths and view parents as partners, we can work more effectively to support parent-child relationships and other outcomes for families and children.

Everything we do is intended to give families the emotional and concrete supports they want and need to reach better outcomes. When a family makes progress, parents have more capacity to give to their children. For example, a family may be struggling financially and constantly worried about where the next meal will come from. The parent may be overwhelmed or embarrassed, unsure of how to ask for help. If the parent trusts the program or a staff member, the parent might share their distress and worry. The program can work with the parent to find and access food and nutrition resources in their community.

As the family stabilizes, the parent might work with staff to identify how to improve the situation in the long term. The parent may decide to go back to school to increase his or her earning potential or might join a group to talk with other families about educational goals. The parent might work with the program and peers to find and access educational resources. As families take steps to reach their goals, they can engage in relationships with their children.

Strong relationships between parents and caregivers contribute to better outcomes for children and families.

RECOGNIZE WHAT FAMILIES, STAFF, AND CHILDREN CONTRIBUTE

Building a relationship is a dynamic and ongoing process that depends on contributions from everyone involved: families, program staff, and children. Families have a set of beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives that affect relationships with staff. Likewise, providers have a set of beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives, both personal and professional, which affect our relationships with families. Children live and learn in specific environments and are influenced by the parents, families, and other adults and peers in their lives. They also bring their own unique contributions to relationships in the form of behavior, temperament, emotion, and stage of development.

UNDERSTAND AND APPRECIATE DIFFERENCES

Successful partnerships are created when families and staff value the perspectives and contributions of one another and care about shared goals and positive outcomes. Programs can partner with parents to understand the child's and family's strengths, goals, interests, and challenges. In each interaction, we can learn more about each other and about ourselves as professionals. When we understand and appreciate the family's perspective, we are more likely to set aside our own agenda and create a shared agenda with the family.[94]

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHILDREN

Teachers build meaningful relationships with children during ordinary, everyday interactions. A mutual gaze with a four-month-old baby, a moment of eye contact with a twelve-month-old child scooting across the room, the acknowledgment of a two-year-old's interest in his image in the mirror—such actions occur every day in early childhood programs. In one instance, a child feels more secure, in another, a child becomes more willing to explore, and in the third a child gains a stronger sense of self. Teachers who are responsive as they develop relationships with young children appear to work magic. However, underneath the magic are a compassionate interest in each child, careful observations, a commitment to children and families, and a thoughtful approach to supporting development and learning.[95]

[94] Building Partnerships: Guide to Developing Relationships with Families by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is in the public domain

[95] Infant/Toddler Learning and Development Program Guidelines by the California Department of Education is used with permission

Figure 9.2 - That magic in action.[96]

STRENGTHS-BASED ATTITUDES AND RELATIONSHIP-BASED PRACTICES

We all know how important families are in the lives of their children. When we have strong relationships with families, we are helping to promote healthy child development and school readiness. Strong relationships with families also make it easier to have conversations involving uncomfortable feelings or challenging topics. In this section, we will explore tools that we know work well when building relationships with families.

Strengths-based Attitudes for Building Positive Goal-Oriented Relationships

An attitude is a way of thinking or feeling about someone or something that is often reflected in a person's behavior. Our attitudes create a frame of mind that shapes how we behave in our personal and professional life. Attitudes are shaped by experiences, beliefs, and assumptions.

When we begin our interactions with positive attitudes, we tend to see families in a more positive light, giving us a strong foundation to build an effective partnership. In contrast, when we approach our interactions with negative attitudes, we are more likely to see fault, make negative judgments, and expect a negative outcome. Adopting a positive attitude does not mean avoiding challenges and only talking about positive observations and ideas. Instead, it includes adopting a frame of mind that begins with a family's strengths. We begin with Strengths-based Attitudes to express our belief that all families can make progress and that we are ready to strive for better outcomes together. [97]

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[96] Image by the California Department of Education is used with permission

[97] Family Engagement as Parent Involvement 2.0 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is in the

Table 9.1 - Strengths-based Attitudes and Interactions

Strengths-based Attitudes	Sample Interactions Reflecting these Attitudes
• Families are the first and most important teachers of their children • Families are our partners with a critical role in their family's development • Families have expertise about their child and their family Families' contributions are important and valuable	**Intake Meeting** • Tell me how you think your child learns best. How can you tell when he is really interested in something? • What ideas do you have for how we can best support her when she is here? • What do you do to comfort her when she is upset? • Is there anything else you'd like us to know about you and your family? Follow-up During Informal Discussion • You mentioned that she's a smart girl. Can you tell me more about that? Home Visit • You know him best. What do you imagine it will be like for him when he's in the program with other children? • Can you tell me what you would like for us to know about him? Challenging Behavior • Can you tell what has worked at home when you have seen this behavior? Within an Established Relationship • Can you tell me about your hopes for yourself and your family? • What are your wishes and dreams for your family?

When you engage with a family, you help strengthen the partnership with that family. There are six Relationship-based Practices that can help promote family engagement. These practices are intended to guide what we say and do with families to support open communication and promote better understanding. Reflecting on how we apply Relationship-based Practices can improve our efforts to strengthen our relationships with families.

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Table 9.2 - Relationship-based Attitudes and Interactions

<table>
<tr><th>Relationship-based Practices</th><th>Sample Interactions Reflecting these Practices</th></tr>
<tr><td>1. Observe and describe the child’s behavior to open communication with the family
2. Reflect on the family’s perspective
3. Support competence
4. Focus on the family-child relationship
5. Value a family’s passion
6. Reflect on your own perspective</td><td>Intake Meeting
• Invite the family’s input and use it in making decisions about the child and family.
• Be aware of your own biases.

Follow-up During Informal Discussion
• Use simple, clear, and objective descriptions of the child’s behavior.
• Acknowledge and share child and parent behavior that demonstrates something about the parent-child relationship.

Home Visit
• Use the family’s observations and interpretations to inform how you support the child’s development.
• Invite parents to share their perspective on the child’s behavior and development.

Challenging Behavior
• Recognize the child’s strengths.
• Reframe the family’s emotions as passion for their child.

Within an Established Relationship
• Share positive and specific information about the child with the family.
• Attribute the child’s progress to the family’s efforts.</td></tr>
</table>

1. *Observe and Describe the Child's Behavior to Open Communication with the Family*

Description	Actions
The child is the common focus for families and programs. When staff ask for parents' observations of a child's behavior and share their own, they create opportunities for discussion. Simple, clear descriptions of a child's behavior, without interpretations or judgments, give families and staff the chance to make meaning of that behavior together. This creates a starting point for discussion that can help identify common ground and differences. This practice invites families to guide the conversation about their child. Often families react and respond to the program's ideas or agenda. This strategy gives families the freedom to volunteer and share what they see, know, and want for their child.	• Share positive, genuine, and specific information about the child with the family. • Recognize the child's strengths and share them with the family. • Use simple, clear, and objective descriptions of the child's behavior. • Ask for the family's observations and listen to what they think these mean about their child. • Begin challenging conversations by asking parents about what they see, what behaviors concern them, and what they think these behaviors may mean. It's important to know what kind of meaning parents make of their child's behavior. Follow up with a description of what you see, and give parents a chance to offer their ideas. • Wait before asking too many questions. Instead, start with a description of the child's behavior or a specific situation from the day. • Leave time for the parent to share their ideas rather than be guided by a specific question based on your own agenda. Instead of sharing your interpretation, listen to how the parent makes meaning of the behavior.

EXAMPLES

"You and Elizabeth are always ready when the bus arrives. We really appreciate that."

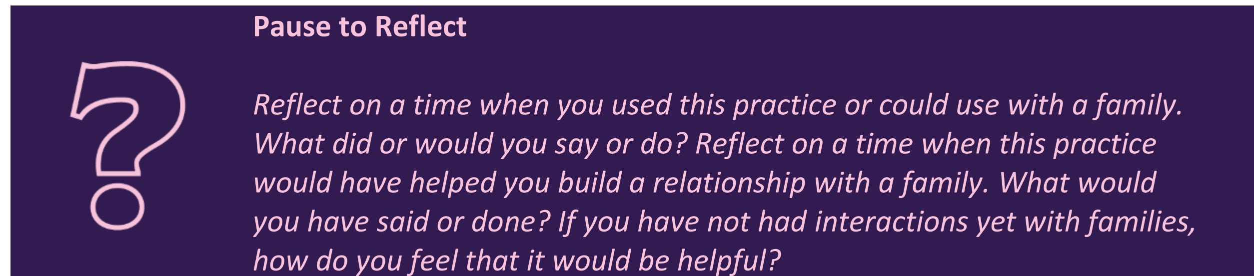
"I saw that Victoria looked at you and grabbed onto your shirt as I came into the house."

"I've been watching Abdul explore with paint and get used to the different brushes. He also tells stories about his paintings. You told me you want him to paint more realistic paintings. I

wonder if he'll begin to do that once his painting skills catch up to his ideas. Abdul is really sticking with it, and he loves it! I think we both want to help him work toward the same goal."

"I notice that Christina often pats other children when they are crying."

"I notice that every time you begin a conversation with me, David begins to tug at your arm."



2. Reflect on the Family's Perspective

Description	Actions
Families share their children and themselves with us as soon as they join our program. They trust us with their hopes, fears, and challenges. We can work toward strong partnerships by showing genuine interest in families – their goals, values, and dreams for their family. We can gain a better understanding of the child and family if we listen to the family's perspectives. Both the staff and the family benefit from taking the time to consider each other's perspectives. This practice is particularly useful when cultural differences in child-rearing and family roles emerge. Issues such as education, discipline, social behavior, and even the goals of learning vary a great deal within a multicultural society. All families bring their beliefs and values to discussions about their child.	**Actions** • Invite families to share their perspectives on their child's behavior and development. • Use the family's observations and interpretations to inform how to foster the child's healthy development. • Before sharing data about a child, consider why you think the information is important and whether it will be important to the child's family in the same ways. • Invite families to share insights about their child. C with families to set goals and make decisions. • Ask family members what they would like to know about the program and other services in the community.

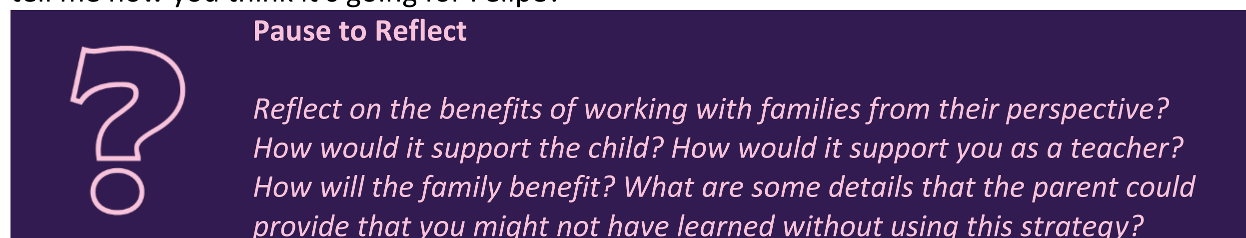
EXAMPLES

"I wanted to talk with you about Michael's progress in learning to get along with the other children. I've seen a lot of changes. I wondered what you've been thinking about this."

"Jacqueline is working so hard to learn to do things by herself. This morning she wanted to put her coat on all by herself. She got very frustrated and started to cry. I wanted her to be successful and, at the same time, I needed to go outside to help supervise the other children. She was very determined. I want to learn from you about what you do if you see Jacqueline struggling with this. We'd really like to work together on this with you. What do you do at home?"

"Last month you mentioned that you were going to learn more about the community center in your neighborhood. I'm curious if you found any programs that your family is interested in?"

"I wanted to follow up with you on our conversation about toilet learning last week. Can you tell me how you think it's going for Felipe?"



Pause to Reflect

Reflect on the benefits of working with families from their perspective? How would it support the child? How would it support you as a teacher? How will the family benefit? What are some details that the parent could provide that you might not have learned without using this strategy?

3. Support Competence

Description	Actions
This practice helps us to recognize and celebrate a family's successes, progress, and efforts in accomplishing their goals for their child and themselves. We share in their successes, encourage them to recognize their competence, and join them as they aspire to new goals. Sometimes, because of our training, we think we know best and want to show or teach families how to do things better. We need to be careful not to interfere with their sense of competence by suggesting that we know more than they do. We have expertise to share and we want to choose the right time to share our ideas and suggestions. Follow their lead. Ask if they want feedback or suggestions before jumping in with	• Recognize and acknowledge family strengths. • Celebrate each step taken toward a goal as progress. • Help families identify and access personal and community resources. • Attribute a child's progress to the family's efforts whenever possible. • Build on the family's understanding with new ways to look at the child's behavior. • Wait until you establish a relationship with a family, or until they ask, before you share your expertise and knowledge.

Description	Actions
advice. This practice reminds us to embrace the strengths of the cultures and home languages of families. We can tailor opportunities to build on each family's individual strengths and interests. Invite parents to share their home language with children, staff, and families by teaching a song, sharing familiar words, or telling a story.	• Ask the family for ideas about how your program can help them achieve the goals they have for themselves and their children.

EXAMPLES

"You are doing a great job navigating the bus system to get Teegan to school. Would you be willing to share what you've learned with other parents?"

"I noticed that while we were talking, José and Leila worked together to separate the crayons and markers by color. Look how they separated them into four piles—blue, yellow, green, and red. I remember when they started at the program it was important to you that they be successful in math and science. You must have been working on sorting things with them at home."

"I noticed Christopher gave a make-believe cupcake to another little boy who was sad because he had fallen and scraped his knee. It reminded me of when you brought me flowers when I had been out sick. You both are so thoughtful of others."

"Last time we met you said you wanted to get your General Educational Development (GED) and we came up with some ideas for making that happen. Your husband mentioned that you seemed excited about these ideas. Is there anything I can do to support you in your progress?"

Pause to Reflect

Reflect on challenges that can come from teachers taking on the role of the "expert". How does that impact the child and the family? What are the advantages of supporting a child and families competence? Share an example of when a supervisor supported you and focused on your strengths - what impact did it have on your job performance? Or on the opposite end, share an example of when a supervisor focused on your negative attributes or "weaknesses" - what impact did in have on your job performance?

4. Focus on Family-Child Relationships

Description	Actions
Strong parent-child relationships link with positive learning and social outcomes for children. Staff efforts to strengthen these relationships can help. Parents need to know that their relationship with their child is valued and supported by program staff. Sometimes parents worry that their child may feel closer to program staff than to them, or they may feel that program staff judge their relationship with their child. When you share observations of positive parent-child interactions, you provide reassurance that the relationship between them and their child is more important than any other. This practice reminds us that everything we do is meant to strengthen the relationships between children and their families. When you tie a family's efforts to make progress in their lives to the positive effect it has on their children, it reminds them how working toward their goals benefits the entire family.	• Share observations of parent-child interactions that demonstrate something positive about the relationship. • Share what you learned about the child from your observations of family-child interactions. • Welcome families to visit and volunteer in the classroom. • Talk with parents about the things you see them do and say that are responsive to their child's individual temperament and that positively impact the child's development. • Acknowledge how a parent's progress positively affect the child's well-being. Discuss how setting and reaching goals models important skills and qualities for their children. • Discuss information that reinforces how much the family means to the child (for example, pictures the child draws that include family members, or times when you've observed the child acting as one of the family members in dramatic play).

EXAMPLES

"I noticed when I arrived that Sam ran over to you and hugged your leg. I can see he is really connected to you."

"I understand you are concerned that when you pick Abdullah up at the end of the day, he often seems upset or angry. I wonder if it is his way of saying how much he missed you all day. He manages his emotions all day and then gets to let go when he sees you. Maybe it's his way of saying how glad he is that you're back."

"Since you have been reading stories at bedtime together, Sara is spending more time with the books I bring on our home visits. Today she chose the book about dinosaurs. Would you like to borrow that book to read at bedtime this week?"

"I think Fatuma knows that school is important to you. She sees you going back to school, and it makes learning that much more exciting for her because she wants to be like her mom."

Pause to Reflect

Reflect on the benefits of creating a family-child relationship. What challenges do you feel could occur in your classroom, if you did not create that connection?

5. Value a Family's Passion

Description	Actions
Raising children and working with families always involves emotions. We can expect parents to have feelings about what is happening in their families, whether they are celebrating a child's successes, worrying about how to pay bills, or showing anger at a child's behavior. And, no matter how professional program staff are, emotions are also part of how we react to the families we work with in our programs. It is important to understand that these emotions— both positive and negative—are parents' and staff's passionate concern for the child and family. Sometimes sharing emotions can be uncomfortable, but it is also a way to deepen partnerships with families. This practice helps us remember that even when parents and staff have very different ideas about what a family needs, they all want what is best for the family. When our shared goal is positive outcomes, families and staff can work together to determine how to celebrate successes, share worries, and resolve disagreements.	• Accept and acknowledge the family's emotions, both positive and negative. • Reframe the parent's emotions as passion for their family. • Listen for what is behind the emotions and work with the family to understand them. • Recognize and remember the family's passion from past conversations, and then build on it to provide focus when you set goals together.

EXAMPLES

"It is so important to you that Jack succeeds. All of these small successes with toilet learning don't always seem like enough when you are still facing wet laundry at the end of a long day. I

want Jack to succeed too, and we can work together to make sure it happens!"

"You certainly want what's best for Jayda. What about you? Are there things you would like to do?"

"Last time we talked you were very concerned that Hiromi is not learning the alphabet as quickly as the other children in her classroom. I wonder if you have thought more about that."

"I can see that you're upset that the bus was late this morning. You've told us that it is important to you that Madeline gets to school on time so that you can get to your class at the college on time."

"I understand why you are upset about Francesca getting bitten today. We're sorry she was hurt and want to reassure you that no skin was broken. We cleaned the area and put on a bandage. We gave her lots of hugs. We know her safety is the most important thing to you."

Pause to Reflect

Reflect on your passion for your own family - or future family. Share why you feel it would be important for your child's teacher to understand your families passion and goals?

6. *Reflect on Your Own Perspective*

Description	Actions
Both the family's perspectives and the staff's perspectives shape the conversation between families and staff. Our own perspectives include many elements—what we have been trained to do, what our program wants from us, our feelings about working with children and families, and, most importantly, the personal beliefs and values gained from our own cultural upbringing. All of these elements, both conscious and unconscious, affect our relationships. It's important to consider our own views when working with families. Although we often are told to put aside our feelings in our work, the reality is that we bring our own beliefs and values into everything we do.	• Be aware of your own biases, judgments, and negative assumptions. • Identify how biases, judgments, and assumptions may affect your interactions with families. • Choose to approach families by holding aside biases, judgments, and assumptions. Adopt one of the strengths-based attitudes to guide you. • Identify common perspectives and work together to understand differences. • Ask for help from co-workers and supervisors if you need help doing things differently.

Description	Actions
Rather than put them aside, we can increase our awareness of them so we are more effective in our relationships with families. This practice encourages us to reflect on our interactions with families, so that we can choose what we say and do to promote positive family and child outcomes. Each decision affects the success of our partnerships and the positive impact we can have	• Make time to reflect on your perspective and how it is affecting your work and your attitudes toward families. • Before sharing your views, ask the family to share their perspectives. Share your own when it can help you both come to a common understanding.

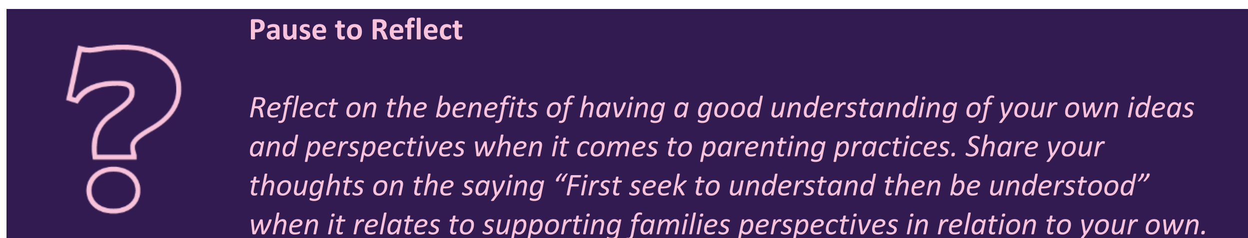
EXAMPLES

"Sebastian's family says it's our job to teach him letter recognition and they don't have time to do extra at home. They want him to read by the time he is four and that's just unrealistic. I want to partner with them and I'm angry they won't work with us. Can you help me think about how to approach this?"

"I'm excited for Julia to learn English and Spanish, her family's home language. Her family is concerned that learning Spanish will affect her English negatively. I'd like to find a way to share my passion for multiple language learning and the positive effects it has on brain development and still honor their concern."

"I'm so frustrated with Rebecca's family. They tell me all the time they are going to follow through on the referrals I give them, and then they always have excuses. It feels like a waste of time to be working with them on this. I don't understand what they want from me."

"David had a really hard drop-off again this morning. If his mom would just get here earlier and read with him like I suggested, the transition wouldn't be so difficult. She is always running late, and it just makes it harder for him and for us. I don't know what to do."



Pause to Reflect

Reflect on the benefits of having a good understanding of your own ideas and perspectives when it comes to parenting practices. Share your thoughts on the saying "First seek to understand then be understood" when it relates to supporting families perspectives in relation to your own.

IN CONCLUSION

This chapter provided you with some important information to help program staff build relationships with a strength-based attitude. We explored in more depth how our attitudes

shape the way in which we see families. Reflecting on those attitudes can help us to build relationships based on mutual trust and respect, where collaboration can occur to ensure better outcomes for the children in our programs.

As you continue your exploration in this field, you have the opportunity to return to this textbook to re-engage with the content. Reflective practice is a necessary disposition in our work with children and families. We are the ones who set the tone. When we offer acceptance and understanding through the lens of equity, the children and families we serve will have opportunities for better outcomes.

Quotable

"Families are the compass that guides us. They are the inspiration to reach great heights, and our comfort when we occasionally fail." – Brad Henry