
UNIT 3 POSITIVE PARENTING

Structure

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- describe the family as a sociological concept;
- identify the emerging trends;
- discuss the Family Life Cycle and its implications for the various life stages;
- explain parenting both as a concept as well as its challenges during the various life stages of the family lifecycle; and
- discuss various parenting styles and proactive strategies in child rearing.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Family is understood to be one among the most important social institutions all over the world. Schriver (1995) uses the term ‘familiness’ to broaden the traditional concept of family; familiness “reminds us as individuals and as members of particular families, to think always about possible alternative structures and sets of functions that constitute family for others” (Schriver, 1995). Garbarino and Abramowitz (1992) terms family as the “headquarters for human development.” Families, for that matter, make up the thread necessary to weave human society together.

From the sociological perspective, a family is regarded as the primary institution, as constitutes the basic unit of any society. But, how then does one define a family? Sociologists worldwide define three distinct functions for families: getting married, procreating, and developing kinship ties. Reader (1980) defines family as a “small kinship structured group with the key function of nurturant socialization.” Duvall (1971) defines family as “a unit of interacting persons related by ties of marriage, birth, or adoption, whose central purpose is to create and maintain common culture, which promotes the physical, mental, emotional, and social development of each of its members.”

A simpler, yet broader definition by Hartman and Laird (1983), considers a family created when “two or more people construct an intimate environment that they define as a “family,” an environment in which they generally will share living space, commitment, and a variety of the roles and functions usually considered part of family life.” Such a broad definition takes into account couples – heterosexual and homosexual, single-parent families, elderly, as well as persons related by blood, living together, also.

3.2 THE “SYSTEMS” APPROACH TO FAMILY

A “family” is a system consisting of interrelated parts that keep influencing each other. For that matter, family influence is regarded as complex (Ashford, 2003) because it often goes beyond the mother-child relationships, and involves the father, the grandparents (or the in-laws, as in the Indian context) and their interrelations with the parents and the social environment. Considering the ‘systems’ approach, one cannot afford to underestimate the influence of external factors – religion, caste, neighbourhood, friends, school, and work.

Still further, the family takes the responsibility of almost all functional nurturing activities- childbearing, childrearing, schooling, socializing, and indoctrinating a definite value system – of a society. Herein, comes the role of the parents. The following section explains the concept of parenting, the changing trends in family systems and its impact on parenting and helps you to appreciate the difference between the traditional Indian way of parenting as against the West; the various approaches to parenting; the variations required across the different stages – childhood and adolescence; and, finally, provide the tips for parenting. Also, important is the need to understand the concept of responsible parenthood.

3.3 FAMILY IN A CHANGING CONTEXT

The family is a complex system; but it is not static, and as a developing system the family reflects a changing world. For that matter, even the definition of ‘family’ is changing to accommodate the rapid changes that are taking place in our society. The simpler yet complex forms of families, such as “single-parent” and “nuclear” families, as a concept are vying for more attention. The former kind, emerging out of choice or imposed for reasons of marital discord, although not accepted in the Indian society, is becoming increasingly common. The latter, carried more appeal, not only because it was fashionable, but also because it became a compulsion with the new trend worldwide to economize and make efficient use of one’s resources. The propagation of neo-colonialism (read the LPG regime), this compulsion has become all the more a reality. Sigelman & Shaffer (1991) have brought to our attention certain changing trends:

- More adults are living as singles today than in the past
- Many young adults are delaying marriage in order to pursue educational and career goals
- After marriage, couples are having fewer chances of surviving
- An increasing number of couples decide to remain childless
- Up to 50% of young people are expected to obtain divorce sometime in their marriage
- Up to 50% of the children born in the 1980s are more likely to end up in a single-parent family.

Statistics in India, especially the urban areas, show a similar pattern. True, nuclear families are of great significance in urban India too. This continues to dominate literature written by and for the elite and the literate. However, in reality 80% of India's population lives in villages, where the joint family system still continues to be a significant presence and is thus of relevance and value. The West still continues to marvel and discuss with much awe how this unique system functions and holds its ground. As one of the experts Prof. Gracious Thomas remarks, the joint family system will remain a force to reckon with for at least another half of a century.

All said and done having a family, as well as raising a child within the family may be deemed to be one of the toughest and most fulfilling jobs in the world. Needless to say it is one for which you may feel the least prepared. Most of the other less important things in the world, whether it be a car, a laptop, a microwave oven or a blender all come with instruction manuals offering you ample preparation. For that matter, the simplest of mobile phones come with a minimum of two manuals, twice the dimensions of the mobile. But unfortunately, we have no instruction manuals for the most important, priceless things in life – marriage, parenting and child-rearing. Most of these are transacted only through trial and error and practice wisdom handed down from generation to generation, or even sheer accident.

3.4 THE FAMILY LIFE CYCLE

In fact, a family undergoes a sequential development that may be likened to a life cycle. Carter and McGoldrick (1988) describes a six-stage cycle for family development, each with distinct development tasks that put special demands on the couple.

Life Cycle Stage	Key Development Tasks	Changes required to Develop
the unattached young adult: between families	accepting parent/off spring separation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> differentiation of self from parents (or family of origin) development of intimate peer relations establishment of self at work
newly married couple: enjoining of families	committing to a new phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> forming a marital system realignment of relationships with families and peers
family with young children	accepting new members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> adjusting marital system to accommodate children assuming parenting roles realignment of relationships to include parenting and grand parenting roles
family with adolescents	assigning flexibility to family boundaries to include children's independence and grandparents' frailities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> altering parent-child relationships permitting adolescents to move in and out of the system

<p>launching children and moving on</p>	<p>accepting a multitude of exits from and entries into the family system</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● re-focussing on mid-life issues - marital and career ● shift in concern for the older generation ● renegotiation of marital system (as a dyad) ● development of adult-to-adult relationships between grown children and their parents ● re-alignment of relationships to include in-laws and grandchildren
<p>family in late life</p> <p>Adapted from: Carter & McGoldrick. 1988</p>	<p>accepting shifting generational roles</p> <p>Adapted from: Carter & McGoldrick. 1988</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● maintaining functioning - own, couple, or both - and interests in the face of physiological decline ● exploration of new familial and social-role options ● support for a more central role for middle generations ● making room in the system for the wisdom and experience of the elderly: supporting the older generation without over-exerting them ● dealing with loss of spouse, siblings, and other peers and preparation for own death, life review and integration

Adapted from: Carter & McGoldrick. 1988

For the very same reason that a family undergoes various changes, one may expect the pressure to vary from one stage to the other, thereby impacting on the satisfaction of the couples. As couples move through the family life cycle, they experience different sources of satisfaction and frustration. Some researchers have attempted to examine the effects (Belsky, 1990; Rollins & Feldman, 1970) and have found a U-shaped relationship between life-cycle stage and marital satisfaction; marital satisfaction starts high, when the couple are newly married (honeymooning), and eventually plummets to its lowest point during the stage where families have school-aged children. However, there is subsequently an improvement, especially when families grow up with teenage children and eventually begins an upward incline to the final stage, the ageing family, where satisfaction reaches a level similar to that of the newly married couple.

Check Your Progress I

- 1) Describe the concept of family and its emerging trends in the changing context.

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- 2) Describe the systems approach to understanding a family.

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- 3) Explain the concept of “family lifecycle” and the various challenges posed to each life stage.

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3.5 PARENTING: THE CONCEPT

What is parenting? The simplest possible answer is “anything and everything that a parent does, with the intention of helping her/his child to develop into a well adjusted human being.” Parenting encompasses the host of activities undertaken by the parent(s), in raising a child or children (Webster’s Dictionary, 1975). Parenting connotes the caring and rearing of a child or children, especially the care, love, and guidance given by a parent (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2009; Collins English Dictionary, 2003).

Parenting is quite often understood, to be a consistent activity, starting with the birth of the child and pervading until usually early adulthood. It is vital to appreciate the necessity for an agreement and conscious planning between the couple regarding the number of children, the spacing, consistency regarding discipline, the necessity of core family values and tradition, much before the child is born. In this manner, parenting is a more comprehensive phenomena, beginning before conception. Once the child is born, parenting develops in complexity as it consists of mutual, reciprocal interactions that take place, in the least, between the child, the mother and the father. The adjustment between these pairs has got an influence on the other. For instance the adjustment between the mother and the child, influences the mother’s disposition towards the father. Likewise, it is also important to realize how the relationship between the mother and father could be a stressor on the

adjustment between the mother and child. Belsky (1981) refers to this as circular influences.

Parenting is an activity, very instinctual, and unique to living creatures. Parenting among non-human species, is usually less lengthy and complicated, though mammals tend to nurture their young extensively, over longer periods of time. There are diverse views regarding how effective parenting would become with the number of offsprings in the family. The very rational, linear thinking West concludes that the degree of attention parents invest in their offspring is largely inversely proportional to the number of offspring the average adult in the species produces (Scutta, 2006). Thus, the western psyche on parenting subscribes to the principles of economics of investing most into the minimum, to make it more efficient. As against this, the Orient and the Mediterranean seem to think that love (attention) is not divided, instead it is multiplied! For the latter, it is more the merrier! Taken in this manner, parenting becomes all the more challenging too!

3.6 INDIAN CULTURE AND PARENTING

It needs to be stressed that parents world over, unlike what has been perceived, are not very different when it comes to teaching children the importance of values. The significant difference however, lies in the fact that, Indian families have their own unique set of values and traditions that sometimes conflict with the values of other cultures, especially in the context of the globalization and multiculturalism. One needs to understand that among these, are values, which would qualify as universal values. For instance all cultures hold courage, independence, honesty, faithfulness, respect (for dignity), etc. to be values that should be inculcated in children.

In its broadest sense, India's cultural heritage is unique in many ways. It has at the subliminal level, Indian values such as non-violence, respect for the elders, respect for life even for the lowest species (leading to ahimsa), respect even for that matter towards inanimate objects such as books or tools of trade, respect for family ties, as well as hospitality and reverence for guests as embodied in Sanskrit "*athiti devo bhava.*" In spite of the rich diversity in the Indian continent, all such values are universally cherished. The value of prayer in some form or the other, continues to be important for all sections of the Indian society. Whether it be home, place of work, or even a meeting, all starts with a prayer or an aarathi (a ritual). Similarly, the old and the infirm are taken care of, at home and even by the society. Family ties and core values continue to be a very significant influence when it comes critical decisions. The age old adage "cleanliness is next to Godliness" still holds good. This is something that all parents inculcate in their children, as it is a form of discipline.

Honesty and integrity, however old fashioned they may sound, rest high on the priority list. Inculcating such values in children will hold them in good stead for the rest of their life. In an age where corruption is ruling the roost, the average youngster might be faced with the dilemma as to how much honest (or dishonest), one can be; nevertheless for a few this virtue becomes even more important. We may not be able to change the world, but, in our daily lives, we can definitely practise being honest. Since children learn from what they see, it becomes very important for the parents and teachers to set an example by being genuine and honest themselves. On the other front, the increasing influence of the West, has made it increasingly difficult for parents to try and keep such values intact, nor translate and inculcate them to the young. The exposure to immense opportunities at work, the media, telecommunications – all propel the younger generation into a state of conflict between the values that they have and the values that prevail in the society at large.

3.7 PARENTING NEEDS DURING VARIOUS LIFE STAGES

Parenting strategies are not the same for all children and during all stages. One needs to understand that parenting needs to be approached, not from the parents' point of view but rather, it should be strategized in accordance with the child. Parenting strategies need to be devised in consonance with the child, who is at the receiving end. The parent must be flexible in order to accommodate various aspects such as the child's temperament, age (affects cognition and preparedness), gender, special needs, family type, cultural context, etc., naming a few. The next part of the discussion explores the various stages and the strategies, therein.

Infancy and Babyhood

According to Erikson, infancy is the stage of establishing "Trust". The child being very sensitive might be affected by neglect or even poor parental responsiveness. Factors in the family that can affect the infant's development include parental personality and temperament, parental history of mental illness, major family transitions such as separation and divorce, and periods of parental apathy such as those that occur during a depression. An infant is extremely vulnerable. Hence consistent care-giving and attention is essential for the child to develop trust in the family – the (first) world the child is born into.

Interactions within the family seem to occur in a regular pattern. Parents satisfied with their marriage, may interact positively with the baby and have, in turn, responsive infants. Stress in the relationship can occupy the parents and affect the quality of their interaction with the infant. Marital problems can negatively affect the baby's development. Ironically, one of the major sources of stress in a relationship can be the babies themselves. A demanding infant can increase the stress level within the family, which, in turn, may then interfere with the parents' interaction and consequently can affect the baby's responses. Belsky (1981) describes these interactions as circular influences; what transpires between the husband and the wife might affect the caregiver's attitude and also behaviour, which, in turn, could influence the infant's functioning, which might in full circle, affect the marital relations.

Clarke-Stewart (1978) argues that the mother's stimulation and involvement with the infant enhances the infant's development, making it more responsive. This responsive infant arouses the father to participate better in parenting. The father's interest in the infant further increases the mother's involvement. This is again a circular influence. Chan & Patterson (1998) too have noted how the quality of the parent-child relationship and the relationship between the two parents impacts on the child's adjustment.

Babyhood and Toddlerhood

The ages one to three years are significant, in the sense that it is during this stage that the child gradually becomes confident and establishes control over its body self. Babyhood is the stage of "autonomy" (Erikson, XXXX). It starts with many 'firsts' – the first time it rolls over, the first time it stands, the first time it utters the universal word "ma" or "amma", the first step it takes, etc. During all these stages, the mother and the father encourage the child to repeat the act. In fact many of those firsts are accomplished by the constant egging done by these significant many. It is this persistent encouragement by means of words and excitement that eventually propels a child to master the art of repetition. The encouragement on the part of the parent enables the child to attain control over its body and endorse a sense of autonomy. If encouragement does not come otherwise, the child becomes doubtful and is in shame and will eventually withdraw as it loses its confidence.

Preschool (Early Childhood)

The preschool age is the age during which the child progressively gains more confidence in terms of developing relationships and engaging a wider environment outside their home setting. Piaget identifies this as the pre-operational stage of cognitive development. During the preschool stage, the child's activities are oriented towards developing control over its own body and progressively adjusting with the demands of the external environment. In the process the child engages in play and working in a group. The experiences of a child need to be oriented to developing language proficiency and social skills.

Parenting assumes special significance since it determines the gender identity. Preschoolers are attuned to learning about the meaning of being male or female and begin to identify with the same sex parent. Adult males help young boys define their own developing masculinity by encouraging and supporting their accomplishments. Boys will model themselves after their fathers at this age. Girls too seek out and benefit from fatherly attention; the father's role helps girls define their feminine side. On the flip side, Western studies show that preschool girls may tend to be resentful and jealous of their mother's special relationship with the father.

The mother's role remains significant in the preschool years. Although they depend on their mothers less for physical care than they did as infants, they need emotional support and encouragement just as much as ever (Hartup, 1989; Sears, Maccoby, & Leven, 1967). Still, much of a mother's time revolves around childcare duties; the fathers tend to spend less time in direct care and more time playing (Robinson, 1977). Mothers tend to introduce soothing activities to their preschoolers, such as reading, drawing, and music. Such activities teach children how to soothe and comfort themselves. Children also learn a great deal about feelings and relationships from their mothers. During play, mothers tend to be more verbal and visual with their preschoolers than fathers (Power, 1985). This interaction style during play may contribute to the child's understanding of relationships and coping strategies.

The father plays a significant role in broadening the child's perspective on the world. The father's play has been described as more provocative and vigorous, and less conventional and verbal than the mother's play (Yogman, Colley, & Kindlen, 1988). Fathers engaging their children physically and in rough play tend to raise children with increased social competencies (MacDonald, 1987; Parke et al., 1988). This physical play is important to children in that, how they learn to cope with the exhilaration, challenge, and unpredictability of their fathers' physical play, prepares them for the uncertainties of later life experiences. Watching and interacting with their fathers, help children learn of the numerous, alternative ways of completing a task.

Late Childhood and Adolescence

Middle and late childhood converges on the need to develop abilities and skills to deal with the real world around. Classified as the concrete operational stage of cognitive development by Piaget, this stage expects the child to learn the primary skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. Eventually they also become conscious of themselves and eventually are oriented towards the "sculpturing" of an identity.

By the time children reach late childhood, they are spending much less time with parents and more time with the peers. One study reveals that parents spend less than half as much time with their children between the ages of 5 and 12 than they did before (Hill & Stafford, 1980). Although less time is spent with the immediate family, it continues to be an extremely significant influence on the child. A parent's expressed confidence about the child's ability is a more important influence than the child's past performance (Parsons, Adler, & Kazchak, 1982a). During late

adulthood, the family provides a very important base for the child to continue growing and developing. Children need the safe authoritative structure that parents can provide. Even though children show less patience and respect for their parents, they depend on the parents for unconditional love and perceive them as sources of reliable information and authority (Rapalie, Degelman, & Ashburn, 1986). It is this trust that parents may subtly use as a pivot in disciplining their children, which is the most critical component in parenting.

Discipline may be introduced in a more subtle manner during late child and further into adolescence. Hoffman (1970) identified three major parental disciplinary strategies. The first approach is power assertive discipline which includes physical punishment, threat of punishment, and physical attempts to control the child's behaviour; the second strategy is love withdrawal, which involves withdrawing love when the child's behaviour is inappropriate; and finally induction, involves explanation and rationality in attempting to influence the child's actions.

There are critiques to these strategies. For instance, using physical means and punishment, may be a covert form of aggression. Parents who behave aggressively toward their children provide a model for aggressive behaviour which the child is most likely to emulate. Similarly, children who are forced to be involved in physical confrontations with their parents are more likely to use fighting, arguing, and threats of punishment as suitable strategies to resolve disputes. Parents who use love withdrawal do so by verbally discounting their children, threatening to send the children away, and indicating to the children that they are not loved because of their actions. In this approach, parental actions include persistently ignoring the child, refusing to converse with the child, and generally, not interacting with the child. Research has shown that such behavior often leaves the child fearful, can lead to excessive anxiety in children and inhibit needed expression of emotions (Hoffman, 1970). Induction is an important alternate strategy that emphasizes on moral development. Induction is effective because it helps children develop internal moral standards (Lickona, 1983). Children disciplined by induction exercise self-control and learn to display more consideration and generosity toward others when compared with children who have been disciplined with power assertion techniques (Dlugokinski & Firestone, 1974).

Induction becomes all the more effective a strategy when the child approaches adolescence, during which individuation happens and the child yearns for psychological emancipation. The child who is in the process of transforming into a mature adult, needs to evaluate its actions and decisions. Only such learning would help the child develop self-control.

3.8 PARENTING STYLES

Intergenerational patterns of parenting also affect the family environment. Parenting styles are passed on from parents to children, who then adopt the same style of parenting with their own children (Lyons & Zeanalt, 1993). Needless to say, parents who abuse their children are often those who were once party to child abuse and were often abused as children themselves. Hence, it becomes imperative that we adopt neutral strategies to parenting as the child advances from late childhood, through puberty into adolescence. Baumrind (1989) concluded that the type of parenting practiced influenced the adolescent's behaviours. Baumrind (1989) identified three types of parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and laissez-faire.'

Authoritative parenting, is that parenting style whereby there is warmth and affection coupled with demands being made on the child. Such parenting leads to psychologically healthy adolescents. Authoritative parents expect adolescents to

be independent, yet still place limits and controls on their behaviours. Authoritative parenting is found to influence positively the adolescent’s development of social competence-particularly self-reliance and social responsibility.

On the other hand, authoritarian parenting is characterized by being excessively demanding, restrictive and punitive, while showing low levels of warmth. This type of parenting is associated with anxiety concerning social comparison, ineffective social interactions, and inability to relate to others in group activities.

‘Laissez-faire’ parenting suggests an excessive indulgence or detachment; apparently Baumrind identifies two types-permissive indifferent and permissive indulgent. Permissive indifferent parents are uninvolved in their child’s life; they are neglectful and unresponsive. This type of parenting is associated with a relative absence of self-control on the part of the adolescent. Permissive – indulgent parents are warm, accepting, and responsive but rarely demanding. Such parents are actively involved in the adolescent’s life but rarely enforce rules and allow the child excessive freedom. As a consequence, such adolescents are not sensitive and often do not abide by rules. Similarly, adolescents who are brought up by parents who are indifferent or uninvolved are found to be at greatest risk for psychological and social problems (Baumrind, 1989).

Check Your Progress II

1) What is parenting? Describe the various challenges posed to the couple during the various stages of child development.

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2) What do you understand by parenting styles?

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3.9 STRATEGIES TOWARD EFFECTIVE PARENTING

The present section will examine some of the more popular approaches to parent training in the West, which happen to be equally relevant to the Indian context. These include: parent-effectiveness training (Gordon, 1970), parent involvement training (reality therapy for parents, inspired by William Glasser); behaviour modification (Forehand & Long, 1996; Barkley, 1998); and systematic training for effective parenting (Adlerian therapy for parents, originated by Dreikurs and best represented by the work of Dinkmeyer et al., 1997).

Parent Effectiveness Training (PET)

This is a strategy developed to impart effective parenting skills to individuals especially young parents and single parents, who are deficient in parenting skills. Parent-Effectiveness-Training emphasizes on the need for respect between parent

and child. PET encourages parents to give up, forever, the use of power. Gordon (1970) proposes two reasons: first, it is damaging to people and relationships, and, second, power undermines PET's "no lose" approach to resolving conflicts. Another paradigm in PET is its conceptualization that there is no such thing as children's misbehaviour; children simply behave. Any behaviour for that matter aims at getting needs met.

Hence, the first strategy is to encourage parents and children to enlarge the no-problem aspect of their relationships. This goal can be accomplished via such approaches as environmental modification-putting things where children cannot reach them, where the thing can become the major irritant (e.g. the remote) or minding your own business, or relaxing and staying calm. When this does not work, the parent turns to the critical techniques of PET, where the parent is taught to first ask the question "Who owns the problem?" If the child owns the problem, the parent learns to use active listening. For example, the child comes home and is upset because she misplaced her homework book and was scolded by the teacher. The parent is taught to help the child understand, accept, and deal with her (own) feelings. The parent may ask "You really look very upset...it means a lot to you to turn in your homework on time." Often a parent's inclination is to use other ineffective strategies, including getting mad at the child, attempting to reassure the child, or presenting rationalizations or solutions! If on the other hand, the behaviour is unacceptable to the parent, then for obvious reasons the parent owns the problem; then the first strategy is to use messages: "I really need some quiet time... could you please reduce the volume on the TV?" Parents are taught to use this rather than the familiar You-message: "You always have to turn up the volume too loud!" Such messages, according to PET, may not only challenge, but also demean the child and can be damaging to the child's self-esteem.

When active listening and I-messages do not resolve the problem, the parent turns to the "no lose" method of problem solving. The parent reverts to eliciting the child's cooperation in problem solving and proceeds in six steps: (1) defining the conflict; (2) use brainstorming with the child to generate solutions; (3) evaluate the solutions on the list; (4) examining if there is a solution that satisfies both parties, and, if so; (5) deciding how to implement it; and (6) evaluate the solution at a later time to examine whether it had really worked.

Parent Involvement Training (PIT)

A large part of the PIT strategy focuses on the parents involved. The PIT theory holds that no effective behaviour change can take place without a helping relationship based on trust, warmth, and respect. PIT uses direct strategies of getting involved, including teaching parents to stop what they are doing and attending to their children, especially when the child is upset. PIT involves seven steps:

- 1) Establish and maintain involvement- Strongly recommended is a conversation- talking about something of mutual interest
- 2) Help the child see what their current behaviour is, and understand that it is something they have chosen. Although feelings are important, understanding one's behaviour is critical.
- 3) Suggest the children evaluate their behaviour; Self-judgment is stressed on; the child is asked to examine whether what they are doing is helping them.
- 4) Help the children plan increasingly responsible behaviour and assist the child to set realistic goals and have a successful experience.
- 5) Get the child committed to a plan by extracting a mutual contract; such a strategy increases the child's commitment to the plan.

- 6) Accepting no excuses if the child fails to meet the commitment; together revert back to Step 3.
- 7) Avoiding punishment (as a rule) as it will demoralize the child; instead, use praise whenever the child succeeds.

Behaviour Modification

This strategy involves using principles of learning and behaviours; we apply concepts such as reinforcement, punishment, extinction, as well as stimulus control. Here for a start, the parents are taught to identify behaviours they want to change. After learning to define behaviour as precisely as possible, the parent develops a home project: identifying the target behaviour, defining it, developing a tracking by record-keeping. Parents are then taught ways and means of increasing and decreasing such behaviour; for example, to increase a target behaviour, the parents may use praise (a positive reinforcement) and in the case of younger children even a home “token economy”, or to decrease a target behaviour, the parent may be taught to resort to various sorts of punishments ranging from ignoring to cutting down on privileges (TV watching, computer games, etc.).

Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP)

The fulcrum of STEP rests on the belief that a misbehaving child is a discouraged child. Often there are only four goals to a child’s behaviour: power, revenge, inadequacy and attention. STEP emphasises on equipping the parent with skills of disciplining and encouragement, thereby reducing chances of overprotection and unnecessary service. For example, the parent never is encouraged to pour milk for the child; instead, the child pours the milk in tandem with its needs, wipes it if it spills, and is taught to try doing the same again without spillage. This puts the onus of the behaviour on the child, making the child increasingly capable of learning to regulate his behaviour. Unlike Behaviour Modification which holds the parent responsible for controlling behaviour, STEP holds the child responsible for its own decisions and consequent behaviour. Hence, if their choice is good, they enjoy its fruits; if their choice is bad, they bear the consequences. This, in effect, develops the child to be adult-oriented, learning from natural consequences rather than parental interference.

3.10 TIPS TO EFFECTIVE PARENTING

1) Catch Kids Being Good

Parents often realize late in the evening of life, that they were far more critical about their children’s negative behaviour than complimenting their good behaviour. How would you feel about a boss, who had treated you with such negative guidance, however well-intentioned it was? A more effective approach would be to catch kids doing something right: “You made your bed without being asked – that’s terrific!”, “You have kept your shirt clean and creaseless – wow!... you have grown up!” or “I was watching you play with your sister and you were exceptionally patient and caring.” Such complimentary statements will do more to encourage good behaviour in the long run than repeated scolding or negative comments. It would be healthy to make a point of finding something to praise your child with every day. Be generous with rewards – your love, hugs, smiles and compliments – they can work wonders and are often rewards enough. Soon you will find you are “cultivating” more of the desired behaviour.

2) Setting Limits

Discipline is absolute for every household. The goal of discipline is to help the child choose acceptable behaviours and also to learn self-control. They may first

test the limits you set for them. These are first external (as demanded by the parent), and eventually internalized with advances in age; limits internalized become necessary in one's growth into responsible adults. Establishing house rules – “no TV until homework is done”, “no physical violence”, “sparing others for their transgression”, “avoid name-calling, or hurtful teasing of others” – helps kids understand parental expectations and develops self-control. In order to enforce this one might need a system in place: one warning, followed by avoidable, undesirable consequences (punishment) such as a “time out” or loss of privileges. A common mistake parents often make, is failure to follow through with the consequences. One cannot discipline a child for warning or punishing one day and ignoring the same behaviour the next. Consistency and contingency in punishment teaches what you expect. As a corollary, the same needs to be applied to rewards for approved, appropriate behavior.

There is this perennial debate regarding the efficacy of ‘corporal punishment’. The dilemma that hounds many of the nouveau parents is “to spare the rod and spoil the child”. Although these parents are well aware that the purpose of discipline is to teach, when corporal punishment is used, the danger of using and abusing children is greater. Most parents will agree that children learn a great deal through imitation, especially when they see their children dress up in their clothes, repeat familiar phrases or even pantomime cigarette smoking. When the child is spanked, they end up using hitting as a form of communication. They are, in fact, teaching him through imitation to communicate with his hands (hitting) instead of with words. When our children see us become so angry with them that we strike them, we not only lose sight of why we are disciplining them, but we show them that it is an appropriate way to deal with anger.

3) Finding Time for the Child

It is often difficult, if not impossible for parents and kids to get together for a family meal, let alone spend quality time together. But there is probably nothing else a child would enjoy more. Getting up ten minutes earlier in the morning so you can eat breakfast with your child, or an occasional walk after dinner, leaving the plates in the sink, might be more rewarding than the mundane tasks we undertake. Children who do not get the necessary attention they want from their parents, often act out or misbehave because they are sure to be noticed at least in that way. The children may turn desperate, and rather would be “kicked if not kissed!”

One strategy might be to hold “family meetings”. Family meetings can be a very successful method of enhancing family cooperation and closeness. Hold the meeting once a week at a time when everyone in the family can attend. Keep this time sacred – avoid changing it at everyone's convenience. Mark the time on a calendar and make it as important as a business meeting. Take the phone off the hook so there are no interruptions. This helps your children see how valuable they are to you also. Decisions should ideally be made by family consensus, not a majority vote. If an agreement cannot be reached after a discussion, table the decision until the next meeting.

Creating a “special night” each week to be together and letting your child decide on how to spend the time in a reasonable manner would be good. Adolescents seem to need less undivided attention from their parents than younger children. Because there are fewer windows of opportunity for parents and teens to get together, parents should leave no stone unturned to be available when their teen does express a desire to talk or participate in family activities. Attending concerts, games, and other events with your teen communicates caring and lets you get to know more about your child and his or her friends in important ways. Look for other ‘thoughtful’ ways to connect such as leaving a note of appreciation, or

something special in your kid's lunchbox; taking a day of work and school together to watch a major event (a cricket match or a concert) will not only help you connect, but also, leave the child memories to cherish together. Do not feel guilty if you are a working parent; there are the many "little things" you do – making popcorn, playing board games, watching a movie or window shopping at a mall, or ice-cream hangout – that kids will remember.

4) **Being a Good Role Model**

Young children learn a lot about how to behave and respond by observing their parents as well as significant others. The younger they are, the more likely they are to take cues from you. Before you lash out or blow your top in front of your child, think about this: is that how you expect your child to behave when angry? Be constantly aware that you are being keenly observed by your kids. Studies have shown that children ending up in violence, usually have a role model for aggression at home. Each parent needs to model those traits – respect, friendliness, honesty, kindness, tolerance – that s/he wishes to cultivate in their children. Demonstrate unselfish behavior – doing things for other people without expecting a reward, expressing gratitude and offering compliments. Above all, it is important to treat your kids the way you expect other people to treat you.

5) **Make Communication a Priority**

Do not expect children to do everything simply because you, as a parent, "say so." Gone are those days when children would take for granted anything dished out to them. They require and deserve explanations as much as adults do. If we do not show the patience to explain, any average child would begin to question our values and motives and their basis. Parents who reason with their kids allow them to understand and learn in a non-judgmental manner. It is imperative that you make your expectations clear. If there is a problem, describe it, express your feelings, and invite your child to work on a solution with you. Be sure to include consequences. Make suggestions and offer choices; these offer the child the opportunity of considering various options. Be open to your child's suggestions as well. Negotiate. Kids who participate in decisions are more motivated to carry them out.

6) **Flexible Parenting**

As a parent, if you frequently feel "let down" by your child's behaviour, it may be because you have unrealistic expectations. Parents who get caught up in "shoulds" (for example, "My kid should be potty-trained by now") may find it helpful to read up on the matter or to talk to other parents or child development specialists. One needs to appreciate the interaction between the child's personality and the environment and its impact on the child's behaviour. This would enable one to modify a targeted behaviour by changing the environment. If you find yourself constantly saying "no" to your 2-year-old who gets hold of the precious porcelain or decorative pieces, look for ways to restructure your surroundings so that fewer things are off-limits. This will substantially reduce frustration for both of you. As your child changes, you will also have to gradually modify your parenting style. Chances are that, what works with your child now, would not work as well in a year or two. Still confounding, teenagers tend to look less to their parents and more to their peers for role models. At this stage the role of the parent is to continue to provide guidance, encouragement, and appropriate discipline while allowing your teen to earn more independence by allowing the teen to explore and decide. And above all, be a friend and seize every available opportunity to make a connection!

7) **Assurance that Your Love is Unconditional**

As a parent, you are responsible for correcting and guiding your kids. But how you express your corrective guidance, makes all the difference in how a child

receives it. When you have to confront your child, avoid blaming, criticising, or fault-finding; such responses generally tend to undermine self-esteem and generate resentment. Instead, strive to nurture and encourage, even when disciplining your kids. Make sure they understand that although you want and expect better next time, your love is there no matter what.

8) **Be Aware of Limitations as a Parent**

Face it! No one is perfect! You are imperfect even as a parent. You have strengths and weaknesses as a family leader. Recognize your abilities – “I am caring and dedicated.” Vow to work on your weaknesses – “I need to be more consistent with discipline.” Try to have more realistic expectations for yourself, your spouse, and your kids. You do not have to have all the answers to every problem or resources to cater to every need – be forgiving of yourself. And try making parenting a manageable job. Focus on the areas that need the most attention rather than trying to address everything all at once. Admit it when you’re burned out. Take time out from parenting to do things that will make you happy as a person (or as a couple). Focusing on your own needs does not make you selfish. It simply means you care about your own well-being, which would ensure that you are recharged and available as better disposed to parenting. This in itself is another important value to model for your children.

9) **Differentiating Normal against Abnormal Expectations**

Development happens in the range of years. Each child develops as an individual. Each parent needs to ask himself/herself as to whether they are not expecting too much or too little? A child’s “problem” behaviour may be just one of his/her important and normal developmental tasks. Awareness of these tasks should reassure you that your child’s development is normal and likely to change again soon. A behaviour “problem” often lasts more than 6 months, happens in more than one place consistently, and appears as a pattern.

Piaget’s research had identified certain normal expectations for the various stages in development. For instance, during the stage from birth to 3 years, which he termed Sensorimotor Period, a child expands its world view. Consequently, the child now experiences outrage and impulses are out of control. During this stage “parallel play” is normal. Birth of a younger sibling is likely to precipitate ‘sibling rivalry. Piaget’s termed the period 2 to 7 years as the Pre-operational period. During the period 2-5 years, children are egocentric and can only see their own perspective. Hence it is quite natural for them to say “no!”, as it allows them to have feeling of being in control. They however gradually learn to tolerate frustration and to delay gratification. Coupled with it, they attribute life-like quality to inanimate objects and have “imaginary” friends. This is because they develop imagination and language. The period 5-7 years finds the child very sensitive as the child is prone to making mistakes. Parent needs to allow them to make mistakes and help teach that mistakes are opportunities to learn. Thus, the parent can begin to plant seeds for empathy, through modeling. The period 7-11 years, which Piaget categorized as the period of Concrete Operations manifests in the form of “latency”, during which sexual and aggressive drives diminish. The stage being a period of relative stability (until puberty), it opportunes adaptive functions to solidify, and for habits and patterns to develop. Children during this phase are often able to organize and get along on their own. Social skills and ego functions develop now. They also show interest in the outside world and develop friendships and self control (body, emotions). During the end stages of late childhood (8-9 years) children become competitive and experience peer rivalry. This competition enables self evaluation. Gender barriers emerge in spite of efforts to avoid it; children begin teasing between the sexes, an act that helps set clear boundaries. Piaget terms 12 years onwards as the period of Formal Operations. Rebellion with the parents occasions a breakaway

from the parents and the redefinition of a self identity or expression. Children now are in a stage of overdrive, exploring their future – career, friendships, life partners, sexual orientation etc.

It is imperative that if the parent suspects a behaviour problem, it is important to get a thorough diagnosis. Only through a thorough psychological and medical assessment can you rule out learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), perceptual problems or genetic disorders.

10) **Boosting Self-confidence and Self-esteem**

Children develop their sense of self as early as infancy and babyhood through their parents' eyes. The parent's tone of voice, body language, and every single expression are absorbed by the child; these affect their self-esteem more than anything else. Praising accomplishments, however little, makes them proud; letting the child do things independently will make them feel competent and confident. By contrast, belittling or unfavourable comparison of a child with another, makes the child feel worthless. Similarly, it is equally important to avoid loaded statements. Comments such as "What a stupid thing to do!" or "You act sillier than ... !", can be as damaging as physical blows. A parent needs to pick and choose words very carefully. It is also important to let the child know that everyone makes mistakes. The parent needs to communicate that they still love them, even while they do not approve their behaviour. Children must be taught to believe in their innate abilities, and also to believe in themselves.

Children need to be educated to take perspectives by analyzing things in broader contexts, and the implications of their actions based on their beliefs. They need to be brought up tough and resilient, and should be able to source from within, the necessary courage to bounce back after adversities. They need to be given room to grow into what they actually are; they need to be allowed to dream and help them to attain their dreams. This is always not very easy, because it may mean wandering away from the familiar, well-trodden path. The parent needs to instill in them the courage to take failure in the stride and help them learn from their mistakes. Self-confidence should be the password which guides their lives. Parents on their part need to be taught to listen not to what their children tell them; on the contrary, they need to be sensitive to understand what the children are trying to tell them. And it is paramount to always find time for them. Children need to be encouraged to ask questions; they also need to find out answers if any of the questions stump the parent. Such an attitude will find a good ally in your children.

There are numerous other things that may make our children resourceful and endear them to others, which parents can help in inculcating. Parents must encourage children to appreciate good things, good deeds and good actions. In the present age, although we know that almost all people thrive on praise, rendering praise has become a rare commodity. On the same note, expressing gratitude goes a long way and children should be taught the art of 'thank you's. They should be taught to be grateful for all that life has given them – all the small things that make up their lives, which so many others who are underprivileged, do not have. Showing compassion, having consideration for others, learning to empathize should be a part of their daily lives. Acquiring a sense of responsibility and accountability, as well as learning to behave properly are values, which should be instilled when the child is young. The value of money and the art of managing finances must be inculcated early. Ensure that children live within their allowances and without making it apparent make sure they spend correctly. LIVE well but live simply should be the motto of their lives.

Check Your Progress III

- 1) Delineate various strategies involved in effective parenting.

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3.11 LET US SUM UP

The present Unit introduces the reader to the concept of family and also in the Indian context. It also defines parenting and the various strategies that may be adapted to operationalize effective parenting. While schools do impart moral education in the early years, it is the parents who have the greater influence. Imparting appropriate values and teaching the appropriate things are never easy. Yet, the Indian parenting values provide a foundation since it draws from the great heritage and culture that is so symbolically India. With this as a base, parenting and value instilling becomes a little easier. However, we need to contend a generation “next”, which is so perceptively “modern” in its approach. Keeping this in mind, small changes in approach can reap rich dividends.

3.12 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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