



Childhood-The Significant Period of Life

A.Bharathi
**M.Sc., M.Ed., M.Phil, Asst. Professor.MNR College of Education
Hyderabad, Telangana.**
ABSTRACT

Childhood is entitled to special care and assistance. Children should have ample opportunities to develop their individual capacities in a safe and supportive environment. The child rightly can expect that his physical and psychological needs will be met in the home. He needs parental care, the kind of rearing that will ensure for him the developing of personally and socially adequate attitudes and behavior. It is in the home that the child gains his first knowledge of the world and the people in it. The kind of home in which the child receives his early training will determine the kind of individual he will become. A home should be a place in which the child not only can participate in activities but also can relax and recuperate his energy. A favorable home is one in which there is emotional balance and a harmonious atmosphere. A child coming from such a kind of home shows high levels of adjustment in life. An ideal home atmosphere depends on several other factors. The present paper discusses about few certain factors like, parental role at home, parental occupation, Socio – economic status of the family, sibling relationship and also the possible effect of outside influence that can have a noticeable effect on a child's development. The child is happy when his fundamental requirements are met and his psychological needs are fulfilled by loving and understanding parents. Every child has potentialities of growth and development into the kind of mature adult who can become an asset or a menace to the society, according to the direction in which he is stimulated to develop. The child is a dynamic living being, struggling to achieve a way of life that will be personally satisfying. Every person associated with him should render their part of support.

KEYWORDS

Ideal home atmosphere, Healthy sibling relationship, gender differences.

Introduction

Childhood is the most crucial and very important phase in everybody's life. It is important that a child grows up to his fullest potential. Healthy development means that children of all abilities, including those with special health care needs, are able to grow up where their social, emotional and educational needs are met. Having a safe and loving home and spending time with family playing, singing, reading, and talking are very important. Proper nutrition, exercise, and rest also make a big difference. The child rightly can expect that his physical and psychological needs will be met in the home. He needs an encouraging parental care, an affectionate sibling relationship, the kind of rearing that will ensure for him the developing of personally and socially adequate attitudes and behavior for a success in life. In the home, the child should experience modes of living that will prepare him to assume an active role in managing his own affairs and in providing for the needs of others. He receives, he shares, he makes decisions and he learns how to behave. It is in the home that the child gains his first knowledge of the world and the people in it. Under the guidance of his parents and based on the relationship he has with his siblings, the child slowly develops the ability first to live with his family, and later to function as a member of a school or other social group. The kind of home in which the child receives his early training will determine the kind of individual he will become.

A home should be a place in which the child not only can participate in activities but also can relax and recuperate his energy. A favorable home is one in which there is emotional balance and a harmonious atmosphere. Stronger the relationship of the child is with his parents and siblings, stronger is the character he develops and subsequently greater is the child's adjustment in life. A research study reported that out of the children who came from such favorable homes, 81% children showed excellent levels of adjustment.

An ideal home atmosphere depends on several factors, parents invariably playing the main role.

Parental role: A child thinks of his mother as a person who takes good care of his needs, his emotions, his desires etc. who gives him attention and affection, who is almost happy and in good humor and most tolerant to childish mischief. They perceive mothers as having greater authority over them than fathers.

Children have a fairly different concept about 'father'. According to them, father is away from home more than mother, he punishes more and is more harder, he knows more and in general is more important than the mother because he earns money, owns more and is the 'head' of the family.

A favorable concept the child develops about his parents will help strengthen the relationships. A child's slight preference for one parent may be accepted with good humor or may lead to hurt feelings. Such hurt feelings could be avoided, when the parent is aware of the following factors that influence the child's preference for one parent.

- Time spent with the child
- Play with the child
- Care taken
- Expression of affection
- Disciplinary approach
- Parental expectations from the child
- Concept of ideal parent that the child has.

Even as children grow older, they tend to shift preference from one parent to the other, but, a mature parent should accept such behavior in a philosophical way. Unfortunately few parents are so mature. A split in the family relationship, no matter how small, is likely to lead to friction and adversely affects the development of the child.

Parental attitudes towards children- Over protective, permissive, indulgent, rejectant, acceptant, domineering, submissive, favoring one child, ambitious for the child – each of these has its own characteristic effect on the child development.

Parental occupations – The father's occupation is important to a young child insofar as it has a direct bearing in the child's welfare. For the older child, however the father's occupation has a cultural significance in that it affects the child's social prestige. When the child is ashamed of father's occupation, the child's attitude will be adversely affected. From his experience in work, the father knows what attitudes, skills and qualities are essential to success. He then tries to foster these in child and shapes the child's personality likewise.

The effect of mother's occupation on the child's attitude depends on the child's age at the time the mother starts to work. If she begins working before a concrete mother – child relationship is established, the effect will be minimal. If strong attachment is formed, the child will suffer of deprivation unless a satisfactory mother substitute is provided. How older children feel about mother's working depends partly upon how seriously her working interferes with the pattern of family life, partly upon what their friends' mothers do, partly upon the 'stereo type' they have learned of 'mother' etc. For the child, there are lesser opportunities for recreation and social life but greater stress to assume home duties. How effectively the child's interests and emotions are taken care of, depends on the attention the mother pays for her child, regardless of the pressures of work in the workplace.

Socio-economic status of the family – Sociologists categorize socio-economic status as upper, middle and lower class. Though socio-economic status is one of the variables responsible for a child's personal and social development, the sole cause for acceptable or undesirable rearing cannot be associated with the economic classification of the family. The child of poor parents may be denied luxuries. Yet, if the parents maintain a clean, neat home, in which the child's fundamental requirements are met, and his psychological needs are fulfilled by loving and understanding even though financially underprivileged parents, the child may be more fortunate in his parents than is one who is economically more secure but whose parents are less mindful of their responsibilities of their child.

Sibling Relationship:

Sibling relationships play a very important role in the child development. When sibling relationships are favorable, the home climate is pleasant, free from friction and fosters healthy family relationships. On the other hand, when sibling relationships are frictional, marked by jealousies, antagonisms and other forms of disharmony, they play havoc, proving hazardous to the personal & social adjustment of not the child alone but all the family members. When sibling rivalry exists, parental attitudes towards all the children in the family are less favorable than when siblings get along well with one another.

Numbers of factors in turn affect sibling relationships.

Parental Attitude:

First born child, as a result of early training and close association with parents, tend to conform more to parental expectations than do later –born children. Parents thus show a preference for them. Middle children, often feel neglected in favor of first and last born children. They feel that their parents play favorites and they resent their siblings. Such attitudes whether justified or not lead to jealousies & animosities that effect sibling relationships unfavorably.

Ordinal Position:

In all except one-child families, all children are assigned roles according to the order of their birth and they are expected to carry out these assigned roles. If children like the roles assigned to them, all will be well. But, the very fact that roles were assigned & not voluntarily selected is likely to lead to friction. The displeasure that develops within the child, may lead to deterioration in the parent – child as well as in sibling relationships.

Gender of Siblings:

Gender creates a great difference in the behavior of the siblings. For example, there is more jealousy in a girl-girl combination than in a boy – boy, boy-girl combination.

An older sister likes to be more bossy with her younger sister than with her younger brother. Boys fight more with their brother than with their sisters, because parents don't permit as much aggressiveness against sisters as against brothers. The antagonism that develops early among siblings leads to more or less constant conflicts in the future, sometimes though it reaches a low point with maturity. Gender difference does have a devastating effect especially when parents step in and try to resolve conflicts. Parents are then accused of playing favorites – an accusation that further damages relationships.

Age Difference:

The age difference between siblings influences their reactions towards one another and the way in which their parents treat them. When the age difference between siblings is large, whether the children are of the same or opposite gender, a more friendly, co-operative and affectionate relationship exists than when they are close together in age. Small age difference tends to increase friction between them. It has been reported that in case of twins there exists more affection & minimal aggression for one another.

There is a difference in parental attitude as well. When children are close together in age, parents tend to treat them in much the same way. But, parents tend to expect older children to set good models and they criticize them when they fail to do so. The younger child, in turn, is expected to imitate and obey the older child. These parental expectations contribute to poor sibling relationships.

Number of siblings:

A small number of siblings tend to lead to a more frictional relationship than a large number. This perhaps could be for two reasons:

First, when there are only two or three children in the family, they are thrown together and are expected to play and do things together. This sets the stage for potential friction. On the contrast, when siblings are more in number, contacts between them are less frequent.

Second, when there are many children in the family, disciplinary control tends to be authoritarian arresting the overt expression of any undesirable behavior. On the other hand, in a small family, parental control is more relaxed and permissive which permits children to express openly their antagonisms and resentments, thus leading to a frictional emotional home climate.

Sibling relationships are far pleasanter in homes where authoritarian discipline is used than democratic discipline. In the latter when children are freely permitted to do as much as they want to, relationships often become chaotic. However in the long run, democratic discipline leads to pleasanter and more wholesome sibling relationships than authoritarian.

Outside influence:

Outsiders – whether family members, friends of the parents or teachers – can intensify already existing friction between siblings by comparing one child in the family with other children. Should the comparison be favorable to the child, it will cause resentments on the part of the other siblings toward that child. Should, on the other hand, the comparison be unfavorable to the child, it is likely to lead to resentments on the child's part toward the sibling who is favorably judged.

Conclusion

Besides all the factors discussed above, from personal experiences, mass media and other sources, children either pick up traits uncommon in the family atmosphere or drop a few acquired by them through parenting. Since a behavior trait is a learned reaction, an attempt to understand the source of its acquisition must be made both by parents at home and teachers in school and subsequently try to bring changes at the source level. Many of the problems encountered by

the child could be avoided if parents and others possessed a greater understanding of the child development. Understanding involves knowing the problems that beset the child, when he should be helped, and when he should be left alone. It involves knowing what happy, well-adjusted childhood really means and knowing what can be done for children during their growing years. Also, if one understands child psychology, he may be able to give delicate and subtle assistance which will enable the child to develop adequately. Before anticipating a behavioural change in the child, an attempt has to be made to recognize and fulfill their responsibilities towards them.

Childhood is a significant period of life. Every child has potentialities of growth and development into the kind of mature adult who can become an asset or a menace to society, according to the direction in which he is stimulated to develop. The child is not a putty that can be moulded by more or less expert adults. He is not a miniature adult or a well constructed or faulty machine. He is a dynamic living being, struggling to achieve a way of life that will be personally satisfying. Let each one of the parents and teachers respect it to the farthest possible extent.

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