

Social Adjustment and Development in Children: The Key Role of Parents

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Abstract: Man is a social animal and cannot live in isolation. It is therefore important for a person to adapt and adjust to his surroundings and this process of adjustment with others and to one's environment begins right from the birth of a person. It is only when a child comes in contact with his or her parents and those surrounding him; he is slowly able to learn the art of social adjustment. For some individuals it is an easy task to adjust socially while for others it is not so easy and they learn with time. Parents play a crucial role in helping a child to slowly adjust according to his or her surroundings and society. Other factors also contribute to the social adjustment of a person. The present paper seeks to explain the role of parents play in the development of the social adjustment of the child.

Key Words: Social Adjustment, Parents, Society, Education, Development.

Introduction:

During the first years of life – thought by many to be a unique period of human development – parents assume special importance. As parents' guide their young children from complete infantile dependence into the beginning stages of autonomy, their styles of care giving can have both immediate and lasting effects on children's social functioning in areas from moral development to peer play to academic achievement. Ensuring the best possible outcome for children requires parents to face the challenge of balancing the maturity and disciplinary demands they make to integrate their children into the family and social system with maintaining an atmosphere of warmth, responsiveness and support. When parent conduct and attitude during the preschool years do not reflect an appropriate balance on these spectra, children may face a multitude of adjustment issues. *What parenting styles best achieve this balance?*

The concept of adjustment was originally borrowed from biology. It was modeled after the biological term 'adaptation', which refers to effect by a species to adjust to change in its environment. The term adjustment is often used as a synonym for accommodation and adaptation. Strictly speaking, the term denotes the results of equilibrium, which may be affected by either of these processes (Monroe, 1990). It is used to emphasize the individual's struggle to along or survive in his or her social and physical environment. Good (1959) sates that adjustment is the process of finding and adopting modes of behavior suitable to the environment or the changes in the environment. Shafer (1961) emphasized that adjustment is the process by which a living organism maintains a balance between its needs and the circumstances that influence the satisfaction of these needs. Kulshrestha (1979) explained that the adjustment process is a way in which the individual attempts to deal with stress, tensions, conflict etc. and meet his or her needs. In, this process, the individual also makes efforts to maintain harmonious

relationships with the environment. In adjustment, the two crucial factors are the individual and the environment.

Thus adjustment refers to the psychological processes through which people manage or cope with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Adjustment is an important factor to complete a person's goal successfully. It is the process by which a living organism maintains a balance between its needs and the circumstances that influence the satisfaction of these needs. Adjustment refers to the ability of an individual to fit into his environment. Integration into the social environment has been found to be an essential factor which influences one's life and everything related to it. It is very essential for a person to live in a manner where he or she fits and blends in the society so be able to lead a happy and peaceful life. Parents play a very crucial role in this regard and help their children to understand the social setting and adjust accordingly. Learning of adjustment process is a crucial process and differs from family to family and culture to culture. Social growth is the most important aspect of one's development and it is acquired through the relationship with others especially with the parents, peers and the teachers, and it is the assessing criterion of social growth related to the person's adjustment with him/herself and others (Hartup & Rubin, 2013).

On the other hand, living in a human society has stemmed from a set of values and expectations paradigm, and to meet one's expectations and value framework a person needs a sufficient amount of adjustment. Without adjustment, the person is not able to meet many of his/her basic needs. If one is incompatible with the society properly, he will feel isolated. Dhingra and Colleagues (2005) assert that social adjustment is a continuous process through which one changes to be in proper adjustment with his environment, others, and himself.

The basic objective to adjustment is to set a balance between one's wishes and social expectations that affects all aspects of one's life. As a result, the person can respond properly to all environmental stimuli to acquire his favorable stimuli and reinforcement. Although adjustment contains many aspects like social, emotional, physical and educational dimensions; the best aspect is social adjustment which is the prerequisite to the other aspects of adjustment (Mazaheri, Baghiyan, & Fatehizadeh, 2006). Emotional and social adjustment resulting from positive self-concept can provide the person with some kind of ability to face the difficulties, and higher self-esteem strengthens one's ability to efficiently tackle with the psychological pressures (Wilbum & Smith, 2005).

"Social Adjustment may take place by adapting the self to the environment or by changing the environment." - Campbell, Psychiatric Dictionary (1996).

Significance of Social Adjustment for Development:

Several research studies have demonstrated the importance of social adjustment in several areas, such as peer relationships, academic performance, family and social relationships, happiness and satisfaction in life etc. The association between social performance and academic achievement has been demonstrated in a number of empirical studies in western countries as well as in India.(e.g., Green, Fore- hand, Beck, & Vosk, 1980; Havighurst, Bowman, Liddle, Mathews, & Pierce, 1962; Wentzel & Asher, 1995). In general, it has been found that children who display sociable and prosocial behavior are likely to achieve highly in academic areas (e.g., Green et al., 1980; Masten et al., 1995; Wentzel & Asher, 1995). In contrast, children who are disruptive and aggressive fare poorly on academic achievement (e.g., Dishion, 1990; Masten et ai., 1995). It has been found that social withdrawal and inhibition are also associated with academic difficulties among children (e.g., Green et al., 1980; Wentzel, 1991); socially inhibited and shy children tend to perform more poorly in school than their less inhibited counterparts.

Children who are accepted and liked by peers and hold leadership positions are likely to be high achievers in the school, whereas children who are rejected have academic difficulties. Children's social competence and interpersonal acceptance may constitute emotional and social resources for achievement in life. Pro social and cooperative behavior may lead the child to develop deep friendship and a sympathetic attitude towards others. Whereas children who are unable to adjust socially may feel aloof from the rest of the people surrounding him, might not be able to express himself in the right way, and sometimes may be viewed by others as rude and non cooperative. Social adjustment also helps children to understand social relationships well which they can nurture and cherish all their lives.

Factor Affecting the Social Adjustment of Children:

The following factors affect the social adjustment of a person-

Family/Parents - What kind of a family a child comes from affects a child's social adjustment. It is the parents or the family of the child with whom the child first comes in contact with when he is born. The child first interacts with the mother or the initial care giver and later as he grows he slowly learns to interact with his caregiver and others surrounding him. This initial interaction is very essential as it forms the base for further social development and understanding for the child of the world around him. Children who experience the security of loving parents and have strong attachments to their parents are better able to reach out to relate with others. According to attachment theory, children who enjoy a secure attachment relationship with their parents and caregivers use this relationship as a support to venture out and explore their environment (Maccoby, 1993). They reach out to others, return to the caregiver for support, and venture out again, going further into the world of social relationships (Ainsworth et al., 1978). As the child confidently wanders out to test the social waters, he enlarges his social world, expands his social contacts, and is more likely to learn from experience in social interaction.

Child's Own Personality- Every child is different and special and so is their personality. It depends from a person to person how he will socially interact with others. It is the tendency of some children to introduce themselves to others and take the lead in a conversation while others wait for the opposite person to begin. Some children are naturally introvert while others are ambiverts or extroverts which affect the social relationships a child is able to form and thus affects his social adjustment.

Emotional Learning- Personal-emotional adjustment refers to the psychological distress and somatic symptoms associated with the adjustment process. Emotional adjustment affects achievement in an indirect way. Emotional knowledge and understanding of one self and of others in children affect their social adjustment. Unstable and maladjusted children have been found to do less well in their studies in proportion to their intelligence than children who were well balanced. Failure to achieve proper adjustment may be a precursor to psychological problems.

School Atmosphere and Peer Relations- The school of the child often becomes his second home for him and it is here that the child spends a major part of his life here and learns a number of skills including social interaction. Schools encourage the children to develop socially and give the children a chance to understand themselves and others. This leads a person to become helpful, cooperative, and adjusting. Once children are in a school setting, it affects their social understanding (Berk, 2001; NRC & IM, 2000). In addition to a child's parents and family, the teacher becomes an agent of socialization. Now the teacher and perhaps the principal set rules, limits, and standards for behavior. Other children also become models, setting new or different standards for social behaviors. The dichotomy of

socialization—developing a strong sense of individuality while learning to become a member of a group—is ever-present in school, and affects the social adjustment of a child.

Counseling- Guidance is a process that consists of a group of service offered to individual to assist them in securing the knowledge and skills needed in making adequate choices, plans and interpretation essential to satisfactory adjustment in diverse areas (Sindabi, 1991). The services are therefore designed to result in efficiency which requires the individual to make adjustments in order to be an effective member of the society. Counseling is a process that helps an individual analyse him/her by relating his capabilities, achievements, interests and mode of adjustment to new decision made. Infact, Makinde (1984), remarked that, guidance and counseling services are essential in secondary schools, colleges and universities where most of the adolescents congregate. Therefore, guidance and counseling programme in higher institution of learning addresses the needs of the children so as to enhance their adjustment to the immediate environmental challenges that affect their social growth and academic performance.

Environment of a Child- Child adjusts to fit into the dynamic conditions in the environment. The interaction between the child and the environment involves human beliefs and cognitive competencies that are developed and modified by social influences and structures within the environment. The environment of the child includes everything surrounding him. His parents, family, siblings, school, friends, peers, teachers etc. everything in the child's environment affects the social adjustment of the child, directly or indirectly.

Culture- The characteristics of culture also affect children's developing social skills (Wardle, 2001). Teachers who take the time to observe and know the culture and community in which children live are better able to build on its strengths or work to mediate its potential negative effects on children's social development. Children who live in violent or unsafe communities may be fearful and withdrawn when in the classroom. Those exposed to domestic abuse, gang violence, and petty or not-so-petty criminals do not feel safe or secure. Their feelings of insecurity will interfere with their total development, especially social skills development.

Role of Parents in Helping the Child to Adjust Socially

It is believed that every person is born with a certain innate potential for balanced life. This innate tendency can be either developed or damaged with life experiences, particularly by the emotional lessons learned during childhood and adolescence. Parents play a crucial role in the overall development of a child. The presence of parents, and the love and affection provided by them to the child, affects the child in a significant manner. Many children are blessed with both mother and father and a normal childhood. On the other hand there are several children who are unable to receive any kind of love and care from their parents, many times because such children have one parent i.e. either the mother or the father, or they are orphan. In all the three cases the social adjustment process of the child is affected deeply. The UN estimates that up to 8 million children around the world are living in care institutions (Pinheiro, 2006). Child rearing practices has a significant impact on the social adjustment of children. Most developmental theories (e.g., psychoanalytic theory, Freud in 1940; social-cultural theory, Vygotsky in 1978; social-learning theory by Bandura in 1977; attachment theory Bolwby 1958) emphasize the importance of early social-emotional experience and the opportunity to experience human relationships for typical social and mental development. Attachment theory, in particular, focuses specifically on early experience with a few warm, caring, and socially-emotionally responsive adults who are relatively stable in the child's life as the foundation of appropriate social-emotional development and long-term mental health (e.g., Ainsworth, 1979; Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton,

1974; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bornstein & Tamis-LeMonda, 1989; Bowlby, 1958, 1969; Grusec & Lytton, 1988; Spitz, 1946; Sroufe, 1983; Sroufe, Carlson, Levy, & Egeland, 1999). Theoretically, a child, with a warm, responsive caregiver develops an internal working model of expectations for nurturing, supportive reactions from that caregiver, whom the child comes to trust and use as a secure base from which to explore the social and physical world. Such experiences in turn promote the development of a sense of worthiness and self-esteem and appropriate long-term social development and mental health of the child. Without the early experience of a few warm, caring, socially–emotionally responsive adults, long-term development may be compromised.

Conclusion:

Information and education on optimal parenting styles and early establishment of effective practices are both important to a child’s social adjustment and success. In many situations, adoption of a flexible and warm authoritative parenting style is most beneficial for a child’s social, intellectual, moral and emotional growth. However, research in the area of parent-child interaction must continue to expand to evaluate not only outcomes in a broader variety of ethnic/racial/cultural and socioeconomic groups, but also outcomes in children of different ages so that families in all types of situations can reap the full benefits of research.

Children learn social skills in social settings. Good adjustment leads to the positive outcomes in one’s life. Whereas poor adjustment leads to problems in one’s life. It is essential to understand that the childhood is a major part of every individual, and children who receive a good atmosphere to learn social skills are able to better adjust in the society while children who are unable to receive an environment that would encourage social learning and adjustment find it hard to adjust socially.

In conclusion, it is clear from the literature reviewed in this paper that early parent-child relationship does affect the well-being, social adjustment and friendships of young adults. However, it’s also apparent that further research, particularly regarding the effects of parent child relationship on development in young adulthood, would benefit this area of study greatly. Hopefully, researchers remain interested in looking into parent-child relationship and their long term effects on well-being, social adjustment and development, as further work would provide us with a much better understanding of these subjects.

Implications for the Policy and Services Perspective

The development of personality, morals, goals and problem-solving that occurs during the first years of life is critical and developmentally unlike any other time in the life course. It is important for family policy-makers and family support service workers to aid new parents in adopting appropriate parenting techniques and strategies to ensure that children receive guidance that will best allow them to succeed in later life. However, research into the broad applicability of certain types of parenting techniques must continue so that policy-makers can tailor advice and guidelines to optimize outcomes for every child.

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