

Strategies for Strengthening Parent-Child Bonds for Children 1- 6 Years

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Abstract

Children are very important for the future of any society. Their importance emphasizes the need for their optimal development and care. Various factors contribute to their development, including, among others, appropriate parent-child bond. This bonding is especially crucial in the formative years. This paper examines conditions which enhance parent-child bonds for children aged 1-6 years and factors which militate against this bonding, including parental behaviours, neglect and abuse, cultural issues and others. It also reviews some ways of enhancing the bonding.

Keywords: Child, Development, Parent, Bonding, Communication, Culture.

Introduction

Children represent the future hope of any society. Thus, ensuring the physical, socio-emotional and language and cognitive development of children ought to be a priority for all societies. The first five years is important for normal development of a child. During this period, parent-child relationship is vital. Parenting is important. Parenting is the process of raising and educating a child from birth or before until adulthood (Self Growth, 2012). It refers to carrying out the responsibilities of raising and relating to a child in such a manner that the child is well prepared to realize his or her full potential as a human being. According to Santrock

(2006), parenting requires interpersonal skills and makes emotional demands on parents.

Bonding is the intense attachment that develops between parents and their baby. It makes parents want to shower their baby with love and affection and to protect and care for them. Bonding therefore is the formation of a mutual emotional and psychological closeness between parents and their newborn child (Marshall and Tracy, 2009). Bonding is a significant reciprocal attachment which both parent and child want and expect to continue (Murunga, 2015).

Babies are totally dependent on their caregivers (usually one or both

parents) for all their physical needs, therefore this bond is necessary for their very survival. The parent child relationship affects the child more profoundly. It is the foundation of all relationships and source of earliest consciousness about love, intimacy, trust and security (Gibbons 2016). Parents need to be physically present with the child enough for the child to get a sense that the parents are always there. Time spent with one's child is important both in quality and quantity (WHO, 2016). A secure attachment bond ensures that the child will feel secure, understood, and be calm enough to experience optimal development. Developing a secure attachment bond between parents and child gives the child the best start in life (Tomlin, 2016). The importance of the phenomenon of parent-child bond calls for attention. Parents need to understand this. They need to become aware of factors that militate against this bond, bonding and ways of enhancing it. The focus of this paper therefore is to examine various

- i. conditions that enhances parent-child bonds for children from age one to six
- ii. factors that militate against parent-child
- iii. ways of enhancing parent child bond

Conditions that enhance Parent Child-Bonds for Children aged 1-6:

Some of the conditions that enhance parent-child bonds include:

Sensitivity of both parents to child's cues: Parents need to be sensitive to the child's cues. with parents sensitive, responsive and predictable care, young children develop the skills they need to succeed in life. Early parent-child bonds have powerful effects on children's emotional well-being (Dawson & Ashman, 2000), their basic coping and problem-solving abilities, and their future capacity for relationships (Lerner & Castellino, 2002). Through these interactions, children learn skills they need to engage with others and to succeed in different environments (Rogoff, 2003). They learn how to manage their emotions and behaviors and establish healthy relationships with adults and peers. They also learn how to adjust to new situations and to resolve conflicts. While a large number of studies focus on issues like parental bond (Antonucci et al., 2004; Bohlin et al., 2000).

The quality of bond: The quality of bond that an infant develops with a specific caregiver is largely determined by the caregiver's response to the infant when the infant's bond system is activated. This can occur when the infant's feelings of safety and security are threatened, such as when he/she is ill, physically hurt or emotionally upset; particularly, frightened. Beginning at approximately six months of age, infants come to anticipate specific caregivers' response to their distress

and shape their own behaviours accordingly. For instance, a child can develop strategies for dealing with distress when in the presence of that caregiver based on daily interactions with their specific caregivers (Van, Schuengel and Bakerman-Kranenburg, 1999).

The gender of the child: The gender of the child may have an impact on the parent-child bond and how they handle the overall family experience. This is a serious issue when there is boy-child preferences.

Emotional state of the parents: One parent's hostility might disrupt the other parent's ability to maintain a positive relationship with his or her children. The father-child relationship appears to be especially vulnerable to parental hostility. Maternal social factors and infant temperament can significantly influence the development of infant neurobiology (Tomlin, 2016).

Factors that militate against Parent Child Bonds

Obstacles to creating an effective parent child bond may first appear when the child is an infant, therefore when parents are unable to manage their own stress, they will be unable to calm and soothe the child. If, however, that the parents are frequently depressed, anxious, angry, grieving, pre-occupied, or otherwise unable to be calm and present for the child, his or her physical, emotional,

and/or intellectual development may suffer. An ineffective parent child bond is characterized by the child's inability to use his or her parent for comfort or as a secure base (Popov&Ilesanmi,2015).

Repeated experiences of failed emotional communication: All communication is vital. when they are repeated experiences of failed emotional communication between parent and child, bonding will be difficult.

Overly dependent child: According to Popov & Ilesanmi (2015) ineffective parent child bond becomes noticeable when some children are overly dependent, expressing difficulty with separation and with independent play, also some children are under-dependent, seeming disengaged from the parent and barely noticing them upon separation. Furthermore, disorganized/disoriented bond refers to children who seem frightened or disorganized in the presence of their parents.

Negative parental behaviours: Parental behaviors typically associated with ineffective parent child bond includes interfering with the child's attempts at exploration. This can occur when parent exercise control over a child (Murunga 2015).

Neglect and abuse: Other factors that militate against parent child bond includes physical neglect, emotional

neglect, abuse, separation from primary caregiver, changes in primary caregiver, frequent moves or placements, traumatic experiences, maternal depression, maternal addiction to drugs or alcohol, undiagnosed, painful illness such as colic, ear infections, etc., lack of atonement or harmony between mother and child and young or inexperienced mother with poor parenting skills (WHO, 2016).

Cultural issues: Parent Child Bonds is jointly shared within the kinship network. According to Degbey (2012), the family is usually the major source of the basic necessities of life and health; the love and tenderness, food, water, clothing, shelter and sanitation which are made possible by the socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions. Thus in discussing major issues with regards to parent child bonding, it would be impossible to overlook the functions of the family (Degbey, 2012).

In traditional communities the responsibility in taking care of the child is not only to the biological parents. The extended family is a strong tool in parenting and strengthening parent child bonds. It helps to develop a strong sense of social connection in the child from his early years and learns to be respectful, responsible and supportive member of the extended family and society (Amos, 2013). In most Nigerian families, touch is an early language as babies respond to

skin-to-skin contact. It's soothing for both parents and your baby while promoting their baby's healthy growth and development.

Breastfeeding practice: Breastfeeding among other things helps to enhance mother-child bonding. Eye-to-eye contact provides meaningful communication at close range during breastfeeding. Breastfeeding and even bottle feeding are both natural times for bonding in Nigeria. Infants respond to the smell and touch of their mothers, as well as the responsiveness of the parents to their needs (Bakermans-Kranenburg, Van Ijzendoorn & Juffer, 2005).

Ways of enhancing Parent Child Bonds

According to Cherry (2012) Parent child bonding differ due to certain factors. The factors include culture, personality, parental background and religion (Amos 2013). Children need to be able to engage in a nonverbal emotional exchange with their parents in a way that communicates their needs and makes them feel understood, secure, and balanced. Children who feel emotionally disconnected from their parents are likely to feel confused, misunderstood, and insecure. It is therefore necessary to enhance parent-child bond. The following can help:

Maintaining secure parent-child bonds: A healthy parent-child bond is

essential to socio-emotional health, and one outcome of a nurturing and safe early relationship is the "security" of the infant-parent bond. Secure parent-child bonds are strongly related to numerous positive child outcomes (Goldberg, 2000, Sroufe *et al.*, 2009). In contrast, insecure parent-child bonds leave infants and young children less able to regulate stress and vulnerable to other adverse child behavioral and emotional outcomes (Bakermans-Kranenburg, Van Ijzendoorn, & Juffer, 2005). Caregivers and parents should make bonding secure.

Maintaining close relationships and open communication with the child: strengthening parent-child bonds requires work and effort. Parenting is a tough job, but by maintaining close relationships and open communication with the child, parents can stay connected to them during all stages of life. Parent should use verbal and non-verbal cues.

Seeing the positive child: This is very important. It helps the child develop expectations and trust, to act and to relate to people.

Provide positive feedback: Although it is important to correct babies, parents do not want to develop a relationship that is built on power and control. Instead, they can focus on the child's accomplishments and improvements. Positive feedback teaches the child good behavior and

will reduce the number of misbehaviors. Save correction for situations that are dangerous for the child or broken household rules. They should develop a great relationship with their children by taking a little extra time (Gorunmex, 2006). By focusing on positives and spending time together, the baby will know that they are loved and safe from an early age.

Stable Emotional inclination: Emotion, in all its facets, plays an important role in the development and trajectory of parent-child relationships. it is a two-way street; children's emotions affecting parental behaviors and parental emotions affecting children's development and behaviors. The regulation of emotion is especially critical in parent-child relationships, for parents as models, and for children as a core developmental competence (Pairman *et al.*, 2006).

Conclusion

Parent-child bond is of great importance in improving social relations at a child. Healthy relation made between mother and child allows the child to develop a healthy personality and creates a basis for positive relations with others. A healthy relation between mother and child depends on a confident dependence developing between mother and child in the early days of the birth and then to cut off in the coming periods. A successful tie

made between the baby and mother is of great importance in terms of making the child adapt to life. This paper has reviewed the vital importance of parent-child bonding, factors that militate against such bonding and some possible ways of enhancing the bonding.

Recommendations

The following recommendations

- ❖ It is therefore recommended that children's Centres should do more to improve parenting, especially for the under-six, health visitors and other health services should play a stronger role in supporting parenting-child bonds.
- ❖ Local authorities and health services should enhance home visiting and parenting programmes for higher risk families, through the government's early intervention and troubled families agendas.
- ❖ Parents should be aware of their child's play. They should plan to play with their child without being in a hurry.
- ❖ Parents should start right for a firm foundation they must remember that all relationships take work; quality time is a myth, because there's no switch to turn on closeness.

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