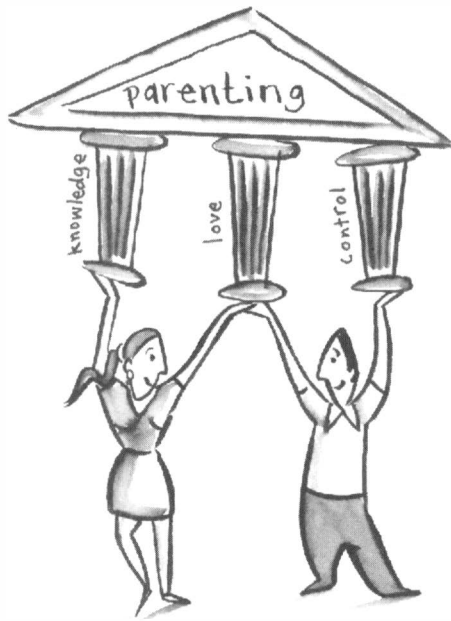


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BRINGING UP PARENTS AND CHILDREN



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*To my grandchildren
Alexandra, Kirsten, David and Kelly-Anne
who are all directly or indirectly part of this book*

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book

For whom this book is intended

How to use this book

Basic assumptions of this book

Who has not at some stage thought: 'Life will never be the same again' after a major life event or change? Suddenly becoming a millionaire, losing a loved one, or having a glorious moment of revelation ... What you really should be saying is: 'I'll never be the same again'.

It is like that with parenthood too. Not only does your lifestyle change – **you** change. That is what the title of this book implies.

Parenting is one of life's most challenging and demanding roles. It is also the role for which one is likely to be the least prepared: there is no clear job description, selection or training for parenthood. Whereas there are tests which measure school readiness, examinations which test if one has the basic training for a particular job, there are no tests for assessing parenting readiness. Most new parents are rank amateurs who learn largely through on-the-job training, and by a great deal of trial and error. This may be hard on parent and child.

Surprisingly, many parents do quite well and most children are resilient enough to survive their parents' inexperience and grow into reasonably well-adjusted adults. Nevertheless, it is likely that many parents suffer a great deal of unnecessary anxiety because they lack knowledge and direction. This may lead to unrealistic expectations of themselves or their children. Anxiety, doubt, frustration are but some of the likely results.

Effective parenting demands knowledge, understanding and skill. It requires knowledge of oneself, partner and child. But such knowledge should be enriched by imagination which enables one to 'walk in the shoes of another' to try to understand their point of view, their feelings and their worries.

Being a family is an ongoing human relations and development exercise for both parent and child. Certain skills are valuable tools for this: good communication, thoughtful decision-making and coping constructively with conflict or stress.

But most of all, parenthood is a matter of the heart: of love, concern, kindness, compassion, and patience stretched to its limits. Being so emotionally involved makes parents vulnerable. They suffer with and for their children. They may be plagued with self-doubt when things go wrong.



Wanting to be ‘perfect’ parents, they may be devastated by their failure to produce ‘model’ children. But because of their emotional involvement they also share the joys and achievements of their child in a very special way: a baby’s first smile, a toddler’s wobbly steps, early attempts to express an idea like ‘Stars are holes the rain comes through’, and seeing them grow and mature may engender a sense of incredible wonder, joy and pride in a parent.

We live in a rapidly changing society in which values and norms of what is right and wrong may be uncertain. Yet, parenthood demands a definite sense of direction. Trying to parent without clearly defined values, beliefs and standards of behaviour is akin to navigating a ship through a stormy sea without a compass. It is far easier to parent in times when standards are rigidly prescribed by society but, today, the onus rests on each family to define their own standards to a far greater degree than was the case with previous generations.

At this point it needs to be emphasised that there are no simple ‘how to parent’ recipes. Every family is unique and will have to chart its own course through the stormy sea of life. Nevertheless, there are certain principles and skills which can make it more rewarding to be a parent, more exciting to be a child and help to make the family a safe haven in an uncertain world.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

The purpose of this book is to provide perspective, and to help parents to develop their own insights in order to chart the course of their family’s voyage through life in a more meaningful and joyous way.

More specific goals of the book are:

- to increase understanding of oneself as parent and of one’s child, and
- to identify current issues and problems and how to think about possible solutions, and
- to hone certain skills essential for good parenting

Let me clarify these goals.

- **Self-understanding:** Self-understanding begins with self-awareness: how do we act as parents and why do we react the way we do?

- **Understanding one's child:** This begins with knowing what can be realistically expected of a child at different stages of development.
- **Understanding family interactions:** There is a constant interaction between the development of each parent and their relationship as a couple, and the development of the child
- **Developing a sense of perspective:** Seeing things in perspective means taking a more objective view of situations and recognising how circumstances impact upon us as parents and our children. Families are part of the larger community and do not function in isolation from it.
Many problems parents face today were unknown to previous generations.
- **Current issues:** Difficult issues confront parents, such as: what is moral behaviour? and what is quality time? Relevant information should help them make more informed decisions.
- **Points to ponder:** The purpose here is to encourage parents to do their own thinking about specific issues and thus to find their own solutions.
- **Improving skills:** Certain skills are essential for good parenting: open communication, effective decision-making and coping with stress. These skills demand insight as well as practice.

EXERCISES are given throughout this book to develop insight and practise some of these skills.

FOR WHOM THIS BOOK IS INTENDED

This book is for the well-intended caring and thinking parent, and others interested in and involved with the development of children and of themselves.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

It is strongly recommended that the book be read in sequence as there is a planned progression.

The book can also be used as basis for **workshops** and **discussion groups**. Each chapter introduces a certain subject. At some point questions are raised, issues are broached or exercises are given to practise

skills. All of these could form the basis of group interaction and discussion. Schools, churches, self-help and particular peer groups, such as the twenty-, thirty-, or forty-somethings, could form discussion groups. Intergenerational groups, such as parent-child or grandparent-child, might also be considered. (See Appendix.)

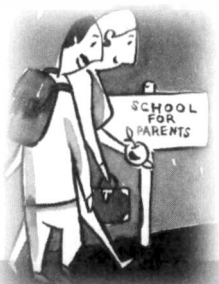
BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF THIS BOOK

It is impossible to write a book suitable for all parents in a variety of contexts. It would also be presumptuous for me to try to write a multicultural guide to parenting. Yet, among all the diversity in our rainbow nation, certain fundamental common denominators do exist.

This book rests upon three basic assumptions about human development:

- **We all share a common humanity.** In some respects, all people are alike. We all have the same physical appearance of human beings; we share the same basic needs for survival; all children are born totally dependent on the care of others; we all need to be recognised as worthy human beings; we all grow according to a pre-determined sequence and we all need to be loved.
- **In some respects some people are alike.** People are grouped, or group themselves, in terms of certain features common to them, but different in specific ways from others. There are differences associated with gender, age, socio-economic status, lifestyle and beliefs, values and traditions. It is a natural tendency to seek out the company of those with whom we have a great deal in common. Group differences only become a problem when they are used as a basis for stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination, or when they isolate groups from one another to the extent that mutual understanding becomes impossible.
- **Each individual is unique.** It is one of the most inconceivable mysteries of life that every single individual is totally unique. None of us has an exact replica or clone among the billions of people inhabiting this world. So any generalisations made about human development must also take cognisance of individual variation. The life stories and anecdotes in this book are a pertinent reminder of this fact.

This book does not claim to give equal weight to all three assumptions, but recognises their validity as well as the constant interplay between them.



CHAPTER 1

PARENTS THEN AND NOW

The era of the child

How do children become what they are?

Factors influencing development

Many factors interact

Summing up

PARENTS THEN AND NOW

It may be said that parents are not what they used to be. To some extent this is true because different times and circumstances may lead parents to behave somewhat differently. This immediately raises the question: were parents better, more effective or less competent parents in the past? Historical sources, biographies and literary classics are informative in this regard.

There is little evidence to suggest that childhood was ever an idyllic period in the past. Instead, there is a good deal of information to suggest that children were little understood, often expected to behave like miniature adults, not infrequently exploited, abused and ill-treated.

It is also noteworthy that prevailing ideas and myths about human nature in general and children in particular have always profoundly influenced parents and the treatment of children. Consequently changing beliefs have led to changes in parental behaviour and to different expectations of acceptable behaviour in children.

The further we go back in history the worse the treatment of children seems to have been. For example, the practice of infanticide, by exposing newborn babies to the elements and leaving them to die, was widespread in Roman times. The practice was so common that a law was passed in 374 AD which proclaimed that infanticide was a crime of murder. This law had become necessary because of concern for the decline of the population and because of the imbalance created by an excess of boys, as more girls were put out to die. Nevertheless, abandonment of unwanted and illegitimate children continued for many centuries after this.

However, throughout history there were also caring parents. While some parents were practising infanticide the Apostle Paul was saying to fathers that they should 'not provoke their children to wrath' (Ephesians



6:4). In the twelfth century the great Jewish philosopher and physician Maimonides wrote about the love of parents which, he believed, became stronger as the child grew older. However, he cautioned against indulgence.

Another feature of earlier times was that parents tended to place the blame for their own shortcomings on disasters or outside forces. De Mause, in his book *The history of childhood*, tells of a father who blamed the accidental death of his five-year-old son who drowned in a well on the fact that he had worked on a holy day. That he and the mother had left their young children alone at home was not seen as a relevant factor!

During the eighteenth century the prevailing philosophy of the time stressed the absolute power of the parents, who were to 'conquer the child's mind and break its will'. As a result, extreme strictness and harshness were acceptable. Towards the end of the eighteenth century and well into the next century, attitudes began to change as the emphasis shifted from conquering the child's mind to training it to conform.

THE ERA OF THE CHILD

Changes in attitude were gradual in the past. But in the course of the twentieth century several dramatic changes have occurred. At the beginning of this century the emphasis was still on training children to conform rigidly to social standards. By the 1920s the belief was held that children should be regulated, like effectively functioning machines: it was the time of rigid feeding schedules and sleeping times. Adhering to a fixed schedule was more important than responding to the needs of a particular child. For example, all babies were to be fed only every four hours for twenty minutes, ignoring the fact that some might be slower or hungrier than others.

By the middle of this century a new style was in vogue: that of 'helping' the child to develop its full potential. Probably for the first time in history an attitude of great tolerance of children's behaviour and an understanding of the child's psychological needs had begun to emerge. The mother's role was considered all important in this regard. She had become more than a child bearer and child rearer, she had become a **child developer**. As her role became defined in this way, child rearing became an all-encompass-



ing task. Any problems of the children were laid at mother's door: it was a time of great maternal expectations but also of maternal guilt as many mothers tried to live up to these expectations without knowing how to. Mothers were confused by experts advocating different approaches. These were sometimes extreme, such as recommending the total freedom of the child, which was largely a reaction against former ideas and practices expressed in sayings such as 'children should be seen but not heard' or 'spare the rod and spoil the child'.

New perspectives on women, men and work

The Feminist Movement, which gained much impetus in the 1960s, stressed the rights of women and the development of *their* potential, not only in their domestic and maternal roles but in the occupational field as well. This led to a period of new role patterns at work and in the family as more and more women sought to improve their education and more married women went out to work. Inter-role conflict and role strain resulting from the demands of combining several roles became an important feature in the lives of many women in the later decades of this century. They remain a source of considerable strain to this day.

From the mid-seventies onwards we see yet another change as the spotlight begins to fall on the father's role and the increasing expectation that he should be a more involved parent, not only a provider and disciplinarian. In other words, the view emerges that he should become part of the developmental parental team.



POINT TO PONDER

'It is noteworthy that in societies where fathers are more involved with their children the status of women tends to be higher' (Scott Coltrane).

New challenges for parents

This brief review of parental beliefs and attitudes lends support to the view that the twentieth century may legitimately be called 'The Century of the Child': one of the most dramatic and least publicised of the achievements of this century is the phenomenal change in parental attitudes and practices. This has been largely the result of a new understanding of human development from infancy to old age, thus providing a developmental perspective on both parents and children. For the first time insight into the world of childhood has begun to emerge and attempts to see the world through the eyes of the child are encouraged. Inevitably this has added greatly to the challenges facing parents.

In some ways parents may be less comfortable than in the past, when conformity to clearly spelt out standards and expectations, rather than insight into children's behaviour, was stressed. But the opportunities for parents to be more active participants in their children's development has never been greater than now. This implies a special kind of responsibility, but also holds the potential for parental rewards which may have been little known to parents in former times. But it is no easy task to achieve a balance between the needs and aspirations of both parents and children.

The changes among urban, westernised families have been considerable. Among many black families it has been enormous, especially among those who are in a state of transition from a rural, extended and traditional family life to an urban, more westernised lifestyle. This change is more like a quantum leap than a transition.

EXERCISE

- 1 What do you think are the most important influences shaping a child's behaviour and development?
- 2 How have your ideas about this subject been formed?

It is quite possible that you have never really thought about this question. Then this is a good opportunity to begin doing so. If you are in a group then compare and discuss different answers.

REMEMBER that you are entitled to your personal views. Do not judge the views given as either right or wrong.

Bear your view in mind as you work through this book. You may find

no reason to change it or you may begin to reconsider it to a greater or lesser extent.

HOW DO CHILDREN BECOME WHAT THEY ARE?

The point has been made that our notions about the nature of children and the forces shaping them will greatly influence our behaviour as parents. Consequently we need to consider current ideas and theories about children which may strongly influence our expectations and practices as parents.

At the outset it is emphasised that diversity rather than acceptance of one particular viewpoint is found at present. This is not surprising in view of the complexity of the subject: childhood development comprises many different aspects and there is enormous individual variation, and circumstances may differ widely.

Having said this, it is possible to identify a few predominant viewpoints which can briefly be summed up in a few statements:

- It's all in the genes (that is, a child inherits its characteristics).
- Mothers are responsible (how they rear their children determines what they become).
- It is the environment that counts (it is the environment that determines how a child develops).
- Fathers should be more active parents (parenting is not only the mother's task).

Until fairly recently educators, psychologists and other professionals in the mental health field were divided among themselves: some argued that 'nature' and inherited characteristics were mainly responsible for a child's development and wellbeing, or lack of it. At the other extreme, learning theorists stressed that a child learned as a result of the encouragement given or punishment meted out for certain behaviour to either persist with it or to avoid it. Clinicians, working mainly with emotionally disturbed children, focused on the role of interpersonal relationships, notably on the determining importance of the emotional bond between mother and child. Environmentalists argued the case for the overriding importance of environmental circumstances ranging from nutrition to educational opportunities. Small wonder then that parents

were often confused while the 'nature versus nurture' controversy prevailed. Moreover, the most extreme viewpoints tended to get more publicity than more moderate ones.

Today, a more balanced view is emerging which acknowledges that many factors interact. Rarely is it possible to reduce human behaviour to one cause. A few examples illustrate the complexity of factors involved.

Studies of black township youth who grew up in the turbulent times since 1976 have revealed some interesting facts which contradict the popular idea of a 'lost generation'. What is being revealed is the remarkable resilience of many young people who were exposed to ongoing conditions of severe family disruption, deprivation and high levels of violence. Certainly there were many psychological casualties among them, but what is noteworthy is how many proved to be remarkably resilient. This does not mean that they were unaffected but that, given a supportive environment, they had the potential to recover and were not broken by the hardships endured. A feature of the lives of those who may be seen as resilient and coping with the demands of life is that they felt encouraged and supported by others, such as grandmothers, older siblings, or peers who shared their political beliefs and aspirations (Straker, 1992).

It is also interesting to note that many people of exceptional ability, recognised as creative geniuses, were able to lead highly productive lives, even though their lives may have been characterised more by stress and trauma than by tranquillity: one can think here of a Mozart or Vincent van Gogh. Einstein suffered a nervous breakdown in high school and was considered a problem pupil.

What the foregoing suggests is that some people are broken or severely damaged by adverse circumstances but others are able to rise above them or can recover from early trauma to become effectively functioning adults. Even within the same family different children may react in a variety of ways.

Jonathan and Mary were a loving and caring couple who had three children who were balanced, doing well at school and popular. Jonathan and Mary enjoyed their parenthood and were somewhat puzzled that some of their friends seemed to be struggling as parents. This perception changed when their fourth child arrived: a noisy, restless boy who struggled at school in spite of good intelligence, he was given to temper tantrums, often rebellious and resistant. Nonplussed, they sought professional help, to be told that their son

had a learning problem, which left him frustrated and angry and irritable.

FACTORS INFLUENCING DEVELOPMENT

Many different forces affect the development of children, chief among them:

- the genes they have inherited
- their temperament and personality
- their physical health and condition
- the extent to which their basic needs for food, shelter and security are met
- their early attachment and bonding with mothers and care-givers, and the consequent development of trust or distrust
- the parenting styles of their (mother and father)
- the harmony or disharmony within the home
- relationships with other members of the family members.
- the availability of suitable role models
- the context in which they live whether it be a city or country home, suburban home or squatter camp
- their teachers and school
- their peers and friends
- the culture in which they are embedded
- the worldview ^{of} faith or ideology of their parents and community
- the support available to them when in difficulties, be it illness or family crises
- opportunities available to them such as good schooling and health care
- the stability or instability of their social system and country: life in a war-torn country is totally different from life in a peaceful one
● of community

MANY FACTORS INTERACT

Many family histories demonstrate the interaction between numerous factors. John, Diana and Peter came from a family in which their mother was an alcoholic. The father's work often took him away from home and he was not really involved with his children. It is interesting to note the

development of the three siblings. John grew up to be a highly respected member of the community. He had worked his way through university and eventually established his own engineering firm. He was a devoted husband and father. He never touched alcohol. It was as if he wanted to provide everything for his family that he himself had missed.

Diana was an anxious and insecure person, demanding constant reassurance and subject to bouts of depression. On the whole she nevertheless coped well with her work as bookkeeper and had a good marriage. Peter showed great promise at school. At university he became a great party-goer, neglected his studies and dropped out. Occupationally he never settled down. He struggled to maintain lasting relationships with women. By the age of forty he had a serious drinking problem.

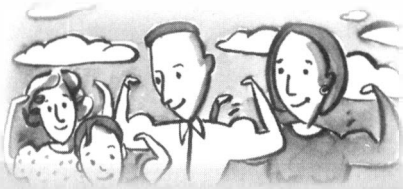
How can one explain such different reactions within one family ?

Rarely is it possible to find one specific explanation which accounts for the course a particular person's development takes. Peter may have been physiologically more predisposed to become an alcoholic: as the lastborn he may have arrived when his mother's alcoholism was in a more advanced state and he may have suffered more neglect than his older siblings.

John, as the firstborn, will have received more undivided attention than either Peter or Mary. One can go on suggesting many other factors.

SUMMING UP

To sum up, one can say that many factors influence development: the temperament and ability of the child, the care it receives from its parents and concerned others, the environment in which it grows up, the opportunities provided, the support available when in need or distress, and role models who represent values and goals with which one can identify. Parents play a vitally important part in regard to most of these aspects.



CHAPTER 2

CAN THE FAMILY SURVIVE?

Why then is the family in trouble?

Why has the family changed?

Strong families

Parents and the community

Summing up

CAN THE FAMILY SURVIVE?

It is not unusual these days to be confronted by this question. In support of asking it, people say: 'Just look at the divorce rate in this country!' True, we cannot argue away the fact that South Africa has a divorce rate which is among the highest in the world. True, there is real concern about neglected children, family disruption and violence.

However, it is also true that the majority of couples do remain married and that the majority of divorcees remarry. Although the incidence of violence in families is far too high, it is not the norm. What the foregoing suggests is that the family is in trouble but far from dead.

It is reaffirmed that a good family life contributes enormously to the wellbeing of its members. It is linked to psychological satisfaction and happiness and to a sense of personal security. It also promotes physical wellbeing and health and is associated with longevity. It forms a most powerful support system in times of distress and need. It is the best antidote to Aids, one of the greatest threats to society, by encouraging fidelity.

WHY THEN IS THE FAMILY IN TROUBLE?

At the outset it should be recognised that marriage and family life have always been complex matters. To think of the family as having moved from an ideal state to one of conflict and disruption is to ignore the facts of history. For instance, in the Bible we find many examples of strained marriage and family relationships.

Bad publicity for marriage

Marriage is an excellent investment, yet nowhere have I seen it recommended or advertised as such. Look at any of the major newspapers or financial journals or glossy magazines and we find them brimming with big, bold advertisements shouting at us:

- 'Invest in Krugerrands'
- 'Time sharing – an investment for the future'
- 'Unit trusts are the best investment'
- 'How to make your money work for you ...', etc, etc.

I have yet to see the advertisement which says:

- 'The best investment for the future is a good marriage'
- 'Get married – live longer'
- 'Marriage promotes health'
- 'Married couples enjoy the best sex life!'

All these statements have been confirmed by research, yet whoever hears about them?

Changes in family structure

How does one define a family today?

- Is it the **extended family** consisting of husband, wife, their children and elderly parents, and probably other relatives, all living in a common household in which resources are shared and goods and services are exchanged?
- Is it the **nuclear family** comprising only husband, wife and their children, which is economically self-sufficient and in which the emphasis falls on love, psychological closeness and emotional compatibility? ﷺ
- Is it the **blended family** comprising, for example: father, married to his third wife, mother, married to her second husband, who between them have five children: his, hers and theirs?
- Is it the **single parent** unit?
- Is the **single person**, living alone not also part of a family?

These questions relate to but a few of the more commonly found family structures today. Steyn (1993/94), who undertook a survey of family structures in South Africa, identified 14 major different kinds – a list which is not exhaustive since even within these categories a great deal of variation is to be found.

This situation is vastly different from that found at the beginning of this century when two forms predominated: the extended family, which

was the most usual in the black community, and the nuclear family, which predominated among whites.

What does noticeably distinguish much of the past from the present is that social pressures to conform have diminished and so we find infinitely greater variation in the way in which families and relationships are structured.

Choices

Even within a particular structure, certain choices are nowadays possible which may previously have been more limited. More effective family planning has made it possible to choose how many children to have and when to have them: professional women may postpone parenthood until their mid-thirties and some couples may choose not to have children at all. Ironically, we also find a high incidence of teenage pregnancy – one of the most pressing social problems of today.

Single parents are becoming a sizeable group. They may be divorced, widowed, separated, never married or en route to marriage. Some are comfortably off, some are desperately poor. In some flatlands in big cities it is estimated that up to 80 per cent of the inhabitants are single parents, mostly mothers, often trying to cope on their own with little support from others. They may be part of what has come to be termed 'the new poor', that is women who are struggling to rear children on their own with limited financial resources. They often have poorly paid jobs with little possibility of advancement because of unfinished training or frequent absence from work because of problems with their children, such as illness. Employers thus see them as poor investments for further training.

In the black community it was traditionally expected that the young bride would move into the home of her husband's family and family relationships were guided by clearly defined norms and standards of behaviour. This does not necessarily mean that everyone was always content with these arrangements, but at least there was no uncertainty about what was expected of each of the role players in the family. Today we find many admixtures of these old and new family traditions. In urban areas it may be a lack of housing, rather than preference or tradition, that determines sharing a household with members of the kinship group.

What the foregoing tells us is that nowadays the responsibility rests

much more on the shoulders of each individual, couple and family to define their own roles, values and norms of behaviour: this is both a problem and a challenge. But it is not easy. It is a major reason that couples and parents seek information and guidelines about marriage and parenthood.

The core of the family

For the purposes of this book it is accepted that the core of a family ideally consists of a couple and their children. However, it is recognised that other members of the family may be directly or indirectly as involved with parenting in a particular family. What is certain is that most general principles of child-rearing still apply whether mother, father, grandparent or extended family is responsible.

However, even within the nuclear family of parents and their children we find different scenarios:

- *Scenario 1:* The traditional nuclear family in which the husband is the sole breadwinner and the wife a full-time housewife.
- *Scenario 2:* The companionate nuclear family. The father is the main breadwinner but the wife actively supports the husband in this role as, for example, in the doctor/nurse team, the shopowner/counterhand team, the minister of religion husband and wife team, and so on.
- *Scenario 3:* The dual-career team in which husband and wife share the breadwinner role and both are committed to a career of their own.
- *Scenario 4:* The wife is the main breadwinner and the husband plays the supportive role.



In these different scenarios we may find different authority and power relations between husband and wife in terms of which it is decided who is responsible for what, but there are no absolute norms regulating such family interactions.



POINT TO PONDER

Whatever is said about parent-child interactions in this book generally also applies to parents living apart: marriages may be dissolved but parenting usually continues.

WHY HAS THE FAMILY CHANGED?

The small nuclear family is essentially a product of the twentieth century. It resulted from the interaction of many factors:

- Greater mobility because of new, faster methods of transport often results in family members moving away to distant places.
- Industrialisation and urbanisation broke up the home as a productive unit where all hands were needed, as on farms where sons helped their father on the land and daughters assisted their mother in the kitchen.
- Several tasks previously carried out at home were taken over by other organisations: schooling and nursing the sick in hospitals began to replace teaching and caring for the severely ill in the home.
- In cities, smaller families became desirable as the family changed from a producer unit to a buying, consumer unit.
- Relationships became more demanding: one no longer seeks only a husband who is a good provider or a wife who is a capable housewife and mother. Instead one expects a mutually satisfying relationship based on love, sexual satisfaction and companionship.
- The training of children for adult roles was largely taken over by outside agencies. Previously the tradesman trained his son from an early age to follow in his footsteps. Older daughters were expected to actively help with the care of younger sibling and household chores. They were thus generally much better prepared for their roles as housewife and mother than is now the case.
- Nowadays, the choice of occupations is much wider and training much



more intensive and in the hands of specialists in the field. On-the-job training in the family has made way for training in institutions of higher learning and within organisations of various kinds.

- Values have changed: duty, responsibility, obedience and respect were stressed in the past whereas the emphasis has shifted to freedom and self-actualisation and personal happiness. In the past, the needs of the family had a higher priority than the needs of the individual, and divorce was strongly disapproved of.
- Moral behaviour in regard to marriage was clearly defined in the past and transgressions were not readily tolerated: marriage was for life and 'for better or for worse'. There was heavy pressure to conform to expected standards. Today, morality is defined in more relative terms so that a situation is judged less in terms of absolute rights and wrongs and more in terms of personal circumstances. At its best, this has led to greater tolerance, at its worst, to confusion, hedonism or escapism.
- Sex: Previously the emphasis was on procreation; now it is on pleasure and performance.
- Roles: These were clearly defined in the past and there was no ambiguity about the family tasks and responsibilities of men and women. For example, in the black community the young bride was expected to become part of the household of her husband's family, to perform specific tasks and to observe certain forms of respect toward her husband's family. Today, roles are far less clearly defined in black and white communities, giving rise to uncertainty and role conflict as when the demands of one role conflict with those of another or when old traditions and new lifestyles are difficult to reconcile.
- In society as a whole there seems to be an authority crisis. Gone are the days when people in authority, including parents, were unquestioningly respected and obeyed because of the position they occupied. There has been a move away from blind obedience to a more critical attitude towards those in authority, including one's parents.
- Parents used to know better what was expected of them. Today, many parents are uncertain about how to parent.

What is evident is that the family is in transition. Such transitions can be confusing and painful; they can also be seen as a challenge to find solutions to complex situations not encountered before. In view of the many complex changes the family has undergone and is still undergoing, it might be considered remarkable that it has survived at all and that there are still so many well-functioning, strong families to be found.

STRONG FAMILIES



The year 1994 was proclaimed 'The International Year of the Family' recognising the fact that happy, healthy families contribute towards a healthy society. The family is society's barometer: the ills of society directly affect the family. The reverse is equally true.

Much attention has been focused on the problems of families today. The media report vividly on conflict and violence in disrupted and unhappy families. By happy contrast the year of the family highlighted what the components of strong, happy families are – and there are many of them to be found, they just do not hit the headlines!

The features of strong families provide useful guidelines for any efforts aimed at strengthening family life.

POINT TO PONDER



A word of warning at the outset against unrealistic expectations when considering the features of strong families: not even the best of families manifest all the features of strong families all the time. Families, after all, are human and will fail sometimes. Nevertheless, the features listed below tell us what the strengths are of those families which remain intact and happy, and provide a secure haven even in the turbulent and changing times in which we live.

Features of strong families

- There is mutual respect among members of the family.
- They spend time together, interacting with one another, be it at meals, sharing hobbies and interests, or whatever.
- There is good communication and family members listen and talk to one another.
- There is lots of love and affection between family members.
- There is a good sexual relationship between spouses.
- There is a balance between togetherness and respect for individual privacy.
- Parents work as a team and are agreed on parenting goals.
- Strong families are **not** conflict free but they handle conflict constructively, working toward solutions.
- Family members support and praise each other.
- There is a fair division of labour in the home. All family members know what their specific responsibilities are.
- There is a reasonable balance between work and play and between work roles and family life.
- The family shares a firm religious or ideological belief. This enables it to clearly define its values, its goals and to determine what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviour. In view of all the transitions and changes currently occurring this is a particularly important and difficult task for the family in today's uncertain world.
- Parents set a good example: an example is worth a thousand words!

Every individual is unique and every family has its own character, strengths and vulnerabilities. While we need to be aware of our vulnerabilities we should not let them blind us to our strengths. I am reminded of a remark by the famous tennis star Martina Navratilova at a time early in her career when she was struggling with certain weaknesses in her game. She had to decide whether to concentrate on overcoming her weaknesses or developing her strengths. She decided on the latter course of action – and we know what this did for her tennis! I believe that one can make the same recommendation for building a family's strength.

PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY

Parents often go it alone these days because they may no longer have the

support of the extended family as in the past. Nor may the local community in which they live be as bonded and supportive as was the case formerly. Life in towns and cities is very impersonal and it is not unusual for someone not even to know his or her neighbour.

For these and many other reasons, parents need to get together as formal or informal groups in order to

- share and discuss common concerns
- learn from one another and thus gain a new understanding about different children and various ways of dealing with them. In this way parents can begin to feel more secure in their own parenting role
- reduce feelings of uncertainty and isolation
- provide mutual support for parental values expressed in rules of conduct: like children, parents also need an 'everybody' who is doing it their way
- add weight to parent's convictions so that children may be dealt with more consistently in the community of which they are a part.

SUMMING UP

The family is responding to many changes in society and is under considerable threat itself. Nonetheless a sound family life is one of the greatest sources of security in a sometimes chaotic world. It remains the greatest source of happiness for many. But it needs to adapt to social changes around it without sacrificing its most fundamental values of love, hope for the future generation, and faith in its survival. Whatever their lifestyle, parents need the encouragement and support of other members of the community.



CHAPTER 3

PARENT-CHILD SCENARIOS

Each child is unique

Different kinds of children

Different styles of parenting

Family interaction

A bill of rights for parents

A bill of rights for children

PARENT-CHILD SCENARIOS

No-one will dispute that we are living in times of phenomenal change. Just consider that in mid-thirties of the twentieth century

- organ transplants were a future dream
- the word processor did not exist
- TV was not a feature of home life
- antibiotics were not yet developed
- women generally stopped work when their first child was born
- women's rights were coming under review but the Women's Liberation Movement was still some 20 years away
- the mid-life crisis had not been identified
- pre-marital chastity was the norm
- divorce was rare
- sex was still a taboo subject not featured in the mass media
- women had very limited occupational choices
- parents were seen as authority figures and their needs had priority
- moral codes were clearly defined, even if not always adhered to
- rural life in the past fostered more sharing of resources; urban living today is more individualistic.



POINT TO PONDER

At this stage it is emphasised that there is no single or perfect recipe for parenting. Parenting changes with the age and development of the child and that of the parent. The challenge today is to strike a balance between the needs and rights of the parents and those of the child – which is more easily said than done!

The family has been described as the most sensitive barometer of society and parenting has not been unaffected by the changes which have occurred in the course of this century. Toffler, in his bestseller *Future shock* (1970), pointed out that change was occurring at a faster rate than many

people's ability to adjust to it. Never have family patterns, values and norms varied as much as today. Not surprisingly, many parents seek knowledge and reassurance about their role.

EACH CHILD IS UNIQUE

No two children are identical and there should always be respect for the uniqueness and individuality of each child. But while acknowledging the diversity we also need to identify common factors which characterise certain kinds of children.

Children differ enormously from the moment of birth, even within the same family. Yet, despite this, there is a strong belief that parents can mould their children almost as if they were an unformed lump of clay. Watson, a famous psychologist of the thirties, claimed that 'Give me a dozen healthy infants and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become a doctor, a lawyer, artist, merchant ...' (in Segal, 1978, p 8).

Even everyday observation of families belies this. Although there may



be similarities between siblings, there may also be big differences. Stemming from an inherited pool of genes, their combinations may vary surprisingly. Some children may be easier to parent than others. And some parents may find it easier than others to be a parent.

If parents were the only factor shaping their children, they would surely mould them to suit them-

selves. The rugby forward would probably try to mould his son to become a great sportsman, yet he may have a son who is a writer or painter or who actively dislikes aggressive sport. It really is too simplistic to assume that parents alone are responsible for the shaping of their children.

Many characteristics are part of the nature of the child. This, however, does not mean that parents cannot exert considerable influence on how their children learn to behave. A parent can certainly teach a child to be well mannered, to communicate and to learn to cope with the demands of life as constructively as possible. But parents cannot determine a child's

basic temperament, such as being placid or highly strung or introverted and shy, or extroverted and sociable, although they can strongly influence how these tendencies are expressed.

Diaries can tell us a great deal about children's development. For example, extracts from a diary kept about two sisters, Lynne and Kerry, born fourteen months apart, shows how early certain tendencies may be observed and how they tend to persist.

Lynne: 'At three months shows no traces of shyness, nor is she upset when left in strange surroundings. At her first birthday party she waddled happily from person to person. She likes being with a group of people and is always well behaved at parties, better than at home. She shrieks with delight when being carried through a busy town. She is rather a fearless child. At the age of twenty-seven months she was known as "the swimming babe of Uvongo" who loved the sea and being bounced by the waves. Concerned onlookers who rushed to her aid were greeted with calls for "more, more!"'.

As an adult Lynne still tends to take risks, albeit of a different kind. She loves entertaining and her dinner parties are something to remember.

Kerry: 'At two and a half months cried bitterly when taken to the neighbour and picked up by her. At five months she did the same when her grandmother, whom she had not seen for a little while, picked her up. She is the least troublesome of children when at home with mummy and daddy. She does not like her routine upset and will stop in the middle of a game because she wants to go "doodoo" and heads for bed. Kerry walked early at nine months and from then on always ran but she always seems to know just where she is headed, be it the vegetable patch or whatever. At three Kerry is more sociable but seems to do her own thing even when with others. She is very independent but likes to be rooted at home. She settled down very easily on her first day at school – in fact when marching to her classroom she rather gave the impression of being in charge of it!'

Is it surprising that Kerry became a dedicated teacher?

Despite such definite predispositions the importance of parents should never be minimised. They remain the greatest external influence on their children. But they need to recognise and respect certain inherent tendencies their children have. Failure to do so may have detrimental consequences:

- Parents may fail to accept the child for what it is and try to change it to someone it does not have the potential to be, which will be frustrating for parent and child.
- Parents may see themselves as terrible failures because they have not been able to produce a perfect child and may blame themselves for attributes for which they are not responsible, such as hyperactivity or low frustration tolerance in their children.



POINT TO PONDER

It is true that in cases of rejection, neglect or abuse, parents can do irreparable harm. However, this book is not about such pathological behaviour but about well-intentioned 'normal' parents. Undoubtedly they will make mistakes but they are willing to learn and to work at becoming good parents.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF CHILDREN

Several attempts have been made to group children in terms of certain characteristics. One such classification is that of Thomas and Chess (1977) who studied children in some 80 families from infancy to adolescence. They identified three patterns of temperament and behaviour in children which showed remarkable persistence over time from infancy through to adolescence.

- The '*Easy Child*' is characterised by positive mood and responsiveness to others, even-temperedness, adaptability to new situations, and regular sleeping and eating patterns. Such children are generally easy to rear. They comprised about 40 per cent of the children studied.
- The '*Difficult Child*' is more or less the opposite of the easy child, manifesting considerable negative mood, a tendency to withdraw from people, showing poor adaptability to new situations, irritability, intense mood swings and irregular sleeping and eating patterns. Only about 10 per cent fell into this category. They are difficult to parent.
- The '*Slow to Warm Up Child*' has a low activity level and slowness in adjusting to new situations. These children are less emotionally intense than the difficult child and have somewhat more regular sleeping and

eating habits. As their descriptive name implies, they need time to adapt to change. An important child-rearing requirement for these children is patience: they need to be ushered into new situations gently. Approximately 15 per cent fell into this category.

The remaining 35 per cent of children did not clearly fall into any of these three categories.

Vulnerable and resilient children

A distinction has also been made between resilient children who are able to cope with considerable stress and disruption to a surprising extent and vulnerable children who are not able to do so.

Three factors are involved in regard to vulnerability or resilience. First, certain **personality characteristics** of the child make a difference: is it cheerful or fretful and anxious. Second, the **family situation**: is it harmonious or conflict-ridden. Third, the availability of **support** in times of stress. Role models who provide examples of how to cope with difficult situations or ineffective role models are another important factor. In combination these factors can make the difference between vulnerability and resilience.

It is of particular interest to note that these findings have been found to apply to children in different places and contexts: to children from black urban ghettos in America, children from the Isle of Wight and the Inner City of London, children from strife- and war- torn situations, and from a Hawaiian island. Young black activists in South Africa could also be included in this list (Garmezy, 1983; Straker, 1992). All had been exposed to conditions of great hardship, such as poverty, war and degradation. In all these groups some children were more resilient, others more vulnerable.

Parents, too, may be vulnerable or resilient. (For further information see chapter 10, the section on children and stress.)

DIFFERENT STYLES OF PARENTING

Parenting styles tend to reflect the personality values and ideas about child-rearing of the parents.

In broad terms, several styles of parenting have been identified, namely the authoritarian, the permissive and the democratic style (Baumrind, 1971).

In the **authoritarian** style the emphasis is placed on the absolute authority of the parents. It is assumed that they know best and children should obey them unquestioningly. This kind of style was at its height during the last century and the beginning of this century.

A letter in a woman's journal in the middle of last century tells how an eighteen-month-old child was commanded to say 'Dear Mama', but when it failed to respond correctly it was severely punished for its 'wilfulness'. Such an expectation and extreme action would not be acceptable nowadays. However, there are still many parents today who strongly emphasise their authority and see their role as that of decision-making and controlling parent. They tend to be strict disciplinarians, enforcing rules that they have made. Extreme authoritarianism may lead to social inhibition, and a lack of confidence and independence in children.

At the other extreme, we find the **permissive style**. As the name suggests, a wide range of behaviour on the part of children is permitted

which would previously not have been tolerated. There is a strong emphasis on the freedom of the child, allied to the notion that such freedom from restraint will foster the development of the child.

Here, I am reminded of a thank you letter from a mother to a friend who had sent her a playpen on the

arrival of her fourth child. The letter read: 'Thank you for the playpen – every afternoon I go and sit in it for an hour so the children can't get at me!'

A further distinction can be made between permissive parents who are indulgent and those who are indifferent. **Permissive-indifferent** parents are uninterested and uninvolved. For example, they often do not know where their children are or what they are doing. The effects may be poor self-control and sensation and pleasure seeking in their children. By



contrast, **permissive-indulgent** parents are very involved with their children but make few demands on them. The result may be children lacking in self-control and in respect and consideration for others (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Thirdly, there is the **democratic style** of parenting where the authority of the parent rests upon his or her qualities of leadership. This style is founded on decision-making in which the child is encouraged to participate, especially as its understanding increases. The emphasis is on control, encouragement and agreement rather than on punitive discipline. For example, family meetings might be held where problems and choices are discussed and decisions are reached (Keech, 1993). Children of democratic parents tend to function well socially.

It should, however, be recognised that even within one family, parenting styles may differ in response to children's different needs, personality and age. One child may respond best to gentleness, another to firmness. Yet it cannot be stated without reserve that any one of the three basic styles mentioned is always the ideal. The personality of the parents and of the child, its age, their life circumstances, and particular cultural background will all exert a greater or lesser influence on parental ways of dealing with their children. It must also be recognised that not all children will react in the same way to particular parental styles.

Well-adjusted children can come from the most authoritarian as well as from extremely permissive homes because another crucial factor is involved, namely the **love** of the parent. So one really needs to compare the parenting style plus the amount of love and caring that goes with it. A loving, authoritarian parent is experienced very differently from an emotionally distant one.

EXERCISE

A recent letter to a newspaper by a grandmother reported the following incident:

Two little boys (aged about four and six) were moving about eating popcorn and dropping much of it on the carpet. Then they proceeded to raid the slips and forms provided by the bank.

As a granny I was just a little taken aback that no one checked them and eventually leaned down to one of them and said as kindly as

I know how: “Sweetheart, I don’t think these forms are for kiddies to play with.”

He meekly replaced them but his father, an enormous chap, verbally attacked me. His argument was that he practically owned this bank and his kids could do as they pleased. I replied that wastage and mess were everybody’s concern.’

- 1 What kind of parenting style does the father’s reaction suggest?
 - 2 What difference in values do the reactions of the father and granny suggest?
 - 3 What is your personal viewpoint?
-

Obedience

The matter of obedience is central to the question of discipline. The obedience expected of children varies greatly across time and culture. In the eighteenth century absolute obedience was generally required. Among many black groups, obedience tends to become an issue when a child reaches the age of three or four. Mwamwenda (1989) explains that among the Shona ‘parents start teaching their children how to behave after the age of about three years ... A child is expected to obey his parent’s instructions unquestioningly and is not expected to answer back when he is reprimanded’ (p 293). Black children in a rural, traditional environment may be given certain responsibilities at an early age. A girl of five may be expected to balance a gourd or other water container on her head as she goes to fetch water with her mother. Or she may be expected to babysit a younger sibling. Boys start herding goats between the ages of four and five and assist with milking by holding the cows. This preparation for adult roles begins early.

The large-scale move to the towns and cities and the different lifestyle this entails may create many uncertainties about such parent/child activities.

Consistency

A factor of particular importance is consistency in parenting. *Inconsistent* parenting may be reflected in vacillation between a ‘do as I say’

authoritarian approach one day to a 'do as you please' the next. An inconsistent parent's actions may be more influenced by a current mood or by a matter of convenience than by any principles of childrearing.

Some variation in how parents deal with situations is inevitable. However, major and regular inconsistencies are very confusing for a child.

Inconsistencies are most likely to occur when parents

- have problems of their own
- are under a great deal of uncertainty and stress
- drink to excess
- have no guiding values

Great inconsistencies may also stem from the difference between the values and styles of the mother and the father where one veers to the extreme of rigid authoritarianism and the other to indulgent permissiveness, or where one parent tries to impose traditional values and the other a modification of these.

FAMILY INTERACTION

Parents and children form an interacting system. So whatever fosters the development of one member of the family, be it parent or child, is likely also to benefit the others. The reverse is also true; if one member of the family has a serious problem of whatever kind, this is likely to affect the rest of the family.

A graphic illustration of this is provided by the story of Nicola, the eldest of three children in a happy family living in very comfortable circumstances. Nicola was regarded as a model but somewhat vulnerable child because of frequent illnesses. She was a lovely girl and a talented dancer of whom great things were expected. In her autobiography, *Nicola*, she describes her childhood as very happy with caring and supportive parents who had a great sense of fun. But, after puberty Nicola began to change in inexplicable ways. She became a compulsive eater, suffered extreme mood swings, resorted to destructive behaviour (as when she tried to mutilate herself), and twice set fire to the family home. The once sweet, talented and co-operative child had become an uncontrolled, destructive, irrational, obese young woman. The point being singled out for emphasis here is the totally disruptive effect this had on the rest of the family; a puzzled

and often outraged, but deeply concerned father; a guilt-ridden mother who believed it must all be her fault; a younger brother and sister who felt more and more neglected because all the attention was focused on giving Nicola support and seeking a solution for her bizarre behaviour. The once happy family was in disarray. Eventually, Nicola was in prison awaiting trial, with the possibility of a long-term sentence.

The story has an amazing ending. It was finally established that the onset of her menstruation had caused an unusual hormonal imbalance. Medical and legal history was made in Great Britain as her condition was finally diagnosed and successfully treated and her case was dismissed. Gradually, she began to return to normal. At this point, we also see the family stabilising. Angry interactions begin to be replaced by loving and helpful ones. Of particular note is the part played by the father, who by following up some vague leads was able, as a complete amateur, to help identify a rare medical problem.

Few disturbed family interactions can be attributed to one specific problem. Often causes are numerous, subtle, and difficult to pinpoint. What is being illustrated here is that family relationships are highly complex and always changing. There is a strong reciprocity between what one person does and how others respond.

In this book, the development of parents and children and how they impact upon one another is dealt with. At this point, it seems relevant to state a bill of rights for parents and for children.

A BILL OF RIGHTS FOR PARENTS

You have the right to

- do the best you can for your child
- love, care for and enjoy your child
- be depressed or angry or have hostile thoughts once in a while without feeling that you are a bad parent
- be alone sometimes
- enhance your marriage by having time alone together
- be supported in your role as parent
- foster your own development

(Adapted from the Newsletter of the South African Federation of Mental Health, January 1994.)

A BILL OF RIGHTS FOR CHILDREN

Article 6: Family Life

- All children have the right to a safe, secure and nurturing family and the right to participate as a member of that family.
- All children have the right to love and affection from their parents and family.
- All children have the right to clothing, housing and a healthy diet.
- All children have the right to clean water, sanitation and a clean living environment.
- All children have the right to be protected from domestic violence.
- All children who do not have a family should be provided with a safe and secure place to live and clothing and nutritious food within the community where they live.
- Special protection should be given to children who are orphaned or abandoned as a result of violence or any other reason or are refugees returning from exile and every effort should be made to place them within a safe and secure 'family'.

(Taken from The Children's Charter of South Africa.)



CHAPTER 4

THE PILLARS OF PARENTING: KNOWLEDGE, LOVE, DISCIPLINE

Knowledge

Love

Discipline, responsibility and control

Methods of control

Making discipline work

Summing up

Daily recipe for parents

THE PILLARS OF PARENTING: KNOWLEDGE, LOVE, DISCIPLINE

The three pillars of parenting which provide the structure which holds the house of parenting together, are knowledge, love and discipline. These pillars rest on a foundation of values. The overarching roof is represented by the goals and objectives of parenthood. All these parts of the structure should be strong and mutually reinforcing.



KNOWLEDGE

Parenting requires knowledge, which relates to questions such as:

- What do I expect of myself as a parent?
- What do I expect of my husband/wife as a parent?
- Do I know what to expect of a child at different stages of development?

Answers to questions such as these are essential for effective parenting. It may be argued that most people muddle along well enough without confronting such complex questions. This may indeed be so; however, it needs to be asked whether this is good enough for such a vitally important task. Moreover, anything which increases the effectiveness of a parent should simultaneously make parenting a less stressful task, because some uncertainties have been removed, some aims have become clearer, and some perspective has been gained. In turn, feeling more confident should increase the joys of parenting.

Know yourself as parent

How one has been brought up will inevitably influence one's approach to

parenting. Some people may wish to follow the example set by their own parents closely or, at the other extreme, may react strongly against it. For example, a person who resented a very authoritarian father and strict mother could later be a very permissive parent.

EXERCISE

At this point it might be useful to consider some features of yourself as a parent by answering the following questions. (Do this in writing first, then discuss the answers with your spouse or a group.)

- 1 My main goal as a parent is to
- 2 How have you come to decide on this as your main goal: what factors, experiences, observations or knowledge have influenced you?
.....
- 3 How similar or different are your views from those of your husband/
wife?
- 4 The hardest part of being a parent is
- 5 The best part of being a parent is

Share your views with your partner or, if in a group, with one other person.

KEEP YOUR ANSWERS AND REFER BACK TO THEM LATER.

Knowing your child

Knowledge of one’s child requires some sort of perspective, yet every parent knows how difficult it is to be objective because we are just too emotionally involved. Sometimes we see ourselves in our children, who may be a source of pride, exasperation or shame to us! What mother has not heard her child talking to its doll, the neighbour’s child or family dog in words that sounded just like her own: and she did not like what she heard!

Parents may also lack perspective because a child is seen through the filter of their own expectations. They may have a tomboy daughter but see

her as a potential ballerina because that is what they want her to be. We may overreact because we see behaviour we do not like as a reflection of our poor parenting – which may or may not be true.

By contrast, a child's achievement may have a parent basking in its glory. This is fine as long as the parent does not begin to live vicariously through this child to satisfy his or her own unfulfilled ambitions. Then the child becomes a major aspect of the parent's self-esteem who may therefore begin to push this child relentlessly, taking the joy out of its achievement.

It is as well to heed the words of Khalil Gibran, writing 'On Children':

You may give them your love, but not your thoughts,
For they may have their own thoughts. You may house their bodies
but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot
visit, not even in your dreams.

(The Prophet, 1923.)

EXERCISE

Write a one-page description of your child(ren). Compare this description with that of your spouse, grandparent, teacher or friend.

What have you learnt about your child and yourself from this?

LOVE

Love is surely the most central feeling of a parent for a child. But to define love is very difficult because it has so many facets. Moreover, subtle variations may distinguish the love felt towards different children in the same family. A parent may say to his or her three children: 'I love you all equally', yet the love for one child may elicit particularly protective feelings of love, whereas a second child may bring out a special kind of tenderness in the parent. In regard to the third child, a special kind of loving affinity may be felt because of a certain similarity or even because of a valued difference: the shy father may be drawn to his outgoing son or daughter.

C S Lewis makes an interesting distinction between what he calls Need-Love and Gift-Love. 'The typical example of Gift-Love would be that love which moves a man to work and plan and save for the future well-being of his family ...' whereas Need-Love is the love which 'sends a lonely frightened child to its mother's arms ...' (1971, p 7). Over time, the relationship between these two kinds of love changes. As the child matures and becomes more independent, so the need element decreases, although it may surface again even in adulthood in times of crisis. When parents become elderly, we may see a complete reversal of this pattern.

Common features of parental love

Fromm says: 'Love is the active concern for the life and growth of that which we love' (1972, p 25). It is, therefore, an ongoing process which is linked to a sense of responsibility that initially focuses strongly on the physical care and survival of the infant.

In the animal world, such care seems to be entirely instinctive: the mother responds instinctively to the need of her newborn calf, kitten or monkey. In turn, the newborn animal responds with pre-programmed behaviour. Human babies are far more helpless at birth. So, from the very beginning the mother has to take full responsibility for the mere survival of her child. She is guided by love rather than instinct.

Parental love embraces **acceptance** of the child for what it is: even though Peter wanted a son, he can accept his daughter lovingly. It is this acceptance of the child which lays the foundation for the development of the child's self-image and self-respect. Moreover, recognising a child's uniqueness and respecting this acts as a safeguard against parental domination and manipulation to suit the parent's needs. Parental love is, however, not an unchanging constant. At times it may be all tenderness and pride, and sometimes it may be allied to a sense of guilt and anxiety and when a child is truly at risk, it may be associated with almost unbearable pain. The very strength of a parent's love heightens the capacity for both great worry and joy.

Despite tremendous challenges to it, parental love is probably the most resilient kind of love. There may be times when a parent does not



particularly like his child, as when a rebellious teenager seems intent on breaking all the rules of the house, when a bright child refuses to put any effort into its schoolwork, when a son is quite unable to find the time to wash his father's car, but always finds time to wash that of his girlfriend! There may certainly be times when parents may want to divorce their children just as children would sometimes like to divorce their parents. However, in an otherwise loving home, such differences and conflicts are temporary and do not lead to mutual rejection.

Tough mind and a tender heart

Martin Luther King (1969) said some very wise things about love. He stressed the combination of a tough mind and a tender heart. The tough mind helps us to guard against sentimental and over-indulgent parental love which does not foster a child's development.

Sarah is an overindulgent mother. Any problems her son Dennis had she believed were always caused by others, so she never encouraged him to take responsibility for his actions or their consequences. When he failed at school, it was because of poor teaching; when he was not chosen for the soccer team it was because he was not the teacher's pet; when he stole a car it was because his friends misled him; and when he assaulted an elderly person it was because he was provoked. Now at forty, an idle, unhappy person, he blames the world for his problems and his mother is still constantly covering up for him.

Tough-mindedness means that thought is given to the consequences of a child's behaviour, which sometimes demands that firm action be taken because it is in the long-term interests of a child and its development. Tough-mindedness becomes hard-heartedness when it is not motivated by concern for the child, but by selfish parental desires such as having a 'perfect child'.

Some mothers and fathers play complementary roles: the one may be more tough-minded, the other more tender-hearted. Provided they have common parental aims, they may achieve a good balance, but, in the absence of shared parental aims, confusion in the child is very likely.

In a nutshell, love involves the mind as well as the heart. It also involves effort and action. Peck (1990) says quite simply: '... love is effortful'. Expressing and sustaining love, be it between loving adults or

between parents and children, requires hard work. Sometimes very hard work indeed.

DISCIPLINE, RESPONSIBILITY AND CONTROL

Discipline and control

The word discipline is not very popular these days because it tends to be associated with corporal and other forms of punishment. This is unfortunate, since discipline has a much broader meaning. According to dictionary definitions, discipline refers to 'mental and moral training, a system of rules of conduct, corrections, and training towards obedience and order within a particular system', such as the family or the community. The purpose of such discipline is to prepare a person to fit into the existing social order. By contrast, punishment is an action taken to enforce conformity. Punishment is essentially concerned with deterrent action by others whereas discipline is more focused on the development of self-control.



POINT TO PONDER

'But children need and want help in controlling their impulses; if they are not called upon to control themselves, they use their behaviour to control adults. Yet, in fact, it is scary to a child to have power over adults' (David Elkind).

Throughout history, there have always been rebellious children and teenagers. What is different today is that they can no longer be sure what they are rebelling against. A comparison of the main disciplinary problems in American schools in 1940 and in 1990 is quite startling. In 1940 the major problems were

- talking out of turn
- chewing gum
- making a noise
- running in hallways
- queue jumping
- ignoring dress code
- littering.

Now compare these with those listed for 1990:

- drug abuse
- alcohol abuse
- sexual behaviour
- attempted suicide
- rape and sexual assault
- robbery and theft
- physical assault.



(Quoted by Clem Sunter, 1996, based on the Congressional Quarterly, 1993.)

This is an alarming list of criminal activity and one has to ask: What has happened to values and to discipline?

The purpose of parental control

The purpose of parental control should be

- to foster their child's development
- to teach and encourage desired behaviour
- to develop a sense of responsibility
- to help the child to move from control by others toward self-control, a long and difficult process.

METHODS OF CONTROL

Four different methods of training can be identified.

Avoidance versus teaching

In the very young child, parents may have to take strong and fast avoiding action, as when preventing a child from putting its fingers into electric plugs or boiling water. A little child may also have to be distracted and its attention redirected when it insists on pulling the dog's ears or spitting at strangers. However, as a child gains in understanding so teaching should replace avoidant action to an increasing extent. The focus should be on the do's rather than the don'ts. Instead of saying: 'Don't touch that vase!', a child could be helped to hold it gently, put its hand inside and feel its hollowness, stroke its shining surface and then be shown that it has a special place on the table. The point being made is that in teaching a child that an object, such as a vase, is interesting and precious, it is also learning what to do with it rather than damaging it.

Commanding versus directing

'Do as you are told' is the style of the commanding parent who generally sees no need to give explanations. There may certainly be occasions when this approach is appropriate. If the curtains have caught alight there is no time to explain why a certain escape action should be taken. However, in general, directing is preferable to commanding because it encourages learning based on understanding. 'Try doing it this way, it might be easier' would be a directing response. It encourages further questions and discussion.

Positive versus negative control

The following statements show the difference between positive and negative control.

'STOP THIS MESS NOW, OR ELSE!'

'This is very messy, but if you tidy up when you are finished you can play this game again tomorrow.'

'Let's see who can clean up this mess the fastest, starting now.'

Clearly, the first statement is an example of negative control and the two subsequent statements reflect a more positive approach. Few parents

will always exercise positive control, but the positives should outweigh the negatives.

Emotional reward versus material reward

Rewarding good behaviour is an important way of encouraging it. In this regard, adults do not differ from children. We only need to think of time and money devoted to the planning and implementation of incentive schemes in business and industry to appreciate this! Rewards may take many forms. An emotional reward is a response indicating approval and acceptance:

‘That is a lovely picture you drew for me. It deserves a special hug.’

‘I am so proud of you.’

‘I knew you could score that goal, it was terrific.’

‘You are such a nice brother to your little sister.’

‘You really helped me with that job.’

Comments such as these show a parent’s approval and make a child feel good about itself. That is the reward.

Another form of reward may be of a more tangible kind: it may range from a cookie for being good to a golden watch for passing matric. This kind of reward is often anticipated because of a promise given. Used in moderation, material rewards can act as incentives and encouragement. If used to excess, this approach can become counter-productive as ultimately nothing is done unless a reward is promised. A means to an end has then become an end in itself. This can even become a battleground between parent and the child dictating ‘If you give me what I want, only then will I give you what you want.’

EXERCISE

Think of your current family situation during the past week.

- Which of the above kinds of control did you use most often?
- Is this the way in which you generally deal with family situations?
- Is this the best way of dealing with them?
- Depending on the age of your child(ren), how would you describe the ground rules of behaviour in your home?

MAKING DISCIPLINE WORK

At the outset it needs to be emphasised that psychological problems cannot be resolved through punishment. For example, to punish a child with a bed-wetting problem is merely going to increase its anxiety, thereby aggravating the problem. A child who is generally bright at school but cannot do maths or write legibly may have a learning problem requiring special teaching, not punishment. Extreme shyness or nervousness will be worsened, not lessened, by punishment. In all such cases, punishment is likely to engender a sense of unworthiness, which does not foster development.

Several aspects need to be taken into account when dealing with a question of discipline, namely appropriateness, fairness, and consistency.

Age appropriateness

An example may best explain what is meant by age appropriateness. At the age of 15 months, Mary took great delight in pulling the flowers out of the vase, removing petal by petal and watching a flower change its shape with complete fascination. Her mother could respond with 'Stop being so naughty, you are spoiling my pretty flowers', followed by a firm smack. This mother is assuming that Mary is intentionally destructive and therefore deserves punishment. She fails to understand that Mary is examining the flower and is thrilled to be able to change its shape! Had Mary been six years old, the same action could have been interpreted quite differently, as Mary would by then have understood that the flowers in the vase were meant to be looked at, not pulled apart.

Punishment should fit the crime

If punishment is indeed necessary, it should match the 'crime'. To deprive a teenager of a month's pocket money for being twenty minutes late is likely to be felt as unreasonable: hostility is a more likely outcome than repentance.

Fairness

Sometimes punishment may be necessary. But if we want to instil a sense

of justice in our children, then it must be seen to be fair. What is more, the effects of punishment will differ depending on whether it is seen to be fair or not. This means taking account of the intention behind the action.



Little Joe, aged three, loved to observe his mother planting seeds and noticed how plants eventually grew big and numerous from the seeds that had been sown. So he decided that he wanted his daddy to have several watches and maybe even a bigger one. So he planted his daddy's best watch and waited for it to grow! Clearly his intention was good. Punishment for ruining his father's watch would surely have made no sense at all to little Joe.

EXERCISE

How would you have dealt with this situation?

Corrective action is preferable to punishment

Punishment only teaches a child that what it has done is not acceptable. It may teach very little about what is desirable or how to attain it. It can be more helpful to show a child how something can be put right. Even a two-year-old can 'help' its mother to mop up some spilt water. A teenager can help repaint a room whose walls have been spoilt by gummed-on posters and graffiti.

Consistency

Parents are not well-regulated machines that always perform in exactly the same way. A parent under pressure is likely to punish more than a relaxed

parent. In general, however, punishment or reprimand should be consistent so that what is acceptable one day is not treated as unacceptable the next. All the child learns from such inconsistencies is that the parent's mood or motive determines the reaction rather than the child's behaviour. What the child understands is that it is safe to do or request certain things when father or mother is in a good mood but not otherwise. What the child has learnt is to exploit a parent's mood!

Good example

Parents should model the behaviour they expect of their children. Saying one thing and doing another does not carry much weight. For example, a Swedish study convincingly demonstrated that parents who were well disciplined, who lived in accordance with their values, did not need to preach discipline to their children. Moreover, a comparison between problem children, delinquents and asocial youth and those who were socially responsible and well adjusted revealed only one overriding factor: 'What made the difference was how closely and well parents lived by their stated values and by the values they tried to teach their children' (Bruno Bettelheim, 1987, p 104).

In a nutshell: punishment may sometimes be necessary. It should, however, be a last rather than a first resort. It should be age appropriate, fair and not humiliating. Above all, it should never be abusive or excessive.

EXERCISE

Consider the following questions: write down your answers.

- 1 What behaviour in your children makes you really angry?
- 2 How do you react when they behave like this?
- 3 How would you classify your parental style?
- 4 Do you think that some change in your parenting style may be a good idea? If yes, explain the change you would like to make.
- 5 How would you rate yourself on a scale of leniency versus strictness: place an x on the appropriate number below.

Lenient

Strict

1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10

- 6 How similar is your rating to that of your spouse or other person raising your children?
 - 7 If you differ quite a lot, is this a problem?
 - 8 What do you consider to be absolute values and non-negotiable behaviour?
 - 9 How would you describe helpful discipline?
-

Good manners

‘Manners maketh man’ is an old proverb that guided social behaviour in the past. Taken to extremes, it placed excessive emphasis on the trivial niceties of behaviour which today may be regarded of lesser importance. Yet, at the core of good manners lies a very important social and interpersonal skill, namely showing consideration and respect toward others. Just how such respect is expressed may differ vastly from one culture to another, but the common factor is the avoidance of insult and hurt and promoting behaviour which makes living together more comfortable for all. Good manners are part of self-discipline. Ill-mannered children and adults are generally not popular.

Significantly, at the time of writing, the current *Reader's Digest* features an article: ‘How to bring up polite kids in a rude world’. Reference is made to rudeness seen on television, elsewhere and in the home, and stressing the importance of teaching politeness at home.

SUMMING UP

Perhaps you are feeling somewhat anxious at this stage. This might well be the case if it is the first time that you have dealt with your feelings and actions as a parent in this way. All the more reason to go on to the next section to learn about skills which could help you cope better with this difficult task of being a parent. In the meantime you might try this recipe:

DAILY RECIPE FOR PARENTS

Give each child:

- lots of acceptance
- plenty of love
- at least one hug
- an attentive ear
- control and guidance
- fun and laughter
- encouragement

And be patient with yourself – no parent is perfect.





CHAPTER 5

COMMUNICATION: THE BASIS OF UNDERSTANDING

Why is good communication difficult?

Essentials of good communication

Communication between parent and child

Summing up

COMMUNICATION: THE BASIS OF UNDERSTANDING

Communication is the process by which one person tries to convey to another his or her personal ideas, feelings and beliefs about a matter that is of some importance. In other words, communication is more than small talk. Language is the main means of communication, but not the only one: we also communicate by our body language, facial expression, the way we dress, the way we carry ourselves.

Communication means 'tuning in' to the other person's feelings and ideas. To do this effectively, we have to be able to silence our own thoughts and feelings temporarily so as to be sufficiently open to hear what the other person is trying to tell us. This is very difficult to do, especially when feelings are running high and when our ideas differ greatly.

It is quite possible for a couple to argue for hours on end, and yet there may be no real communication between them. All that has been learnt is that each partner is angry, and that neither has understood the other.

Conveying information is essentially a one-way process with a speaker putting across ideas or facts to a listener or audience. By contrast, communication is a two-way process in which there is direct interaction between the people involved.

There are different levels of communication, from small talk to intimacy.



WHY IS GOOD COMMUNICATION DIFFICULT?

Even when several people speak the same language and use the same

words, their underlying meaning may differ in terms of culture, age, gender and personal life experience. To a person who had a caring, tender mother, the word 'mother' conveys something very different from what the same word means to a person who had a rejecting and neglectful mother. In other words, there may be a difference between the dictionary meaning of a word and the personal meaning it has for us.

Cultural differences

Linguistic differences between different cultures may be a rich source of misinterpretation. For example, according to Japanese tradition it is considered impolite to say 'No'. There are thus indirect ways of conveying a difference of opinion. Mikes (1970) explains that one should not phrase a question addressed to a Japanese in negative form. For example, 'Aren't you bored stiff with me?' might be replied to, to your astonishment, with 'Yes!', because it is more polite to agree than to disagree.

Differences in cultural norms are revealed to us through knowing another language. It is thus a great help in understanding not only the meaning of the word, but possibly also the customs and values which it reflects. A few examples will illustrate this point.

In Spanish, the clock walks, whereas in English, it runs. Could this be telling us something about differences in time perception between the English and the Spanish? Cultural differences in family constellation and interactions may also be reflected in language. In Afrikaans no difference is made, linguistically, between cousins and nephews and nieces, who are all called 'neefs' (male) or 'niggies' (female). In African languages numerous kinship relationships are detailed very fully. Certain customs may prevail in some groups but not in others. There is always vocabulary relating to various customs and traditions but the appropriate words may not exist in another language where they do not apply. Among the Zulu, for example, there is the *umkhongi*, who is a negotiator on behalf of a young man who wishes to become betrothed to a certain young girl. The *umkhongi* visits the girl's father and male relatives. The matter of *lobola* (what is offered by the intending groom) and the *izibizo* (demands of the wife's family) are discussed. There are no English equivalents for these terms.

So, even concerning something as universal as the family we find great variation in the way family relationships are described. This may reflect patterns of respect and other forms of interaction which may be difficult for someone to grasp whose language does not make the same distinctions.

Gender differences

If you would like to establish whether there are gender differences in the way certain words and meanings are perceived and reacted to, the following little exercise could be carried out.

EXERCISE

Ask a group of men and women to write down whatever other words come instantly to mind and are associated with the following. Give one word at a time and allow only 15 seconds for response.

- 1 tools
- 2 ballet
- 3 string
- 4 tree
- 5 kitchen
- 6 car
- 7 knife
- 8 baby

How similar/different were the responses?

One difference that needs to be noted is that, in general, women tend to express feelings in words more readily than men, whereas men may often let actions speak in place of words. This has considerable relevance for dealing with family relations.

Jack and Susie sought marriage counselling because of numerous conflicts they were experiencing. It soon became clear that poor communication was a major factor in their misunderstandings, as the following extract shows. Susie looked at Jack accusingly, saying: 'You

never say you love me anymore.’ Jack looked at her in utter amazement and said ‘Good heavens! I hand over my pay check to you at the end of every month. I am giving you my hard-earned money. How can you question my love for you?’ It was Susie’s turn to look amazed.

Age differences

Many humorous examples come to mind when thinking of young children’s comments which reflect their own unique way of perceiving and reacting to the world. One small child was astonished to hear his father had a godchild. In utter amazement he exclaimed: ‘I didn’t even know you were God!’

Iris Vaughan kept a diary as a child that was later published as a book – this provides some endearing examples of a child’s perception of the world. ‘Only sometimes Pop read us out of the child’s Bible about Moses and David and other old men. All had beards. Solomon was the wisest becos he had so many wives and learnt to keep alive for 200 years. That was becos God liked him. I asked Pop why he did not have many wives and he said God forbid and told me not to ask silly questions’ (p 21).

What we see here is a logic of its own, reflecting the child’s limited knowledge of language and conventions. Yet if we accept the child’s level of reasoning, in terms of what it knows, or doesn’t know, these responses are entirely sensible.

At the other end of the lifespan, when dealing with the elderly, we may note the use of words which are unfamiliar to the youth of today. For example, a tickey (a small coin) or a tickey box (a pay phone operated by paying with tickeys) is unknown to today’s younger generation. A bioscope has become a movie, a gramophone a record player, and a housewife is now a home executive.

Even more confusingly, some words have remained the same, but their meaning has changed. A delightful newsletter for retirees provides some amusing examples. ‘When we were young, Grass was mowed, Coke was a cold drink, Pot was something you cooked in, Rock Music was a grandma’s lullaby (Rock a bye baby ...) and being gay meant being cheerful.’ One could surely spend an entertaining evening with a multi-generation family adding to this list.

ESSENTIALS OF GOOD COMMUNICATION

Volumes have been written about communication. But the basic essentials can be summed up in a few key words: look, observe, listen, confirm, accept and respond meaningfully. In technical terms, we speak of the sender of the message and of the receiver to whom it is addressed.

Look/observe

It is essential for good communication for sender and receiver to look at each other. If one person is trying to communicate with one eye on the newspaper, how can the other person's reactions be observed? Is it with a smile, with indifference, eyes flashing with anger or with complete surprise? Important non-verbal cues will thus be missed. **Non-verbal cues** include gestures, facial expression, posture, tone of voice, appearance, and actions.

- **Gesture:** A person emphatically wagging his finger is being very persuasive or determined. A girl biting her nails is conveying insecurity.
- **Facial expression:** There are obvious cues which are easily recognised: a frown, which may reflect concentration or puzzlement; a smile, which suggests pleasure; tears, which signal acute distress.
- **Posture:** Assertiveness is suggested by a person drawing himself or herself up to his/her full height and facing the opposition directly, leaning forward. Submission is shown by a bowed head and avoidance of eye contact.
- **Tone of voice:** A loud voice tends to be associated with strong feelings or with confidence and assertiveness, whereas speaking very softly may convey timidity or uncertainty.
- **Appearance:** This may tell us something about a person's personality. Flamboyant dress may reflect an outgoing or imaginative personality. A conservative, tailored suit tends to reflect conventionality. Note, for example, the differ-



ence in dress of the presenters of arts programmes on television compared to business executives discussing the financial scene.

- **Actions:** Actions often reflect particular customs and conventions. In Western tradition a person of status usually precedes another of lower status. Among some traditional African groups, the reverse is true. The person of lesser rank goes first, thus paving the way for a person of higher rank.

There are certain conventional ways of expressing attitudes and feelings, but there will also be highly individualistic ways of doing so. We should, therefore, be careful about attributing a conventional meaning to a particular way of reacting because it may mean something different in the case of a specific individual. The more foreign the other person is, the less reliance should be placed on the interpretation of non-verbal signals in terms of our own familiar signs. When actions seem inexplicable we need to use verbal communication to explore their meaning to gain further understanding.

An effective communicator is a good observer.

Listen

An old proverb says that the Lord in his wisdom gave us two ears and only one mouth so that we might listen more than we speak! Many of us need to be reminded of this. Often we are so eager to express our own thoughts and feelings that we forget to listen to what the other person is saying. We



need to listen with an open mind so that we are free to hear what the other person is saying and how it is being said. It requires a great deal of discipline to listen in this attentive way, especially when feelings are running high. Often we are so busy putting together our counter-argument or defence that we are really not listening to what the other person is saying. Instead, we keep on interrupting. It is not unusual in a counselling situation to hear one exasperated person saying to the other: 'I have been telling you this for ten years, and you still have not heard me.'

A good communicator is a good listener

Confirm

One way to check that a message has been correctly understood is to repeat it. This is especially true of children. We need to confirm what the other person has said because we tend to filter what we see and hear through our own preconceptions and expectations, heavily laced with our feelings. So, what is said to us may be construed in terms of what **we** think and not in terms of what the sender was saying. Confirming what the other person has said implies a measure of acceptance. However, it does not necessarily imply agreement. It is possible to understand yet to disagree. Consider the following example:

‘My boss had absolutely no right to take me to task because I used my initiative. He just saw this as an effort to upstage him. It leaves me no option but to resign.’

Several responses could be made to this indicating different degrees of confirmation:

‘Don’t be stupid. How can you think of resigning? Where’s the money for our rent going to come from?’

‘I think you are exaggerating. Maybe your boss was just in a bad mood.’

‘You really thought you were doing your best, and your boss does not seem to appreciate this. You feel sore enough about this to want to resign.’

These three alternatives range from total lack of understanding to accurate confirmation of what has been said.

A non-confirming response usually closes the door to further communication, or it may deflect the discussion to an issue that may be irrelevant, or only partly relevant, such as who is going to pay the rent.

Let us consider another example.

Anne, coming to sit close to her husband, Jim, says: ‘I have had such a boring day with nobody to talk to.’

Jim, watching TV: ‘Well, I wish my day had been more boring. Everybody in the office seemed to have a problem they wanted to talk about.’

Anne: ‘Well, I wouldn’t complain about that, at least it was interesting.’

Jim: 'What's interesting about Pete's income tax, the firm's overdraft, Helen's gripes about lack of promotion, and Tom's blocked drain?'

Can you imagine this situation? Neither is really confirming what the other is saying, but each is preoccupied with his or her own world of experience. Moreover, each is trying to prove to the other that he or she had the most frustrating day.

Good communication could have sounded something like this. Jim could have replied to Anne's statement by saying: 'Yes, it must be boring to be alone at home the whole day.' He could have switched off the television, and encouraged Anne to come closer to him. Anne, on the other hand, could have confirmed Jim's remark with: 'Yes, it can be a bit much if everyone comes to you with their problems – me too.'

To sum up: to confirm means to acknowledge what the other person thinks or feels **as genuine for them**, however strange it may seem to you. It is this acceptance which keeps the door of communication open. Differences are then likely to be discussed with the aim of solving problems rather than proving each other right or wrong.

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENT AND CHILD

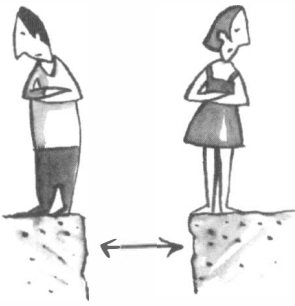
All the features of communication discussed so far also apply to communication between parent and child. Because of the difference in age, experience, the power position and the particular emotional involvement of a parent, there is an extra need for awareness of what kind of communication may be destructive.



POINT TO PONDER

Whereas good communication builds relationships and bridges gaps, poor communication widens them.

Damaging communication



What is communicated can be highly destructive. This may be knowingly done by cruel and insensitive parents, but may also be unwittingly done by parents in moments of anger, exasperation, frustration or parental burnout, when total fatigue impairs judgement and self-control. Some parents may simply have so little understanding of a child that they do not realise what effect negative messages can have. An occasional lapse by an

otherwise loving parent may soon be forgotten, but constant negative messages can be a subtle form of abuse because the self-respect and self-image of the child are damaged. This is also true for adults, of course, especially if they are unable to fight back for various reasons, such as fear of loss of work, or of rejection by a partner.

The following kind of communication should always be avoided:

- **Humiliation.** This means putting children or teenagers down, belittling them. This is especially damaging in the presence of others.

‘Oh, so you’ve let the family down again.’

‘You are just so utterly useless.’

Instead it could be said firmly: ‘This sort of behaviour is just not acceptable.’ Note that the *behaviour* is being condemned, not the person.

- **Blaming** even before the evidence has been heard. ‘I suppose you were careless again’, or ‘I’m sure it’s all your fault.’
- **Labelling** which lumps people of a group together without recognising individual differences. ‘You are completely irresponsible, like all teenagers.’
- **Denial**, when the importance of what is heard is not acknowledged. ‘Never mind, dear, let’s go to a movie and forget all about it.’ This leaves a problem unsolved. Rather go to the movie once possible solutions have been talked about.
- **Threatening**, when a parent threatens action which the child may be unhappy about. For example, when a mother belligerently says: ‘I’m going to tell your principal about this !’, which may be the last thing the child would like the parent to do. It is important to consider how the intended action is seen by the child. If it is very unhappy about it, discuss alternatives. Maybe it is the belligerent attitude the child fears

will be adopted more than a visit to the principal. If a visit to the principal seems necessary, explain this calmly to the child.

- **Sarcasm**, as when a child's remark that it won a competition is responded to with 'Some competition!'. Children are unable to deal with this kind of comment.

Constructive communication which builds understanding and trust

- **Listening** is particularly important when dealing with children. Ginott (1965) pointed out that children's messages are often in code which needs deciphering. He gives the example of the little boy who on his first visit to the nursery school asked who had made the ugly pictures on the wall, much to his mother's embarrassment. However, the teacher understood the meaning behind the question and told him that it was OK to paint ugly pictures, thereby reassuring the little fellow that his difficulty with drawing pretty pictures would not be a problem.

Not only do parents need to decode their children's messages, they sometimes need to help them to communicate with themselves. A young child may often feel and sense more than it is able to express in words. A tearful, irritable four year old may be missing his older brother who has just started attending school but may not be able to actually express this in words.

- **Statements of understanding** (confirming) should precede discussion of a problem and how to deal with it. If a teenager has just had a big fight with a best friend it is helpful to first acknowledge the feelings of hurt and anger. 'You must be feeling really mad right now.'

A remark such as 'Well, thank goodness that friendship's over', reflects a parent's relief, not the teenager's feelings. Discussion may follow more readily if we sense that our feelings have been understood. This applies equally to adults.

- **Seeking solutions** should be the purpose of communication about problems. Sometimes the understanding conveyed is enough. Sometimes definite action needs to be taken. What is important is to remain focused on the specific issue. If there is a problem with maths then this is what should be dealt with. It may be quite irrelevant to see this as a problem with the school as a whole. The child should also be given the opportunity to come up with solutions of its own.

- **Choose time and place well.** Communicating about controversial or emotional matters is best avoided when rushed, exhausted, hungry or ill. It is also important to choose a quiet place where one is least likely to be interrupted.
- **Praise and encourage effort,** even if it was not successful.



POINT TO PONDER

What has been said implies that honesty about feelings and ideas is an essential ingredient of good communication. It is an honesty that will only develop in an atmosphere of love and trust. It is an honesty allied to sensitivity and understanding. It is not being 'brutally frank'.

Communicating love

Love may be expressed in different ways. It can be communicated **physically** by touch, hugging, kissing or moving closer. A baby's first experience of love is linked to being held, supported, fed and comforted. The need for physical expression of love remains with us throughout life. In adulthood it may be expressed in the intimacy of sex, though sex does not necessarily mean love.

Love can be communicated **verbally**: 'I love you', 'You light up my day' or 'I can't wait to be with you'.

Love may be expressed in **subtle ways**, by a knowing look, a special smile, words of encouragement, tears of shared sadness or joy.

Love can be shown through **action**: a thoughtful gift, a bunch of flowers, the interest taken in a child's activities, making time to be together, or working hard at a disliked job to support the family.



EXERCISE

Henry has brought home a very mixed school report. He did very well in languages, barely passed maths and did very poorly in all other subjects. His teacher comments: 'Henry is bright but lazy and inattentive and somewhat disruptive as he constantly seeks attention. He can do much better. We would welcome more involvement by the parents.'

- How could Henry's parents discuss this report with him? What kind of remarks could be damaging or helpful?
 - Is there a message to Henry's parents and what light could this shed on his erratic performance?
-

SUMMING UP

Effective communication is essential for harmony between couples, parents and children and in any situation where mutual understanding is of paramount importance.

It is a skill which requires constant practice and refinement but the results more than justify the effort.



CHAPTER 6

PARENTS AS PEOPLE AND TEAM MATES

Parenting as a growth experience

The quest for psychological maturity

Mothering and fathering

Parents as team mates

Support

Parenting: who does what?

Summing up

PARENTS AS PEOPLE AND TEAM MATES

An old German proverb says 'It is easy to become a parent but hard to be one'. One of the reasons that it is hard to be a parent is simply because people are human, yet they think they should be super parents.

As humans we tend to be rather selfish, demanding creatures and generally like our comforts. We seek recognition and self-fulfilment and would like life to be as trouble free as possible. We want our needs to be satisfied sooner rather than later, and would prefer things to be done our way. Children challenge all this. Remarkably, parents may become willing to do things for their children they would not dream of doing for anyone else. Dad takes Jonathan to the circus even though he dislikes animal acts intensely. Mum stays at home and forgoes a reunion with old friends to comfort her daughter whose first broken romance has left her totally distraught. Ernest postpones early and eagerly desired retirement to send his daughter to medical school and his son overseas for postgraduate training.



POINT TO PONDER

Parenthood is a most demanding role. It can also be immensely rewarding. As a growth experience, it is unequalled.

PARENTING AS A GROWTH EXPERIENCE

The kind of person we are, the beliefs and values we cherish, the way our

parents raised us are but some of the factors that have helped to shape us as people. In turn, they will exert a strong influence over what we as parents expect of ourselves and our children. Just as rearing children is an ongoing process, so too is one's development as a parent. It begins with the anticipation of the birth of one's first child, continues with the arrival of the baby and as it grows and passes through different stages, eventually to leave home and become a parent, thus making you a grandparent.

Perhaps the term 'grand' is appropriate in the sense that by the time one becomes a grandparent one has experienced the full cycle of parenthood and, generally, knows a lot more than when first becoming a parent.

Most parents are wise in retrospect. We could all have done better knowing what we know by the time our children grow up. But few are wise in the beginning. In fact, most first-time parents are rank amateurs – more so than in the past when large families provided a training ground for parenting since older siblings, especially girls, had actively to help raise younger ones. We do not come to parenthood as experts so what really counts is the willingness to learn and to grow as a parent and as a person.

To be an effective parent means ensuring the physical wellbeing of a child, stimulating its intellectual development, encouraging socially acceptable and responsible behaviour, providing emotional security and giving moral and spiritual direction. It presupposes that one has reached a certain level of maturity.

THE QUEST FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL MATURITY

Physical and psychological maturity do not necessarily coincide. In exceptional individuals psychological maturity may be attained early in life but often it is a lifelong quest. Some people remain immature throughout their lives.

Psychological maturity is a special combination of self-knowledge and practical wisdom, guided by moral principles and beliefs. It is associated with psychological wellbeing. It promotes good human relationships and certainly fosters our effectiveness as parents. Certain characteristics are linked to this kind of maturity.

Realism

A feature of maturity is the ability to assess oneself with a fair measure of objectivity and to see things as they are, rather than as one would wish them to be. It implies a willingness to recognise one's strengths and limitations. It also means accepting responsibility for one's mistakes instead of projecting them onto others. This kind of honesty is an essential ingredient of maturity – and of parenting. The realistic parent does not try to be a perfect parent, whatever that may mean, but strives to be a good one. Moreover, parents who are realistic about themselves are also more likely to be reasonably realistic about their children's abilities, personal strengths and limitations than those with too high or too low an opinion of themselves.

A positive self-image

We all have definite ideas about our personal characteristics such as our looks, level of intelligence, personality, what others think we are like and what we would ideally like to be. This is what is meant by our self-image. Susan says, 'I need to lose weight.' Peter says, 'I'm as competent as my boss.' Mary moans, 'I'm stupid at budgeting.' Mark laments: 'I wish I could keep my cool when I get angry.' All these are self-evaluative remarks which tell us something about how Susan, Peter, Mary and Mark see themselves.



In general, our self-image tends to be a mixture of the positive and the negative. However, if a self-image is too negative, when our shortcomings feature too strongly, it is likely to impair our functioning because of anxiety, and persistent doubt about our own worth and our ability to cope with the demands of life. By contrast, a positive self-image tends to be linked to self-confidence and higher self-esteem because it recognises certain strengths. In turn, this generates faith in our ability to cope reasonably well. It does not mean being self-satisfied, smug, or unwilling to learn.



POINT TO PONDER

It is difficult for a child to have confidence in a parent who lacks it and has a poor self-image.

Our self-image is not static. As new situations arise, so it may need to be modified. In fact, every major life change is likely to entail some re-evaluation of our self-concept. Becoming a parent may not affect the image we hold of ourselves as a fairly intelligent and sociable person, but may require a new look at our level of frustration tolerance or the ability to postpone the satisfaction of our own needs to give priority to those of our child.

A balanced self-image means that there is a reasonable balance between its different dimensions – that it is not, for example, centred almost exclusively on one's appearance or social skills or musical ability.

A **firm sense of identity** is a feature of maturity. Our identity is closely linked to our self-image, but refers more specifically to the position we hold and the roles we play in the family, at work and in the community. For example, a person could be described as a husband, father and shopowner. Becoming a parent adds yet another role to existing ones: a woman becomes a mother in addition to already being a homemaker, wife and salesperson; a man becomes a father in addition to being a husband, a church elder and an auto technician. Parenthood, however, could also threaten a person's existing identity with which it is incompatible, such as that of the 'eternal bachelor' or the 'glamour girl'.

A mature person is able to adapt his or her identity in response to new roles and challenges.

Caring love

The mature person is able to freely give and receive love. Parenthood requires the capacity for caring love in abundance. Much has been said about love in chapter 3. Here it is merely re-emphasised that the caring

love of a parent should comprise a tender heart, a thoughtful mind, and should be expressed in caring actions.

Sense of responsibility

A sense of responsibility towards oneself and others is a feature of maturity. The current emphasis on self-fulfilment and human rights needs to be counter-balanced by accepting one's responsibility for the wellbeing of others in the family and community.

Commitment

Commitment means believing in the importance of what one is doing and to be fully involved in doing it well. It embraces enthusiasm and perseverance. Enthusiasm implies an underlying spirit of joy and pleasure. Perseverance means persisting with a task despite difficulties and setbacks. It is the quality which often makes the difference between success and failure.

Commitment means wholeheartedness, of which parenthood demands plenty. Moreover, there can be little personal development without it.

Life balance

It is not always easy to achieve a good balance between the different spheres of one's life – that is between family, work and leisure. But in general the mature person strives for a reasonable balance, trying to spread his/her energy and commitment across these different spheres.

Another kind of balance may be between change and stability. Stability is important to give continuity and consistency to our behaviour. However, as we live in a rapidly changing world we also need to be flexible to adapt to changes of various kinds, including our way of parenting. As our children grow older so our interaction with them needs to change.

EXERCISE

How balanced is your life at present?

Are there certain changes you would like to make in regard to this?

How could this affect you and your relationship with your child(ren)?

Joyfulness

Optimism, enthusiasm, a sense of fun, and zest go together. They enhance ordinary experiences. The bored, blasé person who feels that all has been seen and heard before lacks such joyfulness. The joyful person can take a childlike delight in simple things and so can identify with a child's sense of wonder and fun, like the father sitting on his haunches, sharing his little son's fascination with an ant carrying a burden of crumbs to its nest; or the parent who joins in a child's laughter as it walks barefoot in long grass, and who can share its utter amazement when it sees an ostrich ('BIG birdie') for the first time. Joyfulness and curiosity often go together. The joyful person anticipates happy things and may therefore be more venturesome than an anxious person.



POINT TO PONDER

What is this life,
if full of care
we have no time to stand and stare ...
(W H Davies).

The child is an explorer by nature, wanting to learn about the world, trying to make sense of it and to gain control over it. This curiosity, and the enjoyment it can generate, can strongly draw parent and child together.

A philosophy of life

Everybody has some kind of philosophy of life or worldview, that is a system of ideas about life and about people. It also involves ideals and what we see as desirable. It gives direction about our social standards and moral behaviour. More than this, it refers to our beliefs about the purpose and meaning of life itself. The ability to identify with larger ideals and goals and to accept the meaningfulness of life itself lies at the heart of psychological wellbeing (Carl Gustav Jung, 1933; Viktor Frankl, 1969).

Some people may be guided by ideological beliefs, others by economic values or by a strongly developed code of ethics. For many, their faith and religion provide the foundation for understanding man's place in the universe, their relationship with the Almighty and their obligation toward others.

Clearly defined values and beliefs act as an integrating force which help us to plan our future and to evaluate people and events. They certainly are an essential ingredient of effective parenting. A parent without guiding values and beliefs is like the explorer without a map, unsure of what direction to take.



POINT TO PONDER

If you value your child, teach it values!
(D Stewart Briscoe).

MOTHERING AND FATHERING

The features of maturity discussed above apply equally to men and women. There are, however, also some subtle psychological differences between men and women, although it is not considered politically correct to say so these days. The egalitarian philosophy of our times has led us to neglect the value of certain gender differences because 'It seems particularly difficult for people to accept differences between their own and other groups without judging one group, usually their own, as superior

to the other.' This often forms the basis of prejudice and discrimination, yet 'the optimal development of both men and women can be achieved only when psychological similarities as well as differences are understood by all concerned with human development such as parents ...' (Gerdes, 1988, p 15).

Although some features tend to be more dominant in one sex, this does not mean that they are exclusive to it: it is more a question of preference, style, and priority. As an analogy, one can think of the masculine/feminine dimensions of personality as akin to the warp (thread running lengthwise) and the weft (thread running across) of woven material. Both threads should be of high quality if the material is to be strong. Applied to parenthood, it is suggested that mothering and fathering together provide a strong parental fabric.

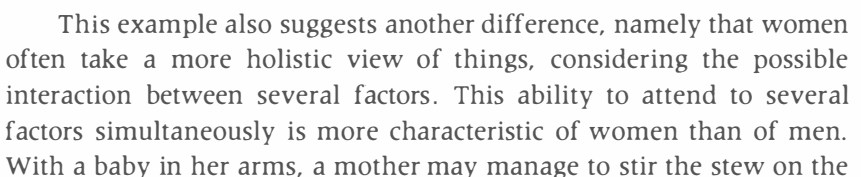
The question of whether these differences are genetic or due to social factors, or both, is a highly complex issue, which will not be discussed here. Whatever their origin, they are malleable and subject to modification should circumstance demand this. For example, fathers who have custody of their children tend to become gentler in their interaction with them, and single mothers often expect more independent behaviour of their children.

It is also possible to find a reversal of gender patterns. In some couples, the father may be more nurturant and empathetic whereas the mother may be the more assertive, or even domineering parent.

Nevertheless, the following are fairly general differences in mothering and fathering:

- Mothers tend to be the main caretakers, especially during their children's infancy. Fathers often become more involved once their children are mobile and able to take part in games like playing ball and romping in the bath, and are able to communicate to some degree.
- Mothers are concerned more with nurturance and interdependence. Fathers tend to encourage independence. A mother, on seeing her child climb a tree, is likely to say, 'Don't go too high – be careful.' A father might say: 'Well done, check your foothold before you go any higher!'
- Mothers respond strongly in terms of a child's needs and feelings. A little boy who is scared of going into a dark cave is likely to be picked up and cuddled by his mother concerned about his fear. By contrast, his father might take him firmly by the hand, assuring him that he will be safe.
- Both mothers and fathers are protective towards their children. A mother's protectiveness is often aimed at soothing hurt feelings. For

When it comes to dealing with problems, mothers may seek to understand, fathers to take action. Ten-year-old Paul has a problem with a school subject, his mother might wonder if this is due to his inattentiveness, the teacher's lack of skill, the fact that Paul is more interested in sport than school work, or because of his general lack of confidence. Paul's father may simply assume that he needs extra lessons.



stove, while reminding her four-year-old to wash his hands, and her twelve-year-old to do his homework, and feed the cat. In its extreme form, women may be too unfocused. Men, by contrast, tend to be more single-minded, concentrating on one thing at a time, and sometimes being excessively one-track-minded.

- Mothers are more likely to discipline in terms of a child's present state of mind; fathers are more likely to discipline by rules.
- Men and women play differently with their children: mothers join in at the child's level, which gives the child the opportunity to feel in charge. Fathers often use play to teach skill and teamwork, often trying to stretch a child to test its limits.

(Gerdes, 1972; 1988; Thevenin, 1993.)

Shapiro says: 'My wife is the mother in our family, and she is very good at it. I'm not much of a **mother** but I still consider myself a good parent to our two children. My approach to raising children is quite different from Susan's – because if the truth be known, she doesn't know much about how to **father**. That's where I'm a natural! As parents, both of us have inherent tendencies that do not always co-incide, and occasionally we disagree about what is best for our children. I'm convinced, however, that what is best for our children is that we **don't** always agree – that each of us brings a certain dimension to parenthood that complements the other' (*Living and Loving*, 1994, p 62).

A new definition of motherhood

I'd like to quote a little episode here. It happened some time ago but the message is still valid.

A few months ago, when I was picking up the children at school, another mother I know well rushed up to me. Emily was fuming with indignation.

'Do you know what you and I are?' she demanded.

Before I could give her an answer – and I didn't really have one handy – she blurted out the reason for her question. It seemed she had just returned from renewing her driver's licence. Asked to state her occupation, Emily hesitated, uncertain how to classify herself.

'What I mean,' explained the clerk, 'is do you have a job or are you just a ...?'

‘Of course I have a job,’ snapped Emily, ‘I’m a mother.’

The clerk smiled indulgently. Then she wrote ‘Occupation: Housewife.’

‘Oh, no!’ protested Emily, ‘I’d rather be listed as a mother.’

‘We don’t list “mother” as an occupation. “Housewife” covers it,’ said the clerk emphatically.

I forgot all about her story until one day I found myself in the same situation, this time at the Town Hall. The clerk was obviously a career woman, poised, efficient and possessed of a high-sounding title, like ‘official interrogator’ or ‘Town registrar’.

‘And what is your occupation?’ she probed.

What made me say it, I do not know. The words just simply poured out.

‘I’m a research associate in the field of child development and human relations.’

The clerk paused, ball-point pen frozen in mid-air and looked up, as though she had not heard right. I repeated the title slowly, emphasising the significant words. Then I stared with wonder as my pompous pronouncement was written in bold, black ink on the official questionnaire.

‘Might I ask,’ said the clerk with interest, ‘just what you do in your field?’

Coolly, without any trace of fluster in my voice, I heard myself reply, ‘I have a continuing programme of research [what mother doesn’t?] in the laboratory and in the field [normally I would have said ‘indoors and out’]. I’m working for my master’s [the whole darned family!] and already have four credits [all daughters]. Of course, the job is one of the most demanding in the humanities [any mother care to disagree?] and I often work a fourteen-hour day [24-hour is more like it!]. But the job is more challenging than most run-of-the-mill careers, and the rewards are in satisfaction, rather than just money.’

There was an increasing note of respect in the clerk’s voice, as she completed the form, stood up and ushered me personally to the door.

As I drove into our driveway, buoyed up by my glamorous new career, I was greeted by my ‘lab assistants’ aged 13, 7 and 3. Upstairs, I could hear our new experimental model (six months) in the child development programme, testing out a new vocal pattern.

I felt triumphant. I had scored a beat on beaurocracy. I had gone

down on the official records as someone more distinguished and indispensable to mankind, than just 'mother'.

Home – what a glorious career! Especially when there is a title on the door.

Esther Wilkinson Cross

(This delightful anecdote was featured in a magazine that went out of print many years ago. So I cannot be more specific in my acknowledgement.)

PARENTS AS TEAM MATES

The gainful employment of women has been one of the most dramatic changes during the past three decades. Currently, approximately 40 per cent of women in urban areas are employed (Erwee, 1994). This has obviously had an impact on women's role as homemaker and parent.

A vast body of research investigating these changes has been spawned. Some findings are remarkably consistent – notably that women's entry into the labour market has greatly increased their workload. In fact, reference is made to their 'double day'. What this means is that the roles of women have changed more dramatically than those of men, and that there is not always a fair division of labour in the home.

In the traditional family, the roles of husband and wife are clearly defined. He is the breadwinner, she the full-time homemaker and mother. There is little ambiguity about who does what in the home. Although each partner may help the other, this is not prescribed in any way.

In one dual-earner marriage, for example, Brendon is a business executive and Joyce a journalist. Both face heavy demands in their work situation. Their joint salary enables them to live a life of material comfort and security. They have a son of ten, and a daughter of seven, and they have the back-up services of a part-time domestic. Joyce does the shopping and cooking for the family. Brendon sees to breakfast for the family and looks after the garden. They take turns to transport their children to and from school. Joyce supervises homework. Their role division works fairly well, but Joyce feels overburdened, and especially when there is a crisis, like a sick child or a deadline for her to meet at work. Brendon feels that compared with other men, he does more than his share and is entitled to having Saturday off for golf. Joyce sees this differently, and says: 'Saturday is my catching-up day, pre-cooking for the next week, shopping, spending special time with

the children, having my hair cut and so on. I would also like a day off.'

In rural families, role patterns used to be particularly well defined, but this is no longer always the case. Greta, for example, sees to the running of the farm, while her husband works as a bookkeeper in the nearby town.

The extended family, too, is changing. Nzimande, who undertook research in a rural Zulu community, remarks: 'Much debate still goes on as to the exact type of change that has taken place. Certainly, it has not been a case of replacing one family form with another. Often, we find aspects of different systems coexisting' (1996, p 45). Jithoo (1996) claims that the Indian family in South Africa is changing towards the nuclear family system but that it is not the same as the Western nuclear family because it still exhibits many of the features of the joint family, as reflected in traditional values and certain inter-generational family obligations.

Not surprisingly, there is scope for considerable role confusion. On the other hand, these changes have also brought some advantages, notably the greater flexibility concerning the roles within a particular family, to suit its specific needs. The disadvantages lie in uncertainty about role fulfilment and the potential for role strain and role conflict.



Role strain occurs when the demands of one or several roles produce a situation of overdemand and overwork. A case in point would be that of Raymond, a young medical intern, working 18 hours a day and trying, not very successfully, to maintain a relationship with his wife and new baby.

Another example is that of Linda, a young mother with three children under the age of four. Her husband, Pieter, is often away from home on long business trips and may not be there when his practical and moral support may be most needed. As they live far from family and close friends, crises such as having a sick child can be particularly difficult for Linda to manage.

Role conflict occurs when the demands of one role conflict with another. For example, Elisabeth is a mother of two teenagers. She has a demanding job as a teacher and is studying for a degree. Examination times at school clash with her own, thus creating a real problem for her.

Then there is Moses, who works long hours in his shop to make ends meet, but he only sees his children when they are asleep because he gets

home so late. He would like to see much more of them, but his economic position makes this difficult, because his business must be his first priority for the survival of the family.

Support

Role strain and role conflict can be reduced if sufficient support is available, especially in times of pressure and stress. Such support is one of the strengths of the extended family with its strong ties with siblings and kinship folk, often living nearby. In the nuclear family, such support is often lacking because of its emphasis on self-sufficiency and independence. Moreover, family members may be living far apart. To some extent, childcare facilities have come to replace the extended family, but they are not always affordable or accessible. Sometimes self-help groups provide backup for people finding themselves in similar situations, such as an association for mothers of multiple births, or a neighbourhood group of single parents.

Parenting: who does what?

The question of who does what in the home concerning household and parenting tasks has generated much debate and research. On the whole, research findings indicate considerable variation, which is not surprising in view of the many factors implicated. Nevertheless, certain trends can be briefly summarised.

- Not unexpectedly, the most general finding is that women perform far more parenting tasks than men.
- Interestingly, mothers and fathers view their own and each other's role fulfilment somewhat differently. Both tend to estimate their own contribution as higher than their partner gives them credit for.
- There are less clearly defined roles for fathers in urbanised technological societies than in rural areas. A South African study found urban black fathers more involved in family responsibilities than their rural counterparts or those in transition from rural to urban living. This suggests that urbanisation has a particularly important effect on changing parenting roles (Edwards, Borsten & Kunene, 1986).
- The extent of a father's participation is not generally much affected by

the wife's employment. Although she may be sharing the breadwinner role equally, this does not necessarily mean that he will equally share the parental role. The greatest role uncertainty, in fact, seems to be in dual earner couples (Gerdes, Coetzee, Cronje, 1996; Maconachie, 1985).

- There are indications that men's attitudes have changed, but this is not necessarily paralleled to the same extent by their actual behaviour. Societal attitudes may have much to do with this. In fact, Lamb (1975) refers to the father as the 'forgotten parent'. Nonetheless, there is a 'quiet revolution' going on as more men are asserting their right to greater participation as nurturers and not only as providers for the child, as in the past. Numerous studies concerning the possible detrimental effects of a father's ongoing absence or non-involvement with his children have highlighted his specific importance as parent. It is noteworthy that nowadays more fathers are fighting for custody of their children.

No general rules can be formulated for role division in the home, but in the interest of a harmonious relationship, the focus should be on fairness as seen by a particular couple and determined by their particular circumstances. With the foregoing in mind, the following exercise could be undertaken.

EXERCISE

Each partner should complete the following questionnaire separately, and then couples should compare the results. It should be borne in mind that the list will be affected by the age of the child, or children, in the home. Clearly, some tasks refer to younger and some to older children. Ignore those which seem irrelevant.

In the column below, indicate who performs the following tasks and allocate a score as follows:

If you do it all, score 4 points.

If you do most of it, score 3 points.

If you do approximately half, score 2 points.

If you do it occasionally, score 1 point.

If you never do it, score nothing.

(You may wish to add to the list to make it more relevant to your own situation.)

TASKS OF PARENTS	DONE BY		
	Mother	Father	Others
Physical care			
Playing games			
Visits to doctor/clinic etc			
Transporting children			
Talking to a child			
Reading to a child			
Answering questions			
Seeking information together			
Interest in school work			
Encouraging child's interests			
Encouraging good study habits			
Comforting child when distressed			
Dealing with child's worries and fears			
Giving emotional support			
Sharing joy and laughter			
Creating opportunities for social contact with friends			
Supporting school functions			
Monitoring social activities (where is your child and with whom?)			
Discipline/control			
Rewarding good behaviour			
Restraining; punishing			
Teaching acceptable behaviour			
Teaching/sharing religious beliefs			
Developing a code of values			
Other (name them)			
TOTAL SCORE:			

- How close or different are the final scores? What have you learnt from this exercise? Is this work division reasonable, bearing in mind your special circumstances? In other words, take account of the time each parent has, his or her state of health and energy, and ability to deal with certain tasks.
- What tasks would you like to be involved with more, or less?
- If you are feeling very overworked is this a temporary situation or an ongoing one? Is some renegotiation of tasks required?

It may also be helpful to complete a similar table for household activities because the time and energy available for parenting will also depend on the extent of one's involvement in household activities.

These exercises may leave you feeling over- or under-worked! The point is not only how much is done, but whether it is done with enjoyment or resentment. For example, Esther loves cooking and spends a great deal of time in the kitchen but really enjoys it. Her sister, Lucy, dislikes cooking and spends as little time as possible in the kitchen, and never stops grumbling about it. Mike enjoys preparing special dinners, but won't make breakfast.

Some renegotiation of roles may be required or sources of support be enlisted if there is acute role strain or conflict. But it also needs to be remembered that family situations change with time and that some demanding and difficult periods do not last for ever.

SUMMING UP

This chapter has gone well beyond parenting as such because parents are, after all, individuals with their own needs, role commitments and preferences. Parenthood has to be woven into the fabric of their lives in a meaningful way in the interests of their child's development and their own.

The flexibility of work distribution in the family and home these days should be seen as a challenge for each couple, testing their ingenuity and allowing for the expression of their individual talents and skills.

At this point it is perhaps appropriate to consider what children's perceptions of a good parent are.

To a child a good parent is one who

- does things for and with the child
- can be relied on
- is not too strict
- is fair in discipline
- respects the child's individuality
- inspires love not fear
- is even-tempered
- shows affection
- is sympathetic when the child is hurt
- encourages friends in the home
- grants independence appropriate for age
- does not expect unreasonable achievements
- creates a happy atmosphere
- has time to share
- gives encouragement.



CHAPTER 7

MILESTONES AND STAGES OF PARENTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Life tasks of early adulthood

Transition to parenthood

Changes in the couple's relationship

The beginnings of parenthood

Milestones of early childhood development

Some crucial concerns of parents with babies and young children

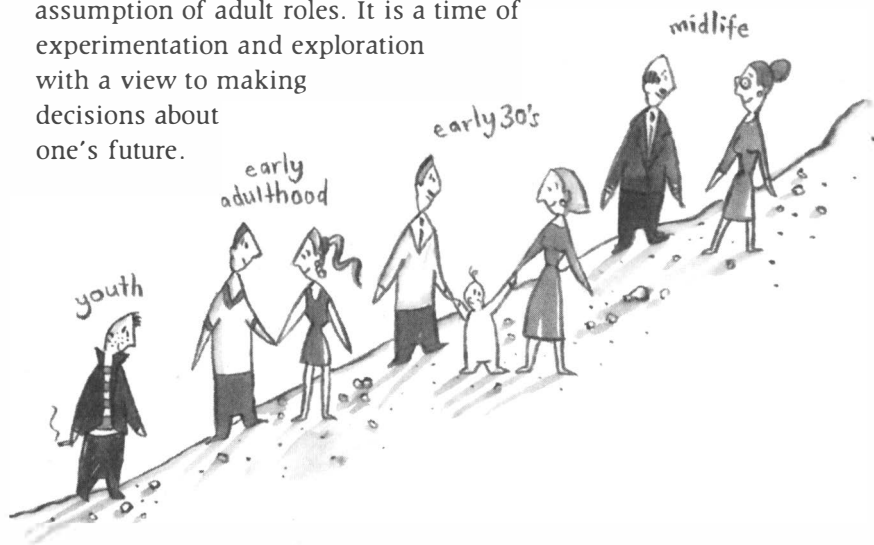
Summing up

MILESTONES AND STAGES OF PARENTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

It is easier to identify the stages of childhood and adolescence than of adulthood. We easily recognise the crawling stage, the 'terrible twos', the idealism of the teenager. We may be less aware of the identity crisis of midlife.

In the past adulthood was simply divided into three broad stages: young, middle-aged and old. In recent decades these major stages have been broken down into finer phases, such as:

- **Youth:** This is the transition to adulthood. It may be brief or extended. It is the time between leaving school and the assumption of adult roles. It is a time of experimentation and exploration with a view to making decisions about one's future.



- **Early adulthood:** This falls somewhere in the twenties. It is characterised by entry into the adult world; the focus is on acquiring competence at roles at work and in the family, and making choices.
- **Early thirties:** This is a period of settling down and commitments are deepened. It has been referred to as the establishment stage, in which the focus is more inward and on the family and raising children.
- **Late thirties – early forties:** Also known as the midlife transition, it

may be a midlife crisis. In the work situation it often means becoming one's own person with ideas and a style of one's own. There may be some reality shock at finding oneself at the midpoint in life. Sometimes there is a gap between one's youthful dreams and their actual fulfilment. A crisis may be precipitated if existing roles and priorities are questioned and come under serious review.

- **Mid-forties – early fifties:** This tends to be a fairly stable period unless early retirement is considered or a major upheaval is caused by particular circumstances (Gerdes *et al*, 1988; Gould, 1978; Levinson, 1978).

These divisions are much more arbitrary than those of childhood because they are strongly influenced by family and work roles. Moreover, the cumulative experience of life will add to individual differences: one person may marry young, have several children before the age of 30, another may not marry at all; one person may be a farmer, another a teacher and so on. Despite all such differences certain general trends and sequences are sufficiently common to provide some kind of chart through adulthood.

There is a period of transition between each of the main life-stages. They may proceed gradually and smoothly, or be a time of crisis and upheaval. Pregnancy could be seen as the transition to parenthood, the midlife transition as the lead-in to middle age, retirement the transition to old age.

There may also be general conditions within a community which either hinder or promote progress through these stages. A dramatic improvement in one's standard of living, health or education will in all likelihood promote development. Poverty, war and unrest may seriously limit it. Nevertheless, the way in which circumstances are responded to varies enormously. What makes one person breaks another.

LIFE TASKS OF EARLY ADULthood

Many new life tasks confront the young adult. The period between 20 and 30 in particular is a time of tremendous learning as several new tasks may have to be mastered at the same time.

Tasks relating to the self include:

- becoming independent economically and psychologically, and assuming responsibility for one's future
- achieving a sense of identity, knowing who and what one is
- defining one's values and applying them to different life situations
- defining short- and long-term goals
- developing the capacity for long-term commitment

Tasks relating to work include:

- completing one's training, finding work and becoming established in an occupation
- establishing a pattern of recreation

Tasks concerning the family include:

- choosing a life partner
- learning to live with a marriage partner
- establishing a home
- becoming a parent and raising a child(ren)

Tasks relating to the community include:

- finding one's place in the community and becoming a part of it.

(Gerdes *et al*, 1988)

This is a formidable list of tasks to have to accomplish, each one being complex in itself. Although preparation for them will have begun earlier, this is the time when they have to be dealt with in earnest. Sometimes these tasks are dealt with in succession, as when a woman first completes her training, becomes established in a career and then later, in her thirties, settles down to motherhood. Often these tasks have to be managed more or less simultaneously, making it a period of considerable challenge and, possibly, one of role overload.

Levinson (1978) found that young men tend to have an occupational 'dream' at this stage: one man's dream is to own a small business; another wants to be a missionary; one man's dream is to be an artist; another's is to be a doctor.

Women too have dreams about the future, but may be less single-minded in their pursuit of it. They may have to face the dilemma of choosing between career and family roles, or learning to combine them in various ways.

If some of the life tasks have already been mastered to some extent, parenthood and its many demands may be more easily met than if one is still at the beginning of learning about several new roles and tasks.

TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD

Few life events change one's lifestyle and interaction as a couple as much as becoming a parent does. During the months of pregnancy many changes have already occurred. Apart from the obvious physical changes of pregnancy, changes may already be planned and practical preparations made for the birth of the baby. Here, however, we are concerned mainly with the psychological preparation of the parents.

Parental readiness

Reactions to the realisation that a baby is on its way may range from great joy to consternation. Many considerations and realities will play a part in determining these reactions. Is the baby wanted? Are the couple married? Are the parents able to cope financially with another mouth to feed? How will the mother's work role or schooling be affected?

There are no tests which measure psychological readiness for parenthood as there are, for example, for school readiness. Moreover, the first reactions to knowing one is to become a parent are not necessarily predictive of later attitudes and behaviour. A first reaction of consternation may give way to an attitude of acceptance. This may happen quite dramatically, as when Tom, a young expectant father, saw his baby on the sonar screen for the first time. Tom remarked: 'Until I saw the little one on the screen, it was just an abstract idea, but here was this living, moving little being and it was part of me! It was mind boggling. Something happened to me. There and then I truly became a father.'

Not all attitudes change suddenly or dramatically, or even for the better. Unrealistic ideas about beautiful babies and glamorous, relaxed and smiling mothers, as seen in glossy magazines, may painfully give way to more realistic perceptions as weary and anxious parents cope with the realities of parenthood.

While some may face parenthood sooner than expected, others may

postpone it for as long as possible, such as some career women in demanding professions. This does not necessarily mean greater readiness for the demands of parenthood. An older person may have an established lifestyle which is not readily modified to incorporate a baby, nor can babies be programmed not to disturb a mother's or a father's lifestyle. Furthermore, the sheer physical stamina required for parenting may be waning at this time. On the other hand, late parenthood may benefit from greater psychological maturity, more developed coping skills, and a tried and tested marital team.

Sally's first child was born when she was barely eighteen. She had completed school very successfully but had not yet started further training when she found herself pregnant. Her husband, Ted, was twenty and just starting his studies at university, for which he had been awarded a substantial bursary. Ted had to change to part-time studies and find work to help support a wife and child. The young couple moved into the small home of his parents. Living was tough for all under these constrained economic conditions and in rather crowded conditions. After many difficult and often frustrating years, Ted and Sally were able to move to a small home of their own. Both agreed that unexpected parenthood had 'forced us to grow up fast'. Sally added somewhat wistfully: 'I wish we had had a little time to ourselves first. We really were too young for the responsibility.' Ted said: 'It was tough trying to study late at night after a day's work and then not being able to get away from a restless baby. I love our little fellow, but it would have been easier and probably more fun if we had been financially secure and more independent when he arrived.'

Ted and Sally's marriage had survived the stresses and strains of early, unplanned parenthood. Many do not. When asked what had helped them most, they agreed it had been their love for one another and Sally's impish sense of humour.

A different story is told by Sue, a marketing executive, who had her first child at the age of 38. 'I really wanted this baby but I was in for a reality shock. After Jenna's birth I spent the first few months eating all my words of wisdom so freely given to friends on how to rear children. This job of mother was tough! I vacillated between unbelievable joy and total despair. I found it difficult to accept that I had so little control over things and my emotions. I was so vulnerable.'

Somewhere between these two extremes of very young and 'old' parents, we find the majority of first-time parents. They are often in the stage of early adulthood, somewhere between 22 and their early thirties.

Factors promoting adjustment to parenthood

The birth of the first child has often been seen as a crisis situation for the parents. Many researchers have focused on this stage and have brought the following to light. The transition to parenthood is generally easier:

- if the relationship between the parents is good
- if the husband is supportive
- if the baby is an 'easy' baby
- if the mother's health is good
- if the family's income is adequate
- if expectations of themselves as parents and of their child are fairly realistic
- if the marriage has been of two or more years' duration, that is, if the couple have established a lifestyle of togetherness
- if there has been some preparation for parenthood, either by bringing up younger siblings or attending courses on parenthood
- if adequate sources of practical support are available

EXERCISE

At this point the question might well be asked: Can parents be prepared for parenthood so that they become more effective parents? The first step in this connection is to honestly confront their motives and expectations. Consider the following questions:

- Is our relationship strong enough to cope with parenthood?
- Do I want a child for the right reasons?
- What could be wrong reasons for wanting a child?
- What changes will I have to make to my life to accommodate a child?
- Am I ready to make these changes?
- Who is going to take care of the child? What will father/mother do?
- What sources of support are available and how will they be used?

These questions should first be answered separately by each person, then compared and discussed together.

If you are already a family, consider the question:

- How has being a parent influenced our lifestyle?
-

Expectations and myths surrounding parenthood

Our expectations powerfully influence our reactions to situations. If a mother's expectations of parenthood are based on myths, such as that of the glamorous, contented, coping mother of a well-regulated, happy, glowing baby, she may be astonished, appalled and guilty to discover some negative attitudes in herself.

It was in reaction to the myth of blissful, fully satisfying motherhood that a new questioning self-awareness began to emerge. In the 1970s several books appeared which honestly told of the frustration, boredom, fatigue, uncertainties and disillusionment of many first-time mothers. These feelings had not readily been admitted before, because they were incompatible with the romanticised idea of motherhood. Such negative feelings do not generally eclipse those of joy, unfathomable love and tenderness, but the admission of their existence ushered in a new honesty about the mixed feelings which may accompany parenthood. Unrealistic expectations can lead to a sense of disappointment, but more realistic expectations foster acceptance and patience.



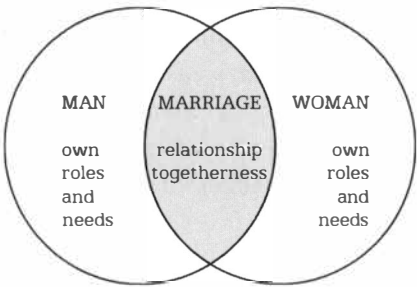
Societal attitudes can exert a powerful influence on expectations and behaviour. For example: 'To the Xhosa, procreation is an obligation and a divine directive' (Mwamwenda, 1989).

A popular myth is that there is a **maternal instinct** akin to that found in animals, who know instinctively how to rear their young. In humans the matter of childrearing is much more complex. While there is undoubtedly a strong quality of nurturance or latent motherliness in most women, this in itself does not ensure that she will know how to rear her child: most of this is learnt. However, if she believes that some hidden instinct will suddenly reveal all she needs to know, she will surely be disappointed. Moreover, if a husband believes that a maternal instinct will

immediately turn his wife into Supermom, then he will feel fully justified in leaving the child-rearing responsibility entirely to her! Yet fathers too have qualities required for parenting: they too can be nurturant, protective and guiding towards those in their care. Ideally, a child should be in the care of a parental team.

CHANGES IN THE COUPLE'S RELATIONSHIP

Before the arrival of the first child a couple's relationship scenario could look something like this: they may spend a good deal of time together and also have considerable time for their own needs, roles and interests.

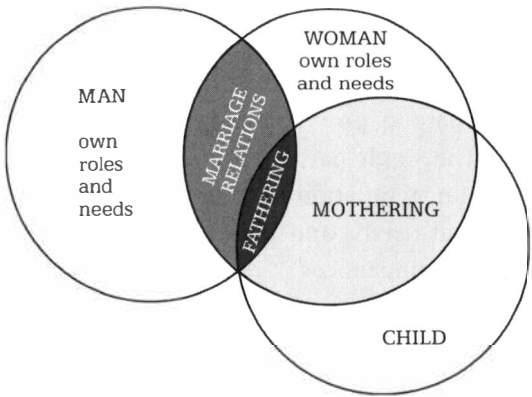


The arrival of a baby will change this pattern dramatically. Because a baby is completely helpless at birth it depends entirely on others for its wellbeing.

Inevitably, there will be less time for the parents to spend together and on themselves. After the arrival of the first child the couple's interaction scenario may look more like this:

This scenario is fairly typical after the arrival of the first child. Note how the mother's time for herself has shrunk, as has the couple's time for togetherness as a couple.

Much of the mother's time is devoted to the baby but far less of the father's time. For various reasons the father's involvement may be limited. Sometimes this situation is forced by circumstances, such as the father's occupation which keeps him away from home for extended periods. Sometimes it is the choice of both partners. But it may be the choice of only one of the parents and resented by the other.



Sometimes other child carers may take over much of the mother's role, substantially changing this scenario.

Balancing parents' and children's needs

It takes some time for the scenario to be adapted to accommodate the new arrival, which may be associated with upheaval demanding much effort, patience and flexibility. After a few months a pattern is generally established, but as the family grows and children grow up so it will change again and again.

The primacy of parental needs and those of their children differ across the life stages of parent and child and it is not always easy to achieve a balance between them. When a parent is under many pressures simultaneously, priorities may have to be reassessed, role patterns may have to be temporarily changed and additional sources of support may have to be enlisted.

Single parents

The sketches of the different scenarios demonstrate that a single parent will require strong sources of support in order to cope with several life roles simultaneously and adequately. The position of the affluent single parent is likely to be very different from that of a less affluent, or deprived counterpart. The more affluent will be able to pay for good support services; the less affluent may not be able to do so. In many cases grandparents provide strong support, either willingly or reluctantly.

The single parent of limited means and with little practical support is often in a situation of great role overload, with little time or energy for personal needs, and may find it difficult to be an effective parent under such circumstances.

Nevertheless, there are many single parents who do cope well and possibly better than immature or severely conflicted couples. In the final analysis it is the parent's maturity, loving concern and problem-solving ability which counts for more than marital status in determining parental effectiveness – be it as mother or as father.

THE BEGINNINGS OF PARENTHOOD

Once conception has occurred, numerous physical changes take place in the mother-to-be. These are well known and not the focus of this book which is concerned with psychological reactions.

Becoming a mother

A mother's immediate reaction after giving birth is mostly one of relief, joy, pride and happiness, especially if all is well with her and the child. She may be rather emotional and a few days after the baby's arrival may have the 'baby blues', when she is weepy for no apparent reason. This is usually a passing phase and is probably due to a combination of factors including hormonal changes and a sense of anticlimax so often experienced after the build-up to some special event. The new mother may also feel somewhat overwhelmed by the responsibility which now rests on her inexperienced shoulders. This is a time when the help she is given in practical ways and in emotional support is very important.

Episodes of the 'baby blues' should not be confused with post-natal depression. As the name implies, this is a much more serious condition. It is characterised by a sense of deep despair, acute anxiety, and a change in personality, as when a formerly competent person becomes overwhelmed by a sense of utter helplessness and may find it difficult to relate to the baby. The depression is out of all proportion to the actual situation. This condition may last for weeks and months and requires specialised medical and psychological treatment.

A woman's **identity** has to be redefined to incorporate her new role as mother. This may enhance her self-esteem. Greater maturity may be revealed in that she becomes less focused on her self and more on her child's needs and as she opens up to a whole new range of experiences.

Susan remarks: 'I am still me and yet I am different. I was never anxious about my safety before but now I am because my safety is now also my child's safety.' Judy says: 'My priorities have changed: my baby's weight gain is more important than regaining my figure, though I'm not saying that my figure is no longer important – it's just no longer all important.' Janet, a dentist, chuckles: 'My baby's first tooth was the greatest miracle I ever saw!'

A baby's arrival profoundly affects a mother's **lifestyle**. Her workload

is increased enormously, especially if she has little or no support. Her time allocation will change as she spends less time on some activities to cope with the demands of her child. Her sleep patterns will change especially for the first few months. Her freedom of movement is likely to be restricted and going shopping with a baby becomes quite a complicated procedure.

Becoming a father

The father may also experience a wide spectrum of **emotions** which range from pride and joy to apprehension as he recognises his additional responsibilities. He too will lose some of his personal freedom unless he sees the baby's care as only the mother's responsibility. Some fathers may be uneasy with a small baby but can give much needed practical support in other ways. Other fathers may be particularly comfortable in handling babies and may be more relaxed about it than the mother.

The man's **identity** also changes to incorporate the new role of father. In fact the entire kinship system changes as brothers and sisters become uncles and aunts, and parents become grandparents, and he, as father, is suddenly part of the middle generation. Becoming a father can increase his self-esteem. One wife was amazed to see her husband, who had not seemed over-enthusiastic about parenthood, proudly wearing a T-shirt boldly proclaiming 'I'm a DAD'.

A father may change his roles and time allocation less than the mother. However, his attitude toward his roles may change and he may take his work more seriously than before, knowing he is now also a provider for his child.

And baby makes three!

The arrival of a baby can cement or disrupt a couple's relationship: this will depend mainly on the relationship prior to the baby's arrival. If the wife tended to 'mother' the husband, she may now transfer her nurturing to the child, which could be experienced as a loss by him. For a time at least, the child is likely to become the mother's priority. Some husbands may feel deprived and may go through a period of mourning. Many husbands now develop a strong sense of responsibility for their growing family.

HYPER-PHARM QUEENSWOOD

1192 WITTLE LANE
QUEENSWOOD
0186

Name VILJOEN, EG. MEV
Address LYS ST 163A
Adres RIETONDALE

Patient/Pasient: JOHAN W
Scheme/Skema: BSTA

!!!!RETAIN FOR TAX PURPOSES / BEWAAR VIR BELASTING DOELEINDES!!!!

Date / Datum	Ref / Verw	Profile / Profiel
09/10/1999	00091881	000322

.....

Amount Received By/Bedrag Ontvang Deur:

>Receipt of Prescribed Medicine<
Gross/Bruto: R11.64

No Of Items/Aantal Items: 1 TOTAL/TOTAAL

R11.64

Both parents may be surprised by the reactions of their partners. Tom is amazed by his wife's endless patience with the baby, having known her as a fairly impatient person. She in turn cannot believe the way he brags about the baby.

Sometimes unrevealed shortcomings surface: an unwillingness to adapt to a new situation, a lack of patience, or a selfishness which was not revealed before when no great demands had been made on selflessness. Whatever form the change may take, it inevitably leads to changed perceptions and behaviour in the other spouse: disappointment, anger or resentment may surface.

The character of the home changes. Disorder may replace order. Nothing seems to happen as it used to any more as mealtimes and sleep patterns change and one wonders if one will ever find time to read a book again!

The wife may feel physically too tired and emotionally too drained to be interested in sex, while the husband may need to be reassured that the baby has not taken all his wife's affection. Nevertheless, after some time certain patterns do again develop as all members of the family begin to settle down.

It is very important for a couple to communicate and share their feelings, uncertainties and joys to avoid misunderstandings and to get to know each other as parents. This is the beginning of becoming a parental team.

Becoming a parenting team

The idealised image of what parenthood entails may be rudely shattered when the realities of baby-care begin to be understood. Moreover, babies do not come with instruction manuals suited to the needs of a particular child.

Parenthood thus entails on-the-job training with a good deal of trial and error. Under these circumstances it certainly helps if parents function as a mutually supportive team. Such support may range from help with household matters like dishwashing or cooking by the husband to sympathetic encouragement.

Mark's refusal to hold the small baby was seen by Margaret as a sign of his lack of interest and caring. After a major row Mark blurted out: 'I'm scared to death to hold this little thing – you know how easily I

drop things.’ Beginning to understand Mark’s fear, Margaret propped him up on the bed and then gently laid the baby in his arms: here he felt secure holding the baby. It further eased the tension when Margaret admitted how unsure of herself she had felt when she first bathed the baby.

Earlier in this book knowledge was defined as one of the main pillars of parenting: knowledge of the sequences of development leads to more realistic expectations. It is hoped that a better grasp of a child’s development will help the parent to share its wide-eyed wonder as it discovers the world around it.

MILESTONES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

At birth the infant is totally dependent on others for its survival. Unlike little puppies or kittens, who soon after birth are able to wobble their way to their mother and find a teat, little humans are far less adept in their first contacts with the world. This should not lead us to assume that the infant is totally unaware and unresponsive to its environment. Already many mechanisms are functioning and ready to develop with astonishing speed. For example, at birth the baby’s brain is about one quarter of its adult weight, at six months approximately one half, at two and a half years it is 75 per cent and by the age of five it has reached about 90 per cent of adult weight. However, it takes about ten years to reach half the height of adulthood.

The foregoing highlights some important characteristics of childhood development:

- different aspects of development proceed at their own pace; some faster than others
- development proceeds from the head downwards
- such development occurs by means of maturation, that is a natural process of the unfolding of human potential.

Such maturation cannot be hurried; it occurs according to its own pre-programmed sequence, although there are variations in the time at which certain motor skills are mastered: some children walk at ten months, others at sixteen months. But generally babies first sit, then crawl, then walk. It is well established by now that the early motor development of

black babies is ahead of that of all other ethnic groups, but the sequence in which different motor skills appear is the same (Mwamwenda, 1989).

Abnormal conditions such as severe illness, severe malnutrition or extreme restriction may impede the process of development. While parents cannot substantially alter the pace of development, they can create an environment in which development is fostered and exercised as it emerges.

The competence of the newborn

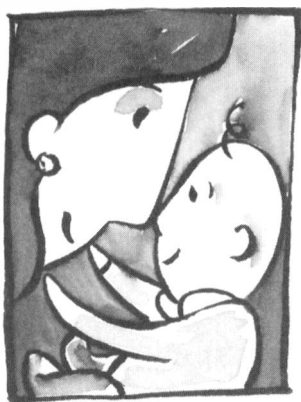
The newborn is more competent than is generally supposed. At birth or shortly thereafter:

- The sucking reflex is ready and the infant sucks whatever is placed in its mouth.
- Coughing, blinking and yawning responses occur.
- Crying is the earliest form of communication and it is estimated that infants spend about 67 per cent of time crying. Most mothers soon learn to distinguish between different cries of discomfort, hunger and pain. A mother's or father's appropriate responsiveness to the baby's crying is important for the bonding between them.

Vision: What can a baby see and is it able to discriminate visually between different stimuli? Some highly ingenious research has shown that visual abilities develop early. For example, infants show definite preferences for certain shapes and focus more on some than on others. They begin by focusing on the human face and especially on the eyes. It

takes approximately six months for the baby to see the face as a whole and this forms the basis of the recognition of familiar faces, and the enthusiastic response to them. It also explains why at this stage a baby begins to show some fear of strangers – it now knows the difference!

Babies are stimulated visually in many ways, as when a mother looks at the infant at close range, smiles at it, talks to it, feeds and baths it. In this face-to-face caring activity we see the earliest interactions, which all form part of the bonding process.



A baby may also respond to colour early on and here I indulge in a grandmotherly reminiscence. When she was three weeks old, I was babysitting my granddaughter. The place was London and the weather was chill and humid. Nappies in various stages of dampness hung in bathroom, kitchen and were also draped around the cot for airing. I found myself with a baby lying in her cot niggling away in discontent. A routine check of nappies, burping and softly cooing to her, had no effect. I picked her up and carried her around and this she seemed to like. However, the telephone rang and baby was deposited on her parent's bed. I returned to the bedroom and found her wide awake, gazing around and quite content. Somewhat later I put her back into the cot – and the niggling started again. Again, I picked her up, placed her on the bed as I went to answer the doorbell and once again returned to a contented baby. Back in her cot the niggle started almost immediately. Intrigued by now I began to wonder what was wrong with the cot! Imagining myself lying there all I saw was a wall of white nappies. By contrast, on the bed, there was a cherry red blanket and a sheet in shades of blue sprinkled with white and yellow daisies. Now I began to experiment in earnest, moving baby from cot to bed and back again and always with the same results. Finally, I removed the nappies from the cot and instead draped some colourful material across the sides of the cot. The niggles stopped as she contentedly gazed at the material. Clearly the little one liked colour. Interestingly enough, as an adult she has become an artist with a feeling for the bold use of colour.

Hearing and smell: Hearing develops while the baby is still in the mother's womb. So, if you would like to encourage a taste for classical music you now know how early you can begin!

Infants are able to **smell** and distinguish between pleasant and unpleasant smells a few days after birth.

Touch is very important and babies like to be held, cuddled and caressed. For the infant, touching becomes an increasingly important means of examining the world. By six months the baby is actively exploring different textures, shapes and sizes of objects within its reach. It is also through touch that the baby gets to know its own body.

Emotional and social development

Babies respond to loving care and mothers and fathers are encouraged to hold their babies as soon after birth as possible. Emotional bonding is

encouraged by this physical closeness. A caring relationship is built through the satisfaction of the baby's needs, but physical care is not enough – the child also senses the feeling behind the care. It is, for example, possible to see to a child's physical needs adequately in an automatic kind of way but the child also needs emotional warmth and tenderness if it is to thrive optimally and bond closely.



POINT TO PONDER

'During the first six months, the baby has the rudiments of love language available ... There is the language of the embrace, the language of the eyes, the language of the smile, vocal communications of pleasure and distress. It is the essential vocabulary of love before we can speak of love' (Selma Fraiberg).

Balance between dependence and independence: An important task of parents is to strive for a balance between dependence and independence. The younger the child, the less developed its motor and other skills, the more help it requires. A two-year-old cannot tie shoe laces or make a bow: this only becomes possible after the age of five. Once a child is able to carry out a task on its own it should be encouraged to do so. Parents are too often inclined to perform a task long after a child has learnt to do it reasonably well because it is quicker and easier for them to do it. But if this is done all the time then they are actually depriving their child of the opportunity to learn a skill, become more independent and, especially, to gain self-confidence.



POINT TO PONDER

The first five years of life are crucial for the development of a sense of trust, love and security which forms the basis of subsequent human relationships. It is also the time when the foundation is laid for self-reliance and independence in carrying out many simple tasks.

Emotional vulnerability

Emotionally, the baby and pre-schooler have a certain vulnerability due to the following factors:

- the emotional intensity of the attachment to the mother, or father, or other major caretaker, and the fear when they go away, disapprove or reject the child
- a limited understanding of the world
- the enormous developmental and adjustment demands it has to face
- the frustrations others impose upon it: think of the many things a small child would like to do and is stopped from doing – often for its own safety
- the frustrations of many failures: think of all the things a child wants to do, sees older children and adults doing, and when it tries to also do them may not succeed at all. This point highlights the need to praise a child's efforts and successes and to set realistic goals.



In view of the above vulnerabilities it is not surprising that young children may have many fears, such as fear of the dark, being left alone, being chased by monsters and so on. They gradually learn to cope with them if parents:

- build the child's confidence in its own abilities to cope
- are patient and loving
- gradually help the child to confront the fearful situation, for example if the child is afraid of the sea, let it play on the sand, take it to small rock pools to get the feel of the water, take it by the hand to the edge of the surf but only as far as it will go, and so on
- give explanations about why something need not be feared as the child's understanding grows
- provide examples of how to deal with a particular fear
- do not ridicule a child's fears

Often a parent does not know the nature of a child's fear since the child may not be able to define it clearly – even for itself. Remember that a

vague understanding precedes the ability to clearly recognise and express ideas and emotions. Selma Fraiberg (1959), a child therapist, gives an example of the fear of a four-year-old boy which seemed inexplicable to his parents. At the age of four, this bright little boy refused to use the toilet, being reduced to sheer terror when expected to do so and continuing to soil his pants. The parents saw this as defiance and stubbornness. In their desperation they appealed to Selma Fraiberg for help.

Once Fraiberg had gained the trust of this little boy he told her he was frightened of the 'lobster' in the toilet. Puzzled at first she eventually came to realise that the child meant 'monster'. This monster lived in the toilet and was 'gonna eat him up!' Seen from this point of view the child's fear began to make sense. The monster which lived in the toilet made growling noises like a lion, Gr-r-rr (the flushing noise). Moreover, whatever was put in the toilet was eaten up – it disappeared! Quite logical really – and the fear concerning the toilet quite understandable when seen like this!

This example also aptly illustrates some of the features of early childhood thinking: what a child imagines seems real to it; and the distinction between living and non-living objects such as lions and toilets is not yet understood.

Many fears disappear after a while, perhaps because the child's level of understanding has increased, because it feels more secure or for reasons we do not know.

The self-image

One's self-image is the way we perceive ourselves to be. A child's self-image develops gradually, based largely on the reactions, perceptions and comments of others. 'Johnnie is so naughty', 'Mary is such a loving child', 'Joy is so pretty', 'You are a spoilt brat'; such comments provide the child with cues about itself.

EXERCISE

- 1 Can you remember early experiences or remarks by others that helped to shape your self-image? Do you think they still influence your self-perception?

2 Would you repeat, modify or avoid such comments and reactions in regard to your own child?

The feedback a child receives at first comes mainly through attention to its physical needs, such as feeding and bathing, and the love or rejection which accompany this. As the child grows older and interacts more with others so their reactions of pleasure, approval, acceptance or irritation are more clearly perceived by the child. Slowly some kind of self-image emerges, based largely on the responses from others.

Parents can promote the development of a realistic and positive self-image by:

- being realistic in their demands of a child so that there is a good likelihood of the child succeeding
- being realistic in their praise: sentiments expressed in words like 'You are the cleverest person in the world', 'No one is prettier than you' may be boosting to the self-image temporarily but may require painful reassessment at a later stage, especially if they are used all the time: an occasional over-enthusiastic response is a different matter
- giving a lot of encouragement by approval, hugging, smiling and other signs of appreciation
- being specific if admonishment or criticism is called for: 'It is not nice to hit your little sister' is a better response than 'You are a nasty boy'. In other words, focus on the specific behaviour, not the total person. (Refer back to the chapter on communication in this regard.)
- showing appreciation for responsible, kind or helpful behaviour.

Gender and self-image

A child's perception of its gender: 'I'm a boy', 'I'm a girl' is an important aspect of his or her self-image. At first Tommy may think of himself as just 'Tommy', then as 'Mummy's little boy' then as 'Tommy Foster'. Somewhere between the ages of 3 and 4 he also recognises that he is a boy, not a girl, and begins to develop a sense of gender. Society has certain expectations of what is appropriate for boys and girls, for example, girls should play with dolls, and boys should be tough. Many stereotypes tell us

of the social expectations we hold for boys and girls: 'Boys don't cry', 'Girls should be gentle and kind.'

Such stereotypes largely reflect cultural values. They reflect the kind of behaviour which heralds what will later be expected of them as adults. Because adult roles have changed and become more flexible (we now have fathers who are primary parents, female engineers, etc), so the acceptable behaviour for boys and girls has also been broadened in range. Nonetheless, certain predispositions will incline boys in general to prefer some activities and girls others. This does not mean that boys and girls should not be given the chance to play with a wide range of toys (boys with dolls and girls with tractors), nor does it mean that they should be discouraged from their own preferences.

Three points should be remembered:

- One's perception of oneself as male or female is an important part of one's self-image.
- The child's awareness of gender (being a boy or girl) emerges at 3–4 years of age.
- The **father** plays a crucial role in this process for both boys and girls.

The importance of the father in this regard seems to be that he distinguishes more between what is acceptable behaviour for boys or girls respectively (refer back to chapter 6 the section on mothering and fathering).

Personality development

Erik Erikson (1963) identified eight stages of psycho-social development, of which three fall into babyhood and the pre-school years. Each subsequent stage of development builds on the foundation of the previous one. Psycho-social development refers to inner psychological development and its interaction with certain cultural requirements.

The first stage centres on the development of trust (0–2 years). As the child's needs for food, warmth and cleanliness are taken care of by a loving mother or other caregiver, so the foundation of **trust** is laid.

From the age of two the second stage is entered, when a child becomes more independent of others. This fosters a sense of **autonomy**. The 'terrible two's' are a sign of the child's budding sense of being an

independent person, testing its own will and emerging skills and reacting with temper tantrums when it is unable to control a situation. (Parents should avoid over-reacting to them. It is better to ignore them as far as possible.) If the development of a child's autonomy is not promoted, a sense of doubt about its abilities or even a sense of shame might develop.

Between three and six years a child learns to perform many tasks by itself. It is able to feed itself, throw and catch balls, to express itself in words, to name but a few of its skills. This leads to a sense of mastery which, in turn, encourages a child to use its **initiative**.

Thinking



Up to the age of about two, a child discovers the world by means of its motor skills, reaching, throwing, moving, and by its senses, looking, smelling, tasting. Gradually patterns emerge and connections between different happenings come to be linked, as when a hungry five-month-old stops crying at the sound of the milk formula being prepared; the sound of milk powder being beaten into water has come to be linked to the satisfaction of a basic need: food!

An advance on this is when a twelve-month-old actually tries to see what happens as a result of its own actions, for example by throwing a toy around and watching to see what happens to it. Between eighteen months and two years we see the beginnings of real thought as the child makes a plan to solve a problem, for example when it uses a stick to reach a toy beyond its grasp.

This brief outline is merely to indicate the progression from simple to more complex activities, recognising that even the simplest actions, like a baby shaking its rattle and trying to put it into its mouth, are part of a fascinating developmental sequence.

The desire to explore the world around it is a fundamental feature of

human development. It is also the basis of thought. However, the thinking of young children is different from that of adults in specific ways:

- A child acts before it thinks: it learns through doing and the consequences of such doing.
- The distinction between reality and fantasy is blurred in the first few years of life: what the child 'sees' in its imagination or dream is '**real**' for it, so the monster it visualises **exists**. It is consequently more reassuring for a monster in the story to be chased away than to explain to a three-year-old that it does not actually exist! The reverse is also true: what is out of sight is out of mind. Hence the game of peek-a-boo is not just a game but also a way of learning that something can disappear and reappear and continue to exist even though not in view. This paves the way for mental pictures being formed in the mind of something not actually present: The little girl can visualise her teddy even if it is in the next room.
- Under the age of four children find it difficult to concentrate on more than one thing at a time and are unable to link different events with one another. Piaget, who did pioneering work on the intellectual development of children, suggests that they see things in a rather disconnected way, like seeing each picture separately in a slow motion movie but without grasping the sequence of events or the whole picture.
- The child under four has a very subjective view of the world and assumes that the way he or she sees the world is also the way it is seen by everyone else. Consequently, a child is unable to see viewpoints other than its own. For example, while in the car which has stopped at a red traffic light, it may well say that another driver moving in a different direction, for whom the traffic light is green, is 'naughty' for not also stopping. Piaget refers to this tendency as egocentric.
- Comparisons are not fully understood by pre-schoolers: although they may use the words 'bigger', 'smaller', and so on, they often do not clearly understand the comparison implied. Ella says: 'When I grow up I will be bigger.' Mummy replies: 'That's right.' Ella: 'Is granny your mummy?' Mummy: 'Yes, she's my mummy.' Ella: 'Is she older?' Mummy: 'Yes, of course.' Ella: 'Then why are you bigger?'
- The child believes what it sees. If milk is poured from a jug into three mugs, it cannot yet grasp that the amount of milk has not changed. Change in shape or appearance to it means change in substance or volume.

These are but a few characteristics of early thought. Gradually, as a result of maturation and learning, reasoning begins to change but much development still has to occur before thinking becomes more akin to that of adults.

Language

Language is unique to humans and without it culture and civilisation as we know it would not exist. The development of language is a fundamental part of being human. Like most other development it begins early in rudimentary form and follows a certain sequence.

Crying is the baby's first form of communication. This is followed by practising sounds and building up a sound repertoire: ba-ba-ba, goo-goo, dadadada. Between the ages of one and two years the first words are put together: 'mama tata', 'dolly doodoo'. Finer distinctions are made only later. At first all men may be called 'dadda', which may cause amusement or consternation!

Mothers tend to talk '**motherese**' to babies and young children: they speak at a higher pitch, somewhat more loudly and slowly and use simple sentences. Most mothers seem to do this spontaneously.

What is known as **babytalk** is often initiated by the child's version of a word, as when 'Dorothy' becomes 'Dottie', a banana is a 'nana'. Gradually pronunciation improves, vocabulary increases and words are put together to form simple sentences.

Parents can be helpful by speaking to their child, and by putting actions into words: 'You are bathing dolly'; 'Car is in the garage', 'Daddy is cutting grass'. By naming things parents help to broaden vocabulary: looking at picture books is one way of doing this. Children's books deliberately limit the number of objects and use the same objects or people repeatedly, thus not overwhelming the child with too many images and words.

Everyday activities provide ample opportunity for teaching the names of things. During a walk in the garden flowers, grass, butterflies and trees can be pointed out and, later, different colours: green grass, yellow, red and blue flowers.

By the age of approximately four, a child reaches the '**why, what, how**' stage. Endless questions test a parent's patience, knowledge and ingenuity.

'Why doesn't the sun fall down?' 'Why can't baby drink beer?' Attempts may also be made by the child to provide its own explanations. 'The wind blew my daddy's hair away' was Maryanne's comment to a friend who wanted to know why her daddy had so little hair on his head.

Sometimes their questions are quite startling. Anna asks:

'Maggie, is there a different heaven for the Protties and the RCs and the Jews and all of them?' 'No, only one.'

'What's all the different churches and synigogs for then?' (quoted by Fynn, 1974).

The important point for parents to know is that they should respond at the child's level. Motherese is fine for babies, simple words and sentences are appropriate for two-year-olds, but babytalk is inappropriate for a four-year-old and an embarrassment for a schoolchild.

That awkward question: where do I come from?

A new baby in a friend's family may lead Johnnie to ask **that** question: 'Where did the baby come from?' It might be interesting to hear what Johnnie's own theory about this is:

'Well, Johnnie, where do you think the baby came from?'

Replies may be: 'I dunno', or 'He was bought from the Hyperama', or 'Peter says his brother came from the hospital'. I suppose in the future one might get an answer like 'He came on the Internet.'

The point is that a child asking the question often already has some ideas on the subject which could provide a good starting point for a talk about the subject and perhaps suggest how much a child needs to know at this stage.

'You want to know where Baby Ian came from?'

'Yes, Peter says he came from the hospital.'

'Yes that's true, little Ian was born in the hospital.'

'Okay, I'm gonna go see the baby.'

Here the subject is closed by Johnnie himself. At this stage all he really wanted was confirmation that what his friend had said was true.

However, the conversation could have proceeded differently:

'Was the baby sick?'

'No, why do you think the baby was sick?'

'Because it was born in hospital.'

'Babies are born in hospital, because the baby is in mummy's tummy and the doctor has to take it out.'

'Does the doctor cut it out – does it hurt?'

At this point it may be sufficient to explain that babies are born through a special passage and that the doctor need not cut mummy open, though sometimes he may have to do this, like when the baby is too big for the passage. At this point one could ask: 'Is there anything else you want to know?' and if not, leave it at that unless Johnny is clearly not satisfied.

What is being stressed here is that a simple question may not require a detailed scientific explanation. A parent talking about babies and their origin in a relaxed way in the form of question and answer is likely to set the scene for further talks about the subject with mum or dad, who can use such opportunities to get rid of wrong ideas and incorrect information. A fumbling anxious reply or discussion far beyond what was needed at that time will less likely encourage further such talks.

Playing

In play a child exercises its emerging abilities and skills, expresses its emotions, mimics adult roles and acts out what it sees in reality or imagines. Whereas play for an adult means recreation and relaxation, for a child it means far more: it is an inherent part of development. Through play a child gets to know the world around it, and to try out and practise its skills.

Like all other development, play patterns tend to follow a certain sequence, as social play patterns demonstrate:



- First comes solitary play, typical of the toddler: Jonathan rushes up and down the lawn, stamps on the snails and kicks a ball but is not interacting with other children;
- This is followed by onlooker play, which is usual at two and three years:

children begin to observe the play of others and may sometimes try to imitate it;

- Next comes parallel play, usual for three-year-olds, when children play alongside one another, but there is little interaction between them. Sharing toys has yet to be learnt;
- Interactive play often only occurs at about the age of five when children become more interested in each other than in play itself;
- Co-operative play occurs mostly among five- and six-year-olds when there is some kind of organised play, when games begin to be understood, when ideas, fears, actions and toys begin to be shared.

Although this sequence of play is fairly constant, the time at which a certain kind of play emerges is more varied because environmental factors do play a part. An only child spending lonely hours in front of the television may have far less opportunity for the development of social play than the child in an extended family with numerous siblings and cousins around.

Many young children have vivid imaginations. They talk and play with imaginary animals, angels or playmates. Sometimes they express their fears in play-play. Little Pepe is afraid that a gangster may jump up from under his bed at night when it is dark. So, every night he puts a cushion under his bed for 'Tokkie', an imaginary lion, to sleep on. Pepe is firmly convinced that Tokkie will chase any gangsters away. Tokkie, we are told, is huge, has glowing green eyes and can run faster than a motor car.

One reason that play therapy is such an effective tool for dealing with children's problems is because children often express themselves better through action, play and drawings than through words. In play therapy the adult meets the child at its own level and way of expression.



POINT TO PONDER

Play with your child and it will later be willing to work with you.

Moral development

I can see some parents shaking their heads in disbelief at this heading.

For one thing, it sounds so Victorian, and for another, is it not rather premature to speak of moral development in the pre-schooler?

In answer to this question I pose another: If all other development has its foundation in the early years of development, albeit in rudimentary form, why should this not apply to moral development?

Moral development relates to the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. It includes honesty, goodness, self-control and the development of a conscience. A person's conscience also has an emotional component as it includes feelings of guilt and anxiety.

Morality relates to values, rules and standards about how people should behave toward others. This is a highly complex process which, like all other development, follows certain stages, generally only reaching maturity in adulthood.

However, the development of conscience does not happen by itself. There are two major requirements for the development of conscience to begin in childhood. First, the child's intellectual, language and social development must have progressed sufficiently for some understanding to be possible. The child has to learn what is acceptable behaviour, what is 'good' and what is considered 'bad'. Thus, in the beginning moral development rests upon control by others by means of reward and punishment which mainly take the form of approval or disapproval by the parents. A child learns to obey because this is what parents expect of it.



EXERCISE

How can you as parent promote the moral development of your child? Consider the part played by discipline in this regard.

Refer back to chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of discipline and control.

It is only after the age of two that one can begin to speak of the gradual emergence of conscience. Between the ages of 3 and 5 years, the pre-

schooler is still focused on the self and most interested in its own needs and pleasure. Its behaviour is labelled as 'good' or 'bad' by others but its own judgement is still immature and it cannot judge its behaviour unless guided by others. By about 5–6 years a child begins to act in terms of standards that come from within itself, having internalised what it has been taught and no longer requiring so much policing of its actions by others. Simply put, the child has learnt to say 'no' to itself – a difficult thing to do which we as adults still struggle to master!

Two examples will show how the moral thinking of a child of four will differ from that of an eight-year-old. The first story concerns Betty. While her mother was away, four-year-old Betty climbed on a chair to get a cookie from a glass jar, knowing she was not supposed to do this. As she was climbing down from the chair she dropped the jar and it broke.

The second story is about Lara who was helping her mother set the table. She tripped as she was carrying a tray of glasses and five of them broke.

When a child of four was asked which child was naughtiest, the answer was that it was Lara because she broke more things than Betty. By contrast, an eight-year-old said Betty was naughtiest because she had done what she was not supposed to do but Lara was trying to be helpful. At four, the child focuses on the **amount** of damage done; at eight it considers the **intention** behind the action. These examples are a powerful reminder that morality involves complicated thinking and reasoning and has a long developmental path to follow. All the more reason to recognise the nature of its beginnings.

POINT TO PONDER



All I really need to know, I learned in kindergarten is the title of a book by Robert Fulgham, who highlights seven basic rules of democratic living:

- 1 Share everything.
- 2 Play fair.
- 3 Don't hit people.
- 4 Put things back where you found them.
- 5 Clean up your own mess.
- 6 Don't take things that are not yours.
- 7 Say sorry when you hurt somebody.

The parent's role in fostering early development

The parent's task is to provide the secure background in which a child feels safe to explore its environment, to provide stimulation to foster learning and to encourage optimal learning by interacting with the child. Most of all, a parent should enjoy witnessing the unfolding of the miracle of development.

SOME CRUCIAL CONCERNS OF PARENTS WITH BABIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Should mothers of babies and young children work away from home?

This question is often posed. Underlying it is a further question: does a baby need a mother's full-time attention?

Volumes have been written about this subject, and to this day there is considerable controversy surrounding this issue. There are those who argue that it is best for the child if the mother is almost constantly available to it. This view is closely linked to an emphasis on the bond between mother and child and to a prolonged period of breast-feeding. At the other end of the opinion spectrum we find the emphasis on quality time rather than the amount of time spent with child.

Here, it is stressed that the needs of both mothers and children need to be considered as well as the realities facing a particular family. A mother compelled to go out to work may have no choice in regard to how much time she is able to be with her child. Moreover, children and families differ and sweeping generalisations are best avoided. Nonetheless, it should be recognised that, as far as possible, certain conditions should be met to ensure the child's best possible development. In this regard the following merits careful consideration.

Quality versus quantity time

There is the notion that the quality of the time a mother spends with her child is more important than the amount of time she spends with it.

This immediately raises the question: what is meant by 'quality' time? It should mean physical closeness and cuddling, emotional bonding and intellectual stimulation, fun and laughter. Now the mere presence of the mother does not ensure this: she may be physically present but psychologically absent or even neglectful. On the other hand, one does need to ask if a hurried hour a day crammed with all kinds of stimulation is adequate to provide quality interaction.

EXERCISE

- 1 How would you describe quality time spent with your child?
 - 2 Could this be part of the general interaction with your child or do you need to set aside specific times for it?
 - 3 It should also be considered what is crucial for the little child. Might it not be the availability of the mother when the child needs her, **now** not later?
-

Patty and Daniel were a young couple struggling to make ends meet. Both had full-time jobs. Their children, aged two and three, spent the day at a pre-school centre and were fetched by their parents late in the afternoon. Homecoming was a nightmare. Both children whiningly wanted their parents' attention and needed to be bathed and fed. Patty still had to prepare supper. Tears, irritation, frustration – chaos reigned. Patty and Daniel became impatient with the children and each other. Finally, after a nasty quarrel they sat down and really talked the matter through: how tired they were, angry with themselves and one another and feeling guilty about not coping as parents.

Together they found a solution. On coming home they first sat down, each with a child on their lap, cuddled them, told them they loved them and all had some cool drinks and cookies. Bathtime and dinner could wait. With everyone feeling more loved and relaxed a traumatic homecoming changed to a time of happy togetherness. Somehow, this feeling was carried over to bathing and feeding, which proceeded much more smoothly.

Patty and Daniel's approach tells us that simple, caring actions can produce remarkable results.

CHILDCARE IN THE ABSENCE OF THE MOTHER

Approximately 40 per cent of the labour force in South Africa consists of married women, many of whom are mothers. A large number of single parents are also employed. What then happens to their children when they are at work? Whatever the kind of childcare provided, be it at a crèche, by a family member, a domestic worker, or whoever, certain conditions should be met.

The following questions should be asked when assessing possible places of care for a child:

- Concerning the child's physical wellbeing, are there adequate facilities with regard to space and activity? Concerning health, how clean and hygienic is the place, and what nutrition is offered? Is there scope for activities of different kinds, and for rest?
- Is the caretaker(s) able to relate lovingly to children and understand their developmental needs? How, and how much, do they interact with children; what kind of behaviour do they encourage; how do they deal with problems? Ideally, the ratio should be one adult per three babies. However, this ratio is seldom found. Older children requiring less total care can be cared for in bigger groups.
- How permanent are the caretakers? Children may suffer 'stranger anxiety' when with unfamiliar people, and more so if the surroundings are also strange to them. It is therefore important to have continuity with regard to caretakers and to gradually familiarise children with new surroundings, for example by the mother staying with her child for a while at the place of care until it has become more familiar with it.
- How is the child's sensory and intellectual development being stimulated? Children do not necessarily need sophisticated toys: colourful boxes, blocks, lids, pots and pans, plastic containers and simple toys can all be fascinating. Most fascinating of all are sand, water and clay.
- Do the caretakers have similar ways of dealing with children as you do? While some variation is to be expected, major inconsistencies are confusing for a child.

POINT TO PONDER



In the extended family there may be 'multiple mothering' when several members of the family share the care of an infant. This is in contrast to the nuclear family view notion that the child needs to bond with one particular person, the mother, for optimum development to occur. There is no evidence to suggest that loving care by several 'mothers' is not as good. Moreover, grandmothers, fathers or stepparents may have all the qualities of good caretakers and loving child-rearers.

From approximately the age of two and a half to four years a child may enjoy being in a small playgroup whereas from the age of four it may cope comfortably in bigger groups, as in nursery schools. However, one should always allow for individual variation. Some children are shy; others are outgoing and sociable.

The employed mother

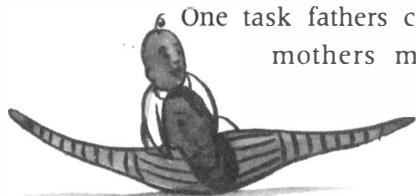
There are a number of conditions which enable a mother to combine several roles (homemaker, wife, mother, employee) more comfortably. If any of these conditions are not met she may experience severe strain.

- Good health and stamina: combining several roles is physically demanding and exhausting.
- An effective support and childcare system. Much stress can be anticipated if these are not in place: a sick child, overtime at work then become major crises.
- An 'easy', healthy child.
- A mother whose own separation anxiety is not too high. Some mothers experience considerably more anxiety when separated from their children than others.
- Flexible working hours are helpful as they offer the opportunity to deal with family crises, such as visits to doctors.

Some husbands are better parents than their wives. Fortunately we live in flexible times where it is more acceptable, if not usual, for fathers to

be the primary caregivers either because they are custodial single parents or because there is a role reversal in the family, and circumstances make this an equitable arrangement. For example, Carla works full-time as an executive secretary and her husband Norman is a freelance artist/designer working from home. He accepts the major responsibility for the children.

In general, fathers are more involved in play with children than mothers. So they are often the parent having most fun with the children.



One task fathers could undertake would be to involve mothers more in family fun. Overburdened mothers may feel that the care of their pre-schooler is all chores and no play. Yet children and families can be a rich source of fun and time should

be set aside for this bearing the following in mind:

- Focus on the joy of the activity rather than on level of performance.
- Choose the things **you** enjoy doing and involve the child in it; children love imitating parents, be they fishing, baking or painting.
- Get down to the child's level – let the dormant child in you surface for a while
- Turn a chore into a game: a bath can be such fun; make it a race to see who can pick up the largest number of toys fastest; record the time it takes a child to run around the house while you sit with a stopwatch, sipping a drink.

SUMMING UP

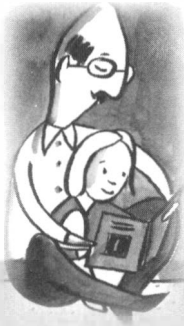
Although far from comprehensive, early childhood development has been dealt with in some detail. It is during this period that the foundation for subsequent development is laid and it is thus vitally important that it be as sturdy as possible. Seeing the world through the eyes of the child should be helpful in identifying with the child, thus avoiding the mistakes we tend to make when we see the child as a miniature adult. It is not. It is not only smaller but uniquely different.

Parenting a baby and pre-schooler is demanding and hard work at a time when parents themselves may be busy facing the demands of their own development. It is no easy task to strike a balance between the

developmental needs of parent and child and some questions relating directly to this are addressed.

One question which perturbs some parents, especially those who may not have been able to provide the best conditions for their children because of difficult circumstances is: 'Will my child ever be able to overcome early negative conditions?' Such conditions may range from lengthy hospitalisation of mother or child, an accident, deprivation due to poverty, or emotional rejection. The current opinion of experts is more optimistic than in the past. It may be possible to counteract some of the early damage bearing in mind that there are some remarkably resilient children. But it will demand extra attention to all aspects of development, great love and patience as the pace of development is likely to be slower, for example distrust may have to be overcome before trust can emerge.

In the case of severe trauma or abuse professional help should be sought. This should also be considered if problems persist despite your best and continuing efforts to deal with them. Consult a psychologist or child therapist, or social worker with special training in the field of family relations and child development.



CHAPTER 8

PARENTS AND THE PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILD

Thirty-something

Husband–wife relations

The child's development

The hurried child – a cause for concern

The school, the parent and the child

Television: friend of foe?

Summing up

PARENTS AND THE PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILD

The most significant change during middle childhood is that children enter school, which is in many ways a microcosm of the community. Here, children are introduced to the values, norms and expectations of the world beyond their home. For some children this will be a natural progression, for others, a leap into a world very different from what they have been accustomed to. The greater the similarity between home and school, the smoother the transition is likely to be.

This stage has sometimes been referred to as a 'plateau stage' because it seems relatively calm compared with earlier and later stages. For the parents it may be physically less exhausting than being the parents of babies and pre-schoolers. On the other hand, it is also likely to be a more settled and less turbulent time than when there are adolescents in the home.

Being a plateau does not, however, imply that nothing much is happening. As in all other stages, much development is taking place in both parent and child. Being a parent of a schoolgoing child has its own challenges, problems and rewards. Just how parents will cope with these new developments in their child is partly dependent on their own development.



THIRTY-SOMETHING

Many parents of primary school children are in their thirties. So, rather arbitrarily, certain fairly typical patterns of the thirties are considered.

The twenties tend to be years of testing adult roles and making certain commitments in regard to work and family life. As the thirties are entered,

Levinson says: 'The age thirty transition is a remarkable gift and burden. It provides an opportunity to work on the flaws of the life structure formed during the previous period and to create the basis for a more satisfactory structure that will be built in the following period' (1978, p 84). In general, the thirties tend to be fairly settled and stronger commitments may be made as goals become more clearly defined.

WOMEN IN THEIR THIRTIES

A notable change in the last two decades has been the increasing number of women in the work force. Many women re-enter the employment field in their thirties because they feel that their children no longer require as much attention as in early childhood. Some mothers may feel rather isolated and lonely at home, which is a risk for full-time housewives. A major reason for going out to work, apart from financial and professional considerations, may be a need for social contact. The social reason for going back to work should not be underestimated, as the need for contact with colleagues, customers and clients may be an important motive for seeking employment. This may be less the case among those groups who live in an extended family or who have the financial resources to pay for good childcare, thus freeing them to pursue hobbies and interests of their own. Others may be forced to go back to work by economic circumstances, including rising school fees and other expenses incurred when the child goes to school.

Career women who may have temporarily stopped work to be with their babies and pre-schoolers may now realise that if they postpone re-entry into their occupations any longer, they risk being unable to bridge the gap created by their temporary absence. It is often in their thirties that women change from a 'just a job' orientation to a true career commitment with definite long-term goals.

What all this suggests is that the child's entry into school generally affects a mother's life more dramatically than a father's.

HUSBAND-WIFE RELATIONS

This may also be a time when marriage partners have more time for each other. The intense demands of young children have somewhat lessened,

and fathers in particular may be more established in their work situation by now. Many marriages at this stage could do with some revitalisation.



POINT TO PONDER

A strong marriage is a great aid to effective parenting. It also provides a good example for children to follow. Especially as they enter their teens this can strongly influence their relationship with the opposite sex.

Ten questions and suggestions for revitalising a marriage

Couples could ask themselves the following questions to check if their relationship is perhaps a little jaded or in danger of becoming somewhat distant:

- Are you taking each other for granted? It needs to be remembered that babies and toddlers in particular can be physically and emotionally draining. They can also be great 'passion killers' as they have a peculiar tendency to wake up and demand immediate attention just when their parents may be feeling romantic. Distance between partners may have increased because of their different priorities, with husbands being more career focused and women more children focused. It may also be worthwhile to remember the effort made to please one another when dating, and how important a part this was of the mutual attraction. Is it necessary to find some time and energy again to please one another?
- Is your relationship given a high priority? In the twenties, when so many new roles have to be learned, it is not always easy, or possible, to give the relationship with partners this type of priority. This may be done more easily as experience in various roles is gained and a greater settledness in the home occurs.
- Do you know what is important for your partner? If there is good communication between a couple, this would certainly foster understanding of each other's needs and priorities. Anticipating and satisfying one another's needs is what strengthens relationships. Keech

says: '... in looking for ways to enhance or save a marriage, close attention should be paid to the possibility that it is not love that is lost, but other needs that lack satisfaction' (1993, p 33).

- How flexible are you in your relationship? Successful couples are flexible and able to change if necessary so they are able to adapt to suit the needs of their partner, except when this involves being untrue to themselves or what they believe in.
- How much give and take is there in a relationship? C S Lewis makes the distinction between 'Need-love' and 'Gift-love'. The former takes and the latter gives. There should be giving and taking by both partners in a good relationship. The person whose love is based largely on Need-Love may be seeking compensation for what he or she lacks in the partner. The unattractive male seeks a beautiful partner, the melancholy woman a cheerful counterpart. While opposites can and do attract, and one can learn to enjoy these differences, this is rather different from using the partner as compensation for what one lacks. There is a distinction between an ego-bolstering compensation and an appreciation for what is different: an introverted, socially somewhat shy woman marries an exuberant, outgoing man and really enjoys his personality.
- Do you accept and value your partner? In successful relationships, partners value the 'real' other person, not some idealised image which never meets their expectations.
- Is your relationship open and honest? Love is fostered by openness and honesty. This means acknowledging one's flaws and shortcomings, and taking responsibility for one's mistakes, rather than hiding them or projecting them onto the partner. The agony columns in popular magazines are filled with letters which clearly show how one partner absolves himself or herself from any responsibility for difficulties in the relationship. Yet there are usually two sides to a story.
- How tolerant are you? Tolerance is an important aspect of love. Some things one can change in a partner, for example if a person is chronically late, one can encourage them to allow more time for unexpected delays and gradually improve their sense of time. Other aspects cannot be easily changed, such as personality traits like extreme extroversion or introversion. However, tolerance does not refer to major problems such as addiction to gambling, alcoholism or abuse. Rather it is accepting the 'otherness' of the partner, even though it may be puzzling or irritating.

- Are you companions and friends? Sharing interests and activities, that is being companions, makes love grow.
- How considerate and appreciative are you of one another? Being considerate means being able to see things from the other person's point of view and being able to communicate effectively. Being considerate can mean putting your own needs aside for the benefit of the other. For example, a recent article in a women's magazine posed a question to the effect of 'When did you know that a person was the right partner for you?' One of the respondents, who believed in postponing sexual gratification until marriage, one night had too much to drink and was willing to compromise this ideal with her boyfriend. At this point he refused, tucked her into bed and told her to go to sleep. It was this action which convinced her of his genuine love for her.
- How supportive and sharing are you of one another? Being supportive of one another in times of trouble is the glue that holds relationships together. No relationship is without its difficulties, nor is life ever trouble free. So most relationships are likely to be severely tested at times. It is at such times that the support given by a loving partner is vitally important and in the long run helps to strengthen love. Happy events too, need to be shared. A German proverb says: 'Shared joy is doubled. Shared sorrow is halved' (Keech, 1993; Santrock, 1995; Sternberg, 1986).

EXERCISE

His/her needs

No one can meet all the needs of his or her partner, nor do specific needs always have the same importance for husband and wife. Nonetheless, it can be very helpful to know what needs you frustrate or satisfy in your partner. This is what the exercise below relates to.

- Without consulting one another, each partner should list their top five personal needs in order of importance. (Needs could relate to earning a living; proper budgeting; sexual needs; contact with own friends; social life; tidiness, punctuality; appreciation; support; security; understanding; faith/religion; togetherness or separateness; owning a home; rest and recreation; having children, and so on.)

1
2
3
4
5

- Having completed these visits separately, compare them.
 - Are there important differences between them? Are they a problem? If so, what can be done about dealing with them with a view to better understanding and, possibly, some adaptation by one or both partners? (Refer back to chapter 5 on communication and try to discuss these matters calmly.)
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THE CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

Physical development

Middle childhood is taken to cover the period from six to twelve years. The growth pattern during middle childhood is one of slow, steady development. On average, children grow by 5–7 cm per year. 'Baby fat' generally decreases and a more slender body emerges as muscles develop. Muscular strength increases and co-ordination improves greatly. Many new skills are mastered.

The large muscles are ahead of the smaller muscles in development, which accounts for the fact that a six-year-old is better at the movements involved in drawing bold pictures than in the finer movements involved in writing. By the age of seven, more control is emerging and by the age of twelve, fine co-ordination is similar to that of adults.

Differences in strength between boys and girls explain some of their preferences. Boys prefer activities involving running, kicking, throwing, jumping and batting. Girls prefer skipping and activities involving rhythmic movement such as dancing. Both boys and girls can become more tired from long periods of sitting than by physical activity. In other words, they need active rather than passive activities.

In our urban environment, children are often living in confined areas which limit vigorous physical activity. A child running around in the country, noisily chasing a dog or trying to catch a bird is accepted as



behaving spontaneously. A child of the same age rushing noisily along the passage of a flat building may be seen as a nuisance. A city child may be anchored in front of the TV eating lots of junk food. It is this combination of passivity

and junk food that has been held at least partly responsible for the poor physical condition of many children in the United States (Santrock, 1995). It is not always easy for children in confined urban areas to get the exercise they need for healthy development. This is particularly true since the high crime and accident rate in this country has almost put a stop to a 'streetlife' where children used to ride and wander round their neighbourhood, meeting friends on the way. Now it is more likely that a suburban child is confined behind a high wall, missing the change, excitement and exercise that could be found on the streets. A different lifestyle may prevail in disadvantaged areas, where cramped and crowded living often forces children into the streets. This may provide some interest and excitement, but may also expose a child to certain risks such as gangs.

What the foregoing suggests is that life in today's world is not particularly geared to the child's need for constructive participation in activities which challenge and develop its muscles, strength and co-ordination while at the same time providing the fun which goes with such activities. It is often the school which is the only place providing scope and opportunities for such activities.

Sport can assume particular importance in the middle childhood years. Apart from promoting the physical development of a child, it often provides the opportunity to learn social skills, such as co-operation with others as part of a group or team. It also encourages competition, a dominant feature of the Western world. And success in competitive sport can contribute to a child's self-esteem. However, excessive demands by parents and others can turn what should be an exercise in fun into something very stressful.

Puberty and sexuality

As a child nears the end of the primary school years, puberty approaches.

It is vitally important that a child be prepared for this, so that it can be accepted as part of the normal progression towards an adult body.

At this stage, if not already before, sex education should become more specific. Its biology should be fully explained, which most children find fascinating. It is also important to correct misperceptions which may abound, especially if peers are the main source of information or disinformation, such as:

‘You never get pregnant the first time you have sex.’

‘It is the only way to prove your love.’

‘Having sex shows you are an adult.’

(Refer to chapters 7 and 9 for further suggestions on talking about sex to one’s children.)

Thinking during middle childhood

In the pre-school years, thinking reveals itself mainly through physical action. For example, at the age of four Jonathan is able to sort out oranges and apples into different boxes. But it is only somewhat later that he is able to imagine doing this without performing the action. This is one of the features of middle childhood that mental activity changes from being very concrete to being more abstract. This is a gradual process towards which school syllabi are well adapted. It is part of an ongoing learning experience. There is also noticeable improvement in children’s memory.

It is also at this time that certain concepts become more clearly understood, such as those referring to shape, size, weight and volume. Ordinary household activities can provide many relevant examples. Children can learn many concepts fundamental to maths, such as measurement, in the kitchen, as when helping mom measure the ingredients for baking a cake. By measuring out one cup of flour, a half cup of sugar, and a quarter cup of oil, a child is learning the difference between a half and a full cup, and so on. By pouring a bottle of cooldrink into a jug a child learns that while it looks different, the volume actually remains the same. When watching dad paving the yard with some bricks, a child can learn that cement, sand and water have to be mixed in a certain proportion to make the paving hold firm. Ten-year-old Timothy often goes to the café to buy bread and milk. He gradually learns what different items cost, how much he needs to pay and what change to expect.

Obviously, parents should be explaining and dialoguing with their children when letting them observe or take part in such activities.

In other words, many ordinary everyday activities provide the opportunity for teaching children certain concepts which form the foundation for many subjects at school. Naturally, such learning experiences should begin long before a child enters school.

Reading

Reading skills are among the first a child has to master during the first years at school. Being able to read well is essential for progress in acquiring



knowledge in the modern world. Some parents, therefore, believe in teaching their children to read long before they attend school. Educationists have divided opinions about this, but there seems to be considerable agreement that early reading should not be forced. Perhaps the most important thing that parents can do is to encourage an interest in books, rather than in reading as such. Yet it is astonishing how many homes may be bookless, though they may have a sophisticated sound system and a large TV.

Interest in books should be encouraged long before children go to school. Pre-school children love to sit looking at books or having a bedtime story read to them. They especially enjoy books with colourful pictures of animals, people and nature, and then try to recognise what they have seen in books, elsewhere.

Little five-year-old Kirsty excitedly led her grandfather into the garden to show him the 'baby dinosaur', which turned out to be a chameleon! Needless to say, Kirsten and her grandfather had spent many happy hours looking at a book on dinosaurs.

By involving children in everyday activities in the home, by talking to them, by keeping their interest and curiosity alive, parents are in many ways preparing them for those skills they will need when they go to school.

Social development and friends

The amount of time spent with friends increases progressively from the toddler stage and, notably, once a child enters school. The sharing of information, talking about worries, interests, and secrets and just having fun is an important feature of friendship.

Timothy, aged 11, says: 'I like my best friend because he is friendly. He is not sulky and he laughs a lot. We make up funny games like putting a parcel on the pavement with a string around it and then we cover the string with sand so no-one can see it. Then we hide behind the bushes, then when somebody tries to pull the string, the parcel jumps. You should just see their faces! Then we run away. I know that my friend won't ever tell on me so I can trust him. We also both like soccer.'

Claire, aged 10, describes her best friend as: 'She's really nice. She's never nasty to others. We like to do things together and help each other. When I am cross, she cheers me up and we giggle a lot. I'll tell her secrets I won't tell anybody else. We both like skipping and jumping games.'

These two anecdotes tell us a good deal about what is valued in friends at this stage:

- They should be 'nice', that is friendly.
- They should be fun.
- They can be turned to in times of trouble.
- They are loyal and can be trusted.
- They enjoy doing things together.
- They can communicate well.

In other words, friendships provide the opportunity to learn and practise many social skills.



POINT TO PONDER

Would your list of what you value in friends differ from this list? If so, in what way?

An important feature of social development in later childhood is the ability to feel sympathy and empathy for the feelings of others. This is

distinctly different from the more egocentric view of the pre-schooler, who is unable to really put himself/herself in the shoes of another.

Friends, classmates and other children with whom a child associates have an important socialising function to perform. The significance of this is not always fully appreciated. Some parents want to see their children 'occupied' all the time, failing to realise the role played by the child's peer group in teaching a child to become a co-operative member of a group. The functions of the peer group can be summarised thus:

- It is a community in miniature and a child learns different kinds of behaviour in this group, such as the rules of a game and penalties for non-compliance with them, co-operation and rejection of unfair play.
- The child must earn acceptance by the group and hence learns to adapt.
- Identification with the group aids gaining independence from adults.
- In the group, what is acceptable behaviour for boys and girls is learnt.
- Moral development may be fostered by the group in that it rewards acceptable behaviour and 'punishes' unacceptable behaviour, often by rejection.
- A child learns that people react differently and that its behaviour may have to be changed to fit in with others. This is an important lesson to be learnt.

Popularity

Being popular becomes very important at this stage. Many of the features valued in good friends are often associated with popularity. Certain other features could be added, for example, popular children tend to be self-confident, but not conceited. They gain attention by what they say or do, but not by showing off. Obviously, not all children can be equally popular. Some children may be delightful in a quiet way. It should not be a matter of concern to parents if their child does not top the popularity poll. They should only become concerned if their child veers to extremes of aggressiveness or withdrawal.

Aggressiveness

Aggressiveness may be a way of attracting attention or a way of venting frustration that has built up. Aggressiveness is more readily expressed

towards other children than adults, and parents may only become aware of this when observing their child in a group. To help children deal with aggression, parents can try to

- understand its cause, for example, is the child unhappy about something at home or at school? Often an underlying fear is masked by aggression
- encourage their child to gain attention in positive ways and praise helpfulness and co-operation, be it taking the dog for a walk, playing ball with a younger sibling or whatever can be done successfully
- listen to their child and try to understand what is at the root of this behaviour
- help their child to listen to what others are saying
- encourage their child to join in with others without forcing his/her way of doing things

Personality development

Erik Erikson (1963) stresses that the schoolgoing years coincide with the **development of industry** in a child. In essence this means mastering new knowledge and skills, and learning how things are made and how they work. The word 'industry' is used to highlight the work aspect involved in doing, making and creating things. The same curiosity that we find in the pre-schooler remains, but the difference is that the child now uses its own initiative to a far greater extent to seek answers to questions. In turn, accomplishment leads to increased self-confidence. Difficulty in coping with school and other tasks can lead to a sense of inferiority.

The role of the parent in fostering the development of industry should be to encourage the child and help it to find sources of information, but not to carry out tasks on its behalf. It is by personally completing a task that a sense of achievement is felt, that experience is enriched, and confidence is gained.

It is important for parents to see the psychological development of their child in a balanced way, recognising that different children have different strengths. For example, Sally, aged nine, has a social awareness way ahead of her peers. In the classroom, Sally will immediately notice if a child has not brought lunch or needs a pencil sharpener, and will do something about this. She will notice the sad child and will spontaneously

put her arms around her. But Sally has a specific learning problem which only time and special teaching will help her to overcome. Academically, she is unlikely to achieve great heights. But here a very special person is emerging with those qualities of caring and sensitivity in abundance which our world so sorely needs. There are many Sallys in this world who need to be appreciated for their very special gifts.

By contrast, David is academically highly gifted and, at the age of nine, has analytical computer skills far beyond his years. He is extremely introverted and prefers working on his own. He lacks all social awareness to the extent that he often says hurtful things without realising he has done so. David's parents have always been highly supportive of him academically, but are now beginning to recognise that they also need to encourage friends and interaction with others so that David can begin to acquire some social competence.

THE HURRIED CHILD – A CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Elkind, a noted American child psychologist, has written an entire book on the hurried child who is 'growing up too fast, too soon'. He explains the reason for writing this book. Elkind claims that in the sixties and seventies there were many 'spoil' children, especially among the middle class in America, who were given 'great freedom to express themselves' and who were unrestrained, wilful and quite 'abominable', being allowed to express their most primitive impulses, for example nursery school children pelting teachers with clay.

By contrast, Elkind explains, the eighties seemed to produce a different kind of child which he calls 'The Hurried Child', 'who make up a large portion of the troubled children seen by clinicians today. These children are placed under too much pressure to achieve, to succeed and ... to take on the physical, psychological trappings of adulthood before they are prepared to deal with them. We dress our children in miniature adult costumes, we expose them to gratuitous sex and violence and we expect them to cope with a bewildering social environment – divorce, single parenthood, homosexuality' (1981, p xii).

In South Africa we can add the uncertainties and fears resulting from high levels of violence and crime. In short, hurried children are stressed children. Certain features are associated with a parental attitude and action of hurrying children to **pseudo adulthood**:

- a shift from activities considered to be fun such as picnics, campfires, and non-competitive games to skills training and highly competitive sports
- a change in clothing so that children wear miniature adult clothes (or is it that adults are wearing clothes that children would be comfortable in?). The point is that clothes help define positions in society and the interchangeability of clothes could be an indication of a broad uncertainty about roles and patterns of authority
- the exposure to different adult role models, for example on TV and in the movies, which is confusing to them. Children may be told by their parents to be considerate and kind but heroes on screen may be ruthless and aggressive
- an unwillingness to accept 'late bloomers'. That is those children who simply need more time to develop. To admit that one's child has been held back a year at school may be perceived as a major disaster by a parent. Yet it may truly be in the child's best interests, allowing it to catch up or establish a firmer foundation for future learning
- the child being seen as a parental status symbol. All parents take pride in their children's accomplishments. But parents to whom their child is a status symbol tend to drive them relentlessly so that they, the parents, feel good.



All the foregoing relate to the egalitarian philosophy of our time which emphasises equality, sadly confusing equality with sameness. Children are not the same as adults, nor are adults the same as children.



POINT TO PONDER

'In truth, the recognition of a group's special needs and accommodation to those needs are the only true ways to ensure equality, and true equal opportunity'
(David Elkind).

Latchkey children

There may be circumstances which may leave parents little choice but to expect adult behaviour of their children. One can think here of 'latchkey children', that is children whose parents are away at work and who have the key to their home so that they can let themselves in when they come home from school.

Latchkey children are, by definition, children between the ages of four and sixteen who are regularly without adult supervision. They are in 'self-care' for a substantial part of the day. Sometimes they are in the care of older siblings who are also still children. A relatively new phenomenon, it is attributed to the increasing number of women in the labour force, the increase in single parents, and the absence of close-knit communities as previously found in villages and small towns. It is a phenomenon often found in unsafe neighbourhoods. In black families, the breakdown of the extended family system has contributed much to this situation (Swart-Kruger, 1994).

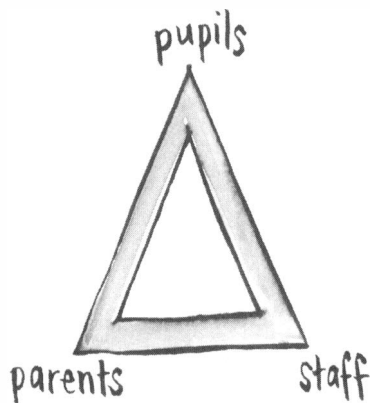
Latchkey children are classified as neglected children. They are often instructed to stay at home until their parents return. Inevitably, they often feel lonely, bored, fearful of situations they may not be able to deal with, and resentful of being left alone. The effects of being alone will depend partly on the age of the child, with younger children being more vulnerable than older ones. Although responsibility may be fostered in some cases, it is hardly an ideal situation for a child to spend so much time alone. Not surprisingly, they may seek company and without adult supervision, this may not always be of the desired kind.

How not to hurry a child

- Parents should respect a child's own pace of development and respond to it appropriately and not force its pace.
- Parents should encourage co-operation and should not focus excessively on competitiveness.
- Parents should acknowledge the importance of play, which has its own developmental value.
- Children should not be used as surrogate adults.
- If circumstances compel children to take on adult roles, then the parents should ensure some support in their absence. For example, a group of

neighbourhood mothers or grannies who could be enlisted in some way or telephone numbers to call in times of emergency or fear, such as Child Line.

THE SCHOOL, THE PARENT AND THE CHILD



In 1995 in an address to parents and members of staff, Mr Theo de Wet, principal of Irene Primary School, used a triangle to highlight the interaction that should exist between the three stakeholders involved.

For a school to function effectively the triangle needs to be in balance and a healthy link needs to exist between parents and pupils, pupils and staff, and between staff and parents. The parents and staff form the base upon which the development of the pupils rests and the links between all three

stakeholders should be strong and clear.

The balance of this triangle may be disturbed in various ways:

- if staff are not fulfilling their role adequately
- if pupils are not fulfilling their role as learners
- if parents give little or no support to the staff as educators of their children or to their children as learners
- if the interaction/communication lines between the three stakeholders are not honest, healthy and open.

The principal went on to explain that children of today are different from children from a decade or more ago. He describes the youth of today as 'confident, outspoken, informed, critical and vibrant in their zest for life. Our present pupils are quite a handful, yes, but they are receptive to guidance, and not unwilling to be structured. Parents and teachers too have changed. They have become more flexible in their approach to children, yet parents often expect schools today to be like those they themselves attended.'

Other points emphasised were that schools are under enormous

pressure today, even the more privileged ones. They are more than places of learning, and are often a safe, if temporary, haven for children who are under severe pressure or stress. With the breakdown of so many families, many children arrive at school emotionally and, sometimes, physically battered. Children come from vastly different backgrounds, now that acceptance into a school is no longer on a neighbourhood/geographical basis as children from further afield must be accommodated. Syllabi and teaching methods are also under review. If ever schools and pupils needed parental support, it surely is now. Moreover, parental attitudes towards school have a direct bearing on children's achievement and happiness at school. If parents have a negative attitude, this may spill over into lack of interest and rebellion in the pupils. Parents should rather discuss specific problems with the teachers concerned, or the principal.

A secure child is willing to venture in the classroom and on the sports field without fearing a negative reaction should he or she not succeed. In other words, insecurity in the family is reflected at school, causing a child to be pre-occupied and anxious which stands in the way of initiative and learning. Just at a time when children most need parental support, it seems to be diminishing. Maria, a Grade 1 teacher, has several children in her class about whom she is really worried.

Little six-year-old Johnny regularly complains of bad headaches. This could indicate anything from a visual problem, which could be rectified by appropriate glasses, to a serious illness or neurological problem. Yet all attempts to reach the parents have been in vain, although they both accept messages on their cell phones.

Bright seven-year-old Judy seems to lose all concentration at times, staring blankly into space and, unseeingly, gazes at her teacher. Then suddenly, after a moment of confusion, her concentration returns. This could be a case of 'petit mal' requiring medical attention. Do her parents know this? Her teacher would like to know, but where are they?

And then there was also Thomas, aged eight, was still at school at 6 o'clock because he had not been collected.

Just what is a concerned teacher supposed to do, and where does the school's responsibility begin and end? What is the responsibility toward a family when the parents tell a school: 'If our child behaves badly at school, that is your problem. Don't call us next time.'

A further problem in schools may be poor equipment or resources

stretched beyond their limit. A disturbing phenomenon is the increase in stealing. Especially under such circumstances, the inculcation of values and responsible behaviour is of major importance and in this regard in particular, parents and schools need to act together to become part of the solution.

POINT TO PONDER



Police forums, here and overseas, are increasingly emphasising the importance of dealing effectively with 'small crime'. Experience has shown that when this is dealt with effectively, serious crime also decreases. What this suggests is that leniency toward minor infringements cultivates an attitude of disregard and disrespect for rules, regulations, the law and inevitably, the rights of others. Once such an attitude develops it paves the way for an ever-increasing disregard of the law.

Multiculturalism in school

As schools in this country become more integrated, so the concept of multicultural education becomes more evident. But just what does this mean?

Jeffcoate (1975) says that in essence multicultural education is based on two major assumptions, namely respect for self and respect for others.

Having respect for oneself implies a positive self-image and confidence in who and what one is. It is often the person with low self-esteem on the one hand, or inflated self-esteem and arrogance on the other, who finds it difficult to respect the dignity of others.

Respect for self and others means accepting



- the uniqueness of each individual
- our common humanity
- the principles of equal rights and justice
- the value of achievements or traditions which differ from our own
- the damage which prejudice does to those discriminated against. To this we could add, the damage done to those who are prejudiced and consequently lack sensitivity and awareness of the needs and values of others.

TELEVISION: FRIEND OR FOE?

Television has become an integral part of most people's lives today. The question arises what impact it has on the ideas, values, attitudes and behaviour of children. That parents have differing opinions about this is reflected in the following statements:

- 'How can one stop one's children seeing undesirable programmes?'
- 'Looking at TV – you'd think only crime and sex were important.'
- 'Oh come on, you take TV too seriously – most of it is play-play.'
- 'I wish they'd bring back censorship of sex and violence.'
- 'I don't let my children watch TV news anymore, there's just too much violence.'
- 'Much of what we see on TV is just plain silly. We just have to teach our children that.'
- 'I think some of the educational programmes are great.'
- 'Well, you don't have to watch what you don't like.'
- 'I think it's public enemy number 1.'
- 'There's too much about sex and too little about love.'

Several explanations have been advanced concerning the possible effects of television. First there is the **Catharsis Theory** which rests on the assumption that one abreacts negative feelings by watching something on TV with which one can identify, and while watching then can let go of similar feelings. Available evidence points to the contrary. Television may act as a **trigger** for behaviour, for example airing information about the amount of money being collected for a charitable cause tends to increase donations. On the negative side, a disturbed person may be triggered into action by something seen on TV in the form of some destructive action. This is similar to the Copycat

Phenomenon whereby people with similar problems or motives then follow the example set by somebody else. Another theory which has been well substantiated is the **desensitisation** theory. Simply stated, it means that if you see enough violence or other disturbing scenes, it blunts your feelings – you become insensitive that is an ever stronger stimulus is needed to get the same effect. The same applies to pornography.



POINT TO PONDER

‘If everyone agrees that television has unrivalled efficiency at selling goods, services, culture, music, politics and fashion, why does the industry continue to claim that the one thing it cannot sell is violence?’

(Paul Johnson).

In South Africa, the Human Sciences Research Council undertook extensive research on the effects of television on children. They established that primary school children in grades 5 to 7 watched television for 22 hours per week and high school children for 17 hours (Pitout, 1985).

Santrock states that ‘Few developments in society over the past 25 years have had a greater impact on children than television has. Many children spend more time in front of the television set than they do with their parents’ (1995, p 252).

There is mounting research evidence on the impact of TV on children and teenagers. Moreover, viewing habits, it appears, are often already established at pre-school level.

Negative effects

Of particular concern has been the effect of television in a society that is manifesting more and more violence and aggression. One study in America compared two small towns of similar size, population and economic condition. One of these towns had TV before it became available to the other. The aggression levels of children from both towns were

assessed at the beginning of the study and were found to be similar. After two years they were re-tested: it was found that the children from the town with television were much higher in aggression (Joy, Kimball, Zabrack, 1977).

Programmes which children tend to find especially disturbing are those which reflect domestic violence, especially if weapons are used; violent sex, cruelty to children and animals, murders and horrendous road accidents, unrest situations, necklace murders, close-up shots of corpses, rape and suicide (SABC Annual Report 1987).

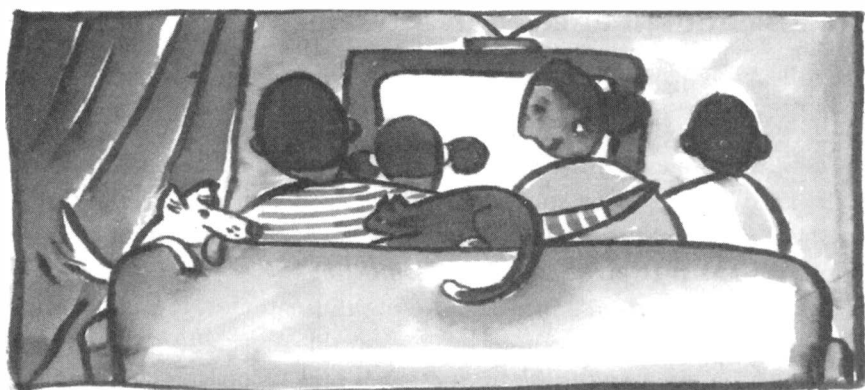
The British Swinfen Working Party on the effects of television viewing, concluded that there is 'a causal link between the viewing of scenes of extreme violence and actual violent behaviour in some children and young people' (quoted in Van Rooyen, 1987, p 81).

There are many investigations which point to the potentially negative effects of TV, especially in regard to aggression which may be increased by

- identification (you feel and act like a certain character on screen)
- imitation in that aggressive skills may be learnt
- weakening of inhibitions about negative acts: everybody is doing it, so why shouldn't I?
- reinforcing the notion that the world is a dangerous place
- making people less sensitive to negative and destructive acts
- blunting the imagination. Just think of the importance of make-believe play in which children act out real-life situations, using their imaginations. This can be a useful way of practising skills and imagining solutions for problems by the child. In such play a child has a feeling of being in control. Television is no substitute for this. Creative activities like drawing, writing stories, making music, dancing, to name but a few, are not exercised by the child glued to the TV set for most of its spare time.

Positive effects

It would be wrong to view the effects of television only in negative terms, as there can be no doubt that it can also be a positive influence. The effects will, partly, be determined by how 'real', that is true to life, the people and situations depicted are seen to be. The more real, the greater the impact. Some research was undertaken to find out how real 'The Cosby Show' is seen to be.



'The Cosby Show' has proved to be as popular in South Africa as in the United States. An analysis of the perceptions of South African children revealed several factors which were linked to identification with members of the Cosby family, as had been found to be the case in America. First of all, the Cosby family was perceived to be like a real family. The interaction portrayed is that children can talk to their parents. The family has fun together and shows mutual affection, for example by hugging one another. Furthermore, they seem to come up with solutions to their problems. 'The present study indicates that the popularity of "The Cosby Show" might be more than mere entertainment and that it could be used by children in South Africa, particularly black children in cultural transition, to be a model for their own behaviour' (Van Vuuren *et al*, 1990).

Television can also promote pro-social behaviour because

- programmes about remarkable people provide exposure to greatness and positive models with whom to identify
- knowledge can be expanded as one is introduced to a wide range of people and situations that would otherwise be unknown
- it can provide historical and cultural information and perspective
- it is a source of entertainment and can be a relaxing break from work
- it can be a wonderful source of information (one need only think of the magnificent films about different peoples and countries made by National Geographic)
- it can increase tolerance and friendliness toward others, even those very different from ourselves. This has particular implications for the understanding of different ethnic groups in South Africa as differing customs and traditions come to be better understood and respected
- it has a vast potential for educating children and adults

Are all children affected in the same way?

As with so many other matters, there can be no single generalisation about the effects of TV on children because numerous factors are involved:

- The child's age. A pre-schooler tends to respond to the action rather than the motives or personal emotions of the people on screen. Primary school children already have a much better understanding of people's motives and the consequences of their actions.
- If television is a child's **main** source of information, it is quite likely to be seen as a true reflection of the real world, especially in the case of younger children and those from a lower socio-economic group.
- TV can isolate a child from the family and TV-bound children tend to become less willing to help in the home. In families with much conflict it may become an escape.
- Some children will not have enough information or experience to critically evaluate what they see.
- Certain personality traits such as low self-esteem, poor social skills, being self-willed and aggressive make children more vulnerable to the effects of TV. The Swinfen Working Party, which examined the effects of TV on children, came to the conclusion that 'the indications are that the short-term harmful effects [of viewing extreme violence on screen] do not last long in normal, healthy children especially where there is wise parental support and a secure family and home environment. Where such basic security is lacking, the harmful effects last longer and may do permanent damage' (cited in Van Rooyen, 1987).

Parents and television

From the foregoing it is clear that parents should limit and monitor their children's TV viewing. Older children and adolescents should be guided to become more critical of what they see, for example by making a TV programme a topic of conversation, instead of a substitute for it. The viewing of educational programmes should be encouraged.

EXERCISE

Choose two or three TV advertisements. Then ask your child or children

what they think the basic message being conveyed is. What is it that is said or done in this advertisement which makes them think so? Are there any hidden messages or suggestions, and if so, what are they?

Why do they think this is a good or a poor advertisement?

Have they been influenced by the adverts, and in what way?

SUMMING UP

The schoolgoing child enters a world peopled by its own generation. Peer interactions are therefore of paramount importance. It is a period of immense learning. It is also a time when children have to face situations without the immediate help of parents being available. Yet the support and love of parents remain as crucial as before.



CHAPTER 9

MIDLIFERS AND TEENAGERS

The midlife transition of the parent

Life tasks of the teenager

Adolescent development

Some specific concerns of parents about teenage behaviour

Thinking about a future career

Summing up

MIDLIFERS AND TEENAGERS

It has been said that adolescence comes at an inconvenient time for parents! Though spaced some 20 to 30 years apart, adolescence and midlife have one thing in common: both are transitional phases.

It could be argued that adolescence ends when schooling has been completed or training has begun for adult roles. However, other criteria may also be used to define its end and the beginning of adulthood, for example, at the age of 17 one may apply for a driver's licence, at 18 one may vote, but only at 21 may one marry without parental consent. So one may be considered more 'adult' in some respects than in others.

The lengthening of education has extended the period of adolescence. Burns aptly sums the situation up thus: 'This transition period provides a young person with time to learn and practise social, vocational, political and economics skills for the future; but equally it provides a period of conflict and vacillation between dependence and independence, maturity and immaturity, between self-expectations/values, peer expectations/values, and adult expectations/values' (1986, p 220).

The terms 'teenager' and 'adolescent' will be used synonymously in what follows. This period begins at the age of 13 and ends at 19. Early adolescence lies roughly between 13 to 16 and late adolescence between 17 to 19. This division is, however, rather arbitrary.

Midlife is the transition from early to middle adulthood. It occurs



somewhere between the late thirties and early forties. It is also known as the midlife transition. For many, it is a gradual transition and a period of consolidation and integration. For others it may be a time of crisis and upheaval. Midlife crises may stem from serious problems in the family or at work. Sometimes acute crises may herald a psychological growth spurt because outworn values and lifestyles are questioned and new ones are sought.

Adolescence and midlife do not coincide in all families, for example in some cases the late arrival of children will mean that parents will be well into middle age when their children reach their teens.

THE MIDLIFE TRANSITION OF THE PARENT

What are the kinds of changes which tend to occur when the midlife transition is reached toward the end of the thirties?

- **Reappraisal of oneself.** Taking a new and perhaps critical look at oneself is an important feature of transitional phases. Questions arise, such as: Just who and what am I? Where am I headed? How can I be nearly middle-aged when I feel so young?

In some people these questions may give rise to near panic. Others, like Bill Cosby, of TV fame, may react with wry humour. He remarks on how young people begin to look as we reach the fifties. 'How can you accept a speeding fine from someone who looks as though he is dressed up for the school play? And how can you have your blood pressure taken by someone who looks as though he should be asking you if he can borrow your car?' (1988).

- **Sense of urgency.** Up to this point there may have been a feeling that any changes one wanted to make could wait till later. Now the realisation dawns that time is not unlimited: time is marching on. This may engender a sense of urgency. Decisions that have been put off may suddenly be made.
- **Role change.** Changes in roles occur throughout life. At midlife a man may become a mentor to others at work, or may have to come to terms with the fact that he has reached his ceiling. Some may make dramatic mid-career changes because they themselves, or their jobs, have changed so much that there is no longer a comfortable fit between them. At this time many women develop stronger commitment and career-orientation in regard to their jobs, with definite plans for

advancement. Career change in the middle years has become more frequent and acceptable in recent years.

James was a highly successful partner in a law firm. He had made his mark early in his career because of his ability to find creative solutions to unusual situations. Now, at the age of 43 James found himself a director of a smoothly running law firm – running too smoothly for James. He was bored and dissatisfied and he became convinced that he had made a bad career choice. So he wanted out! He thought he would like to study ancient history and music. However, the financial realities of such a change made him think again and seek advice. From this it eventually became clear to him that he still enjoyed law but that his innovative talent was not being used in his current position. He decided to become a legal consultant in the field of forensic medicine, a relatively new field in which many new challenges and issues had to be dealt with. He also joined a choir and is reading all he can about ancient history. He has found a happy solution to his problem.

- **Relationships change.** Marriage relationships undergo subtle changes over time. By this stage a couple may have settled into a comfortable companionship. Sometimes a stage of boredom with each other is reached. Often a new balance has to be negotiated as the cumulative effect of change in one or both partners has to be adapted to. In some cases divorce may then be considered. However, it is noteworthy that many marriages improve again in the empty nest stage when children have left home. In some couples this is an opportunity to seek new shared interests and common ground.

Learning to live with certain changes in oneself and one's partner requires commitment, patience, tolerance – and humour.

Midlife may be a tranquil period as life experience comes into its own. It may also be complex and turbulent as when major changes occur from within or are caused by external factors such as retrenchment. Successful coping with earlier life-tasks generally makes it easier to cope with those that arise now.

- **Physical change.** Certain physical changes are fairly obvious: stamina for physical exertion, especially of a strenuous kind, decreases and the battle of the bulge may begin. There may be some deterioration in vision and glasses may become a necessity. Baldness may begin to be visible.

The way in which such changes are reacted to will largely depend on the meaning and importance attached to them: they may be

devastating to a person whose career depends on youthful good looks, such as a model, but be of little consequence to someone focused on intellectual achievement.

Sexuality may decline somewhat, often for non-physical reasons, such as stress, excessive eating or drinking. More significant may be certain qualitative changes, for example, love-making may become less passionately sexual but more gently sensual.

- **Psychological changes.** Psychological changes may be of a subtle kind. A broader perspective of life may be attained. Being sandwiched between the old and the young, and involved with both, may increase understanding of the total lifespan in a new way. This may also promote self-understanding and tolerance toward oneself, which Gould (1980) sees as the goal of personality development. Self-tolerance means acceptance of all one is – the good, the bad and the indifferent. It does not, however, mean complacency or self-satisfaction for there is always room for improvement. But it frees one from the need to impress others and to seek popularity as a defence against a sense of inadequacy because a more secure sense of self has by now been achieved.

A little understood change may occur in regard to the masculine and feminine dimensions of personality which now may become better integrated within a person. Tendencies which have been suppressed may now be more readily accepted. For example, men may gradually become more accepting of the feminine, that is the gentler and more emotional aspects of themselves. It may no longer be so important to be a 'macho guy'. It can be insightful in this regard to compare a father's toughness with his own sons when they were children and his gentleness with his grandson!

On the other hand, women may become more assertive and independent in the middle years. Clearly, this has implications for the marriage relationship, notably for changes in existing power and authority patterns. Such changes may increase existing incompatibilities, generate new conflict or may draw a couple closer together.

- **Roles in the family may need to be renegotiated.** A couple may now refocus on each other where the tendency may have been to centre their life on the children. Flexibility and the willingness to modify existing patterns is important at this stage: mutual tolerance a great asset.

Johann had grown up in a traditional family. His mother had never been employed and his father had been the strong head of the

household whose authority was never questioned. Susanne, his wife, had a different background. Her parents had a little crafts shop in which they both worked. In her mid-thirties Susanne began to take her hobby of dressmaking more seriously and gradually began to spend more time on making special occasion dresses for her friends, who brought more friends. In a rather unplanned way Susanne suddenly found herself making evening gowns and wedding dresses. Her income equalled that of Johann, whose ego was threatened by this, and who resented the amount of time Susanne was giving to her 'hobby', which had become a successful enterprise. Johann demanded that Susanne give it up. Susanne enjoyed her work enormously and refused to consider this option. After much conflict and a great deal of counselling they reached a compromise. Susanne employed an assistant and so gained more time to share with Johann, who gradually learnt to respect Susanne's talent and the need for her to express it. A new relationship began to emerge. Had they been unwilling to adapt, a total breakdown of the relationship could have been expected.

Parents and teenagers

Parents must adapt not only to changes in themselves but to much more dramatic changes in their children as they reach and move through adolescence. Their children's adolescence and all it implies may come as quite a shock to a parent.

Celeste, a mother in her mid-thirties recalls how stunned she was when walking along the beach she suddenly realised that the wolf whistles were for her teenage daughter and not for her. 'Talk about reality shock! I was 35 and my daughter 14 and *she* was getting the admiring glances. My *child* was being reacted to as a woman. It was a double shock. If I was the mother of a budding woman then who was I? I was really confused, staggered and, fortunately, also amused. My female ego was dented but my mother's heart filled with pride – my daughter was a lovely girl. Pride next made way for anxiety as I realised the vulnerability of my daughter – she was still so innocent about the ways of the world. This mixed bag of feelings I carried around with me for a long time.'



Comments by some teenagers also reflect their confusion. Susan, a sixteen year old, says: 'One minute I'm told to be more responsible, the next minute I'm reminded that I'm still a child. So who is mixed up?'

Tom at eighteen says: 'Why can't I have my dad's car to take my friends to a party when he's not using it? And why can't my mom sleep till I am at home? I mean, I'm not a baby anymore.'

'My dad won't let me drive his car – but I teach him how to use his computer!'

'I wish my parents would say what's on their mind. Why do they say I can't go camping with Derek and his friends because the weather is too cold, or I am too young when what they really mean is that they are scared I'm going to sleep with Tom.' This comment by Ursula aptly reveals how teenagers and parents may sense hidden meanings behind what is said. But both may find it difficult to deal with delicate and difficult topics and so tend to pussyfoot around them. This is understandable but is not generally helpful when it comes to finding solutions.

These comments reveal the uncertainties and mixed feelings which parents and their teenagers need to cope with. Good communication is especially important at this stage.

In traditional societies there were specific rites which marked the transition from childhood to adulthood: the initiation ceremonies served this purpose. For example, a Xhosa youth underwent the ritual of circumcision between the ages of 17 and 21 which marked a clear turning point from child to adult. Circumcision is followed by a period of seclusion when instruction is given on what is socially appropriate adult behaviour, such as settling disputes, not by sticks as children do, but by law. Many symbolic acts, such as the removal of old clothes and the burning of the blanket worn during the period of seclusion clearly signal the end of one stage and the beginning of another (Mwamwenda, 1989).

In technologically advanced societies, where education is spread over many more years, we lack such marker events which clearly prescribe what is expected of all concerned. Instead we find considerable uncertainty about the privileges, responsibilities and roles of adolescents. In particular the question of their freedom and independence is a thorny one.

Several notable changes in **parent-child interaction** occur as children grow up. They may take place over a period of years.

- Authority patterns change as teenagers strive toward greater independence. The style of parental authority may also have to be reconsidered, with a greater emphasis placed on negotiation.
- Privacy. The teenager's need for privacy increases. It is not always a simple matter for a parent to decide between respect for a teenager's privacy and the need to know what a teenager may be involved with.
- Responsibility. As the teenager's demands for freedom increase, so the need to take responsibility should also increase. These two developments do not always occur in tandem, causing considerable concern to parents and frustration in their children.
- Different views. As the ability to think more critically and independently develops, parents may find their views challenged.
- Both the midlife parent and his or her teenager may experience identity crises, greatly complicating their interaction. Both may be questioning their identity, learning to cope with a new body-image and changing sexuality.
- Emotional realignments are made as teenagers become emotionally less dependent on parents and more involved with friends and fall in love.



Some of the uncertainties and ambiguities of parent-teenager interaction can be gleaned from the following remarks.

'Pat shows no consideration for others – she just thinks of herself. She's becoming a thoroughly self-centred person.'

'Trevor is such a know-all, he's a real pain.'

'Mary thinks she can change the world. I appreciate her idealism but worry that she will go through life bumping her head against walls of opposition.'

'Jeremy will never settle down, every few weeks he's into something new.'

Such remarks reflect parental concerns about some of the more exaggerated reactions they may be witnessing in their teenagers, particularly if they view them as permanent. In most cases they are transient, heralding new developments which may be expressed with more enthusiasm than subtlety at this stage.

LIFE TASKS OF THE TEENAGER

Just as parents face particular life tasks, so do teenagers. In brief, these are:

- Coming to terms with a changing body which is not only taller and stronger but different, and it is also sexual.
- Developing a sense of identity, thus seeking answers to questions such as 'Who am I?' and 'What am I?'
- Achieving more independence from parents.
- Defining certain life goals in regard to education and a future work role.
- Developing personal insights and ideas in preparation for making choices relating to various issues.
- Developing more mature relationships with peers of both sexes.
- Preparing for socially responsible relationships which are the forerunners of marriage and family life.
- Defining basic values concerning what is right and wrong, desirable and undesirable, that is to develop a personal morality and belief system.

ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

A different body

The most obvious physical change in adolescence is a tremendous growth spurt. A boy's height may increase by as much as 20 per cent. The teenager has to adapt not only to a bigger and taller body but to a different one. Not all aspects of physical development occur in a balanced way and so often cause a certain lack of symmetry: we notice this in the gangliness of some and the podginess of others. As adolescence progresses, so balance is restored. However, the early changes are demanding physically and psychologically, and it is not surprising to find early adolescence to be associated with fatigue and erratic energy patterns.

Sexual maturation occurs as a result of hormonal changes. It is this

new sexual body that the adolescent has to adapt to. Much of the uncertainty of teenagers relates to how to deal with this. A teenager may be sexually mature in purely functional terms: both boys and girls may be able to have sexual intercourse and are fertile. This does not mean that they are ready for the consequences of sexual behaviour.

There are wide variations in the onset of puberty which usually occurs earlier in girls than boys. Early or late puberty affects boys and girls differently. For boys, early maturity and the associated taller and stronger body is linked to strength and masculinity and can be a source of self-confidence and approval by others. For girls, it tends to be less of an advantage, in fact it may be a disadvantage since she looks the woman but is not yet ready for the responses she elicits from older boys and men. It is noteworthy that the age of puberty is dropping, girls are having their first menstruation earlier, thus widening the gap between physical and psychological maturity. This is attributed to better nutrition and health care.

Thinking changes

Only a few general features of adolescent thinking are highlighted.

- The adolescent's **knowledge base increases** because of the effect of years of schooling and contact with more sources of information. There is also an increasing ability to understand the connection between different pieces of information. The adolescent is also able to concentrate for longer periods of time. The ability to evaluate information is linked to becoming more critical of oneself, one's parents and the world in general.
- The **ability to think in abstract terms** increases, which means the adolescent is able to think not only in terms of what is, but also what is possible. This is often associated with a new kind of idealism. This is most noticeable in later adolescence when teenagers may become involved in humanitarian or political causes and may go to extremes in their youthful idealism.
- There is an **egocentricity in the adolescent's thinking** in the sense of being centred on the self – not to be confused with selfishness. This is because of the belief that THEIR way of seeing things is the best way. This is linked to two notions: that of the 'imaginary audience' and of the 'personal fable' (Elkind, 1967).

All of us sometimes react to an **imaginary audience**, as when we mentally rehearse a situation, be it for an interview with a boss, raising a point at a meeting or dealing with a difficult family situation. We picture it in our minds and imagine how 'we' and 'they' will react. The adolescent does much of this kind of imaginary rehearsing, which is a kind of practice for situations and interactions with people. At the centre of the imaginary audience is the self and the notion that others are as strongly focused on it as the teenager is.

Thirteen-year-old Anita was extremely embarrassed about her mother's car, which was old and dented and lacked the style she associated with her friends' parents' BMWs. If school had not been so far away, Anita would rather have walked to school than be seen in this vehicle. She felt that everybody was staring at the car and she would try to hide on the floor of the car if she saw any of her friends on the way home. She was convinced that her social life would surely be ruined if anyone had to associate her with THAT car!

This example highlights the teenager's notion of being the centre of the stage and that the reactions of others will be the same as their own. This tendency is particularly strong in early adolescence.

Another dimension of this self-centredness is the '**personal fable**'. This is a fantasy in which the adolescent occupies a central place, for example as hero or heroine, be it as super popstar, missionary to the distressed, or whatever. This sense of being special also seems to give rise to an exaggerated sense of being invincible or invulnerable. It is expressed in themes such as 'nothing will happen to me', 'I won't have an accident', 'I won't fall pregnant', which partly explains why teenagers may take risks which parents find hair raising.

Taken together, there may be a tendency to be overcritical of others and of things not to the teenager's liking, and to be undercritical concerning the feasibility of their own ideas. Under these circumstances, parents can be helpful if they:

- avoid sarcasm and excessive criticism
- retain a sense of humour without poking fun at their child's ideas and idealism
- are patient, knowing that this stage will usually pass
- stand firm in regard to their own values and ideas
- are willing to listen to their teenager's views and keep the channels of communication open

- are prepared to negotiate, but not to abdicate their role as parents
- give encouragement, praise and credit for trying, even if something is unsuccessful
- help their children to evaluate themselves realistically
- concentrate on the talents and strengths of their teenagers rather than on their limitations
- use their teenager's emerging critical ability to see possible alternative courses of action and to consider the consequences of different courses of action
- are honest, instead of defensive, about their own shortcomings, about which one's adolescent offspring may be uncomfortably perceptive
- recognise the validity of viewpoints which may differ from their own.



POINT TO PONDER

'The best brought up children are those who have seen their parents as they are. Hypocrisy is not the parent's first duty' (George Bernard Shaw).

EXERCISE

Can you recall situations when you were an adolescent, when you felt your parents did not understand you or when they embarrassed you in some way or other? Are there any similarities between this and any of your teenager's reactions?

Behaving morally

Closely allied to the higher levels of thinking which now emerge in the teenager is the increasing ability to make independent moral judgements. This involves certain steps.

- In the first place the teenager must recognise that there is a moral problem. For example, John knows that his friend, Basil, is throwing wild parties while his parents are away and that some drugs and alcohol are being freely taken. This is putting some of his friends at risk for doing things they would not normally do. John is really concerned about this.
- John decides that something ought to be done. He has spent hours thinking that something should be done to stop this situation from possibly becoming harmful in one way or another.
- John has to decide in terms of his conscience and values what action to take. This is often the most difficult part because John may be torn between loyalty to his friends and concern for them. Taking appropriate action may mean getting his friends into trouble with their parents.
- Finally, he makes the decision to speak to Basil himself and to warn other friends about what is going on. Hardest of all, if this fails he will seek the advice of a counsellor or, worst of all, talk to Basil's parents, which would mean the end of their friendship.

Whatever the moral judgement and action taken in response to a situation such as that faced by John it will have its roots in earlier development and particularly in the example shown by parents and other significant people and in the values that have been instilled.

In a nutshell, it is during the teenage years that moral behaviour begins moving towards a sense of responsibility towards others. There tends to be a difference between males and females concerning where the emphasis is placed. Females may place the emphasis on realities and interpersonal relations, for example, considering 'What is good for someone else', or 'What is best for me and you'. Answers to these questions may then influence the action taken. In the case of males the concern may be focused on group interaction such as 'being a good team mate'.

Moving towards moral responsibility is complicated by certain contradictions inherent in Western culture itself. Many years ago Horney (1951) pointed out three major contradictions in our culture which seem even more relevant today:

- The constant stimulation of our needs and our inability to satisfy them. Just consider the numerous products and exciting holiday destinations advertised – yet within reach of so few.

- The contradiction between the values of brotherly love and the demands of the marketplace and its emphasis on rivalry and competition.
- The conflict between our alleged freedom and the innumerable restrictions placed upon it. Here one need only consider how many rules of the road must be observed on the drive from home to work.



POINT TO PONDER

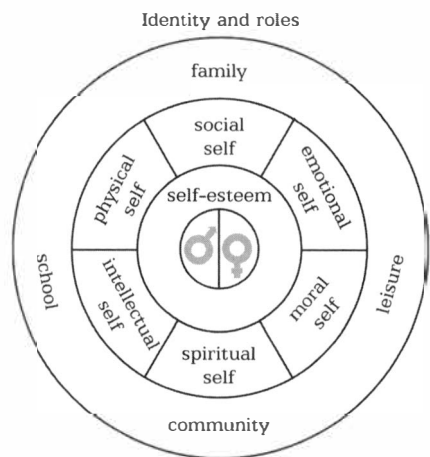
'Everything that frees our spirit without giving us control of ourselves is ruinous' (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe).

This is me!

Our self-image relates to: what I think I am; what I am capable of; what others think of me; what I would like to be (ideal self-concept), and how I rate myself (self-esteem).

This circle represents the different aspects of a person's self-image.

- The *physical* self which refers to one's view of one's health, appearance, sexuality, energy, stamina, etc.
- The *social* self which refers to how one sees oneself socially: as outgoing, shy, popular, friendly, extrovert or introvert.
- The *intellectual* self which refers to one's talents and abilities, for example being good at maths but hopeless at drawing.
- The *emotional* self: perceiving oneself as cool and calm, or emotional, moody, basically joyful, easily hurt, anxious, etc.
- The *moral* self. This refers to what kind of moral person I think I am, what my ethics are. Religious faith is often the foundation of one's moral judgements.



Statements or thoughts such as 'I am not as hardworking as I ought to be' or 'Why can't I be as nice as my best friend?' are self-evaluative remarks that indicate a person's **self-esteem**. Some discrepancy between one's real self and what one should ideally be is common at any age. However, if the discrepancy is too wide this can lead to serious dissatisfaction with oneself. On the other hand, if there is no difference at all this could indicate smugness and a denial of any shortcomings.

There is also a dark side to self-esteem and this we sometimes see in people or leaders who have an inflated sense of self, who are arrogant, brook no opposition and may react in extreme ways when thwarted, challenged or threatened. Often their entire self-image is centred on one aspect thereof, for example being a gang leader, the school's rugby star, a fine drummer or a national hero. This may explain their extreme reaction, often in the form of aggression, to any threat to their position because all their self-esteem is linked only to this (Baumeister *et al*, 1996).

This is my place and future role

Our sense of self and identity are closely interwoven. Identity relates to one's place in the community. This is reflected in statements such as: 'I am a Grade 8 pupil', 'I play tennis for the second team', 'I'm the eldest daughter', 'I'm a Muslim.'

It is during adolescence that a person's identity begins to be more consciously formulated. It has direct implications for the roles the teenager will ultimately fill as an adult. Erikson (1963) sees the development of a clear identity as the primary task of adolescence because it links so closely with a person's later commitments. It is usually during late adolescence or early adulthood that a sense of identity is achieved.

The development of a person's identity does not always proceed smoothly. Some adolescents may lack a sense of direction and commitment. This may especially be the case in early adolescence.

In some cases a role and identity may be prescribed by tradition as when



a social position is inherited. Another example would be when a son is expected to follow in his father's footsteps by joining the family business, even though he may lack the particular talents or skills this may require.

Many adolescents **explore several roles** and alternatives with considerable enthusiasm for limited periods of time before making final choices. Then there are adolescents who set themselves certain goals and pursue them with commitment. In other words, they have made certain vocational, political, or interpersonal choices. They have a clear sense of their identity. Others may find it difficult to find direction, or simply need more time.

An individual's self-image and identity show considerable consistency over time. However, they may have to be reassessed and changed when circumstances change, new challenges must be confronted or new insights are gained.

Erikson (1963) believes that an individual's sense of identity must be firmly established before there is a readiness for true intimacy with others. Intimacy may seem a threat to someone with an uncertain identity.

Alternatively, someone with an unformulated identity may over-identify with someone else, be it a lover, friend or gang leader.

Gender identity

Developing a clear sense of one's masculinity or femininity, that is one's gender identity, is an important aspect of psychological development.

EXERCISE

- 1 What psychological characteristics do you regard as typical for males?
 - 2 What psychological characteristics do you regard as typical for females?
 - 3 Can you think of a person you know, or a character in a book or on screen, with both qualities? (Why not make this a family game, letting each person first draw up a list of his or her own, then compare and discuss them.)
 - 4 Do you and other members of the family hold similar or different views?
 - 5 What have you learnt from this exercise?
-

Nowadays, there is greater flexibility concerning gender identity. This has important implications for vocational choice: a hundred years ago, a female doctor was almost unknown. And what man would possibly have wanted to be a florist?

As during earlier stages, the father can be especially helpful in regard to the development of gender identity of his teenage children. For example, a father can affirm the emerging womanhood of his daughter by treating her with courtesy and striking a balance between protectiveness and respect for her growing independence and by showing appreciation for her achievements of whatever kind. If such affirmation is lacking, she may seek it elsewhere, for example in early involvement with older men. A father's approval of his son's masculinity is equally important. He should acknowledge his son's need for greater independence yet remain interested in and supportive of his activities. There seems to be a connection between a lack of fathering and excessive aggressiveness in male teenagers, as if they were trying just too hard to show their toughness which they see as synonymous with masculinity.

It needs to be emphasised that gender identity is an aspect of personality. So it is possible for a female to be strong in masculine characteristics and vice versa. This should not be confused with homosexuality, which relates to preferences of sexual partner.

SOME SPECIFIC CONCERNS OF PARENTS ABOUT TEENAGE BEHAVIOUR

The aggressive teenager

There is a disturbingly high incidence of aggression and violence among the youth of this country. Various factors have been associated with this. In disadvantaged groups, it is related to a culture of poverty, unemployment, exacerbated by the wide economic gap between the poor and the affluent, possibly leading to envy and jealousy. Disrupted family life is a common feature and active family support may be lacking in times of crisis. The rage and violence of youth stemming from this background may express itself in destructiveness and crime (Le Roux & Geldenhuys, 1994).

Speaking at the launch of the Democracy Education Conference in Pretoria in 1997, Graca Machel appealed to leaders and parents to promote a culture of respect among the youth. 'Whatever was the legitimacy of the

armed struggle ... we have the responsibility of bringing up a generation of young people who believe that to achieve something they must use violence.' She went on to say: 'Our children do not know how to solve a problem without resorting to violence and they believe that human life has no value We must work towards a reaffirmation of a set of values that is free from recourse to violence and racism' (*Pretoria News*, 12 May 1997). To this, I would add freedom from sexism, because the disturbingly high incidence of rape stems from a lack of respect for and aggression towards women.



However, teenage aggression is not limited to any particular ethnic or socio-economic group. It is to be found in all strata of society if a sufficient number of factors which promote it are present.

The youth of South Africa need a positive vision of the future. Among the black youth this means a shift from an identity of protest to an identity of reconstruction (Freeman, 1994); among the white youth a shift to an identity of reconstruction in a new social order.

The energy of youth needs to be canalised constructively to give purpose to life and value to the individual.

In a country with such a high incidence of aggression, we should try to limit aggressive cues that stimulate aggression in those inclined towards it. Such cues could take the form of slogans, scenes of violence on TV, incitements by political leaders, or the visible presence of weapons.

Factors linked to aggression

Aggression incorporates anger, hostility and the desire to hurt or damage. Certain factors have consistently been linked to aggressive behaviour, namely personality, family life, socio-cultural context and personal life history. Briefly they are:

- **Personality:** Distrust, poor self-image or inflated self-esteem tied to aggressive behaviour; feelings of anger, hurt, fear, frustration, alienation and aggressiveness; a lack of social skills.
- **Family:** Lack of warmth and love; conflict in the home; limited coping

skills; absent or uninterested fathers; uncertain values; ineffective role models and little support in times of stress.

- **Context:** Poverty and overcrowding; uncertain values; high visibility of violence; poor support services; aggressive role models.
- **Life history:** Many family disruptions; unsettledness and uprootedness; exposure to trauma and violence; peer pressure, poor education; unrealistic achievement expectations.

This list highlights the numerous factors which might be involved in the development of aggressive behaviour. If we wish to reduce aggressive behaviour, we need to address as many of these factors as possible, and to demonstrate and reward alternative and co-operative responses.

Counteracting aggression

The following points need to be taken into account when trying to counteract aggressive behaviour. There should be exposure to and interaction with non-aggressive role models. Training in social skills can also often reduce aggressiveness because individuals may react with aggression because they have no other skills to use in situations of conflict. Learning to communicate better and to be assertive instead of aggressive is also helpful. Lacking negotiating skills and not knowing how to deal with criticism is another problem. Social skills training should focus on all such aspects in addition to also trying to develop more empathic responses.

One such skills programme was undertaken with highly aggressive adolescents in their last year at primary school. They were taught social skills in small groups. They were shown appropriate videotapes, played games, and read about children who coped successfully or unsuccessfully with problems. At the end of the programme a marked improvement in their behaviour was noted by other children and teachers (Bienert & Schneider, 1993).

Pro-social behaviour

There are many adolescents and young people who are highly responsible and whose behaviour is mostly co-operative. Coupled with the idealism of youth, they are a powerful force for innovation and constructive change. The following tend to be associated with pro-social behaviour, that is,

caring, sharing and helping. Again we find several factors allied to this kind of behaviour.

- **Personality:** Trust in others and optimism; positive self-image and good self-esteem; a sense of competence; social skills: helpful and friendly, assertive, co-operative.
- **Family:** Co-operative and warm; involved and interested; good communication; clear standards and values; good example; support in times of crisis; problem-solving skills; having fun together.
- **Context:** Stability maintained in spite of cultural conflicts; involvement with constructive groups, eg sport; reasonably comfortable living conditions; non-participation in violence, even if affected by it; adequate sources of support, for example at school
- **Life history:** Continuity and stability; good education; reasonable expectations of achievement; effective role models; exposure to helping behaviour.

The two extreme scenarios of aggressive and pro-social behaviour serve to show how many factors are involved. In neither scenario is it suggested that all factors need to be present. They merely reflect what factors have been associated with these contrasting forms of behaviour. Looking at the factors associated with pro-social behaviour, one is able to deduce what kind of action could be taken to counter aggression and encourage responsible social behaviour.

Friends for better or worse

Adolescents are generally drawn strongly to their peers, for example by



being a member of a group, a sports team, a clique of friends, a club, a gang. In early adolescence groups of the same sex are preferred. This gradually changes to participation in groups comprised of both sexes, still later this pattern changes and there may be closer involvement in couples, loosely associated with groups.

Friends and groups are an important form of support for adolescents as they try to become more independent from parental control, yet still lack experience and skill in coping with the outside world. Friends also play a part in the development of the adolescent's identity as different behaviour patterns are tried out in the group. It also should be recognised that a teenager's popularity in the group is an important source of self-esteem.

Parents and friends

It is not unusual for friends of teenagers and their social activities to be a source of worry for parents and a source of conflict between them and their children. Children may resent what they see as parental interference and restrictiveness whereas parents may be concerned about protecting the teenagers against the many risks to which they may be exposed in today's world. Parents may deal with the situation in a variety of ways. They may be authoritarian and rigid, and impose very strict limits. At the other extreme they may be very permissive and define no boundaries of behaviour. Many parents fall somewhere between these two extremes, allowing increasing independence, yet not being afraid to make certain rules and ensuring that they are complied with.

I am reminded of the story of a parent asked to referee a football match between two schools because the referee had not arrived. Valiantly trying to do so, he discovered to his horror that the teams wore similar uniforms and he could not sort out who belonged to which team. Moreover, the rules had changed since the days when he had played football. Not surprisingly, his decisions were not accepted and argument, chaos and fights resulted. Fortunately, the referee arrived in time to avert a major confrontation. The point of this story is that without clearly agreed upon ground rules, much argument, frustration, uncertainty and even aggression may occur, not only on the sports field but also in the home!

EXERCISE

Setting limits

How strict or lenient would you be with regard to setting limits concerning matters such as:

	Strict	Lenient	Moderate
Hairstyle			
Curfew			
Helping at home			
Homework			
Clothes			
Tidiness			
Politeness			
Spending pocket money			
Watching TV			
Smoking			
Drinking			
Using family car (after age 18)			
Other			

- How would this differ according to the age and gender of your teenager?

At what age would you permit your children to:

	Son	Daughter
Go out at night:		
● with a group of same-sex friends		
● with a mixed group of friends		
● as a couple		
Go on holiday with:		
● a group of same-sex friends		
● a mixed group		
● friends of the opposite sex		
Go to a party without adult supervision:		
● at a friend's house		
● at a public place		

*Do you ever discuss these rules with the parents of your children's friends? Would it not be helpful to do so?

Parents and their children's sexuality

One of the particularly difficult situations parents have to face relates to the emerging sexuality of their teenage child.

For centuries most cultures and religions have disapproved of premarital sex. Even during the first part of this century, the prevailing norm in Western countries was to defer sexual intercourse until marriage. To ensure this, a great deal of parental control and chaperonage was exercised. Young teenagers met only in public places, usually in a group under the supervision of adults. Curfews were strict and couples generally only went out alone once there was a real commitment to marriage, as when they were engaged. However, there was also a different sexual morality for males and females. It was considered acceptable for males to 'sow their wild oats' before marriage, usually with women considered to have loose morals. But women were expected to be chaste.

In the sixties the so-called sexual revolution began, leading to increasingly permissive attitudes towards premarital sex. Today there may be considerable discrepancy between religious and parental values and those of their teenagers and their friends. Many young people today believe that sexual activity is acceptable, provided a couple are genuinely in love. A feature of this new morality is the great increase in the number of teenage girls and young women who are sexually active. A particularly worrying phenomenon is that the age at which sexual behaviour begins has been dropping steadily. A serious consequence of these changes has been a dramatic increase in teenage pregnancy, which has even been referred to as an epidemic. It is estimated that about one million teenage pregnancies occur in the United States of America annually. In South Africa it is estimated that 11 per cent of all babies are born to teenage mothers. These are alarming figures (De Barros, 1990).

To deal with all the factors involved in teenage pregnancies would fill a book. Janet's story encompasses many of them. Janet is 16 years old

and four and a half months pregnant. 'I just can't believe this has happened. I only had sex twice. Now I just don't know what to do. I'm going to have to leave school because my mom is a single parent and has to work ... and I had such special plans – I really wanted to do something with my life – now I just don't know. I do well at school, so I think I may be able to stay on, but I don't really feel like it. I'm different from the other girls now. I mean, it just doesn't seem important to talk about wearing my hair up or down and their worrying about their pimples ... I wish that was my biggest worry. And (starting to cry) Jake (the father of the expected baby) is at the same school as me, and he just runs away when he sees me now. I just hate him.'

A child bearing a child. Instead of her resources being used for her own development, she is being physically and psychologically drained. There are certain risks attached to teenage pregnancy and the younger the mother, the more they apply.

- Both mothers and babies are physically more vulnerable, for example babies born to very young mothers tend to have lower birth weight.
- An unwanted child may become a rejected child.
- A teenage mother's schooling and training are at best interrupted, at worst, ended.
- The development of the self-image and identity is deflected from its normal course of development: she is a mother before she really knows who she herself is.

Although social attitudes are changing and there is less rejection of unwed mothers, there may still be disapproval by peers and parents, who react with disappointment, withdrawal and anger.

Teenage pregnancy may lead to early marriage, for which neither partner may be emotionally, intellectually or economically ready.

Abortion

Now that the new abortion act has been promulgated, it may be argued that this is the answer to teenage pregnancy. However, the matter is not that simple. Many people have serious religious and other objections about

abortion. It also needs to be recognised that teenage pregnancy may be associated with a period of denial due to shock such as thinking: 'it can't have happened to me' or 'it will go away if I ignore it'. The consequence of this is that by the time the pregnancy is admitted, it may be too late for an abortion, or associated with much higher risk.



POINT TO PONDER

{ It has been said that the thorny question for parents is whether they should encourage chastity or the use of contraception? } What do you think about it?

Teenage sex is most often unprotected sex, especially in the early years, and therefore the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, including Aids, is another cause for concern. The highest incidence of Aids in South Africa is in the 16 to 24 years age group.

So what can parents do?

At the outset it must be recognised that parents have a difficult task. They live in a society which encourages sexual openness and where the media provide endless stimulation of sexual needs, but little protection is offered by society to young people with raging hormones.

There is no simple answer to the question 'So what should parents do?'. And many parents, because of embarrassment, or lack of knowledge, do little or nothing about sex education. The problem often lies not so much with transmitting the basic facts about reproduction as with talking about the values and acceptable behaviour associated with sex. Parents who are able to discuss sexual behaviour openly and honestly with their children are the exception rather than the rule. Parents who have been able to communicate openly with their children from early childhood onwards may find this less of a problem.

- 1 Do you think that attitudes of your generation towards sex and sexual behaviour differ from those of today's youth?
 - 2 In what ways do you think they differ?
 - 3 What worries you most about these changes?
 - 4 Do you think that some changes are for the better?
-

Having said that sex education is not generally one of the areas of greatest parental skill, it must be admitted that this is not a topic to be avoided: the contrary is true.

Apart from teaching the basic facts of sexual development and reproduction parents must encourage an attitude of concern and advocate responsible sexual behaviour.

So what parents can do is:

- **Be an example** of what they profess. This means being an example by means of the attitudes and behaviour towards each other as a couple.

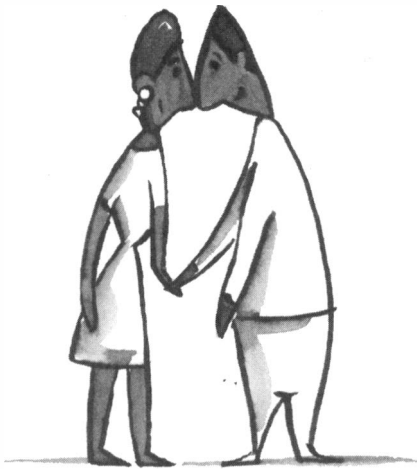
More specifically, there should be mutual respect, love and affection.

- **Ensure that their values and beliefs are clear and reflected in behaviour towards others.**

If parents are seen to be inconsiderate towards others, to manipulate and exploit them for their personal gain, then their arguments about responsibility towards others will lack credibility.

- **See to it that their children are correctly informed about sexual behaviour and development.**

Providing appropriate books or other reading material could be one way of doing this. It would be important to check the approach adopted in such sources of information: an approach which does little more than deal with the gymnastics of sex would hardly be suitable.



- **Find out about life skills and sex education programmes being offered in your area.** If the school your child attends is offering such courses find out about their content and who is presenting them and if the person has been trained to conduct such courses. An ill-at-ease biology teacher talking about the birds and the bees is not adequate! (See chapter notes at end for information.)
- **Use the opportunities provided** by features or stories in newspapers, magazines or on screen to raise relevant issues and to talk about them.
- **Be patient.** Bear in mind that there may be genuine idealism at the heart of the notions a teenager holds. Introduce a note of realism but be careful not to destroy dreams.
- **Do not expect your views to be accepted.** Youth has always rebelled against the opinions and ways of their elders. Nonetheless it is the parent's responsibility to counter ignorance, to raise issues and to suggest different alternatives and discuss their possible consequences.
- **Do not assume that today's youth has no morality of its own.** Today's youth tends to stress respect for the individual, regardless of religion, race or sex, honesty in interpersonal relationships and an awareness of social responsibility.
- **Protect your children against exposure to high-risk situations,** especially during early adolescence. Co-operation with other parents might be useful in establishing certain ground rules.

Adolescent sexuality

What males need to know about females

- Females are often more emotionally involved than males.
- It is often because of a desire to please the male that a girl submits to sex, not because she herself wants it.
- It is often the romantic, emotional side of love which is her primary focus.
- The emotional tie is not easily broken.
- She dresses to invite male attention, not necessarily to invite sex.
- She may be more sensual than sexual, wanting tenderness and caresses.
- The peak of sexuality is later for females than males.
- The consequences of sex, especially unprotected sex, can be very serious

for young females, particularly those resulting from an unwanted pregnancy.

What females need to know about males

- Males can be more casual about sex: the sense of conquest and the hunt can be important to them.
- The male's reaction tends to be genital rather than sensual and it is the climax, the goal, rather than the process which may be important.
- Physical attractiveness is very important to the male and he may find visual cues sexually arousing.
- The male more readily separates emotional and sexual involvement.
- Males reach the peak of their sexuality in their teens.
- Males reach the peak of their sexual arousal more quickly than females.
- The desire to impress others may be an important aspect of male sexuality. (Compare the image of the 'macho sexual conqueror' with that of the 'easy to get' girl or woman.)
- Society judges male and female sexual promiscuity differently.
- The consequences of unprotected sex and subsequent pregnancies are generally less serious for males than females. They do not lose reputation to the same extent, nor do they have their schooling interrupted by unwanted pregnancies.

EXERCISE

- What is responsible or irresponsible sex?

Can you discuss this question with your teenager, bearing the above information in mind?

Alternatively, you could imagine you are taking part in a TV discussion programme. Perhaps a group of teenagers and parents or a teacher, or a group of parents could take part in this discussion. Choose a neutral chairperson who sees to it that everyone has a chance to state his or her case without carrying on endlessly. The chairperson should have read the relevant section in this book and should be able to ask relevant questions. Set a definite time limit for the discussion. Let the

chairperson sum up the discussion at the end. Then go on to the next question.

- What can be done to ensure that opinions are translated into behaviour?
Follow the same procedure as for the first question.
 - What have you learnt from seeking answers to these questions?
 - How can this help you talk to your teenager about responsible sex?
-

When do I know I'm in love?

It would be nice if there was a simple answer to this question, which is asked by most people at some stage in their lives, beginning as teenagers. Much has been written and said about love. Sternberg (1986) identified three components of love, which may be present in different combinations.

- **Passion.** This is physical attraction, romance, sexual excitement and longing for the beloved. It may be instant and intense and may die just as quickly. Passion alone can be equated to infatuation.
- **Intimacy.** This is a sense of closeness because feelings, ideas, possessions and interests are shared. One likes this other person and enjoys being with him or her. Intimacy may take time to develop, or be the source of attraction. Intimacy alone means liking and friendship.
- **Commitment.** Commitment is a deliberate decision to nurture and maintain the love one feels for another. Commitment alone could be emotionally empty.

Ideally, all three dimensions should be present. However, they may vary over time in their predominance. Passion may precede or follow intimacy. Intimacy may lead to commitment and so on It is possible that two people are in love, yet the nature of their love may differ: for one it may be mainly passion, and for the other it may consist essentially of intimacy and commitment. A situation which is best avoided is one in which intense passion is felt for a person one actually does not like, fears or distrusts. An idealistic teenager may believe that love can change the other person to become more 'likeable', for example to stop their aggressiveness, to change their drinking habits or stop their philandering.

A reality to be faced is that one can only change oneself and not another person.

What kind of situations do you think the following combinations may lead to in the case of young people?

- 1 He feels passion
She feels intimacy and commitment
- 2 She feels commitment
He feels intimacy and commitment
- 3 He feels passion and intimacy
She feels passion and intimacy

There are, of course, several other combinations one could consider.

So while there is no simple answer to the question, 'When do I know I'm in love?', it could be helpful to know which component dominates one's love.

Don't do drugs!

The phrase 'Don't do crime' is flashed across our TV screens at regular intervals. It does not suggest that a little bit of crime is OK — and that one should just avoid big crime. The message is clear: no crime is OK. Small crime often leads to big crime. It is the same with drugs. **Don't do drugs.**

There are no 'safe' drugs. People may be misled because there are no immediate visible effects. Because the effects may be 'lekker' this also leads to denial of possible ill-effects. The long-term effects are rarely known at the outset and no one ever plans to become an addict. Yet if a person has a predisposition to mental disturbance, this may be triggered quite suddenly by drug taking.

Then there is always the risk of becoming psychologically dependent, needing a drug whenever feeling low. This escapism then stands in the way of learning to cope with and to enjoy life without drugs, for example by overcoming shyness or lack of confidence. Some drugs, including dagga, have a demotivating effect.

A serious source of concern is the increasing use of drugs among children and especially adolescents. Certain signs should alert a parent to the possibility that a child is using drugs:

- very sudden mood swings (bearing in mind that mood swings are very common in teenagers, especially younger teenagers)
- secretiveness, deception and lying, notably in a child not formerly inclined to behave in this way
- a chronic need for money and unexplained losses of money stealing
- altered sleeping patterns
- lethargy and drowsiness or hyperactivity
- irritability which may culminate in aggressiveness
- change in personality, which is not to be confused with normal developmental changes, but rather a case of being really different
- loss of interest in school work, hobbies and friends
- a general vagueness
- neglect of appearance and 'way out' clothing

A combination of these signs could alert a parent to the possibility of drug use. (Information could be obtained from SANCA and other organisations – refer to chapter notes at end of the book.)

At a recent police forum in the Centurion area, it was emphasised that when parents wish to confront their children when they suspect drug abuse they should first get their facts and evidence together which should then be presented firmly and matter-of-factly. A general question such as: 'Are you on drugs?' is too easily met with denial.

At the same forum, a social worker who is directly involved with drug addiction among teenagers in a rehabilitation centre listed seven factors which were brought to light in answer to the question: 'Why are you on drugs?' In order of importance, the following factors were mentioned:

- Drugs are so easily available
- Demands by society are too high and confusing
- Double standards: if drink is OK, why not drugs?
- Because of needing peer approval
- Curiosity: what is it like to be high?
- The excitement of forbidden fruit
- The influence, but not pressure, of peers

THINKING ABOUT A FUTURE CAREER

The question of choosing a career becomes more urgent in late adolescence as schooling nears its end.

Many years ago, Holland (1956) identified certain personal orientations and preferences which affect career choice which are still useful to this day. Briefly, these orientations can be summed up as follows:

- **The physical/realistic orientation.** A person of this orientation tends to enjoy physical action. It may involve physical strength, co-ordination and manual skills. It often relates to outdoor activities such as sport and recreation, construction activities or gardening. Physical robustness may be necessary.
- **The intellectual/searching orientation.** People of this orientation like to analyse and think things through. There is a strong need to understand and organise knowledge and information. This kind of approach would suit a business analyst, an academic or a researcher. A high educational level is necessary.
- **The supportive or social orientation.** This embodies a strong interest in people, often in a helping or serving capacity, for example as in teaching, social or health services. Good interpersonal skills are important.
- **The conforming/conventional orientation.** This is characteristic of people who like structure and order. They often prefer to work with numbers and systems rather than people. They also tend to strongly identify with power, status and external symbols. People who fit into this category would include administrators, accountants, bankers, etc.
- **The persuasive/enterprising orientation.** Such people are often able to express themselves well and use their ability to influence and persuade others. They tend to avoid rigidly structured situations and enjoy power, status, leadership and social activities. They are often found in sales, politics and management.
- **The artistic/creative orientation.** Individuals with this orientation tend to be non-conforming and dislike highly structured activities. They comprise journalists, artists, musicians and so on. They enjoy freedom of expression, novelty and creativity.
- **The religious orientation.** This is linked to a role in one's spiritual belief system for example as priest, theologian or religious counsellor.

Of course it is possible to have more than one orientation. This can be an advantage in that it broadens one's range of options and adds diversity to life. It may also be a source of difficulty, as when trying to find a job or career which satisfies both orientations equally well. In such cases it may

be possible to focus on one orientation in regard to work and to satisfy the other by means of related interests and hobbies.

EXERCISE

If your teenager is not at all certain about which orientation applies, the following exercise might be helpful. It should be completed by your son or daughter personally and could then form the basis of a discussion with them.

Decide which one or two of the above orientations seem to 'fit' you best. In each case decide why you chose this orientation.

If you are not at all certain about which one applies to you, then first eliminate those that definitely do **not** apply to you.

Then ask yourself the question: What am I good at? Think of all the situations in your life: family, school and school subjects, sport, community, part-time work, hobbies, political activities, looking after pets and so on ...

Then ask yourself:

What am I uncomfortable or unhappy with?

Which of these activities do I really enjoy?

This may help you choose what direction you should follow.

Having made a preliminary choice, one should then obtain as much information as possible. Schools may provide valuable information. Newspapers often have special vocational supplements towards the end of the year. Technikons, colleges or universities in your area could be contacted. It should be borne in mind that many courses can be studied part time or by correspondence. Moreover, there are many new courses at all these institutions, some of which are relatively short courses with a specific applied focus.

It is also very helpful to speak to someone in your field of interest concerning the demands of the job or career and the challenges, difficulties or conditions associated with it. Working as a volunteer or as a student during holidays can be particularly useful in learning about the realities of a certain work situation.

All careers nowadays are open to both men and women. Nonetheless, one should be realistic about the demands that multiple role fulfillment can make on women if they marry and have children. A career which

allows for flexible working hours or the possibility of working from home has much to commend it in this regard.

Entrepreneurship

High unemployment means that many young people may be unable to find work and may have to create their own jobs. Already some schools are beginning to introduce talks and information about being an entrepreneur.

Essentially it means using your initiative and talents, to identify a need in the community that you can satisfy, and charging for the goods or service you are providing. Many enterprises had humble beginnings. To start with, you should find out as much as possible about being self-employed and be willing to begin in a very small way. You must develop an awareness of needs and opportunities in your community. Then you can decide whether there is something you could do about these needs. Once you have an idea, go and discuss it with people who know about business matters. Then make a plan and try it out.

SUMMING UP

What is abundantly clear is that the teenager faces many challenges, opportunities and uncertainties. Moreover, today's teenager will also be confronted by forces in the environment which he or she may still lack the skill, personality or experience to deal with. On the other hand, many teenagers display remarkable enthusiasm, resourcefulness and energy. They have much to learn about life, yet, having grown up in a world very different from that in which their parents grew up, they may sometimes be in a position to teach them a thing or two!

It is evident that the entire social fabric in which families and children are embedded has been disrupted and community bonds have weakened, often leaving parents and children isolated with little community support in times of uncertainty and crisis. It is important, therefore, that forces in the community learn to co-operate, to find common ground and to be mutually supportive in fostering the development and wellbeing of all members of their community.

There are discernable moves in this direction. For example, police forums are inviting the community, parents, schools, volunteers and professionals to join hands in the fight against crime and drugs. Many religious groups are becoming centres of mutual support and pastoral care. Some schools are creating opportunities for parents to meet in small groups to establish closer contact with one another. There is an established youth culture; perhaps we also need a parent culture.

The establishment of such groups and of mini-communities within the large impersonal cities and towns in which the majority of people live may be an effective way of providing a more supportive environment for parents and children alike.



POINT TO PONDER

'In the end, there are only two lasting bequests parents can leave youth: one being roots, and the other being wings' (John D Santrock).



CHAPTER 10

FAMILIES, STRESS AND COPING

What is stress?

Stress in adulthood

Stress in childhood

Adults coping with stress

Getting rid of stress

Summing up

FAMILIES, STRESS AND COPING

Many potential sources of stress have been identified in previous chapters. The most overriding factor contributing to stress can probably be put in one word: CHANGE.

Toffler in his bestseller *Future shock* (1970) refers to the rate of change as sometimes exceeding our capacity to deal with it. No previous century has changed in so many ways in so short a time. 'We are simultaneously experiencing a youth revolution, a sexual revolution, an economic revolution, a racial revolution, a colonial revolution and the most rapid and deep going technological revolution in history,' says Toffler. To this could be added the increasing pace of urbanisation and profound changes in values. Looming like a spectre on the horizon is Aids and the potential it holds for decimating the youth and young adult population.

In South Africa, there are additional factors disrupting the entire social fabric:

- enormous income discrepancies between the affluent and desperately poor
- the weakened family system, leading to a lack of discipline, inadequate role models for children and youth, and the emergence of a street corner culture
- rapid urbanisation and a shift from clan-based communities to a fragmented, urban culture with no clear community leadership
- an authoritarian 'macho-based' popular culture which tends to produce high levels of aggression. To this could be added an alarmingly high rate of violence and crime (Schlemmer, 1993).



POINT TO PONDER

As individuals, possibly the most important thing we can do is to promote a sound family life because so much of the negative behaviour we see is rooted in disrupted and unhappy families. If we can begin to stabilise and enrich our family life and reaffirm values of caring and responsibility, we will have contributed something of immense importance to the future.

At the time of writing, the South African context is hardly one calculated to promote a social climate of tranquility. Nonetheless, one should guard against pessimism and defeatist attitudes. It should be recognised that we are experiencing some very fundamental changes and are currently in a difficult but challenging transition which will, it is hoped, give rise to a truly unique and better society.

WHAT IS STRESS?

Some seventy years ago, Hans Selye introduced the concept of stress, which he explained as a **discrepancy** between an environmental demand and a person's ability to meet it. Stress is a sense of unease and tension and a threat to one's sense of wellbeing.

At a very basic human level, stress can be reacted to by fight or flight. The caveman facing a dangerous animal had only two choices: to fight and kill it, or to remove himself from the scene as fast as possible.



To some extent we still have these two basic options. Aggressiveness in response to threat remains an all-too-human response, and sometimes a necessary one. So does flight, which may take the form of escapism by means such as fantasies of conquest or oblivion by means of alcohol or drugs.

Stress is associated mainly with negative and distressful events. A stress-scale was developed by Holmes and Rahe (1967), who examined the relationship between traumatic and difficult life events and stress levels. The most stressful life event was the death of a spouse. Next in order of severity was divorce, followed by marital separation. Fourth was the death of a close relative or a term in prison.

Apart from such situations of acute distress, there are those **daily hassles** which can wear us down: the daily traffic jam, time pressures, the

incessant barking of the neighbour's dog, the inconsiderate behaviour of others, a sleepless baby, a dripping tap.

While variety has added spice to life, over-choice can become a problem in itself, for example when the supermarket offers ten different brands of toothpaste and when menu planning has to accommodate the taste of friends who include vegetarians, diabetics and those fighting high cholesterol.

It would be misleading, however, to think of stress only in negative terms. Selye, in an interview when he was aged 71, said: '... adopting the right attitude can convert a negative stress into a positive one – what I call EUSTRESS.' Selye went on to explain that there are also different types of people: '... the "racehorses" who thrive on stress and are only happy with a vigorous, fast-paced lifestyle: and "turtles" who in order to be happy require peace, quiet and a generally tranquil environment' (*Psychology Today*, 1978).

In other words, our personality is a powerful element in determining what we find stressful and how we react to it.



Distress is a response to a situation perceived as unpleasant and potentially harmful. It is associated with feelings of helplessness and anxiety.



Eustress is a response to a situation which is perceived as challenging, often associated with a sense of excitement. Risk-takers often fall into this response category, as do the 'stirrers' who find a calm life rather boring.

Either extreme of distress or eustress has its problems. Extreme distress may lead to the inability to take any constructive action. On the other hand, extreme eustress may also have negative consequences. It could result in recklessness, like that of the entrepreneur who started and lost seven big businesses, but was now having problems launching his eighth because he had lost the public's confidence.

What stress can do to us

Stress can affect us in many different ways: psychologically and physically, and it is reflected in our behaviour. **Psychological** reactions

to stress may be anxiety, fear, aggression, hostility or social withdrawal. Our **thinking** may be affected in that we anticipate the negative, thereby sometimes provoking it, or by interpreting situations too negatively. One is reminded here of the difference between a pessimist and an optimist as humorously demonstrated with reference to the story of David and Goliath: The Israelites took a pessimistic view, thinking 'He's too big and strong for us to challenge'. David, however, saw the situation differently. He thought: 'He's so big, I cannot miss!' His was the optimist's response. In other words, stress can affect our perceptions, expectations and actions.

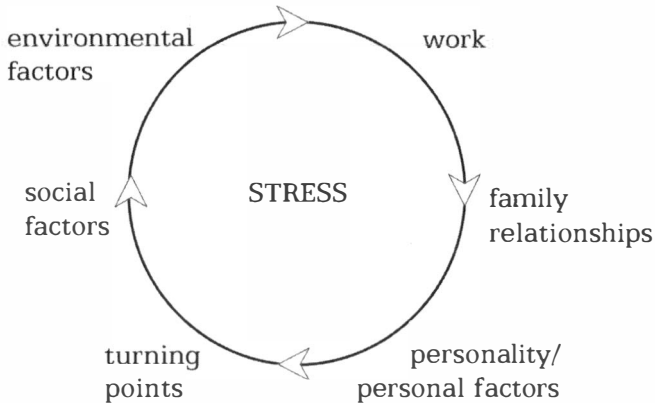
Stress may also trigger **physical** reactions of various kinds because body and mind are closely interconnected. When we are confronted by a threatening situation, such as a snake in our way as we walk along a mountain path, or when we fear dismissal from our job because of a mistake we have made, our mind says: **DANGER**. Paralleled by a mood of fear and anxiety, our body then responds with physiological **ALARM** signals, such as increased heart rate and raised adrenaline levels. Specific symptoms to which we may be prone may also be elicited. One person's stomach will churn, another may feel his chest constrict (signalling a possible attack of asthma), yet another may break out in a rash. Stress finally culminates in **ACTION**. Some individuals react with aggression (attack is the best form of defence). Others may literally be paralysed by fear and unable to move or make any decision. Then there are those who may run from danger at a speed that they would not have thought possible in their wildest dreams, and yet others who cope constructively.

STRESS IN ADULTHOOD

The stresses adults face can be grouped into five main categories which often interact, forming a vicious circle:

- stress which is **work** related
- stress which is related to the **family** or other close relationships
- stress related to **personal factors**, such as our personality or to an identity crisis, low self-esteem or illness
- stress which is related to life's developmental **turning points**
- stress which is largely determined by **environmental factors**, including political upheaval, war, violence, poverty and culture shock when change is too fast
- stress caused by **natural disasters**, such as floods or drought.

The vicious circle of stress



Stress in one area of life often spills over to other areas. When it occurs simultaneously in several areas then anxiety and distress can reach alarmingly high levels.

Overdemand and stress

Stress may be the result of overdemand when our resources are stretched to their limit.

Samuel is a case in point. He is a business executive, very much caught up in the rat-race. He gets up in the morning feeling tired from the night before when he entertained some important overseas clients. The food had been good, but too rich, the wine too abundant, the noise level too high. Perhaps he had also tried too hard to impress his clients. However, his wife was not particularly pleased with his late return home. He slept restlessly. The next morning, breakfast is a rather hurried affair, the emotional climate in the house rather chilly. Samuel feels guilty because he knows he is spending too little time with his family. He actually would prefer to devote more time to his two boys. They used to go fishing together. But nowadays he seems to need to catch up on work, still undone, and on sleep during weekends. So he is either in front of his computer, or resting on his bed. He leaves for work and is soon snarled up in the morning traffic jam and wishes he had left earlier. He turns on the radio for distraction but the

news is so awful it makes him feel worse. He gets to the office late, berates his secretary for not having completed a report he needs NOW, not later, throws himself into his specially designed desk chair and reaches for his cigarettes. He braces himself for his first meeting with a difficult client.

Emma is a social worker. She is a single parent, having divorced her alcoholic husband who phoned her at 2 o'clock in the morning to tell her he was coming back and nothing was going to stop him. Exhausted from this confrontation, Emma drags herself out of bed, wakes the children and makes breakfast. Knowing that this may be her only meal till the evening, she eats well, but probably too quickly. The children, as usual, are dawdling and trying her patience, but eventually they all pile into the old dilapidated car which takes a good deal of coaxing to start. She notices that her youngest has a nasty cough and she begins to wonder if he should not have stayed at home. The children start arguing and she tries to calm them, but ends up by shouting at them. This makes her feel guilty. Having dropped them at school, she is finally off to her demanding job. What awaits her is a desk cluttered with case reports and unfinished administrative work because, due to rationalisation, her staff has been cut. Some particularly difficult situations demand her immediate attention: a runaway teenager who refuses to go home because she hates her mother's boyfriend living with them; a battered woman with nowhere to go. The telephone rings, there is another urgent case which has to be dealt with as soon as possible. Emma wonders if she will ever again feel in control of her life.

Samuel and Emma are in situations of over-demand, both headed for **burnout**, which simply means that the body's resources are being depleted without being adequately replenished. It is a state of mental, emotional and physical exhaustion.

Stress and underdemand

A stress situation of a totally different kind is that of underdemand, when a person's talents and resources are seriously underutilised, when intellectual stimulation is often lacking and when there may be considerable social isolation.

George is a case in point. George worked as a diamond cutter. He had changed firms some two years previously, shortly before there was a slump in the diamond market. Staff were retrenched and as a relative newcomer to the firm, he was one of the first to go. He had in the meantime spent his pension money on a caravan, having visions of happy holidays with his wife and teenage daughter. After the initial shock, George settled down to a few repair jobs around the home, but these soon came to an end. Never having had many interests outside his work, he was sitting around idly, bored and also desperately lonely, realising for the first time how important the social contact with his colleagues at work had been. Now in his early forties, everyone seemed to think he was too old to start something new. In any case, he did not know what else there was for him to do. He tried a few sales jobs, but had to admit that this was not his *forté*. Moreover, the transport expenses he incurred were higher than his commission, so he gave this up. His self-confidence plummeted, he tried to assert himself by telling his wife how to run the home. She was now the breadwinner and thoroughly resented this. As George became more discouraged, he did less and less and began sitting in front of the TV for hours on end. His wife, on the other hand, was feeling more and more overburdened and began to nag him constantly about not trying hard enough to find a job and to sell the caravan, which he refused to do. He still hoped things would improve and, besides, the caravan was his only remaining status symbol.

What these life stories tell us is how stress in one sphere of life spills over into others. However, sometimes stress in one area is counteracted by satisfaction in other aspects of life. For example, the family can be a very important buffer against stress at work and, sometimes, work is an escape from a difficult family situation. Some individuals are able to contain anxiety within one domain and are able to leave their work worries behind when they leave the office, but many take them home. On the other hand, difficulties at home often affect work performance.

LIFE'S TURNING POINTS AND STRESS

The examples given above reflect stress situations peculiar to each of the individuals concerned. There are, however, 'normal' **turning points** in life which may be associated with stress. These are briefly outlined here,

but are dealt with as part of the developmental process discussed in chapters 7, 8 and 9. The normal turning points most young adults face are finding work, developing an intimate relationship, establishing an independent household and starting a family. In the middle years, typical turning points are when children leave the family nest and retirement. All such events are part of everyday life and may be associated with a wide range of reactions from great joy to acute anxiety and, not infrequently, considerable stress.

Often stress motivates the search for solutions to problems. In this way many a crisis situation has actually been a spur to growth and development, as Sarah's story reveals.



Sarah's husband left her shortly after the birth of her second child. Sarah found herself alone, with two young children, and shattered self-confidence. Her artistic talent did not seem to provide much of an income. A kind and concerned uncle sent her for two years' training in dressmaking and design while her mother offered to take care of the children during the day. 'It was so tough that many a time I just wanted to give up. I'd come home to my children exhausted, trying to find some time for them, then preparing supper and making preparations for my course and the next day's work. Life was just one long grind. If I hadn't had my babies to think of, I would just have given up. I was also depressed but so busy that I didn't have much time for self-pity. I completed the course and now the question was where to find enough work. Again my uncle came to my aid. He told me to start from home, to identify a gap in the market and to go for it. This was easier said than done, but I began to walk around shopping centres, talked to customers and salesladies, and gradually came to the conclusion that women who were either very petite or large, big-boned and tall rather than overweight found it difficult to find suitable clothes. This is what I began to focus on – and it worked! I'll never be able to thank my uncle enough for his confidence in me. I also realise now that my marriage would never have worked out. My husband was a pleasant but totally irresponsible person. At 32 he is into his sixth job and third marriage.'

Divorce

Divorce has the second highest rating on the stress scale. Divorce has increased steadily in the second half of the twentieth century and South Africa is no exception, recording one of the highest divorce rates in the world. Thousands of children are affected by the breakdown of family life.

The reasons for divorce will vary from one couple to the next and often several factors interact, reinforcing one another. Major causes may be

- socio-cultural changes referred to in previous chapters
- uncertainties about the nature of the family and the roles of men and women
- early age at marriage: teenage marriages are high-risk marriages
- poor role models: children from divorced or unhappy homes are more likely to divorce than those from intact and happy homes
- lack of trust, love or sexual satisfaction
- change over time in one or both partners
- personal irreconcilable differences, for example in values
- personality problems
- infidelity, alcoholism, abuse

Divorce is the official, legal dissolution of a marriage, but it may not mean the end of a relationship. Many aspects which need to be worked through may only be resolved much later. Divorce is not only the legal termination of a marriage, it is a process which may extend over a long period of time. Several processes are involved which may overlap or occur in sequence.

- Emotional divorce: This happens when positive feelings diminish toward one's partner and negative feelings increase. This process usually starts long before divorce is considered or finalised.
- Sexual divorce means that sexual attraction and sexual activity wane or stop.
- Financial divorce: This relates to the distribution of possessions and is often a source of great conflict. Frequently there is a major drop in living standards, especially in the case of the wife, after divorce.
- Divorce as a parental team occurs when each parent begins to function independently. Although a marriage relationship has ended, former partners still remain parents. One of the major post-divorce challenges is to ensure that this role continues in the best interests of the child.
- The breaking of bonds: This happens when bonds with friends, the in-

law family and the community are disrupted or even broken. It is a situation which may cause considerable anguish to the newly divorced. Friends not wishing to take sides or be drawn into the conflict may withdraw. It also has to be recognised that there are no prescribed social rituals or procedures which indicate what kind of help or support divorcees should be given. This is in sharp contrast to the loss of a spouse through death when communities and families rally around. The newly divorced may instead find themselves in a situation of considerable loneliness until new relationships have been established and it becomes clear which friends can still be counted on.

- Psychological divorce: This usually takes considerable time to achieve and relates to the development of a new identity.

These processes take time to work through and are often associated with considerable anxiety, hate, hurt, anger and ambivalence. Individuals contemplating divorce often have a clearer idea of what they are wanting to get out of than what they are getting into. There may be special difficulties for the woman who has been a full-time homemaker who mostly has to enter the labour market often at a rather low level because of interrupted training or lack of it. It is usually only among the fairly affluent that living standards are maintained by both parents after divorce, depending on the financial settlement.

STRESS IN CHILDHOOD

Children experience stress because they are afraid and do not understand what is happening around them, and because they fear being separated from those who are their source of love, security and protection. Children between the age of 6 months and 4 years are especially vulnerable. Situations associated with stress in childhood are as diverse as hospitalisation, the birth of a sibling, or divorce. The common denominator seems to be separation from a parent or caretaker, or greatly reduced time with them – at worst, removal from them. Among many black families, there is a history of dislocation, migrancy, poverty and family disruption. Not surprisingly, relationships between parents and children fluctuate and children are frequently moved from one household to another. ‘Sporadic separation from parents and the pain of leaving one important person to live with another plays havoc with children’s emotions’ (Kotze, 1991).

Children, age and related stress

Certain general conditions are associated with stress in children under the age of three.

- **1–3 months:** In these early months, pain and physical discomfort are the main sources of stress which result in irritability, and sleep and feeding disturbances. The newborn is still settling down to life outside the mother's womb.
- **4–12 months:** During this stage unpredictable events which a child cannot yet understand are a frequent source of stress resulting in withdrawal or crying. For example, the mother who wears glasses for the first time, or the grandfather who wears a hat instead of his usual cap, may be surprised to find their child or grandchild turning uneasily away from them. To the child, they look too different to be the same.
- **13–24 months:** At this stage likely sources of stress are parental restriction which is necessary when the child explores the world but is still blissfully unaware of its dangers, like electric plugs, hot plates or deep water in a pool. Punishment and restriction cause stress and anxiety. Acute distress results from separation from the mother or from others to whom the child is deeply attached and peaks at about 15 months. It is somewhat less by 30 months. Distress is signalled by a tendency to cry, or to withdraw from play. These signs have been reported from cultures as diverse as the United States, African Bushmen in the Kalahari and Israeli Kibbutzim (Kagan, 1983).
- **The young child** feels most secure in an environment which it knows and which is patterned and is thus, to some extent, predictable. As a child's understanding grows, it becomes less dependent on the presence of familiar people and situations which it knows.
- **The schoolgoing child** may feel stress because of pressure to perform and achieve (see chapter 8).
- **Adolescents** face many uncertainties as they leave childhood behind, but are not yet fully adult. Many of their uncertainties tend to be



exacerbated by contradictions in society, by a lack of guidelines and by new developments of various kinds (see chapter 9).



POINT TO PONDER

If parents are able to cope with stress fairly effectively, they are likely to be able to help their children cope with theirs, and to serve as role models showing children how to cope with difficult situations.

Children and divorce

‘Although designed as a social remedy for an unhappy marriage, divorce has only gradually and reluctantly been acknowledged to be severely stressful for children and adolescents, as well as for many adults’ (Wallerstein, 1983, p 268).

The effects of divorce will vary according to the circumstance preceding it. Separation from an uninterested, abusive or seductive parent will differ markedly from separation from a loved and trusted one. Also the age and gender of the child play a part in determining reactions to divorce.

Wallerstein (1980) conducted follow-up research on children of divorce for fifteen years and identified certain age-related reactions. In the case of young children (2–3 years) there is often bewilderment and anxiety which may be expressed in reverting to earlier habits. For example, a

children's reactions
to death of a parent

age 0–6

‘when will mummy/daddy
come back?’

finality of death is not grasped

age 6–12

‘who will look after me?’
sense of insecurity and abandonment

teenagers

‘who will guide me?’
lack of role model and source
of support

three-year-old toilet trained child again wets its bed. A great deal of clinging behaviour is often shown. Children between three and five often show a marked loss of self-confidence and often blame themselves for the departure of one parent, usually the father, because they think the parent is leaving THEM, not the other parent. Loss of a father at this stage seems to have a particularly pronounced effect on sons. In the early school years, children seem to react in less observable ways, but are nonetheless upset, frightened and saddened. Often their schoolwork suffers. Nine- and 10-year-olds make efforts to understand the divorce, but this does not lessen their underlying sadness, anger and confusion. In the early teens, children generally have a better understanding of the divorce but this does not mean that they are emotionally less affected.

The greatest shock is experienced by children who have perceived their parents' marriage as happy and are totally unprepared for the separation.

The loss of a parent due to death has a finality about it which most children come to acknowledge in time. Divorce does not have the same finality and many children of divorced parents often hope for a reconciliation for many years. Parents in what has come to be called the 'acute phase' of divorce may be suffering intense feelings of humiliation and rejection, and long-suppressed anger towards the partner may now be vented. Such feelings may diminish the effectiveness of the custodial parent, especially in the first years after divorce, and add confusion to the child's already uncertain world. Custodial parents are likely to have less time for their children than before the divorce and non-custodial parents even less. The children's sense of loss can be very real.

POINT TO PONDER



One of the most important factors in determining a child's adjustment to divorce lies in the continuing contact with the non-custodial parent and the quality of the relationship between its divorced parents. If this is reasonably co-operative, children will come to terms with the situation more easily. In fact, children of divorced parents who can still co-operate well as parents often function better than children from severely conflicted, intact marriages.

Lois Gold (1992) suggests that separating couples should write their own '**divorce vows**', such as:

- 'I vow to continue to provide for the children's financial and emotional welfare.'
- 'I vow to place the children's emotional needs above my personal feelings about my former spouse.'
- 'I vow to be fair and honest about the divorce settlement.'
- 'I vow to support the children's relationship with their other parent and never do anything that might compromise that relationship.'
- 'I vow to deal with the issues in this divorce as constructively as I know how so that my family can heal and we can all go forward' (p 7).

The best interests of the child

To serve the best interests of the child, parents should bear the following in mind:

- Parents should not expect their children to have exactly the same feelings as they do. A parent may hate a former spouse; the children may still love this parent.
- Parents should make it clear, especially to younger children, that the fight is between them, the parents, not between parent and child.
- Parents should gradually prepare the children for divorce once a decision has been taken.
- Parents should guard against using their children as confidants or counsellors. Elkind says: 'In this instance, children are hurried into mature interpersonal relations because the parent is under stress and needs a symbolic confidante' (1981, p 42).
- Parents should identify and use sources of support, be they friends, members of the family, self-help groups or other community groups, church groups or professional counselling or mediation services. Parents should not see it as a sign of weakness or failure to seek help in order that they may function more effectively as individuals or as parents.

Grandparents

The support of grandparents can ease many of the tensions and stresses

resulting from divorce, provided the grandparents have not become embroiled in the conflict and take sides. Grandparents may provide the emotional support, time and love these children sorely need. They can be a source of continuity in an otherwise disrupted and often unfamiliar world. They can provide support in numerous practical ways and be a source of emotional calm and reassurance. In many ways they can thus assist the adjustment process of their grandchildren. Moreover, despite disappointment and worry grandparents may be freer to enjoy their grandchildren at a time when parents are preoccupied with themselves.

Little Shireen says: 'I love my granny because she has time to talk to me and she bakes nice cakes.'

Tommy says: 'My oupa is the best. He makes me laugh and plays soccer with me. He never gets mad at me.'

Sam, a teenager, says: 'My grandparents are a haven of safety for me when I can't stand the fights between my parents any more.'

A different situation may prevail in families where grandparents become substitute parents, which may be difficult for them unless they are willing, in good health and financially secure. Although the extended family in the black community may be able to provide more 'people resources', financially it may be a great burden to care for another child. As Mabusela (1994) says: 'Extended families continue to carry the burden of relatives whose marriages and families break down, whatever the cause, without any possibility of accessing support from the country's system of taxation.'

In the rural areas we find a disproportionate number of black grandmothers who are looking after grandchildren while their parents are employed or seeking employment in the towns.

Single fathers

Custody is generally given to the mother but not invariably so. The question arises if fathers can be effective single parents (refer back to chapter 6, the section on Mothering and Fathering). Certainly, there is a movement by fathers to assert their right to custody these days. Research by Risman (1986) has shown that with fathers who had wanted and fought for custody of their children, the relationship between father and child could be particularly close. However, this statement needs to be qualified. The *motivation* underlying the father's fight for custody is important: was this determined by genuine love and concern for the child, or was it an act

of revenge against the mother? The most successful fathers were those who were non-confrontational, but acted out of true concern for their children.

Protective factors against stress in children

Some children are better able to cope with stress than others. A distinction has been made between children who are **vulnerable**, that is children who are easily distressed, and those who are **resilient** and tougher. Resilient children are often shielded by certain factors that protect them against stress. Chief among such factors are a certain kind of personality, a sound family life, and the support available in times of stress. These factors appear to be remarkably consistent across age and culture (refer to chapter 3). A considerable body of research indicates the importance of these factors (Garmezy & Rutter, 1983).

- **Personality:** Resilient children tend to have a cheerful disposition and a positive self-image. They tend to be friendly and co-operative, and low in defensiveness and aggression. They have confidence in their ability to deal with a stressful situation rather than a sense of helplessness. They are thoughtful rather than impulsive.
- **Family life:** In the families of resilient children there is generally love, emotional warmth and considerable closeness. At least one person in the family has a special interest in the child and encourages its activities. This is often the mother, as families were not necessarily intact because fathers might be absent. The family also offered some protection against insecurity and threat. There are clear guidelines or rules in the home and the roles and place of adults and children are understood. There is little uncertainty about who does what in the home. Parents try



to deal with difficult situations constructively, thus being helpful role models.

- **Support:** In the midst of numerous difficulties, resilient children could count on support from a variety of sources such as peers, older members of the family, teachers, relatives or members of their religious community. These people were also often role models who provided examples of how to cope with stress.

Those children who are vulnerable and lack such protective influences may be inclined to develop psychiatric conditions or act out their anger and frustration through aggression and violence.

From those who are able to cope we learn what conditions are required to help those who cope less well. There are important cues for parents here.



POINT TO PONDER

The big question is: How do I as a parent cope with a child who is vulnerable in some particular way?

The answer is that all the conditions of effective parenting apply to the vulnerable child – only more so!

- Good communication; love and acceptance; clear guidelines; fair and consistent control; LOTS of encouragement and support.
- Parents should nevertheless guard against over-protectiveness because this could stand in the way of the child developing coping skills which would help it to learn how best to deal with its difficulties.
- Parents should not be afraid to admit that they might need support or professional help when dealing with a difficult or vulnerable child. This should not be seen as an admission of failure but simply as good common sense.
- Among those who are difficult or vulnerable there may be highly talented and gifted children. Many a creative genius would have fitted the descriptions of vulnerability very well. Here one can think of Winston Churchill, Ludwig von Beethoven and Albert Einstein.

ADULTS COPING WITH STRESS

It should be recognised that if we wish to help our children deal with stress, then we as parents need to be able to cope with our own trials and tribulations. Many of the factors relating to coping with stress in children are not unlike those relevant to adults. Just as with children, so there are certain factors in adulthood which may be seen as protective factors against stress. They enable one to cope with the stresses of life reasonably well, and sometimes astonishingly well.

Hardiness: In recent years the concept of 'hardiness' has come to the fore. It was coined by Kobasa (1982) to describe the features of people who dealt constructively with stress. Her study related to heavily stressed executives, lawyers and US Army captains. A distinction emerged between those who were prone to illness, notably coronary heart disease, and those who remained healthy – the 'hardy' ones. Three characteristics of hardiness emerged.

- Hardy individuals had a strong sense of **commitment**, that is they strongly believed in what they were doing. We see such commitment in Nelson Mandela, and many others, who endured lengthy prison sentences and hardship, yet emerged with strong personalities intact. One reason for this is surely to be found in their sense of commitment to their struggle for freedom.
- Secondly, hardy people tend to see a **challenge** in a situation where others would see only threat or disaster. A remarkable example of this kind of attitude and perception is to be found in the famous inventor Thomas Edison. While trying to perfect the sound of a new invention, the gramophone, he became increasingly deaf. He said: 'Deafness pure and simple, was responsible for the experimentation which perfected the machine. It took me 20 years to make a perfect record of piano music, because it is full of overtones. I now can do it – just because I am deaf' (in Clarke, 1977, p 3). In other words, his deafness spurred him on to extra effort to produce a loud and clear sound.
- Kobasa found that hardy people tended to have a sense of **being in control**, that is being able to influence the course of events. This is in sharp contrast to the sense of powerlessness and helplessness which is allied to anxiety, stress and depression.

The availability of suitable **support** was also found to be important.



POINT TO PONDER

One may not be able to change a situation but one can change one's attitude. Strangely, then the situation also seems to change.

How do I identify stress in myself?

In order to deal with one's stress, it is necessary to recognise and to monitor it. Zimblar and colleagues (1985) suggest the following self-monitoring skills:

- Listen to your body. It will tell you when you have had enough through signals such as insomnia, headaches, stiff neck, tiredness and other stress-related symptoms.
- Listen to your feelings. When there are few moments of joy and peace and if you suffer great mood swings, your tension level could be too high.
- Listen to your spirit. Does life seem to lack purpose or meaning? Are you given to apathy and cynicism? This could tell you that stress is getting you down.
- Listen to your relationships. Are you irritable and impatient with others? This, too, signals stress.

I would add the following:

- Listen to your attitudes. Are you particularly negative, see no light at the end of the tunnel?
- Look at your behaviour. Is this in line with what you value and believe? Are you being true to yourself?

EXERCISE

At this point you may wish to get some indication of your stress level. Complete the following checklist by marking the correct answer in every

row as it applies to you. For example, if your answer to question 1 is ‘often’ score 2, and so on.

Stress	Most of the time	Often	Some-times	Never
Stress score	3	2	1	0
1 I feel tense, anxious and worried				
2 People at work make me feel tense				
3 I eat/drink when tense				
4 People at home make me feel tense				
5 I smoke when tense				
6 I have tension or migraine head-aches, indigestion				
7 I can't forget my worries at night or on weekends				
8 I find it difficult to concentrate when I worry				
9 I take tranquilisers or other drugs to relax or sleep				
10 I have no time to relax				
11 I can't relax even when I have the time				
12 My workday is made up of many demands and deadlines				
13 I find it difficult to make decisions				
14 I worry about the future				
15 My life is full of uncertainties				
TOTAL				

Add up your score: if it is below 11 your stress is low – you might even be a bit apathetic. Between 11 and 22 suggests that your stress is manageable. If it is between 23 and 33 then you should try to reduce your stress. If it is above 34 your stress really is too high and you need to seriously work at reducing it.

How some people deal with stress

In numerous workshops concerning a variety of topics ranging from women's roles to retirement, I have asked participants what they did when feeling tense or stressed. In other words, what were their personal anti-stressors that helped them cope and feel better. The sheer variety of responses is fascinating. They can roughly be fitted under the following headings:

- **Physical reactions:** Go for a walk, jog, clean the cupboards, head for the veld, soak in the bath, pace up and down, dig in the garden, wash the car, go to the zoo, go to the fridge, have a drink.
- **Emotional reactions:** I cry, then feel better; I go quiet and withdraw until I feel calmer; play soothing music; blow a fuse and get it off my chest; if things keep on going wrong it eventually becomes ridiculous – I laugh.
- **Thinking:** I think of all the things I want to say to the person who has made me mad – fortunately I don't say them; I think about what to say and do; I think of different options or get more information; I get off the fence and make a decision; I try to take my mind off it – think about something else; I read a book or watch TV.
- **Interpersonal:** Talk it over with someone; become excessively controlled or polite; go where I am alone; talk to my dog.
- **Faith:** I take it to the Lord; I pray – this calms me especially when I see no way out of a situation; I look for an answer in the scriptures; I speak to my minister or religious counsellor.



EXERCISE

How do **you** cope with stress?

GETTING RID OF STRESS

Many different methods have been tried and advocated to help reduce stress. These are some of them.

Gain a sense of perspective

Ask yourself: Is this really important? You may be reacting to a minor issue as if it were vitally important. A useful test for gaining perspective is asking yourself: Will this matter still be important one day from now; one year from now; twenty years on? Does this traffic jam, your son's long hair, the slow service in a restaurant, a baby's tantrum, merit a full-blown stress reaction?

Sort out your priorities

Frequently, we are torn apart by several seemingly equally important tasks. If this is the case, first make sure about the difference between what is urgent and important. If work and family involvements clash you might set aside one evening a week when family comes first and no other matters are allowed to intrude.

Set long- and short-term goals

If you see only the long-term goal such as completing a course, it may seem too daunting in view of your other commitments. Instead, plan to spread it over a longer period of time and consider what other interests or involvements you could reduce. Set yourself a manageable goal for each month and each year.

Mental rehearsal

Relax and then quietly visualise a situation you dread or are worried about. Work out as complete a picture of this situation as possible: the surroundings, the people, the points you wish to make or what you want to do. In other words, you rehearse the situation. Imagining a positive outcome can be reassuring.

Sometimes it helps to imagine the worst possible scenario. For example, in an important job interview you see yourself tripping over a carpet and entering on your hands and knees. Flustered, you can't

remember the name of the person who is interviewing you; you confuse the secretary with the boss and act accordingly; you've left your revised CV at home; you forget to ask what salary is being offered; you spill the coffee all over the desk – let your imagination run riot! Sooner or later your sense of humour will take over. The actual interview may be a simple matter by comparison.

However, it should be remembered that some tension may help to raise an individual's performance to a peak. The great actor Sir Lawrence Olivier said that he, like most other performers, was very tense before every performance, right up to his last one.

Physical exercise

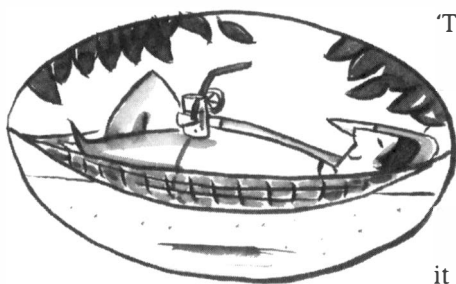
High stress and low fitness is a bad combination. It is by now well established that exercise has beneficial physical and psychological effects. De Vries (1983) found that exercise was more effective in reducing anxiety than one of the most frequently prescribed tranquilisers. A 15-minute walk brought about this effect which lasted for at least an hour. Exercise, suited to the needs of a particular person, and the features of hardiness that is commitment, challenge and control, in combination form a powerful defence against disease and promote psychological wellbeing.

These days much emphasis is placed on aerobic exercise which increases the intake of oxygen. Activities which require sustained and consistent effort promote such aerobic effects better than those demanding sudden spurts of intense energy. Among activities recommended are: jogging, swimming, cycling, walking (not ambling) and other aerobic exercises. Ideally, each person should have an exercise programme worked out for them taking into account their age and health. It is unwise to suddenly embark on a vigorous exercise programme if one has been particularly inactive or unwell, is over the age of 35. Exercise should be increased gradually – its aim should be to reduce, not increase, stress. For this reason, competition is also best avoided. Exercise should be enjoyed.

Moses and others (1989) found that fitness increased in a high-intensity as well as in a moderate aerobic exercise group. However, psychological wellbeing – that is reduced anxiety and tension – was found only in the moderate group. This was not the case in the high-intensity group, suggesting they found this programme too demanding, which is not surprising since they were non-exercisers before entering the programme.

It is possible to increase one's physical activity by making simple adaptations in regard to everyday habits, for example by climbing stairs instead of using lifts, by regularly doing stretching and limbering up exercises, by walking briskly for 20 minutes several times a week. A particularly desk-bound person could place the telephone at a distance, thus being compelled to get up to answer it and in doing so, could do some deep breathing and stretching as well. Mothers of young children, however, may need rest rather than exercise.

Relaxation



'The purpose of relaxation is to give the body a rest and refresh the mind allowing the restorative processes of the body to take over' (Zimbler *et al* 1985, p 175).

The last part of the sentence should be especially noted because it implies that the body has its own natural powers to heal and restore itself.

One of the quickest ways to control stress and anxiety is by regulating one's breathing. When anxious, breathe in deeply, expanding your chest fully, and then slowly exhale. If you are rushing somewhere taking quick, short steps, change to fewer, longer, slower steps.

There are many techniques of relaxation that go beyond the scope of this book. Find one that makes you comfortable and fits in with your daily routine. It is regularity, rather than the length of time that you spend on it, that is important.

Time out

Taking time out means removing oneself either physically or psychologically from a stressful situation in order to be restored and refreshed. For many this may mean getting away from the hustle and bustle of city life and retreating to the sea, walking in the veld, climbing a mountain – just getting closer to nature. For others it may mean watching a hilarious

comedy on TV. Others might prefer a good read. By distancing oneself from a problem one often gains new insight into it, or can return to face it in a less emotional state of mind. Many people have a daily quiet time given to contemplation, communion with God, and prayer.

Creative activities are known to be particularly restorative, like arranging flowers, playing an instrument, painting a picture or making pottery.

Humour and laughter

The role of laughter in restoring physical health has been told by Norman Cousins, author of several books, who as editor of scientific and medical journals acquired a remarkable knowledge of medical science and pharmacology. He was suddenly stricken with a disease diagnosed as a serious collagen disease – a disease of the body's connective tissue which binds the cells together. In his autobiographical description of the disease, *Anatomy of an illness*, he writes: 'I was coming unstuck. I had considerable difficulty in moving my limbs and turning over in bed ... At the low point of my illness, my jaws were almost locked.' His chances of recovery were rated as 1 in 500.

On the basis of his medical knowledge and with the full co-operation of his doctor, he embarked on a very unorthodox treatment programme of his own, stopping all medication and pain-killing drugs. His treatment consisted of large doses of vitamin C, which he could justify for this particular condition. However, what is of interest here is that the second component of his treatment was laughter – again based on sound scientific reasoning. So, he started his laughter cure by looking at funny television films, such as 'Candid Camera' and other comedies. He was read to from humorous books and visitors were expected to bring him jokes and funny anecdotes. 'It worked. I made the joyous discovery that ten minutes of genuine belly laughter would give me at least two hours of pain-free sleep.' To establish if there was really a scientific basis for his idea, sedimentation rate readings were taken before and several hours after laughter episodes. The sedimentation rate dropped by at least five points after each laughter episode. What is more, this improvement was maintained and was cumulative. The physiological basis was established for the notion that laughter is, indeed, the best medicine! More recently it has come to be recognised that hearty laughter has an aerobic effect.



POINT TO PONDER

Is there enough laughter in your life?

Controlling anger

When stressed, we are much more likely to have temper tantrums and angry outbursts. We know when we are angry because our feelings tell us so: 'I'm furious!' 'I resent my boss's attitude – I feel like punching him on the nose!' 'My wife makes me mad!' The body signals your feelings. Your teeth may be clenched, your body generally tense, your head aching. Even if anger seems entirely justified, the question still arises how to deal with it constructively without suppressing the anger or exploding and possibly making matters even worse. It can be helpful to do the following:

- Count slowly from 1 to 10.
- Take a few deep, slow breaths.
- Rehearse the situation in your mind and consider different ways of dealing with it.
- Think about the advantages of keeping cool.
- Be assertive, not aggressive.

Both highly aggressive people, who act out their aggression, and timid non-reactors, who don't dare to express themselves, could benefit from learning to be assertive. Assertiveness does not mean conflict avoidance, but enables one to deal with it in a way that does not lead to increased aggression and conflict, but tends to reduce it.

Assertiveness

Being assertive means that you affirm your right to your personal views

and opinions and goals. The following provide some cues about how to be assertive:

- *Be* State your needs, opinions, goals calmly, firmly and with conviction, not with apology or aggression.
- Avoid the 'little girl' or 'little boy' pleading voice.
- Be genuine and don't pretend to feel or think what is not true.
- Hold your body erect and avoid distracting actions like hair-pulling or fiddling with a tie.
- Rehearse what it is you want to say.
- Choose a good time to state your case.
- Do not be sidetracked. If necessary, repeat what you have to say.
- Assume a co-operative response from the person to be confronted. This will make you less defensive or aggressive.
- *Avoid* Guard against being on the defensive.
- Make 'I-statements'. 'I think,' 'I believe', rather than '**You** did', which may be seen as attack and be responded to by counter-attack.
- Be specific and avoid general statements or requests.
- Be aware of the other person's reactions and modify your approach if necessary but do not revert to aggression or timidity.
- Say 'no!' firmly and with conviction, and without feeling guilty.

Check back to chapter 5 on Communication to remember to look, observe, listen and stick to the point.

EXERCISE

- 1 You wish to end a situation that makes you angry but you don't know how. Write down or talk about how you have tried to do this in the past. How could you approach the issue more assertively?
- 2 You would like your children to be more co-operative in the home. How could an assertive approach be helpful? Think of a specific situation.

Focus on strengths, not weaknesses

It is important to recognise one's strengths. This does not mean being

conceited or arrogant, or denying one's weaknesses. Solutions to problems are found via our strengths, not our limitations. An individual's strengths may relate to little actions as well as to bold ones. They could include being a loyal friend, being kind to animals, perseverance, being an encourager or a peacemaker, being well organised, honest and reliable, doing one's job well and being punctual. One may also have special talents such as singing, being a good golfer, making clothes, fixing things, beautifying a home or garden or managing well on a small income. A special strength is having the courage to confront one's weaknesses and to do something to overcome them. This list is anything but exhaustive.

EXERCISE

Ask yourself:

- 1 What do I do better than others?
- 2 What have I done that was really difficult for me to do?
- 3 What have I done that I can feel proud of?
- 4 What have I learned to do in the last two years that I couldn't do before?
- 5 What are the strengths your answers have revealed?

Such questions and answers could also be used to help a child gain confidence in its ability to cope with its own difficulties.

Remember that little actions can mean a lot. Often the first small step in overcoming a problem is the hardest.

SUMMING UP

Parents who cope constructively with stress can best help their children to cope with theirs.

There are many different ways to counter stress. It is particularly important to mobilise one's own resources, to cultivate and use one's strengths, and to replenish a depleted body and mind. Having read this chapter, consider how often, and to what extent, you are actually helping to restore and revitalise your body, your mind and your spirit.

APPENDIX

Group interaction

The following suggestions may be useful when this book, or sections of it, form the basis of group discussion and interaction.

The aim of group interaction is to learn and to share insights and experiences to help shed light on difficult matters concerning parenting and human development. The ultimate question is:

SO WHAT?

So what has been learnt and what constructive action can be taken? Without such follow-through the value of any discussion will be very limited.

As participant in a group you learn about yourself and others. To do this you need to **share and listen**. Learning takes place at different levels. Intellectually, you may learn about notions very different from your own, you may gain a new sense of perspective, or feel affirmed in what you believe. Emotionally, you may learn to understand your own feelings and those of others better. You may learn about different ways of dealing with difficulties, and you may gain moral support for what you believe. Every participant in a group should pledge **absolute confidentiality**.

Although maximum participation is to be encouraged, every group member has the right to 'pass', if feeling unable, hesitant or unwilling to answer a question put to them.

Several factors influence the way discussion is structured and conducted. The **size** of the group influences the extent of personal participation. In a large group, say over 25, there are two options. The first is to encourage individuals to participate from the floor by asking questions, by making suggestions or comments in regard to the topic being considered. These comments could be listed on a flip chart or board. The facilitator or group leader could arrange them according to themes which could then be discussed more fully. A second alternative is to first have a general session when some information is fed into the group. After this the group breaks into smaller groups of not more than seven people who then discuss issues raised. Each group selects someone from its own group to feed back ideas generated to the group as a whole.

The **time** available will affect the approach adopted. For example, if a meeting is only one hour and aims to discuss only one particular topic, say child care of the preschool child, there may not be time to break into groups.

But if the intention is to work through a range of topics of interest to parents of teenagers over a period of time, it would be preferable to be in small groups, to develop a certain sense of cohesion and mutual support. Then it would be preferable to allow enough time for closer group interaction.

Some **sensitive** topics could be shared in small groups of two or three participants, or only between husband and wife.

It is possible to combine these different approaches and to introduce others, such as role play.

The group leader or facilitator could be a person with considerable experience in leading groups. However, many people without specialised training can be effective facilitators because they are good listeners and are able to encourage participation by others and to sum up what has been learnt.

If discussion is of a very informal kind in a family or among friends, it could be helpful to first read chapter 5 on communication and apply the guidelines given there.

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GENERAL SOURCES

The following books may be consulted if more detailed, scientific information is required. They cover human development in more depth. They are written for psychology students but discussion leaders or those directly involved with adult education or services to parents and children will find these textbooks useful. Preference is given to South African publications. These books are generally to be found in book stores specialising in educational or academic books or may be ordered directly from the publishers.

SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLICATIONS

- Gerdes, L C, Moore, C M, Osche, R, Van Ede, D 1988. *The developing adult* (2nd ed). Durban: Butterworths (now obtainable from Heinemann, Isando, Gauteng). This book deals only with adult stages of development. It provides a broad perspective concerning development within the context of work, the family and social environment. (Also obtainable in Afrikaans: *Die ontwikkelende volwassene*.)
- Louw, D A, Van Ede, D M, Louw, A E 1998. *Human development* (2nd ed). Pretoria: Kagiso Tertiary. A South African textbook which covers the entire lifespan. (Also obtainable in Afrikaans: *Menslike ontwikkeling*.)
- Mwamwenda, T S 1989. *Educational psychology. An African perspective*. Durban: Butterworths. This book focuses on all aspects of child development with special reference to the African child.

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Practical book

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Sources of help and information

- **Concerning life skills and family relationships** contact **FAMSA** (Marriage and Family Life Society of South Africa). FAMSA has presented 'Education for Living' programmes for many years. The programmes have been developed by social workers with specific expertise in family relationships. Sex education is part of a broadly based programme that places it in the context of self-knowledge, human needs, interpersonal relations, values and a sexual code of conduct. It has been presented in many schools. For information contact your local FAMSA Society or the National Council PO Box 2800, Kempton Park, 1620.
- **Concerning drugs and alcohol abuse**, contact **SANCA** (South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence) PO Box 10134, Johannesburg, 2000.

Tough Love is a support group for family and friends of drug dependants. National office, Ferndale Community Centre, Cnr Surrey and Harley Avenues, 2194.

- **MIMS Services Directory of Health and Welfare Facilities in South Africa.** PO Box 2059, Pretoria, 0001. This is a national register of helping services.
- **University Departments of Psychology, Social Work or Education** could be contacted in regard to professional services, seminars and workshops.
- **Churches and religious groups** may offer counselling services to families in distress or those who wish to enrich family relationships within the framework of their own religious belief system.

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- Le Roux, J (ed) 1994. *The black child in crisis. A socio-educational perspective*, vol 2. Pretoria: Van Schaik. The following chapters are of particular relevance: Black latchkey children in South Africa: social and practical implications by J M Swart-Kruger; and The phenomenon of a culture of poverty in contemporary society by J le Roux and F P Gildenhuys. (These are scientific, research-based publications.)

Practical books

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- Kalter, N 1990. *Growing up with divorce*. New York: Free Press. As a clinical psychologist Kalter focuses on the problems, fears, anger and anxieties children experience after divorce. These feelings are dealt with in terms of the children's age and stage of development.
- Keech, R 1993. *Better marriage: better life*. Halfway House: Southern. This book could be helpful in deciding if a marriage requires renewal or dissolution.
- Lindenfield, G 1992. *Assert yourself*. London: Thorsons. A book which offers a short, practical course in assertiveness training for individuals or groups.

Sources of help

- FAMSA (Family and Marriage Society of SA). Among others provides marriage enrichment courses, counselling for single parents, preparation for marriage, stepparenthood and divorce, and many other family problems. Contact your local FAMSA society or the National Council Office: PO Box 2800, Kempton Park, 1260.

SAAM (South African Association of Mediators). Their focus is mediating between divorcing couples to ensure that the best interests of children are served. The national office can be contacted at (011) 433-0908