The Impact of Parenting on Child Disruptive Behaviours

In real life, children are exposed to multiple aspects of parenting at the same time and there is still much to learn about the relative contribution of these factors to children's behavioural functioning.

A US study examined the impact of different parenting characteristics on child disruptive behaviour and emotional regulation among a sample of at-risk children. The sample consisted of 373 Australian 5- to 9-year-old children who were screened for serious behaviour problems. Seven parenting variables based on self-report were evaluated, involving parenting practices, emotion beliefs and behaviours, emotion expressiveness, and mental health.

KEY FINDINGS

→ Emotional competence is essential for adaptive behavioural functioning.

→ Children learn about emotion through parent emotion-related behaviour, the nature of which is largely determined by parental beliefs regarding their own and their children's emotions.

→ Inconsistent discipline, negative parental emotional expressiveness, and parent mental health demonstrated the strongest relationship to disruptive behaviour problems and problems with emotion regulation in children.

→ Parents who regard their child as having behaviour problems may tend to apply discipline inconsistently as they attempt to navigate different ways of managing their child's behaviour.

→ A child can impact parenting as well as a parent impact child functioning. Impulsive and disruptive child behaviour may elicit parenting responses that are negative and dismissing.

→ Emotion regulation in children was found to indirectly affect a number of parenting characteristics.

→ A parent's depressed mood may reduce their motivation to implement changes in their parenting approach.

→ This may impede the growth of emotion regulation skills in children, which may, in turn, exacerbate problem behaviour.

THINGS YOU CAN DO

✓ Constantly review your parenting style, as certain strategies may only work for certain ages.

✓ If depression or other mental health problems are an issue, seek both help and support with your parenting.

✓ Define the specific behaviours in your child that you want to either encourage or discourage. Target the areas where you think your child is underdeveloped and put time into helping them to recognise and change their behaviour.

✓ Ensure expectations are clear. Kids need to know when they've let your down or not done as agreed.

✓ Establish effective, appropriate consequences for behaviour. Praise kids for specific examples of good behaviour, rather than general, constant praise.

✓ Encourage independence rather than dependence. Give kids practise at making decisions and choices.

✓ Talk, read and role model emotions, social responsibility and appropriate behaviour, and how learning skills in negotiation and compromise can build confidence.

✓ Recognise when good behaviour earns a reward. Rewards are motivators (as opposed to bribes) and help to give kids feelings of confidence and control. Appropriate rewards can be one-on-one time with a parent (film, outing) or some extra screen time on their own.

✓ Using time out works best if it immediately follows disruptive behaviour. As soon as your child is calm again, time out can be over.

Source: Duncome, et al., The Contribution of Parenting Practices and Parent Emotion Factors in Children at Risk for Disruptive Behavior Disorders, Child Psychiatry Hum Dev (2012) 43:715–733.

TAKEAWAY

FROM PROFESSOR MICHAEL BERNARD
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Behaviour is communication and there is always a reason for behaviour. Disruptive behaviour is a symptom of an underlying cause and it may take time, patience or professional assistance to identify this cause. By developing a more authoritative parenting style that encompasses good role modelling, constancy and consistency, parents can give their kids ongoing opportunities to develop healthy social and emotional skills that underpin appropriate behaviour.