

## Impact of Parent-Child Relationship on the Social, Behavioural and Emotional Development of Children with Autism

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### Abstract

Autism is classified as a neurodevelopmental disorder that presents a spectrum of difficulties for children in their everyday existence. These challenges are equally formidable for the guardians of these children. The complex bond between parents and their offspring is essential for establishing and sustaining a stable household and a harmonious community. Early interactions between parents and children are imperative for optimal developmental outcomes. A nurturing and affectionate parent-child relationship can alleviate some of the social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties encountered by children with autism. In contrast, a relationship marked by tension and criticism can worsen these challenges. The emotional environment within the family, which encompasses the quality of both parent-child and parental relationships, significantly influences the child's emotional health. This dynamic is shaped by a multitude of factors, including parental stress, depressive symptoms, and the intensity of the child's autism symptoms. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the effects of parent-child relationships on the social, emotional, and behavioral development of children with autism.

### Introduction

The concept of family constitutes the fundamental nucleus of our limited and intricate world. Throughout our existence, we experience birth, life, aging, and ultimately death, all while maintaining a profound and direct connection to specific individuals we collectively identify as family (el Hajri, 2024). Many relationships naturally emerge within the safeguarding embrace of familial bonds, with the parent-child dynamic standing out as one of the most significant and impactful (Lai et al., 2015). This intricate relationship between parents and their offspring encompasses a diverse array of elements, including the protective instincts exhibited by parents, the implementation of symbolic forms of punishment, instances of rejection, and the use of object-based punishment, alongside the often-demanding expectations imposed by parents, their occasional indifference, the provision of symbolic rewards, expressions of love, tangible rewards, and, regrettably, the tendency toward neglect (Hickey, Hartley, & Papp, 2020). While it is true that many parents possess an awareness of these multifaceted factors that play critical roles in shaping the parent-child relationship, it is

also evident that some parents may entirely overlook or neglect these considerations, often influenced by external interventions or pressures. Ultimately, despite the complexities and challenges in this relationship, it usually evolves into a mutually beneficial connection between both parties, fostering an environment where the possibilities for improvement and betterment are perpetually present and attainable (Lee et al., 2008).

#### *Historical overview*

Developmental psychology encompasses a wide array of theoretical perspectives, particularly focusing on the intricate dynamics of the parent-child relationship. It is a pivotal mechanism through which individuals navigate their personal development (May et al., 2015). Notably, the influential psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud posited that the relationships formed by children with their parents serve as foundational determinants of adult psychological development. To illustrate this point, one could consider the case of an adult female who encounters difficulties in forming intimate relationships with male partners; by Freud's theoretical framework, one might assert that these challenges can be traced back to an unhealthy and maladaptive relationship with her father during her formative years (McAuliffe, Dimech, & Setchell, 2024). In a parallel manner, Erik Erikson's comprehensive psychosocial theory of development articulates that infants fortunate enough to have caregivers who consistently attend to their basic needs will likely evolve into adults characterized by trust and security in their interpersonal relationships. Conversely, infants who experience neglect and whose needs remain unmet during these critical early stages are predisposed to develop a pervasive sense of mistrust, which can adversely affect their future relationships (Serrata, 2012).

In addition to these foundational theories, many other significant frameworks emphasize the role of parents as educators in the development of their children. In this context, it can be argued that our interactions with our parents fundamentally shape our behaviors and interpersonal dynamics throughout childhood. The developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky conceptualized parents as the authoritative figures or 'masters' while viewing the child as an 'apprentice' engaged in learning essential social behaviors. Furthermore, Albert Bandura's pioneering social learning theory draws an analogy between parents and behavioral role models, suggesting that children observe and subsequently imitate the actions of their parents. For example, if children are frequently embraced by their parents and also observe their parents exhibiting affectionate behaviors toward others, Bandura's theoretical perspective would lead us to anticipate that these children would likely adopt similar affectionate behaviors, such as engaging in hugging (McIntyre et al., 2023).

#### *Potential challenges of the parent-child relationship*

The dynamics of parent-child relationships invariably constitute a critical concern in maintaining a harmonious and functional family environment. Establishing a happy and healthy family unit is not merely a subjective aspiration but a fundamental necessity for the overall well-being of humanity. Parents must prioritize their responsibilities toward their families, including providing financial support to fulfill their family members' diverse needs and desires. In urban settings, parents often aspire to create abundant opportunities for their

children, reflecting a desire to enhance their children's prospects. A nurturing and supportive environment can only be cultivated when the basic unit of society, the family, exists in tranquillity and mental well-being (Del Rosario et al., 2023). Conversely, an unhealthy family dynamic can have far-reaching implications, negatively impacting the immediate family members and extending to the broader societal context and the nation. A family's overall health can be discerned through the quality of the relationships among its members. As the adage suggests, "one happy family makes a sound country," underscoring the interconnection between familial happiness and societal stability (Di Renzo et al., 2020). However, in contemporary India, there is a troubling trend of declining parent-child relationships, which appear to be weakening with each passing day. Parents are increasingly preoccupied with their professional obligations, particularly in urban environments, where work demands often necessitate long hours to secure financial resources to provide the best possible upbringing for their children. In the broader context, this relentless pursuit of economic success significantly reduces quality family time, fostering potential problems in future relationships between parents and their children (Hall, 2008). The relentless quest for greater financial gain has led to a noticeable decrease in parental presence in their children's lives. As a direct consequence of this absence, children may experience feelings of loneliness, constructing an emotional 'home' in their minds apart from their physical household (Sher-Censor et al., 2024). The lack of parental guidance can manifest in various ways, with some children engaging in anti-social behaviors. In contrast, others may channel their experiences into exemplary, diligent conduct, thereby denying themselves the opportunity to fully enjoy the richness and innocence of childhood. The parent-child relationship is a necessary part of a well-established home and society. Parents live in urban areas and are busy earning more and more money (Smith et al., 2008). As a result, the time for their family decreases. This research not only helps families to know each other but also brings out quality time for their families. Having a happy and healthy family is a fundamental requirement of humanity. Responsibility towards the family is the parents' priority. Earning money is also essential in fulfilling family members' needs and desires. Parents in urban areas desire more opportunities for their children (Ting, 2015).

#### *Parent-child relationship of children with ASD*

The parent-child relationship significantly influences the behavioral and emotional development of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Research indicates that positive interactions between parents and children can enhance emotional regulation and reduce behavioral issues in children with ASD (Benseny, Peñate, & Díaz, 2024). This response will explore the impact of parent-child interactions, the role of parental expressed emotion, and the bidirectional nature of these relationships. Responsive parenting fosters emotional regulation and self-control in children with ASD, improving behavioral outcomes (Mohamed, 2024; Del Bianco, 2018). Programs like Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) have effectively enhanced these interactions, reducing noncompliance behaviors (Mohamed, 2024). Parental expressed emotion (EE) significantly correlates with child behavior. High levels of parental criticism are linked to increased behavioral problems in children, while warmth is associated with better outcomes (Marshall

et al., 2024). This suggests that the emotional climate within the home can directly affect the child's emotional and behavioral development.

### *Bidirectional Relationships*

The relationship between parent warmth and child behavior is bidirectional. Positive parenting can improve child functioning, influencing parental behavior (Hickey et al., 2020). This reciprocal dynamic highlights the importance of nurturing parent-child relationships for better developmental outcomes in children with ASD. Conversely, while positive parent-child interactions are beneficial, high parental stress and mental health issues can negatively impact these relationships, potentially exacerbating behavioral challenges in children with ASD (Franco & Costa, n.d.). This underscores the complexity of the parent-child dynamic in the context of autism.

The quality of the parent-child relationship significantly influences the emotional well-being of children with autism. Research indicates that parental psychological well-being and the emotional quality of parent-child interactions are interrelated, affecting the child's emotional and behavioral outcomes. The relationship between parent warmth and child behavior is bidirectional; improved parent-child interactions can enhance child functioning, while child difficulties can negatively impact parental emotional states (Hickey et al., 2020). A supportive family emotional climate, characterized by high warmth and low criticism, is associated with better emotional outcomes for children with autism (Hickey et al., 2019).

### *Impact of Parental Emotional Well-Being*

High levels of parenting stress and depressive symptoms in parents correlate with negative emotional quality in parent-child relationships, particularly affecting mothers more than fathers (Hickey et al., 2020). Parents' emotional states can lead to increased criticism and decreased warmth towards their children, exacerbating the child's behavioral problems (Hickey et al., 2020).

### *Couple Relationship Satisfaction*

The quality of the couple's relationship also plays a crucial role; higher relationship satisfaction among parents is linked to better emotional well-being and parenting practices, which positively affect the child (Langley et al., 2017). Conversely, while the focus is often on the challenges faced by parents, it is essential to recognize that children with autism can also influence their parents' emotional states, creating a complex interplay that requires comprehensive support strategies.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the parent-child relationship is critical in shaping the social, behavioural, and emotional development of children with autism. A nurturing, responsive, and consistent parental bond can significantly enhance a child's capacity to form relationships, regulate emotions, and engage in appropriate behaviours. Supportive parenting helps buffer the challenges of autism, promoting resilience and adaptive functioning. Conversely, strained or inconsistent interactions may exacerbate difficulties, highlighting the importance of early parental involvement, education, and access to tailored support services. Strengthening the parent-child relationship is beneficial and essential in fostering the overall well-being and developmental progress of children with autism.

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