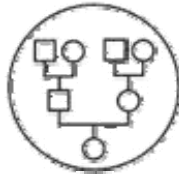


Parent and Family Impact on School Adjustment

Family: a social organization responsible for procreation, child rearing and preparing children for adult life, transmitting religious and cultural values, teaching problem-solving and coping skills, providing for affiliation and intimacy needs, promoting psychological growth, bolstering self-esteem, and serving important economic, recreational, emotional, social and educational functions for its members.

Families are Social Systems

- Family responses are interdependent and reciprocal.
- Observed effects in families are mutually determined and do not flow from a single causal factor.



Families Systems Constructs

- 3 Broad Dimensions:
 - 1. Interdependence: structure relationships to balance between closeness and independence.
 - 2. Homeostasis: maintaining stability and enacting controls over the behavior of family members.
 - 3. Adaptability: responding to change.

Structuring Relationships

- Family behavior and emotions often governed by implicit laws that dominate family interactions.
- Changing one part of the system will inevitably influence how the family functions as a whole.
- Healthy families strike a balance between closeness and autonomy.
- Striking this balance can be a constant underlying tension in families.

Structuring Relationships

- Effective and efficient families have a division of labor without rigid roles.
- It is desirable for families to have emotional closeness, attachment, support and nurturance without losing their autonomy.
- Must be able to fulfill one's unique role in the family without blurring the distinction between the self and that role, and with sufficient flexibility.

Structuring Relationships

- Differentiation: the diffusion or rigidity of functional boundaries and role boundaries among family members and the degree of emotional individuation in the family.
- Emotional differentiation: closeness and intensity of emotional exchanges in the family.
- Highly differentiated families respect the autonomy of family members, accept and encourage differences, and tolerate disagreement.

Structuring Relationships

- Undifferentiated families have poor boundaries, suppress individual identity, and are susceptible to emotional contagion (one person's problem becomes everyone's problem.)
- Undifferentiated families suppress conflict, demand compliance, cover over normal differences in family life, have emotionally intense relationships.

Structuring Relationships

- Degree of family differentiation also reflected in things such as over-involvement in one's life, sibling or spousal competition, jockeying for position or attention, being overly dependent, or getting caught up in trivial issues.



Stability

- Instability and chaos are distressing to families and place demands on their system resources.
- Family rules emerge to regulate the most mundane of family activities.
- Families can be aversive or positive in enforcing these rules.

Stability

- Authoritarian control: influence is based on coercion and power to the exclusion of reasoning.
- Authoritative control: inductive reasoning, persuasion and reciprocal influence.
- Laissez-faire: lack of rules or lack of enforcement of rules.

Stability

- Other factors besides rules may be utilized to maintain stability, sometimes including physical or psychological problems.
- Such problems distract the family from more disturbing sources of conflict and thus contribute to equilibrium or stability.



Managing Change

- As families increase in size, family roles may become more specialized and organization becomes more complex. Changes occur again as children grow up and move out, necessitating that roles and organization change again.
- Crises, illness, substance abuse, and mental disorders are other factors that precipitate change and necessitate flexibility for efficiency.

Families Under Stress

- Stress: any event, situation, or stimulus that places excessive demands on a family.
- Family approaches to stress include: behavioral turn-taking, problem-solving, task redistribution, emotional empathy, and understanding the needs and feelings of other members of the family.



Families Under Stress

- To cope, families may do downward comparisons, comparing themselves to others who are even worse off.
- Attributions also impact how much families blame themselves and how they work toward solutions.
- Families often enhance their coping by resorting to religious paradigms that help them give meaning to their circumstances.

Families Under Stress

- Effective family coping involves the following:
 - Focus on a shared stressor,
 - Emphasis of the mutual influence of family members on each others' coping,
 - And reliance on the family to adapt.
- Coping is further mediated by how the family appraises the situation and the social and economic supports available.

Families Under Stress

- If the family is adaptive, they assimilate the stressors into their existing family routines or develop new routines to accommodate its new demands.
- How well families adapt is often reflected in the children's social competence and school adjustment.

Families Under Stress

- Families who are successful at coping experience a number of desirable outcomes:
- Provides a foundation for secure attachments,
- Reinforces a sense of mastery and personal importance,
- Models reciprocity in social situations,
- Teaches the child to forego personal interests and immediate gratification for greater long-term goals for the common good.

Families Under Stress

- It should come as no surprise that family stressors can have a significant impact on school-related problems and may be misperceived as solely a student problem, e.g. learning disability.
- Loss of a parent through divorce or death may necessitate a stay-at-home parent to go to work.
- Family schedules will need to change, and primary caretakers may change.

Families Under Stress

- The remaining parent will likely be experiencing his/her own individual stress and be less available for the student, both emotionally and physically.
- They may be less after-school structure and less after-school homework guidance.
- Structure and enforcement of rules may suffer, and consequently the student's behavior will deteriorate.
- Focusing exclusively on the student will be unsuccessful in correcting the problem.

Families Under Stress

- Successful outcomes rely on an expansion of the school psychologist's role to include a close working relationship with the family, an understanding of family systems, and some knowledge of other agencies or institutions involved with the family.



Families Under Stress

- It is important to identify and build upon existing family strengths and remember that even the most dysfunctional families typically still want the best for their children:
- High achievement,
- Social competence
- Self-control / pro-social behavior,
- Effective problem-solving.



Families Under Stress

- Families can be utilized as a resource or partner in helping to achieve an educational goal.
- It is important to communicate to families that there is a lot of diversity in the experiences of even what are labeled “normal” or “competent” families.

Evaluating Family Functioning

- The following are good indices of family functioning:
 1. Support—family members behave toward one another in a way that reflects support, intimacy and caring.
 2. Cohesion—they collaborate and work jointly on handling normal demands and in responding to crisis.

Evaluating Family Functioning

- The following are good indices of family functioning:
 3. Differentiation—they respect each other’s need for privacy and autonomy but yet reach out and communicate openly and with empathy.
 4. Flexibility—they realign roles and tasks as the demands on the family change.
 5. Order and rituals—they maintain routines, customs and celebrations for family togetherness and to create a sense of order, even in times of crisis.

Family-Focused Approaches to School Problems May Include:

- Therapy with individual families,
- Multi-family groups,
- Family network meetings,
- Home visits,
- Parent education workshops,
- Preventive programs,
- Family support groups.



Family-Focused Approaches to School Problems

- Effectiveness in working with troubled families often involves “walking a fine line.”
- School personnel must still report suspected abuse or neglect and enforce school attendance and code of conduct.
- Therefore, it is easy for some families to come to distrust the school or be suspicious.
- They may also fear that their “business” will be made known.
- Ensuring confidentiality is a must.

Family-Focused Approaches to School Problems

- Similarly, you must be careful to not attribute blame to the family or assume a hostile attitude.
- Remember that family problems can contribute to school problems, but the reciprocal is also true.
- A child’s school problems contribute to family stress.

Effectively Working With Parents Requires an Understanding of the Notion of Power.

- Power = the potential influence a change agent and exert over a target.
- 1. Reward power: influence based on Person A's perception of Person B 's ability to offer rewards for desired behavior.
- 2. Coercive power: influence based on perception of punishment for noncompliance
- 3. Legitimate power: Person B believes Person A has a legitimate right to influence him.

Effectively Working With Parents Requires an Understanding of the Notion of Power.

- 4. Referent power: Person A exerts an influence over Person B because Person B perceives some desirable or similar personal quality in Person A.
- 5. Expert power: influence is based on the perception that Person A has special knowledge or expertise.
- 6. Informational power: exerting influence because of the perceived relevance of the message.

Effectively Working With Parents Requires an Understanding of the Notion of Power.

- In informational power, the person accepts the message and decides for him or herself, independent of the person delivering the message.
- Reward or coercive power requires monitoring and follow-up.
- School psychologists have access to all 6 sources of power when working with parents.
- Parents often come to the interaction with no source of power.

Effectively Working With Parents Requires an Understanding of the Notion of Power.

- Referent power—establishing rapport with parents.
- Expert power—when we offer professional recommendations.
- Informational power—when communications are consistent with parent's beliefs and accepted by them.
- Parents may nevertheless still attribute coercive, reward and legitimate power to the school personnel.

Parents Participating at IEP Meetings.

- Often parents fail to attend at all.
- When they do, they are often passive.
- Often overwhelmed with the information and overpowered by the many professionals present.



Theory of Reasoned Action

- We try to act in a rational manner.
- Behavior can be predicted from behavioral intention.
- Specificity of the behavior helps, e.g. "Help your son with his math homework 15 minutes per night Monday thru Thursday," rather than "Help your son with his homework."

Theory of Reasoned Action

- Reasoned action composed of:
 - 1. Attitude toward the behavior; what you believe about the consequences of the behavior and the possible outcomes.
 - 2. Subjective norms; perception of what others think you should do.
 - 3. Behavioral intention.
 - 4. The behavior itself.
- Failure to follow through with a request may be due to any of the four, e.g. parent doesn't expect positive outcomes.

Theory of Reasoned Action

- 20% - 50% of recommendations of school psychologists to parents to seek services outside of school are not followed.
- To increase follow-through using theory of reasoned action:
 - Provide parents with names and numbers of contact persons.
 - Have parents acknowledge the importance and state their intention by making a public commitment.



Theory of Reasoned Action

- Arrange circumstances so parents could talk to other parents who have had positive experiences with the services you are recommending.



Social Exchange Theory

- Social relationships are viewed in the light of the rewards and costs involved.
- Parents enter into conferences with school personnel already viewing various "costs:"
- Defensive, guilt ridden or inadequate because of their child's problems;
- They are passive and surrender control of the meetings to the school personnel;
- Perceive that maybe their deficiencies as parents will be discussed rather than their child's problems.

Social Exchange Theory

- Costs need to be balanced out by possible rewards:
- Being able to share their ideas and concerns about their children with people who might be able to help;
- To gain information about their child;
- To take steps toward resolving the child's problems.

Foot-In-The-Door / Door-In-The-Face

- Foot-in-the-door: increase compliance by making two sequential requests—a small insignificant one followed by your true target.
- Want parents to assist child with specific homework.
- Start by simply asking them to review and sign the homework.



Foot-In-The-Door / Door-In-The-Face

- Door-in-the-face: the opposite; make a large request first, then a smaller although still considerable request.
- Overall, the effects of both approaches are relatively weak.
- In order to work, both need to involve a pro-social topic, e.g. helping behavior.
- Parents may perceive all of the requests as too large to comply with.



Schismogenesis

- When differentiated groups exist in dynamic equilibrium, the relationship between them is characterized by symmetrical, complementary or reciprocal interactions



Schismogenesis: extremes of symmetry or complementarity

- Symmetrical: two groups hold similar goals and exhibit similar behaviors. Can be dysfunctional when the behavior is undesirable and they escalate each other
- Complementary: two groups differ in their goals and behavior. Can be dysfunctional when they become too polarized
- Reciprocal: flexibly combines elements of symmetry and complementarity.

Schismogenesis: extremes of symmetry or complementarity

- When parents and school personnel are in a complementary relationship, can stabilize the relationship by promoting mutual dependence.
- Treat parents as experts and enforce notion that you need each other to accomplish the student's goals.
- Commiserating with parents serves as a way of uniting against some other external force also addresses schismogenesis.

Schismogenesis: extremes of symmetry or complementarity

- Talk to parents about schismogenesis and focus on process not content.
- Engage in reflective listening.
- Use humor as an intervention.
- Don't emphasize your role as "expert" and take a more facilitative role to reduce potential parental resentment.
- Don't let them think you are "the only one who can help."
- Enlist the services of skilled parents who could assist less skilled parents.

The Enabling Model
(Dunst & Trivette, 1987)

- Parents are enabled and empowered to the extent that they are given opportunities to acquire and/or display competence and that they attribute behavioral changes to their own efforts.
- Acknowledge the importance of and encourage parent's use of naturally occurring support networks, such as church and neighbors.
- Keep the parents' culture in mind and offer assistance that is normative within that culture.
