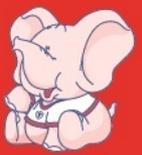




How to Build Children's Discipline
through Better Understanding their
Behaviours and our Parenting Style
from Psychological Perspective

Before we look into parental influence, we have to understand how parental influence affects children's development from a psychological perspective. Through extensive literature reviews, I am going to apply an influential psychological theory - 'Social Learning Theory' as the theoretical base to assist the readers in understanding how children learn what is right and what is wrong during infancy and early childhood. Social Learning Theory suggests that children are not inherently good or bad, but

acquire their social tendencies from how they react with others in their environment. Burrhus Frederic Skinner, one of the leading behaviourists in psychology, hypothesised that the way to understand behaviour is to look at the causes of an action and its consequences. Behaviour of a human being can be changed by applying an operant. He called this 'Operant Conditioning' (Skinner,1938). Skinner believed that children's behaviour could be changed by giving different responses. In brief, 'Positive Reinforcement' strengthens a behaviour by giving rewards, either extrinsic or intrinsic. 'Negative Reinforcement', meaning the removal of an adverse effect, also strengthens a



behaviour. On the other hand, 'Punishment' weakens a behaviour.

Albert Bandura, one of the most influential living psychologists, agreed with the theory of 'Operant Conditioning' but he added that behaviour is also learned through observational learning (Albert Bandura, 1977). Children observe the behaviours of the people around them, including their parents. The people being observed are called models. Children pay attention to the behaviour of models and imitate this behaviour.

The people around the children, including the parents, will respond to the imitated behaviour with either 'Reinforcement' or 'Punishment' .

'Reinforcement' will encourage the

behaviour to be repeated while 'Punishment' will discourage.

Bandura also believes that children do not automatically observe and imitate behaviour of a model, but they apply thinking process and analysis prior to imitation. This is called 'Modeling Process' . This process includes four steps: (1) Attention, (2) Retention, (3) Reproduction, and (4) Motivation.

Attention means paying attention to the behaviour of the model. Retention means storing information about the behaviour of the model. Reproduction means imitating the behaviour of the model. Motivation means either receiving 'Reinforcement' or 'Punishment' .



Regarding 'Reinforcement' , it can be either extrinsic or intrinsic. Extrinsic reinforcement means a tangible reward. Intrinsic reinforcement means feeling good and being acknowledged. This is also called self-actualisation. For instance, if a child does something right and receives a verbal compliment, with reasons, from the parents, the child will feel positive and develop values. This is a form of intrinsic reinforcement. Intrinsic reinforcement is crucial as it helps to build up values and self-discipline. On the other hand, 'Punishment' can be either physical or internal, such as feeling bad or disapproved of. Punishment can also be in the form of

not allowing a child to do something he/she likes to do for a short period.

After studying the above psychological theories, we are now in a better position to understand how parental influence works on children' s development. I am going to quote two real life examples to illustrate how the theories apply. For the first scenario, two children play in a playroom. The two children enter into a quarrel over toys and it leads to abusive behaviour. If the parent sitting next to the child fails to apply reasonable 'Punishment' by scolding him/her for the wrong-doing but blames the neighbouring child instead, this not only fails to deter the child from



repeating his/her wrong-doing again, but in fact also reinforces him/her to imitate the act of his/her parent. Jaywalking is another classic example. When a parent walks with a child and crosses a road while the red light signal is on, the child will pay attention to the act of the parent. If the parent was not injured in any way because there was no vehicle on the road and/or the parent was not punished by receiving a warning or a ticket by a policeman, the child would perceive that the behaviour was right. He/she will then imitate the behaviour of the parent and will cross a road while the red light signal is on. As his/her act will not attract any punishment from the parent, he/she will then adopt this misconduct. All the

psychological studies found that a lack of reinforcement for right doings and a lack of punishment for wrong doings of children in the early childhood stage, greatly contributed to their developing anti-social behaviour at adolescent stage and even criminal behavior in adulthood.

Now we are going to discuss 'Parenting Style' and how different types of parenting style affect children's social learning. In psychology, there has been a great emphasis on parenting style.

Parenting style, in layman terms, means the set of standard strategies that parents use for child rearing. In general, there are four recognised types of parenting styles. These are



Authoritarian, Permissive, Authoritative, and Uninvolved. Authoritarian parents are controlling, punitive, demanding and strict. Permissive parents are indulgent, warm, caring, extremely lenient and non-punitive. Authoritative parents are warm, supportive and sensitive to the child's needs. Using reasoning to promote appropriate behavior. Uninvolved parents are neglectful and unresponsive to their children's needs. People may think that the authoritarian parenting style is the most effective. However, to the contrary, nearly all psychological studies found out that authoritarian parenting had a direct causal effect on juvenile delinquency. The main reason is that authoritarian

parenting breaks effective communications between parents and child. In addition, children's correct behavior is not promptly reinforced. This negatively affects children's social learning process. Permissive parents are warm and caring but these parents tend to avoid confrontation. They are very nurturing but do not set rules and boundaries. Furthermore, permissive parents usually fail to apply punishment effectively to prevent recurrence of misconduct and that also has a negative impact on children's social learning process. A lot of psychological research indicates that permissive parenting is not the most effective way to build children's values and discipline. Uninvolved parents are the



most dangerous as their children completely fail to undergo any social learning process.

Finally, authoritative parents are deemed the most effective.

Authoritative parents are warm, caring and supportive, but on the other hand they set rules, with some negotiation and autonomy allowed (Diana Baumrind, 1966). This type of parenting encourages mutual communication between parents and child. This also strikes the best balance between applying reinforcement and punishment in a child's social learning process. Marc H. Bornstein, PhD, University of Pennsylvania, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, USA, conducted

extensive research on this area and he concluded that adoption of authoritative parenting style is the most beneficial for a child's social, intellectual, moral and emotional growth in many situations (L. Bornstein & M.H. Bornstein, 2014). Your parenting style says a lot about your relationship with your child and affects his/her disciplinary development.

Last but not least, inconsistent or erratic discipline also leads to ineffective social learning. For instance, inconsistency between two parents, with one being punitive and the other being indulgent or lenient, can lead to confusion being formed during the social learning process. A parent should not only punish bad behaviour



sometimes and other times turn a blind eye to it. In conclusion, psychologists have been making tremendous efforts to understand children's development and the causational factors of their misconduct and anti-social behaviour.

This article has only focused on discussing social learning theory and parental influence on children's development. There are other factors, such as peer group influence and environmental factors, that also contribute to children's behavior, especially when they attend adolescent stage. If you are interested in this field of psychology, there are plenty of theories and reading materials that you can research on open source. I hope this article enlightens parents and

encourages them to apply critical thinking to understand their children's behavioural development. I also hope it and enhances their interest in this field of psychology.

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