The Role of Family Communication in Developing Children's Social Skills

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Abstract

This paper aims to elucidate the fundamental role played by the family as a primary sphere of communication and interaction and as a key context for shaping a balanced personality, one that is reflective, socially responsive, and able to engage constructively with both the self and the surrounding environment while also contributing to the development of the wider community. The family furthermore constitutes the social milieu through which the child acquires the capacity to perceive social relationships with others and to act appropriately in social situations. This, in turn, promotes social adjustment and supports a child's success in future social life.

Keywords: *Family Communication, Social Skills, Child.*

Introduction

Childhood is considered one of the most important stages of an individual's life. Compared with other age stages, it is a critical stage in which an individual's personal traits and characteristics are formed, and it also influences various aspects of development, especially the social aspect. The social skills children acquire at this early stage of life lay the foundations for effective communication with others in the future. In other words, social skills are an important and necessary component of successful social relationships between children and those around them. In this paper, we answer the following research question: What is the role of family communication in the development of a child's social skills? What communicative patterns are effective in developing these skills?

Definition of Family Communication:

It is defined as communication between two parties (spouses) or several parties (parents and children) that assumes various communicative forms, such as dialogue, consultation, mutual understanding, persuasion, concord, agreement, cooperation, guidance, and assistance.

By communication, we refer to the language of understanding and dialogue among family members, through which each conveys his or her ideas, feelings, desires, interests, and concerns to others in the family. This language includes speech, movements, changes, instructions, gestures, and other verbal and nonverbal symbols upon which interaction and adjustment among family members are based and through which they are made happy or unhappy in their family life; good family communication is the magical key to family happiness.

Family communication is more than mere words; it also includes facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. It is a state in which verbal and nonverbal information is exchanged within the family; it includes listening, which is no less important than communication, since it enables understanding of the viewpoints of family members.

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Factors Contributing to the Absence of Family Communication

There are three principal factors that lead to an absence of family communication:

Parents are not brought up and habituated to the values and communication culture and thus do not reproduce them with their children.

The predominance of negative attitudes towards children among parents, such as the belief that children must submit to parents' wishes and decisions without discussion.

Work pressures and the exhausting demands of family life upon parents may lead them to neglect the monitoring and upbringing of their children; consequently, communication with children regarding the issues, needs, and problems (educational, psychological, and social) that concern the family as a whole or that concern the children is absent.

Dimensions of Family Communication:

Family communication has two dimensions (conformity orientation and conversation orientation), and these patterns can be measured by the degree to which family members engage in specific behaviours.

Families characterised by a conformity orientation focus on harmony in behaviours, values, and beliefs and on concord among family members; they also seek to avoid any argument or conflict. Families distinguished by a high degree of conformity possess unified beliefs and behaviours, engage in activities that encourage concord and loyalty to parents and other adult members, and avoid activities that may lead to conflict or dispute. In contrast, families characterised by a low degree of conformity orientation are characterised by diverse beliefs and behaviours and focus on their members' distinctive personalities. Their members engage in activities that encourage individuality and independence from the family, and children usually participate in family decision-making, which underscores equality among family members. Moreover, conflicts and disputes within families characterised by a low degree of conformity orientation tend to be calmer and are avoided as much as possible.

The second dimension of family communication is the conversation orientation. Families characterised by a conversation orientation create a climate that encourages family members to think independently and to enjoy the freedom to discuss many topics, such as political debates and social issues. Families characterised by a high conversation orientation also support individual freedom, frequent interaction, and spontaneous discussion of diverse topics without imposing time limits on these discussions. They encourage differences in opinion and open discussion; members of these families exhibit a high degree of personal openness and share information about their personal activities, ideas, and feelings with one another. Their discussions commonly revolve around family activities and important decisions, which are familiar features of such families. In contrast, families characterised by a low conversation orientation interact much less with one another and consistently restrict the topics discussed; their personal activities, ideas, and feelings are less open. Families characterised by a low conversation orientation do not discuss activities or important family decisions.

Patterns of Family Communication:

The term "patterns of family communication" emerged as the outcome of a study by McLeod and Chaffee (McLeod and Chaffee) on social reality. Patterns of family communication were constructed on the assumption that children communicate socially within family structures that possess highly distinctive characteristics, which, in turn, influence how their members perceive the outside world and the roles they perform in it. One of the most important pillars of this theory is that everyday family interactions among family members, in which children participate, convey specific messages that foreground the process of communication. Children internalise these messages in their subconscious minds, thereby forming long-term biases, or cognitive representations, from which they derive their experiences and their manner of interacting with the world, both within and outside the family.

Scholars have identified four patterns of family communication:

The Consensual Communication Pattern

In this pattern, the family exhibits a high degree of conversation orientation and a high degree of conformity orientation. It encourages children to speak for as long as they like, provided that the family's internal harmony is maintained. This duality creates a tension between preserving the status quo and openly exploring new ideas. Since families of this type expect families to take precedence over personal needs, children who grow up within them either absorb their parents' ideology or escape into a world of fantasy.

The Pluralistic Communication Pattern:

These are families with a high degree of conversation orientation but, at the same time, a low degree of conformity orientation. Communication in pluralistic families encourages children to think and speak freely without fear of consequences. Family discussions typically include all family members and emphasise the individual more than the family system. This form of communication provides an environment that encourages children to develop practical, critical thinking, and communication skills. Pluralistic families freely discuss contemporary political, social, and cultural issues and encourage their members to speak and think critically.

Protective Communication Pattern:

These families have a low degree of conversational orientation and a high degree of conformity orientation. They are weak in encouraging their members to engage in discussion and critical thinking. This communication emphasises adherence to family norms and does not encourage discussion or the exchange of ideas; it stresses harmony among members and obedience. These families do not encourage children to reflect or adopt independent behaviour that deviates from the family's course, and they neglect the child's autonomy in favour of the family's internal harmony.

The Laissez-faire Communication Pattern:

These families are characterised by low levels of both conversation and conformity. Neither open communication nor internal harmony is encouraged. The degree of communication between parents and children is minimal, interactions among members are very weak and lack depth, and the range of topics discussed is very narrow. These families focus on individual personalities and achievements and turn to external sources rather than family members to help their members develop.

Definition of Social Skill:

Al-Sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Sammādūnī defines skill as "a coherent system of activity that aims to achieve a specific goal." The term social refers to everything related to reciprocal relationships between individuals or groups. The term social may be distinguished from the term cultural in that the former pertains to relationships between persons. In contrast, the latter is connected to beliefs, levels of behaviour, values, knowledge, and other aspects of culture.

A skill becomes social when one individual interacts with another and undertakes a social activity that requires skills enabling him to coordinate his actions with the other individual's; the course of his activity becomes clear, thereby achieving such coordination.

Social skills are also defined as "specific patterns of learned and observable behaviour through which an individual can influence others and obtain his needs."

Social skills have also been defined as individuals' ability to organise their knowledge and behaviour in an integrated manner to overcome the social obstacles and problems they encounter in daily life, thereby enabling them to adapt to their social environment.

Al-Sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Sammādūnī further explained in his study that social skill is "a communication skill that comprises two fundamental aspects: the affective aspect, which pertains to nonverbal communication, and the second aspect, the social aspect, which pertains to the verbal aspect; both the verbal social aspect and the nonverbal affective aspect contain three independent skills: the sending or expressive skill, the receiving or sensitivity skill, and the organising or control skill. In light of these three skills, it has been possible to identify three dimensions for measuring social skills: affective and social expressiveness, affective and social sensitivity, and affective and social control."

Al-Sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Sammādūnī's definition, as he indicated, is based on Riggio's model of social skills, which he developed in 1986.

Riggio defined social skill as "the individual's ability to express affectively and socially, to receive others' emotions and interpret them, to be aware of the implicit rules underlying forms of social interaction, to regulate and organise his nonverbal expressions, and to play roles and prepare the self socially." Al-Sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Sammādūnī noted that this definition encompasses the two dimensions of person and other, or self and other, insofar as he explained that the individual must understand the other and be aware of what lies implicit in social interaction.

Ṣubḥī ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Kāfūrī maintains that social skills are a set of learned verbal and nonverbal behaviours that enable the child to engage in positive interaction, whether within the family environment, the school, peers, or strangers, and that lead to the attainment of the child's goals, which are pursued and approved by society.

Muḥammad Sayyid ʿAbd al-Raḥmān views social skill as the child's ability to initiate interactions with others, to express positive or negative feelings towards them, and to regulate his emotions in social situations appropriately.

Libet and Wilson define social skill as the ability to develop behaviours that function as positive reinforcers and to refrain from developing behaviours that are extinguished or punished; individuals who tend to display the latter behaviour are generally socially unqualified.

Phillips defines social skill as consisting of the interaction between the individual and the environment through the use of the means and methods necessary to initiate the interpersonal interactions required to maintain them and with others with whom he or she interacts, such that the course of his or her activity becomes directed towards achieving the required adjustment.

Therefore, it is inferred that social skills are, first and foremost, interactive skills that include verbal and nonverbal behaviours. These definitions emphasise the importance of learning in the acquisition of social skills, whether through observation, modelling, or feedback. That is, an individual's social skills are not theoretical or inherited; instead, they are skills that the child learns and acquires through social interaction in accordance with the social and cultural values and norms specific to each society through observing, imitating, and internalising the behaviour of others, especially that of parents.

Characteristics of Social Skills:

Therefore, the most important characteristics of social skills may be summarised as follows:

Social skills are acquired through learning, practice, and imitation.

Social skills include verbal and nonverbal components.

Social skills are interactive and require effective, appropriate responses.

The characteristics of individuals, such as age, sex, and social status, influence social skills in social situations and affect social performance.

Importance of Social Skills:

Social skills are highly important in an individual's life across various domains from childhood to old age. Through them, the individual can interact socially with peers and those around him in a positive manner and acquire many friends; they also positively influence his personal and academic competence.

Social skills contribute to establishing a successful relationship with members of society, whether at home, at school, or with other community members, by understanding social behaviours, learning them, and practising them with local community members.

Any dysfunction or deficiency in an individual's skills negatively affects their self-esteem, emotional and social development, and motivation to learn, in addition to having adverse effects on their psychological and social personality.

Many specialists consider that the most significant importance of social skills operates at different levels, as follows:

At the family level, through social skills, the individual can gain the acceptance of parents and siblings, interact with them, and interact with them in a manner characterised by agreement, familiarity, and affection.

Educational level at school: the child encounters a new world that is broader than the family environment; there is no respect except through the art of dealing with others. Through social skills, the child can understand his or her teacher and respond to him or her.

The general level: For the child, social skills are the instrument that enables the individual to deal with others.

In the same context, Abū al-ʿUlā argues that the importance of social skills lies in the following:

Play, modes of communication, and nonverbal responses are necessary during interactions with others.

They are necessary and valuable as a means of proper conduct in different situations.

High social skills also make it easier for individuals to manage work relationships, whether with colleagues, supervisors, or subordinates, more effectively.

They enable individuals to control different forms of their behaviour, increase their ability to deal with irrational behaviour from others, and establish and maintain close relationships with those around them.

Components of Social Skill:

Social skills have several components, namely:

Behavioural components:

The behavioural components of social skill refer to all behaviours that emanate from the individual and that can be observed when the individual is in an interactive situation with others; these components are termed social behaviour. The behavioural components of social skill may be placed into two principal categories:

- A. Verbal behaviour

- B. Nonverbal behaviour

1. Verbal behaviour: The verbal behaviour of the communicator is highly important in evaluating his social skills in situations of social interaction because the content of speech conveys what the individual intends in a more direct manner than any other manifestation of social behaviour among the components of social skill with verbal content.

B. Nonverbal behaviour: Nonverbal behaviour plays an important role in the process of communication among individuals and in their relationships with one another. The manifestations of this nonverbal behavior often convey significant messages about an individual's social skills during conversation, alongside the content of their speech.

Cognitive components:

Social skills have cognitive components; however, some of these components are difficult to observe directly. These refer to the individual's aspirations, thoughts, and decisions regarding what he should say or do during social interaction. Since thoughts are not visible to the observer, they are inferred correctly or incorrectly from what the observed person has said or done. In social skills, cognitive capacities include the ability to perceive the other person's wishes or intentions accurately or to gain insight into the type of response most likely to influence the other person's opinion. These capacities are responsible for success or failure in social situations (Arkowitz et al., 1975).

The Role of Family Communication in Developing Social Skills:

Parents play an important role in the socialisation of their children within the family by using approaches that affect their children's psychological and social adjustment and support their social skills. Through the child's relationships with his family members and the pattern of communication among them, the child's relationships with others are shaped. From the family, the child derives his approaches, which constitute a primary guide for his social behaviour in both the near and distant future. Therefore, the family must provide its children with affection, love, understanding, and respect.

In this context, some studies have concluded that young children who suffer from poor self-control have persistent mothers and often display behaviours described as temper tantrums and aggression. Resistant children who have directive, insistent parents often develop anger, whereas children who have caregivers who foster empathy and appropriate social functioning often do not. In this way, the mother's temperament interacts with the child's temperament when there is harmony and proportionality between the two, and indications emerge that facilitate the development of the child's social competence. In contrast, when the mother finds it difficult to resolve the child's problems and develops aggressive behaviours, she may not help him in his social development.

For parents to play a positive role in our children's lives, there are "three different ways in which parental influences interact with the child: (parental advice regarding friends; parental organisation of friends' activities; and linking models of parental interaction to friendships friendly interaction models to positive outcomes, and negative or authoritarian models to weak social outcomes)."

Parents may also exert an indirect influence through family and social communication and interactions between parents and adults. Parents who are happier with their friends tend to have a child who is more positively understood by their friends. Fathers who have not internalised social interactions with friends are more likely to have children who are not preferred by their friends and who are aggressive. Socially isolated mothers have children who are excluded from the social sphere and withdraw from social life. Ineffective communication between parents affects the child not through what he or she is told but through what he or she observes about his or her parents' social relationships and the extent of their comfort within them.

Many scholars have found that family interactions function as models, or schemata, of family communication, whereby children develop cognitive structures that represent relationships among family members and between the family and the external world. These cognitive structures provide the basis for family members to encode and decode messages among themselves and with the external world.

The relationship between parents and their children is among the most important and admirable, especially when it is founded on respect, affection, and sound communication. Communication between parents and children is highly important, particularly in this era, when our children's ways of thinking are influenced by advanced technology and the various events shaping our world. The media also play a significant role in shaping how children think and speak.

Communication processes are the foundation of human relationships and human understanding. They play a prominent role in teaching and learning, especially when learning and communicating with children begin in early childhood. Childhood is the foundation for building the human personality, its first point of departure, and the basis for forming the individual in a strong and sound manner across different dimensions: physical, material, health, psychological, social, cultural, and economic. Adults are typically influenced by what they became accustomed to in childhood, and a person cannot forget that stage, with its merits and positives, as well as its setbacks and negatives. The memory of childhood events remains firmly established; accordingly, it is incumbent upon parents to recognise the importance of communicating with their children. The family plays a significant role in teaching the child ways of dealing with others and in behavioural modification.

Here, the role of parents and the family becomes apparent: the family's primary task remains the upbringing of children. Within the family, the child develops his identity and learns to get along well with others. Children, therefore, require intensive and judicious communication to prepare them properly and to advance and elevate society.

By observing reality, we find that parents' complaints about their children have become prevalent; taken as a whole, these complaints reveal the gap between the two generations. This has led to multifaceted failure in confronting life, whether in terms of academic attainment or in the formation of sound social relationships.

The most important reason for this lies in the failure of communication between parents and children. Some conduct dialogue unilaterally, without a response from the other party; that is, they speak in front of their children, not with them, in a domineering manner. In reality, this is not dialogue, as there is no reciprocal exchange.

Today's youth live in a psychological, cultural, and social condition marked by broad openness, and the attractions surrounding them on every side are too dangerous to be underestimated. Today, we undertake the most challenging task in human existence: the socialisation of children.

We also find that among the most prominent negative means of family communication is the use of expressions that adversely affect the balanced development of the child's personality, such as insults and reproach. All these things are easy to employ, but their effects are harmful. Why not transform this into positive practices that increase the child's positive energy, for example, by calling the child by the name he likes or by using a gentle form of address, adding "my son …" at the beginning of every dialogue?

The benefits of dialogue, harmony, and concord among family members provide the child with a basis for logical thinking, help him organise his thoughts and express his opinions well, and train him to listen attentively to others and understand what they mean. Nor can we neglect the important role of dialogue in reducing internal conflicts and hostile feelings, breaking the barrier of fear and shyness, and strengthening the ability to build social relationships, which constitute essential support for building the future. Thus, the outcome will depend on how communication within the family is conducted.

A person who masters social skills can shape his attitudes and behaviour to confront new situations, thereby achieving social adjustment, which is based on the individual's acceptance of others as he accepts himself and on placing himself in others' position, that is, being able to think, feel, and act in the same manner as others understand it. He is also forgiving others, overlooking their weaknesses and faults, and extending a helping hand to those who need it.

An integrated personality, characterised by social competence, performs its function as an apparatus that enjoys sufficient flexibility to meet the demands of an ever-renewing reality. The capacity for change and behavioural flexibility accords with the demands of reality and personal integration.

An individual's success in establishing sound social relationships with others enables him to participate freely in group activities. It also requires him to deploy his skills and capacities for the benefit of the group; in return, he will gain the group's acceptance and respect and benefit from others' skills and activities.

Constructive dialogue, which characterises the family's communication pattern, fosters a sense of responsibility within the family and beyond in children. By this, cooperation with group members is meant, including consulting them to resolve and discuss the social or organisational problems they encounter. In this way, the child's capacity to respect others and to preserve their feelings increases.

Recommendations:

Allow spontaneity in the child's movement and social expression and encourage any activity, initiative, or social participation.

Equipping the child with these skills in early childhood is essential for developing social competence.

Develop guidance programmes to enhance parents' family communication skills.

All media outlets must pay attention to providing specialised programmes for fathers and mothers concerned with sound upbringing and communication with children.

seminars and meetings should be held for parents to become familiar with various methods and approaches for developing children's social skills.

Fathers' and mothers' awareness of the importance and necessity of integrating their children into family discussions and allowing them to express their views are increased.

Conclusion

In light of what has been addressed in this research paper, whose principal aim was to identify the role of family communication in developing a child's social skills, we have found that the pattern of communication adopted by the family has a significant effect on equipping the child with the social competencies and skills necessary to integrate with ease into social groups. This is because it constitutes an effective instrument for enabling the child to assimilate society's reality, values, philosophy, and aims so that the child becomes an individual well adjusted to these values while fostering a spirit of coexistence, cooperation, and belonging in the younger generation.