

Parental Accompaniment and Its Role in Promoting Children's Public Health

Abd el Malek Boudour¹

Abstract

The primary aim of this paper is to become thoroughly acquainted with the facts related to parental accompaniment, and as a research priority in this paper is to determine its role in promoting children's public health within the family environment. Various studies confirm that a harmonious and healthy development of the child can only be achieved through the family environment, where particular attention is paid to the child's personality, including its weaknesses and strengths, and where both apparent and latent abilities are invested to assist the child throughout their developmental stages, without neglecting the basic health, psychological, and social difficulties and problems that may emerge later.

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Introduction

The family is the first group in which a child lives, feels belonging, and learns how to interact with others. It is responsible for providing material, psychological, and social stability for its children, especially during childhood. This stability, in turn, affects the children's future lives, particularly their health. A family atmosphere characterized by understanding, love, and care helps children succeed in all life situations. A child needs to grow up in a warm, calm, and stable family environment; they also need the support and accompaniment of their parents and to feel accepted within the family framework. (Suhair, 2002)

Studying parental accompaniment and its relationship to health and illness is a fundamental reality in Algeria that cannot be overlooked, given that health is essential for achieving security and peace. Therefore, concern with prevailing health problems and ways to prevent and control them has been the family's primary activity to raise the health level of its children and improve their quality of life. This is manifested through increasing children's health-related culture in terms of information, experiences, and health practices and cultivating these in minds to elevate their health awareness and culture, and on the other hand, to preserve their safety from the spread of chronic diseases and epidemics and to work on strengthening their health immunity.

Thus, parental accompaniment of children, translated into healthy practices and behaviors, is the way to protect them from diseases and enable them to enjoy sound mental, physical, and social health, which qualifies them to contribute positively to society.

From this standpoint, instilling health values in children within the family environment is an important factor that enables them to avoid chronic and infectious diseases on one hand, and on the other hand to create sound collective awareness free from physical, social, and psychological impediments that affect their daily lives. Hence, the close relationship between serious parental accompaniment and children's enjoyment of good health becomes evident.

Therefore, through this paper we seek to shed light on parental accompaniment in terms of its connection to health culture and children's health awareness, to identify the most important health behaviors both in illness and in prevention, and to determine its impact on the general health of children.

¹ University of Algiers 2 - Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, Algeria, Email :abdelmalek.boudour@univ-alger2.dz

Accordingly, through this paper we attempt to answer the following question: **To what extent can parental accompaniment contribute to providing an appropriate healthy environment for children, leading to a quality life that helps strengthen their health immunity?**

Parental Accompaniment

Definition of Parental Accompaniment

UNESCO defined parental accompaniment in 1986 under the concept of participation as “joint work that includes various activities starting from exchanging information about the child’s health to parents’ close involvement in raising the child and their contribution to decision-making regarding the policy of using and allocating resources.”

Maha Jad defines parental accompaniment in the concept of social support as the amount that an individual perceives and receives in suggestions, information, advice, and guidance when needed from family, teachers, and peers, and the extent to which the individual feels loved, cared for, and appreciated by them and has their needs satisfied through interaction. (Al-Didamouni, 2009, p. 13)

Parental Health Accompaniment

Parental health accompaniment is the parents’ persistent endeavor to develop their children’s health capacities and to teach them sound health culture that translates known health facts into recognized healthy behavioral patterns at the family level, with the aim of changing unhealthy behavioral habits and helping the individual acquire experiences and practice correct healthy habits. (Manal, 2008, p. 55)

It also means providing culture, information, data, and health facts related to health and illness to all family members without exception. The U.S. Educational Systems Agency defined a health-literate person as someone who:

- Understands the basic facts about health and illness.
- Works to advance health in the community.
- Maintains their own health and the health of those they care for. (Nadia, 2012, p. 13)

From all this we can say that **parental health accompaniment** is that intertwined fabric of actions, information, behaviors, and positive attitudes related to health and illness that parents translate into behavioral patterns that prompt their children to think about preventive and therapeutic matters that protect their bodies from diseases.

Objectives of Parental Health Accompaniment

Parental health accompaniment aims to instill health awareness and sound health culture values with the objectives of:

- Spreading correct health concepts in society and improving the health of the individual and the community.
- Enabling individuals to identify their health problems and helping them solve them.
- Consolidating correct healthy behaviors.
- Reducing the rates of disease and mortality and improving the quality of life for the individual and the community.

- Contributing to lowering the rates of epidemics, diseases, and disabilities. (Ruqayya, 2005, p. 7)

On the other hand, the primary goal of parental health accompaniment is to achieve happiness and well-being for children by raising their health level, correcting their behaviors, and striving to rectify their wrong directions and unhealthy habits, while working to develop their health awareness and knowledge through conditions of bodily, mental, and psychological safety and sufficiency. To reach this goal, the following objectives must be achieved:

- Ensuring that maintaining and enjoying health becomes a goal the family seeks to attain and making the advancement of health level a basic requirement.
- Encouraging family members and involving them in developing and improving health services through positive contribution to activating the role of health institutions and improving their performance.
- Working to change family members' behaviors and unhealthy habits into healthy behaviors and developing them.
- Introducing the effective roles played by primary and supporting health institutions in providing health services such as administering necessary vaccinations to prevent diseases. (Ahmed, 2015, p. 17)

Parental health accompaniment also aims to nourish children with health values that allow prompt adoption of preventive measures against diseases and accidents by helping them understand the practices and habits necessary to preserve and improve health. Individuals must know what practices are required, why they are practiced, and how they can be performed. (Dalila, 2019, p. 243)

Role of Parental Accompaniment in Achieving Children's Health Awareness and Culture

Parental accompaniment seeks to achieve sustainable health development based on positive attitudes among children regarding their health status and its development, and this step contributes to improving the health situation of its community and maintaining its balance and stability, far from popular interpretations of the health situation and closer to the scientific explanation of available health phenomena and conditions. (Basma, 2018, p. 185)

To achieve children's health culture, parents must combat negative ideas related to the health situation that are strongly influenced by cultural standards and values. (Basma, 2018, p. 186)

Thus, parents who are concerned with transmitting experiences to their children that aim to develop their health status must correct practices that contained errors and transgressions harmful to their children's health and safety; otherwise, the danger will persist, worsen, and spread more as children continue to interact with others, especially since they carry incorrect values and ideas about their health.

On the other hand, the role of parental accompaniment is evident in adhering to the features of health education, complying with its values and principles, and avoiding practices contrary to health, such as neglecting health care and adopting violent behaviors and smoking that children may acquire during the imitation stage. (Basma, 2018, p. 189)

Parents must also increase attention to personal health, general hygiene, healthy nutrition, and water cleanliness. Family members should follow the foundations of proper disease prevention, promptly treat and isolate the infected individual and keep distance as much as possible. Attention should also be paid to the health of the home environment (pest control, healthy ventilation, proper food preservation).

From here it becomes clear that parental health accompaniment seeks to instill health culture values based on prevention and treatment as follows:

❖ **Primary health education:** Aims to raise health awareness, prevent diseases, and improve life by focusing on children who are not ill and who have no risk factors that might lead to infection; for example: educating and raising their awareness about the dangers of drugs and addiction, addiction to social networks, proper nutrition, etc.

❖ **Secondary health education:** Directed at children who have risk factors but have not yet reached the stage of disease; health education is aimed at protecting them from disease or preventing its occurrence; for example: guiding an obese child who has not yet developed malnutrition-related diseases.

❖ **Final health education:** This level of education aims to enable those afflicted with disabilities or chronic or severe illnesses that are not expected to be cured to limit the worsening of the problem and to live with the diseases with all available physical, mental, and psychological capacities. (Nadia, 2012).

Basics of parental health accompaniment: These are the knowledge, experiences, and healthy behaviors that parents must know and master in order to accompany their children in the most healthful way, and they are:

Parental health accompaniment for the newborn: The family and the mother must know that after the child leaves the sterile environment of the mother's womb, the newborn is exposed to diseases and infections (brain injury, low birth weight, pulmonary infections, hereditary diseases, cleft defects), which often lead to the infant's death.

This is the position taken by the World Health Organization, which confirmed that cases of asphyxia in the perinatal period and infections in newborns are among the most common causes of death from complications related to preterm birth. (World Health Organization, 8 April 2019, p. 4)

Parental health accompaniment for routine child checkups : The family in general, and the mother in particular, must know that medical follow-up of their children in child care units is important, especially in the first year of life, where visits should be repeated every month. At each visit the child's weight and length are measured, the teeth are examined, and it is verified that the child is acquiring physical and mental abilities and skills on schedule. In addition, care must be taken to vaccinate the child and give all immunizations appropriate to each age stage.

It is noted that the mother's familiarity with these health matters and the high level of health care during pregnancy and delivery, as well as the level of early care for the child after birth, lead to a reduction in morbidity and mortality rates for children during this period. (Samir, 2012, p. 45)

Mother's essentials for interacting with her child

These are the important pieces of information a mother needs to be able to deal with her child in a healthy way. The ideal situation here is represented by the following information:

– **Child's sleep:** The mother must ensure correct sleeping positions for her child to avoid suffocation and to preserve the natural shape of the head during growth periods.

– **Child's clothing:** Clothing must be appropriate for the weather, loose and roomy, to help the child move, which contributes to strengthening muscles and stimulating blood circulation.

– **Monitoring the child's health and growth:** The mother should make regular periodic visits to the specialist doctor to follow up on her child's health condition.

– **Child's temperature:** The mother should know that body temperature in childhood ranges between 37.5 / 38.5 °C, and if the temperature rises above that, she should consult a doctor. (Samir, 2012, p. 54)

- **Child's crying:** A child usually does not cry without a reason; the cause may be pathological, accompanied by vomiting, fever, and diarrhea, or non-pathological such as hunger or thirst, etc.
- **Diarrhea:** Diarrhea is considered one of the serious pathological symptoms a child may suffer from, with causes that vary between bacteria, viruses, or others.
- **Breastfeeding:** It is considered the best method of feeding the child and is necessary to provide the body with immunity against various diseases. The mother must learn the correct method of breastfeeding her child, the appropriate number of feedings per day, and how to take care of herself in order to breastfeed her child. (Samir, 2012, p. 57).

Parental Accompaniment for Developing Nutritional Awareness and Sound Dietary Education

Forming healthy eating habits in the child from an early age has become one of the decisive factors that shape a positive balance in their personality and in their relationship with family and society. Thus, children sitting with other family members during meals is an important opportunity to spend beneficial and pleasant group time, to eat slowly and deliberately to give the body its due, and it is a very important chance for parents to teach the child healthy dietary habits that help his physical and mental growth, such as discussing the benefits of certain foods, vegetables, or fruits, and, conversely, warning about the dangers of consuming sugars, sweets, and fast food, etc. Over time, this forms a dietary regimen in the child and builds a conviction about the necessity of choosing the best foods, in accordance with the Qur'anic verse: "O you who have believed, eat from the good things which We have provided for you and be grateful to Allah if it is Him that you worship" Al-Baqarah 2:172.

Parental Accompaniment for Developing Adolescents' Health Awareness

Concerns about adolescent health usually focus on lifestyle issues — such as weight control, sleep, smoking, and sex. Adolescent obesity is a serious and growing health problem. Although there is no magic solution to weight loss for adolescents, there are many things parents can do to facilitate it. Discuss age-appropriate tactics, such as regular physical activity and attention to portion sizes.

Sex is another worrying topic regarding adolescent health. Therefore, parents should provide adolescents with accurate information about sex and adolescent health. It is also important to discuss feelings, attitudes, and values. By speaking clearly and frankly, you can help the adolescent mature and behave responsibly in sexual matters. (Clinic, 2023)

Public health for children

Definition of health

We will limit ourselves here to the World Health Organization's (W.H.O.) definition because of its importance and to avoid differing definitions that fall under various specializations. The World Health Organization defined health as a positive state of peace and bodily, mental, and social sufficiency, not merely the absence of disease or disability. (Al-Damardash I., 2006, p. 18)

The concept of health includes the physiological, physical, psychological, and social manifestations of an individual's condition and the existence of sufficient cognitive and behavioral organizations for the individual's healthy design of life to overcome current life crises.

From this perspective, health can be considered the tangible and realistic outcome of a successful process of social upbringing; failure in it will lead to illness, so complications of disease can be considered the result of not receiving sufficient social support. (Samer, 2008, p. 7)

Health here is the opposite of disease; as it is said, it is a crown on the heads of the healthy that only the sick see. The social value here truly reflects the status of this concept for the individual who loses its

meaning. The absence of guidance and failure to adhere to preventive methods are among the factors causing disease; therefore, what is known as health culture must exist to create awareness in the individual, as it is one of the most important factors of development and progress. (Dalila, 2019, p. 41).

Concept of Public Health for Children

Public health for the child can be defined as the child's good and healthy development across biological, social, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive domains. It also includes teaching the child correct problem-solving methods. Good health in childhood is a pathway to a good life filled with positivity and appropriate interaction with peers and the surrounding community.

Family Health

Family health is considered one of the important sociological topics that helps the individual and society organize daily social life. Family health is a set of interrelated and interacting conditions and processes that require analysis of relationships inside and outside the family while taking the family's needs into account. The daily living pattern constitutes the temporal and spatial framework for the individual and represents an intermediate state between illness and health.

Manifestations of Child Health Care

Periodic Examination of the Child

There are a number of health and motor examinations that should be performed from time to time during early childhood, aimed at detecting any health or motor problems that may affect the child's physical growth or motor development. The most important of these examinations and tests are as follows:

- a) The child's height and weight should be monitored regularly and compared with the standard norms for other children of the same age. Excess weight beyond normal limits indicates obesity in the child, while low weight or lack of height gain may indicate undernutrition or an underlying health problem. All of this may directly or indirectly affect the child's motor activity.
- b) Visual acuity and eye movement must be examined; eye problems inevitably lead to impairment of motor development related to vision, such as hand-eye coordination, which negatively affects participation in motor activities.
- c) Neuromuscular coordination should be assessed; poor neuromuscular coordination is an indicator of a disorder in the child's coordination component, which adversely affects motor development and therefore requires examination by a pediatric specialist.

An assessment should be made to determine the child's mastery of basic motor skills. Most children acquire motor skills at specific ages: running typically occurs between one and a half and two years; jumping occurs between approximately 2.5 and 3 years; hopping between 3 and 4 years; and skipping (as in rope-jumping) between 4 and 5 years. All of this assumes that children undergo motor experiences that contribute to the timely development of these skills. (Nashwan, 2010, p. 87)

Healthy Nutrition

Healthy nutrition plays an important role in the child's growth; it supplies the body with the energy needed to carry out activities, whether internal or external, physical, mental, or psychological. Nutrition also plays a key role in repairing damaged cells and rebuilding them, forming new cells, and increasing the body's immunity against certain diseases and protecting it from them. (Khalifawi, 2013, p. 93)

Hygiene

Hygiene is one of the basic conditions for a child's growth; it protects the child from diseases and epidemics and activates major body organs such as the heart and nerves. Hygiene includes personal cleanliness, food hygiene, clothing, the home and surrounding environment, the cleanliness of water used, and the availability of sewage networks. (Khalifawi, 2013, p. 93)

Sociological Analysis of the Dialectic between Parental Accompaniment and Child Health

As the child grows and ages, parents need to pay increasing attention to the child's health preferences and needs. This, however, often occurs only if the accompanying parents possess health awareness and culture that grant them skills and behaviors beneficial to the child's health—based on the principle that one who lacks something cannot give it.

A study by Maha Ahmed Abdel Halim confirmed that family health culture made the woman a mother knowledgeable about the stages of child growth and development, the importance of breastfeeding and reproductive health and their consequences, as well as how to protect the child from household accidents and the spread of infectious diseases among children. It acquainted her with types of good nutrition in her living environment, appropriate awareness methods, and child-rearing according to customs and traditions; it also familiarized her with first-aid principles and hereditary diseases that may affect her offspring. All of this positively reflects on her health and that of her children. (Al-Halim, 2018, p. 92)

Therefore, the mother accompanying her children must be keen to practice these healthy behaviors, foremost among them breastfeeding, given its numerous benefits for both mother and infant—especially in the early feedings when the milk appears as a yellowish fluid containing ready antibodies to fight diseases, thereby supplying the infant with ready antibodies that protect against these illnesses. (Samir, 2012, p. 55) Undoubtedly, the positive effects of breastfeeding on children persist for many years, as they are less likely to suffer from many conditions such as high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, and severe obesity. Children who were breastfed also tend to have higher intelligence scores than peers fed substitutes for breast milk. (Hassan, 2011, pp. 129–130) Moreover, breastfeeding has a positive effect on many aspects of child health: beyond its nutritional value, it strengthens the child's immune system and thus protects against a wide range of infectious diseases. (Commission, 2012, p. 11)

Children also need an environment during their childhood years that stimulates cognitive curiosity and a love of learning and discovery. Therefore, it is very beneficial for parents to ensure that the child engages in play with peers in kindergarten or designated public play areas. This helps the child acquire and reinforce essential social skills and experiences such as sharing, interaction, communication, and forming social relationships. Enrollment in a good kindergarten before school age also helps detect learning disorders and address them early if present. (Deborah M. Consolini, 2023).

Some children benefit greatly when parents give them the opportunity to participate in social activity groups (for example: sports, science, music, recreational activities). These activities can also help them acquire social skills that enhance their social health. Conversely, an overly crowded daily schedule of activities may cause stress and discomfort for the child. Children need encouragement and support in their extracurricular educational activities without parents overinflating expectations about outcomes. (Deborah M. Consolini, 2023)

On the other hand, studies have shown that parental accompaniment of adolescents by providing accurate information about sex and adolescent health, and by discussing their feelings, attitudes, and values openly and frankly, can help adolescents mature and adopt principles of sexual health, enabling them to behave responsibly in sexual matters. (Clinic, 2023)

Studies have also demonstrated that parental accompaniment saturated with family health culture prepares the child to be physically healthy, instills correct concepts and life skills, and fills them with habits and behaviors that build sound practices supporting the child's mental and intellectual development. It also

builds children's moral and social values and teaches them the basics of preventing infectious diseases such as cholera, typhoid, viral hepatitis, and prevention of childhood diseases like measles and poliomyelitis. (Al-Halim, 2018, p. 91)

Conclusion

Parental health accompaniment allows for raising the general health level of children and helps strengthen their immunity against diseases and epidemics, which leads to increased productivity and reduced expenditure on medical treatment.

In summary, parents must immerse their family members in balanced health values so as to serve as good role models for their children, remain vigilant about their children and monitor them through the various stages of life, confront contemporary health problems facing their children, adopt the best means to protect them in multiple ways, enhance their health and advance it toward betterment, and make the values of health education firmly rooted in children's minds and personalities.

To ensure effective parental accompaniment in providing an appropriate healthy environment for children and achieving a quality life that contributes to strengthening their health immunity, the following are necessary:

- **Educating the family:** The family is the nucleus of society and is capable of instilling sound health values and concepts in the individual from an early age, thereby acquiring collective preventive and therapeutic awareness against current and potential epidemics and diseases.
- **Establishing preparatory courses for those about to marry and intensifying awareness programs targeting parents:** This aims to develop family life culture in general and to cultivate the skill of accompanying children in particular, to keep pace with social and cultural changes and to develop crisis and health-problem management skills, thereby reducing health imbalances and confronting the resulting social disorders.
- **Focusing parents on awareness, prevention, and treatment programs for children on both psychological and physical levels:** Studies have shown these two aspects are the most important for children.
- **Providing health education to children on matters that concern them:** such as healthy nutrition, understanding disease causes and prevention, personal hygiene and environmental sanitation, proper nutrition, etc.

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