

Parent Attitudes and Behaviors

Below we describe four parental attitudes and behaviors which can lead to a child's positive growth. However, when a parent incorporates inappropriate attitudes and behaviors it can lead to child abuse and/or neglect.

1. Realistic expectations

Explanation: Realistic expectations are those that are both chronologically and developmentally age appropriate for the child. Parental expectations can be unrealistic when the child is unable developmentally, physically, or psychologically to perform or behave in certain ways. Children impacted by neglect or abuse often experience delays and need to be recognized for their developmental age not their chronological age.

Example: A mother who is fostering a six-year-old boy and has unrealistic expectations for him to keep his bedroom picked up at all times. What is unrealistic is that his developmental age is similar to a three-year-old child who would not have the maturity and/or the motivation to pick up his room.

Effect: When only the chronological age of a child is considered, parents can easily become frustrated, resulting in anger. When children experience repeated failures as they struggle to please their parent's unrealistic expectations, it can lead to lowered sense of self-worth.

2. Empathy

Explanation: Empathy is the parent's ability to share a child's thoughts and perspectives, to understand his or her feelings, and to respond with compassion if he or she is in distress. A lack of parental empathy can slow the psychological and emotional development of the child.

Example: A caregiver says that he has no interest in why his child misbehaves, and he makes no effort to explore the intentions or feelings behind the child's misbehavior or address them in positive ways.

Effect: Lack of parental empathy can result in children's inability to describe feelings in words or to regulate emotions. Such children may also fail to develop secure attachment and empathy for others.

3. Discipline

Explanation: One goal of discipline is to increase children's desirable behaviors and decrease undesirable behaviors. A positive parenting approach includes using encouragement and rewards for desirable behavior along with discipline that blends clear expectations with warmth and understanding. Discipline that resorts to rigidity, over reaction, harshness, or cruel punishment can become emotionally or physically abusive. Corporal punishment, which is forbidden in foster or kinship care, amounts to spankings or other physical punishment. It has been found to be ineffective for any child.

Example: A mother who praises and rewards her son with a trip to the park for doing well on a school test is using positive parenting. A mother who strikes her child when he talks back is using corporal punishment.

Effect: Parents who use positive parenting techniques will foster their child's self confidence. However, children exposed to corporal punishment may learn that aggression is used to express frustration and to control others.

4. Appropriate parent-child roles

Explanation: A healthy parent-child role involves the parents taking care of the children and keeping them safe. An inappropriate parent-child role or "role reversal" happens when the child is expected attend to the parent's needs. Consequently, the child sacrifices his or her own emotional needs in order to care for the parent.

Example: A mother withdraws because of depression and expects her daughter to care for her and the younger children.

Effect: Children raised in a role-reversed relationship are more likely to report depression and anxiety, as well as headaches and stomachaches. They also show more aggression, disruptive behavior, and self-harm, as well missing school which reflects in effecting their grades.

References

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