

THE ROLE OF FAMILY IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Humans rely heavily on learning for child development. Because we are not born knowing how to behave in society, we have to learn many of the behaviors from the environment around us growing up. For most of us, this learning starts with the family at home.

Learning comes in many forms. Sometimes children learn by being told something directly. However, the most common way children learn is by observation of everyday life. A child's learning and socialization are most influenced by their family since the family is the child's *primary social group*.

Child development happens physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually during this time. To make an analogy, if you were constructing a large building, you have to make sure that it has a solid foundation so that the rest of the building can stand tall and strong for many years to come. If the foundation is not strong, the building will have trouble standing on its own. Just like people, if our foundations are not solid, we find it more difficult to be successful in our relationships with others, work, health, and ourselves. So, it cannot be stressed enough how important the family is in development of a child.

Ultimately, the family will be responsible for shaping a child and developing their *values, skills, socialization, and security*.

Values

We generally understand values to mean an understanding between what is right and what is wrong. As a society, we have norms and values, and these function in conjunction with personal values and norms.

One way to see what a society values is to look at whom a society respects. Usually, people show more respect to people and to things that they value highly. Whenever you treat people with disrespect, your child will certainly notice. Children are sponges that soak up *everything* around them, and many times we forget that they are watching us.

However, as a whole, many of us agree and desire to share with our children values of respect, compassion, fairness, and responsibility to name a few.

A good way to teach your child values is to discuss with them the importance of healthy and unhealthy values. Even when your child is little, giving them some responsibilities, such as cleaning the table or helping to cheer up a friend or sibling when they're sick, will begin to teach them the importance of these values. Additionally, explaining the importance of values will help your child understand consequences.

Within the world we live in today, where media is a dominant, it may be appropriate to block some forms of media from your child. For example, a 4 year old may not be learning the best values from watching rated-R movies. As adults, we can more easily separate right from wrong, whereas little children are still trying to understand where the line is.

So, as the family, it is your job to teach your children about the values that they will use to guide their own lives. This requires a lot of work for you because not only do you have to directly teach these values to your children, such as through explaining and tasks as mentioned above, but your children will look to you as a role model. Your child will notice if you do behave in the same way that you expect of them. Your child watches your behaviors to gauge how to behave themselves. When something goes awry, having a level-headed response is very important.

Trying to always exhibit your values is important more than ever with a family because a child's presence must then always be taken into consideration.

Skills

Once your child is born, they start learning motor skills, language skills, cognitive skills, and emotional skills.

Regarding motor skills, it is largely the family's responsibility for teaching these skills. Even if your child is in daycare, the work that parents put in at home to teach these skills is much more effective than in the few hours your child is under someone else's care. Your child will learn how to sit up, walk, run, climb, hold a spoon, and so on. These seem so natural to us as adults, but they are skills that have to be fine-tuned at a very young age, and they also reinforce your child's independence which is essential for their development.

Language skills are another essential component of the role of family in child development. If you do not speak to your child and teach them your language, they will never learn. One infamous example of this occurring is with Genie, a child who was locked in a dark room with extremely little human contact until she was rescued at age 13. She was never able to develop language fluency because it was never taught to her. So, teaching your children language skills from a young age is also essential to child development.

Another skill that is very important for child development is emotion. Emotional skills are important throughout your child's entire life as they teach them when to have sympathy and compassion for others as well as teach them how to deal with the highs and lows that come with life. If your child does not have proper emotional skills, they will not be able to deal with bad outcomes. If they lack emotional skills, it could lead to destructive choices when they are older.

To help develop your child's emotional skills, teaching them to smile and wave when they are babies is a good place to start. When they get a bit older, teaching them to share is very

important. In a family, because there are multiple people, the family can be very helpful in developing a child's skills with the multiple perspectives.

To bring this more to foundational building blocks, while your child is very young, something very helpful for family members to do is to teach children basic emotions. When a child is feeling a certain way, naming emotions and describing them are important ways for your child to understand how they are feeling. Once this foundation is set, children can learn how to respond to their feelings and move forward.

Socialization

When you bring your child home for the first time, your family will become their social group. Parents are the first teachers for children.

What your child learns through the interactions between you and them is what they will carry for the rest of their life in regards to how to treat others. Through this socialization with family, your child will learn how to *trust*, *seek friendships* from others, and *find comfort* with others as well.

Generally, we have to learn how to make and sustain relationships. These skills are started and strengthened with the family. Additionally, giving your child the tools for interpersonal development before they learn the skills of technology is vital.

Learning how to have face-to-face interactions is critical in a child's development. Face-to-face interactions require immediate responses, facial expressions, cues, certain tones of voice, and much more that we do not receive through texting or other online message systems. This is exactly what your child is looking to you and their family to learn. By making sure family members are putting away their smartphones and spending at least a portion of the day "off the grid," it will ensure that interpersonal connection is happening with your child. Simply talking to your child during dinner about their day does a lot more to reinforce person-to-person skills than you may think!

Security

Your child gets their primary sense of security from their family. They rely on you to make sure their basic needs, such as shelter, food, and clothing, are met.

More than that, there is emotional security at home that your child will not find in any other place. Once your child goes to school, they will learn more of public and social skills. But, when they are at home is when your child really learns how to be themselves and express themselves fully. Creating a safe, open home environment is vital so that they can grow.

As a parent, giving your child consistency and structure helps them to develop feelings of security. This can be achieved through schedules. Your child will know that everyday around a

certain time, they will eat, bathe, sleep, etc. Therefore, with a schedule, your child will be able to feel comfort knowing their needs will be met.

When your child feels secure, they are able to develop many more skills. Like the mention of Genie above, she was never able to have security before she was rescued. Because of that, she was not able to grow (properly) emotionally, cognitively, or physically.

Security within your child is a lifelong positive attribute. This also happens with building trust between family members and child. When your child feels that they can trust others around them, then they will be more comfortable to be themselves. Trust happens through secure attachment when a child's basic and emotional needs are met.

Imagine what it would be like growing up without trust, attachment, or security. Key qualities that ensure your child's security are dependability, consistency, respectfulness, and responsiveness.

As a parent, recognizing your child's needs is very important. Additionally, knowing how they ask for their needs is essential. Everyone expresses themselves in different ways, and children are no different (especially young children).

Final Thoughts

Raising children can be very difficult, but it can also be extremely rewarding. Remember to not only teach your child, but make sure that you act in the way that you expect your child to act. It's impossible to be perfect all the time, but you can always strive to be your best when it comes to your role in child development. No one is perfect and no family is perfect.

However, knowing how important the role of family is in the development of children is crucial. As parents, you are your child's first teachers. More than day care or other caregivers, most of your child's learning happens at home with their family. Creating an environment where your child can learn the appropriate skills and values as well as learn how to socialize and be secure creates a solid foundation upon which your child can grow.

Relationships

"Families play an enormously important role in kids' social and emotional development," says Smith Luedtke. "In addition to being your child's first teacher, as a parent, you are also his personal coping consultant." Nurturing family relationships lay the foundation for all other relationships. Through these experiences, children learn to trust others and seek out friendship and comfort. These early lessons pave the way for satisfying personal relationships later