

# CHAPTER IV\*

## THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL WAYS OF EDUCATING ON THEIR CHILD

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

If a parent aims to educate his child successfully in order for him to become a proper adult, this means that the parent will associate with him *purposefully* and *systematically*.

For the task of being-an-educator, no formal instruction is needed because, as often is argued, educating is something that comes from nature. However, the opposite of this is indicated by the number of emotionally impeded children, the conflict in households and increasing social and behavioral problems in our society. This corroborates the fact that relationships in which a child is involved do not leave him unscathed but that he *lived experiences* them and gives *sense* to them.

From the beginning a child has *personal potentialities* at his disposal (also known as his *psychic life*) that require educating for their accountable realization. Educating is not something that occurs automatically with a child; indeed, from his first moment of existing in the world, a child announces himself as someone who is dependent on an adult for his adequate care and becoming adult. That educating has a strong influence on a child's totality of behaving and becoming adult is beyond doubt.

Now the question arises *how* educating by a parent must appear in order for him to accompany his child to adequately become adult. Sonnekus distinguishes three different modes of educating, i.e., *emotional*, *knowing* and *normative educating*. Consequently, it is

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\*From: Sonnekus, M. C. H.: *Opvoeding en opvoedingsprobleme tussen ouer en kind* [Educating and educative problems between parent and child]. HAUM, Pretoria, 1985, pp. 49-62.

necessary to refer briefly to these different ways of educating and their influence on a child.

## 2. EMOTIONAL (AFFECTIVE) EDUCATING

The emotional accompaniment of a child by a parent provides the basis for his personal unfolding and carries the educative relationship between the parent and the child. Here this involves those behaviors and attitudes of a parent that are responsible for creating a warm and intimate atmosphere in the parental home within which a child is given support and is led to becoming adult. Such educating strengthens and forms a child's emotional life and this provides a fruitful and stable basis for educative influencing.

### 2.1 A few forms in which emotional educating appears

#### 2.1.1 *Acceptance*

In emotional educating a child as well as a parent experiences a feeling of mutual *trust* and *acceptance* that inspire a parent to educate his child with love and understanding and that makes him ready to open himself for being influenced educatively. Acceptance includes having love for a child as a *human being* and not for his appearance, his achievements or what he is going to become.

Acceptance is an absolute condition for an encounter between parent and child and it is in this encounter that a parent's love becomes fulfilled. This encounter succeeds when a child experiences security and the parent is ready to be *with* him. The adult's being-there proceeds to a "we-ness" where a child experiences that he is *encountered*—he becomes free from all "musts"; he is *free* to be himself. An intimate, warm, interpersonal space is created where he can be himself completely.

Ways in which a parent conveys to his child that he accepts him is, e.g., with a friendly smile; words and tone of voice; behavior such as tussling his hair; an attentiveness to what he says, acknowledgment, praise, encouragement, etc.

Mutual unconditional acceptance between parent and child is needed for a favorable relationship of trust between them. A child cannot merely know intuitively that he is accepted; he must experience that his parents accept him. To be accepted and receive attention perhaps are among the most important contributing reasons for a child's behavior. If there are inadequacies in fulfilling these needs he will ask about them in his negative behavior.

A parent can act in one of the following ways should his child persist with attention-seeking behavior:

- a) A parent can just stop doing what he is involved with when his child asks for his attention. In this way the *child's* demand is met, there is temporary peace and the parent relieves his guilt feeling of being a "rejecting parent". However, this does not solve the problem.
- b) A child's behavior can be ignored by which the child in due course will stop his behavior. However, should the child have had a justifiable need for the parent's attention, such a behavior would be extremely cruel. Thus a child's search for attention and acceptance cannot merely be ignored.

Attention-seeking behavior that appears repeatedly can be an indication that:

- (i) there is not sufficient provision for the child's needs for attention and acceptance; or
- (ii) the child tries to control his parents through his behavior.

The following way of behaving rests on (i) and (ii) above, i.e.:

- c) To insure that there is provision for the child's needs, it is necessary to evaluate the educative relationships – how is it with the emotional relationship between me and my child? Does my child experience and know that he is important for his parents? How does the communication progress between parent and child? Is there time to play together with the child? Etc.

In response to a child's attention-seeking behavior the following behaviors possibly can help, provided there are no problems with respect to the above-mentioned questions. "Sally, you know Mamma has much love for you and that today we have done many enjoyable things together. Now Mamma has other work to do and thus I cannot come if you call. You can play with your toys while Mamma does her work." With such a response you assure your child of your love, but at the same time you deny that your child governs your life.

### ***2.2.2 Mutual trust***

It is an experiential fact that a child's trust first must be won before he can be helped. In accompanying his child emotionally a parent tries to give him trust by creating a congenial, emotionally balanced relationship. A cold atmosphere blunts a child's emotions and can impair his trust and confidence in himself.

Consistent behavior by a parent will stabilize the relationship of trust. This strengthens and forms a child's emotional life and offers him a venturesome attitude by which he will show an increasing readiness to explore his world with the needed self-confidence.

A child's trust in his parent will occur only if he increasingly grows aware that his parent can help him to become someone himself. In other words, in his weakness a child must trust that his parent will help and not merely forsake him because it is precisely in his weakness that his experience of his own human dignity can be undermined or crushed. To be lovingly by and with a child there is the possibility of expanding and intensifying the mutual trust that offers the impetus for a child to unfold his potentialities. A parent must demonstrate to his child that he trusts him to be able to do something and that he is worth something. Sometimes parents effusively expect something from their children without working on the prerequisites, i.e., then relationship of trust.

### ***2.2.3 Establishing a relationship***

A child has a need to begin a relationship with a trustworthy parent who can understand and support him. At the foundation of such a

relationship is a personal encounter with the child during which he can be guided in the form of sympathy, example, explanation, providing support, doing and experiencing things together.

A parent can ask himself: “What do I mean to this son or daughter, what does he/she expect from me, and for what does he/she need me?” When a child experiences his relationship with his parents as meaningful; when he experiences love and even has love, he will (at least sometimes) try to do the right things for the sake of his parents.

Confidence must be awakened in a child to seek friendly advice from a parent that, in its turn, can guarantee security. A child who experiences a positive relationship with his parents and also experiences the parents’ relationship as a mutual attachment will more easily be able to himself proceed to have meaningful relationships with peers and other adults.

Such a relationship with a child is the most important means available to a parent. A happy relationship can be established by a parent who also enjoys being with his children—as long as it is not at their expense.

#### ***2.2.4 Lived experiencing security***

In showing love parents bestows a feeling of security on their child. To be affectionate is to give a child basic security. With a lack in love, insecurity arises and a child will not seek help from his parents and can result in the child withdrawing and his parents even become a threat for him. It helps a child to know that the security of his parental home always is there to fall back on. This offers him the security that, if he should fail somewhere, his parents will always care for him and that he always will matter to them.

The ways in which and the attitude with which a parent cares for his child can provide security for the latter or not. The child must experience this caring as being based on his worthiness as a person who is becoming adult and not as a sacrifice that his parents make with great pains and which they then continually recall and expect that he will be thankful for them providing it.

Other aspects of family life that lead to a child experiencing security are, among other things, routine; a demand to be obedient; setting limits that indicate to a child what he can and can't do; meeting a child's physical and emotional needs; etc. For a child who feels insecure even bedtime can be a matter of anxiety. To go to sleep is a form of isolation; isolation from the warmth of the people around you, in winding up the day and others helping you. Should a parent hurriedly go to bed, the child will settle down less because he will feel as if the parent wants to get rid of him and, consequently, his anxiety will increase. Such a child must be treated calmly and with understanding.

### ***2.2.5 Handling feelings***

An important parenting task is helping their child better to understand, recognize, distinguish and control in more acceptable ways their own feelings. This requires particular tact but also knowledge and empathy from them. Empathy is a real contact with a child, not only superficially or through an exchange of words in a day-to-day interaction but on the deeper levels of feelings, aspirations and needs. It refers to sensitivity for a child's feelings such that a parent not only is aware of the *content* of these feelings but also of the level on which a child actualizes them. This empathic understanding implies that the parents will try to understand a child as he is; this means to see the child through the eyes of the child.

To allow a child to express his feelings will indicate to him that he is accepted and respected and in doing so his own feelings will become more real for himself and he will be able to handle them in acceptable ways, e.g., to talk about his feelings rather than throwing the nearest thing at someone. The parents' *example* of how they handle their own feelings is extremely important.

To say to a child: "You must not feel that way about your little brother; it is bad to feel that way", means for the child that he is bad because he has such feelings. Such a child will not find a solution to his problem and also will not talk about it with his parents. Knowing that his parents condemn any negative feelings

and, he then feels rejected and guilty he now assumes a fake friendly and complying attitude. In this way he hides his inner feelings and in later years this can lead to problems. One must try to determine what feelings are behind a child's words. In this way a parent shows that he is a good listener and the child has an opportunity to acquire a better understanding of his own feelings and arrive at a solution. The child's feelings are not necessarily approved but by airing them he can assimilate them.

For a child who normally is withdrawn, a degree of aggression is a sign of progression. This indicates at least that now he is able to air the feelings he still always hides. In such a case, an attentive parent also will notice other signs of progression.

### ***2.2.6 Independence***

The task of a parent is to accompany his child emotionally in such a way that he becomes ready to himself navigate in the world, to himself learn to *know* and himself *give meaning* to it.

The aim here is to stabilize the child emotionally such that he can become emancipated. This means taking his own initiative to realize his own potentialities and in doing so to be able to become independent. This means the child must be given the opportunity by the parent trusting that his child can decide and do things for himself. In this way his child will learn to know his own potentialities and/or limitations and also learn to strive for realistic goals.

A child who is overprotected is confronted with a relationship of dependency and then feels insecure and anxious when he is not in the presence of his parents. Such a child withdraws himself into his own insecure little world in order to protect himself in passivity. One of the gravest kinds of overprotection is the inclination of an unwise, overprotecting mother who "protects" her child against responsibility, hard work and effort. The fact is, a child best realizes his potentialities when he confronts resistance or when he must deal with a task requiring spunk and persistence. The task must be neither too easy nor too difficult for him. When he has dealt with it, he must experience a feeling of satisfaction and self-

fulfillment. Parents must be vigilant against “protecting” their children from formative experiences.

### 3. KNOWING (COGNITIVE) EDUCATING

Knowing educating only can proceed adequately if it is based on a *stable emotional experiencing* of a child. This educative relationship is characterized by a purposeful striving by the parents as well as the child to *learn* to know each other better and to realize the child’s learning potentialities. This mutual knowing only can be attained if opportunities are created to be involved with each other. If this does not happen, a child’s need “to be known fully” is negated and he experiences this as such.

A parent must understand his child in his being-a-child and educate him explanatorily accordingly. Knowledge of child-being includes knowledge of each level of becoming. This knowledge only is possible if a parent *lives together with* his child and not merely along side of him.

A parent must know *how* his child sees and lived experiences his little world; for what he has need; what his fears and aims are. Also, a child must understand what a parent means with his educative activities and why he behaves in a certain way. The extent to which a child knows his parent will depend on the degree to which a parent makes himself available in order to be known. If a child has a “skewed” image of his parent, e.g., when he experiences his mother as a “scolding mamma” this indicates that he has only learned to know this aspect of her. A parent ought to be careful about what image of himself he wants to convey to his child.

#### ***3.1 Conversation between parent and child***

Characteristic of a young person of today is loneliness because of a lack of someone to talk to. Parents do not know how to talk with their children in order to allow them to feel that they are part of the home family and not lonely. The hurriedness of life deters parents and children in forming a mutual bond by means of conversations.



A parent spends two to three years in learning to talk well with a child only after which he continually shuts him up. To have a good conversation with one's teenager means that this relationship must be worked on beginning with his days as a baby. If this communication is successful, a parent will have remained in touch with his teenager.

It happens that people live together in the same house for fifteen years or even longer and still do not understand each other because they do not really communicate and consequently never really learn to know each other. Many "discussions" between parent and child exist as two monologues: from the parents' side it is admonitions and instructions; from the child's side it is pleads and excuses.

Often children do not have the courage to state their case or are warned to keep quiet because the parents view the matter as having been settled in their stated position. A responsible parent will not force his child to dance to his tune. On the contrary, in his communication he continually will keep in mind the good relationship between them. He also will say to the child candidly how his behavior allows him to feel like an adult because in talking with each other about their feelings, the channels of communication between adult and child remain open.

A healthy course of communication between parent and child makes it possible for a child to be able to reveal himself, unload and arrive at an outpouring with a parent who understands. If this two-directed involvement between parent and child does not exist, it happens that the child withdraws with the result that parent and child do not understand each other.

Until a parent has learned to *listen* to how a child *feels*, to treat him as a *person* and not as a "thing" and to respect his right to be different, not much can be contributed to the knowing relationship between parent and child.

### **3.2 Accompanying a child in dealing with problems**

The problems of a newborn baby are entirely the responsibility of someone else, usually the parents. As children grow they acquire

more curiosity and inquisitiveness and will do things on their own, including solving problems.

A three year old certainly can solve problems if they involve things that he can really *see* and *feel*. A school beginner has the ability to weigh more than one possibility from which he then can choose the best solution. However, he might experience problems in expressing his thoughts in words.

The more opportunity a child has to solve problems, the greater skill he has in coping with problems he encounters. By being able to solve problems, a child simultaneously learns other skills such as being more tolerant of himself and others. He also learns that possibly there is more than one solution to a problem and to be more observant. In his activities outside of school and in his relationships with people a child has the necessary skills to cope with problems. When a child is able to solve problems himself, this increases his confidence in his own abilities.

Since a child spends most of his time at home, most of his problems arise there. A parent can help a child arrive at a solution to a problem by taking his problem seriously irrespective of how simple it might appear for him as a parent. The development of a positive attitude toward handling a problem will contribute to a child's successes in school.

To question and discuss a child's meanings and ideas not only allows him to feel that he is respected as a person of personal dignity but this also encourages him to think and to express his thoughts in words. A child builds a healthy self-image when a parent accepts and respects his meanings and ideas.

To help a child think through a problem, the following steps can be pointed out to him (although not all problems necessarily are solved by all of the steps, and they are not necessarily used in the same sequence).

### ***3.2.1 Defining the problem***

A two year-old child, e.g., does not think to define what the problem is if his train does not arrive when he wants to take it. Even older children find it difficult to recognize a problem. A child should be encouraged to talk about the situation. This can help determine the nature of the problem. Only if he is aware of the importance of the problem will he be interested in solving it. However, it also is important for the parent to understand that problem is serious to his child and that the parent does not joke about it as unimportant.

### ***3.2.2 Thinking through possible solutions***

Further there must be a consideration of different ways in which the problem can be solved. Small children will use the first solution they think of; therefore it is necessary to suggest solutions to them, e.g., “Let us think of a plan so that both of you can play with the ball...”

Older children enjoy solving a problem themselves. They must receive recognition for their attempts to find other ways of coping with problems.

### ***3.2.3 Determine what is needed to solve the problem***

Some problems require that more information is obtained before it can be solved. Sometimes only a discussion is enough. E.g., “Let’s find out why John will not let you play with his ball.”

Sometimes it is necessary to ask for another’s help and children must be taught how to do this. However, they also must learn that some problems do not have any solution, e.g., when a child hopes his parent’s can bring the dead kitty to life again.

### ***3.2.4 Testing the solution chosen***

After following the preceding steps, now a child can practically apply the solution he has chosen. If he does not succeed, it is the parent’s task to encourage him to consider other possibilities. Parents ought to create opportunities where a child himself must solve problems, e.g., through games and also by asking them questions by which they are required to think and express their

thoughts in words. A child must be given the opportunity to solve a problem himself before a parent provides help. It must never be expected that a child will offer the same solution as a parent.

Children learn to cope with problems by the example of their parents. It is important that a parent explain to a child what he does and why so the child understands how the problem was solved. A child also must experience that a solution that is not successful is not necessarily a failure.

#### **4. NORMATIVE EDUCATING**

As seems clear from the above, educating clearly is normative. A parent presents (and exemplifies) norms to a child that eventually must be accepted and appropriated such that he shows that it is meaningful to *identify* himself with them.

##### **4.1 Norm identification**

A child has a need for authority and welcomes a good reprimand that is evidence of a parent's genuine interest in what he does and says. The purpose of discipline is not to bring up obedient children for the sake of a peaceful life in the home but to bring about recognition of, a respect for and submission to the demands of propriety of the person who is the conveyor of that authority.

The basis of authority is the setting of specific limits; limits that clearly indicate to a child what he should and should not do. In setting these limits, a child's age, abilities and understanding of them should be taken into account. It must be possible for a child to respect the limits. Limits must be in a child's interest and not for a parent's own convenience. They also must provide enough room for a child to live. Parents must agree to the defined limits and remain constant and firm about them so a child knows where he stands.

It must be admitted that it is not easy to punish a child you love, but as soon as there is a yielding with "I'll let it go this time", you become a sympathetic, understanding and loving parent who is totally controlled by his child. From this the child learns that he is

his own master and does not readily understand why the authority prevails. Left to his own, he will not understand this authority that offers him the security of knowing where the limits are.

Then the question is why does a child overstep limits. He does it to test if a limit is still there or because of his uncertainty about it; as soon as the limits are not maintained this makes a child anxious and uncertain when he has succeeded in violating his parent's normative limits. When parents are in doubt about or differ in decisions, this makes a child uncertain and he will test them until he has certainty. If a parent says "no" and a child nevertheless is disobedient and he does nothing about it, a child learns something about the parent's definition of "no". His so-called disobedient behavior often is nothing more than an attempt to get his parents to express in clear language and constructive activity their "yes" or "no". A thoughtful parent in exercising authority always will keep in mind what value this will have for a child in the future. It is a means of improvement and *positive* in nature. Therefore, authority only should be exercised by a parent who is in full control of himself and never impulsively in the heat of battle.

Since the opposite of pedagogical intervention (i.e., where authority must be applied), i.e., *agreeing with or recognizing*, is so closely related to a child's self-image, this will now be discussed.

## 4.2 Self-image

Educating by means of identification involves a child who takes the initiative to identify himself with the norms of an adult. Thus, a small son will identify himself strongly with the outward forms of his father. This is the beginning of his *acquisition of his own identity*. For the next twenty years he tries to discover and learn to know himself. Drawings of children in different stages of becoming show how they experience their self-image. Small children draw themselves entirely as a head, while the mouth also plays an important role.

In his search for his own identity a child particularly is attuned to his parents' view of him. A small child's view of himself still is very formable and because he always believes everything his parents say

to him, he begins to constitute his own self-image on this basis. A critical parent can damage a child's self-image such that in the course of time he throws in the towel and no longer protects himself against possible further failure and rejection.

There are many factors that work against a child forming a favorable self-image. He has sufficient reasons to feel inferior to those around him because he is much smaller, has no authority or power, etc. To fully actualize his given potentialities a child needs a good self-image because a person with a weak self-image is depressive, selfish and appears ineffective.

A parent's contribution to a favorable self-image is in allowing his child to feel good about *who* he is and what he can *do*. Approval and recognition allow a child to blossom while negative and critical comments lead to despair and feelings of inadequacy. Words can motivate or crush a child because he gives meaning to everything.

Perhaps there is no better way to compliment than to tell another (within the child's hearing distance) how precious he is or what a good piece of work he has done. The opposite also is true – a severe way of criticizing is hardly thinkable. A child will quickly respect values and follow a moral judgment by being a “good child”. Therefore, his good behavior deserves recognition so that he can build a good self-image.

Each parent draws a line that determines what is acceptable to him or not. If the line is unrealistically high such as a parent who is not satisfied with his child's achievement--even though it is 80-90%--and lets him know that even the best he can do is not good enough for his parents. Children who are aware of their parents' unrealistic expectations try to act in such ways that they avoid the accusations and reprimands of their parents. These children are the so-called “model children” who are without the slightest indication of negative feelings because they repress them. From fear of rejection they act “properly” but this leaves them with a feeling of despair and even depression. The image that such a child has of himself will depend on how much of what he does is acceptable to his parents. It is interesting to note that a child's behavior sometimes is

not changeable but a parent's decision of where a line of acceptance is going to be drawn is.

This does not mean that a child must never be corrected but that a parent must be thoughtful about the way he does this and continually keeps in mind what potential damage he can do to the child's self-image in comparison to what improvement they should be.

Children often hear their parents say: "Not now, I am busy...." by which they convey to their child his importance to them or possibly that other matters are of greater concern. The message a child also can receive is: "I am not very important to my mom and dad." The result is an undervaluing of his self-esteem. For a parent, the question arises: "Is *my* idea of my child the image of himself that I give him, i.e., do I see my child as lazy and unproductive or as a helpful and interesting person to be with?" A parent's image of his child is conveyed by his genuine interest in his little world. A child who is not given the opportunity to build a positive self-image through the eyes of his parents will constitute an image of himself that for the rest of his life will have a restraining influence on his personal unfolding. A child's self-confidence is a sign of emotional stability; i.e., when a child gives favorable meaning to his abilities. It is a parent's task to accompany his child in attributing such favorable meaning.

## 5. CONCLUSION

It ought to be clear from the above that the parents' ways of educating have a particular influence on the total personal realization of their child. These three ways of accompaniment progress as a unitary event and must be actualized in the most accountable ways in order to best serve a child's potential to become an adequate adult.

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