

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/her child successfully for him/her to become a proper adult, this means the parent associate *purposefully* and *systematically* with him/her.

For the task of being-an-educator, no formal instruction is needed because, as is often argued, educating is something natural. However, the opposite of this is indicated by the number of emotionally impeded children, the conflicts 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/her unscathed, but he/she *lived experiences* them and gives *sense* to them.

From the beginning, a child has *personal potentialities* at his/her disposal (also known as his/her *psychic life*) which require educating for their accountable realization. Educating is not something which occurs automatically with a child; indeed, from his/her first moment of existing in the world, a child announces him/herself as someone who is dependent on an adult for his/her 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 for him/her to accompany his/her child to adequately become adult.

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

Sonnekus distinguishes three modes of educating, i.e., *emotional*, *knowing*, and *normative*. Thus, it is necessary to refer 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/her personal unfolding and carries the educative relationship between parent and child. Here, this involves those behaviors and attitudes of a parent which 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 and a parent experience a feeling of mutual *trust* and *acceptance* which inspire a parent to educate his/her child with love and understanding, which makes him/her ready to open him/herself for being influenced educatively. Acceptance includes having love for a child as a *human being* and not for his/her appearance, his/her achievements, or what he/she 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 loving becomes fulfilled. This encounter succeeds when a child experiences security and the parent is ready to be *with* him/her. The adult's being-there proceeds to a "we-ness" where a child experiences that he/she is *encountered*—he/she becomes free from all "musts"; he/she is *free* to be him/herself. An intimate, warm, interpersonal space is created where he/she can be him/herself completely.

Ways in which a parent conveys to his/her child that he/she accepts him/her is, e.g., with a friendly smile; words and tone of voice;

behavior, such as tussling his/her hair; an attentiveness to what he/she 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/she is accepted; he/she must experience that his/her parents accept him/her. 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/she will "ask" about them in his/her negative behavior.

A parent can act in one of the following ways if his/her child persists with attention-seeking behavior:

- a) A parent can just stop doing what he/she is involved with when his/her child asks for his/her attention. In this way, the *child's* demand is met, there is temporary peace, and the parent relieves his/her 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, stops his/her behavior. However, if the child 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 which 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/her parents through his/her behavior.

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

- c) To ensure that there is provision for the child's needs, it is necessary for a parent to evaluate the educative relationships – how is it with the emotional relationship between me and

my child? Does my child experience and know he/she is important to me? How does the communication progress between us? Is there time for us to play together? Etc.

In response to a child's attention-seeking behavior, the following behaviors can possibly help, provided there are no problems with respect to the above-mentioned questions. "Sally, you know Mama has much love for you and that today we have done many enjoyable things together. Now Mama has other work to do, and I cannot come if you call. You can play with your toys while Mama 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 must first be won before he/she can be helped. In accompanying his/her child emotionally, a parent tries to foster his/her trust by creating a congenial, emotionally balanced relationship. A cold atmosphere blunts a child's emotions and can impair his/her trust and confidence in him/herself.

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

A child's trust in his/her parents only occurs if he/she increasingly becomes aware that his/her parents can help him/her to become someone him/herself. In other words, in his/her weakness, a child must trust that his/her parents will help and not merely forsake him/her, because it is precisely in his/her weakness that his/her experience of his/her 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 which offers the impetus for a child to unfold his/her potentialities. A parent must demonstrate to his/her child that he/she trusts him/her to do something, and that he/she is worth something. Sometimes parents

effusively expect something from their children without working on the prerequisites, i.e., the relationship of trust.

2.2.3 Establishing a relationship

A child has a need for a relationship with a trustworthy parent who understands and supports him/her. At the foundation of such a relationship is a personal encounter with the child during which he/she can be guided in the form of sympathy, example, explanation, providing support, doing, and experiencing things together.

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

Confidence must be awakened in a child to seek friendly advice from a parent which, in its turn, can ensure security. A child who experiences a positive relationship with his/her parents and experiences the parents’ relationship as a mutual attachment, can him/herself more easily 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/her children—if it is not at the children’s expense.

2.2.4 Lived experiencing security

In showing love, parents bestow 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 doesn’t seek help from his/her parents, which can result in the child withdrawing, and his/her parents even become a threat to him/her. It helps a child to know that the security of his/her parental home is always there to fall back on. This offers him/her the security that, if he/she should fail,

somewhere, his/her parents always care for him/her, and where he/she always matters to them.

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

Other aspects of family life which lead to a child experiencing security are routine; a demand to be obedient; setting limits indicating to a child what he/she 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 settles down less because he/she feels as if the parent wants to get rid of him/her and, thus, his/her anxiety increases. Such a child must be treated calmly and with understanding.

2.2.5 Handling feelings

An important parenting task is helping their child better understand, recognize, distinguish, and control their own feelings in more acceptable ways. This requires tact, but also knowledge and empathy from them. Empathy is a genuine 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 is not only 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 try to understand their child as he/she is; this means to see the child through his/her eyes.

To allow a child to express his/her feelings indicates to him/her that he/she is accepted and respected and, in doing so, his/her own feelings become more real for him/herself, and he/she can handle

them in acceptable ways, e.g., talking about his/her 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/she is bad because he/she has such feelings. Such a child will not find a solution to his/her problem, and will not talk about it with his/her parents. Knowing that his/her parents condemn any negative feelings, he/she then feels rejected and guilty, and he/she now assumes a fake friendly and complying attitude. In this way, he/she hides his/her 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/she is a good listener, and the child has an opportunity to acquire a better understanding of his/her own feelings and arrive at a solution. The child's feelings are not necessarily approved, but by airing them, he/she can assimilate them.

For a child who is normally withdrawn, a degree of aggression is a sign of progression. At least, this indicates he/she can air the feelings he/she is still hiding. In such a case, an attentive parent also notices other signs of progression.

2.2.6 Independence

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

The aim here is to stabilize the child emotionally, such that he/she can become emancipated. This means taking his/her own initiative to realize his/her own potentialities and, in doing so, to become independent. This means the child must be given the opportunity by the parent trusting that his/her child can decide and do things for him/herself. In this way, his/her child learns to know his/her own potentialities and/or limitations and learns 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/she is not in the presence of his/her parents. Such a child withdraws him/herself into his/her own insecure little world to protect him/herself 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. Indeed, a child best realizes his/her potentialities when he/she confronts resistance, or when he/she must deal with a task requiring spunk and persistence. The task must be neither too easy nor too difficult for him/her. When he/she has dealt with it, he/she 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 can only proceed adequately if it is based on a child’s *stable emotional experiencing*. This educative relationship is characterized by a purposeful striving by the parents and the child to *learn* to know each other better, and to realize the child’s learning potentialities. This mutual knowing can only 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/she experiences this as such.

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

A parent must know *how* his/her child sees and lived experiences his/her little world; for what he/she needs; what his/her fears and aims are. Also, a child must understand what a parent means with his/her educative activities, and why he/she behaves in a certain way. The extent to which a child knows his/her parents depends on the degree to which a parent makes him/herself available to be known. If a child has a “skewed” image of his/her parents, e.g., when he/she experiences his/her mother as a “scolding mama”, this

indicates that he/she has only learned to know this aspect of her. A parent ought to be careful about what image of him/herself he/she wants to convey to his/her 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 to allow them to feel 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 learning to talk well with a child, only after which he/she continually shuts him/her up. To have a good conversation with one's teenager means this relationship must be worked on, beginning with his/her days as a baby. If this communication is successful, a parent will have remained in touch with his/her 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, thus, 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 pleading and making 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 doesn't force his/her child to dance to his/her tune. On the contrary, in his/her communicating, he/she continually keeps in mind the good relationship between them. He/she also candidly says to the child how his/her behavior allows him/her to feel like an adult because, in talking with each other about their feelings, the channels of communicating between adult and child remain open.

A healthy course of communicating between parent and child makes it possible for a child to reveal him/herself, 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/her as a *person* and not as a “thing,” and to respect his/her 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 do things on their own, including solving problems.

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

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

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

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

To help a child think through a problem, the following steps can be pointed out to him/her (although not all problems necessarily are solved by all 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/her train does not arrive when he/she 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/she is aware of the importance of the problem will he/she be interested in solving it. However, it also is important for the parent to understand that a problem is serious to his/her 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 use the first solution they think of; thus, it is necessary to suggest solutions to them, e.g., "Let us think of a plan so 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 parents 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/she has chosen. If he/she does not succeed, it is the parent's task to encourage him/her to consider other possibilities.

Parents ought to create opportunities where a child him/herself must solve problems, e.g., through games, and 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 him/herself 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/she does and why, so the child understands how the problem was solved. A child also must experience that a solution which is not successful is not necessarily a failure.

4. NORMATIVE EDUCATING

From the above, educating is normative. A parent presents (and exemplifies) norms to a child which eventually must be accepted and appropriated, such that he/she shows that it is meaningful to *identify* him/herself with them.

4.1 Norm identification

A child has a need for authority and welcomes a good reprimand which is evidence of a parent's genuine interest in what he/she 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 which clearly indicate to a child what he/she should and should not do. In setting these limits, a child's age, abilities, and understanding of them should be considered. It must be possible for a child to respect the limits. Limits must be in a child's interest and not for a parents' 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/she stands.

It is 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/her child. From this, the child learns that he/she is his/her own master, and does not readily understand why the authority prevails. Left to his/her own devices, he/she will not understand this authority which offers him/her the security of knowing where the limits are.

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

Since the opposite of pedagogical intervention (i.e., where authority must be applied), is when the parent *agrees with or recognizes*

appropriate behavior is so closely related to a child's self-image, this is now discussed.

4.2 Self-image

Educating by means of identification involves a child who takes the initiative to identify him/herself with the norms of an adult. Thus, a small son identifies him/herself 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/her own identity, a child is particularly attuned to his/her parents' view of him/her. A small child's view of him/herself is still very formable, and because he/she always believes everything his/her parents say to him/her, he/she begins to constitute his/her own self-image on this basis. A critical parent can damage a child's self-image such that, in the course of time, he/she throws in the towel and no longer protects him/herself against possible further failure and rejection.

There are many factors which work against a child forming a favorable self-image. He/she has sufficient reasons to feel inferior to those around him/her because he/she is much smaller, has no authority or power, etc. To fully actualize his/her 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/her child to feel good about *who* he/she is and what he/she 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/she 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/she is or what

a good piece of work he/she has done. The opposite also is true – a severe way of criticizing is hardly thinkable. A child quickly respects values and follows a moral judgment by being a “good child”. Therefore, his/her good behavior deserves recognition so that he/she can build a good self-image.

Each parent draws a line which determines what is acceptable to him/her. If the line is unrealistically high, such as a parent who is not satisfied with his/her child’s achievement--even though it is 80-90%--and lets him/her know that even the best he/she can do is not good enough for his/her 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 which such a child has of him/herself depends on how much of what he/she does is acceptable to his/her 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/she does this and continually keeps in mind what potential damage he/she can do to the child’s self-image, in comparison to what improvement there should be.

Children often hear their parents say: “Not now, I am busy....”, by which they convey to their child his/her 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/her self-esteem. For a parent, the question arises: “Is *my* idea of my child the image of him/herself that I give him/her, 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/her child is conveyed by his/her genuine interest in his/her little world. A child who is not given the opportunity to build a positive self-image through the eyes of his/her parents constitutes an image of him/herself which, for the

rest of his/her life has a restraining influence on his/her personal unfolding. A child's self-confidence is a sign of emotional stability, i.e., when a child gives favorable meaning to his/her abilities. It is a parent's task to accompany his/her child in attributing such favorable meaning.

5. CONCLUSION

The parents' ways of educating have an 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 to best serve a child's potential to become an adequate adult.

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