PARENTAL ROLE EXPECTATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE CHILD DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract
The process of human development provides one with an opportunity to improve the human condition as well as to hopefully acquire the knowledge needed to live a more satisfying life. Human development is also a process of becoming someone different while remaining the same person over an extended period of time. It is a pattern of change that begins at conception and continues throughout the life span. Parents, have vital roles to play in the overall development of a child. This paper focuses on the parental roles for sustainable development of their children, whether they are biological or foster parents. In terms of the parental roles for development, the paper examines how parents influence the emotional, personality, social and moral development of their children.

Key Words: Development, Child, Parental-roles and Sustainability.

Development is the orderly and sequential changes that occur with the passage of time as an organism moves from conception to death. It is a process that is continuous. Development is deeply associated with growth. This is simply why people talk of growth and development and use the two terminologies interchangeably. According to Nnachi (2003), development is a process of quantitative changes that takes place in the individual which results in the progressive transformation of behaviour, personality and character from a lower to advanced form. It involves improvement and maturity in character.

Development occurs through processes that are biologically programmed within the organism and the processes of interaction with the environment, resulting in the transformation of the organism. It occurs in stages in human beings which include: prenatal stage, babyhood/infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. This paper looked at the childhood stage because it is a very significant period of human life and constitutes a foundation for the higher stages. Childhood is a period that span between the end of babyhood and the beginning of adolescence. The individual that is involved in this stage is known as a child. A child is an immature and a continuously developing postnatal human organism whose life is significantly dependent on the adult or other more environmentally experienced human organism for survival (Nnachi, 2003). Thus, children generally tend to grow up to be much like their parents both in character and in appearance.
For human development to be what it ought to be, sustainability should be the concern of parents. In the course of development, sustainability has to do with given one the essential tools for leading a wholesome life. The sustainability of any society depends on the behaviour, values, attitude, and skills acquired during the childhood stage. Whatever is learnt at this period of development has long-lasting impact on the later life. Sustainable learning on the other hand, can be understood from the point of developing attitudes necessary for current and future adaptability. The writer looked at parental roles for a sustainable emotional, personality, social and moral development. Of the child

**Parental Roles for Emotional and Personality Development of the Child**

The term *Emotion* is derived from the Latin word ‘*Emovere*’ meaning to move out. Emotions are outward expression of the inner feelings of the individual which are aroused by one’s own behaviour or the behaviour of other people (Durojaiye, 1981 as in Nnachi, 2003). It is also a stirred up state of the entire organism which leads to action when aroused (Agu; 1995).
Parents play a vital role in the emotional development of their children as this is a crucial aspect of human wellbeing. Emotions are the first language with which parents and infant communicate before the infant acquire speech (Anyakoha, 2007). According to Anyakoha and Eluwa (2010) emotional development includes: all aspects of personality and identity development. Throughout life, a person’s personality and identity are greatly influenced by gene as well as most important environmental influences such as parents. For example, at birth, one has a particular temperament or character disposition and method of approaching and reacting to situations (Papalia, Olds, Fieldman, 2002). A child’s temperament is essentially the emotional self-regulation of a child when he/she responds to situations, how sociable the child is and its activity level. According to research, temperament is a fairly stable characteristic of an individual based mainly on heredity (Papalia et-al, 2002). However, one’s temperament can be influenced and altered to a certain degree based on the interactions of the child with a parent. If a child with a difficult temperament has a parent with a difficult temperament, the parent theoretically will be able to address the child’s temperament and make adapting to new situations and various changes easier; this is referred to as goodness of fit between parent and child (Papalia et-al, 2002). Park, Belsky, Putnam and Crnic (1997) as cited in Papalia et-al (2002) found out that fearful and shy male toddlers who were encouraged by their parents to explore new situations became less inhibited over time. However, toddlers who were not encouraged to explore maintained their shy and fearful nature. Despite the relative stability of temperament, parental involvement does play a big role in the development of a child. In addition to temperament adaptation, parents influence the personality development of their child. According to Erik Erikson and his psychosocial development theory, individuals encounter a specific crisis at various stages of development. For example, at the first stage of development, toddlers encounter the trust versus mistrust crisis. At this stage, a child must experience enough trust in situations and relationships to establish the virtue of hope (Papalia, Olds, and Feldman, 2003). A child at this age largely interacts only with his/her parents, and they are the main source of trust and mistrust in the child’s life. If the parents have a trusting and supportive relationship with their children, then the child overcomes the crisis and establishes the virtue of hope. In a later stage Erikson indentifies the crisis of identity versus identity diffusion in which one must fully explore relationships and occupations and then commit in order to reach identity achievement. Erikson states that parents must allow the child to fully explore his or her options and commit on his/her own in order to obtain identity achievement. Erikson stated that if parents force the child into a career or relationship, the child will not reach identity achievement (Papalia et-al; 2003). In this sense, parental influence is pivotal to a child reaching identity achievement; if a child is not allowed a specific amount of autonomy, the child will not overcome this crisis.

Parental role on the personality development of a child also includes the development of emotional and behavioral self-regulation. Emotional regulation or the ability to control emotions and emotional responses stems from the level of response and involvement of parents in a child’s life. For example, parents act as a buffer for their children in social referencing. When a child is placed in a fear-inducing situation,
if a parent is present, the child will look toward the parent and examine facial expressions. If the parent does not show emotional distress, then the child will display less distress and more encouragement in the situation (Bornstein; 2002). As a result of the emotional regulation and social referencing, a child also experiences a level of emotional stability (Hay & Ashman; 2003 and Onuzulike; 2005).

Like emotional regulation, behavioural regulation comes about as a result of parental involvement and response to various aspects of a child’s life. For example, Onuzulike (2005) observed that parents who are accepting of their children, grant them more autonomy, and implement higher levels of behavioural control in terms of rules and guidelines have children who display higher levels of behavioural self-regulation, maturity, identity, and work orientation (Bornstein; 2002).

It is clear that parents not only influence the development of emotional and behavioural self-regulation in their children, they also influence the development of maturity and drive. The development of maturity and drive in children is most prevalent in academic achievement. Aunola, Nurmi, Lerkkanen and Raku-Puttonen (2003) in a recent study found out that a parent’s belief in his/her child’s academic success influenced the child’s success and drive to excel. If the parent believed the child was going to be successful academically, he/she often became more focused on success and as a result, achieved higher success. In addition, the study found out that in the mathematical area, if children were task-focused and had a drive to succeed their mathematical scores would increase (Aunola et-al, 2003). Parents who played an active part in their child’s life and advocated certain success in academics positively influenced the development of drive and success in their children. Overall, parents who actively participate in their child’s development in a responsive manner will positively influence the emotional development of their children.

Parental Role for Social Development of the Child

Human beings live in societies. Because of this, they do not only need to develop physically, cognitively or emotionally but are also required to develop socially to adjust to social conditions and situations. Social development refers to the development of basic skills and techniques that help the individual acquire the ability to satisfy his social needs which invariably facilitates the individual social adjustment. The foundation of social development is laid by the parents in the family (Chauhan, 1981 as in Nnachi, 2003). It begins in infancy and goes on throughout life. Adults develop the young ones socially because the adults are cultural authorities. They socialize and educate the young ones. As the adults educate the children, they indirectly educate themselves, thereby making social development a continuous process for the child.

The social development of a child is greatly influenced by parental involvement similar to emotional development. The social relationship a child has with his/her parents directly correlates with the relationships and social behaviour the child will have throughout life. As a result, the attachment a child has with his/her parents is
pivotal to his/her social development. Ainsworth as in Zanden (2003) classified three main forms of attachment a child has with his/her parents as; secure, avoidant, ambivalent. In a secure attachment, a child is upset when the parent leaves and happy when the parent returns. An avoidant attachment is characteristic of a child not being upset when the parent comes and goes. A child with an ambivalent attachment to his/her parent is upset when the parent leaves and will go back to him/her when the parent return but the child is resistant and hard to comfort. A child who has a secure attachment with his/her parents is more resilient, empathetic, and self-knowledgeable, has a higher self-esteem, and is more curious (Papalia et-al; 2002).

The attachment relationship a child forms as a baby influences the relationship the child has throughout the remainder of his/her life. Sternberg 1987 as in Papalia et-al (2003) has identified a triangular theory of love composed of three main components, passion, intimacy and commitment. An ideal relationship according to Sternberg will consist of all three components over time; an individual in a relationship with all three components will have consummate love. People who did not have secure relationships as children will not be able to be loving. Rather, one who has ambivalent attachments will have passion and commitment in relationships but not intimacy, and one who has avoidant attachment will only have passion in relationships (Papalia et-al; 2003). In addition, the form of attachment one has will influence peer relationship as well as romantic relations. Individuals who have secure attachment to parents and other family members will transfer this level of security, trust and support to peer relationships as well (Cui, Conger, Bryant & Elder; 2002).

The relationship between parents and their children will also influence different aspects of their social development. When a child is very young, the child will look to parents to see how to respond to ambiguous situations as a form of social referencing. In this manner, the child learns proper social behaviour by imitating the behaviour of the parents (Papalia et-al; 2002 and Oshodin, 2005). A child will learn how to address conflict from the influence or her parents actions. Miller, Dilorio,and Dudley (2002) found out that children whose parents were responsive, controlling, and involved were less likely to respond to conflict with violence than children whose parents were not involved as much. Children who are likely to respond to conflict with violence had parents who were inconsistent in discipline approaches and did not respond with adequate punishment (Miller et-al; 2002).

In addition to directly influencing the social development of their children, parents influence the people the child interact with and the child’s peer group. Parke and Bhavnagri (1989) as cited in Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington and Bornstein; (2000) found out that parents influence their children’s peer experience by propelling their child toward certain peers through managing the child’s social activities. Furthermore, they found out that parents influence the child’s attitude, values, personality and motives and these affect the child’s interactions with peers. From his/her initial experiences with his peers, a child then becomes friendly with his peers.
who are similar in school achievement, activities, and personality traits (Collins et-al; 2000).

A final aspect of a child’s social development that parents influence is their child’s response to peer pressure. A child whose parents are responsive and demanding is less influenced by peer pressure to partake in antisocial behaviour such as using drugs, alcohol, and participating in sexual relationship (Collins et-al; 2000). In addition, these children are more likely to be influenced by pro-social behaviour such as pressure to do well in school. Lastly, peer relationships do not alter enduring personality traits and values such as religion, occupational goals, and educational plans (Collins et-al; 2000). Furthermore, responsive and demanding parents instill traits and qualities in their children that inhibit their susceptibility to negative forms of peer pressure.

Parental Roles for the Child’s Moral Development

Moral development refers to the process by which children adopt principles that lead them to evaluate given behaviour as right and others as wrong, and to govern their own actions in terms of these principles. Moral development, what some call character education is not simply a matter of learning prohibitions against misbehaviours (Schaps, Schaeffer, and McDonnell, 2001). It also involves acquiring pro-social behaviours that is ways of responding to others through sympathetic cooperation, helpful, rescuing, comforting and giving acts.

Moral development, like emotional development, results from the positive influence of parents on a child. According to Lawrence Kohlberg (1969) as in Bornstein (2002), parental participation in moral development is not necessary for one to reach a high level of moral reasoning because schools and other settings can provide similar moral environment. Hoffman (1983) as cited in Bornstein (2002), however states that disciplinary encounter with parents are crucial for the internalization of moral standards. When a parent intervenes in a child’s negative behaviour in an attempt to correct the behaviour and then discipline the child, he/she is attempting to help the child internalize moral standards. Hoffman (1983) as in Bornstein (2002), stated that in order for the disciplinary action to lead to internalization, the parents must use inductive techniques in which they point out the effect of child’s behaviour on others. In terms of moral judgment, parents who encourage their child to actively participate in discussion and decision-making with regards to self and the family are more likely to help their child function at a higher level of moral reasoning (Bornstein, 2002).

Parents also facilitate moral growth and high levels of moral reasoning when they draw out the child’s opinion and reasoning with appropriate questions and paraphrasing to check for an understanding of the situation. The probing must however be done with support and attentiveness in order to effectively influence moral growth. Furthermore, parents who use inductive reasoning stimulate moral reasoning with moral discussion and are supportive and encouraged autonomous thinking will help a child who functions at a higher level of moral reasoning.
Parental Role Expectations for Sustainable Development of the Child

Development is increase in skill and complexity of functions. It is orderly and progressive in a normal child, which means that the changes moves forward rather than backwards. Every human being pass through different stages of development and each stage is marked by certain characteristics/features.

Childhood stage is the most critical of all the stages because of its fundamental characteristics. Any mistake at this stage may have long lasting effect on the other stage thus, the need for parents’ guidance. Parents are expected to provide love, attention, support, and encouragement for good emotional, personality, social and moral development of children. The expected parental roles for sustainable development of the child include:

1) Guiding and directing the decision-making process of the child especially life-long decisions
2) Providing safe and stimulating environment
3) Teaching societal values which are beliefs, feelings or ideas of what is considered important, desirable and good.
4) Protecting the child’s right as a citizen of the country
5) Encouraging and supporting when good traits that are exhibited and discouraging bad ones as they manifest.
6) Modeling the child by living above board in ones conducts and dealings.
7) Monitoring the company the child keeps.
8) Encouraging siblings-cordial relationships for strong family bond and ties in the future (eating together, sharing their belongings etc, these remove selfishness).
9) Enforcement of family rules and regulation on partying, time management, clubbing, games and films to watch
10) Foster discipline in children by being firm though friendly
11) Teach the child the following personal competencies: self awareness, self regulation and motivation. These will determine how he manages himself.

Conclusions

It is evident that parents influence the development of their children. In the emotional sense, a positive parental influence can help a child establish a healthy personality and reach identity achievement. Parents also aid in the development of their child’s moral reasoning and judgment skills through supportive discussions and conversations. However, a close secure relationship between the child and his/her parents influences the social behaviour of the child in future and a secure attachment between the parents and the child positively influence peer relations and romantic relations.

Finally, the genetic component of the child that the parents provide is only one aspect of their influence on the child’s development. The environmental aspect of development is especially important for sustainability of a child’s development.
Recommendation

Childhood stage of human development is seen as the bedrock for other stages. It is a period when human brain makes critical connections. Therefore, it is recommended that parents should endeavour to be role models to their children as they learn by imitation.

References


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