
PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Changes in parent-child relationships, which began during the later years of babyhood, continue throughout early childhood. Many conditions are responsible for those changes; the most common and most important are:

Changes in Parental Attitudes

As young children become more independent, parents feel that they need less care and attention than they did when they were babies. But even though young children want to be independent, they often resent not having the attention they had become accustomed to during babyhood.

Parental Concept of a "Good" Child

When young children do not meet parental expectations, parents often become critical and punitive. Children react to this treatment by being even more negativistic and troublesome.

Parental Preferences

Because mothers spend more time with young children than fathers do, and because they better understand troublesome behavior, many young children prefer their mothers and show it plainly. If fathers resent this and show their resentment by being critical of young children and their behavior, it widens the gap between them. Should little boys show a preference for their fathers, many mothers resent this, feeling that since they have assumed greater responsibility for the care of the children, they should be the favorites.

Because young children depend more on their parents for feelings of security and for happiness than anyone else, poor relationships with their parents have a devastating effect. This is especially true when the poor relationship is with the mother, the parent on whom most young children are especially dependent.

Not only is a poor relationship with parents serious because it undermines feelings of security, but it is especially serious if it is broken, due to death or divorce. Children who are deprived of the parent on whom they have depended for security since birth are likely to experience severe emotional trauma when this source of security is removed. Some of the emotional trauma can be eased if the missing parent is replaced by a stepparent, or if the child is adopted into a two-parent family where a satisfactory relationship can be established.

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