



CHAPTER 3

Understanding Roles and Experiences of Parents

WHY THIS TOPIC MATTERS

Given the importance of parenting, it is essential that you learn about the dimensions of the family's role in raising children. Although cultural patterns, interaction styles, and outside influences may differ from your own family experiences, remember that there is no "ideal" family form. You should appreciate that most families, no matter how they are constituted, provide appropriate care for their children, and they want your help and support. In this chapter, you will find lots of ways to connect your schoolwork with the activities and practices in children's homes.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

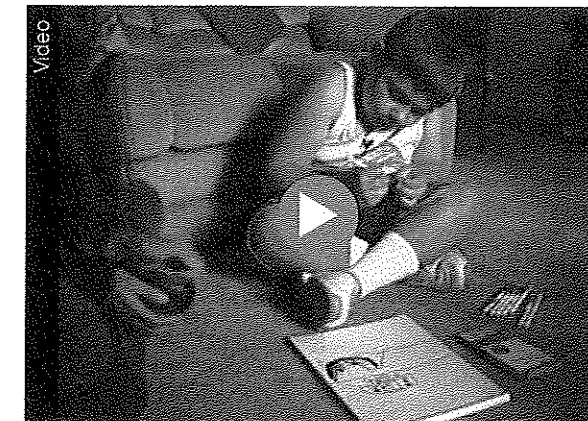
After reading this chapter, you will be able to do the following:

- Explain how parents are key in providing the nurturance needs of young children.
- Describe family responsibilities in children's upbringing and how these roles have changed in recent years.
- Compare and contrast cultural patterns in parenting practices and approaches to child-rearing among different ethnic communities in the United States.
- Identify various interaction styles and how these styles affect children's participation in school and community life.
- Consider how the experiences of families in terms of skills and family mobility can impact children's capabilities.
- Discuss the impact of other influences on parenting, such as child-care arrangements and family stress caused by divorce, illness, and economic conditions.
- Understand how difficult it can be for families to meet the challenges of parenting and the importance of support for families from school and community.

In this chapter, we turn our attention to the adults who care for children in their homes. As the previous chapter on diversity in families made clear, these adults may be biological, adoptive, step-, or foster mothers and fathers. They may be grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, or close family friends. In this text, we use the term *parents* to refer to these primary caregivers, who have established a deep, potentially lifelong bond with their children.

Video Example 3.1

Watch this video, in which a young boy defines his family as he draws and talks about his grandparents and other extended family members. How would you have described your family when you were a child?



Disabilities

While all families have dreams and aspirations for their children, we find different customs, priorities, and even somewhat different values. Of course, the differences signal the uniqueness of our diverse society, but at the same time, those very different elements fuse in most families to provide coherence and stability for members in the household.

In spite of the differences, we find some constants in all families with children. The first constant—the nurturance of children—precedes all others. Nurturance is followed by defined family roles, cultural patterns, interaction styles, and family experiences. Additional characteristics, such as child-care arrangements, poverty, and divorce, can emerge as stressors that have an impact on the parenting quality of some family units. Although some household arrangements may be more vulnerable or sensitive than others, each family can and does make positive contributions to children's development.

NURTURANCE IN FAMILIES

Generally, *nurturance* means providing the basic necessities of life for children. In a wider sense, however, it denotes general support, love, and cultivation for the physical and emotional needs of the growing child. In other words, nurturance is parenting. Nurturing is critical for children, because it sets the foundations needed to build empathy, compassion, and trust (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2006). A key idea set forth by social learning theory posits that the aforementioned skills are learned through the modeling of the caregiver.

Few adults are actually trained for nurturing roles, but our society expects certain minimum levels of support and effectiveness from parents as they rear children. The assumption is that nurturance, in its general and wider sense, has been modeled by preceding generations, and is then refined by an individual's experience and participation in society. The range of nurturing competence in US homes, however, is wide indeed.

Range of Child-Rearing

The nurturer accepts responsibilities not only for giving children basic physical care, guidance, and love, but also for stimulating a child's investigations of the world and monitoring the child's social relationships with others. The nurturing parent is one who provides loving care and attention, and who has a vision of what children can become.

Some aspects of parenting may be instinctual, but the most effective nurturers have certain characteristics in common, such as motivation to be with children and knowledge about how to care for them. Empathy, predictability, responsiveness, emotional availability, and a sense of well-being have also been identified as traits that enhance parents' effectiveness. On the other hand, traits like self-centeredness, depression, and substance abuse can affect parenting adversely, and may lead to abuse or neglect of children.

Abusive behavior in families is the opposite of nurturing. Few parents carry out destructive acts with children. However, *some do* suffer lapses in judgment and vision that result in psychological and physical abuse or indifferent care practices. As a teacher, you must learn to recognize the signs of abuse and neglect, and follow the laws of your state in reporting suspected abuse. This text does not focus on the pathologies that accompany abuse and indifference; rather, we have chosen to consider the range of positive nurturance that is featured in the great majority of US families.

EXAMINE YOUR BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

T. Berry Brazelton and Joshua Sparrow (2003) have developed a model for helping parents understand their child's development that is now considered the standard. This model is based on the assumptions listed below.

- The parent is the expert on his/her child.*
- All parents have strengths.*
- All parents want to do well by their child.*
- All parents have something critical to share at each developmental stage.*
- All parents have ambivalent feelings.*
- Parenting is a process built on trial and error.*

Now think about these assumptions and consider how they can help steer you toward relating to parents in a positive and accepting manner.

Features of Positive Nurturance

Maslow's (2011) classic **paradigm** (Figure 3-1) shows, in ascending fashion, the scale of human needs. When related to the lives of young children, the levels of the pyramid clearly imply the need for adult nurturance. As you associate the five levels discussed here with Figure 3-1, you can see that parental **nurturing practices** connect with the hierarchy developed by Maslow.

ADDRESSING PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS Food, warmth, and shelter are bare necessities for survival, and all parents provide them, except in rare cases when families are caught in physical distress, dislocation, or mental illness. In spite of positive intentions, some financially stressed families find providing these basics difficult. Cold or hungry children cannot respond to any educational program. At the same time, unhealthy living climates can lead to reduced functioning, and improper food choices can lead to obesity and other nutritional problems.

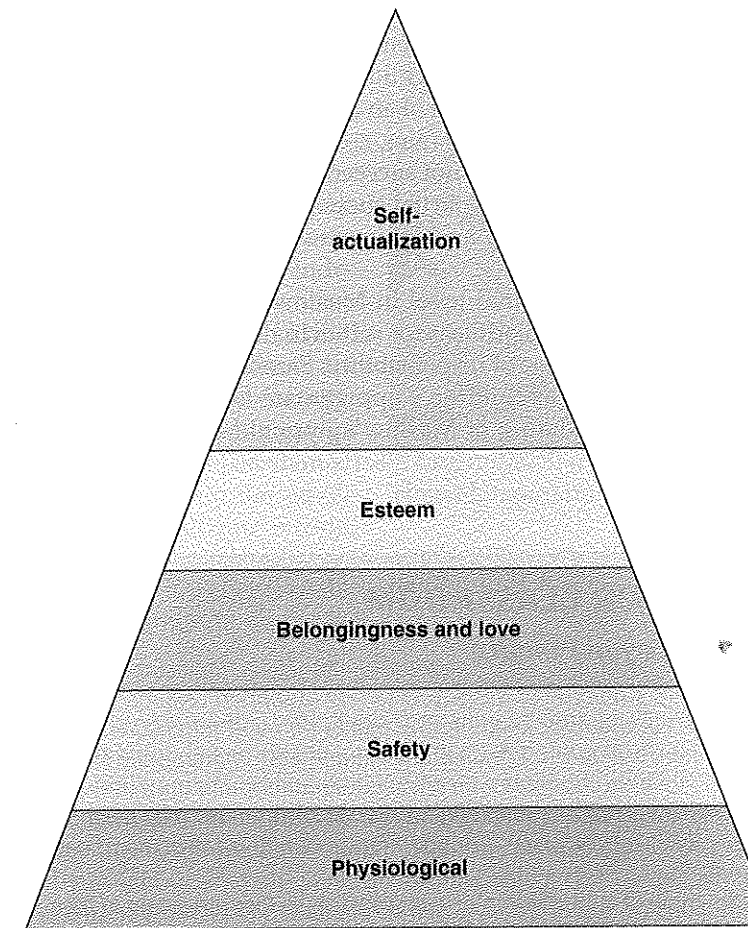


FIGURE 3-1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Source: Maslow, A. H. (2011). *Toward a psychology of being*. Radford, VA: Wilder Publications.

ENSURING SAFETY Ensuring a child's safety is almost instinctive with parents, and we expect this attention to be provided carefully and lovingly. As technology becomes more sophisticated, there is more potential danger to children. Most parents are alert to physical dangers inside and outside the home and protect their children from hazards, but many are unaware of the online threats to their children. Parents need to be cognizant of the online activities of their children and alert to potential threats to keep them safe. Providing a home free from domestic violence and abuse is another way families offer children security and stability.

PROVIDING LOVE Giving emotional support and providing love are features of nurturance that occur naturally in typical families. Expressions of love may range from nonverbal signals and understated expressions to effusive expressions of affection. It is important to remember that parents from different cultures may express love in a variety of ways. Occasionally, parents overdo their support role and encourage dependency and immaturity in their child. Other parents help their children form loving relationships with extended family, friends, and teachers to develop a deeper sense of belonging.

PROMOTING ESTEEM, SUCCESS, AND ACHIEVEMENT Families vary greatly in how they foster esteem and support the achievements of their children. Some parents campaign vigorously with and for their children, whereas others gently encourage or deliberately withhold praise until the end of an activity or a task. Parents sometimes hold children to adult standards in playing games, conversing, or socializing. These expectations can be problematic if children do not succeed, for their aspirations may be deflated. Adult encouragement and delight in partial success normally provide a foundation for children to increase their confidence and achievement.

SELF-ACTUALIZATION The final level in Maslow's hierarchy is an adult level of competence, but families foster readiness for self-actualization by supporting children's growing independence and sense of responsibility. Families can also encourage problem solving and decision making at children's appropriate levels of growth. A recent, but somewhat controversial, updating of Maslow's pyramid maintains the four previous areas but eliminates self-actualization and inserts mate acquisition, mate retention, and parenting as the highest fundamental needs.

IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

Maslow's Hierarchy in Practice

As a teacher, there are a number of things you can do to support children's needs described in Maslow's hierarchy. For example, keep healthy snacks on hand for children who have missed breakfast or forgotten their lunch. Obtain a few extra jackets, mittens, and hats for children to use when needed. Provide a classroom with predictable routines, and use a daily picture schedule.

Work to create a sense of community so that all children feel they belong. Acknowledge children's accomplishments regularly. Consider implementing a celebration board to highlight accomplishments.

Let parents know of their children's small successes so they are aware of their progress and can acknowledge it regularly. Small notes home are a quick and easy way to celebrate success with the parent (see below). You can even let the child call his/her parent(s) to share a success. This is especially important when working with children who may have a history of problem behaviors or academic struggles.

Help parents access parenting support classes and groups to increase their skills. And perhaps, most importantly, be alert to problems and lack of knowledge and skills in nurturance and arrange referrals for assistance, if necessary.

Family Systems Theory

Just as children have their basic human needs met through the nurturing they receive from their families, they also learn how to interact with the larger world based on their experiences at home. Recognizing a family's communication and interaction patterns, separateness and connectedness, loyalty and independence, and adaptation to stress, for example, can help us understand better why members of a family act the way they do in certain circumstances. The Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978) is a well-known theory that explains this interconnection. The Family Systems Theory suggests that family members influence each other in predictable and recurring ways. Although this theory has been used in family counseling and therapy for some time, it can also be helpful for educators in their work with families.

Six characteristics of the family as a system are especially relevant for teachers: boundaries, roles, rules, hierarchy, climate, and equilibrium. Some of these characteristics occur on a continuum, and each family will have a unique profile determined by

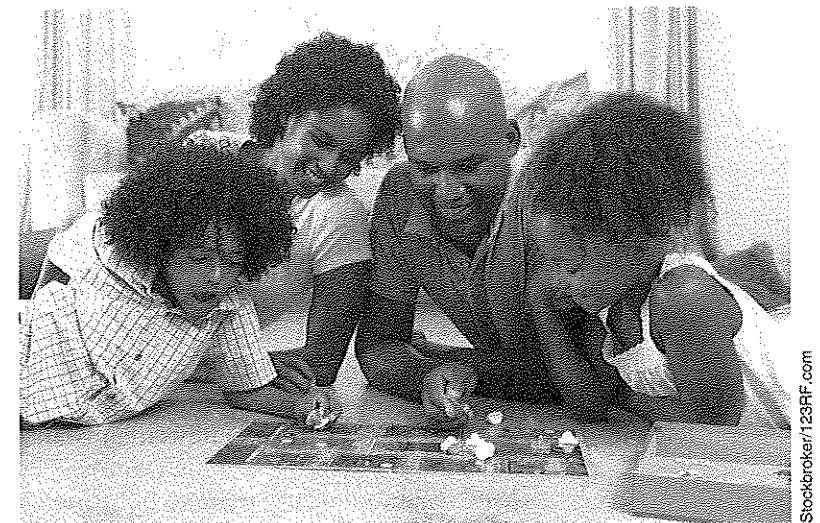
where it falls along each continuum. As a teacher, it is important to have insights into a family's perspective so that you better understand the needs of the child.

BOUNDARIES Boundaries refers to the range of a family's togetherness and separateness. On one end of the continuum are families who value autonomy and independence in their members. Such families tend to be open to new people and ideas. On the other end of the continuum are families who value belonging, conformity, and togetherness within the family group. In these families, an individual's behavior can be seen as a reflection on the whole family. Neither way is right or wrong, but it will influence how much different families participate in school events or the amount of independence families want for their children.

ROLES Members of families also have roles they play within the family that will be carried into the school setting. For example, one member may be considered the responsible one in the family, whereas another may be considered a jokester. Some individuals tend to be peacemakers; others take on the role of troublemaker or victim. A child who is a helper at home may carry these helping behaviors to school, just as a child who is a jokester at home may be silly in school. Having insights into the role a child plays in the family can help a teacher broaden children's experiences while capitalizing on their strengths.

RULES All families have rules, spoken or unspoken, that determine how they live in relation to one another. Such rules may also overlap with the roles family members play, especially those related to gender, power, and how the family interacts. Some families have many rules and follow them closely; others have fewer rules and are inconsistent in following them. While consistency between school and home expectation is ideal, teachers often have to help children make distinctions between home rules and school rules. They may also have to help families understand why certain expectations occur at school that may be different from those at home. For example, some children are told by their parents to hit back if someone hurts them, but responding in this way is not allowable in school. As a teacher, you need to be prepared for these differences and ready to respond. Being open to hearing about different expectations and providing alternatives that meet the goals of the activity can help keep lines of communication open when school and home rules collide.

HIERARCHY A family's hierarchy denotes who has the decision-making power. This hierarchy may be determined by gender or age, and may be influenced by a family's culture, religion, or economic status. In some families, for example, the male head of the household is clearly in charge, and controls much of what goes on in the family. In other cases, it may be less clear who is the leader; this may be the role of someone in the extended family who is considered the matriarch or patriarch of the family. Noticing who signs permission forms, who attends conferences, and who returns phone calls can give clues to the family hierarchy and can help smooth communication between school and home.



Family interaction patterns help us understand why family members act the way they do.

needs. The disparity in incomes in the United States is a troubling sign that affects children more than any other group.

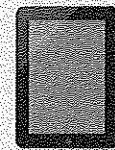
Emotional Support

Nurturing a child is often a natural response; despite some parents reading parenting books, nurturing is frequently done through instinct and experience. In addition, although most new parents use the parenting skills they observed and experienced in their own childhood, others make a conscious decision to parent their children differently than the way they were raised.

Parents who are sensitive to an infant's needs, responsive to the infant's cues, and both supportive and stimulating enhance the likelihood of secure attachment. Infants and young children who securely attach to their parents are more likely to develop healthy adult relationships (Haltigan, Leerkes, Supple, & Calkins, 2014). Physical affection, appreciation of the child as an individual, and acknowledgment of a child's competence all contribute to the development of self-esteem in children, the basis of sound emotional health. Emotional development in children benefits from parenting practices that emphasize mutual respect for family members, open communication, and parental authority.

Parenting classes and support groups are available (and needed) for parents who are uncertain about the ways to nurture their children most effectively. A growing problem with the present generation is that smaller families, dual-income families, and especially single-parent families provide noticeably less modeling of parenting behavior. Again, community policies must ensure availability and use of resources to support parents who need guidance in providing emotional support for their children.

MEDIA MATTERS



Cafemom, Black Parenting Blog, Baby Center in Spanish, and Parenting are just a few of the many websites that are available for parents to obtain information, connect with other parents, and get advice about raising their children. Start exploring such sites, and ask for recommendations from families you know. Online resources make support available to families when they need it!

Education

As we noted previously, parents in past centuries assumed a major role in all aspects of educating their children. Even in the 1800s, many families still taught basic lessons for living and vocational preparation to their children. In the 1900s, however, schools expanded rapidly in scope and assumed most of the role of educating children in literary skills, calculation, and sciences. They even acquired the job of developing work habits; moral training and health education were added quickly thereafter. Today's schools have expanded to include sex education, health and recreation training, vocational training, and other educational aspects that were formerly a family's responsibility.

One regrettable outcome of this transfer of educative roles is that many parents have become much less involved in teaching their children essential responsibilities. The importance of parents in educating their children remains, however, and schools need to help families understand their significance as their children's first and most important teachers. Parents who have high academic expectations for their children and are involved in their educations are more likely to have children who are successful in school (Wilder, 2014).

We must remember that families are in a good position to provide the support, critical demonstrations, and follow-up for their child's learning opportunities. They have an intimate knowledge of the learner and many chances to apply text material to everyday life. Most parents do much of their teaching in informal ways; they share their skills, hobbies, and other interests during everyday events and conversations. The importance of the shared family meal as a socializing and educational factor in children's lives is increasingly recognized, even as such gatherings occur less often in many families (Noddings, 2005). Other parents, however, have assumed responsibility for educating their children in a more direct and formal way by home schooling.

Socialization

Many agents, such as the school, the peer group, the church, and the media, are involved in socializing children, but the family has the primary responsibility for beginning the process. Socialization of young children involves learning to relate to a variety of people in varying circumstances and modifying behavior in different environments. Children learn to socialize appropriately by first observing these interactions in their families. Strong social skills, specifically the ability to get along with other children, are the best childhood predictors of adult competence. Emotional and social development are closely linked, and children with high self-esteem are better able to face the challenges of social interaction.

As children enter school and community life today, other forces begin to exert increasing influence on their socialization. In earlier periods of history, parents' impact on children's socialization was more significant. Isolated communities, less mobility, and the virtual dominance of parental figures ensured that values and attitudes were quickly inculcated in children through example and statement. In addition, communities in the early United States were highly idealistic in orientation, and **role expectations** were similar for everyone in those areas.

Patterns differ today. There is less general agreement in the United States on social expectations as a result of the heterogeneous communities in which we live. But schools still have certain expectations for children, and those who enter without the requisite social skills of sharing, cooperating, and respecting rules find themselves at a disadvantage. Families must work hard to prepare their children for the social expectations of the school and the community while maintaining their own values, beliefs, family ethnic and religious identity, and gender roles.

VALUES, BELIEFS, AND ATTITUDES Parents rarely plan to teach their children values and beliefs. They do, however, model via their behavior what they value and prize, and what they are willing to accept. This practice has both positive and negative implications. If a parent rushes to help a neighbor in need, the idea is passed on to children; if a parent models lying, that habit is passed on.

Just as children learn from their parents' examples, they also learn values as they interact with family members. Daily conversations, struggles, and explanations of the world all help build children's attitudes and beliefs about the world and other people.



Strong social skills are the best childhood predictor of adult competence.

Spending time as a family playing games, watching a movie, hiking, or just talking conveys to children the priority their parents place on the family.

If we consider that children spend many hours a week with screen media, computers, handheld and console video game players, interactive mobile devices, and television, it is no surprise that they gain many beliefs and values from participating in these activities (Avci & Guçray, 2013). Of particular concern is the increasing amount and level of violence (Steyer, 2012; Watkins, 2009) and sexualized gender roles in media for children (Levin, 2008). This violence and sexualization does not fit into the value systems of most parents. Of course, parents can limit screen time, monitor content, and watch programs to discuss actions and make comments, but the problem of media violence and other aspects of media culture are being increasingly viewed as a public health issue, and schools and community agencies are beginning to get involved in protecting children from unhealthy and undesirable images. The American Academy of Pediatrics has developed guidelines for screen time. Despite the fact that some media can provide positive results, the AAP recommends that screen time be limited to an hour a day (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016).

GENDER ROLES Although both gender and parenting roles today appear quite different from those of earlier generations, gender role expectations can vary significantly from family to family and from culture to culture. And while gender-related expectations are less rigid in many US homes, most parents do try to steer their children toward **gender-appropriate behaviors**. The process of gender socialization often begins even before a child is born, as parents use information about their coming child's gender to choose a name, clothing, and nursery decorations. Parents also tend to give children gender-stereotyped toys and interact with their children differently, depending on their gender. Some gendering in family life is inevitable, but rigid expectations perpetuate the inequities of power between men and women in our society. Inflexible gender roles can be particularly problematic for **gender-variant children** who do not express their gender roles as defined by the larger society. Many quality children's books now portray more flexibility in gender roles.

In the past, fathers were the primary economic mainstay, but that role is changing. In many dual-career homes, mothers and fathers now contribute equally to the family's economic support. In addition, mothers are the breadwinners in the majority of single-parent homes. In 40% of households with children under age 18, the mother is the main source of income for the family, two-thirds of these are single mom households. Today, 61% of mothers with children under age 3 and 64% of mothers with children under age 6 are in the labor force. Overall, approximately 71% of mothers with children under age 18 years are employed (US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Thus, the notion of associating economic support with one particular gender does not fit many children's life experiences.

The character of family duties in the household continues to evolve as fathers take on more noneconomic household responsibilities (Banchefsky & Park, 2016). Historically, roles determined that the mother was the cook and general homemaker, whereas the father was in the field or away at work. In the modern home, duties are not so clearly defined. Some fathers, although still a small percentage, now have major responsibilities for meal preparation and cleaning in addition to child monitoring. Husbands now attend childbirth and parenting classes with their wives, and take responsibility for infant care. Seminal research in this area indicates that men born between 1965 and 1979 spend, on average, an hour or more per workday caring for and doing things with their children than do men born between 1946 and 1964 (Piburn, 2006).

The vast majority of married couples, however, still adhere to traditional family roles, and even women who are employed do about 80% of the household chores and child care. Even though roles within the family are evolving, overall research indicates

that fathers do less in terms of child-care and household duties (Banchefsky & Park, 2016; Schoppe-Sullivan, Kotila, Jia, Lang, & Bower, 2013).

Attempts to eliminate gender-specific tasks in the family have been slowed by the lack of changes in the workforce. The persisting lag in women's incomes compared to men's, traditional full-time work schedules that don't allow flexibility or part-time options, and work that spills over into family life make it very challenging for families to balance the needs of employment and raising children.

Over the course of their lives, children may live in various family configurations because of separation, divorce, death, remarriage, and other family changes. These reconfigured family structures expose children to more flexible gender roles. Single-parent households and families led by gay or lesbian parents also provide a less rigid idea of what roles men and women can play in family life and society (Anderson, 2012; Green, 2012).

EXAMINE YOUR BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Were there gender-specific tasks that certain family members took on in your own family? Were the expectations different for boys and girls? How do children with whom you work now see their responsibilities for certain tasks? How do you feel when your ideas about fairness and equity are at odds with those of others?

RACIAL AND ETHNIC IDENTITY Defining race and ethnicity in the United States is a complex and sometimes contested endeavor. As our society grows more diverse physically, it is becoming increasingly difficult to categorize by race. In 2015, 13.3% of Americans self-identified as Black or African American (sourced from census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/00). However, many of these individuals who were born in the Caribbean, Latin America, or Africa are far more likely to identify with their ethnic heritage (Jamaican American, for example) than with their racial identity.

Nevertheless, race remains a defining social identity in the United States, and children begin to become aware of racial differences in skin color and other physical characteristics at around age 3 or 4, as illustrated in the following vignette:

When Catherine, an African American 3-year-old adopted by a White family, asked what color her mother was, her mother replied, "Well, I am peach color, but most people would call me White." She went on to say that people would call Catherine Black, to which Catherine replied incredulously, "I'm not Black, I'm silver!" By age 5, Catherine was coloring her skin brown in self-portraits and referring to herself as brown.

Children gradually construct their racial identity from their families and other significant people within the context of the larger society, their life experiences, and their developmental stage. How children feel about their own racial identity and that of others is developed from the varied messages they have received from these sources. In the classic Doll Study (Clark & Clark, 1950), African American children during that era of segregation and overt racism showed a marked preference for White dolls. Replications of those studies over the years have not seen much change, perhaps due to the continued emphasis on standards of beauty based on light skin and straight hair.

While many minority homes provide support and foster pride in the family culture and racial identity, responsibility for enhancing a heritage and affirming racial differences goes beyond family efforts. Schools and communities must also foster accurate knowledge and positive messages about racial and cultural diversity.

IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

Developing Cultural Understanding

Children of the 21st century face a very different socializing environment than did children of previous generations. You will be at the forefront of experiencing all the dimensions of diversity that families reveal today.

Video Example 3.2

This video shares how families from different cultures view behavior. How will you educate yourself about the differences and unique contributions of the families with which you will work that come from ethnic, racial, and language backgrounds different from your own?



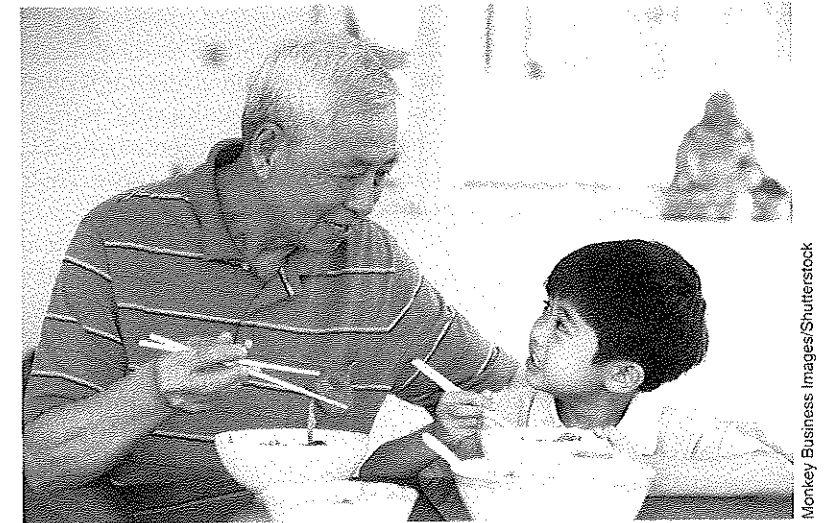
Music, art, literature, clothing, and cuisine are some of the visible aspects of various cultures with which you will want to become familiar. And you certainly want to try to incorporate some of these aspects of the cultures of the children with whom you work into your classroom. Including children's books in different languages on your shelves, lining your bulletin boards with traditional fabrics of the ethnic groups you serve, and having photos of the children's families prominently displayed in the classroom are examples of ways to visibly show families that you are aware of their languages, cultures, and lifestyles. When possible, invite parents and caregivers into your classroom to share the traditions of their culture, such as food, language, stories, or games.

More challenging is to try to understand the patterns of thought, beliefs, behaviors, customs, and habits of various cultural groups. These aspects of culture can shape how parents interact with their children and with you. You may notice, for example, parents feeding a child old enough to feed himself (in your opinion). Knowing that his family comes from a country that experienced food shortages for many generations can help you understand the cultural roots of this behavior. Feeding children avoids wasting any precious morsel. A sincere interest in a family's culture and a willingness to withhold judgment on patterns you find perplexing will reward you with better communication and increased understanding of why families behave the way they do. Also, remember to respect a family's decision to maintain their cultural identity. Families often choose to speak and read in their native language; do not request they use English to "practice." Parents who have come to the United States from other countries often seek to preserve their heritage by maintaining their native language in the home and sharing stories of their homeland with their children. Children who maintain and develop a home language while learning English at school and other places outside the home preserve their sense of belonging to their families and become biliterate as well as bicultural, an increasing advantage in our diverse world (Shin, 2013; Zacarian, 2011).

Much of a family's cultural history comes in the form of stories shared and passed down through generations. In many African American, Latino, Hawaiian, and Southeast Asian families, storytelling is also a way of passing on life lessons and values.

Changes in Functions in the 21st Century

As we have noted, US families are diverse, and will continue to become more diverse in the foreseeable future. Children are being raised by single parents, gay or lesbian parents, unmarried or married partners. Family composition changes over the course of children's lifetimes, and they must adjust to separation, divorce, and blended families. Roles for family members in the information age are still evolving, and certainly changes will continue to appear. Parents seek to balance work and family responsibilities. Fathers are more involved with child-rearing from the earliest days, and some do the primary caregiving; mothers are in the workforce but may do home repairs or coach sports teams; and children are in various forms of child care for increased amounts of times. Although one can only guess how different the typical family roles will be in another few decades, the family has shown itself to be a social form that is strong and adaptable.



Family mealtime is an important socializing and educational factor in children's growth.

✓ Check Your Understanding 3.2

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

CULTURAL PATTERNS AND FAMILY FUNCTIONS

The United States is a diverse country that encompasses an array of ethnic minority groups, and we find differences in the ways groups perform tasks, establish values, and relate to one another (Hutchinson, 2017). Different ethnic groups frequently have varying cultural features, but we also find multiple cultures within the larger groups. Professionals must be knowledgeable about and reflect upon this interesting cultural mix. It is also important to think about how teachers can celebrate different cultures and traditions. Think about how you can celebrate different communities, families, and traditions in your classroom!

The shared history and culture, common values, behaviors, and/or other characteristics of a group that create a sense of identity among its members is referred to as *ethnic background* (Banks & McGee-Banks, 2010). Although some ethnic groups, such as African Americans, can have distinguishing racial characteristics, other ethnic groups, such as Puerto Ricans, include people who belong to several different racial groups. In the case of Jewish Americans, their shared religious and cultural background, rather than their racial identities, creates a common bond.

Culture refers to the attitudes, traditions, beliefs, symbols, and customs held by a group of people. In the United States, there is an overarching core culture shared to a greater or lesser extent by all individuals and groups within the nation. Ideas related to equality, individualism, and opportunities for social mobility are examples of the core ideals of the culture of the United States. Within our country, there are also many smaller subcultures that reflect the components important to particular groups.

Ethnicity and culture frequently overlap; for example, many Native Americans continue to identify themselves by ethnic background and hold cultural beliefs separate from those of mainstream US culture. We also find groups of people with similar ethnic backgrounds who differ culturally. For example, in English-speaking regions, Appalachian Americans are very different from Oregonian ranchers or Connecticut commuters, even though they have similar roots. Their traditions, values, and attitudes place them in different cultural groups.

For simplification, we differentiate in this text between the European American (White), English-speaking majority and non-European American minorities in the United States, even though each of these delineations contains more than one ethnic group. Table 3-1 presents the proportions of these primary minority groups as of 2015.

Ethnic and cultural groups may have lifestyles, ways of communicating, and parenting practices that differ from those of the mainstream in the United States. Gender roles, social class, socioeconomic status, and parents' occupations are variables that may further impact a group's parenting style in unique ways, depending on the culture. Because of increasing diversity and overlap of cultures, it is essential for professionals to examine their own behavior and increase their awareness of other ways of living and communicating so that discussions with parents are carried out with respect. Professionals must keep in mind that individuals also vary greatly in their identification with their ethnic group, so they must take care not to stereotype people on the basis of their ethnic background.

Parents from different cultures may nurture their children in different ways, but overall, families want their offspring to live healthy lives, achieve economic stability, and adhere to certain cultural values (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2016). Parents may, however, vary in their expectations about development of competencies at different ages, and may have dissimilar educational expectations for girls and boys based on their cultural backgrounds.

Video Example 3.3

Watch this video, which provides an example of a cultural difference. How can you celebrate cultural differences in your classroom?

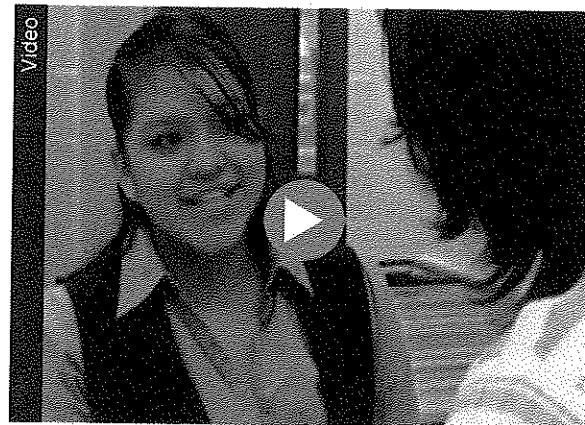


TABLE 3-1 Major Ethnic Groups in the United States in 2015

Ethnic Group	Percentage of the US Population
African American	13.3
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.9
Asian/Pacific Islanders	5.2
European Americans	61.6
Hispanic Americans	17.6
Other and multiple ethnicity	2.8

Note: Persons of Hispanic ancestry may be of any race, but are separated from other groups in this table.

Source: US Bureau of the Census, Population Division Estimates, July 1, 2015.

The values of a culture are transmitted primarily through adult modeling, storytelling, directions and instructions given to children, pressures from the cultural group, and reinforcements for certain serendipitous actions that each child displays. So, although the goals for children's development are similar, various cultural groups may rear their children quite differently. You must also bear in mind, however, that today, many children's values and attitudes are influenced more and more by the media, schools, and peers.

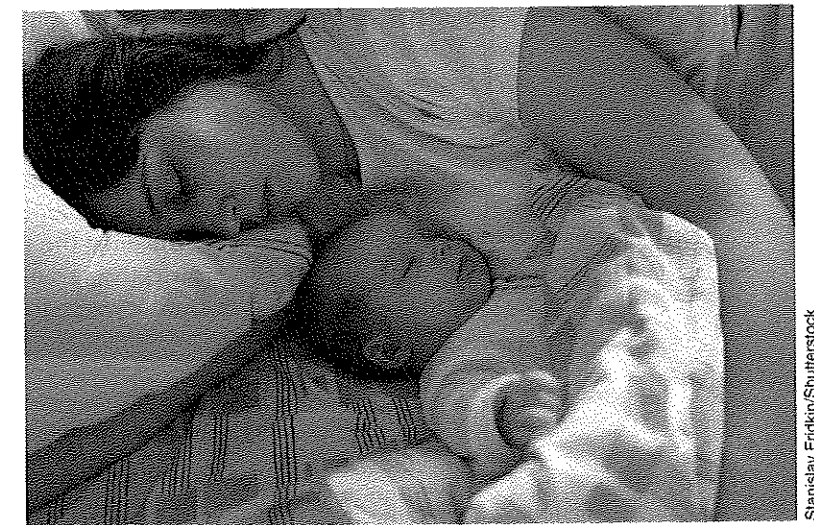
EXAMINE YOUR BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

How did your family's culture contribute to your beliefs today? What were the underlying beliefs and values about child-rearing in your family? Were they consistent with the current American values of equality (boys and girls valued the same) and individualism (children sleep in their own rooms, develop friendships outside the family), or did they reflect values brought from another culture or time period? Were the expectations the same for boys and girls in your family? How were you disciplined? Did you receive an allowance? Would you raise your own children in a way similar to the way you were brought up?

Parenting Features in Various Cultures

Child-raising practices in the United States changed considerably during the 20th century. We now find great variation from one cultural group to another within society as a whole. The socioeconomic status (SES) of different families within one cultural group indicates that other differences exist as well.

For European American groups, behaviorism was valued in the early years of the 20th century, and many parents at that time valued the principles of reinforcement and extinction that were popularized by psychologists. A child-centered phase bloomed in the middle years of the century, but in recent decades, the swing



Bed sharing is the norm in two-thirds of the world's families.

has been toward a middle ground. Overall, contemporary European Americans are quite susceptible to current theories, and depend less on folklore and tradition than did prior generations. Although most minority cultures in the United States have retained their traditional child-raising practices to a greater extent than have European American families, the proliferation of ideas in mass media has altered some of their practices as well.

Keeping all the complexity about approaches to parenting in mind, certain practices do tend to differ among various ethnic groups. It is essential to remember, however, that these are broad generalizations meant to suggest the range in approaches to caring for children. Although it is possible to find general characteristics of a group, individuals within the group may not conform to the generalizations. Further, socioeconomic level, education, and parental occupation are all important factors in determining an individual's child-rearing practices.

INFANT CARE Historically, caring for babies and young children was considered women's work, and men had very little involvement until their offspring were older. In many Middle Eastern and African cultures, this pattern continues. In some cultures, a grandmother becomes the primary caregiver for babies, and other extended female family members also play significant roles in child-rearing. In other social and economic groups, infants may be cared for in child-care settings while parents work, with men taking on increasing responsibilities for caring for babies after work. A small but increasing number of men have become single parents or stay-at-home fathers. In 21st-century United States, parental norms based on gender have changed to a degree, but across cultures, mothers remain the predominant caregivers of infants, with fathers, when present, playing a supporting role.

The European American way of socializing children has been characterized as geared toward the goal of independence and individualism, whereas many other cultural groups have a goal of interdependence and collectivism (Rothstein-Fisch & Trumbull, 2008). The emphasis in many European American families is on babies' cognitive development through manipulation and labeling of objects, whereas those from Africa, Asia, and Latin America place a high value on social development through positive interactions between babies and other people. These different goals, although vastly oversimplified, can help explain various infant-care practices.

In the European American tradition, where the development of autonomy and separate, individual existence is an important parental goal, babies often are held less than they are in many other cultures, and are left to cry after all obvious physical needs have been met. However, new research on attachment has led many parents away from "cry-it-out" techniques to a more hands-on approach. Many European American parents now find a middle ground in this area. In Native American society, by contrast, babies and mothers traditionally have had continuous contact, and other groups, such as African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and various Asian American cultures, tend to feed infants on demand and maintain very close physical connections between mothers and infants.

The norm in about two-thirds of the world's cultures is to keep infants and young children in the same room or in the same bed. Many minority and immigrant groups continue this practice after they come to this country. Other parents use bed-sharing or room-sharing as a way to maintain closeness with an infant from whom they have been separated during the day. Bed-sharing remains controversial in the United States, with proponents believing it has many benefits and detractors warning of risks to the infant. However, more Americans are keeping infants in the same room in a co-sleeper or other infant bed nearby.

Bed-sharing is most common in cultures that emphasize interdependence and family bonding above independence. Immigrants from many African countries, as well as Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, and other Asian groups, may bed-share or keep children in the same room with them through early childhood. Although the American Academy of Pediatrics (2016) has stated that bed-sharing puts babies at risk for suffocation, strangulation, and entrapment, it does encourage parents to keep their infants in the same room with them in a separate crib or in an appropriate sleeping device attached to the adult bed.

PHYSICAL CONTACT Different cultural groups vary greatly in the amount and kind of physical contact that takes place between parents and their children. Affection is displayed in different ways, and physical punishment is used to a greater or lesser extent among various groups.

In many Asian American homes, the physical closeness common between infants and parents is reduced as children grow. In African American families, however, body contact is expected and encouraged throughout childhood. Less physical intimacy is found between parents and children in many European American homes, although playful interaction is encouraged. Some physical punishment is accepted in Hispanic families, but these families also tend to be physically affectionate with their children. African American families are more likely to use physical punishment than Native American families, who avoid its use.

FAMILY ROLE In many cultures, the solidarity and importance of the family are primary; in others, however, children are encouraged to be more independent. In some groups, the nuclear family is paramount, whereas in others—for example, Native Hawaiians—the extended family and the kinship network are essential aspects of child-rearing. **Patriarchal, matriarchal,** and shared leadership can be found in different cultures.

Interaction styles within the family reflect the roles expected of children. In many Hispanic families, for example, children are encouraged and expected to play with siblings rather than peers. European American families, on the other hand, may encourage their children to move beyond the family to establish other relationships. In most Asian American families, children are expected to be family oriented and work hard for the support of the family. Much value is placed on respect for elders within the family in most Asian cultures. Many African American families also place great emphasis on children being part of an extended family of relatives and other adults who function as part of a large kinship network and participate in raising the children. Clearly, differences exist among ethnic groups in parenting practices, although these are general characteristics only. One can easily find homes displaying few of the practices noted in the preceding sections.

The numerous decisions parents must make regarding the conflicting forces that surround all homes in busy America—media, entertainment, peer culture, and other attractions—can make it very challenging for parents to meet their responsibilities. Parenting is complex, and often factors other than a family's culture or ethnic background can influence child-rearing behaviors. Birth order of children; the child's age, temperament, or gender; parental experiences; and parent temperament all will have an impact on how a parent raises a child. All parents use a mixture of child-rearing practices, and impressions and information from other sources will influence their behavior.

PERSPECTIVES ON DIVERSITY

Cultural Aspects of Parenting

As you advance in your professional preparation, remain open to parenting that may be very different from the way you were raised or intend to raise your children. Parenting practices generally make sense in the context of the culture the parent is trying to preserve, and culture impacts many aspects of parenting. These include goals for children (independence, compliance, and/or sociability), discipline beliefs (power assertion vs. reasoning), roles of parents and other family members, developmental expectations (motor, language, independent behavior), sleeping arrangements, feeding and food practices, communication, expectations of the role of families in schools, and many more. Becoming familiar with different parenting practices of various cultures will help you better understand and communicate with children and their families. When parents exhibit different beliefs than your own, try not to judge; remember, the majority of parents want what is best for their child(ren).



Check Your Understanding 3.3

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

INTERACTION STYLES WITHIN FAMILIES

Another major feature of child-rearing is the interaction and communication between children and significant family adults. Researchers confirm the effect of parents' verbalizations and actions on their children's interactions, and this effect relates to all other elements of parenting. The studies we present in this section demonstrate connections between parenting and child behavior, and will give you some background on this aspect of parenting behavior that you will find once you are in a classroom.

Baumrind's Classification

Baumrind (1968, 1995), in her classic studies of parent-child interactions, revealed the existence of various parenting styles (see Figure 3-2) that influence parental discipline, provision of warmth and nurturance, and expectations of children's control and maturity. Her work and that of later researchers (Sclafani, 2012) placed parenting styles along the following continuum of parental responsiveness (warmth and supportiveness) and parental demandingness (behavioral control):

1. **Permissive (nondirective).** Noncontrolling, overly indulgent, nondemanding, and relatively warm. Avoids confrontation and allows child considerable self-regulation.
2. **Authoritarian (autocratic).** Directive, demanding, controlling, and somewhat less warm than the authoritative or permissive style. Provides structured environment and rules.
3. **Authoritative (democratic).** Demanding but responsive and warm; rational and receptive to the child's communication. Provides clear standards but values child's assertiveness.
4. **Uninvolved (detached).** Unresponsive and undemanding; in extreme cases, can veer toward neglect.

Baumrind (1966) found that the authoritative style led to many positive outcomes in children. Most children of authoritative parents showed independence and were

FIGURE 3-2 Four Parenting Types

	Accepting, Responsive	Rejecting, Unresponsive
Demanding, controlling	AUTHORITATIVE	AUTHORITARIAN
Undemanding, uncontrolling	PERMISSIVE-INDULGENT	PERMISSIVE-NEGLECTFUL

socially responsible. They were better able to regulate their emotions and behaviors, and they tended to have good tolerance for frustration as well as the ability to delay gratification. These traits translated into competence and resistance to substance abuse during adolescence, according to a later study. Baumrind found that authoritative parents took into account their children's needs as well as their own before dealing with situations. The parents respected children's need to make their own decisions, yet they exerted control. They reasoned with their children and explained things more often than did other parents.

On the other hand, Baumrind found problematic outcomes for children whose parents used the other styles. Children of permissive parents frequently lacked social responsibility, and often were not independent. Children from authoritarian homes may have lower levels of acceptance from their parents. The children of authoritarian parents also showed little independence, and were less socially responsible. Children raised this way perform well enough in school and generally do not exhibit problem behavior, but they tend to have lower self-esteem and poorer social skills. Children whose parents are uninvolved perform poorly in all areas, showing the detrimental effects of detached parenting. Permissive involvement may be considered loving and warm, but also uninvolved in the child's growth. Permissive parents are often seen as friends and not parents. Uninvolved parents are often neglectful.

The authoritative style requires parents to guide, share activities, and talk and listen to their children. The following summary illustrates the adult behaviors that produce Baumrind's authoritative style. To foster socially responsible and independent behavior in children, parents should do the following:

- Serve as responsible and self-assertive models.
- Set standards whereby responsible behavior is rewarded and unacceptable behavior is punished.
- Are committed to the child in a way that is neither overprotective nor rejecting.
- Have high demands for achievement and conformity but are receptive to the child's rational demands.
- Provide secure but challenging and stimulating environments for creative and rational thinking.

Maccoby and Martin (1983) supported and extended the findings of Baumrind. Clark (1983) produced similar findings showing his **sponsored independence parenting style** to be consistent with Baumrind's authoritative style. Later studies measuring the long-term effects of the authoritative style produced even more evidence that it engenders positive adolescent behavior.

One caveat is needed concerning this research. Baumrind used White, middle-class parents in her study, whereas in their replication studies, Maccoby and Martin (1983) found that Baumrind's conclusions did not always translate directly to poor, minority, and single-parent families. Cross-cultural research (Fu & Markus, 2014) suggests that although the authoritative style works well with middle-class Americans, Asian American children, who are often raised by so-called "tiger moms," maintain strong parental relationships and achieve at high levels. Clark (1983), however, found that the authoritative or sponsored independence behaviors in Mexican American and African American

homes often made the difference between success and failure for minority children in school. As far as parenting in a contemporary society is concerned, the authoritative style seems to be most effective in preparing children for school expectations as well for later positive outcomes.

Bernstein's Work

We know that language is a primary means by which a child learns to understand and function in the world. Children tend to develop language on a predictable developmental scale, but different parental language styles and interactions do affect children's socialization and literacy development. Bernstein's (1972) classic study of family language patterns revealed two general linguistic codes used in many homes. He termed these very different patterns *restricted* and *elaborated*.

In the elaborated code, everything is spelled out with lots of detail. Because young children are often lacking in background knowledge, it is helpful for them to have the increased information that the elaborated code provides. On the other hand, a restricted code assumes background knowledge and shared understanding. Communication is generally shorter, condensed, and present-oriented in contrast to the future-oriented aspect of the elaborated codes. While many families will use both restricted and elaborated codes in their communication with children, others will rely almost exclusively on restricted code language, depriving their children of deeper understanding of present events. The following vignette illustrates the two codes.

Two very similar families were observed in a grocery store. The first family was comprised of a father and a daughter who appeared to be about age 5. The little girl noticed the rows of candy bars near the cash register, and placed one in her pocket. The father noticed and asked, "Did you put a candy bar in your pocket?" The little girl shrugged, put her head down, and took it out of her pocket. "It is not okay to take things from the grocery store without paying for them," the father said. The little girl looked at him. "When you take something without paying for it, it is stealing," he continued. "Stealing is not a good choice, and you will get in trouble for it. Do you understand?" The girl nodded. "Put the candy bar back, please," her father directed.

The second family, consisting of a mother, a father, and a little boy, were at a different cash register when the boy, age 6, took a candy bar. The mother noticed the child, who was behind her, place the candy bar in his pocket. She yelled, "Put that back!" The boy looked at her, and the mother screamed again, "Put it back!" The father took the candy bar from the boy's pocket and returned it to the shelf. "Do not steal!" the mother said, and the family waited in line—bodies rigid, the father holding tightly to the child.

The parents in the second family appear to use aspects of a **restricted language code**, characterized by syntactically simple sentences and concrete meanings. According to Bernstein, their communication is object- and present-oriented. The parents communicate one thing only to their son—to obey a single command. There is no explanation, and sentences are short and direct. The child will not really understand what happened and how to handle a similar situation in the future.

The father in the first family, on the other hand, communicates with his child using an **elaborated language code**. He chats with his daughter about stealing, and explains why it is wrong. He engages the child in the decision making. His language includes judgments and reasons, allowing his daughter to learn to cope with abstractions and ambiguity.

Teachers must help all children adjust to the language of school, but children whose family uses mostly restricted language need extra attention to acquire elaborated language. As a teacher, you can become a vital communication model for children from families using restricted codes, as can other children. It is especially critical that you phrase things in a positive tone. Tell children what you need them to do. Older children may often help their teacher communicate with new children who are not familiar with school language and culture. We find this situation in the following vignette.

In the vignette below Traton had learned not only the correct language patterns of the school but also the politeness rules. Then he used language and tonal patterns familiar to Damian, and skillfully switched between the two patterns to explain what their teacher's words meant. One can appreciate the advantages that elaborated codes have in the broadening requirements of the information age. Research has shown that preschool children who engaged in conversation with adults that went beyond the here and now to include past, future, and imagined events and abstract ideas had a larger vocabulary on school entry, and performed better on comprehension tests up to sixth grade (Bardige, 2005). Clearly, the language environment in which a child is brought up will have long-term consequences for their success in school and opportunities in later life.

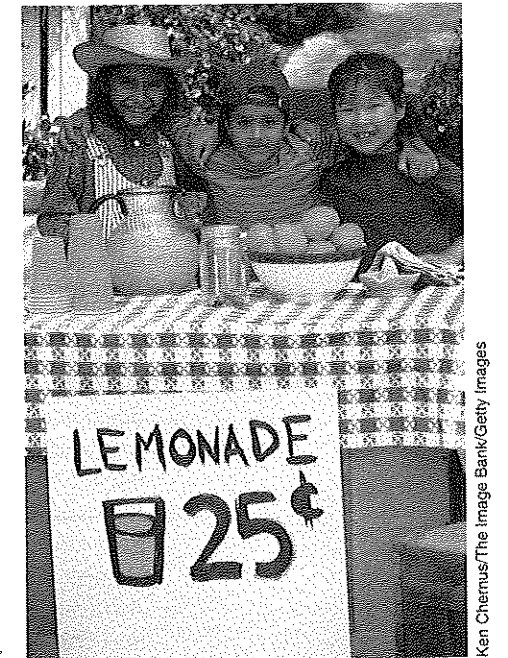
Ms. Dansky, a White teacher, wasn't successful in getting Damian, an African American 5-year-old just entering school, to join other children in a circle. She had used a polite invitation to call all the children. When Damian didn't move, she gave a sterner and more specific command. Then Traton, a seasoned African American 8-year-old, raised his hand and asked quietly, "You want me to get him for you, Ms. D?" Upon receiving a polite "Yes, thank you," he yelled to Damian, "Get over here right now!" When Damian came immediately to sit beside him, Traton leaned over to him and said, "When she says, 'Boys and girls join me,' she means 'Come here.' And when she say, 'Damian, it's time for circle!' she means, 'Get over here right (pats a spot beside himself) NOW!'"

Hart and Risley's Studies

Hart and Risley (1995) also concentrated on language development in a decade-long study of parent-child talk that began during the first three years of life and were followed up by studies conducted when the same children were 9 years old. They established three key findings:

1. The variation in children's IQs and language abilities is directly related to the amount parents spoke to their children.
2. Children's academic successes at ages 9 and 10 are attributable to the amount of talk they hear from birth to age 3.
3. Parents of advanced children talk significantly more to their children than do parents of children who are not as advanced.

Their studies demonstrate that quality of parenting and richness of the linguistic environment are not necessarily linked to economic status or ethnicity, although they



Person-oriented families allow children to make decisions as they engage in activities.

did find that children in professional families heard significantly more words per hour and developed larger vocabularies by age 3 than did children from working-class or low-income families. In their study of homes representing three SES levels, they discussed the linkages between young children's language development and meaningful experiences. The longitudinal study provides convincing evidence that the type and amount of interaction between parents and children result in significant differences, irrespective of SES. All parents need to know that quality interactions in everyday parenting center on the following five variables:

1. **Amount and richness of vocabulary.** Parents deliberately use various terms, labels, and expressions, and model their use when talking. "There are many foods on your plate—carrots are your vegetable, the chicken is your meat, and the rice is a grain."
2. **Sentence usage.** Parents make a connection between objects and events when responding to children. "Yes, that is a truck, and it belongs to Peter; please give it back."
3. **Discourse function.** The quality of utterances used is important when parents give choices or directions to prompt child behavior. "Did you remember to say, 'Thank you'?"
4. **Adjacency condition.** This variable centers on the relation between the parent's and child's behavior when the parent listens or initiates for the child. Child: "I like ice cream!" Parent models by saying: "Yes, it's delicious, isn't it?"
5. **Valence of communication.** The emotional tone given to interactions is important, whether the parent tries to be pleasant or not. Simply smiling and repeating a child's word ("I know, you're tired") has positive valence.

The positive dimension of this study shows us that parenting behaviors leading to increased child performance can be learned and practiced. Hart and Risley (1995) assert that parents who purposely concentrate on meaningful differences are being "social partners" with their children. Multiple studies, including Gridley, Hutchings, and Baker-Henningham (2015), have provided different interventions and strategies to improve language modeling by parents for their children.

Natural experiences, such as what happened in school or at a playdate, are perfect starting points for building conversations. Adults need to take time to talk to their young child, focusing on things that the child has done, seen, or heard, and using experiences with picture books to move conversations beyond the here and now. But with parents' busy work schedules and the amount of screen time spent by the entire family, substantive conversation—which does not include directions, commands, or reprimands—between parents and children is becoming rare in many homes. Teachers need to be cognizant of this and use every possible moment as a potential language builder. By modeling and encouraging more sophisticated language, teachers make up some of the missing pieces.

No two families are exactly alike, and parents have diverse ways of managing. The various features of parenting make family behaviors very complex and difficult to understand. We can examine general patterns of parenting, though, and we can relate these patterns to children's behavior. Clearly, a combination of love, limits, and verbal interaction appears to be most beneficial.

Always remember that parenting practices are influenced by more than cultural background and interaction styles. As professionals, you must also be alert to the influence of family size, family SES, levels of stress in the home, and different community characteristics surrounding the children with whom you work.

IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

Linking Home and School Talk

Although most research indicates that the authoritative style of parenting provides the best outcome, some families you meet will be raising their children using other approaches. Remember that the authoritative method is more closely aligned with the interaction style we find in most schools today. So, you may have to help some of your children adapt to the differences between home and school. Use the following principles of the authoritative style to guide your interactions with children:

- Maintain a warm and affectionate demeanor.
- Set clear guidelines and high expectations.
- Be consistent with your expectations.
- Structure is key! Even play-based classrooms need to have structure.
- Be willing to discuss the reasons for your decisions, and be prepared to negotiate at times.
- Show the children that you value and respect their opinions.

Share all of this with parents and encourage them to communicate when they have questions about the classroom routine. Children who have been raised in more permissive or in authoritarian homes may also need help developing appropriate autonomy. You can help them develop this skill by having the class determine class rules, classroom jobs, and other projects in which they can make choices and develop their own timelines for accomplishing tasks.



Check Your Understanding 3.4

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

EXPERIENCES OF FAMILIES

The life experiences of children within their families establish a background for their performance and their contributions in their school and community. What children see, hear, smell, taste, and do creates a foundation for their communication patterns, perceptual styles, and modes of thinking. As young children begin to interact with their environments, they also learn to understand where they belong in a social context and form a sense of self (Joerchel, 2015). However, these experiences require guidance and explanation from caregivers.

Culture, economic, and experiential backgrounds make a significant difference in the way a child learns, communicates, and participates. In addition to basic nurturing, family histories of interactions, experiences, and practices will enhance or reduce children's development potential. When stress or problems arise, some families are **resilient** and display an ability to deal with changes and modify problems; others are ill-equipped and cannot cope. Some adults even lean on their own children for support. Such resilience or its absence derives from many aspects of family experience. Of course, the communication styles and parenting practices noted earlier have an effect on children's learning and development. But we should also consider the skill level of the parents as well as the type and degree of family mobility when thinking about its effect on children.

Skill Levels and Experience

Most parents and caregivers have extensive knowledge of their world—how to operate within society and how to manage their everyday lives. Passing on wisdom and skills is one of the pleasures of parenting, and some parents impart this knowledge in particularly beneficial ways.

Homemakers know their living quarters and what it takes to live in a particular home. Parents have experiences with food shopping, preparation, and serving, and some have added knowledge of nutrition and skills with food presentation. Involving children in food management can be done easily in all homes, and provides a foundation for healthy living. Using tools to build or repair household objects is also common in many homes. Almost all parents have interesting experiences involving household tools, and many take pleasure in helping children learn how to use them as well.

Families are increasingly finding that spending time in nature with their children helps them establish bonds and shared memories. The Children and Nature Network website has many resources to help connect children, their families, and communities to nature.

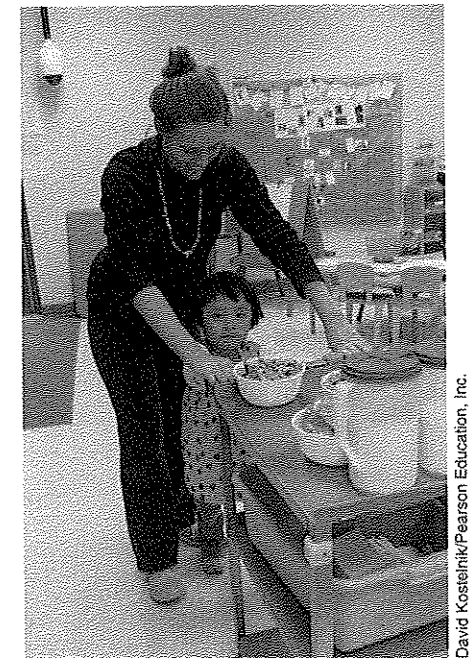
Other families enjoy the outdoors through gardening for relaxation or growing summer vegetables. The growing of green things fascinates most youngsters, and it is the beginning of a basic science that children encounter during their school years. An example of “gardening” learning was demonstrated when our neighbor Melissa involved her 3-year-old son, in a very natural way, in her regular gardening, singing, and reading activities:

Having just received *Inch by Inch* (Mallett, 1995) from the community's Growing Up Reading Project, Melissa and her son, Adam, immediately opened the new treasure and looked at the end pages, which contained pictures of vegetables. Adam saw a picture of a carrot and exclaimed, “That’s a carrot.” “Yes,” said Melissa, “we’ve just gathered those from our garden, haven’t we? See any more vegetables we have?” Adam thumbed through and found a huge beet. “Beet, yum, yum!” He turned to the end pages again, and with a scooping motion began to “pick up” the imaginary vegetables, name them, and pretend to stuff them into his mouth. In the next few months, Melissa and Adam often played the “Garden Song” tape that accompanied this new book, and sang the song together. It was a delight to see Melissa and Adam in the garden together the next spring, weeding. Adam trotted along the rows singing, “Inch by inch . . . make my garden grow . . . inch by inch, make my garden grow.” Then he stopped to pull a “weed” and exclaimed, “A carrot! No, a beet! Yum, yum.”

Many games feature family interactions, and by using games as entertainment, parents can provide children with involvement in group activities, experience in strategy development and planning, positive use of aggressiveness, and practice in cooperative activities. Games are fundamentally simulations of life experiences, and children who have extensive experience with various games internalize approaches for living and many strategies for facing interactive situations. Many families have instituted a family game night when they gather together to enjoy cards, board games, and time together.

Storytelling plays an important role in children’s growth. A large part of language development comes through stories. In families where stories are used for re-creating family history, for entertainment, or as examples, listeners grow in appreciation of language, their culture, and their family’s experiences and identity. In some cultures, life lessons are passed on through such stories and connect children with their cultural history. One very important manifestation is the story in book form. In a book, the story belongs to someone else, but it gives much the same satisfaction to the young child.

Parents’ skills in these and other aspects of daily life can and should be passed on to children in the family. All community life and school programs must reinforce these practices. Given the right conditions, home management and repair, gardening projects, game playing, storytelling, and other family-oriented experiences represent important resources and a worthy heritage for parents to pass on to their children. Most parents are not skilled instructors, but they can be very successful in teaching home activities and projects informally. When a caregiver is engaged with a single child on a topic of mutual interest, most classroom “teaching” demands are not present. Instructor and student can go directly to the task of transferring a particular skill to the learner. Most parents are successful at this natural process, and most yearn to pass on their knowledge when an opportunity occurs.



Even if they are not skilled teachers, most adults can be successful in teaching about home projects.

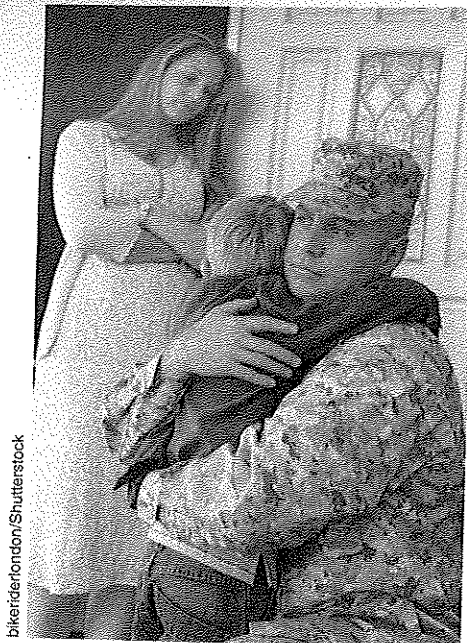
EXAMINE YOUR BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Reflect on some of the activities and special skills that the parents of children in your classroom possessed when you were a child. What did you learn from them? Do you feel a connection with those parents when you use those skills? Did the parents use adult language when teaching you these skills?

Mobility of Families

Another feature of experience that affects children’s emotional and academic progress is the mobility that families have in and around their communities and beyond. Americans change residences frequently, and moves often place families farther from their kin and other members of their social network. In 2016, 11.2% of American households moved. Recent census bureau data demonstrates that 42.2% of Americans relocate for housing-related reasons, such as wanting to improve their living conditions (i.e., more space, more desirable neighborhood). Other reasons for moving include family-related reasons (27.4%), reasons related to their job (20.2%), and unrelated reasons (10.2%) (sourced from census.gov).

FORCED AND VOLUNTARY MOBILITY A number of families are forced to relocate because of migrant work, *reassignments for parents*, homelessness, coping with unemployment, or escaping hostile conditions. Many children also move after a divorce and experience the difficulty of going back and forth between two homes. On the other hand, voluntary relocation frequently connotes an improved socioeconomic situation for the family.



Military families often deal with extended separations.

Military Families

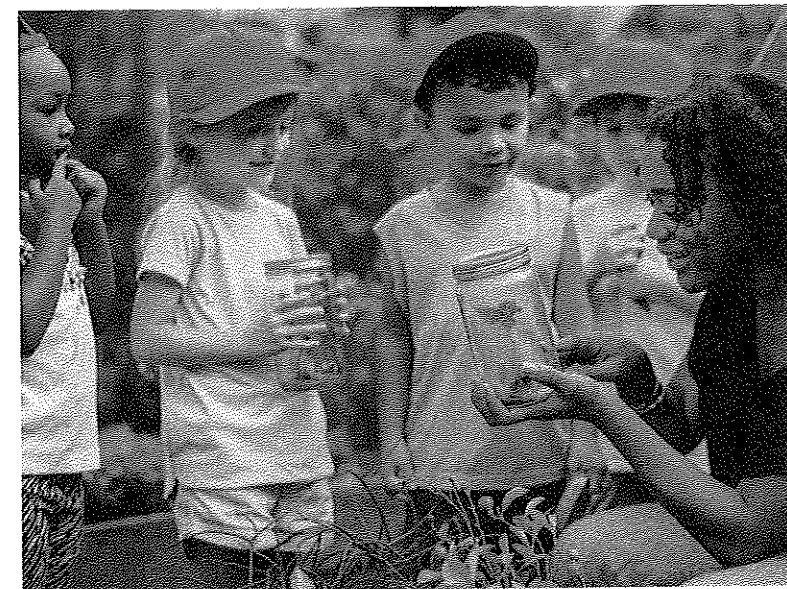
Military families are highly mobile, and military-connected children are likely to attend many schools before their graduation. While there is a tight-knit social and cultural environment in place for military families, frequent moves and school changes can be especially challenging for children. This is especially true when a family relocates to an installation with a smaller military population. While military children have the benefit of being exposed to different areas of the United States and the world, they must also deal with the loss of friends, the need to rebuild social networks, and the academic challenges of a new school curriculum every time they move. Early childhood teachers have noted that geographic mobility negatively impacts academic growth in young children, but are largely split on whether or not there is a negative socioemotional impact related to relocating every few years (Stites, 2016). Organizations such as the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) provide educational resources to schools, teachers, and families to help ease geographic transitions. (Military Child Education Coalition, Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission, Military One Source, National Military Family Association, Our Military Kids, and SesameWorkshop)

Harrison, Jean, and their 4-year-old twins, Ava and Chloe, were stationed in Japan when an earthquake, tsunami, and subsequent nuclear accident occurred in 2011. Harrison was away on deployment when Jean was told that she and her daughters needed to evacuate with no definite return date. The family was scheduled to relocate to California the following summer, so given the lack of a definite time to return to Japan, Jean decided to relocate immediately rather than in a few months. Jean boarded the plane with her young children, and upon arriving in California, was told that she was not able to move into government housing because her husband was still technically stationed in Japan. Jean checked herself and her daughters into a temporary apartment and looked for a preschool. When she found a perfect option, she was told that the school didn't take late-year enrollments; however, when she shared her story, the director made an exception.

Forced mobility (apart from job-related transfers and military relocations) is often a reaction to undesirable conditions, and contributes to erratic lifestyles for parents and their children. Isolation is implied, for forced mobility signifies that a family lacks connections or community linkages that could provide help. During the economic downturn that began in 2007, increasing numbers of families were forced to move when their homes went to foreclosure. Whatever the conditions, a family's forced move to a new environment presents different but rarely positive learning experiences for children. Little pleasure comes with a transfer from one home to another under duress.

Immigrants and Refugee Families

Children who are immigrants and/or undocumented refugees continue to be part of classrooms. These children may feel fearful due to recent policy initiatives about immigration bans and proposed construction of a wall on the US-Mexico border. In 2014, about 17 million children younger than age 18 lived with at least one immigrant parent, meaning 25% of children have ties to other countries (sourced from <http://bit.ly/2BkvjMU>). As a teacher, it is important to recognize fears and uncertainty, and to help young children find ways to communicate their worries.



Travel and new experiences enrich the lives of young children.

RECREATIONAL MOBILITY Both local travel and long-distance travel involve the positive expectation of new encounters. Arranging for the travel is a learning experience, whether for recreation or to reconnect with family members in the family's native land. Family members learn together as they plan and experience the trip, and these social and educational values are important. Transnational or international travel brings a family in touch with other cultures, as travelers need to adapt to new conditions, languages, different foods, and a different sense of space. Such travel is expansive, and families gain psychic income and social capital.

Video Example 3.4

Watch this video to learn about how members of a community support the immigrants in their community and schools. What are some ways you can support children from immigrant families in your classroom?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5gkQ4_aeY

Families benefit in different ways from travel experiences. Some families use their experience with great facility; others do not. Such use of experience may be a function of SES, as economically privileged families have the means to provide the benefits of local and long-distance travel. We also find instances of families from modest means enriching their children's lives through carefully developed experiences, however. And some affluent families neglect the need for family interaction and experience and fill their children's lives with sports, cultural, and other activities that do not involve parental interaction.



Check Your Understanding 3.5

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

OTHER INFLUENCES ON PARENTING

We have tried to show that parenting needs to be examined and analyzed in the context of culture and community. As noted earlier, numerous variables affect family life and may be external factors of community and environment as well as internal factors of cultural background, family demographics, and economics. Following is a brief discussion of some of these other dimensions.

Child-Care Arrangements

With extended work schedules for most American families, most parents need temporary care of their children. At one time, when many mothers were homemakers, child care was merged with running the household. Mothers attended to their preschool-age children, welcomed their older children home from school, and supervised most at-home activities. Today, however, the situation is very different, with huge numbers of young children in some type of child-care arrangement for part of every workday. These arrangements include center-based and family child care as well as less formal situations, such as babysitters or care by slightly older siblings.

Once found, child care solves many problems for parents. Supportive caregivers become an extension of the family and develop ties to the child and parents. These caregivers can offer parents advice and reassurance as issues and concerns arise. This can be especially helpful to single parents. Child care also fosters connections between parents and other families with children, allowing them to develop a larger support network. Knowing their child is well cared for relieves parents of stress and anxiety, and allows them to do their jobs. Unfortunately, many child-care programs have waiting lists for children, as the need for care outstrips availability. Furthermore, the quality and costs of care are quite variable—adding another dimension to the problem for parents seeking care for their children. (See chapter 5 for a more detailed look at child care.)

Family Stressors

The circumstances of modern life have led to an increase in stress among children and their parents. Separation, divorce, chronic illness, and death of a parent can reduce children's feeling of security and subject them to new patterns of family life. Living in a blended family, in a single-parent household, or with parents who are deployed or travel frequently also increases the stress level of all involved.

SEPARATION, DIVORCE, AND RECONFIGURED FAMILIES As noted earlier, divorce has become common for US families in recent decades, and although the divorce rate is no longer increasing, at the present time, first marriages in the United States have a 41% chance of breaking up and second marriages have a 60% chance of ending (CDC/NCHS National Vital Statistics System, 2014). Consequently, more than 40% of American children will experience the effects of divorce, with nearly 90% placed in the physical custody of their mothers (although increasingly, legal custody tends to be shared between the parents). Of the children born after 2000, 34% live in single-parent households, and 5% live with remarried parents (Pew Research Center, 2014).

Liberalization of divorce laws in most states permits couples to separate more easily and more amicably, and although parents may adjust reasonably well to a divorce, many children of divorced parents tend to have long-term difficulties (Green, Anderson, Forgatch, DeGarmo, & Hetherington, 2012). Separation changes all roles in a family and alters the way a family functions. Responsibilities for the custodial parent increase dramatically, particularly with regard to child-care arrangements. There are more household tasks to perform, and financial obligations are heavier than before. Complicating the situation for children is the likelihood of one or both of their parents remarrying (65% of divorced women and 75% of divorced men remarry within four years). Even more likely are the non-marital, short-lived cohabitations of either parent. Finally, one-third of American children today will become part of a stepfamily.

FINANCIAL ASPECTS OF DIVORCE Mothers are most often given custody of children in a divorce, but this can have dire consequences for the resulting single-parent family. Surveys indicate that the poverty rate for single-mother households is around 39% compared to 7% for two-parent homes (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). Women in the workforce earn less on average than men, and even though child support judgments are made in divorce cases, fathers frequently leave mothers to assume full financial responsibility for their children. Divorce improves the economic position of men, but reduces that of women and children left with their mothers.

OTHER CONSEQUENCES OF DIVORCE Increased work hours for custodial parents are typical after divorce, and decreased social interaction with children can result. This means less parenting. Children in the home may face increased responsibilities, less time with either parent, and less emotional support after separation. A serious long-range effect of divorce is the removal of marriage models for affected children.

Behavioral changes in children often result from divorce and separation, and a considerable amount of research shows that the negative effects for children of divorce are sadness, anger, fear, aggressiveness, anxiety, and disobedience (Lamanna & Riedmann, 2011). Children who have positive, nurturing relationships with both parents, low levels of parental and family conflict, and adequate economic resources seem to adjust better to the diverse forms of family life that occur after a divorce (Fine, Ganong, & Demo, 2010).

For many children, these diverse family forms may include living in a single-parent home, moving between the homes of both parents as part of shared-custody arrangements, or becoming part of a stepfamily (Pasley & Lee, 2010). All these situations can pose challenges to children, but can also have strengths when compared to a pre-divorce situation: happier environments, better custodial parent-child relationships, more commitment to a wider community, and better-run households. In their authoritative review of hundreds of clients, Hetherington and Kelly (2002) found that most single-parent households provide the nurturance that children need, despite the



Divorce can mean decreased social interaction between children and parents.

Gladskikh Tatiana/Shutterstock

challenges. Negative stereotypes continue to affect single parents, stepparents, and their children, however. For example, teachers tend to assume that problems in school are related to the situation in the home. Research has shown that the majority of children from divorced homes eventually adapt to their new lives and become reasonably well-adjusted.

IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

Working with Reconfigured Families

In the foreseeable future, many children will experience their parents' separation, divorce, and remarriage. As a teacher, you will be in a position to help families going through these life changes. For example, you may be able to connect parents with support groups to ease them through the initial period of adjustment during a divorce. And you could pass on information such as the following: Parents who learn not to criticize the other parent in front of their children, who seek help for their own emotional upheaval, and who shield their children from heated discussions tend to have healthier divorces and a better outcome for their children. Another step is alerting your school counselor to changes in a family and enlisting her assistance in helping the children deal with the emotions that arise from the losses and changes associated with divorce and remarriage.

As a professional in early care and education, you are responsible for accommodating the extra needs that families and children may have during this time of transition. Make certain you are communicating with all the significant adults in the child's life. It can be stressful for parents not to have information about homework, projects, and school events because the information was sent to only one of the child's homes. E-mail can simplify sending out needed information and ensure that everyone has it. Children's literature that is sensitively read and discussed both at home and in school can also be of great help to children who are caught in a family upheaval. See the Appendix for recommended titles.

ILLNESS Conditions of health and well-being impact the success of parenting. And although many families contend only with minor illnesses and accidents, others encounter major issues with long-term illness, obesity, or handicapping conditions.

When a parent is sick, the level of stress in the home increases. When a family member becomes injured or ill, numerous interaction patterns must cease or be modified. Family communication can be limited, and attention to those who are not ill is lessened. Realignment of the priorities in family functioning is a consequence of long-term illness.

Illness of a wage earner has even greater consequences for the family. Furthermore, if inadequate health care is the cause (which is the situation for one-seventh of the US population), this particular stress gives rise to others. When a child becomes seriously injured or is chronically ill, parents must develop coping skills to adjust to the need for medical care and the other issues that arise.

— Ava and Ainsley were ages 5 and 2 when their mother was diagnosed with cancer. Although too young to understand what cancer meant, they recognized the changes in their mother and their routines. Their mother was often tired and needed rest after a treatment, and their father took on more of the day-to-day responsibilities. This caused stress for both parents, as their mother had a routine and their father missed work time to handle home responsibilities. But they worked through it, and when their mother recovered, they were all even more appreciative of one another. —

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES Caring for a child with a disability presents unique challenges to families, and often leads to an increase in families' stress levels. Although some disabilities are evident from birth or early infancy, others, such as learning disabilities and emotional problems, may not show up until the child attends school. Not only do parents have to struggle with their own acceptance of the disability and the shattered expectations, guilt, anger, and parental conflict, but they must also spend large amounts of time and energy on the child. Just getting the child's disability identified can be a long process, and determining treatment, obtaining needed services, and following up on the child's progress are also time-consuming. Teachers and community-service personnel play an important support role for families parenting children with disabilities. While often thought of as the "secondary parent," new research has shown that fathers of children with disabilities are more involved than those of typically developing children (Noggle, 2012). As a teacher, it is critical to include fathers in all communication.

EVERYDAY STRESS While they are not life-changing events, the hassles of everyday life are another source of stress for families. These day-to-day common annoyances, although relatively minor, are a more frequent and continuous form of stress. Included in this category are the difficulties associated with commuting, meeting deadlines, balancing work and family life on a daily basis, and minor childhood illnesses that require schedule changes and arrangements. These everyday hassles can be even bigger family stressors than the major life events discussed previously.

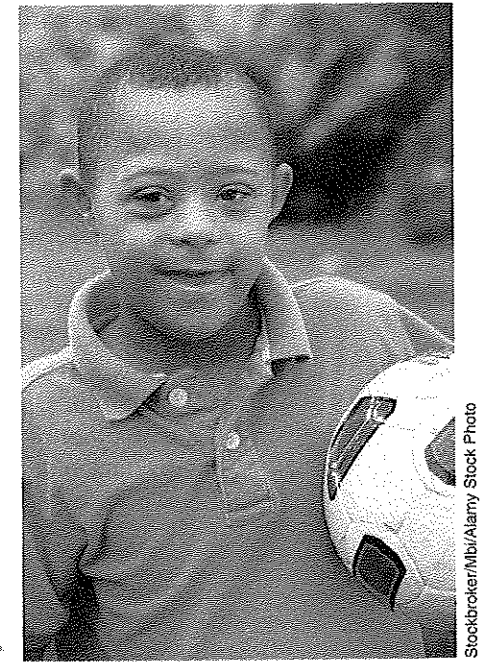
As expected, the way parents respond to these everyday stressors determines how much they contribute to the family stress level. Some parents are able to buffer their children from the everyday hassles of life, but others are not. Factors such as SES, perceptions of the severity of the hassles, parent temperament, and responses to the ongoing, relentless nature of caring for a family and home all influence the way a family will adapt to and cope with the stresses of everyday life.

Economics and Parenting

The stressful circumstances discussed above are difficult for all families, but children and parents who live in poverty or suffer economic setbacks face added challenges that can contribute to additional stress. Financial resources underlie the quality of life in all communities and for all parents. Obtaining an adequate income to support housing, a good diet, and health care is a challenge in many areas of the world. This challenge also exists in many US neighborhoods.

DUAL-INCOME FAMILIES Statistics show that 67% of children living with both parents have mothers and fathers in the workforce, and this trend increases each year. As parents try to balance the potentially competing demands of jobs and child-rearing, many find the conflict between caring for children and employment physically and psychologically draining. The stress is particularly pronounced for women who, despite their increased participation in the workforce, still have primary responsibility for children in the majority of families. It appears, however, that it is the nature and intensity of the work and family responsibilities, rather than employment or parenthood *per se*, that determine the pressure of parents working outside the home.

Although a double income enables a family to enjoy a higher standard of living, it has drawbacks, such as less time for family interaction, tighter schedules, increased dependence on child care, and fewer choices in recreation. Research has found that



Children with Down syndrome are often included in school with their peers.

working parents have increasingly developed a number of strategies to maximize the time they spend with their children. Smaller families, less time spent on housework, and greater income are all factors that allow dual-income parents to devote time to their children. For the more than 7% of American working men and women who hold two or more jobs, however, time for family interactions is minimal.

POVERTY Poverty restricts many positive experiences for children and their families, because financial resources dictate the quality of education, housing, diet, clothing, and amount of health care, to say nothing of entertainment and recreation. Most of all, poverty lays a veil of despair on poor or near-poor families—a group disproportionately composed of single-parent families and families of color—and aspirations and a sense of self-worth become hard to elevate (Dodson & Bravo, 2005). Of all the stressors present in US families, poverty is perhaps the greatest, and it is a risk factor that is often combined with other risk factors (e.g., multiple relocations in a year, single parents, teenage mothers, lack of a high school diploma, and having more than four children) that contribute to poor outcomes for children (Robbins, Stagman, & Smith, 2012).

IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

Working with Families Living in Poverty

The needs of children living in poverty can seem overwhelming. Although you may choose to work as an advocate for greater social change, you can also increase your awareness of ways to support these children on an everyday basis in your classroom. Berliner's classic (2009) principles for teaching homeless students apply to children living in poverty. Among his suggestions are making schools safe havens for children, attending to the needs of the whole child, and working with parents and guardians to develop goals. In practical terms, this may mean keeping nutritious snacks and clean clothes on hand, helping connect families to the school counselor to help them access social services, and providing warmth and acceptance to children caught in circumstances beyond their control and understanding. Don't assume that children have a place to do homework or the needed materials. Simple things like providing a clipboard and an attached pencil for children or an after-school homework club can make a big difference in their ability to complete outside work. Most of all, however, don't stigmatize children living in poverty or in homelessness. Your loving care and acceptance can make a big difference in children's lives! Table 3-2 provides practical suggestions for your curriculum.

TABLE 3-2 Strategies for Teaching Children Living in Poverty

1. Incorporate music, art, and theater across the curriculum.
2. Have high expectations for all students, and communicate those expectations.
3. Teach in a student-centered manner.
4. Provide opportunities for exercise and movement.
5. Make lessons relevant to children living in poverty.
6. Teach about poverty and bias toward the poor.
7. Review materials (books, technology, etc.) for potential biases.
8. Promote literacy and learning for enjoyment.

Source: Based on recommendations from *Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty: Strategies for Erasing the Opportunity Gap* by Paul C. Gorski (2013).

Child Poverty, by Age and Race, 2015

	White, non-Hispanic		Black		Hispanic		Asian	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Under 18	4,563,000	12.1	3,651,000	32.9	5,269,000	28.9	466,000	12.3
Under 5	1,245,000	12.8	1,116,000	37.4	1,537,000	30.2	125,000	11.9

Percent of Children Living in Poverty, by Age and Race, 2015

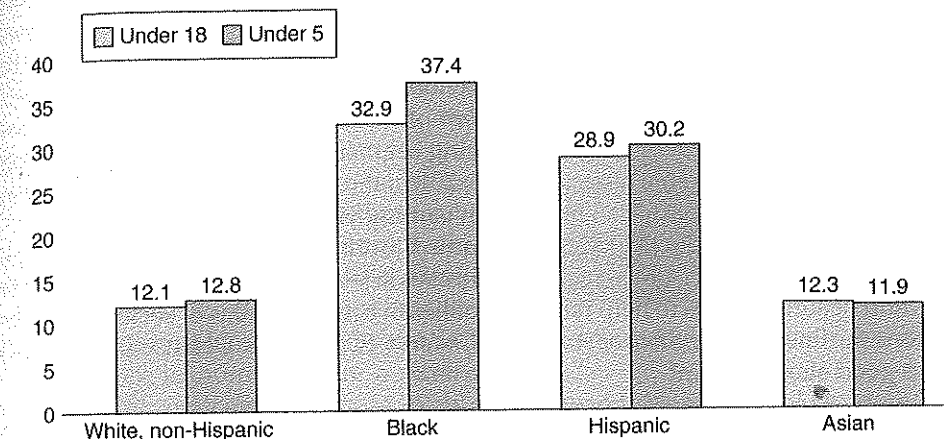


FIGURE 3-3 Children Under Age 18 Living in Poverty in 2015

Source: Children's Defense Fund, 2016: Child Poverty in America 2015—National Analysis.

The Children's Defense Fund (2016) found that in 2015, more than 14.5 million, or 19.7%, of US children under age 18 were living below the poverty line. Even more disturbing is the growing number of children who live in extreme poverty, defined as an income of less than \$12,129 per year for a family of four. In 2015, over 6.5 million children were living in extreme poverty. Poverty rates among minority groups are disproportionate to their populations. Whereas the poverty rate for Whites was 12.1%, that for Hispanics was 28.9%, and for African Americans, it was 32.9% (Children's Defense Fund, 2016). Figure 3-3 gives a picture of American children living in poverty.

Poor families are burdened with the challenges of survival, and their lives are punctuated with stress brought on by lack of money. Family members are frequently ill, sustain injury more often, and encounter hostility from numerous sources. The buildup of stress in poor families is extensive. Housing that is affordable to families near or below the poverty line tends to be in crime- and drug-ridden areas, where children and many adults lead lives of sheer terror. Cramped living quarters and meager diets result in illnesses that precipitate even more stress. Not surprisingly, children raised in poverty are more likely to become teen parents, and as adults, they earn less and have more unemployment than those raised in families with higher



Strong social skills are the best childhood predictor of adult competence.

incomes. They are also more likely to raise their own children in poverty, continuing the cycle.

HOMELESS FAMILIES One dire consequence of poverty can be the loss of housing for a family. Although we tend to associate homelessness with urban environments, it exists in suburban and rural areas as well. Homeless families may live in a shelter, on the street, or in their cars; camp in the woods; or double up with other family members or friends. Homelessness is a fluid state with frequent moves and many upheavals that reduce children's ability to attend school and benefit from educational services. Homeless children also experience **food insecurity**, and have increased risk for moderate to severe health problems. During the 2013-2014 school year, 1.3 million homeless children were enrolled in public schools (US Department of Education, 2016). Because families with children under age 5 are the fastest-growing segment of the homeless population in the United States (Children's Defense Fund, 2016), the number of homeless children in elementary schools is expected to increase in coming years.

Reversing poverty in the United States requires strong community action and large investments in federal, state, and private aid to provide job training, child care, adequate housing, and health facilities to help rebuild families in besieged areas of society. Recommendations outlined in *The State of America's Children* (Children's Defense Fund, 2014) serve as a good starting point.



Check Your Understanding 3.6

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF PARENTING

Despite the well-known stressors associated with parenting, most adults find that caring and providing for children is rewarding and pleasurable. In addition, although families may function in a variety of ways and possess different attributes, given reasonable conditions, most families develop along healthy lines and rear children who respect the home culture and get ready to meet the world. Although many families are independent, some may at times need the help and support of friends, community, and other services.

At times, stresses are too great, and family dysfunction may result. If this occurs, professional aid via the community is the first level of response. It may be possible for school professionals to help by advocating for the family, talking with family members, counseling the family, and listening to family members to show support.

EXAMINE YOUR BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

What are the sources of stress in your life? Are the strategies you use to relieve stress positive ones for you? Are you familiar with community resources to help you and others understand and practice stress-reduction techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, and muscle relaxation?

Abuse and Neglect

Abuse and neglect of children can be one outcome of unrelieved stress. Because families in poverty are in dire straits and services are meager, abuse may rise in concert with the frustrations and anxieties of needy families. But remember that neglect, physical abuse, psychological maltreatment, and sexual abuse of children occur at all levels of society, across all ethnic and cultural groups, within all religions, and at all levels of education. In 2014, 1,546 children died as a result of abuse, and over 70% of those deaths were

children under age 3 (Children's Bureau, 2014). Seventy-five percent of maltreated children suffer from neglect. Physical abuse accounts for 17% of cases, followed by 8.3% for sexual abuse, and 8% of victims experienced such nonspecific types of abuse including threats, parental substance abuse, or "safe relinquishment of a newborn" (Children's Bureau, 2014). In 2014, an estimated 3.9 million referrals were made to Child Protection Service agencies in the United States, and these referrals represented about 6.2 million children. About one-third of these referrals are substantiated. Of those substantiated reports, 9.2% had a parent who abused alcohol, while 26% had a parent who abused drugs (Children's Bureau, 2014). These numbers highlight the fact that children in homes where a parent abuses drugs or alcohol are more likely to be abused. Many abused children become abusive adults or victims of other abusers later in their lives. Abuse has a negative impact on the feelings and attitudes of families: it destroys normal family relationships.

Parent education can help break the cycle of abuse and neglect. All interventions that help reduce parents' stress level, increase their understanding of child development and their social coping skills, and assist them in developing supportive networks are effective in reducing and preventing child maltreatment.

Competent Parenting

Parents do not need to be affluent or highly educated to be competent in their role of raising children. While most have a good idea what it means to provide for their children's physiological needs and physical safety, some parents may wonder how best to help their children develop emotionally. Szalavitz and Perry (2010) contend that empathy is the key element of emotional growth, and have identified areas that are essential for healthy development. In order to help their children grow and flourish, competent parents cultivate the following six core strengths in their children:

1. Attachment—the ability to form and maintain healthy emotional bonds with another person.
2. Self-regulation—the ability to notice and control urges such as hunger, frustration, or anger.
3. Affiliation—the ability to form relationships and join with others in groups.
4. Awareness—the ability to recognize the needs, interests, and capacities of others.
5. Tolerance—the ability to understand and accept that others are different from you.
6. Respect—the ability to appreciate one's own self-worth and that of others.

To develop these strengths, children need unconditional love and affection from their parents. They also require the security that comes from responsive and attentive caregivers who help them develop relationships and friendships beyond the immediate family, and parents who will guide their behavior in ways that will help them make responsible choices, think about others, and develop self-confidence. While parents provide the initial opportunities for children to develop these core strengths, school and community also offer support for children's optimal emotional development.



Children need unconditional love and affection from their parents.

IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

Supporting Families

Children and families are resilient to some degree. We find situations that appear depressing and even disastrous, but many children survive intact and view the traumatic events in their lives, such as death, divorce, and hardship, with objectivity and later even with humor. Most children are not so fragile and impressionable that they must succumb to their problems. As a teacher or community service provider, you may be the person who helps a child overcome difficulties through your support and belief in the child. Always be ready to listen and collect resources (such as the websites listed here) to help families. You are not expected to have all the answers; don't be afraid to say that you need assistance in pointing them in the right direction. You must also remember that as long as reasonably positive experiences and interventions punctuate the lives of developing children, their outlook and perspective can be ultimately optimistic.



Check Your Understanding 3.7

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

Summary and Review

The nurturance of a parent or another loving adult is the most significant factor in a child's healthy growth and development. Despite changes in the role of parents over the years, they continue to provide major economic and emotional support for their children, as well as experiences, education, and socialization.

Different styles of interaction exist within families, and various cultural groups may have parenting practices that differ from those of the others. Research shows that the authoritative parent style, characterized by a warm emotional tone coupled with high expectations and open communication, usually produces better results for most parents and their children than does either a permissive or an authoritarian pattern.

Experience defines a family's quality of life, and all families pass on their culture and attempt to instruct

children in profitable ways. Some families have natural gifts for instructing the young about tasks, thereby giving them added command of their lives. Mobility is one avenue for enhancing experience; another is manual work skills.

Economic circumstances, life-changing events, and everyday stressors all impact family functioning. Handling such stressors is a mark of a family's ability to cope with the major and minor stressors that are part of life. All families encounter stress, but processing and managing it appropriately are hallmarks of stable families. Competent families are those that are able to provide for children's physical and psychological health, promote their growth, and shape their behavior to meet socially accepted norms. Poverty can undermine parents' best efforts to provide for their children, and unfortunately, the rates of poverty for children are increasing in the 21st century.

How Does Learning About this Topic Help You Become a Better Teacher?

Teachers need to know their students' families as well as their situations. As a teacher, you are in a unique position to explain the community to families, and vice versa. It is important for you to take time to learn about each family so you can better understand their values, customs, and backgrounds. This understanding will help you find ways to create a positive home and school connection.

This chapter has taken you into the homes of the children you teach. It has shown the broad picture of parents and their ways of parenting. Use this vital knowledge to make a better program as you get to know your students' families and situations. Always remember that teachers are in a unique position to explain the community to families, and vice versa. It is important for you to invest time in learning about family functioning to discover the values and ways of doing things.

Suggested Activities and Questions

1. Name three ways that families provide nurturance for their children. Speculate about how you see them manifested in one child with whom you work.
2. Families are increasingly turning to social network sites for support and guidance in meeting their parental responsibilities. Do an internet search, and locate at least three sites that you feel would be helpful to share with parents with whom you work.
3. Select two families represented in your classroom or community. What appear to be the social and cultural influences affecting them? Are there differences? What do you infer about the parenting practices in these families?
4. As you pursue your daily activities, be aware of how parents are interacting with their children in the grocery store, library, mall, and other locations. What are some differences in the way parents appear to be talking to their children? What do you think accounts for any differences you see?
5. Almost every school district in the United States serves children with one or more family members in the military. What resources from the Military Child Education Coalition's website would be useful to you in working with children with this experience?
6. Have a discussion with several of your peers about the stresses they recollect during their childhoods. What were the sources of support, if any, for your families during the difficulties? Determine how you would try to support your students if they were undergoing similar circumstances today.
7. Locate the social service agencies, tutoring options, after-school programs, and other community resources that support children and families, and develop a web-based directory for your future use. Having this information to share with families will be invaluable.

Resources and Websites

Common Sense Media

The Children and Nature Network

National Fatherhood Initiative

National Parenting Center

National Parenting Education Network

National Stepfamily Resource Center

Zero to Three: National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families

National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse offers resources, research, and information for furthering the work of fatherhood.

Life Matters: Tools for Stressless Living offers a compilation of articles from various authors that promote education, information, and support for those who want to learn more about democratic styles of parenting.

MomsRising organizes grassroots actions to critical issues facing families.

Our Family Coalition promotes the equality and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender families with children.

Single Parents provides a forum for sharing experiences and resources about the single-parent experience.