

Chapter 1

Introduction to Parenting

ABSTRACT

As an introductory chapter to the book, this chapter captures some key themes that build the basis of parenting for South Asian heritage. This chapter focusses on definition of a parent and the changing family structures. It highlights the notion that the meaning of the term family for each person is varied and it changes from one family to another. In this fluid and diverse state, it is clear that what is family can change for the same person throughout the course of their individual life. Different types of parenting styles are explored to highlight the subtle differences in parenting style and their impact. Childhood as a “social construction” and its consequent impact on parenting is discussed. Social influences on parenting are discussed and parenting of 21st century is highlighted by the key stressors like technological advances, values, immigration and related issues, and changes in social expectations.

INTRODUCTION

Life begins in the same way for all, much research prove the prenatally and after birth, multiple influences impact human behaviour and development. In a developing child’s life, the interaction of the people around is invaluable in shaping future citizens who are productive, socially aware, and creative in society. If we maintain that children are the future of the world, then the contribution of the parents who shape them and give them appropriate care, opportunities, love, support, and education is undeniable. The changing family structures and the impact of multiple factors on the family dynamics is evident

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all around in the UK and globally. The outbreak of Covid 19 brought to focus the role of parents and their impact on children's physical, psychological and social aspects of development. While the key role of any parent is not defined in any formal way most parents and children agree that the role of a parent is diverse and can encompass a role of a friend, disciplinarian, nurturer, teacher, guide, partner, and a carer.

Definition of a Parent

If the role of a parent is so wide and diverse then truly, it would be useful to understand the definition of a parent. The literature and studies around parents and their role are exemplified in many academic writeups and analysis however, the word parent itself has a deep meaning. The word "parent" comes from a Latin verb "parere" which means to bring forth to develop or educate. This meaning itself highlights how the role of a parent is intertwined with the definition of the word itself. Parenting is defined as "purposive activity that aimed at ensuring the survival and development of children" (Laird et al., 2003). All parents enable a child to learn and develop skills, emotions, beliefs, values, thinking, language, and social sensitivity to others which children aim to use in the wider society in interactions with peers, in school and with others. In some languages the complexity and inclusivity of the word parent is captured well. For example, in Hindi language the word "Abhibhavak" is used. In its root meaning, it implies someone who feels and understands same as you. This word itself is gender neutral and covers single parents, birth parents, foster parents, mother, or father. In Sanskrit, the word "Pitraou" is used. This word is an amalgamation of Mata (mother) and Pita (Father). While interacting in the early stages of a developing child, the genetic and environmental influences impact all. Positive beneficial aspects of early nurturing and social interaction by the parents have been noted by many research studies (Ermisch et.al.2012; Boivin 2013). Adverse environmental factors like poverty, deprivation and violence can pose another level of challenge to infants and parents (Barker et.al 2008; Cote et al, 2009).

As nurturing and purposeful activities to support children keep changing with the developmental stages and ages of children it is important to recognise that that no single definition of parent is sufficient to capture the role of a parents across the world in various cultures. The core role of a nurturer and the socio-cultural aspects determine to a large extent the kind of the parenting the parents have had themselves and what they take to their own parenting. Parents

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