Co-Parental Relationships Across Family Contexts

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What is Co-Parenting?

“Coparenting… refers to the ways that parents and/or parental figures relate to each other in the role of parent.”

- 4 components:
  - Agreement/disagreement on childrearing issues
  - Division of (child-related) labor
  - Support and undermining
  - Joint management of family interactions

- Why is Coparenting Important?

(Feinberg, 2003)
What Influences Coparenting Quality?

- Relationship / marital quality
- Higher parent education
- Race / ethnicity
- Parent mental health
- Child temperament & behavior
- Stress & support
- Father involvement
- Maternal gatekeeping
Co-Parenting Players

Parent

Parent

New baby

(McHale & Lindahl 2011)
Co-Parenting and the Transition to Parenthood

- Pre-birth relationship predicts co-parenting
  - Similarity in parenting beliefs
  - Triadic language for future family (versus dyadic language: “baby and me”)
- “Making room” for a third person
  - Avoiding competition for baby’s affection
- Early co-parenting behaviors set the stage for:
  - Later co-parenting
  - Child behavior problems

(Mangelsdorf, Laxman, & Jesse, 2011)
Maternal Gatekeeping

Control

High--------------------Low
- Family decision maker
- Dictates child-rearing and family management
- No control over fathers
- Cooperative or father directed parenting

Encouragement

High--------------------Low
- Welcoming towards father
- High degree of warmth
- Supportive of fathering
- No positivity towards fathers
- Absence of supportive behaviors
- Neutrality

Discouragement

High--------------------Low
- Overt criticism
- Negativity directed towards fathers
- Undermining and sarcastic attitudes
- No negativity towards fathers
- Absence of discouraging behaviors
Maternal Gatekeeping Types

Polarized Gatekeepers

• Traditional Gateblocker
  • High C, Low E, High D

• Facilitative Gateopener
  • High C, High E, Low D

• Passive Gatesnubber
  • Low C, Low E, High D

• Passive Gatewelcomer
  • Low C, High E, Low D

Ambivalent Gatekeepers

- Confused Gatemanager
  • High C, High E, High D

- Apathetic Gatemanager
  • High C, Low E, Low D

- Opinionated Gatemanager
  • Low C, High E, High D

- Invisible Gateignorer
  • Low C, Low E, Low D
Coparenting and Development

- **Young Children (2-5)**
  - Supportive coparenting interactions provide sense of family security
    - Foster prosocial behavior and emotional regulation
    - Undermining and hostile coparenting predict externalizing

- **Middle Childhood (6-12)**
  - Co-parental relationships model interactions for children
    - Less positive co-parenting and undermining are associated with conflicted peer interactions

- **Adolescence (13-18)**
  - Coparenting conflict predicts risky and antisocial behavior
Divorce: Establishing the Bi-Nuclear Family

“My former spouse and I communicate better now and both put our child first.”

“My experience is terrible. My ex-husband don’t help with nothing.”

(Ferraro, Davis, Petren, & Pasley, 2016)
The central question becomes one of how the binuclear family system can continue to function effectively as an alliance of common purpose in the presence of repeated, if not perpetual, conflict over discordant individual interests.” (Buehler & Trotter, 1990)
Overt and Covert Co-Parenting Behaviors

• Cooperation
  • Placing child needs above individual interests to work together

• Overt conflict
  • Conflictual face-to-face interactions

• Covert conflict
  • Triangulating the child, disparaging, seeking info
  • “stuck in the middle”

(Buehler & Trotter, 1990; Petren, Ferraro, Davis, & Pasley, 2017)
Re-Partnerships and Co-Parenting
Co-Parenting in Other Family Contexts

- Unmarried parents
- Multiple partner fertility
- Lesbian, gay, and transgender parents
- Grandparents and extended kinship systems
- Foster families
- Adoptive families
Thank you!

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