

Parental Strategies towards Criticism and Their Effects on Communication

Hudson Bissell

University of Kentucky

## Abstract

The purpose of this literary review is to discuss how parent-child relations are affected when a child goes through failure. The implications of a parent's attitude towards their offspring will be explored, along with the variables that alter communication patterns between the two parties. The research presented in this paper also shows trends between the emotions and reactions parents display to their children to how the child will develop and communicate later in life.

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Failure is something that everyone experiences. It shapes lives, and modifies the way people relate to each other. Having positive relations with friends and family is very helpful in times of failure, but many problems can arise. The way someone sees their own failure is often much different than how others may perceive the situation. This review will focus on failure, and the ways that parent-child communication is affected when the child has a setback.

### Parental Approach to Communication and Criticism

Parents affect their children in ways that they many times don't realize. Most choices that they make will alter the way that their offspring develop and view life. Fisak, et al. (2012), reinforce this by writing "Parent related variables are found to be important determinants of child well-being in academic, social, and psychosocial domains." Therefore, the way a child presents himself later in life is indirectly influenced by his parents.

There are many different approaches parents take to raising and communicating with their offspring. The sex and gender role of the parent usually plays a large part in how they will communicate. The article *Communicating Dissapointment* (Miller-Day, 2001) shows differing trends in communication between mothers and fathers:

"Results indicate that although parents are reported to be generally verbally direct in their expression of disappointment, mothers were reported using indirect verbal criticism and relying on nonverbal cues more often than fathers to communicate their disappointment."

Fathers, on the other hand, are shown to express disappointment more directly. This of course is subject to the gender role of each of parent. Adler and Proctor (2013) define gender

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roles as, “Socially approved ways that men and women are expected to behave”. In some situations, the mother may fill a more masculine role in parenting, or vice versa.

The way a parent criticizes their offspring plays a large role in the way that child develops. More indirect criticism is shown to produce more negative results. Miller-Day (2001) follows up on this with his research, showing: “For both parents, the greater the use of indirect criticism, the more likely the child would report feeling out of control of his or her life.”

### Nonverbal Communication and Emotional Contagion

Not all communication is directed towards the child, but still can translate that way. As Adler & Proctor (2013) explain in the communication textbook *Looking Out, Looking In*, “we cannot not communicate”. Every attitude and emotion that a parent displays around their child can be interpreted in a wide range of ways. This is a phenomenon known by communication scholars as emotional contagion, and is defined by Adler & Proctor as “The process by which emotions are transferred from one person to another”. This can be negative or positive. (Adler & Proctor, 2013)

There is a substantial amount of research to support this phenomenon. Tafoya and Hamilton (2012) support this, stating “parents who verbally aggress against their children are more likely to produce children who are egocentric and strive to assert their will on their siblings. ...In turn, the egocentric assertion of power should fuel hostility, with hostility driving verbal aggressiveness.” This implies that a parent’s anger is causing a chain reaction- not only affecting one of their children, but all of them.

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On the other hand, a parent can produce positive emotions in their children. Tafoya and Hamilton's research shows that "parents who are close to their children are more likely to produce children who are empathic. In turn, empathy should enable attachment in the form of a strong bond between siblings (Shortt & Gottman, 1997), with this attachment driving verbal collaborativeness." This research shows that both positive and negative emotions displayed by the parent transfer not only to the child, but also to those that the children communicate with.

### Parental Response in Times of Dissappointment

In a recent study by Shapiro, et al. (2013), parents were asked questions regarding their child's wellbeing, while their responses were recorded. They specified that "...when evaluating their child, parents are inclined to ascribe the cause of their child's achievements to the child's ability (see Ryktonen et al. 2005) and setbacks to teachers or peers (Miller et al. 2002). (Shapiro et al. (2013)

This could possibly lead to many issues. If a parent is unwilling to take responsibility for their child's failure, they may not see their own flaws in how they raise their child. Parents do not always see the negative outcomes of their actions, and this can lead to relational issues when they criticize their child. Miller-Day (2001) supports with his research in parenting, inferring:

"...coercive strategies are counterproductive for encouraging long-term features of social competence in children (Hoffman, 1980; Peterson & Zill, 1986). Coercive strategies tend to minimize and discourage internalization of, or commitment to, parents' perspectives and the tendency to become self-efficacious, or self-responsible for their own actions."

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In other words, children are less likely to agree with a parent's viewpoints when that parent intimidates them. This relates to the study conducted by Shapiro et al. (2013), who also show that "parents who do perceive their child's setback as controllable will be more likely to report using punishment". Therefore, a parent that believes they are in control of their child's wellbeing will more likely respond to a child's failure with negative feedback.

Beck and Ledbetter (2013) show from their studies in family conflict that "high conversation orientation tends to be associated with prosocial conflict communication behavior". This shows how positive communication between family members will lead to better results when there is an issue between one or more members of the family.

### Research Limitations and Conclusion

The studies presented in this review provide a large amount of research to explain the outcomes of a parenting strategies towards criticizing their children and the resulting effects due to emotional contagion, verbal and nonverbal communication. The literature studied lacked extensive data regarding how the children reacted to their parent's behavior during different stages of life, and how it would change the way that they communicated afterwards.

The purpose of this literary review was to discuss parent-child relations when a child goes through failure. This is a relevant topic that explains why many people develop and communicate the way they do. Having an understanding of this research could prove very useful in improving communication skills as a parent or child, and preventing the issues that arise when experiencing failure.

References

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