The Role of the Father in Child Development

With Focus on The Early Years
Outline

• Forming attachments
• Individual differences
• Relative importance
• Socialisation
• The ‘essential’ father
• Family context
• Together and apart
Becoming attached

• How?

• To Whom?
Babies can’t approach or hold on--but they can cry!
Adults respond instinctively to cries.
Crying elicits responses that link features of the adult with positive feelings of relief, and confidence in the person’s reliability.
To Whom?
Babies form attachments to both parents at the same time if both are attentive even when one is more involved.
Individual Differences
Degree of trust varies depending on sensitivity, affecting security of attachment
No intrinsic differences in parenting ability -- Expectations and greater involvement build maternal skills
Make the mother-child tie stronger and more influential.
Socialisation

• Deliberate efforts to shape children’s behaviour

• Warmth and Control
Both relationships affect adjustment. Parents are the most important psychological influences.
Are There ‘Essential’ Differences Between Mothers and Fathers Conditioned by Their Gender?
• Gender or Role?
• Cultural Variability?
• Does it Matter?
Fathers have positive effects when they are responsive, committed, caring, and involved. Tendencies to rough-house or appear masculine do not affect children’s adjustment.
Amount of time together is less important than the range of shared activities and contexts. Major risk when parents don’t live together.
Effects can be positive or negative. Mothers and fathers affect children whether or not they live together.
In addition to relationships with parents, interaction between parents is influential.
Quality of relationship between parents at least as important as quality of relationships with children—whether or not the parents live together.
Children in one-parent families are at risk because relationships with parents are attenuated, they are exposed to conflict, inadequately supported, and/or economically stressed.
Summary

• Father- (and mother-) infant relationships emerge together.
• They affect children in similar ways.
• Effects can be positive or negative.
• Direct and indirect.
• Relationships change.
• Mothers and fathers affect children whether or not they live together.
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• *Kind und Familie: Untersuchungen der Wechselbeziehungen des Kindes mit seiner Familie* ("Child and family: Studies on the interactions of the child with his family"). Fischer, Jena 1937.