

What Can We Do for the Parents? How Can a Society Help Future Parents Support and Care for Their Children in the Best Possible Way?

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ABSTRACT

Becoming a parent is one of the most life-changing experiences that has long-lasting consequences for not only the individual who has taken on this new role but also the child and, consequently, the whole society. There is no formal education for being a parent, and some people naturally have more skills and feel more confident. For some people, it could be intimidating to imagine how they will handle parenting. Before outlining how we can help parents, we must gain some understanding of the complex dynamics of parenting. First, contemporary changes in parenting are described; second, parental responsibility, parental competence, and positive parenting are defined, and we briefly describe what determines parenting and parental behaviour. Then, a list of possible ways to support parents as individuals and their living conditions is provided.

KEYWORDS

parental responsibility, parental competence, positive parenting, support, parenting programmes

1. Introduction

1.1. Contemporary Changes in Parenting and Parental Behaviour

Changes in the society and living conditions during the last half of the century¹ triggered changes in expectations and experiences of what parenting should look like.² Over the past few decades, the maternal role as a primary carer has also changed

1 Examples include decades of decreased rates of fertility and marriage, increased rates of divorce and number of single-parent households, increase in unmarried or divorced families, increase in single and same-sex parents, decrease in family stability and family living arrangements, increase in working mothers, increase in the number of children by family, and older age of childbearing.

2 Ulferts, 2020, pp. 8–9.

Marina MERKAŠ – Lana BATINIĆ (2025) 'What Can We Do for the Parents? How Can a Society Help Future Parents Support and Care for Their Children in the Best Possible Way?' in Bernadett RAPOSA – Balázs Péter HÁMORNIK (eds.) *Social and Personality Development in Childhood*. Miskolc–Budapest: Central European Academic Publishing. pp. 309–332. https://doi.org/10.71009/2025.brbph.sapdic_12



due to women's increased economic roles, declining fertility rates, implementation of paternity leaves in many countries, and more paternal involvement in family duties and childcare.³ However, mothering is still different from fathering despite the shift in gender and parental roles over time,⁴ and mothers continue to predominantly assume caregiving within the household.⁵ More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a deep impact on family dynamics, relationships, and routine.⁶ As of writing this chapter, the war in Ukraine and migration trends bring new challenges for parents, and the policies and services of different countries since war and migration have also had a significant effect on parenting.^{7,8} In the digital age, rapid development of technology contributed to changes in family life and modified the way parents and children communicate and interact more than ever.⁹ Parents today seek advice and are more inclined to look for support and help online before visiting a professional office or asking for help from family members or neighbours. Media content can include misinformation and be misleading because a mass of information is shared by people who are not parenting experts. It seems impossible to escape this fast information contamination and public disputes about how parenting should look like. To counterbalance such media and public debates, evidence-based information on parenting should be provided.

All previously noted changes are likely related to the trend of intensive or over-involved parenting,¹⁰ especially among (upper) middle class parents. The evolution of intensive parenting is almost certainly a parental attempt to manage today's uncertainty.¹¹ Modern society has evolved into a risk-averse society because of the uncertainty of everyday living.¹² This impression of children's safety and vulnerability is influenced by the media, which made parents more vigilant about potential threats and fuelled their ongoing need to evaluate and manage risks in all facets of their children's lives.¹³ Moreover, because of the stronger individualism of parental responsibility due to the feeling of disconnection from extended family and community, parents are left with growing concerns about their ability and power to ensure their children's well-being and success.¹⁴ This intensive parenting approach is usually well intended but generally hinders children's development of autonomy and self-reliance.

3 Ibid.

4 Endendijk et al., 2016, pp. 3–4.

5 García Román and Cortina, 2016, p. 921.

6 Weeland, Keijsers and Branje, 2021.

7 Eltanamly et al., 2021, p. 153.

8 Bornstein, Bohr and Hamel, 2020.

9 Livingstone and Blum-Ross, 2020, pp. 29–58.

10 LeMoyné and Buchanan, 2011, pp. 399–418.

11 Ulferts, 2020.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

The literature has several variations and modern terms for such parenting, such as “concerted-cultivating parenting”,^{15,16} “helicopter parenting”,^{17,18,19,20} “tiger parenting”,^{21,22,23,24} “bulldozer parenting”,²⁵ “lawnmower parenting”,^{26,27} and “snowplough parenting”.^{28,29} Research using the dimensional approach to parenting describes, for example, intrusive,³⁰ overprotective,³¹ and overinvolved³² parenting. All these terms describe parenting that involves excessive intervention in and control of a child’s life; although there are slight differences, all these variations can be summed up as overparenting.^{33,34} Overparenting is intrusive, overcontrolling, and overly assertive, and it involves developmentally inappropriate parental involvement or behaviour towards children to promote children’s achievement; remove obstacles or difficulties; and ensure happiness, success, and well-being.^{35,36}

Although parenting behaviours have evolved, classic parenting styles and dimensions remain relevant.³⁷ Diane Baumrind,³⁸ the pioneer of parenting styles, emphasised control as a crucial parental feature, identifying three models: authoritarian

15 Carolan and Wasserman, 2015, pp. 168–169.

16 These parents take an active role in their children’s education and development by involving them in various extracurricular activities; having extensive conversations with their children, usually about school; and being overly involved in school, asking for extra attention from teachers.

17 Padilla-Walker and Nelson, 2012, pp. 1177–1178.

18 İlgar, 2021, pp. 143–145.

19 Somers and Settle, 2010, pp. 18–20.

20 These parents are extremely overprotective and hovering towards children, constantly monitor their children’s activities, are overinvolved in children’s interactions and activities, and are overprotective and controlling regarding decision-making; thus, the children usually lack independence and responsibility for their own choices.

21 These parents are strict and demanding and push their children to achieve high levels of academic success and excellence in extracurricular activities, often at the expense of other aspects of life, such as play and socialisation; they practice strict discipline, have high expectations, focus on academic excellence, limit free time, and practice high parental control.

22 Chua, 2011, pp. 3–4.

23 Juang, Qin and Park, 2013, p. 1.

24 Kim et al., 2013, pp. 7–8.

25 Sharma and Sarna, 2018, p. 13.

26 Locke, Campbell and Kavanagh, 2012, p. 250.

27 Bristow, 2023, pp. 267–290.

28 Malley-Morrison, 2009.

29 This refers to an overprotective and overly involved style of parenting where parents attempt to clear all obstacles and challenges from their child’s life.

30 Taylor et al., 2013, pp. 1145–1146.

31 Thomasgard and Metz, 1993, pp. 67–68.

32 Ulferts, 2020, pp. 17.

33 Locke, Campbell and Kavanagh, 2012, pp. 25–261.

34 Munich and Munich, 2009.

35 Segrin et al., 2012, pp. 237–252.

36 Segrin et al., 2013, pp. 569–595.

37 Ulferts, 2020, pp. 24–26.

38 Baumrind, 1967, pp. 43–88.

(rigid and strict), authoritative (democratically consistent), and permissive. Eleanor Emmons Maccoby and John Martin³⁹ introduced the term demandingness instead of control and added parental warmth. Combining these dimensions resulted in today's four parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and neglecting.⁴⁰ Research consistently supports the positive impact of authoritative parenting on child development.⁴¹

1.2. Raising Children in the Digital Age

In the digital age, parents feel the need to monitor and manage children's device and media use. Parental mediation refers to the involvement of parents or caregivers in managing and guiding their children's use of media and technology.⁴² The primary goal of parental mediation is to ensure that children have a safe and beneficial media experience while also promoting their media literacy and critical thinking skills. Parents use different strategies of mediation.^{43,44,45} Parental restrictions, prohibitions, or insistence on close parental supervision are examples of restrictive mediation.⁴⁶ Enabling mediation involves parents engaging in proactive strategies such as talking to their children about their online activities and encouraging them while also providing safety advice. It also includes actions that may appear restrictive (e.g. the use of technical controls and parental monitoring) but are better understood as creating a safe environment to encourage children's positive use of the internet.⁴⁷ Parental mediation can vary depending on the age and maturity of the child.

Research showed how technology can disrupt parenting, namely by phubbing and sharenting.⁴⁸ Parental phubbing specifically pertains to parents' acts of paying more attention to their smartphones or other electronic devices than to their children, particularly during face-to-face social interactions. Parental phubbing is associated with "technoference", which, in the context of parenting, refers to everyday intrusions and interruptions of parent-child face-to-face interactions due to parents' technology devices, most often cell phones or smartphones.⁴⁹ Research shows that this act negatively affects parenting and child development. "Sharenting"⁵⁰ refers to the practice of parents sharing information, pictures, and updates about their children

39 Maccoby and Martin, 1983, pp. 1–101.

40 The authoritarian style is characterised by low warmth and high demandingness, authoritative style with high warmth and high demandingness, permissive style with low demandingness and high warmth, and neglecting style with low warmth and low demandingness.

41 Darling and Steinberg, 1993, p. 487; Berk, 2018, p. 283.

42 Livingstone and Helsper, 2008.

43 Kotrla Topić, Perić Pavišić and Merkaš, 2023, pp. 1–19.

44 Livingstone and Byrne, 2018, pp. 19–30.

45 Valkenburg et al., 2013, pp. 445–469.

46 Livingstone and Byrne, 2018, pp. 19–30.

47 Ibid.

48 Burns and Gottschalk, 2019, pp. 82–85, pp. 103–113.

49 McDaniel and Coyne, 2016, pp. 85–98.

50 Cataldo et al., 2022, pp. 1–12.

on social media platforms and other online spaces. While sharenting can be a way for parents to connect with friends and family, seek advice, and celebrate their children's achievements, it also raises privacy and ethical concerns.

2. Who Is a Parent, and What Is Parental Responsibility?

A parent is responsible for children's upbringing, education, and property and, in European Union (EU) countries, has the right to represent children legally.⁵¹ A married father and a mother both have automatic parental responsibility in all EU countries.⁵² Depending on the country, different laws govern which obligations and rights an unmarried father is entitled to.⁵³ In most countries, parents have an 18-year obligation to take care of a child.⁵⁴

According to Art. 18 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child,⁵⁵ three components make up a parent's obligation to raise a child.⁵⁶ First, the obligation must be shared equally and agreed upon by both parents. Second, parents or other carers are largely held accountable. Third, the obligation must be given with the child's best interests as the primary consideration. The convention⁵⁷ postulates that parents are the primary persons responsible for the development of children, that they have parental responsibility for children, and that they must behave in the best interest of the child. Legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for a child, have parental responsibility similar to parents. Parental responsibility can be described as the legal right to participate in decisions that affect a child's life, such as those involving his or her education, health, and any medical care he or she may get. The focus is on the parents' duties towards their children; that is, parents must behave dutifully towards their children, and childcare belongs to parents.⁵⁸ In sum, parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for a child have legal and moral obligations and duties towards children, which are called responsibilities. In this context, parents may be described as authorities, providers, caregivers, protectors, and socialisers.⁵⁹ The specific definition and general scope of parental responsibility include providing for and ensuring the child's needs, physical and emotional safety,

51 European Union, 2023.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 UNICEF, 2023.

55 United Nations, 1989, p. 5. States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.

56 Ruggiero, 2022, pp. 153–163.

57 UNICEF, 2023.

58 Eekelaar, 1991, pp. 37–50.

59 Pagliocca et al., 1995, pp. 437–457.

education, healthcare, emotional support and nurturing, financial support, stability, and consistency, as well as making legal decisions for the child and guiding the child's cultural and religious upbringing.⁶⁰

However, “responsibility” refers to a function that should be carried out by the parent rather than by another entity⁶¹ and not to how the parent really acts towards his child. Ultimately, parental responsibility is grounded in the principle that parents have a duty to act in the best interests of their child and ensuring their safety, well-being, and development into responsible and well-adjusted individuals. This exact principle also guides lawyers in the domain of child protection who aspire to have parents take on their responsibilities to meet the needs and uphold the rights of children and eventually ensure positive child development and well-being. Since the outcomes of child protection cases have a significant impact on the life of children and their families, lawyers often must put additional effort to ensure that the legal process takes place and necessary decisions are made with due caution and sensitivity.⁶² This effort of lawyers can be seen in actions such as participating in open and democratic discussions with children, assisting in their legal education, establishing a mutual understanding with all participants in the legal process of child protection involvement, and making sure there are adaptable chances for involvement.⁶³ Hence, there are ample opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration between psychologists and lawyers.

The explicit connection between law and psychology in the context of children's well-being can be depicted as follows. The law establishes rules and regulations that define parental responsibilities and rights. It sets the guidelines for custody, visitation, child support, and various legal aspects of parenting. This legal framework ensures that parents have specific obligations and that children have certain rights under the law. Psychology, on the other hand, plays a critical role in understanding the psychological needs of children. It delves into the emotional, cognitive, and social aspects of a child's development. Psychologists can assess and address issues such as emotional well-being, trauma, behaviour, and overall mental health. They provide insights into how different parenting approaches can impact a child's well-being. When we combine these two disciplines, an interdisciplinary approach emerges. It means that legal decisions related to child custody, support, and visitation are made with a deep understanding of the psychological needs and well-being of the children involved. By considering psychological factors alongside legal considerations, we can create more holistic and child-centred solutions. The goal of this interdisciplinary connection is to ensure that children receive the care, support, and protection they need for their optimal development and happiness. This means that legal decisions are not made in isolation but are informed by psychological insights. This also

60 European Union, 2023.

61 Eekelaar, 1991, pp. 37–50.

62 Walsh and Douglas, 2012, pp. 181–211.

63 Horsfall, 2013, pp. 429–444.

acknowledges that the well-being of children goes beyond just meeting their basic needs; it includes their emotional and psychological health, which can significantly impact their future well-being. In conclusion, when psychology and law work together to promote children's well-being, a thorough and child-centred strategy is produced, with legal choices being based on a thorough comprehension of the psychological requirements of children to support their best possible growth and well-being.

In this context, it can be useful for lawyers to gain specific knowledge about parenting, which will be discussed further.

3. What Are Parental Competence and Positive Parenting?

Just because someone has parental responsibility legally and is authorised as a “parent” does not imply that they are a loving and caring parent, or that he or she acts in this way or behaves in the best interest of the child. Being a loving and caring parent means to practice positive parenting. According to the Council of Europe, *positive parenting* involves parental behaviour based on the best interests of the child that is nurturing, empowering, non-violent, and provides recognition and guidance, which involves setting of boundaries to enable the full development of the child.⁶⁴ Parents should give their children the following: “nurture” by meeting the children’s need for affection, warmth, and security; “structure and guidance” by giving the children a sense of security, predictable routine, and necessary boundaries; “recognition” by paying attention to the children and valuing them as persons; “empowerment” by boosting the children’s sense of competence and personal control; and “a non-violent upbringing” by excluding all corporal or psychological punishment because of children’s rights to respect for their bodily integrity and human dignity.⁶⁵ These parental behaviours sum up the authoritative parenting style.

To be able to practice positive parenting, one must have parental competencies. *Parental competence* is defined by its impacts, and although it has been studied from several angles, all of them converge on at least three key criteria.⁶⁶ The first is that, regardless of the developmental stage of the child, warmth, acceptance, and sensitivity to children’s basic needs; social cues; and what is adequately expected for a given child’s developmental level appear to be universal components of successful parenting. However, the ability to be sensitive does not define or guarantee parental competence because it must be put into practise for the care to be regarded as competent. Parenting that is sensitively attuned to children’s capabilities and their developmental tasks promotes developmental outcomes that are thought to be important: emotional security, behavioural independence, social competence, and intellectual

64 Council of Europe, 2006, Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states on policy to support positive parenting (Rec(2006)19), sec 1.

65 Ibid.

66 Teti and Candelaria, 2002, pp. 149–180.

achievement.⁶⁷ The second criterion is that strict, harsh, critical, and coercive parenting is universally recognised as being bad for children. Third, although parental participation is not a good indicator of parenting ability on its own, it is probably better than not being involved at all. Therefore, the level and consistency of parental participation in a child's life and upbringing matters.

We can highlight the intersection of law and psychology when it comes to the well-being of children, specifically in the context of fulfilling parental responsibilities and addressing psychological needs. This intersection can be seen as an interdisciplinary connection where legal and psychological aspects come together to promote the overall well-being of children. In this interdisciplinary connection, the law provides a framework for defining and enforcing parental responsibilities and rights, while psychology plays a crucial role in understanding and addressing the psychological needs and well-being of children. By integrating these two disciplines, we can better ensure that children receive the necessary care, support, and protection they need for their optimal development and well-being.

4. What Determines Parenting and Parental Behaviour?

Belsky's comprehensive process model,⁶⁸ which considers various factors such as developmental history, personality, marital relations, work, social network, and child characteristics, sheds light on parenting dynamics. For instance, one's developmental history, including experiences such as divorce⁶⁹ or parental conflicts⁷⁰ during upbringing, has a lasting impact on one's adult intimate relationships and own families. People mainly learn to form close bonds in their families of origin, and based on their early experiences with parents, they develop an inner working model of their self and of others.^{71,72} Parental divorce can affect the nature of the parent-child relationship, disrupting the attachment between the child and parents, which then negatively affects intimate relationships.⁷³ Secure attachment to parents in childhood tends to translate into more sensitive and emotionally warm parenting in adulthood.⁷⁴

Personality traits also play a crucial role. Parents with high extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness tend to provide warmer and more organised parenting.⁷⁵ Conversely, those with elevated levels of neuroticism may adopt an

67 Belsky, Robins and Gamble, 1984, p. 254.

68 Belsky, 1984, pp. 83–96.

69 Amato and Cheadle, 2005, pp. 191–195.

70 Amato, Loomis and Booth, 1995, pp. 895–896.

71 Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991, pp. 226–263.

72 Secure, preoccupied, dismissive, and fearful attachment styles emerge from the model of self, which can be positive or negative, and the model of others (positive or negative).

73 Crowell, Treboux, and Brockmeyer, 2009, cited in Mustonen et al., 2011, p. 616.

74 van IJzendoorn, 1995, pp. 387–389.

75 Prinzie et al., 2009, pp. 351–362.

authoritarian style and become overly protective.⁷⁶ Furthermore, studies indicate that higher parental self-efficacy^{77,78} is linked to a nurturing and supportive child-rearing environment.⁷⁹

The transition to parenthood⁸⁰ can be challenging for a partner relationship as parents must adjust to their new roles and responsibilities, which can affect the quality of their relationship.⁸¹ Concerning work, schedules that do not align well with family life, such as evening or weekend work (especially working Sundays),⁸² shift work, and excessive overtime, are linked to stress related to balancing work and family.⁸³ This conflict can arise from time constraints, constant tension, fatigue, or ineffective time management,⁸⁴ with accumulated overtime hours adding strain to marital relationships.⁸⁵ Furthermore, absence or inadequacy of social support can jeopardise parents' well-being and lead to potentially inappropriate parenting practices.⁸⁶

Before providing recommendations for supporting parents, it is essential to emphasise the pivotal role of children in the dynamics of parenting. Research, influenced by Bell's⁸⁷ ground-breaking work on socialisation effects, has revealed that children significantly impact their parents and parenting behaviours. Factors such as the child's age, gender, and temperament⁸⁸ have a profound influence on how parents interact with them.⁸⁹ Parenting differs when dealing with a challenging versus an easy-going child or when caring for a toddler compared to an adolescent. Furthermore, children themselves interpret and respond to parenting behaviours, and their perceptions change as they age and develop. They actively participate in the parenting process; for instance, adolescents' willingness to disclose information to their parents can affect parental knowledge and subsequently reduce problem behaviours over time.^{90,91} In essence, every child is unique and interprets parental actions in their own way. This relationship is reciprocal and evolves as both the parents and child grow older. It is crucial to bear in mind that not all parents, children, and families will respond favourably to a one-size-fits-all approach to support.

76 Kendler, Shami and MacLean, 1997, pp. 549–562.

77 This refers to the caregiver's or parent's confidence in their ability to raise children effectively and successfully.

78 Jones and Prinz, 2005, pp. 341–363.

79 Wittkowski et al., 2017, p. 2961.

80 Doss and Rhoades, 2017, pp. 25–28.

81 Kluwer, 2010, p. 106.

82 Batinić, 2014, pp. 55–78.

83 Barnett, 1998, cited in Alexander and Baxter, 2005, p. 19.

84 Čudina-Obradović and Obradović, 2006, p. 172.

85 Fursman, 2009, pp. 55–67.

86 Belsky and Jafee, 2015, cited in Nunes et al., 2009, p. 3.

87 Bell, 1968, p. 81.

88 Bornstein, 2002, pp. 3–43.

89 Rodrigo, Byrne and Rodríguez, 2014, pp. 2173–2196.

90 Stattin and Kerr, 2000, pp. 1072–1085.

91 Willoughby and Hamza, 2011, pp. 463–477.

Parenting exists within a complex ecological framework.⁹² To support parents in becoming responsible, positive, and competent caregivers, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model⁹³ places parents at the centre, primarily engaging with the family microsystem. This microsystem includes factors within the family, such as the marital relationship, child characteristics and behaviours, and parental mental health. In today's digital age, we also recognise virtual microsystems as significant contexts for parental engagement,⁹⁴ according to the neo-ecological theory.⁹⁵ Moving outward, mesosystemic influences involve interactions between parents and other microsystems, such as the child's school, parents' workplace, and healthcare systems. Beyond this, the exosystem encompasses more distant influences on parenting, including economic and political systems, government policies, and mass media. For example, a healthy economy with ample job opportunities and decent wages benefits parents and parenting, while economic hardship, including poverty and financial struggles, poses risks to positive parenting.⁹⁶ The macrosystem, the largest layer, represents cultural ideologies and values. While there are cultural variations in parenting practices related to parental ethnotheories,^{97,98} there are also shared global parenting goals.⁹⁹ Parents universally desire their children to survive, thrive, respect adults, socialise effectively, succeed in adulthood, and receive education. They generally believe in the negative consequences of overly harsh parenting. However, cultural differences exist in how these goals are pursued.¹⁰⁰ Lastly, the chronosystem acknowledges that diverse environmental and historical influences on parenting may occur at various time points.

5. Support for Parents

The challenge today is not that the evidence is insufficient to show the effects of parenting, but rather that evidence has revealed a reality that is far more complex than critics expected or that writers can convey in most popular media outlets.¹⁰¹ The same level of education and guidance does not need to be provided to all parents.¹⁰² Public service announcements, one-time community seminars, and printed or online resources such as newsletters and parenting articles that teach fundamental knowledge about child development and parenting techniques are a few examples of ways to

92 Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2007, pp. 793–828.

93 Ibid.

94 Navarro and Tudge, 2023, pp. 19338–19354.

95 Ibid.

96 Batinić, Bošnjaković and Merkaš, 2018, pp. 245–265.

97 The ethnotheories represent shared beliefs regarding the objectives of child development and the methods of socialisation that can achieve these objectives defined by the cultural setting.

98 Greenfield and Keller, 2004, p. 546.

99 Teti et al., 2017.

100 Ibid.

101 Collins et al., 2022, pp. 89–116.

102 Teti et al., 2017, pp. 1–34.

provide support. The literature advocates that parenting approaches and their impact vary because parenting is embedded in history, modernisation, and the wider social context; parents depend on social and economic resources in their functioning and their family's functioning; parenting is a “family-centred process”,¹⁰³ bidirectional in nature between a child and a parent; and the parent's and child's characteristics impact parenting. ‘Given the systematic nature of parenting’ ecology, a single problem or policy has the potential to benefit parents, even if it is a distal factor’.¹⁰⁴ However, additional elements may quickly outweigh the advantages of a single constructive improvement. Therefore, it makes sense to approach the topic of parenting support from a comprehensive and systematic perspective. This also involves respecting the notion that social support encompasses various types of assistance, such as instrumental (e.g. financial help or support with everyday chores), informational (e.g. advice and feedback on personal and family matters), and emotional (e.g. empathy and expressions of care).¹⁰⁵ Drawing on the recent literature about supporting parenting,^{106,107} implications for policies and support are discussed next, considering an evidence-based and culturally sensitive framework of parenting when applied in real life.

5.1. Individual-Level Factors: Helping Parents Thrive as Individuals

Clear and strong evidence from the literature confirms that *parents' psychological distress* and *parents' relationship problems with their partner or spouse* are two proximal determinants that seem to have the strongest link to and pose risk factors for positive and competent parenting.¹⁰⁸ “Distress” refers to the triad of depression, anxiety, and stress that negatively affects positive and competent parenting. When parents are distressed and have marital problems, parenting worsens. Thus, the aim of support for parents should be to strengthen them as individuals so they can face the challenges of parenting and practice positive parenting.

Here is a list of different specific and general ways to support current and future parents, with the aim of strengthening them as individuals who will have better well-being, better parental competencies, and ability to practice positive parenting.

- Develop and implement high-quality, easily accessible parenting education programmes: Offer accessible and affordable parenting education programmes by experts covering child development, discipline, communication, parental mediation, overparenting, co-parenting, and stress management. These programmes can be conducted in schools, community centres, and online, and they should be easily accessible to parents. Regulate these high-quality

103 Ulferts, 2020, pp. 7–40.

104 Teti et al., 2017, p. 5.

105 Ulferts, 2020, pp. 7–40.

106 Teti et al., 2017, pp. 1–34.

107 Ulferts, 2020, pp. 7–40.

108 Teti et al., 2017, pp. 1–34.

programmes for practical, guided training and knowledge transfer, involving teachers, kindergartens, and schools. Incorporate evidence-based parental education into high school and college curricula for both genders. Develop and implement parenting interventions that enhance parenting skills and relationships, benefiting children’s emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and health outcomes.¹⁰⁹ These interventions are essential for EU member states to support families.¹¹⁰ Effective parent-training programmes include increasing positive parent-child interactions and emotional communication skills, teaching parents to use time out and the importance of parenting consistency, and requiring parents to practice new skills with their children during parent training sessions.¹¹¹ It is also important to emphasise the co-parenting skills and relationship.

- Support the creation of parent support groups, parental support networks, and parenting hotlines: Facilitate support groups where parents can connect with others who face similar challenges. These groups can provide a sense of community, share experiences, and offer emotional support. Encourage the formation of parental support networks, such as parent-teacher associations and neighbourhood groups that facilitate peer support and community engagement. Establish helplines or hotlines staffed by trained professionals who can provide advice, guidance, and emotional support to parents facing challenges or seeking information.
- Develop and install high-quality and easily accessible mental health services, counselling services, and online mental health support: Offer counselling services to parents who may be dealing with issues such as substance abuse, domestic violence, or mental health issues.
- Develop and implement prenatal and postnatal support: Ensure expectant parents receive comprehensive prenatal care, including healthcare access, childbirth education, and postnatal resources, as well as breastfeeding support. Encourage fathers to participate in obstetric and paediatric visits. Implement home visiting programmes for guidance and support, especially for families with young children.
- Enable access to educational resources and technology: Ensure parents can access parenting resources, including books, articles, online materials, and community services. Promote digital literacy and technological access for parenting information. Establish programmes to support high school completion, college enrolment, and job training, particularly for parents facing social inequalities.

109 Gardner and Leijten, 2017, pp. 99–104.

110 European Commission, 2019, Positive Parenting Interventions, p. 2.

111 Kaminski et al., 2008, pp. 567–588.

5.2. Contextual and Social-Level Factors: Policies, Services, and Programmes

Designing approaches and policies that are strength- and community-based and family-centred as well as permit individualised support for all families¹¹² should be our goal in the future. Provide a continuum of parenting services across all communities, starting with preventative strategies and incorporating strategies that have been tailored for parents who are at risk from proximal or distal influences.^{113,114,115}

Here is a list of different specific and general ways to support current and future parents, with the aim of making their living environment supportive and nurturing.

- *Develop and implement child and family services:* Enhance child protective services and family support agencies to aid families facing challenges such as substance abuse and domestic violence. Establish community centres for resource access, workshops, and family activities. Provide respite care for parents of children with special needs or those having high stress levels. Promote community resources such as family support centres and gardens for education, social support, and recreation. Strengthen local support in childcare, schools, family centres, parks, and organised activities, especially in disadvantaged areas. Ensure services are accessible in frequently visited places such as hospitals, schools, churches, and community centres.
- *Develop and implement parent and family friendly policies:* Develop policies and programmes that are inclusive and culturally sensitive, recognising the diverse needs of families from various backgrounds and communities. Encourage flexible work policies and parental leave options that allow parents to better balance their career and family responsibilities (e.g. regular work schedule, standardised flexible work hours, telecommuting options, and parental leave for both parents). Develop and implement labour market and welfare policies that mitigate family stress and enhance family bonding (e.g. paid leave). Ensure that insurance policies cover two-generation integrated services and permit the participation of additional carers, such grandparents, in the support network through legislation.
- *Launch public awareness campaigns:* Launch public awareness campaigns about support for parents, investment in child well-being, and available resources. Reduce stigma and encourage participation in evidence-based parent training with campaigns highlighting parenting's value for all. Promote nurturing, communicative, and non-violent discipline methods in media. Advocate for family-supportive policies. Disseminate parenting information through campaigns, printed materials, and school/community events. Implement policies for distributing parenting resources at obstetrics/gynaecology and paediatric offices. Support efforts to expand proven parent-training programmes for parents facing depression or relationship and marital problems.

112 Ulferts, 2020, pp. 7–40.

113 Freymond and Cameron, 2006, 3–318.

114 Teti et al., 2017, pp. 1–34.

115 Cameron, Coady and Adams, 2007, pp. 1–368.

- *Develop and implement high-quality education and healthcare services for children:* Ensure equitable access to quality education for all children, regardless of socioeconomic status. Provide affordable, safe, and high-quality childcare to support working parents and their children. Offer subsidised childcare services for families facing work-family balance challenges. Enhance school-family relationships and manage parental involvement. Expand access to affordable, high-quality childcare for babies and young children, and summer programmes for school-aged children, including those with special needs and during non-traditional hours.
- *Provide professional training:* Train educators, healthcare providers, and social workers to identify parental stress and challenges, offering referrals and assistance. Provide cultural sensitivity training for professionals working with diverse families. Implement parenting knowledge, risk, and psychopathology screenings at obstetrics/gynaecology and paediatric offices, schools, and kindergartens. Educate paediatric staff and teachers on interpreting and prioritising screening results for appropriate community service referrals.
- *Provide financial support:* Ensure parental access to financial assistance programmes (e.g. child support, food, housing) to reduce financial stress, but condition it on the attendance of parenting programmes. Increase economic support through cash transfers to low-income families and improve employment opportunities by raising the minimum wage. Expand tax credit for low-income families and offer paid family and sick leave. Enhance paid parental leave for childbirth and provide state-wide support for unemployed worker retraining and affordable job training. Ensure affordable healthcare for preventive and timely medical care. Expand day-care tax credits and simplify the application process to help families afford high-quality childcare.
- *Collect data:* Invest in research and data collection to better understand the needs of parents and children and to inform evidence-based policies and programmes.

5.3. How Can Lawyers Support Parents?

Lawyers can assist parents in various legal matters and situations, ensuring that their rights are protected and that they are able to fulfil their responsibilities as parents. Here are some ways in which lawyers can help parents:^{116,117,118,119,120}

- *Legal advice and consultation:* Lawyers can offer legal advice to parents on various family law issues, including divorce,¹²¹ child custody, child support, and property division. Lawyers can educate parents about their legal rights and responsibilities, helping them make informed decisions regarding their family and

116 Gottlieb and Pital, 2007, pp. 17–35.

117 Gottlieb, 2005, pp. 1263–1276.

118 Bala, Hebert and Birnbaum, 2017, pp. 557–589.

119 Kelly and Kisthardt, 2009, pp. 1401–1420.

120 Spinak, 2007, pp. 393–411.

121 Pruett and Jackson, 1999, pp. 283–310.

- children.¹²² Lawyers can navigate various legal processes, ensuring that parents meet deadlines, file the necessary paperwork, and adhere to legal requirements.
- *Drafting of legal documents*: Lawyers can draft legal documents, such as parenting plans, custody agreements, guardianship designations to ensure that their children are cared for in the event of their death or incapacitation, prenuptial agreements, and wills, to ensure that the legal aspects of parenting and family matters are properly addressed.
 - *Legal representation*: Lawyers assist parents in various legal proceedings such as divorce, child custody, adoption, and child support cases. They advocate for their clients' rights and represent them in court. In custody disputes, lawyers provide guidance, negotiate agreements, and prioritise children's best interests. During divorce or separation, lawyers handle property division, spousal support, child support, and parenting plans for custody and visitation arrangements.
 - *Enforcement of court orders*: Lawyers help parents enforce court orders for child support, visitation, and custody. They take legal action against non-compliant parents. When circumstances change, lawyers assist in modifying existing orders due to changes in income, living, or child needs. In cases of domestic violence or child abuse, lawyers aid in obtaining protection orders for parent and child safety.
 - *Adoption*: Lawyers aid parents in adoption, handling of paperwork, compliance with adoption laws, and court representation when needed. They assist with guardianship and foster care, helping parents establish legal guardianship or navigate the foster care system. For surrogacy and assisted reproduction, lawyers offer guidance on parental rights and responsibilities in complex legal matters.
 - *Paternity issues*: Lawyers can handle paternity cases, representing parents in legal matters concerning paternity, child custody, and child support. They also protect and assert parental rights, particularly in cases involving disputes or challenges.
 - *Mediation and alternative dispute resolution*: Lawyers^{123,124} assist parents in resolving conflicts cooperatively outside of court. They focus on co-parenting, communication, and decision-making to create a healthier family environment for the child.
 - *Child advocacy*:^{125,126} In cases prioritising the child's well-being, lawyers advocate for their rights and needs. For child support matters, family law specialists assist in determining support amounts and enforcing orders. In education, lawyers help parents advocate for their child's educational rights, especially if the child has special needs or faces school-related challenges.

122 Masson, 2012, pp. 202–211.

123 Cooper and Brandon, 2007, pp. 288–308.

124 Maclean and Eekelaar, 2016, pp. 1–23.

125 Gottlieb and Pitchal, 2007, pp. 17–35.

126 Kisthardt, 2006, pp. 1–77.

6. Concluding Remarks

When it comes to the well-being of children, specifically in the context of fulfilling parental responsibilities and addressing children's needs, the intersection of law and psychology can be seen as an interdisciplinary connection where the legal and psychological aspects come together to promote the overall well-being of children. In this interdisciplinary connection, the law provides a framework for defining and enforcing parental responsibilities and rights, while psychology plays a crucial role in understanding and addressing the psychological needs and well-being of children. By integrating these two disciplines, we can better ensure that children receive the necessary care, support, and protection they need for their optimal development and well-being.

Supportive communities, access to resources, and a strong social network can contribute to parental competence and positive parenting, which are continuous and evolving processes. It is important to note that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to parenting, as each child is unique, and parenting styles and practices may need to be adjusted to suit children's individual needs and personalities. One-parent and immigrant families depend on a smaller support network, particularly in terms of family members, and need more support compared to other family types. Investment in promoting the father's involvement, negative effects of overparenting, negative impact of media and technology use on parenting, and education and the promotion of parental mediation of children's digital technology use are needed.

Programmes and policies aimed at parenting must recognise the cultural similarities and differences across a country's communities. There is neither a universal answer to parenting nor a justification for treating all parents from a certain culture uniformly. Instead, parenting programmes must be designed with an awareness of the situations in which they will be used and adapted to be as effective as possible in those contexts.

Parents have a legal right and obligation to decide for their children, considering the best interests of the child. Support must be provided to them not only as individuals but also in the context of their childcare and living. Support should be given to parents to develop their parental competence and skills in positive parenting before legally taking their parental responsibility from them. Support for parents should be a joint activity of different stakeholders and stem from the collaboration efforts of the government and non-governmental sectors that need to be educated about the importance of parenting and support to parents.

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