Chapter 3
Is There a Right Way to Parent?
Focusing on Mindful Parenting

Swati Patra

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4984-9147

Indira Gandhi National Open University, India

ABSTRACT

The chapter focuses on bringing mindfulness into the parent-child relationship. The concept of mindfulness is discussed and its dimensions are examined as having an impact on effective parenting and a harmonious relationship between the parent and child. A model of mindful parenting emphasizing on the social context of parent-child relationship is described. The chapter highlights the significance of mindful parenting which includes being mindful to one's self as well as being mindful of the relationship between the parent and child, indicating a shift from doing mode to being mode. Thus, mindful parenting requires the parent to be mindful of the parent-child relationship itself rather than considering parenting as a task to be carried out and just doing or acting in this relationship. Infusing mindfulness into the dynamics of the parent-child relationship will usher in the well-being of both child and parent.

INTRODUCTION

Each child is unique. Each parent is a unique individual. They have their own narrative. Each family also has its own narrative, context, and history. Given this uniqueness associated with each parent and family, can it be said that there is a 'right way for parenting'? There can be no one way to parent. It is important to take into account a host of factors related to the parents, family, and the child herself/ himself to decide the course of parenting. However, there can be a broad agreement about the goals and objectives of parenting that focuses on nurturing the child and making the child a good human being. Thus parenting aims at providing a safe and secure environment, fulfilling all the basic needs, providing love, care and support for the child to grow and develop – nurturing the child in physical, cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual aspects. Further, it aims at making the child a good human being having the values and character – kindness, honesty, empathy, self-confidence, self-worth, cooperation, etc. that make life worthwhile and meaningful.

Two main things in parenting relate to the protection and development of the child. In accordance with Maslow's needs hierarchy, parents also need to first fulfill the basic survival needs of the child and then focus on their development in different aspects such as emotional, social, and character development. As proposed by Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), the satisfaction of physiological needs and safety of the child are the primary needs that the parents are required to meet. Then there is the need for love, affection, and belongingness which the parents try to fulfill. Next is the need for self-esteem followed by self-actualization. Self-esteem need refers to the child's need for approval, achievement, recognition, and to feel accepted and competent. Self-actualization need refers to the need to fulfill one's potentials and realize one's capabilities. The parenting approach followed by parents will facilitate in achieving this need in the child later on by developing the required qualities and skills in them. Depending on the parenting approach adopted by the parents, these needs of the children are satisfied to various extent.

However, the larger goals of parenting are usually neglected in the competitive world where parents want to see their child on the top, as the best amongst others, not the best of herself/himself. As a result, the child may gain wide knowledge, acquire various skills, achieve a lot, but may not develop self-awareness, self-connection and self-realization that will give a true purpose to one's life. Moreover, the parents themselves find the entire parenting process to be very exhausting, frustrating and disrupting their peace. Parenting though definitely a challenging task can also be rewarding and an enlightening experience if we bring in the mindfulness component to the entire parenting approach.

This indicates the importance of being mindful to one's parenting. It highlights aspects of positive parenting. Being mindful will enable the parents to focus on themselves and their approach to child-rearing and how they can help realize the goals of parenting by developing the child into a good human being. The present chapter thus aims at discussing the significance and implications of a mindfulness approach to parent-child relationship.

BACKGROUND

Meaning of Mindfulness

Mindfulness, as described by Kabat-Zinn (2003, p.145) refers to the moment-to-moment awareness that emerges through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and with a non-judgemental attitude towards the present experiences. This definition highlights four main aspects: paying attention, the present moment, non-judgemental attitude, and a sense of consciousness or awareness. Thus it talks about mindfulness as a state of consciousness in which one brings awareness and attentiveness to the immediate experience (Grossman, 2010). One's complete attention is on creating awareness about the present moment experience.

Further, when noticing or attending to the experiences in the moment, one needs to have a non-judgemental attitude towards it. For example, when one is eating ice-cream, mindfulness will involve paying attention to the whole experience of eating the ice-cream, noticing how the ice-cream looks, the texture, how it feels to the tongue and how does it go inside the mouth and body, the entire experience of eating it. While attending to this moment-to-moment experience, one is just noticing it without assigning any kind of value judgement. As Baer (2003) observes, it is the non-judgemental observation of the ongoing stream of internal and external stimuli as they arise.

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