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Enhancing Psychological Safety in Parent-Child Relationships: Promoting Healthy Development and Resilience

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Abstract: *The article explores today's approaches to understanding psychological safety within the family, focusing on the dynamics between parents and children. It emphasises key aspects of ensuring safety for children being raised within the family environment. The analysis includes factors that may compromise this safety, as well as strategies for maintaining it. Current research in psychological safety provides foundational approaches for studying personal safety within the family context. This issue is especially relevant when considering the development of a child's psychological safety in the home. The article also addresses challenges in fostering a child's psychological well-being within the family setting.*

Keywords: *psychological safety; child; family; personality; safety assurance; security; development.*

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1. Introduction

In the development of a child's personality, psychological safety plays an important role. Nowadays, in the fields of educational and developmental psychology, it is a promising area of interest. Its significance has been highlighted by many prestigious foreign and Ukrainian psychologists, including Carneiro et al. (2017), Nembhard, & Edmondson (2006), Polishchuk (2021), Stoliarchuk (2015), Sarancha, et al. (2022). Research in this area is based on understanding psychological safety which has evolved within the psychology of safety as a relatively new field.

It has rapidly gained significant attention although it has emerged only in the past two decades. Psychologists study it across various branches, such as social, educational, political, and extreme psychology. This field's complexity resulted in a greater understanding of psychological safety as a phenomenon, viewed as the impact of environmental factors on one's psychological structures. It includes a sense of security and a sustained ability for growth that is maintained over time.

For fostering healthy development, it is essential to enhance psychological safety in parent-child relationships. It is the foundation of building trust and tight connections between children and parents. When children have a sense of security, they tend to explore the surroundings, build their self-esteem, and develop their skills.

This article's purpose is to explore current approaches to psychological safety within the family, specifically between parents and children. It seeks to outline key aspects of safety within the child's family environment, analyse factors that can undermine it, and propose strategies for maintaining it.

2. Results

Ensuring a child's psychological safety is crucial for their future success and well-being, and parents play a vital role in fostering this sense of security. To achieve this, parents should spend quality time with their children, showing genuine interest in their daily lives by asking about their day, school, thoughts, and feelings. Beyond school-related topics, parents need to engage in conversations about friends, hobbies, and personal interests. Simple questions, such as asking about the last movie they watched or their thoughts on it, can build connection and trust. Parents should also prioritise making their child feel trusted and supported; when a child shares openly, it is a sign of trust that parents should honour by listening attentively. Ultimately, respecting the child's opinions and dedicating meaningful time to them strengthens the parent-child relationship.

Mitchell, Landers, & Morales (2018) suggest that the subjective experience of psychological safety, typically latent, often surfaces in extreme situations. This safety can manifest in different forms, including informational-psychological and linguistic safety. A key mechanism for achieving psychological safety is the ability to control factors essential for maintaining security and supporting stable development.

Currently, the foundations of psychological safety have been established, including its resources, strategies, levels, timing, and personal factors. Extensive empirical data and theoretical insights have helped outline methods to ensure individual safety and support its development.

As noted by Barbeta-Viñas, & Cano (2017), psychological safety in childhood can be viewed as protection from threats, psychological manipulation, humiliation, and insults, as well as anything that hinders a child's development. This sense of safety is strongly influenced by the emotional environment in which a child grows. Even though the family is generally seen as the safest place for a child, some families demonstrate silent indifference or condescension toward children, and in some cases, the home environment can harm a child's mental well-being. Children are especially sensitive to the effects of psychological abuse, which often brings feelings of insecurity and discomfort.

Psychological abuse, including experiences that trigger anger, resentment, and emotional vulnerability, can greatly undermine a child's sense of safety. Unfortunately, some parents may confuse psychological abuse with proper discipline. In response, children may begin to protect

themselves, consciously or unconsciously, by distancing themselves from negative influences and forming psychological defence mechanisms to guard against potential threats.

One should consider the following situation in detail. A 12-year-old girl named Maria lives in a family environment where her father frequently criticises her, calls her a failure, and compares her to more successful peers. Even though her mother occasionally tries to defend her, she often supports her father's negative remarks. Maria is repeatedly told that she is worthless and incapable of achieving success. Over time, she begins to internalise these statements, leading to a loss of confidence in her abilities. She may withdraw from her family and prefer spending time alone. Psychological abuse of this nature can have long-term effects on a child's mental health, with the specific outcomes varying among children.

One common method that parents frequently use, which should be avoided at all costs to protect the child, is intimidation. While this may occasionally help to calm a child, it can seriously harm their psyche and significantly threaten their psychological safety. Parents can also unintentionally inflict similar damage by projecting their psychological issues onto their children and instilling false beliefs. Additionally, neglecting a child can be equally detrimental to their psychological well-being.

When children feel lonely and alienated from their family members, it can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and other psychological issues that signal a violation of their psychological safety.

Parents struggling with their children's uncontrollable behaviour and stubbornness may not recognise that this is often a sign of the child feeling powerless. Instead, they deal with their child's defensive reactions. Therefore, adults need to refrain from expressing frustration or anger and instead cultivate patience.

To foster psychological safety, parents must reflect on their attitudes and behaviours toward their children. Three key factors contribute to the positive impact parents can have on their children, one of which is the quality of the relationship between the parents.

According to Coles, Hewitt, & Martin, (2018), parents should be present for their children, actively listen to them, show empathy and provide support. It is essential for them to cultivate an environment where the child feels accepted for who they are, regularly demonstrating love and care.

When children see love and harmony between their parents, they feel secure. Thus, parents should never act out conflicts in front of the children, nor show aggression towards the other parent or the children. Also, parents should avoid showing any kind of suffering in front of the children, such as crying or verbal outbursts.

Children often imitate their parents' behaviour, which is another important aspect. Therefore, in challenging circumstances with a child, the parent shall always consider their actions. Because children must feel secure at home, it is important to create a safe family environment. Encouraging and praising them plays a significant role in their self-esteem. Aggression, recurring arguments, or even unresolved conflicts can put in danger the family's psychological safety, making the child feel anxious and insecure. Lack of trust and trauma can be consequences of physical or mental abuse, humiliation, constant shouting, or dismissing the child's feelings. When children are not given adequate attention or parents do not show any interest in their lives, they can feel unwanted and isolated. Unrealistic expectations or even low expectations may lead to persistent stress or low self-esteem. Children can recognise their importance in their parents' lives by feeling loved, cared for, and respected. Effective communication is the key to children knowing how much they are valued and loved by their parents. A few ways to do that would be celebrating their children's accomplishments and successes, showing interest in their activities, and nurturing their belief in their potential. In situations of failure, it is recommended to highlight their strengths and reinforce their self-confidence.

3. How Parents Influence Children's Development and Behaviour

It is commonly believed that the primary role of parents is to influence their children's development and behaviour while ensuring their well-being. Parenting involves efforts to shape the child's thoughts, actions, and beliefs, ultimately impacting their growth and welfare. Providing parents with the knowledge and skills to guide their children's behaviour and development helps create a balanced and supportive environment for growth.

Various parenting programmes have different educational goals. Some focus on correcting a child's behaviour, while others prioritise their intellectual development. However, a shared aim across all programmes that emphasise child-rearing is to foster the child's independence in tackling tasks, interacting with different individuals, and making decisions about their behaviour in various situations. Additionally, there are specialised programmes designed for parents that target the development of children's language skills, cognitive abilities, and social behaviours.

Currently, many parenting initiatives emphasise intellectual growth and achieving success in school. This applies to behaviour adaptation, personality development, and social compensations. Parents can enhance their understanding of child upbringing by focusing on specific knowledge areas, such as social-psychological, intellectual, and religious dimensions. According to Umberson, & Montez (2010), this should enable parents to better comprehend their children's thoughts, behaviours, and challenges at various ages, thus helping them avoid many common mistakes in parenting.

In family sociology, family life is divided into distinct phases that correspond to the child's development, with each phase presenting different developmental tasks for the family. Parenting tasks can also be categorised based on the unique characteristics of each developmental stage: parents of children at different ages deal with various parenting challenges and need specific skills and techniques.

Ensuring safety is especially crucial in single-parent families and LGBTQ+ families, where children may deal with unique challenges. A child might feel different from peers due to their family's non-traditional structure. Events such as parental divorce or a family member coming out can introduce additional stress within the household. Single-parent families often experience financial hardships, which can affect a child's emotional health. In such cases, the child may feel a lack of adequate parental attention or care.

Therefore, outlining the tasks associated with family development can serve as a valuable resource for defining parenting objectives. It is essential to recognise that the concept of developmental periods in family life is relative and does not align precisely with empirical time.

As Borelli et al. (2016) observe, the relationships among family members, similar to any other interpersonal connections, are primarily founded on bonds of sympathy, care, and love rather than on the obligations that stem from these relationships. Parenting driven solely by a sense of duty will not yield positive results (Paquette, & Bigras, 2010).

4. Effective Methods for Maintaining Discipline

One of the most critical responsibilities of parents, particularly important for a child's development, is to cultivate an intuition that enables them to sense their child's needs, understand their thoughts better, and grasp what the child wants to communicate. This heightened awareness of their child can certainly be viewed as a result of deepening pedagogical understanding, changing perspectives on family dynamics, and the parents' self-awareness. However, it can also be regarded as a characteristic that does not necessarily arise from increased information or enhanced consciousness.

Moral education within the family is a cornerstone of educational theory, a point recognised by Aristotle (2023) as essential for parents. Supporting parents in this area is one of the most challenging and significant aspects of parenting (Suchman et al., 2010). This dimension of upbringing is crucial for the child's personal development since moral growth plays a pivotal role in helping an individual lead a fulfilling life. The parenting tasks associated with a child's

development are closely linked to family issues. A harmonious and joyful childhood can thrive only in a loving home.

The well-being of a child is greatly enhanced by a nurturing atmosphere and a system of family relationships that fosters a sense of security while also stimulating and directing their development. The instinct of kinship, often referred to as “the voice of blood”, is most vividly expressed when parents and children share a close emotional bond, connected not only by family ties but also by spiritual closeness. As stated by Mahdysiuk et al. (2022), this bond is a crucial prerequisite for a successful educational process within the family, enabling a deeper understanding of the inner world of children and an effective influence on them.

Each developmental stage provides unique opportunities for strengthening and enhancing internal connections with children. It is only when these connections are established that the expectations and desires of parents become moral benchmarks for their children’s behaviour. Children start to feel the need to seek their parents’ advice, imagining themselves in their parents’ situations during difficult moments, aspiring to follow their example, and relying on their guidance. Any negative dynamics within family relationships do not have to be seen as an insurmountable, fatalistic dominance. If parents can effectively analyse their relationship dynamics, either on their own or with the assistance of a consultant psychologist, overcoming negative influences is possible. People naturally tend to attribute the causes of their circumstances to their actions and personal qualities, which is known as having an internal locus of control, or simply, a belief in personal responsibility for outcomes. Conversely, if one tends to attribute significant power to other individuals and external circumstances, they are believed to have an external locus of control (attributing success or failure to external forces).

A belief in personal responsibility for outcomes develops through parenting that focuses on nurturing an independent individual who takes responsibility for their actions. This approach to upbringing usually requires patience and skill from both parents and teachers, as it is far easier to force a child to comply than to guide them in making their own choices. This approach, which fosters children’s awareness and use of their power, was characteristic of the nobility.

In noble upbringing, the concept of honour played a significant role, closely tied to the ability to stand by one’s words and actions. In today’s society, this form of education is more often observed among the children of entrepreneurs, politicians, psychologists, educators, and others who embody these qualities or recognise their importance for a child. Generally, possessing an internal locus of control signifies a developed and mature personality capable of making important decisions and accepting responsibility for them. Individuals with an internal locus of control tend to be more self-assured and less anxious, and they often achieve greater success in life. They are also more likely to be liked and respected for their reliability, responsibility, and ability to overcome challenges.

Overton (2015) claims that excessive self-confidence can lead to several negative consequences. First, an inflated sense of one’s abilities and influence may result in significant failures, along with their various repercussions, including psychological effects. Second, a tendency to blame oneself for all shortcomings can create unwarranted feelings of guilt, as well as lead to depression and discouragement.

5. Managing Emotional Vulnerability

It is crucial to strike a balance and acknowledge the potential impact of luck and external factors on the outcomes of one’s efforts. This balance, however, leans more towards an internal locus of control. Those with an external locus of control often attribute events to outside circumstances or the actions of others. They tend to shift responsibility onto others and their surroundings.

This phenomenon is particularly evident in children raised in religious families. The concept of divine intervention is central to religious upbringing. When a religious person acts improperly, they may claim they were misled by a demon, while a positive event is often viewed as an act of

God. Less religious individuals might refer to being “lucky” or state that things simply turned out that way. In both instances, the focus remains on external circumstances that largely shape the trajectory of one’s life.

Ravn et al. (2011) indicate that religious upbringing often requires strict obedience to the head of the family, which can nurture fatalistic tendencies, suppress initiative, and ultimately create a personality that lacks an active engagement with life. Additionally, the focus shifts from the importance of achieving goals to the approval or disapproval of those achievements, further emphasising an external “judge” whose opinions dictate outcomes. Similar dynamics can be found in non-religious families, where children are expected to be obedient but are not encouraged to take an active role. In environments where demands are not clarified and initiative is discouraged, children may struggle with making independent decisions and accepting responsibility for their actions. This primarily relates to difficulties in decision-making.

Individuals who place excessive emphasis on the influence of external forces and circumstances often wait for those forces to take the lead and are hesitant to take the initiative themselves. Furthermore, fear of failure or an over-reliance on luck can significantly undermine the effectiveness of their actions. Another negative aspect of having an external locus of control is a tendency toward irresponsibility. A person who sincerely believes that the outcome of their efforts is largely out of their control may seek excessive forgiveness for their mistakes, failures, and weaknesses. They may also be unwilling to invest the effort needed to see a task through to completion if it demands substantial work.

Under the influence of unforeseen circumstances, individuals with an external locus of control find it much easier to acknowledge defeat. Such individuals are often regarded with disfavour due to their unreliability, even though they may sometimes earn respect for their carefree attitude. Generally, an external locus of control reflects a degree of personal immaturity, despite possessing certain advantages. One key benefit of this perspective is a somewhat higher psychological resilience to setbacks and failures.

According to Brown, Mangelsdorf, & Neff, (2012), the fundamental principles of current parenting approaches emphasise the importance of establishing equal relationships with children, rooted in mutual respect and collaboration. This entails that parents actively listen to their children’s opinions, consider their feelings, and involve them in family decisions. Parents who create a psychologically safe environment are open about their own emotions, which helps children understand that their feelings are valid and can be expressed without fear.

Rather than resorting to punishment, today’s parents prioritise positive reinforcement, encouraging desired behaviours, and celebrating their children’s achievements. It is crucial for children to feel secure in expressing their emotions, even when those feelings are negative. Parents play a vital role in helping their children recognise and manage their emotions. The latest approaches to psychological safety within the family are continually evolving, making it important to keep informed about expert recommendations and new research in order to create the most ideal conditions for a child’s development.

6. Enhancing Psychological Safety in Parent-Child Relationships

In order to enhance psychological safety in a parent-child relationship, in-depth study is required, aiming to develop effective practical approaches. It is important to address this problem, as it comes from global changes that develop feelings of vulnerability and insecurity on a personal level. The human mind needs protection to face the factors that can affect psychological safety. This is a great challenge, as there is an ongoing advance in telecommunications technology. The transmission of natural disasters, terrorist acts, or other tragedies that are happening around the world, can trigger fear and hysteria. It is considered that the family is the most significant factor in influencing the safety of its members, which is particularly true for children raised within the family. It is necessary to create conditions for a family environment that offers the children a direct

level of psychological safety and also sets the basis for maintaining their safety in their adult lives as well.

Nowadays, psychological safety is essential in sociology, philosophy, cultural studies, and political science, as well as in disciplines within psycho-pedagogical fields. There is a great focus on examining issues related to a child's psychological safety, as well as on advancing the psychological and social aspects of safety.

Extensive research in pedagogical, social, extreme, political, and other fields of psychological knowledge has resulted in a categorical framework for this relatively new area of study. Psychological safety is understood as a unique personal concept, shaped by the influence of specific environmental factors on one's psychological framework. It is defined by its crucial role in ensuring the integrity of one's experience of safety and the potential for growth toward a personally meaningful life goal.

As indicated by Nerubasska, Palshkov, & Maksymchuk (2020), a critical mechanism for ensuring psychological safety lies in one's ability to control factors essential for security and growth, a capacity that remains constant over time. Current research into psychological safety has examined its inherent patterns, levels, strategies, resource reserves, and personal foundations, enabling an analysis of psychological safety in a wide social context, especially within a child's family environment.

In the family setting, psychological safety focuses on shielding the child from threats, psychological violence, humiliation, coercion, neglect, abandonment, and abuse. While the family is traditionally viewed as the safest place for a child, some families may compromise a child's psychological safety. Families that seem stable on the surface can still experience events that lead to long-term emotional distress. Children might experience cruel jokes, be treated as objects for amusement, or face situations beyond the limits of their developing psychological resilience (World Health Organisation, 2009).

Children exposed to scenes of violence and cruelty, whether on screens or in real life, may suffer severe psychological effects and disrupt their nervous systems. This is because children tend to identify more strongly with what they see than any other age group, leading to intense shock. Such experiences can result in heightened anxiety, eating disorders, difficulties in peer relationships, social problems, frequent conflicts, and various negative dependencies (such as on television or computers). Disruptions in a child's emotional and psychological well-being can often contribute to juvenile delinquency and even suicide. A healthy mental state in children is primarily established within the family, where the foundations of their psyche are formed.

A child's future character, worldview, sense of safety, and interpersonal relationships will largely depend on the psychological traits developed in the family environment. Therefore, it is essential to identify a set of values that, when nurtured in the family, positively influence the development of a child's psyche and character.

Within this set of values, parental praise holds significant importance. Encouragement serves as a nurturing approach, yet it possesses both positive and negative sides. For instance, excessive praise can have a negative aspect; it is important not to offer undeserved compliments indiscriminately to capture the child's attention. Another key element is encouraging the child, which fosters self-confidence and belief in their abilities. The manner and extent of criticism directed at the child are vital for their psychological safety.

It is crucial to abandon practices that rely on harsh language and constant focus on the child's shortcomings. Ongoing and overly emotional criticism of their character proves to be counterproductive. Likewise, a hostile atmosphere in the family is detrimental to the child. When exposed to such negativity at home, a child may become aggressive and defiant, often contradicting their parents and insisting on their perspective.

7. Conclusions

The significance of this article lies in understanding that enhancing psychological safety in parent-child relationships is a collective responsibility shared by parents and children. Establishing a safe environment is an investment in a child's future, enabling them to develop into a healthy, happy, and successful individual.

Thus, it is crucial to recognise that while most adults realise that children can be traumatised by conflicts and arguments between parents, many are unaware of the subtler aspects of this issue. Sometimes, an impulsive reaction from a mother to a child's behaviour or a careless comment from a frustrated preschool teacher can deeply wound a child's psyche. The younger the child, the more intense their perception, and consequently, the deeper the issue.

The article proves that preventing disruptions to psychological safety involves creating family centres and support groups for parents. Parents need to be well-informed about child development psychology and effective parenting techniques. Routine check-ups with a doctor or psychologist can facilitate the early detection of potential issues. Psychological safety is a dynamic process that requires continuous attention and effort from all family members. Fostering a safe environment for the child is a vital investment in their future.

Finally, the article explores current approaches to psychological safety within the family dynamics between parents and children, highlights the critical factors for the child's safety in that environment, and analyses the disruptive elements and strategies for maintaining it.

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