

The Role of Parenting Skills Training in the Prevention of Addiction of Children

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Letter to Editor

The Editor

Family is considered as the first environmental factor for developmental changes, especially the affective, motional, and social development of children. Psychological theories consider the relationship between the child and environment to be a reciprocal relationship. Thus, just as the parents' behavior affects the child and their parenting style affects the child's behavior and abilities, the child's temperament and mood can be a predictor of the parents' quality of life (QOL). Previous researches have shown that the exposure of a child with a difficult temperament to positive parenting will result in reduced behavioral problems, better social skills, and higher sense of competence in the child. Moreover, the child's understanding of the parents' parenting styles is of great importance. In other words, a child who interprets the parents' behavior as rejection, suppression or overprotection is at higher risk of mental damages.¹

Studies have shown that 90% of substance users have started using substances before 18 years of age. Its underlying issues are the result of the complex interaction of parents' characteristics, school, and the individual's personality traits. For example, childhood aggression and behavioral problems at school have a direct relationship with substances use at older ages. Furthermore, boys who have been recognized as high-risk in terms of substance abuse have lower ability to endure failure compared to the low-risk group.²

The process of socialization of children by their parents is a major source the protection and prevention of substance abuse during adolescence. Research has shown that children who are raised using authoritative parenting style are less likely to use drugs as adolescents, are more resilient in challenges, use better coping strategies, and present fewer behavioral

problems. Nevertheless, despite their high self-esteem, behavioral problems frequencies of substances abuse are higher among children who have been raised using indulgent parenting style.³

Thus, it seems that authoritative parenting style, which is defined as compliance with family laws and regulations set within the family in combination with intimacy and mutual respect and active participation of the child in relevant issues, protects the child against different behavioral problems and addiction.⁴

Authoritative parenting style, which provides a combination of logical support and limitation for the child and includes warm affective relationship and suitable supervision on the child, provides the key factors to the prevention of addiction.⁵

Roskam et al. found that children who were raised with positive parenting style showed better obedience to their parents, less irritability in response to frustration, and higher inhibition of their undesirable behavior.⁶ Moreover, these children had better problem-solving and planning skills.⁶

Substance abuse in parents increases the possibility of substance abuse by their children. This increase in risk of addiction results from both genetic and environmental factors. Families with a parent with addiction are generally harmful, unpredictable, chaotic, and disorganized. Parents with substance abuse not only have fewer parenting skills, but also have less control and supervision over their children. Moreover, the parent-child interaction quality is not satisfactory and more parent-child conflicts are observed in such families. These issues can have negative effects on the socialization process (social skills training) of the child.²

Since depression and mood disorders are comorbid with substance abuse, parents with substance abuse have less affective relation with their children and use harsh punishment methods

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to a greater extent. In these families, there is a higher possibility of child abuse, and these factors increase parenting problems and child maltreatment.⁷

Children from divorced families are at risk of numerous social, physical, and mental damages. Research has shown that these children experience the use of illegal substances at younger ages compared to others.⁸ Parental conflict and misplaced expectations can affect the different aspects of development and education in children and increase behavioral problems, and thus, the risk of substance abuse in them. Family training programs suggest that if parents strengthen their child's sense of competence and manage their child's behavioral problems during childhood, the risk of substance abuse during adolescence will decrease in their child.²

Moreover, studies have shown that interventions in parenting style in at-risk groups have had positive effects on children. Early interventions increase protective factors (positive parent-child interaction and parental behavior) and decrease subsequent risk factors at older ages.⁸

Today, it has been proven that parenting is not only a science, but also a skill that must be learned and converted into action. Parents equipped with

parenting skills and techniques are more successful in the positive and effective upbringing of their children and enjoy their children's company. With these skills, they can raise accomplished individuals who have thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills regarding everyday challenges and can solve their daily problems with assertion and self-control.

The range of effects of positive parenting is so extensive that it clearly justifies the necessity of specific policies in this regard by authorities of the mental health system of Iran.

Thus, due to the importance of the role of correct parenting in children's mental health and prevention of behavioral problems and substance abuse during adolescence and later stages of life, parents' knowledge and skills regarding improvement of parenting styles should be increased. The training of these principles should be incorporated into the comprehensive treatment programs of parents who refer to health centers for counseling and treatment by therapists and counselors. Moreover, policy makers and authorities, especially community mental health officials, should pay attention to the development of parenting skills education programs for young couples and even young individuals before marriage.

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