

Ways of Developing Competence in Children



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A New born child is utterly dependent on his mother surrogates. However ,as he grows up and gains physical strength and cognitive abilities, he tends to be more on his own. He tries to stand up, explore, and make thing happen by kicking and throwing. It is at this stage and thereafter that the mother and other play critical role in helping him develop competence or getting him fixated in dependency. In India the overprotective and indulgent mother or her surrogates are every ready to anticipate and meet his needs before needs get urgent and the child has to cry out for help. In a larger joint family and even in nuclear families, there are always other to jump to help the child at the slightest indication of his seeming discomfort. Naturally, the child does not have to exert. He turns into, what a scholar calls, “the little tyrant” whose needs are met in advance. However, once the passes infancy and his drawn away from his mother’s apron springs, he feels utterly helpless and dependent. But if the child insists on doing it whole evening then the mother needs to feel concerned. Similarly, when a child throws himself in to temper-tantrum once a while it may be normal. But if he does that at the first instance of his being refused something, then the present need to worry. Furthermore, behavioural manifestations of dependency change over time. For examples, climbing into the parent’s lap may be natural dependency for a child of 2-4 years, but problematic during later years.

Dependency is negatively related to competence. The more dependent means less competent. There are four clusters of indicators of competence;

- Development of skills appropriate to age.
- Self-sufficiency and independence in managing himself.
- Sence of responsibility for thing he can or should do.
- Active and coping abilities.

Researches on the Indian child reveal very high degree of dependency in him. Some of the typical sign’s dependency are the following:

- Seeking attention of parents.
- Trying to stay close to parents, hugging and insisting to in their lap, etc.
- Hesitating to move farther from the mother.
- Asking for help.
- Crying and getting into a temper-tantrum

These may be signs of normal dependency. But if a child shows them very frequently or in excessive degrees, then the dependency may become problematic. For example, a child may like to talk to his mother when she returns home from her work. This is normal. Obviously, the descriptions are too abstract. The concrete manifestations vary across age. The psychological literature provides details of the expected signs of growth at the various age levels (and may be obtained by contacting me)

The role of mother

The growth of competence or the lingering of dependencies affected not only by mother's behaviour but also by all those who are involved in upbringing of the child. First, it may be parents and the family, then the persons in neighbourhood and schools' friends, etc. who deeply affect the child. Deficiencies and inadequacies at one stage may be compensated or aggravated at the next stage, or by another people.

However, it is the mother which leaves the deepest imprints on the psychological make-up of a child. Our research shows that mothers vary in their styles of rearing their children. Six styles are found to be distinct in my own research. They are the followings;

- Controlling style means behaviors designed to keep strict vigilance on child's activities to decide what the child should or should not do to restrict his exploratory behavior, etc.
- Nurturant the nurturant style is manifested in warm affectionate supportive and caring behavior. The mother conveys her eagerness to promote the wellbeing of her child.
- Over-protective the behaviors reflect an orientation to do as many things for the child as possible. The mother helps her child in feeding and dressing even when then the child is willing to do so on his own. She also provides excessive contact by way of holding kissing touching and never leaving the child alone
- Responsive style means that the mother is prompt and consistent in giving adequately elaborate feedbacks to child's good and bad behaviors.
- Permissive style is manifested in allowing the child freedom to move around, to try new things, or new ways of doing things, to explore around, and to learn by experiences, etc.

- Encouraging style is expressed in encouraging and guiding the child and giving appreciation when the child succeeds. The mother encourages the child to take initiative and helps him in taking right decisions.

My research further shows that these six styles are meaningfully inter-related and form two clusters. The nutrient, responsive, permissive, and encouraging style constitute one cluster which is inversely related to the second cluster of controlling and over-protective styles. While the first set of styles promote competence, the second perpetuates dependency.

The second and the more important finding is that the styles are not fixed for all times. If mothers try on their own or are helped through counselling, they can change their styles from being over-protective and controlling to nurturing , responsive, permissive, and encouraging. The crucial point is to continuously monitor one's behaviours and to cultivate more often the second type of behaviours. Through counselling, I have helped many mothers and fathers to shift their styles and have found that the shift has positive effects on child's shift form dependency to competence.