

Niamh at 9 months



Niamh at 3 years



Niamh at 5 years



Communication and Closeness: Parent-child relationships

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Introduction

- Nine year old children and their parents
 - Less contact time than earlier years (Hill & Stafford, 1980)
 - Continue to provide scaffolding to children as they begin to regulate their own lives (Huston & Ripke, 2006)
 - Parents play a managerial role in the lives of their children, providing opportunities and monitoring behaviour (Gauvain & Parke, 2010)
 - Importance of communication and closeness at this transitional stage



Introduction

- **Parent-Child Relationship**

- Identified as a protective factor against risky behaviour in childhood and on into adolescence, including;
 - Sexual behaviour (Juarez & LeGrand, 2006)
 - Alcohol use and abuse (Overturf & Down, 2003)
 - Delinquency (Wasserman et al., 1996)

- **Family relationships**

- Low family adaptability and cohesion have repeatedly been linked to child maltreatment (e.g., Higgins & McCabe, 1999; Pelcovitz et al., 2000; Stith et al., 2009)



Research Questions

- **What is the relationship between communication and parent-child relationship closeness**
- **What predicts parent-child closeness**
 - Child factors
 - Temperament
 - Shyness, emotionality, activity, sociability
 - Gender
 - Parent factors
 - Parenting styles
 - Dyadic relationship



Communication

- **Irish children's communication with parents**
 - HBSC data (ages 10-17 years)
 - Found it 'easy' or 'very easy' to talk to mothers
 - Increased over the years: from 74.0% in 1998 to 81.7% in 2010
 - Gender difference: 82.5% for girls to 80.9% for boys
 - Gender reversal father data (59.8% of girls vs. 73.2% of boys)
 - Broadly similar to international data in 2010 (75.7% for Ireland Vs. 75.6% internationally)
 - Disparity with international data has decreased over recent years (4% difference in 1998 vs. 0.1% difference in 2010)
 - Higher than the international average for father data (62.6% vs. 57.9%)



Communication

- **The role of communication**
 - Social support
 - Coping
 - Information exchange
 - Problem solving
- **Family communication and Stressors**
 - A resource to buffer against stress
 - May act as a vulnerability factor for those families with poor communication
 - Influences the perception of a stressor
 - Plays a vital role in the adaptation to the situation



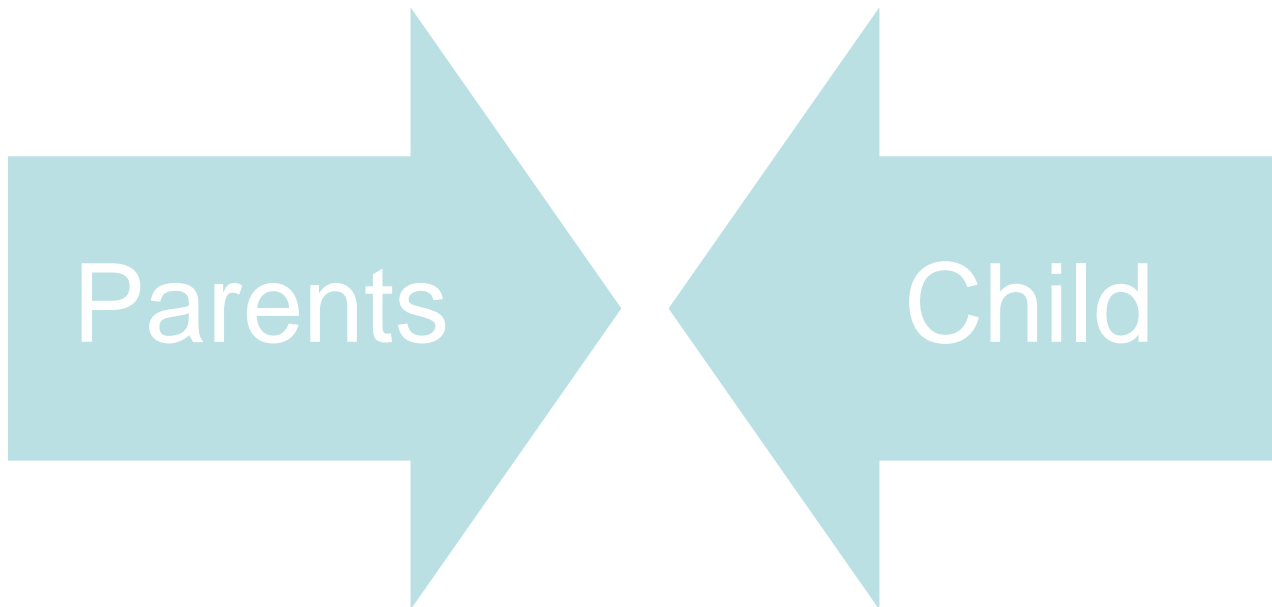
Communication

- **Family Communication Climate (FCC)**
 - Conversation orientation: conversation, openness and expressiveness
 - Conformity orientation: encourage conformity, suppression of conflict, adherence to traditional beliefs
 - Pluralistic families: high conversation orientation and low conformity orientation
 - Consensual families: high conversation orientation and high conformity orientation
 - Protective families: low in conversation and high in conformity
 - Laissez faire: low in conversation and low in conformity



Relationships

- **The reciprocal relationship**
 - The family as an interdependent system (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006)





Relationships

- Child development is a process in which both child and caregiver seek to influence the other's behaviour (Bell, 1968)
- The ecological approach (Belsky, 1984) explicitly states the need to study both the parent and the child in the process of their emerging relationship
 - Joint contributions of both
- The parent and child as active agents who together create the reciprocal relationship by continuous transactions (Collins et al., 2000)



Parental Factors

- **Parenting dimensions**
 - Emotionality: warm, responsive and child centred vs. rejecting, unresponsive and uninvolved
 - Control: demanding, restricting vs. permissive and undemanding
- **Parenting styles**
 - Authoritarian
 - Authoritative
 - Permissive
 - Neglectful



Parental Factors

- **The Dyadic Relationship**

- The spillover hypothesis
 - » Parents who have a good relationship with each other are more likely to be caring and supportive with their children (Cowan & Cowan, 2002; 2008; Katz & Gottman, 1997)
 - » Conflict within one part of the family system usually spills over to taint other family systems
 - » Effects on children can be direct and indirect (Katz & Gottman, 1997)
- Gender difference: Boys more likely to be directly exposed to parental bickering and physical abuse than girls (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagen, 2002)



Child Factors

- **Child Temperament**

- Affects parent-child relationship (Buss, 1981)
 - Both direct and indirect
- Affects parental stress (Gelfand, Teti & Radin Fox, 1992) and parental depression (Cutrona & Troutman, 1986)
- Affects parenting behaviour (Bates, Pettit, Dodge, & Ridge, 1998; Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000)
 - Bidirectionality



Child Factors

- **Gender**

- Girls rated as closer to mothers than boys (Benenson, Morash & Petrakos, 1998)
 - May be different processes involved across gender (e.g., Leaper, Anderson, & Sanders, 1998)
 - Mothers show increased positive and negative interactions with both boys and girls (Driscoll & Pianta, 2011)



Method

- **9 year old child cohort**
- **Mothers only**
- **Questions**
 - Who do they talk to about their problems
 - Relationship between closeness and communication
 - Predictors of parent-child closeness
 - Child factors
 - Temperament
 - Gender
 - Parental factors
 - Parenting style
 - Dyadic relationship



Results

- **Who the child talks to about problems**
 - 88% - mothers
 - 59% - fathers
 - 28% - teacher
 - 28% - friends
- **Relationship between talking to the mother and parent-child closeness**
 - $r = 0.09, p < 0.01$



Results

- **Predictors of parent-child closeness**

- **Child Factors**

- Shyness: $\beta = -0.12, p < 0.01$
- Emotionality: $\beta = -0.05, p < 0.01$
- Activity level: $\beta = 0.08, p < 0.01$
- Sociability: $\beta = 0.14, p < 0.01$

- Gender: $\beta = 0.15, p < 0.01$

- **Parental Factors**

- Parenting style (authoritative vs. authoritarian): $\beta = -0.07, p < 0.01$
- Dyadic relationship: $\beta = 0.11, p < 0.01$



Results

- **Higher levels of parent-child closeness associated with;**
 - High levels of activity and sociability
 - Lower levels of shyness and emotionality
 - Girls
 - Authoritative parents
 - Higher quality of dyadic relationships



Discussion

- **Highlights the reciprocal relationship between parent and child**
- **Supports the spillover hypothesis**
- **Difficulty of causality: causal processes likely to act in both directions**
- **Developmental significance going into adolescence**



Implications

- **Developmental continuity and change in closeness and communication (Keijsers & Poulin, 2013)**
 - 13 year old
- **Buffering effect for risky behaviours**
 - Timing is paramount
- **Emerging sexuality**
 - Importance of relationship and sex education at home
 - Gender differences



Implications

- **Closeness and communication across different domains**
 - Parenting programmes (Cowan & Cowan)
 - Educational context
- **Children's Voice**
 - Communicative competence