how the parenting of both perpetrators and victims may be better assessed and improved through education and support efforts.

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See also Custody, Contact, and Visitation: Relationship to Domestic Violence; Nonoffending Parents of Maltreated Children; Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, Parent-Child Trauma Therapy; Parenting Practices and Violence, Child Maltreatment, Parenting Practices and Violence, Youth Violence

Further Readings


**Parenting Practices and Violence, Youth Violence**

Parenting practices refer to the methods and styles of parenting used to control and socialize children, including discipline tactics, as well as supervision and monitoring of the child. In addition, parent–child interactions can also be evaluated in terms of the quality of the relationship. A consistent finding in the research literature is that certain parenting practices and parent–child relationships can increase the likelihood of youth violence and that the influence of these factors is particularly salient for younger children. Because one of the strongest predictors of youth violence is early childhood aggression, it is important to address family factors related to the learning of aggression in childhood to effectively prevent youth violence.

**Quality of the Parent–Child Relationship**

Children who experience rejection, neglect, or indifference from parents are more likely to display aggressive behavior. Neglectful or disengaged parents are unresponsive to the needs of children and demand little of them. Some evidence has found that neglected children actually show higher levels of subsequent violent behavior than physically abused children. One reason these children may engage in violence is to gain attention from their parents. In contrast, parents who are warm, supportive, and responsive have children who are less aggressive. The quality of the parent–child relationship also influences child aggression and violence by modifying the impact of parenting practices.

**Discipline Practices**

Consistent discipline practices have been linked to lower levels of aggression and violence. In contrast, problematic discipline practices and erratic expressions of anger promote aggression in children. Children become less inhibited about displaying aggression when discipline is inconsistent. In addition to learning theory accounts of this effect, another explanation is suggested by social control theory. Parents’ use of harsh punishment is thought to prevent the internalization of moral standards by damaging the parent–child bond. Children who do not feel attached to their parents fail to internalize the parents’ values and those of the society, resulting in poor self-control. Individuals with low self-control ignore potential long-term costs of aggressive behavior.

**Corporal Punishment**

The use of corporal punishment has been associated with increased aggression in children, especially
among European Americans. Corporal punishment increases child aggression in various ways. First, when parents resort to physical means of controlling and punishing their children, they send a message that aggression is a normative, acceptable, and effective way to gain compliance. When corporal punishment is used in response to children’s aggression, in essence, parents are punishing children with the very behavior they are trying to eliminate. This behavior, in turn, communicates to the child that it is acceptable to hit others when they behave in ways they do not like. Second, the use of this disciplinary tactic leads to avoidance of the disciplinary figure, reducing parental opportunities to direct and influence their child. Third, corporal punishment also promotes hostile attributions that, in turn, predict violent behavior. The way in which a child responds to a situation is a function of how the child interprets social information. Experience with harsh treatment from parents results in children who are hypervigilant to hostile cues, attribute hostile intent to others, access more aggression potential responses, and view aggression as a way to attain social benefits.

One of the goals of parenting is to teach children to behave independently in morally and socially acceptable ways. Attributing compliance to internal rather than external sources is an integral part of this process, and corporal punishment has been found to interfere with this process by promoting external attributions. Physical force by the parent provides external controls to which children can attribute their compliance and therefore can propel children to avoid misbehaviors to avoid future punishment, but physical force does not teach children the responsibility to behave independently in morally and socially acceptable ways. Thus, the child may never learn socially acceptable ways of handling situations and instead views violence as a reasonable option for solving social conflicts.

**Cultural Considerations**

The cultural context of parenting plays a role in determining the impact various parenting practices have on children. Among African American families, corporal punishment is more common and is less likely to be associated with child aggressive outcomes. This outcome is due to the message the parents send their children during the discipline event. Among African American families, corporal punishment seems to be relatively accepted, parents believe that it is effective, and the message sent is that the parent cares about the child. Among European American families, corporal punishment generally is viewed less favorably, and the message sent is that the parent is rejecting the child. Thus, these different messages sent to the child can result in a qualitatively different experience for the child. Parental warmth is also expressed differently in different cultures. Therefore, how messages are communicated to the child may differ according to the cultural context in which the child is reared.

**Prevention of Youth Violence**

Teaching parents effective methods of parenting has been found to reduce child and adolescent delinquency and aggression. Teaching parents to use consistent discipline and to monitor their children reduces behavior problems in children. A more responsive, warm style of parenting has also been associated with lower levels of aggression in children. Preventive efforts in early childhood are generally more effective than later timed interventions in reducing aggression.

**Parental Monitoring**

High parental monitoring is associated with lower levels of aggression, violence, and delinquency among children and adolescents. Monitoring refers to parents knowing where their children are, with whom they are associating, and what they are doing. Good supervision allows parents to respond appropriately to antisocial and delinquent behaviors and minimizes the adolescents’ contact with risky circumstances and activities and deviant peers.

**Further Readings**