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**Title of the Course**

**Respectful Parenting vs Overparenting**

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# Introduction

Understanding today’s nature of childhood requires an understanding of parenting in the 21st century. Parents and caregivers essentially shape children’s lives and everyday experiences, which has a major impact on their cognitive, academic and socio-emotional development (Bornstein, 2019). They also have a major impact on children’s health and well-being (Skinner, Johnson and Snyder, 2005). Parenting now, as in the past, is challenging and demanding. Family life has changed over the years, bringing about new challenges for parents and the question if the way children are raised should change as well (Zahran, 2011). Globally, many families face multiple adversities. These advertises may include mental illness, substance use and addiction problems, physical illness, domestic and community violence, poverty, insecure housing and war (Burns and Gottschalk, 2019). Moreover, many of these problems are accumulative, with one problem, for example, parental mental illness, cascading into other problems, such as relationship breakdowns, unemployment and poverty. Preventing and mitigating the impact of these problems on parents and children is critical for improving population health for families now and in the future. However, no one sector or organization is in a position to address all the issues that these families may face. Hence, it is proposed that a “village approach” is needed when bringing up children.

# Overprotective parenting

There is an increasing trend towards young people who are growing up in safe communities but who are being denied opportunities to experience what were normative rites of passage a generation ago (Barber et al., 2005). Behaviors that are perceived as having an element of risk or responsibility (e.g. walking to school alone or in pairs, sleepovers as part of community programming with groups like Guides and Scouts) are being denied children by parents who fear for their offspring’s safety (Barber et al., 2005). Furthermore, parents have increased surveillance of their children by insisting on webcams in daycares, giving elementary school aged children cell phones, installing net nannies to restrict internet access, and physically shadowing children when they are on playgrounds or at recreational activities like swimming lessons and soccer practices (Barber et al., 2005). There is evidence that such caution is:

1. unnecessary;
2. denies children the opportunity structures to experience healthy psychosocial development;
3. contributes to patterns of delinquency or excessive anxiety among children from stable, well-resourced homes; and
4. leaves children unprepared for transitions to adulthood and independent living.

## *The inner voice of Over parenting*

The critical inner voice refers to a well-integrated pattern of destructive thoughts toward ourselves and others (Beddoe, 2014). The “voices” that make up this internalized dialogue are at the root of much of our maladaptive behavior. This internal enemy fosters inwardness, distrust, self-criticism, self-denial, addictions and a retreat from goal-directed activities (Beddoe, 2014). The critical inner voice affects every aspect of our lives: our self-esteem and confidence, our personal and intimate relationships, our performance and accomplishments at school and work and especially our parenting (Bornstein, 2019).

### Common voices in Parenting

Common inner voices that are present and manifest through behavior of over parenting include:

* You don’t know what you’re doing.
* You’re a horrible father.
* You’re just like your mother.
* Everyone sees what a bad parent you are.
* Your kids are out of control.
* They’re no good, because you’re no good.
* They are so mean and demanding.
* You never get a moment’s peace.
* Don’t you wish they’d just leave you alone?
* Having kids means giving up your life.
* Only a horrible person feels critical of their kids

## *Why over protection makes sense to parents*

### *Argument One: Overprotection represents normative functioning*

Under the stress of modernity and heightened expectations for individual achievement, parents may experience themselves as reasonable in protecting the few children they raise from every eventuality (Bouverie, 2016). They may also, within the cultural hegemony of middle-class western values, be perfectly normal in their heightened surveillance. Viewed from the perspective of child development, however, overprotection is not benign (Ungar, 2007). What has become a sign of normative family functioning (e.g. long lines of SUV’s pulling up to let children off at neighborhood schools) may be inadvertently disadvantaging young people’s healthy physical and psychosocial development (Burchinal, Nelson, Carlson, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008).

### *Argument Two: Threats to the autonomy of the family*

Family sociologists like Popenoe (1988) argue that the nuclear family is in decline, that its members are less internally cohesive, its social functions (from the regulation of sexuality to socializing of children) are weakening, that the family as a unit has transferred its power to the state, and that the nature of the nuclear family structure is unstable over time.

### Argument Three: The self-actualization of the parent

As parents seek to complete themselves through acts of generativity (Kesselring, De Winter, Van Yperen, & Lucluijze, 2016), the raising of offspring who succeed is well understood as part of the cycle of adult development. It is not surprising, therefore, that children’s success should shape adult perceptions of their capacities. A growing number of studies show that children influence their parents as much as parents influence children (Luthar, 2003).

### *Argument Four: The lack of capacity among youth*

As Elkind shows in *The Hurried Child* (2001), there is concern that we are prettifying young people in the absence of parental executive functioning. While Elkind’s argument is for letting children be children, and thus one might extrapolate, protect them, there has been a concurrent lengthening of the period a young person may avoid responsibility for self and others. The result is that a child may be double disadvantaged in light of her caregiver’s assessment of the child’s capacity to reason through the consequences of her actions (Levine, 2006). Regardless which of these arguments one holds to (the truncating or lengthening of childhood) there remains a perception of the child as lacking capacity to fend for herself.

## *overprotection is unnecessary*

Criminologists Chesney-Lind and Belknap (2004) tell us that our children are neither more dangerous to themselves and others, nor more out-of-control than in the past. Violence in our communities is also decreasing despite changing charge patterns by police which have tended to criminalize status offences of youth (like drinking under age) and aspects of youth behavior like bullying and school yard fighting (Lynch, Hurford, & Cole, 2002). The most common crimes committed by young people remain common assault in which no injury is caused and theft under $5,000. Rates of common assault have decreased over the past decade despite police being more likely to investigate playground skirmishes (Osher & Osher, 2002). Population wide, rates of homicide are also down in almost all western countries. Likewise, worry about other aspects of teenager delinquency is increasing unfounded (Phillips & Straussner, 2017). There is little evidence that drug and alcohol use among youth as a population has increased, and may have actually decreased over the past 30 years.

A disturbing irony, however, regarding risk exposure is that statistically, children are most at risk when they are with their families or at their place of residence (Sanders, Munford, & Liebenberg, 2012). Sexual assaults are most commonly perpetrated by individuals known to a child and while the child is at home. Most child abductions are carried out by parents themselves and result from custody disputes. It is the same for internet solicitations by sexual predators (Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2007). A survey of youth internet use showed that 79% of such solicitations occur while children are using their home computers (Mitchel, Wolak & Finkelhor,2007). Gun related deaths are also more likely when a child is at home. Sadly, the safest place for our children seems to be out beyond our front doors (Selekman, 2005)

# Intervention

To help families look critically at their pattern of overprotection, various professionals have proposed an employment of a three phase clinical approach. The approach borrows heavily from social constructionism and postmodern approaches to therapy first developed by Gergen (1991) and White (1988) and reflected in writing by Madsen (1999) and Ungar (2001, 2004).

## *Phase One: Inviting parents to reflect on their childhoods*

Inviting parents to reflect on their own childhoods and the risks and responsibilities that they assumed is a respectful place to begin a family conversation (Spratt, 2011). Often, it has been a youth’s insistence on more freedom or problematic withdrawal that brings the family to therapy. Parents often feel attacked (Ungar, 2004). Their initial fear for their children becomes compounded by their fear of being perceived as a bad parent by the therapist. Conversations during this phase focus on inviting parents to remember their own patterns of risk-taking, whether through episodes of adventure or assuming of responsibilities that signaled their transition to adulthood (Ungar, 2007). The focus is on eliciting thick descriptions of childhood experiences that parents say taught them self-respect, demonstrated capacities, fostered independence and, where possible, helped them nurture compassion for others.

## *Phase Two: Exploring the child’s motivation for risk and responsibility*

Parents are asked to explore their child’s motivation for his/her problem behavior (Ungar, 2004). Where children are anxious and withdrawn, the exploration relates to the functionality of the disordered behavior: “How does being anxious help your child stay safe?” “What does your child need in order to function more independently and confidently?” Where children are acting out in dangerous and delinquent ways, questions focus on other functional aspects of the behavior: “How does delinquency help your child experience adventure and responsibility?” “What messages does he hear about himself when he behaves in these ways?” It is preferable that all family members meet to answer these questions, with youth themselves explaining the advantages and disadvantages of how they have adapted to the experience of overprotection by their caregivers (Ungar, 2004).

## *Phase Three: Exploring safe substitutes for the child’s problem behavior*

During this third phase, intervention moves from reflections on past behavior of parents and child motivation to identifying substitute behaviors for the young person (Tjepkema, 2004). These substitutes should be sufficiently safe to reassure parents but still bring with them the necessary risk and responsibility to meet the needs of young people seeking to “jump the maturity gap” (Tjepkema, 2004).

# Parenthood and life satisfaction

Today parenthood is largely a choice, and is typically considered an important experience. The trajectories of life satisfaction levels during parenthood differ across groups of parents. For example, Barber et al. (2005) showed that the well-being of the majority of parents did not change in response to birth, 7% experienced a sustained decrease, and 4% experienced a strong increase. This may reflect personal preferences for parenthood (Barber et al, 2005), but also the ability to cope with its challenges. Indeed, married and older people typically derive more life satisfaction from parenthood than do single and poorer people (Myrskyl¨a and Margolis 2014). Such people may be better prepared for the demands of parenthood, such as financial costs (Mason, 2009) and constraints on parental time (Walsh, 2006)

# Conclusion

The degree of acceptable monitoring of children is always a negotiation between parents, children and their wider community (Phillips & Straussner, 2017). Such surveillance only becomes problematic when it is out of keeping with the relative degree of risk facing a child. Where religious or cultural norms dictate restrictive rules, children usually are willing to accommodate to these if other opportunities are provided to signal the transition to a more adult-like status (Reupert & Maybery, 2014). Religious ceremonies that mark the transition to adulthood are a good substitute for young people where these rites of passage are vested with powerful self-constructions and witnessed by others (Levine, 2006). Efforts to help families where overprotection threatens children’s well-being need further study. However, as the model here demonstrates, there are already a number of related bodies of work that may help to inform practice with this population (Mason, 2009). Public education campaigns that help parents understand the potential danger posed to their children through overprotection may yet be the next wave of health promotion efforts with families from socially advantaged neighborhoods (Mason, 2009).

# Reflection of the article

There seems to a lot of opinions concerning how one should raise a child, there also exists a variety of proven research that provides a guideline on how children should be raised and as much as that has worked for some it does not prove that it will work for the coming generation. On that note, it is safe to say that despite various research and proven studies, children are not wired the same and in the world such as this that is changing, one can only hope for wisdom to better prepare their child for the world. Perception however continues to be everything which means that what might have been over parenting back then is exactly what is needed now and so nothing remains the same long enough to be a proven fact. My unsolicited opinion would be for one to do the best they can until they know better and when they know better they will do better cause children are complex beings born into a complex and dangerous world and so no one can safely say their child is good to adapt or move from the nest but one can depend on grace and hope that whatever is instilled in them helps them. As the bible says ‘teach a child the way they should go and they will not depart from it’ and even that is not up to you to make sure they do not depart from it but your faith that God will come through for your children is what holds everything together.

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