
Handbook of Parenting and Child Development Across the Lifespan

Matthew R. Sanders • Alina Morawska
Editors

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 Springer

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Preface

The *Handbook of Parenting and Child Development Across the Lifespan* was written to bring together in one book the most important theory and empirical findings relating to the parent-child relationship. We wanted to build a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding all aspects of the parenting role, and how parenting practices influence children's and young people's development across the lifespan. To do this, we invited leading parenting researchers from around the world who had made important contributions to the parenting literature. This goal of bringing together a diverse body of evidence spanning genetics, cognitive neuroscience, child development, and research on prevention and intervention science was challenging: individual contributions tend to be quite specialized and the links between basic scientific research on parenting and child development do not always inform research or policy on parenting intervention in the context of prevention and treatment.

We structured the volume into six parts. We begin with important foundational information relating to understanding the psychological processes and mechanisms that explain how differences in parenting influence children's development. In Part I we consider the role, functions, and tasks of parenthood. Next, we discuss the biological factors that influence parenting, the role of attachment in understanding the parent-child relationship, the effects of interparental relationships, and fathers on children's development. We then consider how family functioning can be affected by disruptive events such as exposure to natural disasters, war, and becoming a refugee.

Part II explores how parenting affects children's development, including brain architecture and function, language, communication and cognitive development, children's emotions and capacity for self-regulation, their relationships with peers, their health, physical activity and nutritional status, and finally how parenting influences children with specific developmental disorders. What becomes apparent in this section is the pervasiveness of parental impact on children's lives.

Part III asks the question of how being a parent influences a parent's life and capacity to parent. Many of the chapters in this section adopt a broad social ecological perspective. Parents are not simply born knowing how to care for and educate children, and learning how to parent is influenced by multiple contextual issues including the child's temperament and characteristics, a parent's capacity to self-regulate their own emotions and behavior and their cognitive functioning (including expectations and attributions).

Importantly the kind of social support parents can access from partners, extended family and friends, religious organizations, and the workplace influences how stressful parenting can become. Disruptive family relationships that come about through separation and divorce experiences can influence parents' relationships with their children and can be very stressful as parents seek to create a new life for themselves in a changing family arrangement. This section also explores basic social conditions of living in communities and neighborhoods and the impact of housing conditions on parenting and child development. We end this section with a chapter addressing policies and services as a context that supports the parenting role and how this in turn influences parental functioning and children's development.

Part IV turns to the issue of how the parenting role changes across different phases of development from infancy, toddlerhood, the preschool years, through school-age children, adolescents and emerging adults, adult children, and parenting during the later years of life. We discuss the unique challenges of parenting children of different ages. Each stage of development brings new challenges, but each stage is still fundamentally focused on promoting the well-being of children. The parent role involves a lifelong commitment to offspring and can both positively and adversely affect parents and children, even as children become adults, then parents and grandparents themselves.

Part V turns to the issue of how best to support parents in their role. It begins with a consideration of the broader social ecology of parenting and the adverse effects of poverty on families. We discuss the role of parenting programs in preventing social and emotional problems in children and parenting, and family intervention programs in the treatment of child behavioral and emotional problems. The final Part VI turns to the implications of the prior research on parenting for policy development and practice. We make the case for a multilevel system of evidence-based parenting support within a population health framework and discuss the economic benefits of investments in parenting programs. We end by considering possible future directions for parenting research, practice, and policy. Our fundamental conclusion is that substantial progress has been made in understanding the critical role of parenting in influencing children's development, and importantly a range of evidence-based parenting programs are now being disseminated widely throughout the world to benefit parents and children. However, there is so much more to do, and only a tiny fraction of the world's population of parents access these programs, with the vast majority learning their parenting role on the job through trial and error learning.

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We also acknowledge the following organizations that have provided financial support to the Parenting and Family Support Centre to support our research work into parenting including the National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, US National Institute of Drug Abuse, US National Institute of Mental Health, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Commonwealth Government of Australia, Victorian Government, Queensland Government, and Western Australian Government, New Zealand Government (Ministry of Health), Sylvia and Charles Viertel Charitable Foundation, Australian Rotary Health Research Fund, Beyond Blue, Telstra Foundation, and Triple P International. We also acknowledge funding support from the ARC Centre of Excellence for Children and Families over the Life Course.

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Acknowledgement of Country

The editors and contributing authors of this volume acknowledge indigenous families of all nations including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, First Nations peoples of Canada, American Indian/Alaska Native families of the United States of America, and Māori families (whānau) of New Zealand. We pay our respects to ancestors and elders, past and present. We are committed to honoring indigenous peoples' unique

cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters, and seas and their rich contribution to society.

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