

Parental Strategies Employed to Facilitate Adjustment of Children in Laboratory Day Care Centre

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ABSTRACT The present study aimed at studying the strategies employed by parents to facilitate the adjustment of children in the Laboratory Day Care Centre (LDCC). The study was based upon a sample of 32 (15 male and 17 female) children admitted in April, 2009 and 2010 sessions, as well as 'Parents of the sample children (n=32)' and 'Care Providers (n=3)'. Observation-cum-Interview method was used for data collection for the study. Based on their non-adjustment reactions, the children were divided into two categories, viz. 'Early Adjusting Children' and 'Late Adjusting Children'. This categorization was based on an opinion survey conducted in the five 'Early Childhood Care Centres' in Ludhiana City. As per the opinion of the supervisors, 3 weeks time period was kept as the demarcating line for 'Early and Late Adjusting' categories of children. Therefore, all the children taking more than 3 weeks time for their comfortable adjustment to the LDCC were designated as the 'Late Adjusting Children'. The results of the study highlighted that statistically significant differences existed between the strategies adopted by the parents of 'Early and Late Adjusting Children' to assist their child in his transition from home to Laboratory Day Care Centre. In majority of the dimensions investigated, the parents of the 'Early Adjusting Children' were using the pro-adjustment strategies more aggressively as compared to the parents of 'Late Adjusting Children'.

INTRODUCTION

Parenting encompasses a number of different aspects, including beliefs, values, goals and behaviours. Each of these dimensions can influence and be influenced by child characteristics such as temperament (Chen and Luster 2002) as well as aspects of the macro social system in which children grow up. Parenting is also affected by physical and social contexts, child rearing customs and the psychological characteristics of adults (Boushel 2000; Rosenthal and Stier 2001).

Parenting is a complex activity that includes many specific behaviours that work individually and together to influence the child outcomes. Although specific parenting behaviours, such as spanking or reading aloud, may influence child development, looking at any specific behaviour in isolation may be misleading. Most researchers who attempt to describe this broad parental milieu rely on Diana Baumrind's concept of parenting style. The construct of parenting style is used to capture normal variations in parents' attempts to control and socialize their children (Baumrind 1967).

Lewis et al. (1995) had found that children with multiple siblings or those who interacted regularly with a variety of adult relatives had

shown more rapid understanding of other people's thinking and acting than the children with fewer social partners.

Theoretical Perspective of the Issue

Attachment describes the tendency of human infants to seek comfort, support, nurturance and protection from one or more discriminated care-givers. The tendency for selective seeking of comfort is not apparent at birth, however. During the first few months babies don't differentiate much among care-givers and usually can be calmed by any loving person, regardless of the relationship. Following a period of sociability and comfort with a wide range of adult care-givers during the first 6 months, at about 7 to 9 months of age, two new infant behaviours appear, 'stranger wariness' and 'separation protest' (Berk 2005).

'Stranger wariness' describes an apparent discomfort with unfamiliar adults and a turning for comfort selectively to those they know and trust. 'Separation protest' refers to the infant's new tendency to protest separation from familiar caregivers. Although individual differences in the intensity and expression of these behaviours are clear, they may be considered virtually ubiquitous. When these behaviours

appear, the infant is said to be attached to one or more caregivers (Berk 2005).

Infants and mothers seem to be biologically primed to develop reciprocal contact and communication patterns. Harlow's research (1959) with surrogate-reared infant monkeys emphasizes the importance of contact comfort provided by the mother's body furthering infant's development of love and attachment.

Ainsworth (1967) found that the mothers of infants who were more securely attached were better informants than other mothers. These mothers communicated greater interest in and gave more specific information about their babies. Strength of the infant's attachment was positively related to amount of time spent in care giving and to mother's enjoyment of breast feeding.

Ainsworth (1978) research paradigm that indexes differential communicative patterns in infant-mother attachment is the "strange situation". Mother, baby and observer are introduced into an experimental room. For alternating three-minute periods, different dyadic pairs are left together. This sequence of situations revealed three major responses. About 70 percent of infants showed securely attached patterns of responding to mother's presence, absence and re-entry. About 20 percent of infants were anxious/ avoidant. Their mother's tended to be rejecting impatient and disliked body cuddling. About 10 percent of infants were resistant to or resentful of maternal efforts to comfort them on reunion. Their mothers tended to be inattentive to and insensitive to infant signals.

Two behaviours were much more frequent among the mothers of secure infants than among the mothers of anxious/insecure infants. These behaviours were called "contingent pacing" and "encouragement of further interaction". A mother was identified as showing contingent pacing when she leaned toward the baby, smiling, or talking, gently and in slow tempo allowed the baby plenty of time to mobilize a response before she gave a gentle burst of stimulation. After little or no initial response from the baby, these mothers did not abandon efforts to get interaction going, but instead gently persisted in stimulation, increasing positive effect as the infant became more responsive. These mothers were more apt to hold the infant tenderly and carefully (Ainsworth et al. 1978). With this backdrop the present study was initiated with the following objectives:

Objectives

- (i) To assess the various strategies used by the parents to facilitate adjustment of children in Laboratory Day Care Centre.
- (ii) To design an orientation programme for the parents for facilitating initial adjustment of children in Day Care facilities.

Hypothesis

- (i) There is no significant difference in the strategies employed by parents to facilitate adjustment of children in the Laboratory Day Care Centre.

METHODOLOGY

Sample Selection

The sample for the study was drawn from the Laboratory Day Care Centre, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana. Fresh admissions are made during the month of April each year and the sample was drawn out of the children admitted during two consecutive sessions, viz, April 2009 and April 2010. In April 2009, 17 children (9 males and 8 females) and in April 2010, 15 children (6 males and 9 females) were admitted to the Laboratory Day Care Centre. The total sample of the study comprised 32 subjects (15 males and 17 females). Based on the admissions made during these two academic sessions, the subjects of the study were unevenly distributed over the two sexes. All the children were carefully observed from the first day of their joining till three weeks to investigate the time differentials in their adjustment in the Laboratory Day Care Centre as per the pre-decided parameters of adjustment. Subsequently, on the basis of non-adjustment reactions shown by the children, they were categorized into two groups, viz, 'Early Adjusting Children (EAC)' and 'Late Adjusting Children (LAC)'. The dividing line for categorization of Early and Late adjustment was set criteria on the basis of an opinion survey conducted in Ludhiana City in the five Early Childhood Care Centres. For this purpose the supervisors working in these centres were interviewed to seek their opinion based on their working experience as to whom they considered 'Early Adjusting or Late Adjusting Children'.

The data presented in Table 1 was utilized to categorize the observed children in the two

categories of 'Early Adjusting Children' and 'Late Adjusting Children'. The results revealed that the mean time taken by the children to adjust was 2.6 ± 0.4 weeks. Therefore, in line with the results of the opinion survey the demarcating line between 'Early Adjusting and Late Adjusting Children' in the present study was drawn at 3 weeks. Although some foreign research studies were also available on this aspect, but the culturally appropriate responses were preferred. Indeed, parenting is an intense and intimate experience in India which strongly influences the adjustment process of the children. After identifying the categories, observations were recorded regarding the non-adjustment reactions and behaviour of the 'Late Adjusting' group with a view to keep track of their behaviour. The observations during the subsequent weeks were periodical with two hours observation everyday alternating between outdoor and indoor activities. Observations of the 'Late Adjusting Children' were stretched up to 12 weeks (90 days) till the observed non-adjustment reactions phased out slowly. Observations during the extended period were more focused on the typical non-adjustment patterns of the individual subject. Along with the selected children ($n=32$), the parents ($n=32$) of the selected children were also the subjects of the study.

Tools Used for the Study

Self-structured Interview Schedule for Parents of Sample Children

Self-structured interview schedule was prepared to assess the various strategies adopted by the parents to facilitate adjustment of their children in Laboratory Day Care Centre. The

interview schedule was prepared after conducting a comprehensive study of the relevant literature and consulting the subject experts in the field. The interview schedules were also handed over to the members of the advisory committee to seek their advice and make necessary amendments, wherever required. Thus, the interview schedule was validated by a group of experts of the Department of Human Development, PAU, Ludhiana.

RESULTS

Background Information of the Subjects

The socio-personal characteristics of the respondents are reported in Table 2. These characteristics include their gender, age, maternal education, maternal occupation, paternal education, paternal occupation, family type, family size and number of siblings. As evident from Table 1, the total sample ($n=32$) comprised 46.9 per cent males and 53.1 per cent females.

The majority of the selected children were females in the age group of 2-2½ years and belonged to the nuclear families. Both the parents were well-qualified and professionally well-placed. The preponderance of the only child was also quite evident in the selected sample.

Time Differentials in Adjustment by Early and Late Adjusting Children

Distribution of the Early Adjusting Children and Late Adjusting Children according to the weeks taken by them in adjustment is presented in Table 3. In the case of 'Early Adjusting Children', the majority (71.42%) of the children adjusted within a week, while the rest (28.58%)

Table 1: Information obtained from the care providers regarding adjustment patterns (in weeks) of the newly admitted children

Name of the early childhood care centre →	Laboratory Day Care Centre, PAU			Laboratory Nursery School, PAU		Magic Year Child Development Centre			Pumpkins	Penguin Castle Pre-school		Average weeks of adjustment ($n=11$)
Care provider (C)	C1	C2	C3	C1	C2	C1	C2	C3	C1	C1	C2	2.6 $\pm$ 0.4
Age group of children (Years)	2-4	2-4	2-4	2.5-4	2.5-4	2-3.5	2-3.5	2-3	2-4.5	1.5-4	1.5-4	
Time taken to adjust normally (weeks)	3	2-3	3	1-3	3-4	1-3	2-3	1-3	4	3-4	1-3	
Time taken by late adjusting children (weeks)	After 3	After 3	After 3	After 4	After 4	After 3	After 3	After 3	After 4	After 4	After 3	

Table 2: Socio-personal characteristics of the respondents

S. No.	Socio-personal characteristics	Frequency (n=32)	Percentage
1.	<i>Gender</i>		
	Male	15	(46.88)
	Female	17	(53.12)
2.	<i>Age</i>		
	1.5-2 years	1	(3.13)
	2-2.5 years	28	(87.50)
	2.5 -3 years	3	(9.38)
3.	<i>Educational Qualification of Mother</i>		
	10+2	1	(3.13)
	Graduation	10	(31.25)
	Post-graduation	17	(53.13)
	Ph.D	4	(12.50)
4.	<i>Profession of Mother</i>		
	Housewife	5	(15.63)
	Teaching	8	(25.00)
	Medical	7	(21.88)
	Others(corporate sector, bank jobs, etc.)	12	(37.50)
5.	<i>Educational Qualification of Father</i>		
	10+2	2	(6.25)
	Graduation	4	(12.50)
	Post-graduation	16	(50.00)
	Ph.D	10	(31.25)
6.	<i>Profession of Father</i>		
	Business	5	(15.63)
	Teaching	11	(34.38)
	Medical	6	(18.75)
	Administration	1	(3.13)
	Others(corporate sector, bank jobs, etc.)	9	(28.13)
7.	<i>Family Type</i>		
	Nuclear	23	(71.88)
	Joint	9	(28.13)
8.	<i>Family Size</i>		
	Small family(3-4 members)	21	(65.63)
	Large family(5 and more than 5 members)	11	(34.37)
9.	<i>Number of Siblings</i>		
	Only child	22	(68.75)
	One	9	(28.13)
	Two	1	(3.13)

Figures in parentheses denote the percentages

adjusted within next 2 weeks. However, in the category of 'Late Adjusting Children', the results revealed that 33.3 per cent adjusted within 4 weeks followed by 50 per cent adjusting in 4 to 9 weeks and about 16.7 percent took 9 weeks or more to adjust.

Parental Strategies to Facilitate Adjustment of Children

Results in Table 4 illustrate the strategies used by parents to facilitate adjustment of children in Laboratory Day Care Centre. The results have been presented in three distinct categories viz. Category-A, Category-B and Category-C.

Table 3: Per cent distribution of early and late adjusting children according to time differentials in adjustment

Particulars	Range (Days)	F	%
<i>Category Early Adjusting Children (n=14)</i>			
Within a week	1- 5	10	71.42
One to two weeks	7-10	2	14.29
Two to three weeks	15-18	2	14.29
<i>Category Late Adjusting Children (n=18)</i>			
Up to 4 weeks (More than 3 weeks)	24-28	6	33.3
4 to 9 weeks	30-60	9	50.0
More than 9 weeks	75-90	3	16.7

Category-A included queries related to the personal preparation of the parents prior to their child's joining Laboratory Day Care Centre. It is evident from the results that there were significant differences in the strategies employed in the personal preparation of the parents of Early and Late Adjusting Children prior to the child's joining Laboratory Day Care Centre. Preceding to the child's joining the Laboratory Day Care Centre, 88.89 per cent parents of Late Adjusting Children in contrast to 28.57 per cent parents of Early Adjusting Children were 'extremely worried and insecure' about sending their child to the Laboratory Day Care Centre. However, as evident from the results, parents of Early Adjusting Children were 'reasonably anxious' about the separation (71.43 % in Early Adjusting Children). Nearly 64.29 per cent parents of Early Adjusting Children were better oriented with the schedule of the Laboratory Day Care Centre, prepared themselves emotionally for this transitional phase (71.43 % in Early Adjusting Children and 27.78 % in Late Adjusting Children), read relevant literature (71.43 % in Early Adjusting Children and 33.33 % in Late Adjusting Children) and discussed the issue with experienced parents to get proper know how (71.43 % in Early Adjusting Children and 27.78 % in Late Adjusting Children). However, no significant difference was observed in the parental strategies of Early Adjusting Children and Late Adjusting Children with respect to "attending seminar, lecture or orientation programme" and "attempting informal meetings with the care-providers".

In order to gain further insight into the parental strategies for facilitating adjustment of the children, further analysis of the data was carried out in terms of the preparation of the child prior to joining Laboratory Day Care Cen-

Table 4: Parental strategies to facilitate adjustment of children

Category	Parental strategies	Parents of Early Adjusting Children (n=14)	Parents of Late Adjusting Children (n=18)	Z-values
A.	<i>Personal Preparation by the Parents Prior to their Child's Joining Laboratory Day Care Centre</i>			
	1. Extremely worried and insecure about sending the child to Laboratory Day Care Centre	4 (28.57)	16 (88.89)	3.496*
	2. Reasonably anxious about the separation from the child	10 (71.43)	2 (11.11)	3.446*
	3. Oriented oneself with the schedule of the Laboratory Day Care Centre	9 (64.29)	5 (27.78)	2.065*
	4. Prepared oneself emotionally for this transition phase	10 (71.43)	5 (27.78)	2.455*
	5. Attended any seminar, lecture or orientation programme to extend maximum support for comfortable transition	3 (21.43)	2 (11.11)	0.1797
	6. Read any relevant literature	10 (71.43)	6 (33.33)	2.138*
	7. Discussed various issues with experienced parents to get know-how	10 (71.43)	5 (27.78)	2.455*
	8. Attended informal meetings with the care providers	6 (42.86)	3 (16.67)	1.635
B.	<i>Preparation of the Child Prior to Joining Laboratory Day Care Centre</i>			
	1. Visited Laboratory Day Care Centre before joining to get familiar with the physical environment	6 (42.86)	2 (11.11)	2.057*
	2. Familiarized the child with other children and his future care providers	6 (42.86)	2 (11.11)	2.057*
	3. Familiarized the Laboratory Day Care Centre routine at home	4 (28.57)	0 (0.00)	2.424*
	4. Discussed about Laboratory Day Care Centre, care providers and friends	12 (85.71)	11 (61.11)	1.536
	5. Cited examples of other children or elder siblings	9 (64.29)	5 (27.78)	2.065*
	6. Read stories or drew pictures about day care with the child	5 (35.71)	0 (0.00)	2.760*
	7. Talked positively about the forthcoming new adventure	11 (78.57)	7 (38.89)	2.245*
C.	<i>Adopting Strategies to Assist in the Adjustment of the Child in Laboratory Day Care Centre</i>			
	1. Allowing extra time to get him ready during the first few days	11 (78.57)	2 (11.11)	3.855*
	2. Allowing to carry his favourite play materials	11 (78.57)	5 (27.78)	2.851*
	3. Comforting by offering a family photo	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	
	4. Starting with few hours then following regular routine	9 (64.29)	7 (38.89)	2.05*
	5. Sneaking out after dropping the child	3 (21.43)	11 (61.11)	2.245*
	6. Saying good-bye cheerfully to the child	12 (85.71)	4 (22.22)	3.563*
	7. Referring to the other better adjusted cheerful children	10 (71.43)	10 (55.56)	0.920
	8. Motivating through play materials	11 (78.57)	9 (50.00)	1.656
	9. Remaining with the child for some time during the initial few days	10 (71.43)	6 (33.33)	2.138*
	10. Keeping the lines of communication open with the child as well as care providers	12 (85.71)	4 (22.22)	3.563*
	11. Extending warm welcome while coming to pick up the child	12 (85.71)	6 (33.33)	2.963*
	12. Setting aside sometime every day for quality interaction at home	9 (64.29)	4 (22.22)	2.403*
	13. Providing contact information to the care providers for emergency	14(100.00)	18(100.00)	

*Significant at 5 per cent Number in parentheses denote the percentages

tre (Category-B). The results displayed the preponderance of the parents of Early Adjusting Children in following three strategies, viz. '85.71 per cent parents discussed about Laboratory Day Care Centre, care providers and friends', '78.57 per cent parents talked positively about the forthcoming adventure' and '64.29 per cent parents cited the examples of other children or elder siblings'. It was found that, none of the parents of Late Adjusting Children had adopted any of these strategies very insistently. Statistically significant differences

were also discerned in the parents of Early Adjusting Children and Late Adjusting Children in preparing the child prior to joining Laboratory Day Care Centre in terms of 'visiting Laboratory Day Care Centre before joining and familiarizing the child with the physical environment', 'familiarizing the child with other children and with his future care-providers', 'familiarizing the schedule of the Laboratory Day Care Centre' and 'reading stories or drawing pictures about day care with child'. In all these domains also the parents of Early Adjusting

Children were employing all these practices more assertively.

Investigations carried out under Category-C throw light on the strategies being used by the parents to assist in the adjustment of the child to Laboratory Day Care Centre when the child has joined the Day Care Centre. The results revealed that the parents of Early Adjusting Children in contrast to the parents of Late Adjusting Children 'bid cheerful good bye while dropping (85.71%)', 'kept the lines of communication open with child and the care provider (85.71%)' and 'extended warm welcome to the child while picking up (85.71%)'. Almost 78.57 per cent parents of the Early Adjusting Children stood out against the parents of the Late Adjusting Children in the terms of 'allowing extra time to get ready during the first few days', 'allowing to carry his favourite play material' and 'motivating through play materials available in the Day Care Centre'. Also, 71.43 per cent parents of the Early Adjusting Children spent some extra time with the child during the initial days of joining to facilitate the adjustment of the child by 'remaining with the child for some time' and 'referred to other better adjusted children' where as among the parents of Late Adjusting Children only 33.33 and 55.56 per cent, respectively used these techniques. Similarly, a vast majority (64.29 %) of parents from the category of Early Adjusting Children preferred to 'start with few hours then following the regular routine' and 'set aside some time every day for quality interaction at home'. All these dimensions were the weak links in the strategies utilized by the parents of Late Adjusting Children. The differences observed in the parental strategies were found to be statistically significant for the majority of the dimensions except a few. Although, the differences were found to be non significant with respect to 'referring to other children' and 'motivating through play materials' yet found to be used more aggressively by the parents of Early Adjusting Children. Only in one domain, that is, 'sneaking out after dropping the child' which is not considered a favourable way of bidding good bye, 61.11 percent parents of Late Adjusting Children were found to be using it often and was found to be sparingly utilized by parents of Early Adjusting Children (21.43 %). This difference was found to be statistically significant (2.245). However, all the parents of both the categories (Early Adjusting Children and Late

Adjusting Children) 'provided the contact information to the care-providers for emergency'. But in contrast to this none of the parents of 'Early and Late Adjusting Children' comforted the child by offering a family photo.

Therefore, it could be inferred from the aforementioned results that statistically significant differences existed between the strategies adopted by the parents of 'Early and Late adjusting Children' to assist their child in his transition from home to Laboratory Day Care Centre. In majority of the dimensions investigated, the parents of the 'Early Adjusting Children' were using the pro-adjustment strategies more aggressively as compared to the parents of 'Late Adjusting Children'.

The research findings were in line with the study conducted by Boyle et al. (2004) to examine the differential-maternal parenting behaviour and family effects on children. The findings supported the positive association between differential-maternal parenting behaviour, evaluated as a family-level experience and children's maladjustment.

Orientation Programme for Parents for Facilitating Initial Adjustment of Children in Day Care Facilities

In the light of the results of this study, some guidelines for the parents were sketched to facilitate the adjustment of the children in the day care centre, which is an area of prime concern for the parents as well as the care providers during present times. The orientation programme should be focused to enlighten the parents about the choices made by them for preparing their children for this transition during early years.

Approaches for Parents in Supporting a Child through this Period of Transition

On the basis of the results obtained through the investigations carried on parents, the following dimensions of the parents need to be strengthened to get along the present interactional process:

1. Parents need to be more encouraging and positive towards the minor adjustment problems encountered during the initial phase of joining at Laboratory Day Care Centre.
2. Parents should visit the Laboratory Day Care Centre ahead of time to acquaint the child

- with the physical environment, the adults and the schedule of the Day Care Centre.
3. Draw pictures or read book about going to the Laboratory Day Care Centre can go a long way in drawing the child's attention and interest in his new abode.
 4. Parents can plan a special celebration leading up to the child's big first day. Count down the days on the calendar along with the child and maintain a level of genuine, but heightened excitement about the new transition. This will help child to look forward to the event in a positive spirit.
 5. Talk to the child about what he can expect at day care. Explain the daily schedule of activities, snacks and naps. Speak excitedly about your positive expectations regarding the experience and the child will most likely work hard to meet them.
 6. Prepare the child's favourite meal, choose a special outfit the day before and get the whole family involved in an evening of fun.
 7. Develop a special way of saying goodbye when dropping the child off and a special cheerful way to picking them up later in the day. While dropping the child don't prolong your departure or come back several times. Don't even sneak out of the room. This creates mistrust in the child and makes his adjustment difficult.
 8. Allow the child to carry his favourite blanket, pillow or stuffed animal for the nap-time. This gives him a lot of emotional security and support. Child relates it to his home and parents and tries to find that comfort and security through this item.
 9. If possible let the child carry pictures of the family for him to look at. Provide any of your personal belonging like a pen or handkerchief that child can "hold it" for you while you are away. Ainsworth et al. (1978) studied patterns of attachment and the results revealed that insecurely attached infants tend to have mothers who engaged in less physical contact, handled them awkwardly, behaved in a routine manner and sometimes negative, resentful and rejecting.
 10. Plan to remain with the child when he arrives at the day care centre the first day. This will provide him much needed reassurance and support.
 11. Avoid the unnecessary inquiry from the Laboratory Day Care Centre staff concerning the behaviour of the child during the

time when you were away. Your over concern/over questioning in the presence of child will reflect your own anxiety and insecurity.

CONCLUSION

It could be inferred from the aforementioned results that significant differences existed between the strategies adopted by the parents of 'Early and Late adjusting Children' to assist their child in his transition from home to Laboratory Day Care Centre. In majority of the dimensions investigated, the parents of the 'Early Adjusting Children' were using the pro-adjustment strategies more aggressively as compared to the parents of 'Late Adjusting Children'. Consequently, the children also vary in their adjustment patterns. Each child adjusts at his or her own pace, exhibiting non-adjustment reactions of varying strength and frequency. Studies suggests that the underlying factors for these individual differences are undoubtedly the parental techniques and temperament, the temperament of the individual child and the environment of the Day Care Centre. Therefore, understanding and creating positive parental interactions with the child are of prime importance to facilitate the smooth transition of children to the Day Care Centre.

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