
NEWSLETTER

Negative Parenting Styles and Preschoolers' Social Adaptation Difficulties: The Mediating Effect of Parent-Child Conflicts

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CHILDREN'S social adaptation is a manifestation of the level of their socialization. Positive social adaptation is represented by qualities such as pro-activeness, sensitivity, cooperation, and popularity among peers in children's social interaction. Social adaptation difficulties include externalizing behavior problems like anger and aggression and internalizing ones such as anxiety and withdrawal. Childhood social adaptation problems can impose negative influences on individuals' future development.

The parenting style is an integration of parents' values, attitudes, and behavior in child rearing, working on children in three dimensions: warmth and caring, behavioral discipline, and psychological control. In early childhood, children learn by simulating the words and actions of their parents. The language, behaviors, and responses delivered by parents in the process of child upbringing directly affect the development of social skills of children in the early years. Negative parenting behavior will induce social adaptation difficulties in young children.

This study constructed a model of the relationships between negative parenting behavior, child-parent conflicts, and child social adaptation difficulties, to analyze: (i) the father vs. mother differences in the impact of negative parenting behavior on child social adaptation; (ii) the mediating effect of child-parent conflicts on the relation between negative parenting styles and child social adaptation difficulties.

Through cluster sampling, 446 second-year kindergarteners and their parents were selected as subjects from 6 kindergartens (including one community, one bilingual, two private, and two public kindergartens) in X City. In the first year of the study, the Child-Rearing Practices Report Q-Sort and the Child-Parent Relationship Scale were utilized to investigate parents' rearing behavior and the child-parent relationships among subjects. The Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation Scale, SCBE-30 was employed to assess children's social adaptation in the following year.

The research findings demonstrate that negative parenting behavior of fathers and mothers can both positively predict children's anger and aggression, and besides, the negative parenting behavior of mothers also positively predicts children's anxiety and withdrawal, indicating that it has a wider adverse influence than that of fathers; and that father-son conflicts can mediate the relation between the negative parenting behavior of the father and children's anger and aggression, while mother-son conflicts can mediate the relationship between negative parenting behavior of the mother and children's anxiety and withdrawal as well as anger and aggression. Therefore, to improve children's social adaptation, parents should be mindful of the impact of their rearing behavior and parent-child relationships on the development of their preschool kids; avoid negative parenting practices such as threatening and coercion, verbal abuse and corporal punishment, overinvolvement and overprotection, etc.; and secure close parent-child relationships.

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