

Importance of Parental Involvement and Parenting Styles in the Development of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

¹Mridula Rani, ²Prasanta Kumar Sahoo, ³Aashi Yadav

Assistant Professor, Department of Audiology & Speech Language Pathology, S. S. College, Bhopal, M.P., India¹

Audiologist & Speech Language Pathologist, Department of ENT, AIIMS, Bhopal, M.P., India²

Clinical Speech Language Pathologist, S. S. College, Bhopal, M.P., India³

ABSTRACT

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by persistent difficulties in social communication, restricted interests, and repetitive patterns of behavior. The developmental outcomes of children with ASD are influenced not only by therapeutic interventions but also by the quality of parental involvement and parenting practices. Parents play a crucial role in supporting the cognitive, social, emotional, and communication development of children with ASD through consistent engagement, emotional support, and participation in intervention programs.

The present study examines the importance of parental involvement and the impact of different parenting styles on the developmental progress of children with ASD. Research indicates that active parental participation in therapy, education, and daily communication activities contributes significantly to improvements in language development, adaptive behaviour, social interaction, and emotional regulation. Furthermore, parenting styles such as authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved approaches can influence a child's behavioural adjustment, self-esteem, and social competence. Among these, the authoritative parenting style, characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and appropriate behavioural expectations, has been associated with more positive developmental outcomes in children with ASD.

The findings highlight that parents who actively collaborate with therapists, educators, and

healthcare professionals create supportive environments that enhance learning opportunities and promote skill generalization across settings. Conversely, limited parental involvement and inconsistent parenting practices may hinder developmental progress and increase behavioural challenges. The study emphasizes the need for parent-training programs and family-centered intervention approaches that empower caregivers with effective strategies for managing the unique needs of children with ASD.

In conclusion, parental involvement and positive parenting practices are fundamental components of successful intervention for children with autism spectrum disorder. Strengthening family engagement and promoting supportive parenting styles can significantly improve developmental outcomes, social functioning, and overall quality of life for children with ASD.

Keywords: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Parental Involvement, Parenting Styles, Child Development, Family-Centered Intervention, Social Communication, Behavioral Development, Autism.

I INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by difficulties in social communication, social interaction, and the presence of restricted and repetitive behaviours. While therapeutic interventions such as speech-language therapy, occupational therapy, behavioural therapy, and special education are important, parents remain the

most influential figures in a child's development. The quality of parent-child interactions and the parenting style adopted significantly shape the child's social, emotional, behavioural, and adaptive functioning.

Children with autism often require greater support in learning social rules, communication skills, emotional regulation, and daily living skills. Therefore, parenting practices become especially important in facilitating developmental progress.

Parenting Styles and Their Impact on Children with Autism

Parenting styles refer to the characteristic ways in which parents interact with, discipline, nurture, and guide their children. The classic parenting styles were proposed by Diana Baumrind and later expanded by other developmental researchers.

1. Authoritative Parenting Style

The authoritative parenting style is widely regarded as the most effective and beneficial approach for raising children, including those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This parenting style is characterized by a balanced combination of warmth, responsiveness, support, and appropriate behavioural expectations. Authoritative parents establish clear rules and boundaries while maintaining open communication and providing emotional support to their children.

In the context of ASD, authoritative parenting helps create a structured and nurturing environment that promotes learning, social interaction, and emotional well-being. Parents encourage independence and positive behaviour while remaining sensitive to the child's unique developmental needs and challenges. They use positive reinforcement, consistent routines, and constructive guidance rather than punishment to manage behaviour.

Research suggests that children with ASD who are raised in an authoritative family environment often demonstrate better social skills, improved

emotional regulation, higher self-esteem, and greater adaptive functioning. Active parental involvement in therapy sessions, educational activities, and daily communication practices further enhances developmental outcomes. The supportive nature of authoritative parenting also helps reduce stress and anxiety in children with ASD, allowing them to develop confidence and engage more effectively with others.

2. Authoritarian Parenting Style

The authoritarian parenting style is characterized by high levels of control, strict discipline, and rigid expectations, with comparatively low levels of warmth, emotional responsiveness, and open communication. Parents who adopt this style often emphasize obedience, rule-following, and respect for authority, expecting children to comply without questioning decisions. In families of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), authoritarian parenting may involve enforcing strict routines and behavioural expectations with limited flexibility or consideration of the child's emotional and developmental needs. While clear structure and consistency can be beneficial for children with ASD, excessive control and punitive disciplinary practices may increase stress, anxiety, and behavioural difficulties. Children may have fewer opportunities to express their feelings, make choices, or develop problem-solving skills, which can negatively affect their self-confidence and social development. Research suggests that an overly authoritarian approach may reduce the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions and weaken parent-child relationships. Therefore, although structure and discipline are important, combining them with warmth, understanding, and supportive communication is generally considered more beneficial for promoting positive developmental outcomes in children with ASD.

3. Permissive Parenting Style

The permissive parenting style is characterized by high levels of warmth, affection, and

responsiveness, but low levels of control, discipline, and rule enforcement. Parents who adopt this style are generally caring and supportive, allowing their children considerable freedom to make decisions and express themselves. In the context of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), permissive parents may avoid setting strict boundaries because they are concerned about causing stress, frustration, or emotional discomfort to their child. While this nurturing and accepting environment can help children with ASD feel loved, secure, and emotionally supported, excessive permissiveness may create challenges in developing self-discipline, social responsibility, and adaptive behaviours. Children with ASD often benefit from clear routines, consistent expectations, and structured guidance to improve communication, social interaction, and daily living skills. Therefore, a highly permissive parenting approach may sometimes hinder the development of these important skills. Researchers suggest that balancing warmth and emotional support with appropriate structure and behavioural guidance is more effective in promoting positive developmental outcomes for children with ASD.

4. Neglectful (Uninvolved) Parenting Style

The neglectful or uninvolved parenting style is characterized by low levels of both responsiveness and demandingness. Parents who follow this style provide minimal emotional support, supervision, communication, and guidance to their children. In the case of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), this parenting approach can have particularly negative effects because these children often require consistent attention, structured support, and active involvement to help them develop social, communication, and adaptive skills. A lack of parental engagement may lead to difficulties in emotional regulation, behavioural management, academic performance, and social development. Children with ASD raised in uninvolved environments may experience increased feelings of isolation, anxiety, and

frustration due to the absence of guidance and emotional connection. Furthermore, neglectful parenting may reduce opportunities for early intervention and skill-building activities that are crucial for improving developmental outcomes. Studies indicate that active parental involvement and supportive caregiving play a vital role in enhancing the overall well-being and quality of life of children with ASD, making neglectful parenting one of the least effective approaches for fostering their healthy growth and development.

II WHY PARENTING STYLE HAS A GREATER IMPACT IN AUTISM

Parenting style plays a particularly significant role in the development and well-being of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) because these children often face challenges in communication, social interaction, emotional regulation, and adaptive functioning. Unlike typically developing children, children with ASD frequently require additional guidance, structured routines, and consistent support to navigate daily activities and social situations. The way parents interact with, guide, and respond to their child can greatly influence the child's behavioural, emotional, and developmental outcomes. Positive parenting practices, such as warmth, consistency, encouragement, and clear expectations, can help children with ASD improve their communication skills, reduce problem behaviours, and develop greater independence.

Furthermore, parenting style affects how effectively therapeutic interventions and educational programs are implemented at home. Parents who maintain a supportive and structured environment are more likely to reinforce learning strategies, behavioural techniques, and social skills training, leading to better developmental progress. In contrast, inconsistent, overly harsh, or uninvolved parenting approaches may increase stress, anxiety, behavioural difficulties, and social challenges in children with ASD. Since children with autism often rely heavily on familiar routines

and caregiver support, the family environment becomes a critical factor in shaping their growth and adaptation.

Additionally, parenting style influences the emotional well-being of both the child and the family. A nurturing and understanding parenting approach can strengthen parent-child relationships, increase the child's self-confidence, and promote emotional security. It can also help parents manage caregiving challenges more effectively and reduce family stress. Therefore, parenting style has a greater impact in autism because it directly affects developmental progress, behavioural outcomes, emotional health, social functioning, and the overall quality of life of children with ASD.

Parent Behaviour and Behavioural Shaping

Parent behaviour plays a crucial role in the behavioural shaping of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Behavioural shaping refers to the process of gradually encouraging and reinforcing desired behaviours while reducing inappropriate or challenging behaviours through consistent guidance and feedback. Children with ASD often learn many social, communication, and daily living skills through repeated interactions with their parents. The way parents respond to their child's actions, emotions, and communication attempts can significantly influence the development of positive behaviours. Supportive parental behaviours such as praise, encouragement, patience, and positive reinforcement help children understand which behaviours are appropriate and rewarding, thereby increasing the likelihood that these behaviours will be repeated.

Parents also serve as primary role models, and children frequently observe and imitate their actions, communication styles, and emotional responses. Consistent parental guidance helps establish routines, improve self-regulation, and develop social skills that are essential for daily functioning. Conversely, inconsistent responses, excessive criticism, or lack of involvement may

contribute to behavioural difficulties, emotional distress, and reduced learning opportunities. For children with ASD, who often benefit from predictability and structured learning environments, parental consistency is especially important in shaping adaptive behaviours. Therefore, positive parent behaviour acts as a foundation for effective behavioural shaping, promoting better social, emotional, and developmental outcomes in children with autism.

III EMOTIONAL VALIDATION

Emotional validation refers to the process of recognizing, understanding, and accepting a child's emotions without judgment. For children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), emotional validation is particularly important because they often experience difficulties in identifying, expressing, and regulating their emotions. Parents and caregivers who acknowledge a child's feelings and respond with empathy help create a supportive environment in which the child feels understood, respected, and emotionally secure. Rather than dismissing or criticizing emotional reactions, emotionally validating parents communicate that the child's feelings are real and meaningful, even when the behaviour associated with those emotions requires guidance or correction.

Emotional validation contributes to healthy emotional development by helping children learn to recognize and manage their feelings more effectively. When children with ASD receive consistent emotional support, they are more likely to develop self-confidence, emotional awareness, and coping skills. Validation also strengthens the parent-child relationship by fostering trust, open communication, and a sense of safety. Furthermore, emotionally supportive interactions can reduce anxiety, frustration, and behavioural difficulties that may arise when a child feels misunderstood or unable to express their needs. Research suggests that emotional validation promotes better social and emotional functioning, making it an essential component of effective

parenting and intervention strategies for children with autism. By acknowledging and responding appropriately to a child's emotional experiences, parents can support both immediate well-being and long-term developmental outcomes.

Modeling

Modeling is a behavioural learning technique in which children learn new skills, behaviours, and social responses by observing and imitating others. In the context of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), modeling is an important strategy for teaching communication, social interaction, emotional regulation, and daily living skills. Parents, caregivers, teachers, and therapists act as role models by demonstrating appropriate behaviours that children can observe and replicate. Through repeated exposure to positive examples, children gradually learn how to respond in different situations and develop more adaptive behaviours.

For children with ASD, modeling can be particularly effective because many social and communication skills that typically developing children acquire naturally may need to be explicitly demonstrated and practiced. For example, a parent may model greeting others, maintaining eye contact, sharing toys, or expressing emotions appropriately. The child is then encouraged to imitate these behaviours, often with guidance and positive reinforcement. Consistent modelling across home, school, and therapy settings helps reinforce learning and increases the likelihood that the child will generalize the behaviour to different environments. Research has shown that modeling can improve language development, social competence, and behavioural functioning in children with autism. Therefore, it serves as a valuable and practical intervention strategy that supports the overall developmental progress of children with ASD.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding is a supportive teaching and learning strategy in which parents, caregivers, or educators

provide temporary assistance to help a child learn new skills and complete tasks that they cannot accomplish independently. As the child gains confidence and competence, the level of support is gradually reduced, allowing the child to perform the task on their own. For children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), scaffolding is particularly beneficial because they may experience difficulties with communication, social interaction, problem-solving, and adaptive functioning. By breaking complex tasks into smaller, manageable steps and providing guidance throughout the learning process, parents can help children develop essential skills in a structured and supportive manner.

Scaffolding can take many forms, including verbal prompts, visual aids, demonstrations, reminders, and physical assistance. For example, a parent may initially guide a child through the steps of getting dressed, completing homework, or initiating a conversation, and then gradually reduce assistance as the child becomes more independent. This approach promotes skill acquisition while minimizing frustration and anxiety. Additionally, scaffolding encourages active participation, builds self-confidence, and supports the development of problem-solving and self-regulation abilities. Research has shown that consistent scaffolding can improve communication skills, social competence, academic performance, and daily living skills in children with ASD. Therefore, scaffolding is considered an effective intervention technique that helps children achieve greater independence and long-term developmental success.

Influence of Parental Stress on Child Development

Parental stress has a significant influence on the development and well-being of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Caring for a child with autism often involves managing communication difficulties, behavioural challenges, educational needs, and therapy schedules, which can place considerable emotional,

physical, and financial demands on parents. High levels of parental stress may affect the quality of parent-child interactions, reducing the consistency, patience, and responsiveness that are essential for supporting a child's development. When parents experience chronic stress, they may find it more difficult to engage in positive communication, implement behavioural strategies effectively, and maintain structured routines that children with ASD often require.

The effects of parental stress can extend to the child's emotional, social, and behavioural development. Children are sensitive to their caregivers' emotional states, and elevated parental stress may contribute to increased anxiety, behavioural problems, and difficulties in emotional regulation. In contrast, parents who receive adequate support and stress-management resources are generally better able to provide a nurturing, stable, and supportive environment that promotes learning and development. Research suggests that lower levels of parental stress are associated with improved communication skills, better adaptive functioning, and more positive behavioural outcomes in children with ASD. Therefore, addressing parental stress through counselling, support groups, parent training programs, and mental health services is essential not only for caregiver well-being but also for enhancing the developmental outcomes and overall quality of life of children with autism.

Parent-Mediated Interventions

Parent-mediated interventions refer to therapeutic approaches in which parents are trained and actively involved in delivering intervention strategies to their children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). These interventions recognize parents as key agents of change because they interact with their children daily and can provide continuous learning opportunities in natural environments such as the home and community. Through professional guidance, parents learn techniques to improve communication, social

interaction, emotional regulation, and adaptive behaviours. They may use strategies such as positive reinforcement, modelling, prompting, and structured play activities to encourage skill development and reduce challenging behaviours.

Parent-mediated interventions offer several advantages, including increased intensity and consistency of intervention beyond formal therapy sessions. Because learning occurs during everyday routines and interactions, children have more opportunities to practice and generalize newly acquired skills across different settings. These interventions also strengthen the parent-child relationship by promoting positive communication and meaningful engagement. Research has shown that parent-mediated programs can lead to improvements in language development, social responsiveness, adaptive functioning, and behavioural outcomes in children with ASD. Additionally, parents often gain greater confidence and competence in managing their child's needs, which can reduce family stress and enhance overall well-being. As a result, parent-mediated interventions are widely recognized as an effective and sustainable approach for supporting the long-term development of children with autism.

IV CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

Parents play a vital role in the development and intervention process of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and should be recognized as active therapeutic partners rather than passive observers. Since parents spend the most time with their children, their involvement can significantly enhance the effectiveness of therapeutic and educational interventions. Therefore, parent training should be incorporated into autism intervention programs to equip caregivers with the knowledge and skills necessary to support their child's development. Authoritative parenting practices, which combine warmth, responsiveness, and appropriate structure, should be encouraged because they help promote positive behavioural, emotional, and social outcomes. In addition,

families should receive education on effective behaviour management techniques, including positive reinforcement, communication strategies, and routine establishment, to better address the unique needs of children with ASD. Given the challenges associated with caregiving, mental health support should also be made available to parents and caregivers who may experience stress, anxiety, or burnout. Furthermore, maintaining consistency between home, school, and therapy settings is essential for reinforcing learned skills and reducing confusion for the child. Parent-mediated interventions, in which caregivers actively participate in implementing therapeutic strategies, have been shown to improve communication, adaptive functioning, and social development, ultimately contributing to better long-term developmental outcomes for children with ASD.

V CONCLUSION

Parenting style is a powerful determinant of developmental outcomes in children with autism spectrum disorder. Among the various parenting styles, authoritative parenting—characterized by warmth, responsiveness, structure, and appropriate expectations—is associated with the most positive outcomes. Through consistent involvement, positive reinforcement, emotional support, and active participation in intervention, parents play a central role in shaping communication, social competence, emotional regulation, adaptive functioning, and overall quality of life in children with autism. Consequently, empowering parents through education, training, and psychosocial support is an essential component of comprehensive autism intervention.

REFERENCES

[1] D. Baumrind, “Effects of authoritative parental control on child behavior,” *Child Development*, vol. 37, no. 4, pp. 887–907, 1966.

- [2] D. Baumrind, “Current patterns of parental authority,” *Developmental Psychology Monograph*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 1–103, 1971.
- [3] E. S. Schaefer, “Children's reports of parental behavior: An inventory,” *Child Development*, vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 413–424, 1965.
- [4] M. H. Bornstein, *Handbook of Parenting*, 2nd ed. Mahwah, NJ, USA: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002.
- [5] D. H. Olson and J. DeFrain, *Marriages and Families: Intimacy, Diversity, and Strengths*, 8th ed. New York, NY, USA: McGraw-Hill, 2014.
- [6] S. Ozonoff, G. Dawson, and J. McPartland, *A Parent's Guide to High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder*. New York, NY, USA: Guilford Press, 2014.
- [7] C. Kasari, “Parent-mediated interventions for children with autism spectrum disorder,” *Current Opinion in Neurology*, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 131–136, 2010.
- [8] G. Dawson et al., “Randomized, controlled trial of an intervention for toddlers with autism: The Early Start Denver Model,” *Pediatrics*, vol. 125, no. 1, pp. e17–e23, 2010.
- [9] S. J. Rogers and G. Dawson, *Early Start Denver Model for Young Children with Autism: Promoting Language, Learning, and Engagement*. New York, NY, USA: Guilford Press, 2010.
- [10] K. E. Smith, P. Greenberg, and M. M. Seltzer, “Social support and well-being at mid-life among mothers of adolescents and adults with autism spectrum disorders,” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, vol. 42, no. 9, pp. 1818–1826, 2012.
- [11] R. M. Hodapp and L. Dykens, “Strengthening family support for children with developmental disabilities,” *Journal of Family Psychology*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 267–276, 2009.
- [12] A. Karst and A. Van Hecke, “Parent and family impact of autism spectrum disorders: A review and proposed model for intervention evaluation,” *Clinical Child and Family*

Psychology Review, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 247–277, 2012.

- [13] M. Siller and M. Sigman, “The behaviors of parents of children with autism predict the subsequent development of their children's communication,” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 77–89, 2002.

[14] National Research Council, *Educating Children with Autism*. Washington, DC, USA: National Academies Press, 2001.

[15] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*, 5th ed. Arlington, VA, USA: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013.