CHAPTER 7

Positive Parenting and Positive Development in Children

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In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations has proclaimed that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance.

Preamble, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*[1]

POSITIVE PARENTING

States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to: (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; . . . (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own.

Article 29, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*

Shards of pottery found at the Oracle of Delphi attest that parents in the ancient Greek world asked the priestess *Pythia,*

"How can I ensure that my children will do something useful?" Parents are charged with myriad portentous and enduring responsibilities associated with preparing children to fare and flourish in the material, social, and economic worlds they will inherit. Numerous factors influence children's development, but parents are the "final common pathway" to childhood development and stature, adaptation, and success. Parenting is a process that formally begins during or before pregnancy but continues through the balance of the life course. Practically speaking, for most, *once a parent, always a parent.* Therefore, parents must be enlisted and empowered to parent positively and provide children with positive experiences and environments that optimize their positive development.

Yet at the start of the 21st century, parenting is in an agitated state of question, flux, and redefinition on account of strong contemporary secular and historical currents. Societywide changes in industrialization, urbanization, poverty, demographic shifts in family size, population growth, and longevity and mortality patterns, as well as the changing constellation of family structure (maternal employment[2] and female-headed households, divorced and blended families, lesbian and gay parents, teens versus 50-year-old first-time parents) exert multiple stresses on parenting, on interactions between parents and children, and consequently on parents' ability to provide for the positive development of their children.

Until now, parents, researchers, and policymakers have principally occupied themselves with children's disorders, deficits, and disabilities, even when they have had the salutatory goals in mind to develop interventions, remediations, or preventions of childhood's ills. Indeed, modern psychology is devoted to understanding and healing human functioning within a disease model; the main mode of psychological intervention has been to repair damaged habits, damaged drives, and damaged bodies. But as Seligman (1998) has written,

> Psychology is not just the study of weakness and damage, it is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is broken, it is nurturing what is best. Human strengths—courage, optimism, interpersonal skill, work ethic, hope, honesty, and perseverance—can buffer against illness. (p. 559)

Indeed, successful prevention may spring from a science that systematically promotes positive competencies. On this account, the central tasks of positive parenting may be to foster the development of positive characteristics and values in the young. Moore and Keyes (2002), reviewing the study of well-being in children and adults, affirmed the paradigm shift that has occurred in developmental science from treating problems, to preventing problems, to promoting positive development.

This chapter reviews *positive parenting* and *positive development* in normal populations.[3] The issues addressed include positive development in children, who is responsible for positive parenting, the effects, domains, and principles of positive parenting, the antecedents of positive parenting, as well as programs that promote positive parenting and positive development in children. The chapter mainly focuses on the nature, conditions, and dimensions of positive parenting but begins with a discussion of positive child outcomes. Parenting competence is at least in part functionally defined by positive child outcomes (Teti & Candelaria, 2002). At least since the publication of Bartholomew of England's *De proprietatibus rerum* and Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum majus,* 13th-century treatises of ancient and modern philosophies and recommendations about proper child care (Gabriel, 1962; Goodrich, 1975), parenting (broadly construed) has been recognized as a principal reason behind why individuals are who they are and why they turn out the way they do (see Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000).

WHAT IS POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN?

> *1. States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.*
>
> Article 27, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*

What are the positive characteristics and values we would like to see in our children? The study of positive youth development is critically in need of development itself in terms of defining positive outcomes, enhancing the research base for positive constructs,

undertaking longitudinal assessments of their growth, and policing their psychometric adequacy (Moore & Keyes, 2002). However, several social commentators and scientific investigators have made a start, and there are many individual and social indicators of positive child development in the intrapersonal and interpersonal realms. For example, Bennett (1993) enumerated a set of desired outcomes for youth that included perseverance, faith, friendship, courage, responsibility, and compassion. The Search Institute (Benson, 1993) identified a set of key "internal assets," such as commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity. More recently, Lerner, Fisher, and Weinberg (2000) developed the "5 Cs" of positive development: competence, confidence, connections, character, and caring. In considering positive developmental attributes, of course, we must keep in mind that they are always "in the parental eye": Some parents may want to see control of emotionality in their children, others want career success, and for still others, eye-hand coordination in batting seems to matter quite a lot.

Three global areas of positive development in children can be identified, each with a series of closely operationalized positive elements (for an elaboration of this scheme, see Bornstein, Davidson, Keyes, Moore, & the Center for Child Well-Being, 2003). Positive development encompasses physical, social and emotional, and cognitive domains. The elements that comprise any one domain are not exhaustive, but represent a core set of essentials that help to define that domain and positive development in children overall.[4]

The Physical Domain of Childhood Positive Development

Positive development in the physical domain includes minimally good nutrition, health care, physical activity, safety and security, and reproductive health.

✓ Good *nutrition* is essential to rapid growth and optimal development throughout the life course; healthy eating habits mean avoiding excesses as much as deficiencies.

✓ Maintaining *physical health* is critical to positive development, and positive development also includes enhancing *desirable physical attributes.*

✓ *Physical activity* and *sleep* are both requisite to healthy function; that is, movement and exercise as well as rest are vital to health and a hearty lifestyle.

✓ Children's *felt safety* and *security* in the home as well as at school and in the surrounding community are requisite to creating a climate conducive to positive development.

✓ In adolescence, *reproductive health* comes on-line as an issue of positive child development; this includes sexual development, safe sexual practices, and reproductive knowledge.

The Social and Emotional Domain of Childhood Positive Development

Temperament, emotional understanding and regulation, coping and resilience, trust, a self-system, character, and social competencies likewise contribute to positive development in children.

✓ Possessing a positive *temperament,* including an approach orientation and an adaptive style, is a positive trait in development.

✓ *Emotional intelligence,* that is, emotion expression, regulation, and understanding, is essential to social and emotional positive development. Empathy is the emotional response to what another person is feeling, and sympathy is the emotional reaction to another's stress; both constitute elements of social and emotional positive development.

✓ *Coping* implies the ability to interact with the environment positively, constructively, and adaptively (especially under conditions of stress, threat, or harm). Relatedly, *resilience* implies the ability to recover and

regain equilibrium in the face of negative environments and experiences.

✓ *Trust* is a hallmark of secure attachment and the ability of the child to use the caregiver as a secure base from which to explore.

✓ Near to the core of social and emotional positive development is children's sense of *self,* including a positive self-concept, identity, and regard, as well as possessing self-efficacy, being able to self-regulate, and having a sense of self-determination.

✓ *Character* includes values and moral behaviors—altruism, courage, honesty, duty, and responsibility—that constitute human strengths and virtues.

✓ Good *social competencies* include understanding one's place in the social world and navigating interpersonal relations well, so as to develop quality, warm, and trusting relationships with others, notably parents, siblings, and peers.

The Cognitive Domain of Childhood Positive Development

Thinking, communicating thought, and the products of thought in everyday life are essential to individual positive development. There are many specific positive elements within the cognitive domain, including information processing and memory, curiosity and exploration, mastery motivation, intelligence, problem solving, language and literacy, educational achievement, moral reasoning, and talent.

✓ Cognitive science has identified two inter-related general mechanisms that are implicated in children's mental performance across a wide range of tasks: One is *information processing* (the execution of fundamental mental processes), and the other process is *memory* (the ongoing cognitive processing of that information).

✓ *Curiosity* can be defined as the desire to learn more, and *exploration* as the behavior that is energized and directed by curiosity.

✓ *Mastery motivation,* an achievement disposition that underlies the person's drive

to learn in various situations, reflects the psychological force that leads individuals to master tasks for the intrinsic feeling of efficacy, rather than for extrinsic reward.

✓ *Thinking* involves basic processes, such as perceiving objects and events in the external environment, and high-level mental processes, such as reasoning, symbolizing, and planning. Traditional global measures of thinking include intelligence tests, but a more encompassing contemporary view of intelligence embraces understanding oneself and others, creativity, and artistic abilities.

✓ *Problem solving* is the sequence of steps that attempts to identify and create alternate solutions for both cognitive and social problems, including the ability to plan, resourcefully seek help from others, and think critically, creatively, and reflectively.

✓ *Language* and *literacy* constitute a set of critical verbal elements of positive cognitive development that are key to entering the social community and to academic and career success through schooling.

✓ *Educational achievement* is commonly measured by children's readiness to learn, the state in which the capacities and competencies of the child match the expectations and requirements of adults and school; achievement test scores; and report card grades, which directly assess children's mastery of specific skills.

✓ Cognitive ability is strongly related to several components of *morality:* moral judgment, moral emotions, and moral action.

✓ Additional elements of positive cognitive development are *creativity* and *talent,* whether intellectual, social, athletic, artistic, or other.

Some Characteristics of the Three Domains of Positive Development

These domains constitute a strengths-based approach to positive development in childhood. Certainly, the elements listed are not the only ones; the elements included here hardly exhaust all possible features of positive development. Moreover, the

"surface" behaviors represented in each of these domains may change during the course of the life span; however, the "latent" strengths they represent probably remain constant, thereby creating a continuity of elements of positive development across (at least parts of) the life course. Further to that point, many elements of positive development will show stability from childhood to maturity. Thus, the foundations of positive development, as well as their antecedents in so-called flourishing adults (Rowe & Kahn, 1998), may be laid down early in life.

Elements of positive development within a domain mutually influence one another, just as elements in the physical, social and emotional, and cognitive domains interact with and support one another. Thus, for example, elements of positive development within the social and emotional domain are themselves positively associated: Children's self-regulation of their internal emotional reactions contributes to the quality of their relationships with parents and others. An example of cross-domain mutual support is the fact that good nutrition, especially during the early years of rapid brain growth, can facilitate or enhance cognitive development, just as positive cognitive development enables children to make better choices and understand more fully the consequences of their behaviors and decisions with respect to their physical health. Finally, attaining positive development in each element in a domain is important, but overall positive development in the life course presumably depends on the human being's ability to attain and sustain reasonably high levels in all domains.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR POSITIVE PARENTING?

> *2. States Parties shall respect the rights and duties of the parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to provide direction to the child in the exercise of his*

> *or her right in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child.*

> Article 14, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*

> *1. States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians, have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.*

> Article 18, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*

Cultures variously distribute the tasks of child caregiving. In the minds of many, motherhood is principal in the development of children, and the roles of mothers are scripted and universal. Mothers are the traditional caregivers to young children, and cross-cultural surveys attest to the primacy of biological mothers in all forms of caregiving (Barnard & Solchany, 2002; Hart Research Associates, 1997; Holden & Buck, 2002; Leiderman, Tulkin, & Rosenfeld, 1977). Fathers are invested in caregiving as well (Parke, 2002). Men generally have fewer opportunities to acquire and practice central skills of caregiving, however. Because the paternal role is less well articulated and defined than is the maternal role, maternal support often helps to crystallize appropriate paternal behavior. In the West, moreover, mothers and fathers tend to interact with and care for their children in complementary ways; that is, they tend to divide the labors of caregiving and engage children by emphasizing different types of interactions (e.g., mothers are more nurturant and affectionate, fathers are more playful). Perhaps time budget constraints and variation in interests and abilities cause mothers and fathers to devote different amounts of time and resources to children across different domains, such as physical health, social and emotional development, and mental growth.

In the minds of others, pluralistic caregiving arrangements of children are much more common and on this account, more significant in the lives of children. In many places around the globe, siblings, grandparents, and various nonparental caregivers play salient roles that vary depending on a variety of factors about the child care provider, including age, gender, age gap, quality of attachment, personality, and so forth (Clarke-Stewart & Allhusen, 2002; Smith, P.K., & Drew, 2002; Zukow-Goldring, 2002). Often, these caregivers behave in a complementary fashion to one another as well, dividing the full labor of child caregiving by individually emphasizing different parenting responsibilities and functions. In short, many individuals (other than mother and father) play roles in positive child development. However, the implications of these diverse patterns of early "parenting" relationships for children's positive development are still unclear. It is a curious and sad fact that superb substitute parenting is often low in value and remuneration, even though the positive development of our children is at risk (Honig, 2002).

It is critical to acknowledge in this connection that as important as the biological role of "begetter" is, it is less central than the social role of "nurturer" in the full meaning of parenthood to children (Leon, in press). In short, in-the-trenches parenting matters more than blood ties to positive child development.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS, DOMAINS, AND PRINCIPLES OF POSITIVE PARENTING?

> *2. The parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capabilities, the conditions of living necessary for the child's development.*
>
> Article 27, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*

Parenting children is a 24/365 job, and parenting responsibilities are clearly greatest during childhood. That is because young human offspring are totally dependent on their parents for survival and caregiving and their ability to cope alone is minimal. Reciprocally, childhood is a period normally attended to and invested in by parents the world over, and childhood is the phase of the life cycle when parenting is believed to exert its most significant and salient influences: Not only is the sheer amount of interaction between parents and children greatest then, but children may be particularly susceptible and responsive to parent-provided experiences (Bornstein, 2002a). Indeed, the opportunity of enhanced parental influence and prolonged childhood learning of positive characteristics and values is thought to be an evolutionary reason for the extended duration of human childhood (Bjorklund, Yunger, & Pellegrini, 2002; Gould, 1977).

Childhood is the time when human beings first grow and develop physically, forge their first social bonds, first learn how to express and read basic human emotions, and first make sense of and understand objects in the world (Bornstein & Lamb, 1992). Parents escort children through all of these dramatic "firsts." Not surprisingly, all of these developmental dynamics are tracked by parents, and all in turn shape parenting. Finally, influences of these developments reverberate through the balance of childhood: In the view of some social theorists, the child's first relationships with parents set the tone and style for the child's later social relationships (Cummings & Cummings, 2002), and a history of shared work and play activities with parents is positively linked to the child's smooth transition into school, just as parents' involvement with their children's school-related tasks and school partnerships relate positively to their children's school experience and performance (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). It would appear that all

elements of positive physical, social and emotional, and cognitive development in childhood can be changed—and presumably, enhanced.

From an ecological stance (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983; Lerner, Rothbaum, Boulos, & Castellino, 2002), the development and growth of any element or domain of positive development depends on children themselves as well as on the many facets of the child's environment and experience. Therefore, only by taking multiple contexts into account can positive child development be fully appreciated.

Mothers, fathers, and other nonparental caregivers guide the development of their charges via many direct and indirect means. Direct effects are of two kinds: genetic and experiential. Of course, biological parents endow a significant and pervasive genetic makeup to their children, with its beneficial or other consequences. Thus, heredity can contribute to positive development. For example, twin studies of children's reactions to simulations of distress in others point to a genetic component for sympathy and prosocial activity (Zahn-Waxler, Robinson, & Emde, 1992); self-reports of sympathy and prosocial behavior appear to have a genetic basis in adulthood, too (e.g., Rushton, Fulker, Neale, & Nias, 1989).

Although genes contribute to children's positive characteristics and values, all prominent theories of human development put experience in the world as either the principal source of individual growth or as a major contributing component (Dixon & Lerner, 1999). Such experiences are of two kinds: beliefs and behaviors.

Parents hold parenting beliefs and communicate them to their offspring (Harkness & Super, 1996). Beliefs constitute a significant force over the positive development of children, whether they are perceptions about, attitudes toward, or knowledge of parenting. Seeing one's own children in a

particular way has consequences for one's affect, thinking, and behavior in child-rearing situations: Parents who regard their children as "easy" are more likely to pay attention and respond to their children, and in turn, responsiveness fosters child growth (Bornstein, 1989; Putnam, Sanson, & Rothbart, 2002). Seeing childhood in a particular way functions likewise: Parents who believe that they can affect children's physical health, social and emotional growth, or cognitive development are more proactive and successful in cultivating their children's competencies (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Coleman & Karraker, 1998; Elder, 1995; Gross, Fogg, & Tucker, 1995; King & Elder, 1998; Schneewind, 1995; Teti & Gelfand, 1991). Finally, seeing oneself in a particular way vis-à-vis children leads to certain cognitions or behaviors: Parents hold different beliefs about the meaning and significance of their own parenting behaviors as well as the behaviors and development of their children, and parents act on these beliefs about children as much as they do on their own experiences with children (Bugental & Happaney, 2002; Sigel & McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 2002).

Perhaps more salient in the phenomenology of childhood, however, are parents' behaviors: the tangible experiences parents provide their children. Parents model specific behaviors, possibly leading to the expression of those behaviors by children as the result of children's observations and practice. Parents promote positive behaviors in children as well, for example, through praise or reward of emotions, cognitions, and actions they appreciate. Parental involvement, monitoring, and communication have been associated with children's positive health, social-emotional, and academic development (Crouter & Head, 2002).

For most elements of positive development, parents exercise duty and authority over their children early in life and plan that

their socialization practices will result, when child independence ultimately takes hold, in children's self-regulation of their own positive characteristics and values (Eisenberg & Valiente, 2002). Parents promote and ensure children's health and safety by attending to their preventative health care needs (such as immunizations); teaching children how to maintain healthy diets; modeling and participating with children when engaging in physical activities; and ensuring and provisioning a safe and secure environment (Melamed, 2002; Tinsley, Markey, Ericksen, Kwasman, & Oritz, 2002). Warmth and responsiveness in parent-child relationships promote the development of trust and autonomy (Cummings & Cummings, 2002). Security from infancy improves the likelihood of success in later social relationships in terms of negotiating and resolving subsequent developmental tasks (Thompson, 1999). So, to continue the above example, a variety of types of positive parenting links to the development of children's prosocial behavior or sympathy (Eisenberg & Valiente, 2002). Parents who are authoritative (in Baumrind's, 1989, sense of being supportive and demanding of appropriate behavior from their children) tend to have children who exhibit prosocial behavior, and the use of reasoning in discipline appears to be especially important to prosocial development (Krevans & Gibbs, 1996). In short, parenting that is responsive, warm, and supportive; relies on reasoning for discipline; and demands more mature behavior tends to promote positive social and emotional development in children (Dekovic & Janssens, 1992; Janssens & Dekovic, 1997).

Taken as a totality, this constellation of caregiving constitutes a varied and demanding set of parenting tasks, and the contents of parent-child interactions that correspond to the domains of children's positive development are dynamic and varied. Of course, adults differ among themselves in terms of their positive caregiving and in how successful

they may be. At the same time, individual parenting styles are reasonably consistent (Holden & Miller, 1999). Over the long-term, the precise nature and structure of positive parenting behaviors can be expected to change, as in response to their children's development. Consider two functions, surveillance and responsiveness, as examples. Positive parenting means keeping track of and tending to children and letting children know that parent and child coexist in a loving and trusting relationship (Crouter & Head, 2002), and parenting actions associated with those goals certainly vary with child age, for example, minding a toddler or giving a cell phone to a newly licensed teen driver.

Parents' nurturing, social-emotional, and didactic behaviors and styles constitute direct-experience effects of parenting. Mothers and fathers exercise indirect effects on positive child development as well. Indirect effects are more subtle and less noticeable than direct effects, but perhaps no less meaningful. Parents indirectly incline their children toward positive development in several ways: Parents influence one another, for example by marital support and communication (Grych, 2002), and parents influence their children through their influence on each other (Grych & Fincham, 2001). Parents' attitudes about themselves, their spouses, and their marriages thereby modify the quality of their interactions with their children and in turn, their children's chance for positive development.

Thus, although some contend that "parents matter less than you think" (Harris, 1998), parents manifestly exert both direct and indirect influences on their children. Consider again children's interactions with their peers. Parents directly influence their children's peer relationships when they cultivate children's social skills, organize their children's social environment, provide access to social play partners, choose playmates, and plan and monitor children's peer activities

(Ladd & Pettit, 2002). Parents indirectly affect their children's peer relationships through behaviors that encourage or hinder children's social competencies, through attachment quality, family emotional climate, support, discipline, and beliefs (Ladd & Pettit, 2002).

Principles of Positive Parenting

To fathom how parenting young children relates to children's later positive functioning, we need to distinguish individual differences and child effects in children from the roles of parent-provided experience. Experiences vital to positive child development can be contemporaneous, early occurring, or cumulative (see Bornstein & Tamis-LeMonda, 1990; Bornstein, Tamis-LeMonda, & Haynes, 1999). In a model of effective contemporary parenting, child positive characteristics and values reflect the effects of parent-provided experiences at a given time, separate from stability of individual differences to that time and the effects of prior parent-provided experience. Contemporary experience is unique and can override earlier experience. The database for this model typically consists of recovery of functioning from early severe deprivation, failure of early intervention studies to show long-term effects, and the like (Kagan, 1998; Lewis, 1997). In a model of effective early parenting, child positive characteristics and values reflect the effects of earlier parent-provided experiences, separate from stability of individual differences in the child and the effects of contemporaneous parent-provided experience. Data derived from ethology, behaviorism, and neuropsychology (e.g., sensitive periods; Bornstein, 1989) support this model. In a model of cumulative parenting, child positive characteristics and values reflect the combined effects of earlier as well as later parent-provided experiences, separate from the stability of individual differences in the child (Bornstein

et al., 1999). Cumulative effects appear to result from consistent environmental influences. To promote positive characteristics and values in young children and to fathom their antecedents in positive parenting, it is necessary to isolate and measure the stability of individual differences in the child and to differentiate among different temporal and causal models of parent-provided experience.

Specificity, Transaction, and Interdependence

Parenting that promotes positive development in children follows several additional noteworthy principles. The *specificity principle* asserts that specific experiences parents provide children at specific times exert specific effects over specific aspects of child development in specific ways. It is probably not the case that the overall level of parental stimulation, for example, directly affects the overall level of children's functioning and compensates for selective deficiencies. That is, simply providing an adequate financial base, a big house, or the like does not guarantee or even speak to a child's good nutrition, development of an empathic personality, cognitive competence, or other desirable positive attributes or capacities. This is apparently counterintuitive, because nearly 90% of parents in the United States think simplistically that the more stimulation a baby receives, the better off the baby is (Hart Research Associates, 1997). Rather, on a goodness-of-fit model, parents need to carefully match the amount and kinds of stimulation they offer to their child's level of development, interests, temperament, mood at the moment, and so forth (Lerner et al., 2002). Furthermore, to maintain appropriate influence and guidance through development, parents must effectively adjust their interactions, cognitions, emotions, affections, and strategies for exerting parental

influence to the changing abilities, activities, and experiences of their children.

The *transaction principle* asserts that positive parenting will help to shape the positive characteristics and values of children through time, just as reciprocally, the characteristics and values of children help to shape their parenting. Children and their parents co-construct the child's physical, social and emotional, and intellectual development. Children influence which experiences they will be exposed to as well as how they interpret those experiences, and thereby how those experiences might affect them (Scarr & Kidd, 1983). Parents and children stimulate and provide feedback to—they mutually influence—one another. In general, parents face a continuous onrush of transitions in children's physical maturity, emotional adjustments, social opportunities and settings, and cognitive capabilities.

The *interdependence principle* asserts that to understand the responsibilities and functions of one member of a family in promoting positive development in children, the complementary responsibilities and functions of other family members also need to be acknowledged. All family members—mothers, fathers, and children, as well as other interested parties—influence each other both directly and indirectly. Furthermore, all families are embedded in, interact with, and are themselves affected by larger social systems (Lerner et al., 2002). These include both formal and informal support systems, extended families, community ties to friends and neighbors, work sites, educational and medical institutions, as well as their culture at large. To understand positive parenting and positive child development requires taking multiple factors into consideration so that individual, dyadic, family, and social level contributions to parenting and child development can be appreciated. Each piece of parenting occurs in multiple immediate and broader contexts, all

of which determine its effect and how it is perceived (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983; Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

At the intersection of these several parenting principles is *uncertainty* in what can be predicted about the positive characteristics and values of individual children, their origins, and how they will unfold . . . the question ancient Greek parents put to the Delphic oracle. There are many pathways to positive child development. Some populations we expect to fail miserably (teen parents, children born to crack-addicted mothers) just as those we think should have it made (high socioeconomic status [SES]) almost always show surprising diversity of outcomes. To detect regular relations between positive parenting and positive child development, one needs to seek and to find the right combinations of variables. The multiple pathways and dynamics of positive parenting and positive child development challenge parents and children alike (see Box 9.1). Researchers must develop new paradigms and methodologies to accommodate the chaos; similarly, this perspective renders the initiation and implementation of parenting programs and policy "nightmarish." Some will fail. Yet only by appreciating and addressing the complexity of this real-world situation can we gain access to more that is valid about positive development in children and their parents.

WHAT ARE THE ANTECEDENTS OF POSITIVE PARENTING?

> *The family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members, particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community.*
>
> Preamble, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*

Box 9.1   Lessons for Promoting Cognitive Competence

It is difficult to predict the developmental course of a given child, and cause-effect relations between parental actions and positive child development are notoriously complex. Nonetheless, some guidelines about possible influences of parents on children's positive development can be identified. Williams and Sternberg (2002), for example, offer 10 lessons to parents who wish to develop cognitively competent and successful children.

✓ *Lesson 1:* Recognize what can and cannot be changed in children. Watch children as they attempt to acquire new skills and meet new experiences and then encourage them to pursue skills and explore areas in which they display talents or profess interests. Expose children broadly to many skill areas.

✓ *Lesson 2:* Challenge children, rather than bore or overwhelm them. Strike a balance between tasks that are just beyond children's reach and those that children can succeed at some but not all of the time.

✓ *Lesson 3:* Teach children that the main limitation on what they can do is what they tell themselves they cannot do. Children have to be told that they have the ability to meet any challenge, and what they need to decide is how hard they are willing to work to meet a challenge.

✓ *Lesson 4:* Move children to learn what questions to ask and how to ask them and when to learn what the answers to the questions are. How we think is often more important than what to think, and how we ask questions is more important than what answers we might receive. What matters more is not what facts children know but rather their ability to use those facts.

✓ *Lesson 5:* Discover and capitalize on what excites children. To excel, children need to genuinely love what they do and to be motivated to work.

✓ *Lesson 6:* Encourage children to take sensible intellectual risks. Creativity is related to risk taking, and parents should teach children to take intellectual risks and develop a sense of when to take a risk and when not to.

✓ *Lesson 7:* Teach children to take responsibility for both their successes and their failures.

✓ *Lesson 8:* Socialize children to delay gratification and be able to wait for rewards. Children need to learn from their parents about the long term and not just the here-and-now.

✓ *Lesson 9:* Teach children empathy, the importance of understanding, respecting, and responding to the viewpoints of others.

✓ *Lesson 10:* Understand that the quality of interaction parents have with children redounds to both parent and child positively.

SOURCE: Williams & Sternberg (2002).

2. The parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, the conditions of living necessary for the child's development.

Article 27, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*

Each day, about three fourths of a million adults around the world experience the joys and heartaches, challenges and rewards, of becoming new parents. Which ones will parent positively? What factors will make parents the kind of parents they are? The origins of variation in parents' beliefs and behaviors are extremely complex, but certain factors seem to be of paramount importance: biological determinants, individual-differences characteristics, actual or perceived characteristics of children, and contextual influences, including social situational factors, family background, SES, and culture (Bornstein, 2002b).

Several aspects of positive parenting initially arise out of biological processes, those, for example, associated with pregnancy and parturition. Pregnancy in human beings causes the release of hormones thought to be involved in the development of positive—protective, nurturant, and responsive—feelings toward offspring (Stallings, Fleming, Corter, Worthman, & Steiner, 2001). Prenatal biological events—parental age, diet, and stress—affect postnatal parenting as well as child development. Adults already know (or think they know) something about parenting by the time they first become parents; that is, human beings appear to possess some intuitive knowledge about parenting, and some characteristics of parenting may be "wired" into our biological makeup (Papoušek & Papoušek, 2002). For example, speaking to babies is vitally important to child development, and parents speak to babies even though they know that babies cannot understand language and will not respond in kind; parents even speak to babies

in a special speech register that fosters child language development (e.g., Papoušek, Papoušek, & Bornstein, 1985).

Parenting calls on transient as well as enduring individual-differences characteristics, including personality and intelligence, traits and attitudes toward the parenting role, motivation to become involved with children, and child development and child-rearing knowledge and skills (Belsky & Barends, 2002; Bornstein, Hahn, Suizzo, & Haynes, 2001; Holden & Buck, 2002). Some personality characteristics that would favor positive parenting include empathic awareness, attuned responsiveness, and emotional availability. More educated parents project a positive authoritative style of child rearing. Perceived self-efficacy is likely to affect parenting positively because parents who feel effective vis-à-vis their children are motivated to engage in further interactions with their children, which in turn provide them with additional opportunities to understand and interact positively with their children (Teti & Candelaria, 2002).

Characteristics of children influence positive parenting and, in turn, child development (Bell, 1968; Bell & Harper, 1977). These characteristics may be obvious (age, gender, or physical appearance), or they may be subtle (temperament). Positive parenting likewise entails understanding and responding to dynamic developmental change as well as individual variation among children.

Biology, individual differences, and child characteristics constitute prominent factors that influence positive parenting. Beyond these, contextual factors motivate and help to define positive beliefs and behaviors of parents. Social situation, social class, and cultural worldview encourage specific parenting attitudes and actions. In some places, mothers and their children are isolated from other social contexts; in others, children are reared in extended families in which care is provided by many individuals (Bornstein & Lamb, 1992).

The ways in which spouses provide support and show respect for each other in parenting—how they work together as a coparenting team—influence their positive parenting (McHale, Khazan, Rotman, DeCourcey, & McConnell, 2002). In the West, frequency of contact with significant others, such as community and friendship supports, improves parents' sense of their own efficacy and competence as well as the positive quality of parent-child relationships (Cochran & Niego, 2002). For example, parents develop feelings of competence and satisfaction through contact with advice givers, role models, and persons who share their responsibilities. Mothers with social support (especially from husbands) feel less harried and overwhelmed, have fewer competing demands on their time, and as a consequence are more sensitive and responsive to their children. SES also exerts differential effects on parenting through the education of parents and provisions in the environment it may afford (Bornstein & Bradley, 2003). For example, high-SES parents compared with low-SES parents typically provide children with more opportunities for variety in daily stimulation, more appropriate play materials, and more total stimulation, especially language (Hoff, Laursen, & Tardif, 2002), and high-SES parents also tend to be more involved than low-SES parents at school (Shumow & Miller, 2001). Finally, virtually all aspects of child rearing and child development are shaped by cultural habits (Bornstein, 1991; Harkness & Super, 1996). We acquire many of our understandings of parenting and childhood simply by living in a culture: Generational, social, and media images of parenting, childhood, and family life, handed-down or co-constructed, play significant roles in helping people form their parenting beliefs and guide their parenting behaviors (Goodnow, 2002). For example, parents from different cultures differ in their opinions about which specific positives in child development spell success.

Contemporary family research teaches that parenting combines intuitive knowledge, self-constructed aspects, shared cultural constructions, and direct experiences with children (Borkowski, Ramey, & Bristol-Power, 2002; Bornstein, 2002b). No one factor is determinative and trumps all others; rather, in a comprehensive systems view of parenting and human development, many factors—biology and genetics, environment and experience—influence positive parenting and positive child development. Understanding the role of each improves explanatory power.

PROGRAMS THAT PROMOTE POSITIVE PARENTING AND POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN

> *1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.*
>
> Article 3, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*

> *3. States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.*
>
> Article 3, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*

Positive characteristics and values in the physical, social-emotional, and cognitive domains of development can all be targeted for promotion and are all responsive to effective interventions. That is, individual, interpersonal, and environmental factors can be brought to bear to promote the positive development of children. Of course, some

positive characteristics and values may be more plastic than others. Reciprocally, in everyday life, positive parenting is not always in effect. Parenting is often time-consuming, effortful, complex, and sometimes ineffective. The time available for positive parenting has diminished, and economic pressures on parents have caused children to receive inadequate care and even to be placed in less-than-positive environments at ever earlier times in their lives. Today, many ills infect parenting and impede positive child development: Increasing numbers of births worldwide occur to single or teenage mothers, babies are born crack addicted, many children are not fully immunized, the very young are common victims of abuse and neglect, and many youth are reared in poverty.

Since the 1880s and the publication of the *Handbook for Friendly Visitors Among the Poor,* by the Charity Organization Society of the City of New York, the state has had manifest interest in improving parental education and social support services for parents in need (Smith, C., Perou, & Lesesne, 2002). For both positive and negative reasons mentioned earlier, contemporary parenting has witnessed an explosive growth in parenting programs. Still, these efforts have focused on the prevention of negative outcomes more than on the promotion of positive parenting and positive child development.

Children are reared in families but also in child care programs, in schools, and in community settings. From the perspective of an ecological model (Lerner et al., 2002), parents influence the "social health" of the environments their children inhabit through their citizenship and politics (Garbarino, Vorrasi, & Kostelny, 2002), and those environments contribute in critical ways to support positive characteristics and values in children. Fortunately, much is known today about the patterns and periods of early learning and the quality of environments that benefit young children's development (Bornstein et al.,

2002). Belief in the potential of the early years as a time when families can foster developmental and educational processes in children is strong. From birth through the lower primary grades, children's physical health, social and emotional development, and mental growth requirements can be better managed by many disadvantaged or taxed parents through supportive efforts from professionals. Parent programs make significant contributions to positive parenting and to positive child development. The best programs educate parents and other caregivers in ways that enhance positive parenting.

The family is the principal source of care and development of the young child. The responsibility for determining the child's best interests rests first and foremost with parents, and parental involvement remains the indispensable ingredient for sustaining the accomplishments of extrafamilial childhood education programs. Therefore, the doctrine of parental rights must remain a fundamental premise of parent education efforts (Smith, C., et al., 2002). However, substantial variation exists among parents, and some parental nurturing styles, socioemotional interactions, and cognitive exchanges appear to be less conducive to providing "optimal developmental environments" for positive development in children. Thus, for those who want it, the primary socializing function of the family can be profitably supplemented with child-rearing information and guidance. Furthermore, the ability of parents to care for and educate their children can be strengthened by support from neighbors, friends, relatives, social groups, and professionals.

Parenting programs usually involve psychological support and information about child rearing and child development, and they normally focus on children's health, social, psychological, and educational needs. Contemporary programs are highly diverse in their theoretical and conceptual frameworks, the populations they serve, the intensity of

service, and the types of intervention activities they advocate, depending on needs and cultural context. Moreover, parenting programs are usually guided by several assumptions: most notably that parents are normally the most consistent and caring people in the lives of their children; when parents are provided with knowledge, skills, and supports, they can respond more positively and effectively to their children; and parents' own emotional and physical needs must be met if they are to respond positively and effectively to their children.

The general orientation of parent support programs is to help families to provide stable, nurturing, and healthy environments for children. Parents come to feel that they are not rearing their children in isolation and that there are people in programs to which they can turn for information and for a shared sense of the challenges and satisfactions surrounding child and family development. Tools commonly found in parenting programs promote positive parenting (see Box 9.2).

Positive programs for parents are guided by beliefs in the consummate role of families in rearing their own children and the importance of family participation in defining its own priorities and identifying appropriate intervention strategies. Families are best served when they are helped to enhance their own skills and traditions, rather than when decisions are made and solutions imposed on or implemented for them. Interventions that will foster positive parenting and positive development in children need to be sensitive to sociocultural diversity in families, and they do well to build on strengths within the family. Because individuals who share sociocultural similarities can still differ significantly in goals, values, and resources, endeavors to enhance positive parenting must still respond to unique characteristics of the family, such as the age of parents and children, gender of offspring, and ethnicity of the family.

Some practitioners have contended that the central responsibility for a family lies with the family and that it is outside the purview of government or other institutions to intervene. However, public and private responsibility must be viewed not as at odds, but rather as complementary. The degree to which the formal structures in a community supply families with helpful supports depends at least in part on the characteristics, desires, and current circumstances of individual families. Even small positive experiences aggregate to large, long-term gains (Abelson, 1985). Thus, increasing child care needs, resulting, for example, from changes in family structures or women's work patterns, combined with recognition of the developmental needs of the child provide powerful arguments for governments, communities, employers, and families to identify appropriate and affordable solutions to the provision of effective parenting programs. Only through complex and sensitive interventions, however, can parent and family, and context and environment be brought to bear on the route and terminus of the child's development. That pursuing such programs challenges us does not mean we should shrink from them. Our children's positive development is at stake.

POSITIVE PARENTING: A POSTSCRIPT

> *2. For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.*
>
> Article 18, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*

Box 9.2   Tools for Positive Parenting

Parenting programs are guided by beliefs that emphasize the importance of addressing family needs when serving individual children, recognizing the family as a social system, and considering environmental and cultural influences when evaluating family needs and resources. Certain tools can help to address these requirements for positive parenting. They include the following:

✓   *Knowledge about child development.* Positive parenting benefits from knowledge of parenting itself and how children develop. Children's normative patterns and stages of physical, nutritional, and health needs, emotional and social requirements, and verbal and cognitive necessities at different stages should be part of the knowledge base for parenthood. Understanding the patterns and processes of development helps parents to develop more realistic expectations of child development and the requisite skills for children's achieving positive competencies.

✓   *Observing skills.* Parents need to know how to observe their children. Child watching can help one understand a child's level of development in relation to what one would like the child to learn or accomplish. Parents need information and observation skills to help them discover the match between their child's ability or readiness and ways and means to help their child achieve developmental goals.

✓   *Strategies for problem prevention and discipline.* Parents need creative insights for managing their children's behavior. Knowledge and skills regarding alternative methods of discipline and problem avoidance are basic. Knowing how to implement positive rewards can help a child more fully enjoy and appreciate the exploration and struggles required in mastering new skills and stages of growth.

✓   *Supports for emotional and social, cognitive and language development.* Parents who learn to speak and read to their children and to present their children with appealing solvable problems will enrich the actions the child carries out and the feelings the child expresses. Knowing how to take advantage of settings, routines, and activities at hand to create learning and problem-solving opportunities enhances parenting and positive development.

✓   *Personal sources of support.* Positive parenting draws on patience, flexibility, and goal orientation, and parents must command an ability to extract pleasure from their encounters with children. Parents need to understand the positive impact they can have on their children's lives through their expressed attention, pleasure, listening, and interest. These activities nourish a child's growing sense of self, just as food nourishes a child's growing body.

Parents intend much in interacting with their children: They ensure their children's physical health through the sustenance they provide, the protections they establish, and the models may afford. They foster their children's emotional regulation, development of self, and social awareness and sensitivity in meaningful relationships and experiences in and outside the family through their own behaviors and the values they display.

And they promote their children's mental development through the structures they create and the meanings they place on those structures. In fact, a parent's main job is to facilitate positive child development—a healthy and fit body, self-confidence, capacity for intimacy, achievement motivation, pleasure in play and work, friendships with peers, and early and continued intellectual success and fulfillment. A *mens sana in* a *corpore sano*.

The good news is that we can influence not just some, but *all* positive characteristics and values we want to see children develop. Intelligence may be inherited in part, but to be inherited does not mean to be immutable. Longitudinal studies of intelligence show that individuals change over time (Neisser et al., 1996). Even heritable traits depend on learning for their expression, and they are subject to experiential influences. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is partly biologically determined. But if parents give their children skills training, make certain their children receive appropriate medication, and hire dedicated and knowledgeable tutors, they will change the trajectory of their children's lives for the positive (Hodapp, 2002). Such positive parenting makes the difference between the ADHD children who drop out of school and those who complete college.

A full understanding of what it means to parent a child positively, however, depends on the dynamics of the family and the ecology in which that parenting takes place (Bornstein, 2002b). Within-family experiences exercise a major impact during the early years of life, and the nuclear family triad—mother, father, child—constitutes the crucible within which young children initially grow and develop. Young children also naturally form important familial relationships with siblings and grandparents, and they have significant experiences with peers and nonfamilial adults outside the family, often through enrollment in alternative-care settings. Family support, social class, and cultural variation affect patterns of parenting and exert salient influences on the ways in which young children are reared and what is expected of them as they grow. These early diverse relationships all ensure that the "parenting" children experience is rich and multifaceted. What also needs to be ensured is that all (or as much as possible) of this parenting coordinates the positive for parents and for children.

Of course, human development is too subtle, dynamic, and intricate to admit that parental caregiving alone determines the course and outcome of child development; positive development is shaped by individuals themselves and by experiences that take place after childhood and outside the scope of parents' influence. Mature characteristics possess a partly biological basis, health, temperament, and intelligence among them. Unquestionably, peer dynamics influence children. At the same time, it makes little sense to argue (as has Harris, 1998) that children are susceptible to influences from outside the family, but not from inside the family and from individuals they spend the most time with: their own parents. Thus, positive parenting does not fix the route or terminus of child development. Still, there is meaning and possibly enduring significance to positive parenting from the start.

Parenting is central to childhood, to child development, and to a society's long-term investment in children. Parents are fundamentally invested in young children: their survival, their socialization, and their education. So, we are motivated to know about the meaning and importance of parenting as much for itself as out of the desire to improve the lives of children. Parenting portends much about the later life of children *and* parents.

If we are fatalists, we accept the situation we live in. If we are not, we parent positively, and we take affirmative social and political steps to organize superb child care, to ensure

children's associations with respectable peers, to erect supportive environments for children with appropriate stimulation, to guarantee children more than merely adequate schooling, and to enroll children in growth-promoting extracurricular activities. Positive parenting lies at the foundation of a science of strength and resilience: making normal people stronger and more productive, as well as actualizing human potential. Policy sometimes needs to focus on interventions that attempt to cure, but policy needs equally to guarantee experiences that are positive in their own right because they improve prevailing conditions. "Models of care" are just as important as "models of cure." Positive parenting will prevent deficit, disorder, and disability; but positive parenting will also promote human strengths, such as courage, optimism, interpersonal skill, work ethic, hope, responsibility, future mindedness, honesty, and perseverance. This in itself is a noble and desirable goal.

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NOTES

1. The United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations General Assembly, 1990) has been signed by 191 countries; only Somalia and the United States have not signed.

2. Women's labor force participation peaks between 25 and 44 years, which is also the period in which women normally experience a peak in child care responsibilities.

3. The chapter presents a synopsis of theory, data, and principles about positive parenting and child development derived from the body of available Western research; much less is currently known scientifically about non-Western parents and children. It could be that positive characteristics and values in development vary in situations that are, for example, less individualistic and capitalistic in their ideology than is found in the United States and Western Europe. For children in the European American middle class, for example, the authoritative parenting style (combining high levels of warmth with moderate-to-high levels of discipline and control; Baumrind, 1989) is associated with achievement of social competence and overall adaptation when compared with other parenting styles, such as authoritarian parenting (high levels of control but little warmth or responsiveness to children's needs), which has generally been associated with poor developmental outcomes in children. In non–European American ethnic groups, other patterns may obtain. For example, adolescents from European American and Latin American homes who report having experienced authoritative parenting in growing up perform well academically, better than those coming from nonauthoritative households. However, school performance is similar for authoritatively and for nonauthoritatively reared Asian Americans and African Americans (Bornstein, 1995). Furthermore, ethnographic observations suggest that authoritarian parenting may be adaptive in some situations. European American parents in different income groups who engage in intrusive and controlling behaviors typically score high on scales of authoritarian parenting. However, work among low-income African American families suggests that a directive style of interaction is adaptive and is not harsh control. That is, an authoritarian style may constitute an appropriate adjustment in circumstances

(e.g., certain inner-city neighborhoods) in which it is a parent's job to impress on the child the necessity of following rules (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). Indeed, authoritarian parenting in some contexts may achieve the same ultimate function—successful social adaptation—that authoritative parenting serves in other contexts (Bornstein, 1995).

4. Order of presentation does not imply any precedence of one domain or element over another.

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