

Parent-Child Relationships during COVID-19 Pandemic and Practices Regarding Spending Quality Time

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Abstract: *The COVID-19 epidemic, which emerged at the end of 2019 and significantly affects the lives of all children, as well as from young to elderly. The present study was planned to discuss parent-child relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic and to provide examples and suggestions for parents in terms of spending quality time at home with their children. The COVID-19 pandemic process may positively or negatively affect the communication of families and children. In children it shows itself as increase in addition to using technological tools. In some families, the fact that family members have to stay at home together for a long time allows parents to spend more time with their children.*

Keywords: COVID-19, Children, Parent-child relationship, Play

1. Introduction

As the pandemic became widespread around the world, measures were begun regarding isolation processes in many countries, which depended on the existing national health policies. Practices such as protecting social distancing and individual isolation/quarantine at home were emphasized (Akoglu and Karaaslan, 2020). In many countries, preventive measures such as curfews, parents working from home and online education have been taken. With these preventive measures taken due to the pandemic, children are temporarily unable to go to school, their face-to-face communication with their peers is reduced and they generally cannot continue the structured leisure activities they used to do outside. During this process, as people have to stay at home all the time, which is causing changes at home and rearrangements are being made in the rhythm of family life regarding family (Basaran and Aksoy, 2020).

These changes in family life, when combined with the anxiety, fear and troubles caused by COVID-19, have had negative effects on parenting skills and parent-child relationships. However, not all families are equally affected by such factors and crises. Parents who are particularly stressed by preventive measures, who are concerned about financial difficulties or changes in their own and their relatives' well-being and health, may demonstrate poor quality parenting skills, or parent-child relationships may be adversely affected (Basaran and Aksoy, 2020; Donker, Mastrotheodoros & Branje, 2021).

General objective

The general objective of this study is to assess the discuss parent-child relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic and to provide examples and suggestions for parents in terms of spending quality time at home with their children.

2. Review of Related Literature

(a) Effects of COVID-19 on children

As part of the preventive measures implemented due to the COVID-19 epidemic, children's relationships with their peers have decreased, opportunities to get together to play have been limited, they have been forced away from school life and social interactions, and their social support has decreased. These factors can also have negative effects on children's physical, social and psychological well-being. The high levels of stress and anxiety felt by adults are also reflected in children, as most of the social conversations of adults in the media and around children are about the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)(Dalton Rapa & Stein, 2020). Disruption of domestic and extra-family routines in the event of an epidemic negatively affects the psychological, social, academic, motor, and mental development of children. In addition to these, obsession, determination, perfectionism, health and separation anxiety, trauma-related disorders, depressive mood, lethargy, acute stress and adjustment disorders can lead to problems such as social interaction difficulties and anorexia(Ercan *et al.* 2020; Imran, Zeshan & Pervaiz, 2020).

Due to the pandemic, preschool children have difficulty in focusing on play, some behaviors such as finger sucking, toilet issues that are not suitable for the child's chronological age, and development level such as lack of attention, sleeping disorders, aggression, irritability, social withdrawal and crying, as well as not being able to handle separating from parents are occurring (Basaran and Aksoy, 2020; Imran, Zeshan & Pervaiz, 2020; Wanget *al.*2020).

(b) Effects of Covid-19 on family

The pandemic period can negatively affect family relationships. However, not all families may be affected in the same way by the COVID-19 outbreak. Some families may enjoy spending time at home, placing more emphasis on their relationship within the home with fewer duties and responsibilities outdoors. Parents in this situation can

provide more support to their children and have the opportunity to carefully monitor their children's reactions. On the other hand, the anxiety and insecurity associated with COVID-19, when combined with factors such as home-schooling or supervising children while working from home, can negatively affect the interactions of parents and children (Donker, Mastrotheodoros & Branje, 2021).

In this process, parents who are confronted with situations such as staying at home for a long time with their children, the decrease in receiving external social support and limiting social interactions are negatively affecting them physically, psychologically and financially. Some families have started to experience more financial difficulties as a result of the changing economy and increasing unemployment. On the other hand, it can cause parents who are under stress to be violent at home or to get angry more quickly with their children. Being impatient, using punishment more, the increase in child abuse and children's addiction to using technological tools can also be counted as additional negative affects (Bradbury-Jones and Isham, 2020; Chung, Lanier & Wong, 2020). Some families on the other hand, face difficulties such as working from home while taking care of their children and supporting their education. But not all parents who experience these anxieties and increasing stressors from COVID-19 may be at higher risk of perceived stress or bad parenting, which could reduce the impact of protective factors on COVID-19's potential for parental stress and child abuse. In particular, adaptive coping strategies and supportive family environments can serve as protective factors for families experiencing stress. Similarly, it has been found to increase the ability to accept the situation and to accept negative thoughts or experiences without judgment (Brown *et al.* 2020).

Parents' empathy and emotion regulation skills also play an important role in positive parent-child interactions during this process. Parents with high levels of empathy are able to approach their children positively and spend more time to support their children's emotional and social development. They can provide better support when their children are upset or bored, and help them engage in various activities in family life to meet their children's play and entertainment needs. High levels of empathy and self-efficacy reduce the stress level of parents, and increase their positive coping skills and supportive parenting practices (Gambin *et al.* 2020). For many families who stay at home for a long time, spending more time together with an uninterrupted contact between child and parents, family interactions and parenting behaviors emerge as clear candidates to be studied as potential sources of risk and protection (Romero *et al.* 2020). During this period, it offers families the opportunity to play games, do art, listen to music, watch television, walk together, ride bikes and complete school work with their children. Such activities positively affect the communication of the child with their parents and make it easier for them to overcome the pandemic process (Gambin *et al.* 2020; Goldschmidt, 2020).

(c) Parent-child interaction and support practices in the Covid-19 process

During COVID-19, parents must actively plan their new care, study and education routines and potentially take time

to address their own emotional experiences and self-care (Russell *et al.* 2020). In the process of staying at home, it is important for parents to talk with the child about the pandemic process, and then to regulate their own emotions and to plan activities that will facilitate their children's adaptation to the process and help them spend effective time together.

(d) Talking to the child

Trying to understand the anxiety and fears of children and accepting them unconditionally, offering appropriate explanations about their emotions, and using realistic and concrete language that they can understand enables them to overcome this process more healthfully and with minimal damage (Ercan *et al.* 2020). Firstly, to control child's anxiety, an environment should be provided where the child can ask questions. The questions they ask should be answered honestly and in a way that the child can understand (Oner, 2020). The child may ask the same question over and over again because the process might be difficult to understand. The parents should calmly and patiently answer the child's questions whenever they ask. During this period, children may believe that a disease can be caused by a particular thought or behavior. While the emergence of this thought leads to the development of a sense of conscience in children, they still have a poor understanding of how the disease spreads. Parents should be vigilant to make sure that their children don't feel the outbreak is a punishment for their previous bad behaviors and blame themselves. Therefore, it is important to listen to what children believe regarding COVID-19 (Dalton, Rapa & Stein, 2020).

During this process, some parents do everything to protect their children from the effects of the outbreak and may avoid talking about difficult feelings and events. In this period, unrealistic suggestions such as "there is nothing to worry about", "don't mind that", "if you think positive, you can overcome your anxiety", "there is nothing to be afraid of", and ignoring the emotions the child might cause confusion. Such behaviors can trigger the feeling of loneliness, insecurity and incomprehension in children, leading to increased fear, panic and anxiety. It is important to make children feel that they are in a safe area and that they are not alone. They should know that many people are ready to help people affected by this disease, and that hospitals, healthcare professionals, the state and the society are doing their best (Ercan *et al.* 2020; Yagmur Copur, 2020). One of the most important factors causing anxiety in children is "uncertainty". When there is uncertainty, children can fill in the gaps with the worst possible scenarios in their own mind, as young children may misunderstand some developments and news. They can increase their anxiety by making comments such as: they will be left without food during curfews, the disease is severe in every person who gets it, everyone who suffers from this disease dies or they are being hooked up to intensive care tubes. It is very important to learn what children know and think and to give correct information to the child as no one wants to increase their anxiety. Knowing that children can comfortably talk to their parents and ask questions and offering a comfortable chat environment relaxes them. In addition, children should not

be forced to speak unless they want to and feel ready (Ercan *et al.* 2020).

(e) Approach to the child

Parents should carefully observe their children's reactions during the epidemic process. It is important to be a model for their children via observing their difficulties in transitions to sleep, reactions such as having nightmares, providing hygiene education, positive psychological attitudes towards reducing stress, and drawing their attention to a more productive and positive direction (Wanget *al.* 2020). Children should be protected from exposure to exaggerated or scary news and comments on television or social media. Children should be told that not everything they hear on social media is true (Oner, 2020).

Since the pandemic process makes it necessary to stay at home, children's use of technology increases and can reach the level of addiction. In order to prevent technology addiction, technology time limits should be determined and implemented consistently. In addition, it is important to take measures such as planning activities to increase communication within the family, and preventing the use of tablets and phones in bed if there is a level of sleep disturbance. In addition, it is important to encourage children to make phone calls and video chats with their friends (Ercan *et al.* 2020; Goldschmidt, 2020). During this period, it is especially important for the parents to spend private time with the child. In other words, when parents take care of the child during the time they spend together and play with them or do activities that they enjoy can strengthen the communication and relationship between the parent and the child and enable the child to express his anxiety and fears.

Activities such as playing games with parents, painting, reading books or preparing meals together can help children stay away from anxiety and enjoy the moment (Ercan *et al.* 2020).

(f) Effective time and play at home with children

Exercising together provides both parents and children the opportunity to spend time together, as well as keeping children away from factors such as weakening of muscles, weight gain and obesity as a result of inactivity. Such activities enable children to both release excess energy, get away from the anxiety and stress caused by the situation, strengthen the coordination of their body and help them be more mindful and healthy (Ercan *et al.* 2020). In this process, various activities can be planned for parents and children to spend time together at home, in which all family members can participate. These types of activities help both of them to reduce stress and anxiety and facilitate their adaptation to this process by ensuring effective communication between each other. Below are samples of games that can enable parents to communicate effectively with their children at home.

Sausage walk

For this game, that the child and both parents can play together, the starting and ending point is determined with two objects (two ropes, shoelaces, slippers, cushions, etc.). Blankets, sacks, and pillowcases can be used for the game.

In the first stage, the game can be started with the child. The child is wrapped in a blanket. S/he can be rolled from the starting point to the end point and return to the starting point. After other family members play in the same way, the mother-child/father-child can be wrapped in the blanket together and rolled up in the blanket. Then the game can go on as follows: going into the sack/pillowcase and jumping from the starting point without falling on the ground, going back to the starting point by jumping while holding each other's hand, going back to the starting point, walking on hands and feet like a dog, dancing to the music, walking or running in line with the rhythm, jumping while cuddling, walking or jumping backwards.

My feelings

This game provides an opportunity for children to express their emotions caused by the events they experience throughout the day. Family members sit face to face on the ground in a circle. In accordance with the daily life of the children, an event that happened that day is discussed. On that day, a picture that the child drew at home, a game s/he played, a cartoon s/he watched, a video conversation with friends or grandparents, a cat or bird s/he saw while looking through the window, and feelings about events or situations can be discussed. For example: If the child had a video call with his friend that day, questions such as "what was your friend doing?", "what did you talk about?", "why was s/he angry?", "why was s/he upset?", "what was s/he doing at home?", "what did you feel when you talked?" etc. can be asked. If it was about the cat s/he saw, then questions such as "What was the cat doing?", "How was it playing with a ball of wool?" Likewise, the child may also be encouraged to ask questions to their parents (Dere Ciftci, 2020).

Poor kitty

Family members sit on the floor in a random placement. An adult chooses a cat by counting and picking. A cat mask is put on the selected family member. The person taking the role of the cat pretends to be a cat, saying "meow, meow" like a cat on his hands and knees. S/he goes to a family member and tries to make him/her laugh by saying "meow, meow", s/he can get close to his/her face or crawl on his/her shoulder. The family member s/he is crawling with, on the other hand, caresses him/her by saying, "Poor kitty, poor kitty." The cat continues until s/he makes one of the players laugh. The person who laughs becomes a cat. The game continues in this way (Keskin, 2015).

Who am I thinking of?

Family members sit on the ground in a circle. The adult asks each family member to consider the characteristics of someone they know and love, choose a family member, and not tell it to anyone. One of the family members is selected through counting-out and sits in the middle or opposite of the family members. The child/adult asks them to guess or find out who s/he has chosen by asking various questions: "What color is their hair? How tall? Are they thin? Which game do they like the most? What makes them angry? Who do they usually play with?" The family member who guesses correctly comes to the middle. The game continues in this way (Dere Ciftci, 2020).

Dance dance dance

First of all, a lot of space for movement and dancing is needed for this game. Then, pictures expressing various emotions such as sadness, anger, surprise, excitement, happiness, tiredness, or boredom. A cover should be made to hide the pictures underneath. When the cover is removed, the expression of emotion is seen. All sizes and covers should be the same color. Upbeat music on a music player is required. The pictures are stacked on the floor with their covers on top. Thus, neither the picture nor the emotion it expresses is seen. One of the family members is chosen to be "It". Other family members are given three cards. When the music plays, all family members dance around the room. When the music stops, family members run away to avoid being caught by the "It" person. The "It" runs towards the family members and tries to tag someone. They choose one of the three cards in the hand of the person they tag. They open the cover of the card they choose. They look at the emotion in the picture and try to express it with movements without speaking. The other person tries to figure out what emotion it is. When they know the emotion (eg. card expressing sadness), they ask questions like: "What does the child in the picture feel? Why are they sad? What would you do to avoid their feeling sad?" The family member who chooses the card and tells about it takes the role of holding the card. The game continues in the same way by playing the music again (Dere Ciftci, 2020).

Reflections

The adult says: "Two people will stand in the game facing each other. One of you will make various movements, and the other will be the reflected person. The reflected person will copy the same movements, reflecting them like a mirror." Family members stand opposite each other, facing each other. The first player starts moving his arm, body and leg very slowly, as if he was in front of a mirror. The person in the "mirror role" tries to imitate these movements. During the game, players are reminded to make eye contact and examine the entire movement. The roles are changed when the adult says "change" or the children feel ready (Sher, 2016).

3. Research Design

In the study, depending on the literature review, examples of games during quality time were presented, taking into consideration of the effects of this process both on children and parents. I searched MEDLINE, PubMed, EBSCO, ULAKBIM databases, and Cochrane library and carried out a review on the parent and relationship in this period.

4. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic process may positively or negatively affect the communication of families and children.

The stress, anxiety, fear and troubles experienced by some parents negatively affect the parenting skills and parent-child relationships. Parents' unemployment and financial difficulties cause stress which may make them show violence at home, irritability, impatience, use of punishment or child abuse. In children it shows itself as increase in

addiction to using technological tools. In some families, the fact that family members have to stay at home together for a long time allows parents to spend more time with their children. It is observed that they can spend quality time with their children at home with activities such as playing, art, listening to music, watching television and doing sports together. Therefore, they can both communicate effectively with their children and reduce the stress and anxiety level of the pandemic process. In the process of staying at home, it is important for parents to talk to the child about the pandemic process. They should also have a positive approach with their child, and then organize their own emotions and plan activities that will facilitate their children's adaptation to the process while spending quality time together.

5. Future Scope

When the literature is examined, the most important task falls on the parents to get through this process in the best way possible. In order for the parents to communicate effectively with their children at home, it is important that they first come to terms with their own stress and anxiety.

The fact that parents are aware of the risk and seriousness of this process causes them much worry. Likewise, the longer the children stay at home, the decrease in their social interactions with their beloved ones and their peers, the inability to throw their energy into activities in outdoor playgrounds, the difficulty in understanding the curfew, the importance of hygiene and the use of masks also worry them as they do not fully understand the important reasons why these measures are necessary. Therefore, the parents should calm themselves first, in order that they can help their children. As a result, family relationships will develop positively, and negative behaviors such as being quick tempered, violence, use of punishment, and harsh reactions can be prevented. Instead, at home, it may be suggested that the parents plan their daytime routines and activities well.

During the day, a good plan should be prepared by taking in the opinions of children, including the chores to be done at home and the time that parents devote to them. The prepared plan should be explained to children in simple language suitable for their age. The use of this prepared plan and timetable with an alarm clock or with an illustrated program for early ages can make it easy for children to understand. During the application, the active participation of the child should be ensured.

At the same time, this process can be organized with games for children to understand hygiene rules, use of masks, social distancing practices and curfews. Playing games that family members can participate together at home, especially to support their social and emotional development, will increase the quality of communication by strengthening parenting skills, and will reduce the anxiety and stress of the parents, and therefore their children.

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