Task, Challenges, and Obstacles (TCO) of Parenting

South Carolina Conference of Adlerian Psychology, Myrtle Beach, SC
September 29, 2012

Presented By: Paul R. Rasmussen, Ph.D.
Director of the Adler Child-Guidance Center
Diplomate in Adlerian Psychology
What is Parenting?

- verb [ with obj. ] (often as noun parenting) be or act as a mother or father to (someone): the warmth and attention that are the hallmarks of good parenting.

- Arguably one of the most profound and important roles that can be undertaken in life.

- Reaches far beyond genetic contribution.

- Transcends age, race/ethnicity, social economic status, sexual orientation, and a broad scope of other demographic variables.

- Has evolved far beyond the traditional two-parent home.
Task, Challenges, and Obstacles (TCO) of Parenting

- Each must be addressed to some degree by ALL parents, regardless of culture.

- HOW the task, challenges, and obstacles are (successfully) addressed will vary based on culture and demographics.

- What works for one child might not work for another.

- What works for one parent might not work for another.
The Task of Parenting
The Task of Parenting Defined

“One’s responsibility to raise his or her child in such a way that he or she (the child) can develop into a contributing member of a civilized society.”
“One’s responsibility to raise his or her child in such a way that he or she (the child) can develop into a contributing member of a civilized society.”

The task of parenting is the responsibility of the individual parent.

Each parent can only control his or her self.

Each parent should be doing what is within his or her own power to achieve task fulfillment.
“One’s responsibility to raise his or her child in such a way that he or she (the child) can develop into a contributing member of a civilized society.”

Parents are not the only influential force on the development of their child.

Task fulfillment does not guarantee that the child will choose to be a contributing member of society.

Ultimately, the child will reach a level of maturity in which he or she will make choices and decide what type of person to be.
“One’s responsibility to raise his or her child in such a way that he or she (the child) can develop into a **contributing member of a civilized society**.”

- Not necessarily someone who makes a new discover or provides a better way to cultivate a natural resource.

- Part of contributing to a civilized society involves keeping society in mind when making decisions or solving problems.

- Doing what is morally mature/socially right, as opposed to acting just in one’s self-interest or following harmful/detrimental social norms (Kholberg, 1971).
The Task as a Process

- The task of parenting is a dynamic process, as opposed to a static product.

- It is the who, what, when, where, how, and why of parenting.

- It is knowing what you are doing, and thinking about why you are doing it.
  - “Because it’s how my parents raised me and I turned out fine.”
  - “My neighbor told me that she had the same problem and it worked with her kid.”
  - “Because I’ve thought about what it takes to be a contributing member of society, and I’m trying to help my child develop the qualities or characteristics that are conducive to this.”
Theoretical Foundations for the Task

- This basic notion of keeping society in mind is at the crux of Alfred Adler’s Individual Psychology.

- According to Adler (1992), “The meaning of life is interest in and co-operation with other people” (p. 20).

- Those who conduct themselves in this manner will seek out solutions to the problems of life that will be exemplary for others, while also contributing to the whole (Adler, 1992).
Adler asserted that there were three problems of life that all humans are constrained by.

These three tasks of life have an inseparable bond and cannot be solved independent of one another.

Though these tasks of life were identified by Adler as Work, Social, and Love/Sex, they can be re-conceptualized to be more available/applicable to parents.

Responsibility, Cooperation, Respect (RCR)
Theoretical Foundations for the Task  continued...

- Occupation Task: Not merely the job or career one undertakes, but sustaining one's self in a responsible manner.
  - The child does not necessarily have a job or career to attend to, but he or she does experience early training.

- Responsibility: Attending to things that need to be done, despite the presence or absence of unpleasantness.
  - A child might associate a certain level of unpleasantness to attending school, doing chores, and finishing homework, but he/she must learn to attend to the things that need done (i.e., school, family, neighborhood, etc.), and to avoid things that might be more attractive.

- Negative outcomes for those who fail to develop responsibility and/or the capacity for hardship (Brooks, 2001; Patton, 1998)
Theoretical Foundations for the Task continued...

- **Social Task:** The way one goes about relating to others.
  - A child might not have the freedom and/or independence to relate to others in the way adults do, but they develop a style of relating to others first in the home, and then at school.

- **Cooperation:** Learning to relate to others in a pro-social manner. This involves working with others to lift up the group, as opposed to working against others to lift up the self.
  - A child observes how his or her parents and siblings interact with him/her, as well as how they interact with each other. The child makes conclusions based on these experiences and acts accordingly.
  - Our ability to function in the world is dependent upon our ability to cooperate (Worthen, Henderson, Rasmussen, & Benson, 2009)
Theoretical Foundations for the Task continued...

- **Love/Sex Task:** The way an individual approaches love/partnership (regardless of sexual orientation), and how his/her dyad or partnership contributes to the next generation (i.e., natural birth, artificial insemination, adoption, etc.).

  - Children might not have a romantic partner, but they are still learning how to treat partnership through their development of Respect.

- **Respect:** Recognizing and maintaining thoughtfulness/consideration of others, while continuing to do so for the self as well.

  - Through respect for self, the individual is willing to control urges/impulses and accept responsibility.
Theoretical Foundations for the Task

Continued...

- Although Alfred Adler did not articulate parenting as one of the tasks of life, the Individual Psychology was/is highly focused on human development and child guidance.

- Adler established over thirty child guidance centers prior to World War II, performed public family demonstrations, and lectured to teachers-in training about the problem child.

- Needless to say, Adler recognized the benefits and necessity of preparing the next generation.
Adler asserted that the greater the amount of trained/acquired community feeling in childhood, the greater the expectation could be of one’s accomplishments.

Successful fulfillment of the life tasks does not cause and/or lead to consistent happiness or subjective well-being.

However, the likelihood of negative consequences is minimized, and the opportunity for positive life experiences is maximized.

Therefore, childhood is the training ground for adulthood.
Successful fulfillment of the task of parenting is likely to contribute to:
- The child’s development of human strengths and optimal human functioning.
- The success/progression of the next generation.

The task of parenting can be defined as a universal concept because it can be applied cross-culturally.

However, this is not to say that fulfillment of the task will be a universal process that will be accomplished in the same way.
- Optimal human functioning must be considered within the cultural context it occurs.
The Challenges of Parenting
The Challenges of Parenting Defined

““The immediate issues that provoke a parent’s reaction in order to reach a timely solution.””
The Challenges of Parenting Defined continued...

- “The immediate issues that provoke a parent’s reaction in order to reach a timely solution.”

- These occur in the here and now:
  - “My child did not do so well on his/her report card.”
  - “My son just got caught lying to me.”
  - “My daughter tried to sneak out of the house…but got caught.”

- Does not have to be a bad thing or a problem:
  - “My son wants to throw the ball around, but I have to get these reports done for tomorrow.”
  - “My daughter asked if I could teach her how to put on makeup, but I have to attend to the baby.”
The Challenges of Parenting Defined continued...

- “The immediate issues that provoke a parent’s reaction in order to reach a timely solution.

- At times, these do not require a parental reaction, but one is often warranted:
  - “My two boys just started arguing in the other room and I feel I need to go in there and set them straight!”
  - “My son/daughter cannot find the shirt that they wanted to wear to school today.”
  - “My child does not want to study for the spelling test he/she is taking tomorrow.”
The Challenges of Parenting Defined continued...

- “The immediate issues that provoke a parent’s reaction in order to reach a timely solution.”

- These issues often interfere with the parents life if left unresolved:
  - “I am going to be late to work, if he does not get out of bed in the next five minutes.”
  - “If I can’t get my daughter to stop crying over this toy, what will the other people in the store think of me?”
  - “I can’t stand a messy home! He needs to get up there and pick up his toys now!”
Why Do Challenges Occur?

- Children have needs, desires, and wants.
- Parents have needs, desires, and wants.
- Challenges occur when the child’s needs, desires, or wants conflict with the parent’s needs, desires, or wants.
  - A child wants attention, but the parent needs to finish his/her paper work.
  - A mother wants to have coffee with a neighbor, but the child needs a snack.
  - The child desires another vacation to Disney World, while the parents have been longing to go to Disney Land.
Why Do Challenges Occur? continued...

- The Child’s World
  - A young child often operates from an immature orientation towards life: “I want what I want when I want it.”
  - Frequently, young children have yet to develop the capacity to consider the group before themselves.

- The Parent’s World
  - The parent has had time to develop a more mature orientation towards life: “I can’t get all the things I want (though I can get many of them with careful effort), and at times it is my responsibility to do things I don’t necessarily want to do.”
  - Parents recognize that there are others in the picture that must also be considered.
Why Do Challenges Occur? continued...

- **4 Goals of Misbehavior:**
  - Attention: “Pay attention to me!”
  - Power: “I’ll show you!”
  - Revenge: “You’ll pay for that!”
  - Demonstration of Inadequacy: “Don’t bother; I just can’t do it.”

- Account for the child’s purpose for misbehaving.

- Misbehavior does not account for all challenges, but it accounts for a substantial amount.
Facing the Challenges

- Today’s society is increasingly focused on equality and democratic process:
  - Equality does not imply lack of leadership.
  - Even Democracies have a President.

- Fallacy of punishment and rewards:
  - Reinforces power differential.
  - Focuses on external reinforcement.
  - Fails to develop intrinsic motivation.
  - Play into the intentions of the child rather than acting as educators.
Facing the Challenges continued...

- Natural and logical consequences:
  - Allow the child to experience the consequences of his or her actions.
  - Provides a learning situation.
  - Encourages and empowers the child through choices.
  - Allows the child to develop intrinsic motivation.
Facing the Challenges continued...

- Be firm, but mindful of the task:
  - Resist the temptation to dominate.
  - Encourage respect, cooperation, and responsibility (RCR), by demonstrating RCR.
  - Implement order in daily life and maintain routine.
  - Eliminate destructive criticism and minimize mistakes.
  - Provide constructive feedback and focus on what is done right.
  - Take time for training, and be mindful of the task when resolving challenges.
Challenges → Task

- One’s approach to the challenges of parenting has direct impacts on the task.

- The task is a process; the challenges are the steps along the way.

- Challenges are opportunities to address the task through training, educating, and preparing the child for adulthood.
The Obstacles of Parenting
The Obstacles of Parenting Defined

“The forces of influence that are affecting a parent’s capacity to meet their task.”
The Obstacles of Parenting Defined continued...

- “The **forces of influence** that are affecting a parent’s capacity to meet their task.”

- These are factors that are beyond the microsystem (i.e., things that impact parenting, but are beyond the parent-child relationship):
  - Parent’s workplace
  - Mass Media
  - Government
The Obstacles of Parenting Defined continued...

- “The forces of influence that are **affecting a parent’s capacity to meet their task.**”

- The Parent might be doing all that they can, but there are going to be things out of their control:
  - A local gang leader recruiting at the child’s school.
  - A receding economy resulting in job cuts.
  - A cut in social services, decreasing insurance coverage.
Navigating the Obstacles of Parenting

- Obstacles are often not within parent’s control.

- Decide what I can and will do about the obstacle:
  - “I can’t control the gang leader, but I can contact the school and/or local police department.”
  - “I can’t stop my boss from laying me off, but I can use this to teach my child a lesson in perseverance.”

- Obstacles often take president over task fulfillment and challenges

- Often involve a parent or child’s basic needs:
  - Joining a gang might interfere with a child’s need for safety.
  - Getting laid off might interfere with a parent’s capacity to provide food for the family.
Navigating the Obstacles of Parenting

Continued...

- Enlist the service of others when needed:
  - The task focused on helping the civilized society
  - The obstacles might require enlisting the help of the civilized society
What Can I Do?

- Get involved with your community.
- Help build your community.
- Be a part of the solution, not the problem.
In Conclusion

- Parenting is one of the most profound and important roles that can be undertaken.

- The Task, Challenges, and Obstacles (TCO) are faced by all parents and transcend all demographics and cultures.

- Fulfillment of the task is directly impacted by how a parent handles/Manages the immediate challenges that arise.

- Think about what you are doing, why you are doing it, and what you hope to accomplish by it.

- It might not be easy, but it is certainly worth it.

- And remember, you are not in this alone…
WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER!