

This, in turn, led to fuller consideration of the term *control* as it has been used in the developmental literature, and particularly in the frameworks of Schaefer (1965) and Barber (1996). We argued that these frameworks are laudable in highlighting the hazards of psychological control and some of the benefits of behavioral control, and yet their employment of the concept of control itself leads to ambiguities. We suggested that even behavioral management by parents can be done in either autonomy-supportive or controlling ways, each of which had distinct effects. Instead, we conceptualize the style that Barber called behavioral control to be the intersection of autonomy support *and* structure.

When it comes to psychological control, we specifically focused on conditional regard, in both its positive and negative forms, because conditional regard is such a pervasive tool in the landscape of parenting and is even advocated not only by some parents but also by some developmental specialists. Research within SDT has, however, documented the negative consequences of conditional regard, even when it takes the form of positive conditional regard (i.e., providing more attention and affection than usual when children do what the parents want them to do). In particular, positive conditional regard tends to foster introjected rather than more autonomous forms of self-regulation. To support this, we reviewed research showing that autonomy support has more positive outcomes for quality of behavior, psychological experiences, parent–child relationships, and well-being than does positive conditional regard.

Stressors and pressures on parents can lead them to be more controlling and can detract from positive involvement with their children. When parents’ own psychological needs are not being met, they are less able and likely to be responsive to their children’s needs (e.g., Kaap-Deeder et al., 2015; Landry et al., 2008). In addition, social pressures can lead parents to be ego involved or perfectionistic with regard to child outcomes, diminishing organismic trust and tendencies to be autonomy-supportive (Grolnick, 2002). More generally, economic threats and lack of social supports place stress on parents and conduce to more controlling practices (Ryan, Deci, & Vansteenkiste, 2016).

Finally, within SDT, we make strong distinctions between autonomy and independence and between autonomy and separation or detachment. We argue that whereas autonomy is a basic need for children, independence is not. In fact, at every stage of development, children optimally depend on parents for support and guidance, even as the focus and content of these dependencies change with maturation and social experience. In healthy parent–child relationships, children and teenagers will turn to parents for support, but this most readily occurs in those relationships characterized by parental autonomy support and involvement. We also do not characterize optimal development in terms of separation or detachment from parents, as some past perspectives have suggested, but rather as a continued closeness between parents and offspring, with the child growing toward an increasingly wider span of competencies and interests in the world while remaining attached and connected with his or her parents.

Speaking Plainly about Parenting

Before leaving this topic, we would like to balance out the somewhat technical and research-based discussion of parenting with some more direct discussion of the topic. As this book is primarily a review of empirical work on motivation, personality development, and wellness, this chapter on parenting may appear to be highly abstract and in some ways divorced from the day-to-day interactions that take place between parents

and their children. When relating to a child or teenager, parents are usually not thinking about concepts such as conditional regard, psychological control, emotional autonomy, or the positive alternatives we propose, such as autonomy support, involvement, and structure. Yet these research constructs and dimensions do show up in real interactions, characterized differentially by more commonly used terms such as *love*, *understanding*, *care*, and *guidance*.

It is important to remember that a parent's being *autonomy-supportive* involves more than just refraining from using pressures, rewards, and controlling language to ensure behavior. Central to autonomy support is the idea that interactions between parent and child begin with *empathy*, with understanding and respect for the child's points of view (or internal frame of reference) in relation to any important event. Responsive and empathic parents consider their child's experience. Because there is understanding, when limits must be set on behavior, there is readily an acknowledgement of potential contrary feelings and a supportive approach.

Moreover, whether setting limits or guiding new behaviors, it is extremely helpful to provide reasons. Rather than simply being demanding, when being autonomy-supportive parents convey their expectations, values, and guidance for behavior in terms that the child is able to assimilate. Giving a *rationale* facilitates more autonomous internalization. This autonomy-supportive practice merely recognizes that it is hard for any individual, adult or child, to volitionally comply without a good reason to do so. When parents make the effort to express the reasons for requesting or requiring specific behaviors, it typically results (at least in the long term) not only in more cooperation but also in fuller internalization (see, e.g., Green-Demers, Pelletier, Stewart, & Gushue, 1998; Jang, 2008; Koestner et al., 1984).

A rationale is not simply saying that this is "what is expected" or "because I say so." Even citing traditions or "duties" may not be enough. As important as expectations and traditions may be, particularly in some cultures (e.g., Miller, Das, & Chakravarthy, 2011), they should still be backed by both rationale and modeling, or what Roth and Assor (1999) called *intrinsic value demonstrations*. Being given reasons and witnessing authentic value enactment both support the child's ultimate autonomy and the likelihood that culturally transmitted behaviors will be followed and maintained over time.

It is also practically important to understand why the use of coercive or seductive controls is so ineffective when children fail to behave up to expectations. Parents' use of rewards and punishments may be well meaning, but in trying to pressure or entice children into specific behaviors, parents may fail to grasp or "diagnose" what barriers, frustrations, or problems are actually interfering with the internalization of desired responses or the achievement of desired levels performance. In contrast, parents who empathically attempt to understand the barriers from the children's or adolescents' internal frame of reference are in a better position to help their children identify, cope with, and overcome the perceived barriers, obstacles, or concerns, as well as to better understand whatever contrary aims and agendas the children may have. This is why both sensitivity and dialogue are so critical to supportive parenting.

Similarly, the idea of relatedness is often read abstractly in terms of connecting with a child, but one could perhaps substitute the more common word *love*. Since the work of Harlow (1958) and Bowlby (1969, 1973), it has been clear that children need a safe, warm, and comforting base to seek out in times of stress. But far beyond this anxiety reduction function, love is a positive force, expressed in the parents' receptiveness to and interest in the children—manifested in smiles as the children come to the door, excitement when there is learning and discovery, and acceptance for all that the children experience—that

truly satisfies this basic need. In love, parents positively regard children unconditionally, as Rogers (1961) recommended, even as the parents experience their own feelings about what children do or say.

Turning to parental competence support and provision of structure means providing helpful guidance and direction for the child's development. This, too, requires communicating "at the child's level," especially when it's time to be explicitly instructive. A structuring parent is thus not one who just sets out rules and communicates consequences but who also facilitates the child in successfully enacting them and who is helpful rather than critical when the child is lost and confused. Communicating consequences does not mean setting out arbitrary rewards and punishments but rather means communicating the real promises and perils of behaving in particular ways. Effective parents inform the children about how the world works, rather than simply shaping the children's behavior through wielding power over them. Such parents also model the behaviors they promote, allowing their children to transparently see them in action in ways that are developmentally attuned and appropriate.

Rather than uniformly valuing independence, parents who are loving and supportive not only take delight in attempts at self-reliance but also welcome dependence and even neediness. Particularly in Western cultures there has often been a disparaging attitude toward dependence when, in fact, some degree of dependence is characteristic of all individuals, at all stages of life. The so-called "self-made man or woman," idealized by some, is never that (Friedman, 2000), but instead there is always a background of support and systematic reliance. Acceptance of that is learned in the loving relationships of families. The growing child needs to learn to be able to comfortably rely on others and to turn to them for emotional support and informational guidance, which is a healthy attribute, as Ryan and Lynch (1989) highlighted. SDT research shows that a willingness to turn to parents for support, advice, and even direct help, which we have labeled *volitional reliance*, is a characteristic of children that positively predicts wellness and adjustment and is associated with parents who are supportive of both autonomy and relatedness, a fact evident across varied cultures (Ryan, La Guardia, Solky-Butzel, Chirkov, & Kim, 2005).

The ideal trajectory of parent-child relationships is therefore not "individuation," insofar as that is in any way characterized by necessarily separating from or growing apart from parents, but instead is a continued trusting and close relationship that transforms over time to become more mutual and reciprocal. In the SDT framework, children need not "detach" from loving parents, even as their relationships change and the children becoming increasingly self-regulating and self-sustaining in contexts outside the family. Further, as we review in Chapter 15 on *identity formation*, children who have the privilege of basic need-supportive parents have the best chance of achieving their unique potentials, fulfilling themselves and the inherent and adaptive human thrust toward diversity.

In many social contexts around the globe, reliance between children and parents will ultimately go both ways. In one of life's many existential ironies, as parents age, it is they who may become more dependent, often on the children they once nurtured. When that occurs, it is likely that those offspring who themselves have experienced basic need supports will be those most fully capable of providing the empathy, support for autonomy, and relational nutrients needed by parents as they face the dependencies of later development. In short, need-satisfying parenting teaches us all how to be volitional and competent, as well as interdependent and caring.