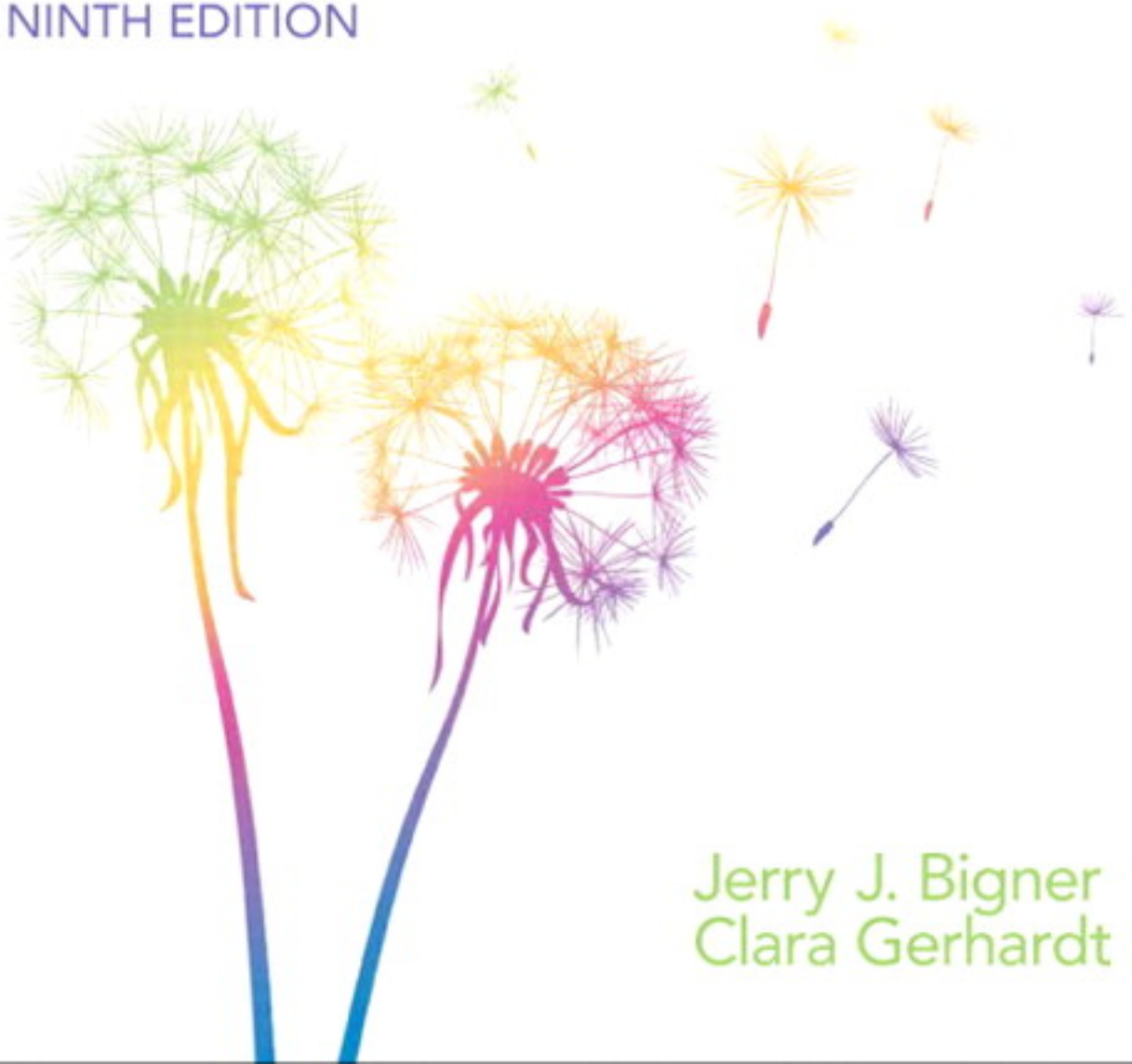
Parent-Child Relations

An Introduction to Parenting

NINTH EDITION



Jerry J. Bigner
Clara Gerhardt

NINTH EDITION

PARENT–CHILD RELATIONS

An Introduction to Parenting

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Full-Service Project Management: Mansi Negi; Aptara®, Inc.
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Printer/Binder: Edwards Brothers Malloy
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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bigner, Jerry J.
Parent-child relations: an introduction to parenting/Jerry J. Bigner, Clara Gerhardt.—9th ed.
p. cm.
ISBN-13: 978-0-13-285334-7
ISBN-10: 0-13-285334-5
1. Parenting. 2. Parent and child. 3. Child development. 4. Families. I. Gerhardt, Clara. II. Title.
HQ755.8.B53 2014
649'.1—dc23 2012036311

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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ISBN-10: 0-13-285334-5
ISBN-13: 978-0-13-285334-7

This text is dedicated to Dr. Jerry Bigner,
A man both giving and gifted.
May his teachings continue to nurture future family life scholars.
With appreciation and gratitude.

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About the Authors

Tribute to Dr. Jerry J. Bigner, Ph.D. (1944–2011)

"There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love . . ."

(Thornton Wilder, 1897–1975)

Welcome to the ninth edition of *Parent–Child Relations: An Introduction to Parenting*. We pay tribute to the "father" of this book, Dr. Jerry J. Bigner, who nurtured and raised it from infancy to adulthood. The work was first conceived in 1972, when Dr. Bigner was in his late twenties. He meticulously tended it, much like a parent carefully watches over a child. He was working on the ninth edition at the time of his passing, in 2011.

Dr. Bigner's curriculum vitae was overwhelmingly impressive, with dozens of publications, and years of hands-on teaching and working in child-care settings as a professor of Human Development and Family Studies at Colorado State University. He had been a member of the National Council on Family Relations since 1966. He also had a noteworthy presence as the senior editor of the *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, and was passionate about respecting human diversity in its many expressions.

In the year of the new millennium, our professional paths crossed. When we first collaborated, it was as part of a project funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts. During what was to be the last year of his life, we were in constant contact. We discussed this text several times a week, as Dr. Bigner had already decided that I was to take on a role in coparenting his life's work. Everything he planned for the ninth edition—his ideas about parenting and the directions for future editions—he co-anchored in my mind.

Dr. Bigner leaves behind a legacy—in his publications, in the influence he has had on the countless students and colleagues who have internalized aspects of his teachings, and on all the significant persons in his life, his closest and dearest. We salute him for having been a role model to family life educators, a man who was extremely generous with his professional knowledge and expertise, and a man who touched the lives of thousands of students over several decades.

Dr. Clara Gerhardt
Professor of Family Studies, Samford University

Clara Gerhardt, MBA, Ph.D., is a professor of Family Studies at Samford University. She is a clinical psychologist and a licensed marriage and family therapist, as well as a certified family life educator. Among her many publications, she documented the history of family therapy in a chapter of *Global Perspectives in Family Therapy*. She writes a regular guest column for a publication of the National Council on Family Relations. She has held positions as chair of the Department of Family Studies at Samford University and chair of a State Board of Examiners in Psychology. As an educator, she teaches parenting, life span development, and multicultural perspectives. As part of her duties as an internship supervisor, she has mentored child life and child development education students. Dr. Gerhardt has professionally presented on six continents, visited more than 60 countries, and speaks five languages fluently. Her practical training is constantly updated by being a parent and a grandparent.

Preface

FEATURES OF THE TEXT

The ninth edition of *Parent–Child Relations* has been revised and updated to retain the significant pedagogical features of previous editions:

- A sharp focus on parenting. Students using this text typically study child development in a separate course.
- A strong emphasis on various theoretical models pertaining to parenting
- An emphasis on family systems theory and a systemic family development model to describe intergenerational family scenarios and life span challenges
- A focus on the ecological, social, and cultural contexts in which parent–child relations occur
- Anchoring of some parenting strategies by focusing on nurture and structure
- Expanded discussions of ethnic diversity and family structures in the United States
- *Frequently Asked Questions* allow students to see parenting concerns through the eyes of a parent or a therapist
- *Parenting Reflections* raise significant questions to promote critical thinking
- *Focus On* highlights important information

SUPPLEMENTS TO THE TEXT

Instructors will be pleased that their favorite topics may be included during lectures to supplement the text. The following online supplements are available to instructors and can be downloaded at www.pearsonhighered.com:

- **Online Instructor's Manual.** This manual provides a variety of resources that support the text, including notes from the author regarding each chapter, suggestions for supplementary lecture topics, and a listing of audiovisual materials that illustrate chapter concepts.
- **Online Test Bank.** The *Test Bank* features evaluation items, such as true–false and multiple choice.
- **Online PowerPoint® Slides.** PowerPoint presentations accompany each chapter of the text. These slides can be customized by adding comments.
- **Computerized Test Bank Software.** Known as TestGen, this computerized test bank software gives instructors electronic access to the Test Bank items, allowing them to create customized exams. TestGen is available in a dual Macintosh and PC/Windows version.
- **Course Management.** The assessment items in the Test Bank are also available in WebCT and Blackboard formats.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

- For the ninth edition, this text has undergone numerous changes and updates. Dr. Clara Gerhardt has joined the team as the coauthor.
- Many chapters were rewritten to reflect recent research and subtle changes in societal attitudes. "Culture and Diversity," "Parenting Strategies," "Transition to Parenthood," "Pregnancy and Birth," and "Family Formation and Parenting in Same-Sex Couples" have been revised in their entirety.
- The "Theoretical Perspectives" chapter was expanded and rewritten to clarify areas that students often find challenging. New visual renderings of the theoretical models were incorporated to facilitate understanding.

- The final chapter, "Best Practices in Parent–Child Relations," is a new addition to the book, and looks at the larger societal systems that cushion families. We ask the ambitious question, "What is the state of parent–child relations?" and analyze some demographics to provide us with indications of our strengths and aspirations.
- We listened to the suggestions of our reviewers, who pointed us in new directions. We asked a number of subject experts to review rewritten sections of the book and to identify leading researchers on particular topics and to highlight current trends.
- Relevant themes were added and expanded, such as parenting in military families, coparenting, sudden infant death syndrome, parental despair, shaken baby syndrome, postpartum depression, miscarriage and infant loss, the history of childhood, prenatal tests, bullying, fragile families, children's brain development and parenting, the role of family therapy in supporting parent–child relations, and commercial parenting programs, to mention a few.
- Current terminology is used. This is especially clear in the chapters on blended families, pregnancy and birth, and family formation with same-sex parents. Proposed, updated *DSM-5* terms are used. We have used gender-neutral language and randomly alternated the use of masculine and feminine pronouns such as *he* and *she*.
- The family snapshots were abbreviated and a select few were introduced with a family genogram to expose our students to this form of family notation.
- The illustrations that support theoretical models were newly rendered for clarity and reader engagement.
- The references have been checked and compared to the original sources. A serious effort was made to replace dated references with current research. This is an ongoing task which ensures that students benefit from up-to-date material.
- We have kept in mind that this is a text intended to facilitate teaching and learning. We added numerous pedagogical features and focused on reader friendliness. We updated the photos and figures, added clarity to the layout and visual engagement through bullet points, recommended reputable websites, and added charts and tables to sum up key concepts.
- The supplementary materials for this text have also undergone major restructuring to lighten the instructor's load.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This ninth edition was built on the inspiring and solid foundations created by the late Dr. Jerry Bigner. My deepest gratitude extends to him, as well as to his partner, Duane Farnell, who smoothed the way to carry out Jerry's wishes for this book. My appreciation to Dr. Bigner's many collaborators, including Dr. Raymond Yang.

It takes many musicians to perform a symphony. For any creative endeavor, there is a wide net of people who inspire, support, and simply create the space so that the project can be completed. I had an entire team, not all mentioned by name, guiding and encouraging me, and importantly, believing in my ability to capture what Dr. Bigner had envisioned. For her consistent affirmation, her artistic eye, and virtually all the diagrammatic renderings in this book, I embrace Claire Gerhardt Gottschalk. My heartfelt appreciation and love I owe to Dr. Christina Gerhardt, pediatrician. She is the backup vocalist who provided the harmony for this duet. For generously sharing her photographs and her vision, my gratitude extends to award-winning photographer Carolyn Sherer.

Samford University has been the academic home which nurtured and supported me. I am deeply indebted to my colleagues and students, especially research assistants Melissa Belflower and Katrina Brown. Dr. David Finn transformed "I can't" to "I can" with cups of tea. Others created the environment in which creativity flourishes: Drs. Mary Sue Baldwin, Jeanie Box, Kristie Chandler, and David Shipley.

The thoughtful insights and comments of the reviewers are greatly appreciated: Jennifer Andres, St. Cloud State University; Ming Cui, Florida State University; Deborah J. Handy, Washington State University; and Kim Kiehl, The Ohio State University.

Many generously shared their expertise and enthusiasm, specifically Drs. Tatum McArthur, Willem Grotepass, Gisela Kreglinger, Eva Buttner, Thomas Boll, Dan Sandiver-Stech, Arlene Hayne, Bryan Johnson, Ginger Frost, Jo King, Fred van Staden, Harold Goss, Irva Hayward, Danielle Hardaman, and computer genius Paul Gerhardt. Special acknowledgment is owed to the numerous unsung experts who read sections of the manuscript and pointed me in the right direction; you know who you are and I thank you from the bottom

of my heart. The editors at Pearson were my compass and anchor: Senior Acquisitions Editor Julie Peters and Editorial Assistant Andrea Hall. Kerry Rubadue, Laura Messerly, Brian Baker, Pat Onufrak, Mansi Negi, as well as the entire Pearson team responsible for editing and production, ultimately guided this book to a safe harbor.

Lastly, to my inner circle—my husband Michael and our children, their spouses and our grandchildren. They are the ones who turned me into a parent and a grandparent, the most important and rewarding learning school of all.

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PART I

Parent–Child Relations in Social Context

In some ways, we are all parenting experts. We have personally felt the effects of parental and coparental influences. We carry these experiences with us for life; we know about that most sacred of bonds, the one that remains with us forever. After all, we have all been parented or coparented within the diverse context of contemporary family life.

In an ideal scenario, we have been at the receiving end of our parents' and coparents' good intentions. We were the object of their hopes and dreams; we may have witnessed their challenges and sacrifices. In reality, we may have been cared for, but not all of these relationships may have amounted to loving or constructive interactions.

Not all parents can or want to parent.

Not all children take the extended opportunities.

Not all parent–child relationships have successful outcomes.

There are many shades of gray in the quality of a (co)parent–child relationship. We take it for granted that children are lovingly parented, but the reality is more complicated. Parenting can challenge us like nothing else. It can bring immense joy; disappointment and bitter tears are the flipside of that coin.

For as much as parents *parent*, the children do something in return; parents and their progeny do things to each other. It occurs against the backdrop of family histories. Parenting goes forward and backward in time; it crosses generations. We parent in the context of social, educational, and biological influences—factors that limit or enhance our effectiveness. Having some tried and true techniques and well researched literature at hand raises our intuitive knowledge to a more scholarly level. Assuming that parenting skills are innate may preclude the benefits of learning from a model of best practices.

In a parenting course, we try to describe the many visible and invisible threads that set the loom—the influences we may be aware of, as well as the somewhat imperceptible ones. By recognizing and understanding some of the patterns, learning techniques, and approaching parenting as a skill set that can be expanded, parent–child relations can become more rewarding for all participants. We can train professionals who will help parents find the most constructive and rewarding path through a forest of challenges. Biological parenthood is not a prerequisite; there are many paths toward a caring

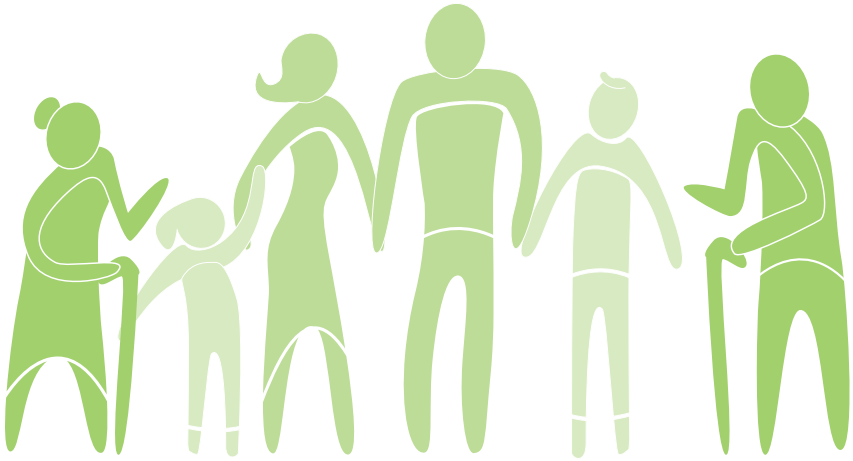
relationship of the *caretaker–care taken* configuration. We can use these skills in any responsible coparenting relationship involving children and adolescents, and in a variety of professions.

Parenting courses are anchored in countless volumes of research. In approaching parenting as a formal topic for study, we sum up the highlights and make the material accessible to those interested in this topic. We try to keep the joyful aspect of parent–child relations in mind. If these relationships seem like an occasional endurance test, learning from what has worked for others may increase our fitness level to run the parenting race gracefully and with good outcomes.

Parenting and the caring dimensions it represents has the potential for being one of life's greatest joys and ongoing gifts. As students of parent–child relations, we are particularly privileged to be close to the stage, where we can observe, encourage, and cheer on the actors partaking in one of life's true dramas, and where we can become part of the audience eavesdropping on the many dialogues that occur within the sacred space of the family.

CHAPTER 1

The Ecology of Parent–Child Relations



Learning Outcomes

After completing this chapter, readers should be able to

1. Explain the current views that support formal parenting education.
2. Explain the implications of the different perspectives concerning parent–child relations.
3. Explain the social factors that contributed to the changing trends in parenthood over the past century.
4. Describe the factors that contribute to the parenthood role, and reflect on the relevance of each of these factors during the life span development of the parent.

THE NEED FOR PARENTING EDUCATION

When we reflect on our own childhood experiences several questions come to mind: Why did our parents behave and react the way they did? What would we do differently if we were in their shoes? Are there lessons to be learned that will make us better parents? Are there best practices that we can follow to ensure optimal outcomes?

One of the most significant and intimate relationships among humans is that between parent and child. The parent–child bond is unique in its biological foundations and in its psychological meanings. For children, this essential relationship ensures

survival and helps shape their destinies. For adults, it can be one of the most fulfilling human experiences and a challenging opportunity for personal growth and development.

For many years, the need for formal parenting education was undervalued, and typically the option of training for this role was not available. Parent educators and professionals who work closely with parents agree that such skills would be a welcome addition. Our society goes to great lengths to train people for most vocational roles. A license indicating training and competence is required for a range of activities and vocations—from driving a car to the most sophisticated of professions. Other than for special circumstances such as foster parenting, no state or federal statute requires individuals to have training or preparation to become parents, or to practice parenting, even though the stakes are high and the effects are long lasting. The question concerning the feasibility of licensing parents has been asked (LaFollette, 2004). Our legal system has intervened in regulating potentially harmful activities, and promoting situations and behaviors that are "in the best interests of the child." It has played a role in adoption and parental rights issues. Even though parenting licensure would represent an attempt at raising the bar and exerting a gate-keeping role, many would see licensure as an intrusion on family privacy. Questioning a family's innate willingness to rise to the challenge of giving parenting their very best shot seems to be an intrusion into the private sphere of family life. Unless the overall emotional and physical well-being of a child is jeopardized or there is suspicion or fear that a child may be at risk, we tend to leave parenting to the parents, with varying outcomes (Tittle, 2004).

The media sometimes depicts parenthood in unrealistic ways by portraying idealistic outcomes of parent–child relations: the happily-ever-after story. It is tempting to believe that most parents and children have smooth interactions; children improve their parents' marriage; children will turn out well if they have good parents; children generally are compliant with parents' requests; and parents are solely responsible for their children's character, personality, and achievements upon attaining maturity. Learning about parenting in formal coursework, observing parents and children interact in natural settings, and hearing parents share their experiences may contribute to a more authentic understanding of parenthood.

Although most parents could profit from learning new ways to be effective in their role, there are so many opposing guidelines concerning parenting that it is hard to separate the wheat from the chaff. Researchers continue to make progress toward helping parents find more effective ways of performing their parenting roles and raising children to become competent adults.

Contemporary ideas about the nature of parent–child relations are the result of years of social evolution and many historical changes. Our concept of the relationship between a parent and a child contains numerous complex meanings. These perceptions influence an adult's decision to become a parent and also shape the subsequent parenting behavior. Our understanding of this significant family relationship has benefited from increased knowledge of the behavioral sciences. Experts continue to study parent–child interactions in the hopes of gaining a clearer understanding of how this relationship changes over time and is altered in certain social contexts. Researchers look at the dynamics of parent–child relations and try to distill the essence of competent parenting behaviors.

Disconcerting events occurring in families and in contemporary society underline the urgency of preparing parents and coparents to ensure that they are competent in their roles. It is becoming clearer that the qualities inherent in parenting relationships can benefit or harm a child's development. The prevalence of destructive behaviors in adulthood is traced to family-of-origin experiences in which poor and ineffective parenting may have played a major role (Coontz, 2006). Family experts are concerned about the effects of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of children by their parents and close family. Poor preparation for parenthood, inadequate social support, lack of adequate skills for coping with the stresses of parenting, and resource-depleted environments all interact to put families at risk (Cheal, 2007).

The relationship between parents and children is complex and varied. Parenthood is described as a **developmental role** that changes over time, usually in response to the changing developmental needs of children. Clearly, people can learn how to be effective in raising children and may be able to improve their behavior as parents. By studying the research, theories, and approaches that have been developed and examined by practitioners, it is possible to develop a better understanding of the many facets of parenting.

Parenting Reflection 1–1

At the outset and before having studied parent–child relations, what topics would you include in a course for first-time parents?

Coparenting

Coparents can come in various guises and in several contexts. It refers to the people who team up or *collaborate to parent*. Think about the word *cooperate*. It contains the prefix *co*, meaning that it is an activity that we do together or jointly, where we share our resources: in short, where we collaborate. It is much more than an extended form of child care. It is a very legitimate form of parenting and can occur in many settings. It can have legal implications concerning parental rights and responsibilities.

At the heart of coparenting lies the ongoing commitment to a child's well-being in a parental manner. Coparents can be biological parents in binuclear families who take on parenting roles from two different households because of divorce or separation. Coparents can be adults who significantly support parents in the parenting role, or may take over the parenting role for an absent or incapacitated parent. In this way, grandparents, supportive family members, friends, and foster parents could act as coparents if they take on permanent and semi-permanent roles with a serious commitment to a child's upbringing. They carry the child's interests at heart and become a significant force in the child's life in a relationship that is ongoing and enduring.

The adults could have a biological link to the child, but they need not have this connection. For instance, parents and stepparents in a post-divorce situation may coparent. Same-sex couples may coparent. Unmarried parents may coparent from two different households. Foster parents could coparent occasionally with a biological parent. In summary, "[co]parenting is an enterprise undertaken by two or more adults who together take on the care and upbringing of children for whom they share responsibility" (McHale & Lindahl, 2011, p. 3).

Focus Point. It is important for parents to learn how to raise children, to understand their developmental needs, and to become more effective in their roles as parents.

CONCEPTS OF PARENTHOOD

In our society, the parenting role is associated with several different concepts. Originally, the idea of parenthood referred singularly to the prominent aspect of sexual reproduction. Our society, like all others, values the function of reproduction within a family setting because, traditionally, this was the only way to sustain the population.

Although advances in medical technology allow for assisted reproduction, the traditional manner of *family formation* is the most frequently occurring variation. Initial family formation is followed by years of careful supervision of the offspring.

Other ideas are also embedded in our society's concept of parenthood—namely, that parents are responsible for nurturing, teaching, and acting as guardians for their children until they reach the age of legal maturity. This extended timespan of providing care for children is unique among most species found on Earth. Human infants and children have a prolonged period of dependency on adults, partly because of the length of time it takes for maturation of the brain and the complexity of the skills that have to be attained (Stiles, 2008). The brain of a human infant, unlike that of the offspring of many other mammals, is immature at birth and continues to develop. Human infants' survival is dependent upon being protected by adults. In contrast, the offspring of many other species walk within hours of birth and are capable of running to escape danger. Human infants do not master these same motor functions until many months and years after birth. Differences in brain size and function account for many of the disparities between humans and other species.

Parents were originally considered to be a child's principal teachers. This instructional function and the responsibility given to parents by society to prepare children for adulthood is referred to as **socialization**, or learning how to conform to the conventional ways of behavior in society. In the past, parents served as educators for their children by teaching them the essential skills needed to survive in society, including reading, writing, and calculation if they were growing up within a literate society. They helped children learn the job skills necessary to provide a living upon attaining adulthood. Today these requirements are met by schools and other agents. Parents are expected to help children learn the basic rules of social functioning and to impart values to guide the behavior and decisions of their offspring.

Understanding the family relationship enhances parenting skills. Parenthood is a developmental role which changes in response to the needs of the children.

Focus Point. A number of concepts are embedded in the role of a parent. These concepts define the different meanings associated with the role.

THE ECOLOGY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF PARENTHOOD

The relationship between parents and children can be described according to several dimensions. This relationship is one of the cornerstones of human existence, largely because of its biological basis. It is an essential part of our society, and society requires the addition of new members in order to continue.

To understand the context and complexity of the unique bond between parents and their children, we examine this bond from an **ecological perspective**. Ecology is an interdisciplinary branch of biology that examines the *interrelationships* between organisms and their environment (Barry, 2007). Behavioral scientists have placed an ecological perspective on human development and social behavior. Using this approach, the developmental changes in individuals, families, and other social groups take place within the context of interactions with changing environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This same perspective is used in the context of parent–child relations. To understand the parent–child relationship from an ecological angle, we must examine the context of the various environments that influence and shape behavior. We explore the basic nature of parent–child relations and identify the particular aspects that influence the roles and behaviors that parents assume.

Parenting Reflection 1–2

Try to imagine yourself as the best parent possible. What characteristics would you have? What are some things that you would try to do, and what would you try to avoid?

Following are some characteristic traits and qualities of the parent–child relationship:

1. *Parenthood is a social construct.* The parental role is a social institution based on complex values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors that focus on procreation and the need to care for the young (Bengston, Acock, Allen, Dilworth-Anderson, & Klein, 2005; Coontz, 2006). People who are not parents can also experience the parenting role—for instance, through coparenting. Coparents are significant persons within a system who collaborate and contribute to the parenting of a child (McHale & Lindahl, 2011).

The role of the parent is universally understood by diverse groups. Every society, culture, and subculture defines appropriate behavior for parents. Some cultural groups allocate a higher moral stature to parents than to nonparents. People who are not parents may be devalued by societies in which parenthood is valued.

2. *The relationship between parents and children is a subsystem of the larger social system that we call a family.* One of the most salient models for understanding family group functioning is the **family systems theory**. This approach falls within an ecological context (Becvar & Becvar, 1998). Family systems theory

describes family functioning in ways that resemble other systems found in nature, such as the solar system and ecological systems. This model explains how everyday functioning takes place in a family, how rules evolve to govern the behavior of members, how roles are assigned to regulate behavior, and how these roles relate to family goals. It explains how a family group strives to maintain stability over time and adapts rules, behaviors, roles, and goals. This model recognizes that family members experience developmental changes, resolve interpersonal conflicts, and confront crises in ways that enhance effective functioning.

Several other subsystems exist simultaneously within a larger family system, such as the committed relationship or marriage between adults and the relationships among siblings. A **subsystem** is a microcosm of the larger family system that mirrors the functioning of this group. The same principles and concepts that explain the functioning of the larger family system relate to how subsystems, including the parent–child subsystem, function.

The main priority of the parent–child relationship is to nurture children toward maturity and effective adult functioning. The family systems model describes the parent–child relationship as bidirectional. The flow of influence goes both ways. Children's behavior and development are strong factors that contribute to the quality and scope of interactions with parents. As children experience developmental changes, parents change their behavior and adapt by changing the rules, the ways they interact with children, and their goals for child rearing. Interactions between parents and children evolve in tandem with children's developmental changes. Similarly, children respond to changes in parenting behavior in ways that help them achieve the developmental tasks appropriate for their particular life span stage.

The parental role is sensitive and responsive to changes within the family system. For example, when one adult is removed from the family through divorce or death, the remaining adult's quality and style of parenting change. The parenthood role is also heavily influenced by factors arising from what is known as **family ecology**, which is the influence of the larger environment on the family system.

3. *Parenting is bidirectional.* Our ideas and philosophies about parent–child relations are derived from diverse cultural and historical influences. Until several decades ago, the relationship between parent and child was described as a **unidirectional** model of socialization

Parenting focuses on nurturing children's growth and development to facilitate learning to become an effectively functioning adult.

(Ambert, 2001). In this model, the adult assumes the role of a teacher who is responsible for encouraging appropriate behavior patterns, values, and attitudes that prepare the child for effective participation in society upon reaching maturity. The child's role is that of being an active learner. According to the model, the flow of information is solely from parent to child. Clearly, the unidirectional model features the adult as having significant power over the child. In contrast, the subordinated child lacks social power. In the past, these were the accepted roles for parents and children, and they received strong support.

Our current ideas about parent–child relations are shaped by the insight from research that reframes this bond as being **bidirectional** (Ambert, 2001; Cui,

TABLE 1–1. Childhood and the Family in Victorian England

	Influences of Victorianism occurring from 1815–1914
Industrial Revolution: Mid 18th to mid 19th century	Childhood differed depending on the class, the generation, and the gender of the child (Frost, 2009). Breakup of the extended family. Increased urbanization as fathers, who were the breadwinners, took on factory jobs; 80 percent of the people lived in cities, often in poverty. Separation of family life from work led to the formation of the nuclear family. Less support from the extended family. Class differences were based on education, financial prospects, and family background. Children were exploited, often laboring in factories.
Early Victorian: 1830s–1840s	Queen Victoria's reign from 1837–1901. Upheaval in the economic, political, and social arenas. Depression in industry and in agriculture. Potato blight in Ireland, resulting in mass immigration to the United States. Victorians idealized the family and the middle class. Reality was different with poverty and persons in the lower classes struggling. This had a direct effect on family life and children. In 1841, about 36 percent of the population was under age 15. At worst, children were exploited, died early of infectious diseases, missed out on education, and were sometimes sexually and socially abused. At best, children were idealized for their innocence and seen as central to the family. Childhood was a very short period, and children could start working as early as age 7.
Middle Victorian: 1850–1875	Relative prosperity. Large families and low life expectancy. Children could be orphaned or have to deal with stepparents. Children born out of wedlock were stigmatized and were either absorbed by maternal families or left as foundling children to be raised in orphanages. Class differences set the stage for the different experiences of childhood. Highly religious society.
Late Victorian: 1875–1914	Rise of new technology like the telephone, chemicals, and electricity. This period culminated in World War I. Large families and high infant mortality. Also frequent loss of a parent as life expectancy was short. Children were often socialized by their siblings. Family size declined in middle-class families. Children's rights became a topic for discussion. Some social reform. Alternatives other than prisons and workhouses for troubled children. The length of childhood increased as children were schooled longer. Scotland made schooling compulsory in 1872; England had a national school system by 1870 and compulsory schooling followed by 1880. Children entered the workforce later.
General Themes: Attitudes toward children	Gradual increase in awareness of the importance of parenting. Gradual change in children's roles with the understanding and insight that childhood had its own characteristics and demands. Childhood and youth were not the first stage of adulthood, but a separate entity. Slow but steady social and legal reform occurred, fueled by political changes, and these reforms spread throughout the social classes. Child rearing entered the realm of public policy.
Discipline	Typically harsh discipline, treating children as if they were innately bad and needed correction. Corporal punishment. From about age 12, children were treated as adults. No extended transition into adulthood. No juvenile legal system; children were punished in the same manner as adults, or placed in harsh reform schools. Social reform initiated in the late 1800s.
Homeless children and orphans	Children born out of wedlock were mostly absorbed by maternal households, although some children were abandoned as a result of dire poverty. Increasing social reform movements to help these children (e.g., orphanages, schools, foundling homes). Many institutions were founded by religious groups (e.g., the Salvation Army).

TABLE 1–1. Childhood and the Family in Victorian England (*Continued*)

Abuse and neglect	Dire social conditions, including poverty, violence, and alcoholism, set the stage for child abuse (including some sexual abuse) and neglect. Prudery in middle-class families did not make them immune to the neglect and abuse of children.
Toys and play	The late Victorian period recognized the importance of play, and children had toys and playtime. Games could be seen as being educational as well as recreational. These insights represented the fragile beginnings of child centeredness. Books for children were being printed.
School	Initially, there was no compulsory schooling; children often left school during late childhood or early adolescence to learn a trade. Education was incomplete. Sunday schools were established to teach literacy, as well as religious concepts, to working children. England had a national school system by 1870, and compulsory schooling followed by 1880.
Child labor	Child labor continued throughout this era, up to World War I. In the late Victorian period, much of the child labor was part time, at least until school-leaving age, which was 14. Interrupted education precluded the hopes for a good economic future, with far-reaching effects on families.

Based on Frost, Ginger S. (2009). *Victorian childhoods*. In the series, Mitchell, Sally (Series Editor). *Victorian life and times*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger.

Donnellan, & Conger, 2007; Parke & Buriel, 2006). This means that adults and children influence each other. Their mutual influence changes constantly, too, because of the developmental nature of the relationship over the course of a life span.

4. *Parenthood is a developmental role that can continue over the life span.* Unlike most adult social roles, parenting behavior and interactions must adapt to the developmental changes in children. Changes arising from a parent's own personal development affect the caregiving behavior. The age and developmental status of both the parent and the child affect the nature and context of the relationship at any point in time. Typically, the parent–child relationship can be a **life span** pursuit as it stretches over the entire life span of the parties involved, and the quality and characteristics of this relationship change accordingly.

Focus Point. Parent–child relations were traditionally and historically described as unidirectional; that is, the adult had complete jurisdiction, power, and control over the relationship. Current mainstream thinking describes this relationship as bidirectional, meaning that a child is acknowledged as an active participant and contributor to the relationship. Each person influences the behavior of the other. The parent–child relationship is unique to family systems and can be described in various ways.

Focus Point. Parenting is characterized by four important characteristics:

- Parenthood is a **social construct**. The parental role is a social institution based on complex values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors.
- The family systems theory describes parenthood as a **subsystem** of the larger social system of the family and within an ecological context.
- Both parent and child actively participate in a **bidirectional** interaction with mutual influence.
- Parenting is a **developmental** role and a **life span** pursuit: both parent and child undergo developmental changes with time and life span progressions.