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Parenting and OCD

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Most experts agree that OCD is the result of both genetic and environmental factors. Since genetic factors are hard to pinpoint, we're going to focus on the environmental ones, especially parenting.

The relationship between caregivers and young children has a significant impact on one's future. Parenting styles can impact a child's mental health and entire life, so it is important to understand how your behavior as a parent can influence your child. This is certainly not to say that any parent can be blamed for their child's OCD. However, caregivers have an important part of children's lives and it is crucial to know how to guide this relationship, so that it is beneficial to the child.

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Authoritarian Parenting

Authoritarian parents are usually described as rigid, inflexible and overly controlling. Mistakes are severely punished and children are not allowed to question the parents' decisions. Usually, there is a strict hierarchy in these types of households, where children are taught to respect their elders and do whatever the adults say.

What Does It Look Like?

Most of the times, the child's desire for freedom, independence and autonomy are labeled as

disobedience. These so called “rebellious acts” are often followed by thorough punishment, designed to correct the child’s behavior.

Authoritarian parents may not be sensitive enough to their children’s needs, especially on an emotional level. They often act according to their own assumptions and seem to be completely blind to their children’s true needs and desires.

The result is usually a child who’ll grow up to integrate this strict set of rules, as well as an unsatisfied inner desire to rebel, which can cause a great deal of emotional distress and confusion. If the parents were verbally abusive, their words might turn into dysfunctional beliefs for child and affect adult life as well.

If You Are the Child

If you believe you are the child of authoritarian parents, then we understand that your childhood might have been difficult and frustrating. Still, the reality is that you cannot go back in time. However, what you can do is work on your dysfunctional beliefs and achieve a happier existence. Remember – whatever might have happened in your childhood, you are an adult now and your life is in your own hands.

If You Are the Parent

If you can recognize yourself in this parenting style, then it is more than likely that you parents were also authoritarian. Although you may be accustomed to this style, now you know how damaging it can be to your child. There is no room for despair though – you can work on the relationship between you and your child, as well as on your own behavior. The most important first step is to allow your child to express their needs and opinions, and to be emotionally supportive.

Other Parenting Styles

There are three other general parenting styles, but studies have not found a relationship between them and the formation of OCD. Still, they may be worth considering.

Authoritative Parenting

This parenting style includes both setting clear boundaries for children, and being emotionally supportive. Both are crucial, when it comes to raising a mentally healthy child. Every child needs to be listened to, respected and allowed to talk about their needs and desires freely. Otherwise, children’s self-esteem and affective style might suffer. On the other hand, children also need boundaries, structure, and parents who hold true to their own word. This provides children with a sense of security and the ability to build healthy coping skills.

Permissive Parenting

If caregivers are allowing the children to do anything they please, without setting any boundaries, then that is considered a permissive parenting style. It usually happens when parents misunderstand the need for emotionally supporting a child and allowing him/her freedom. Although children need understanding and support, without any structure or boundaries they will likely end up frustrated and confused, because they have nothing to

count on and hold on to. This may also lead to a number of disorders later in life.

Neglectful Parenting

Parents who do not set boundaries, do not engage with their children in any way, do not show love and affection, are generally uninvolved in their children's lives, are considered neglectful. Since for a child, especially in the early stages of development, caregivers are the most important figures, neglectful parenting can result in both physical and psychological damage in a child. It has been proven that children who grow up in such families do worse at school, have social difficulties, and more mental health struggles.

Can You Change?

Whether you have been affected by an undesirable parenting style, you are a parent yourself, or both, remember that there is always a way to turn things around. It may not be easy, but the first and most crucial step is to recognize the problem, which you have already done, by being here. Remember that happy parents raise happy children, and so it is just as important to focus on your self-development, as it is on the parenting style you have.

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