

FALLING STANDARD OF PARENTING IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE WAY FORWARD

Abstract

Parenting in the 21st Century is more complex than what was obtainable previously because of the information and technology overload as well as the battle for children's minds these days, yet the fundamentals of raising children remain the same. The generational shifts or complexities of modern terms cannot negate the role of character as the foundation for building strong communities and nations. It is, therefore, imperative to examine the various factors responsible for the falling standard of parenting in the 21st Century and proffer solutions to them. This paper, therefore, seeks to investigate the factors responsible for the falling standard of parenting in the 21st Century with a view to charting the way forward to avoid the collapse of the 21st Century world.

Key words: Parenting, Falling Standard, 21st Century

INTRODUCTION

Parenting or child rearing is the raising of children and all the responsibilities and activities associated with it. It is the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, financial and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood. Furthermore, it relates to the complexities of raising a child and not just a biological relationship (Brooks, 2012). It is therefore the ultimate long-term investment. With changes in the 21st Century necessitated by rapid developments in world civilization, the very demanding task of parenting is becoming more and more overwhelming. Parenting has thus changed completely from what it used to be.

The challenges facing parents all over the world today are identical, irrespective of race, creed or ethnic background. Today, the culture is one of disrespect to parents and adults generally. These days many parents have very little authority in their own homes over their children. The lack of parental authority leads to major breakdown playing out in negative ways in today's society as many children grow up without the skills to deal with the challenges of teen and adult life. Decadence of moral values and erosion of traditional religious beliefs are being witnessed all over the place (Komolafe, 2016).

As parents of today are forced to raise their children in an environment where there are so many competing forces, there is a falling standard of parenting in this 21st Century. Yet, the fundamentals of raising children remain the same despite technological advances or changing of the social norms. The generated shifts cannot negate the role of character as the foundation for building strong communities and nations. What are the factors responsible for this? and what is the way forward in terms of solutions? These questions form the focus of this paper with a view to seeking ways to prevent the collapse of this important pillar of the society; parenting.

What is Parenting?

According to Kretchmar-Hendricks (n.d.), "parenting is the process of raising children and providing them with protection and care in order to ensure their healthy development into adulthood". Parenting is most demanding during infancy and toddlerhood. This is because in the first few years of life, children are totally dependent on their caregivers who determine most of their experiences.

Furthermore, Peterson (2022) sees parenting as a duty that spans a child's developmental stages until he/she becomes an independent adult. In other words, it refers to the parenting responsibilities that accompany child-raising.

Parenting has three key aspects – care, control and development (Hoghughi, 1998). Care ensures the overall well-being of the child – emotional and physical. Control ensures that he/she stays within the set boundaries to ensure his/her safety and that of others. Finally, development involves allowing the child to maximize his/her full potentials and make the best of every opportunity presented to him/her.

Adewale (2009), explained parenting as:

- A call or service
- A privilege
- A responsibility
- A 24/7 work
- A joint work for husband and wife
- An assignment that cannot be delegated to any other person
- A work that requires investment of time
- A task that requires fervent prayer
- A task that requires consistency, and
- A task that is rewarding if done properly

Roles of Parenting

According to Salau (2019), parenting can be divided into four major roles which are as follows:

1. Teacher - The first five years are the bedrock of children's brain development, and the parent is the primary educator, who they learn from directly and indirectly. By age five, approximately 80 percent of the brain is developed with the core values set and the emotional baseline established for life. Ensuring that solid foundation like love, security and discipline are firmly built will help make the child's life better.
2. Coach - A coach is an expert who trains someone to learn or improve a skill. Children's characters get formed between ages 7 and 14. Here, the parent's focus should be on

encouraging and grooming their minds. At this stage, a parent is to hold the child accountable and not to jump to fix their problems automatically. It is the duty of the parents as a coach to soothe the children through pain while encouraging them to be resilient.

3. Mentor – By age 15 to 16, their friends become the center of the lives and the bonds they have with their parents become tested. At this stage, the parental role transits to that of being a mentor. A mentor can be described as a wise or trusted counselor. This is when they begin to establish their own identities and parents should stick with advising and guiding them rather than dictating to them on how they should live or instruct them on who they should be. The firmer the foundation from childhood is, the easier the teenage phase will be. As mentors, parents should create an enabling environment for children to improve their abilities and grow their talents (Roberts, 1992).
4. Cheerleader - At age 21, they should be independent people who have discovered themselves. It is time for parents to move to the sidelines and cheer them on as they run the race of life. Parents should observe them as they move on in a world that is different from what they are used to or that they expected.

21st Century Parenting

Parenting is a universal system which every human race subscribes to. It is as old as the existence of man on the surface of the earth. Parenting in the ancient time/pre-technological period is time consuming. However, with the advent of technological period, it has undergone enormous metamorphosis as Fasanmi (2016) observed.

Parenting in the 21st Century is not as simple as it was previously especially due to development in information and technology over time as well as the prevailing social situations. Today, children face more challenges of growing up. Salau (2019), remarked that parenting of today is a lot different from yesteryears. These children will be adults in a world that is rapidly evolving.

Parenting has always been a demanding job, one that does not involve prior training. Even though the previous generations did not face the challenges that are being faced today, but it was not smooth sailing for them either.

Adolescents today have access to technology that offers the opportunity for constant contact with peers and non-stop entertainment. Thus parent's influence is challenged not only by the rise in peer influence during adolescents, but also by influence from social media.

According to Oyeleke (2022), "the 21st Century child is unlike every other child from previous generations". This makes the job of parenting more tasking. Advances in technology mean that parents need to work extra hard to be effective.

Parenting Styles

According to Darling and Steinberg (1993), parenting style is the combination of parents' attitudes and behaviours towards their children and the emotional context of these attitudes and behaviours. Parenting styles are the representation of how parents respond to and make demands of their children to represent the different methods by which parents raise their children.

How parenting duties are performed hinges on a number of factors relating to parent and child as well as the wider socio-cultural contexts. Parenting style can have far-reaching implications on the child – affecting virtually every aspect of their lives (Morin, 2022).

Four parenting styles and the resulting outcomes for children's behaviour have been identified. Each style has its distinguishing features and is a function of the parents' warmth and sensitivity to their children's needs and the level of influence they exert on their children's behaviour (Zeltzer, 2021).

These parenting styles were based on the research of Diana Baumrind, Eleanor Macoby and John Martin (Zeltzer, 2021)

1. **Authoritarian (Disciplinarian) Parenting Style:** This type of parenting has to do with following strict rules and regulations laid down by the parents. Failure of which leads to repercussions for the children. Communication is one-way while the views and feelings of the children are not considered. Such parents believe that authority and rules should be obeyed even if it means that the child's freedom is lost. This style, therefore allows one way communication, strict laws and orders. Products of this parenting style are law-abiding but are usually unhappy and have low self-esteem (Cherry, 2020).

2. **Authoritative (Democratic) Parenting Style:** Authoritative parenting like authoritarian parenting thrives on following rules laid down by the parents. However, the former differs from the latter because it takes into account the child's feelings. There are consequences for not following the rules but the disciplinary methods focus on building good behaviour rather than just punishing bad behaviour. Good behaviour is also rewarded with praise and reward (not bribery) (Cherry, 2020).

Authoritative parents explain reasons behind the rule. They invest into building and nurturing good relationships with their children. Children from these homes tend to grow up to become responsible, successful adults who are free and comfortable to express their opinions and feelings. They would most likely be able to properly appraise situations and arrive at the right decisions. (Morin, 2022)

3. **Permissive (Indulgent) Parenting Style:** This style is opposite of authoritarian style. Here the child is in control, as such few demands are being made of children. Such parents do not usually discipline their children because they do not expect much from them in terms of maturity and self control. Permissive parents are more responsive than demanding, often relating with their children as friends rather than as parents. They do not like offending or disappointing their kids. Some of them do not set rules and those that do, rarely enforce them. Such parents do not put in enough effort to discourage bad behaviour or wrong choices. In other words, permissive parents are indulgent and not as strict as expected.

Consequently, children who are brought up by permissive parents:

- i. are likely to be academically weak
- ii. may behave worse than other children because they do not obey rules and regulations
- iii. often have self-esteem issues
- iv. are likely to experience health issues like obesity because their parents find it difficult to regulate their diet, encourage "regular exercise" and proper sleep habits
- v. may also experience dental problems because their parents do not minimize their intake of chocolate and other sugary things as well as regular brushing of teeth.
- vi. have worse self-control than other children

- vii. are self-centred
- viii. experience more interpersonal issues

Permissive parenting style often produces children who lack self-control and are unhappy. They are likely to clash with authority figures and tend to fail in school (Cherry, 2020)

4. **Uninvolved (Neglectful) Parenting Style:** This style is characterized by parents being generally disconnected from their children's lives. They are often only concerned about meeting their basic needs only. There are often no strict rules to follow and parenting is often by default as children are typically left to their own devices. They are often left with little or no parental input to their lives. In some cases, it could be due to the parents' own situation like mental health or substance abuse. Such parents might have also experienced typical abuse and parental neglect when they were children. It could also be due to ignorance of parental duties and responsibilities or being "overwhelmed with other problems". Children from this type of parents will likely struggle with their academics, have low self-esteem, display bad behaviour and be generally unhappy (Morin, 2022).

Adebisi (2014), emphasized the need for parents to work together to synergise their different parenting styles.

Research suggests that children of authoritative parents are more likely to be academically successful, know how to relate with others and be solution-driven. According to Zeltzer (2021), children of authoritative parents are less likely to experience mental health problems, addiction issues, "relationship difficulties", lack of discipline and lack of self-worth.

Evidence from Li (2022), shows that authoritative parenting most often brings the best out of children. Psychologists and psychiatrists, thus, consider this style as the most preferred. However, in actual fact, there is no universal parenting style that works at all times, in every context and situation. For this reason, parents are advised to switch between these approaches as appropriate.

Table 1: THE FOUR PARENTING STYLES

AUTHORITARIAN (DISCIPLINARIAN)	AUTHORITATIVE (DEMOCRATIC)	PERMISSIVE (INDULGENT)	UNINVOLVED (NEGLECTFUL)
High Demandingness Low Responsiveness	High Demandingness High Responsiveness	Low Demandingness High Responsiveness	Low Demandingness Low Responsiveness
Has similar names with authoritative parenting style: However, they differ in their parenting methodologies.	Parents have high standards but are relationship-focused and sensitive to their children's needs.	These parents hardly set rules for their children and when they do, hardly enforce them.	This parenting style is characterized by general disinterest.
In authoritarian parenting, the parents are totally in charge with no input from the children.	Rules are set by parents with communication between the parents and children.	These parents are more concerned about being friends with their children than creating and enforcing rules and offending them.	These parents neither make rules nor have high expectations of their children.
Like authoritative parents, they have high expectations of their children. However, authoritarian parents require obedience without question. There is no attempt for the parents and children to reason together about the rules being laid down.	Authoritative parents tend to give reasons for their actions to their children. These dialogues help children to gain a clear understanding of right and wrong.	Permissive parents will do almost anything to ensure their children's happiness.	They do not seem to care about their children and how they live their lives.
Discipline and punishment are used tools for control rather than correction.	The communication channels between these parents and their children is always open, ensuring that the children are always heard and that their "thoughts, feelings and opinions" are factored into decisions.	Permissive parents would rather avoid conflict.	They sometimes come across, as "cold" and "uncaring", although this may be a consequence of going through their own struggles.
Such parents enforce strict rules without considering their children's feelings or socio-emotional and behavioural needs.	Children of these parents tend to be self-controlled and independent-minded.	They tend to be friends rather than parents to their children.	These parents themselves may suffer mental health problems, physical abuse or might have suffered neglect during their own childhood.

Communication is mostly one way from parent to child.	The goal here is improved behaviour. As such discipline is carefully planned and negotiated between the parent and child with a definite outcome in mind.	Children from these homes generally: (i) tend to be unable to obey rules. (ii) find self-regulation hard (iii) are selfish (iv) tend to have more problematic relationships (v) tend to be unhappy and low in self-control (vi) tend to clash with authority (vii) tend to fail in school	Such parents offer little nurturance, guidance and attention.
Discipline here is more concerned with parents asserting their authority and position. Therefore, the methods are forceful and tend to be random.	Such parents set clear rules and expectations for their kids while practising flexibility and understanding.		These parents often have problems with their self-esteem and usually have a problem building intimate relationships.
Authoritarian parents tend not to care about their children's needs nor assist them to develop.	These parents take the time and effort to know and understand their children's needs. They are also intentional about helping to meet these needs.		Children often develop by default as their parents cannot or do not provide the necessary guidance and support probably because they do not care or are busy with other things in their lives.
These parents believe their methods are correct as the aim is to toughen up their children to face life's challenges.	These parents impart values into their children by having "open and honest" conversations with their children.		Interaction between parents and their children are quite rare and rules are seldom enforced.
Their firm parenting methods are often defended as "tough love". These parents do not expect or anticipate feedback from their children when they speak to them.	These parents show love to their children and give them free rein.		Children of neglectful parents: i) tend to act without thought ii) can not control their emotions iii) are more likely to display bad behaviour and have addictions iv) will most probably have mental health problems e.g. suicidal tendency in adolescents.

<p>Children whose parents adopt this style tend to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) be obedient and skillful ii) generally sad iii) rely more on others iv) seem to lack confidence v) lack self-confidence vi) exhibit bad behaviour vii) throw temper tantrums viii) fail in school ix) bad at forming and maintaining relationships x) more likely to suppress emotions and hence experience mental health problems xi) abuse substances find it hard to cope with unfavourable circumstances 	<p>They allow bi-directional communication.</p>		
	<p>These parents treasure their children.</p>		
	<p>Their children tend to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) “be happy”, capable contented and successful. ii) rely less on others iii) be more agile iv) perform better in school v) have self-confidence vi) build and maintain meaningful relationships vii) experience better mental health viii) less likely to display violent behaviour ix) be securely attached x) be self-regulated and think independently 		

Source: Li P. (2022) - 4 Types of Parenting Styles and their effects on the child

CAUSES OF THE FALLING STANDARD OF PARENTING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

One key change that has occurred in parenting over the years is the fact that many women these days tend to have careers or run businesses that keep them out of the home for long periods. This means parenting in the 21st Century is harder than it used to be. Such women hardly spend quality time to train their children or monitor their activities. The fact that many parents cannot dedicate enough time to inculcate good habits in their children may make those children to get involved in wrong doings. Hence, one crucial issue confronting 21st Century parents is that of tight schedules.

Coupled with this fact is that some children feel disconnected from their parents. All children, regardless of their age require “personal and unconditional love and attention”. Some do not get the desired attention because their parents do not have time. They therefore feel abandoned and suffer self-esteem issues (Sithara, 2021).

Another reason for the falling standard of parenting today is the tendency of parents to use the permissive style. Recall that these parents tend to be more of friends than parents to their children, thus having few rules. It is unfortunate that such parents have chosen to abdicate their role for the sake of expediency and to maintain their status as being ‘cool’ or ‘considerate’. In the process, they have handed over their authority to their children, to dictate what they want, how they want it and when they want it, without any concern about the implications of such practice.

Studies have shown that children of permissive parents tend to perform poorly, find it hard to obey rules, are not disciplined, are selfish, have problems maintaining relationships and interacting with others (Li, 2022). Although these parents communicate with their children, they leave them to their own devices. Discipline is seldom used as the expectations are very low or non-existent. The level of freedom in such homes often lead to development of destructive habits due to lack of guidance from the parents.

A growing and disturbing trend that has contributed negatively to the falling standard of parenting is the emergence of children raised by technology syndrome. This refers to the use of television, tablets, social media applications, mobile phones and other devices. Kumar (2022), talking about parenting in digital era remarked that technology which has invaded every nook

and corner of our life is one of the biggest challenges that modern parents have to face. While these enhanced tools of learning have their place in the development of a child, they by no means serve as replacements or substitutes for parenting. Ideally, their use should be supervised but unfortunately many parents do not have time to do this. Google, for instance, has become the chief counselor or advisor to some children in the absence or lack of interest of busy parents. Sadly, there is much content on the worldwide web that is unfiltered that children have access to which can consequently, if unchecked, serve as a weapon of destruction to children of nowadays.

Furthermore, examples are the best teaching aids in life. Lewis (2022), emphasized the need for parents to be a good role model. Parents should be aware that their children are constantly watching them. Most kids today copy their parents' actions. It is obvious that some parents lack the character they would like to see in their kids. Some are not good role models for their children. When parents are exemplary, their kids will naturally follow without any form of coercion. Examples have a way of sticking to human minds more than ordinary words can ever do.

There are several children who are not faring well because of fatherlessness. The cases of single mothers are becoming more rampant - situations where although fathers are still alive but they are not alive to their fatherhood duties or not physically available. Several women these days do not have any support in raising their children for different reasons which include divorce, spousal irresponsibility, economic migration of some men or "Big Girl Syndrome" (that make some ladies to have children either with a "Baby Daddy" or by adoption or by surrogacy).

Coupled with this is the fact that presently, there are cases of single fathers which is also increasing. The term "single fathers" refers to men who are either separated or divorced or widowed or never married. Livingston (2013), observed that in the United States, the number of single father households increased rapidly between 1960 and 2011 from less than 300,000 to more than 2.6million.

Research suggests that parental outcomes are better in stable homes where both the father and the mother properly play their parental roles in the upbringing of their children (Adegbola, 2019).

Rigidity and unwillingness to adjust one's parenting style is another major challenge of parenting. If a parent feels disappointed by the child's behaviour, such a parent probably has unrealistic expectations and may need to make some consultations or make a decision for adjustment. Some parents may not realize this, and this will bring about some serious problems. Some parents may also not be aware that as a child grows, they will gradually have to change their parenting style.

Treating a teenager like a toddler for instance will definitely cause some problems. Teens look more to their peers as role models than they look up to their parents. Good parenting will involve a parent's continuous monitoring, motivation and corrections while at the same time the teenager is given some measure of independence. However, the parent must make sure he/she seizes every available opportunity to make a connection. Inadequate knowledge of such hints is one of the reasons for the state of parenting as it is today (Kidshealth, n.d.).

Inability of some parents to express unconditional love to an erring child is another issue. It is the role of parents to correct and guide their children but the way and manner a parent does this, will go a long way to determine how a child receives such correction. As much as possible a parent should avoid blaming, criticizing or fault-finding which hurt self-esteem and can lead to resentment. Instead, parents should try to nurture and encourage even when disciplining the child. A parent should make the child to know even though something better was expected, he/she is still loved. Many parents do not realize this and so act contrary to this expectation (Kidshealth, n.d.).

Also, parents sometimes feel exhausted and this not only affects the quality of the interaction between parents and their children but it also impacts on parents' capacity to impose boundaries consistently. Therefore, at times, when stressed, parents 'give in', the children realize this and take undue advantage of such situations.

Furthermore, education these days has become intensely assessment-focused, children and adolescents have never been as stressed at school as they are now. Stress erodes emotional well-being and often causes children and adolescents to behave badly (Di Lobbett, 2018).

Lack of needed skills by parents is also a major challenge to parenting in this contemporary time. According to Ologe (2021), the needed skills for good parenting include the following:

- i. ***Self-leadership skill:*** Ability to lead yourself. The skill you want to teach your child, do you have it as a parent?
- ii. ***A parent also needs to develop discipline skills:*** In developing these, you need to be fair, firm and friendly.
- iii. ***A parent also needs to help his/her child to develop social skills:*** which include sharing, giving feedback, putting oneself in others' shoe, making eye contact and controlling negative emotions.
- iv. ***A parent should improve on his/her connection skills:*** Many parents think they are connected with their children but in actual fact they are just being present. You cannot connect without content, connection is in what you have to give. Moyo (2011), cited by Akerele (2019), mentioned connecting true love as one of the roles of parenting, which he described as warmth, affection, care, comfort, concern, nurture or support by parents that help a child to know that he or she is loved and accepted. Akerele (2019) therefore concluded that parental love will create a conducive atmosphere for child development and interaction.
- v. ***Ability to focus on the child's positive behaviour and not just his/her negative behaviour.*** Whatever you keep laying emphasis on, will grow. If the emphasis is on wrong doings, it becomes a subconscious thought and the child begins to internalize it. The more a parent focuses on the positive behaviour, the better the child becomes and vice versa.

Unfortunately, many parents lack many of these aforementioned skills, hence the falling standard of parenting that is prevalent in our society today. Relationships in many families today have become frayed and make parents feel that they have lost or are losing control in the home.

The Way Forward

It is obvious that children nowadays are being raised in a climate of ever-increasing complexities. Situation of things today suggests that times are hard and parenting is becoming more difficult and challenging. It is imperative to seek the way out of this challenging situation to avoid collapse of the society. For improvement on the present standard of parenting, we need to do the following among others.

(1) Get Information

“Intelligent people are always ready to learn, their ears are open to knowledge”. Akindolie (2021), suggests that parents should seek knowledge by:

- (i) attending seminars/workshops/enlightenment programmes on parenting
- (ii) reading/listening to relevant resources
- (iii) understanding your children’s communication patterns - (online and offline)
- (iv) sharing important information with your children

(2) Build Relationships

“Your children need your presence more than your presents”. Jesse Jackson

- Deliberately create time for your children
- Have discussions with them
- Ensure you are well connected with your children.

(3) A Parent should be flexible and willing to make necessary adjustment

Parents should not be rigid with their style of parenting; they should be willing to make adjustments as appropriate. If someone is not satisfied with his child’s behaviour it may become necessary for such a person to change his/her parenting style.

(4) Be a Role-Model

Leading by example is a proven means of being a parent in this 21st Century. Parents should exemplify good character to their children in all areas of their lives. They should demonstrate “traits they wish to see in their kids - such as respect, friendliness, honesty, kindness and tolerance”. In the words of Li (2022), “walk the talk, don’t just tell your children what you want them to do. The best way to teach them is to show them”.

(5) The God-Factor

Parents are duty-bound to teach their children how to respond to God. The children need to be made to understand why communicating with God is crucial. “Parents should guide their children in the way of God”. Proverbs 22 verse 6 in the Holy Bible says “Train up a child the way he should go, when he is old, he will not depart from it”. Parents should make their children aware that there is a God they can call upon in all circumstances.

(6) Seek For Help

Remember you don’t know it all, seek for help and advice when necessary.

(7) Don’t give up.

If your efforts on parenting are not yielding the desired result, don't give up, continue to put in your best. Be optimistic that things will change some day for the better.

Conclusion

Adequate parenting plays a significant role in the life of any child. The way a child is brought up will influence him/ her for the rest of his/ her life. It is therefore imperative to look into the deplorable state of parenting worldwide in this 21st century with a view to improving performance.

Parenting is a very demanding job. One may feel overwhelmed at some stages of his/her parenting journey, but the fact remains that it is as rewarding as ever. Being an effective parent in this 21st Century is undoubtedly a great and demanding task because the world is moving at a fast pace. Effective parenting for the 21st Century child requires patience, knowledge, information, exemplary life, firmness and much more.

Even though there is no such thing as a perfect parent, because even the best of parents will at one time or the other carry out a form of bad parenting that will negatively affect the child, every parent should strive for improvement. Self-reflection and self-evaluation at regular intervals by every parent is needful. Our children are our future, and the future of the society. We should, therefore, be at our best in raising our children, to secure our future and for the survival of the society.

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