



Tasks and Communication as an Avenue to Enhance Parenting of Children Birth-5 years: An Integrative Review^{1,2}

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Every day, normative functions of parenting and their significance are under-investigated. An integrative review of tasks and communication involved in parenting young children informed by Horowitz (1995) and Blumer (1969) was conducted. Research articles consistent with inclusion criteria were published from 1995 to 2013 and focused on parenting tasks and communication. Themes consistent with Horowitz and Blumer were identified. Nurses are reminded about the significance of attending to the everyday, normative work of parenting young children, the potential meaning derived from this work, and the importance of assessing parental development as well as the importance of continuing research in this area.

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ALTHOUGH PARENTS AND parenting issues are central to child health practice, research, and policy, significant gaps in current knowledge exist regarding the nature of parenting. Recent meta-analyses have verified the role of parents in achieving outcomes related to physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive well-being of their children (Barlow, Smailagic, Huband, Roloff, & Bennett, 2012; Belsky & deHaan, 2011; Scott, 2012). In fact, parenting has been deemed most important to our public health because of the far-reaching

influence of the parent–child relationship (Gage, Everett, & Bullock, 2006). The tasks involved in parenting and the ability of the parent to communicate have been found especially important to children's physical, socio-emotional, and psychological outcomes (Hibbard et al., 2012; Sanders, 2012). Parents derive meaning and connection from the tasks associated with parenting and communication with their children, yet much of this work is invisible and occurs in the day-to-day activities of caring for young children.

Parenting young children is labor-intensive and requires a great deal of hands-on physical care, attention to safety, and interpretation of cues. Thus, caring for a newborn or young child can be physically exhausting. The child's communicative abilities and needs change over time: Therefore, the parents must accommodate this evolution by changing how they communicate with the child and how they interpret the child's communication. Because of this, tasks and communication often serve as the focus of

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evaluation and intervention research with clinical populations of children (Horowitz et al., 2001; Horowitz et al., 2013; Sanders, 2012). While more is known about the antecedents to or consequences of parenting, gaps in the literature exist around the normative tasks or processes of parenting. For example, more is known about the influence of a parent's personality on parenting and the effects of harsh parenting, than is known about the ordinary work and essential components of parenting, specifically tasks and communication. Understanding parenting tasks and communication could assist pediatric nurses in supporting families and optimizing child outcomes (Fussell and the Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care, 2011; Kitzman et al., 2010; Olds et al., 2004). In addition, filling these gaps in the literature provides a foundation for theoretically grounded, evidence-based work with families. Thus, the goal of this integrative review is to enrich and expand the current conceptualization of the tasks and communication involved in parenting young children based on the evidence from the literature. The focus is on children 0–5 years of age because the nature of both tasks and communication are linked to the child's developmental phase.

Framework

This integrative review is sensitized by two frameworks. First, symbolic interactionism informs this review because it focuses on how people create meaning as a way to comprehend their world (Blumer, 1969; White & Klein, 2007), including the role of socialization, which is a major goal of parenting. Second, Horowitz's "Critical Components and Characteristics of Effective Parenting" (1995) informs this review in that it specifically examined the process of parenting in various family structures.

Symbolic interactionism (SI) fits the study of tasks and communication within the context of parenting. Three concepts foundational to SI and their relevance to parenting are presented in Table 1. Essentially, individuals assign meaning to persons, thoughts, ideologies, and objects based upon the value they hold for the person within the context of the person's own life and how other people interact with the person regarding them. This process of designating meaning is iterative, interpretive, reciprocal, and social. Parents socialize their children through the completion of tasks and when they communicate with them. SI posits that this process of socialization is highly reciprocal, in that parents and children influence one another and that both the parent and the child are active participants in the relationship (Blumer, 1969).

The sharing of a complex array of common symbols (e.g. words, actions) allows children and their parents to adapt to new environments and roles. Even young infants who exhibit presymbolic or preintentional communication and parents who sensitively observe and respond to these actions participate in this complex exchange. The sharing of such symbols, and arriving at their agreed upon meaning, serve as a foundation for

Table 1 Foundational principals of symbolic interactionism and the application to parenting.

Precept of symbolic interactionism	Illustration in parenting
A person acts towards a thing based on the meaning a thing has for him/her. These things are all the things a person encounters in daily life (objects, people, feelings, concepts) (Blumer, p.2).	A new mother finds it difficult to perform childcare tasks for and communicate sensitively to her new baby after her husband announces he wants to end their marriage (shapes communication with baby and tasks of attending to baby's needs).
Meaning is "derived from or arises out of the social interactions" a person has with other people regarding a thing (as defined above) (Blumer, 1969, p. 2).	An exhausted mother feels better able to perform child care tasks for and communicate with her toddler after a trusted nurse practitioner points out and praises the benefits of a toddler's curiosity and energy to the exhausted mother, which helps the mother interpret the child's behavior and manage everyday childcare activities (shapes meaning child's behavior has for the mother and how she communicates with her child about it).
"Meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters" (Blumer, 1969, p. 2).	The meaning of a child becoming incontinent ("having an accident") ("it is a big deal" or "it is not a big deal") arises from the parent's own interpretation of the accident ("this is more work for me" or "these things happen") in relationship with the child ("she is just bad" or "he is so engrossed in playing") and this shapes the way in which the father cares for and communicates with the child after the accident (rough handling of the child and saying "you are bad" or normalizing the situation and saying, "It's ok. Let's change your clothes.")
A person recognizes the meaning a thing has initially through a process of self-awareness or self-communication and then begins to interpret and shape these meanings as she/he considers this sense of meaning. This becomes a guidepost for how to act towards the thing.	

communication. Understanding the meaning inherent in parental tasks and communication for an individual (e.g. parent) is central to understanding the phenomenology of human behavior. Thus, examining the task and communication-related work of parenting through this lens can aid in understanding the meaning derived from parental work and how such meaning may influence parenting and ultimately the parent–child relationship.

Horowitz's (1995) "Critical Components and Characteristics of Effective Parenting" is unique because of its focus

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