



## ***The Role of the Father in the Formation of a Child's Moral Intelligence***

### ***Rola ojca w kształtowaniu inteligencji moralnej dziecka***

#### **ABSTRACT**

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**RESEARCH OBJECTIVE:** This article aims to examine the concept of moral intelligence and explore the role of fathers in fostering moral intelligence in children during childhood. It discusses the concept of moral intelligence, highlights its significance in child development, and analyses the distinctive aspects of children's developmental stages concerning moral growth. The article also examines the father's role in nurturing moral intelligence in young children.

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**THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS:** This article seeks to answer the following question: what role does the father play in developing a child's moral intelligence? The primary method used to address this question is an analysis of the relevant literature and existing research on moral intelligence.

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**THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION:** The discussion is structured to achieve the research objective and address the primary question. It includes an introduction to the topic, an analysis of children's developmental stages, and a demonstration of the father's role and significance in cultivating moral intelligence.

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**RESEARCH RESULTS:** The analysis reveals that fathers play an essential role in shaping their children's moral intelligence. They introduce children to values and moral principles and significantly influence the development of pro-social behaviours.

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**CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND APPLICABLE VALUE OF RESEARCH:** Fathers' involvement in upbringing their children, according to the analyses carried out, can provide a foundation for the development of appropriate the right moral attitudes and values in the youngest children. Nowadays, in the face of a progressive moral crisis and escalating aggression, it is extremely important to develop moral intelligence. Demonstrations of pro-social behavior by fathers, involvement in activities and conversations with children can contribute to sensitizing the youngest to the needs of others and become a valuable source of knowledge about moral principles and values.

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→ **KEYWORDS:** MORAL INTELLIGENCE, CHILD, FATHER, ROLE, UPBRINGING

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**STRESZCZENIE**

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**CEL NAUKOWY:** Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie zagadnienia inteligencji moralnej oraz ukazanie roli kształtowania jej przez ojców u dzieci w okresie dzieciństwa. W artykule omówiono koncepcje inteligencji moralnej, zaprezentowano jej znaczenie w procesie wychowania. Scharakteryzowano również specyfikę rozwoju i funkcjonowania dzieci w okresie dzieciństwa, uwzględniając także ich funkcjonowanie moralne oraz przedstawiono rolę ojca w rozwijaniu inteligencji moralnej u najmłodszych.

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**PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE:** W artykule podjęto próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie, jaką rolę odgrywa ojciec w rozwijaniu inteligencji moralnej dziecka. Podstawową metodą, jaką zastosowano, aby uzyskać odpowiedź na tak postawione pytanie, była analiza literatury przedmiotu i prowadzonych dotychczas badań nad inteligencją moralną.

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**PROCES WYWODU:** Realizacja celu i odpowiedź na pytanie problemowe została nakreślona w wywodzie, który składa się z wprowadzenia w analizowane zagadnienie, omówienia rozwoju dzieci w okresie dzieciństwa, ukazania roli ojca i jego znaczenia w kształtowaniu inteligencji moralnej.

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**WYNIKI I ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ:** Na podstawie analizy przedstawionego materiału badawczego można zauważyć, że ojcowie odgrywają ważną rolę w kształtowaniu inteligencji moralnej swojego potomstwa. Wprowadzając dzieci w świat wartości, zasad moralnych i pełniąc ważną funkcję w rozwijaniu zachowań prospołecznych.

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**WNIOSKI, REKOMENDACJE I APLIKACYJNE ZNACZENIE WPŁYWU BADAŃ:** Zaangażowanie ojców w wychowanie, jak wynika z przeprowadzonych analiz, może stanowić fundament rozwijania właściwych postaw moralnych i wartości u najmłodszych. Współcześnie w obliczu postępującego kryzysu moralnego, eskalacji agresji niezwykle ważne jest rozwijanie inteligencji moralnej. Demonstracje zachowań prospołecznych przez ojców, zaangażowanie w działania i rozmowy z dziećmi mogą przyczyniać się do uwrażliwiania najmłodszych na potrzeby innych oraz stać się cennym źródłem wiedzy o zasadach i wartościach moralnych.

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→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: INTELIGENCJA MORALNA, DZIECKO, OJCIEC, ROLA, WYCHOWANIE**

## Introduction

The environment in which a child lives and develops is of great importance for his or her development, especially moral development. In the 21st century, signs of a moral crisis are increasingly visible and worrisome. Contemporary children are heavily influenced by technological advancements and consumer culture. On the one hand, technological progress accelerates information flow, however, it also reduces adherence to moral principles. A study by Lobel and colleagues (2017) found that frequent engagement with video games can reduce pro-social behaviours in children, while involvement in violent games correlates with increased verbal and physical aggression (Bjelajac, 2017).

Children are inherently predisposed to kindness but require the right environment to nurture this potential. Studies confirm that even the youngest children share and help others. Infants pay attention to the unequal distribution of resources (Sloane et al., 2012). Liszkowski and colleagues (2021) found that children as young as two can begin displaying pro-social behaviours. Cross-cultural research indicates that children exhibit to sharing and showing care others (Salerni & Caprin, 2022). The analyses conducted on a developmental level indicate that children of different ages tend to help or comfort others. However, it is worth noting that cognitive, motivational mechanisms vary depending on the developmental stage the child is in.

In today's changing world, where moral values are often challenged, fostering moral intelligence is essential. Moral intelligence is developed early through upbringing. Children see their parents as models of values and behavior that they want to emulate. According to Borba (2001), moral intelligence should be nurtured from an early age because discerning right from wrong helps protect children from harm. Traditionally, the role of men has been primarily viewed as that of a provider for the family. Contemporary fathers are committed to raising their children and shaping the right attitudes in them. The guidance provided by fathers plays a crucial role in enabling children to develop their identities and establish a hierarchy of values. Through processes such as imitation, modelling, and identification, children internalise their fathers' approaches to challenges and begin to emulate these behaviours.

The purpose of this article is to examine the role of the father in the development of a child's moral intelligence. It is also important to obtain an answer to the research question: what role does the father play in the development of moral intelligence? A key factor in the formation of this intelligence is the process of upbringing, through which the child acquires norms and principles and internalises the values that guide the parent. In order to answer the research question posed in this way, a literature review was conducted using databases: Sociology Source Ultimate, PsycArticles, PubMed and Google Scholar. The following keywords were used in the search for materials: moral intelligence, fatherhood, father, child rearing, norms, values.

## Moral Intelligence and its Role in Raising Children

Commonly, moral intelligence is associated with the ability to distinguish right from wrong, act with integrity, or act in accordance with certain values. Dziewiecki (2003) notes that moral intelligence is often linked with morality and moral sensitivity. While morality is frequently associated with a specific form of intelligence, moral sensitivity involves distinguishing between behaviours that empower and bring joy to a person and those that harm others or oneself. Lennick and Kiel (2005) define moral intelligence as "the mental capacity to determine how universal human principles should be applied to our personal values, goals, and actions" (p. 7).

Moral intelligence is regarded as a skill developed throughout one's life. This type of intelligence is cultivated through teaching, modelling, and reinforcing appropriate

behaviours (Bandura, 1977). Lennick and Kiel (2005) identify honesty, responsibility, forgiveness, and compassion as core components of moral intelligence. Honesty involves truthfulness, learned through parental modelling and verbalisation. Responsibility, meanwhile, entails a willingness to admit wrongdoing and accept its consequences. According to Enright and North (1998), forgiveness involves a willingness to accept others' faults and tolerate them despite any wrongs experienced. The last component of the moral intelligence model compassion is related to concern for other people.

Another model of moral intelligence is presented by Borba (2001), who identifies seven key virtues: empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance, and justice.

Empathy allows children to recognise the difficulties of others, to better understand their pain and experiences. Conscience, often referred to as the "inner voice", helps individuals distinguish between right and wrong and the correct course of action from the wrong one (Narvaez, 2010). Self-control refers to managing one's actions and learning to delay gratification. Respect is fundamental to maintaining healthy relationships and is demonstrated through kindness and considerate behaviour towards others (Chan, 2023). Kindness is characterised by a positive attitude towards others and concern for their well-being (Clarken, 2009). Tolerance fosters an objective perspective on others' rights and beliefs. Finally, justice entails fairness and is closely linked to honesty.

Moral intelligence plays an undeniably important role in the process of upbringing. Children who develop this type of intelligence are able to distinguish between right and wrong and act in accordance with social rules (Dacka, 2022). Moral intelligence is closely linked to moral development and is often described as encompassing both qualitative and quantitative changes in moral behaviour. The development of moral intelligence involves not only expanding moral knowledge but also cultivating universal values, emotions, and moral principles (Dacka, 2024).

## Childhood Development and the Moral Functioning of the Child

Childhood is a particularly important period, characterised by the exploration of the world, the formation of self-image and the accumulation of life experiences. It is also considered a key stage in the development of concepts of right and wrong. Children learn appropriate moral behaviour, rules and values by observing and imitating their parents.

The early childhood stage is a sensitive period for the development of physical and mental functions and responses to environmental stimuli (Anggraini et al., 2021). Children gradually develop behaviours that facilitate sensory exploration of their environment and learning (Meriem et al., 2020). In order to take helpful actions toward others, children must be able to distinguish their own emotions from the emotions of others. The tendency to react emotionally to violations of certain moral principles plays an important role in the development of moral reasoning.

During the first two years of life, young children begin to display pro-social behaviour and attempts to recognise inequitable distributions of goods (Newton et al., 2016). A study

by Hamlin and colleagues (2011) found that infants prefer helping characters to hindering ones. Around the age of two, children share food and objects with others, comforting those who are experiencing distress (Dunfield and Kuhlmeier, 2013). The examples cited suggest that young children have a natural preference for helping that develops through daily social interactions and attempts to imitate the observable behavior of others.

The middle childhood period (4–6 years of age) is a time when social interactions promote the development of pro-social behaviour, and children begin to experience feelings of guilt and shame, both of which are manifestations of conscientious action. Pre-school children attempt to adhere to the principles of fairness and justice, striving to balance merit and need (Schmidt et al., 2016). An important aspect of this stage is the development of an understanding of intentionality, which helps prevent misattributions of negative intentions to others and the misjudgement of their actions (Killen et al., 2018). According to Warneken and Tomasello (2009), intrinsic motivation plays an important role in the development of helping behaviour. Around the age of five, they recognise and adhere to norms based on relationships or reciprocity (Wörle & Paulus, 2019).

The late childhood stage (6–7 to 10–12 years of age) is a period of acquiring knowledge, engaging in tasks and adhering to social norms. Moral knowledge during this period undergoes a process of organisation and reorganisation through interactions with adults and peers (Piaget, 1967). There is a noticeable shift in children from a tendency to avoid punishment and seek rewards or approval from others (moral heteronomy) to identification with a group, conformity to existing rules, and participation in the creation of those rules (moral socionomy). A sense of justice, emerging from mutual respect, is especially important during this developmental period (Piaget & Inhelder, 1996).

A willingness to take responsibility for one's actions and self-control develops. Peer relationships provide a source of cooperation with others and an opportunity to develop the principle of reciprocity (Tomasello, 2014). Moral reasoning involves moving beyond the status quo and taking action to change behaviour that is considered unjust (Killen et al., 2018). There is an emerging tendency to respect group rules due to fears of ostracism and exclusion (Uskul & Over, 2017). It becomes important for children to be good, to show concern, interest in the affairs of others, to follow the golden rule "treat others as you would like to be treated".

## The Role of the Father in Raising a Child

A father plays many significant roles in a child's life. According to Minczakiewicz et al. (2003), these roles include serving as a guide, a playmate, a source of support in times of difficulty, a selfless friend, a role model, and a link between the family and society. A father also fulfils

[...] the role of a master by, on the one hand, shaping the child's personality – sensitising their conscience, teaching honesty, responsibility, inner discernment, and fair treatment of others;

and, on the other hand, teaching the art of living – taking the child out of the home, introducing them to the world, and imparting skills of discernment and orientation (Kozak, 2006, p. 26).

The father's influence on the child's development is evident through direct contact, relational closeness, readiness to offer help and support, and active involvement in various aspects of upbringing (Suska, 2022). For a child to develop optimally, the father's engagement is essential from the prenatal period through to adulthood (Kornas-Biela, 2010). During the prenatal period, the father begins to establish a relationship (conversation and tactile contact with the mother's abdomen). These early actions contribute to strengthening the child's sense of security and facilitate bonding after birth. In infancy, the father's relationship with the child becomes more intentional and supportive. The father stimulates the child's motor and cognitive development by engaging in manipulative play and encouraging exploration.

During the pre-school period, in addition to stimulating development, the father introduces the child to the world of moral principles and norms, teaching him to distinguish between right and wrong and introduces him to the world of values. Children begin to identify with their parents, and by imitating the behaviour of significant individuals, they develop characteristics associated with femininity or masculinity.

During the school years, the father supports the child in discovering, exploring, and understanding the world. He teaches the child to accept both praise and criticism. Fathers also help develop the child's ability to evaluate their own actions, considering whether they are right or wrong.

During adolescence, the father's role is primarily associated with regulatory influences, such as discipline, control, and the enforcement of tasks. At this stage, a crisis of authority is often evident. However, as observed, adolescents in difficult situations tend to adopt the ideas, motives, and approaches of their parents when responding to challenges. In their actions, they apply the rules and moral principles passed down by their fathers (Kornas-Biela, 2010).

According to Fromm, the father is "[...] the one who teaches the child, the one who shows him the way into the world" (Fromm, 1971, p. 54). Meta-analyses conducted to date have shown that fathers' involvement in the upbringing of children contributes to the improvement of their social-emotional and cognitive development. Fatherhood also involves nurturing values, developing appropriate attitudes and behaviours. A father plays a key role in transmitting moral principles, faith, love, and hope, which form the foundation of a personal relationship and proper moral functioning.

## The Importance of the Father in Developing Moral Intelligence in Children

The care and warmth shown by fathers are crucial in developing pro-social behaviour in young children and shaping their morals (Formoso et al., 2007). A father teaches the

child what is right and what is wrong, thereby instilling a sense of guilt (Pospiszyl, 1980). Borba (2001) recognised that each of us needs “the moral bearings by which to stay on the path of goodness” (p. 6).

In developing moral intelligence, teaching, discussion, the setting of clear rules, and consistency on the part of parents, guardians, and teachers are crucial. The environment in which children live can shape their moral intelligence, with upbringing playing a particularly important role in this process. In the early stages of a child's development, moral intelligence is fostered by parents, while in later stages, it is influenced by teachers and other significant figures. During the upbringing process, the father supports the mother, provides a sense of security for the child, awakens curiosity and interests, directs values, defines rights and duties, and introduces discipline (Gejdoš & Gozdek, 2017). Identification, modelling, and imitation are closely linked to the psychological aspects of fatherhood (Suska, 2022).

The father, in carrying out his role,

[...] on the one hand, shapes the child's personality: sensitises his conscience, teaches honesty, responsibility, inner discernment, and just and righteous treatment of others; and on the other hand, teaches the art of living in the world: he takes the child out of the home, opens the world to him, and teaches the art of discernment and orientation in the world (Augustyn, 1999, p. 301).

The process of shaping moral intelligence in children begins with their cognition of what is good, followed by development, and then the implementation of actions in favour of it (Dacka, 2022). The presence of the father in parenting strengthens the development of empathy, attention, and the ability to build positive social relationships in children (Septiani & Nasution, 2017). Brantasari's (2021) research showed that a father's involvement in parenting promotes the development of empathy in children, which is one of the components of moral intelligence. According to Borba (2001), children who have developed empathy will demonstrate compassion, understanding, tolerance, and a willingness to help others. High levels of empathy promote better tolerance, anger control, and understanding of others in children (Nugraha et al., 2017). Studies of pre-school children have shown that positive care from fathers promotes less aggression and higher self-regulation (Meece & Robinson, 2014).

The active participation of fathers in the child-rearing process is crucial for the development of children's moral intelligence. Research conducted by Septiani and Nasution (2017) found that fathers who are actively involved in parenting have a significant impact on children's moral intelligence from an early age. A study by Septiani and Nasution (2017) revealed that father involvement accounts for 36% of the development of moral intelligence. Similarly, research by Sakinah (2020) indicated that father involvement in parenting contributes to 17.5% of the development of moral intelligence.

## Conclusions and Reflections

The analyses carried out showed the key role of the father in developing moral intelligence in the parenting process. Fathers' involvement in parenting is conducive to: developing the ability to distinguish right from wrong, shaping children's character, acquiring moral norms, principles and values.

Children are attentive observers. Seeing their father's involvement in helping the weaker, needy naturally wants to imitate him. Father's participation in games with children can become an important space for introducing children to the world of social rules and principles. Another way of sensitizing the youngest to norms, values can be reading fairy tales together, putting together picture stories. Analyzing the situation of the characters, the child can develop his empathic abilities, moral principles, learn to solve problems. In these activities, the father is an important source of guidance for proper behavior. Direct interactions with the father can contribute to better formation of the child's ability to analyze, reason and solve problems. Guidance from the father, questions asked, can develop children's critical thinking. Children can also improve their language skills in supporting others and learn be bolder in expressing their moral principles and values.

Father-child interactions can contribute to the gradual development of causal morality, which includes the alignment of behaviour with prevailing moral norms. The father's response to the child's violation of these rules is also crucial in the development of moral intelligence. It should encourage the child to understand the situation, taking into account the violated norms and values, and the potential for repairing the harm.

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