

The role of effective communication as the key to family resilience in families with young children during times of crisis

Aghnia Farrassyania Azhar^{1*}, Regita Musfita², Ratna Dwi Nurcayhani³, Diantifani Rizkita⁴

¹ Institut Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan (IKIP) Siliwangi, Indonesia

² Institut Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan (IKIP) Siliwangi, Indonesia

³ Institut Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan (IKIP) Siliwangi, Indonesia

⁴ Institut Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan (IKIP) Siliwangi, Indonesia

Article Info

Article history:

Received September 05, 2024

Revised September 21, 2024

Accepted October 22, 2024

Keywords:

Family Resilience

Early Childhood

Communication

Abstract

In contemporary times, research on family resilience is crucial. This is because every family faces unique challenges and is required to adapt, cope with, and recover from various difficulties and obstacles. These challenges may include economic issues, health problems, technological advancements, social changes, and other various problems. Gradually, these issues can weaken the family's function in shaping character and facilitating child development. The objective of this case study is to examine how the communication process serves as a key factor in building family resilience among families with young children. This qualitative research employed a case study approach with three families with young children as subjects. Data was collected through interviews and observations, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results indicate the presence of components of the communication process as a key to family resilience in the three participating families. All three participating families have established guidelines for communication, avoiding ambiguity, maintaining positive interactions, and having guidelines for resolving existing problems.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](#) license.



Corresponding Author:

Name Author: Aghnia Farrassyania Azhar

Affiliation, Country: Institut Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan (IKIP) Siliwangi, Indonesia

Email Author: aghniarfarrassyania@ikipsiliwangi.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Family communication is an interpersonal process occurring within the family unit, the smallest social unit. Every individual's initial communication experiences are within the family. The family serves as a primary pillar in life, particularly in supporting the growth and development of young children. As the first educational environment, families are at the forefront of human capital development. However, the aspiration of families to support their children's growth and character development often does not align with contemporary societal realities. Various challenges faced by families, including economic issues, health problems, technological advancements, and social changes, can gradually weaken the family's function in shaping character and facilitating child development.

These challenges can impact parents' emotional states. Parents' inability to manage negative emotions, a consequence of stress, can influence parenting styles and consequently affect children's psychological well-being. Moreover, parenting styles can shape children's behavior and character, and inappropriate parenting practices can have lasting effects. These challenges necessitate adaptation from both children and parents. This adaptive process is facilitated when supported by other family members. Adaptation is not solely an individual endeavor; the entire family, as the child's primary environment, must adapt collectively to overcome these challenges.

The roles and parenting styles of parents are closely intertwined with the family unit. Lestari (2012) suggests that families have the functions of nurturing, providing material and emotional support, and fulfilling specific roles. To prevent parental emotional instability, which can impact parenting styles and consequently affect children's psychological well-being and development, the adaptive process in challenging situations cannot be undertaken by a single individual but requires the involvement of all family members. Daks, dkk (2020) argue that families facing challenges need psychological flexibility as a resource for resilience. This flexibility involves monitoring changing situations, developing coping strategies, evaluating the success of implemented strategies, reassessing changing situations, and modifying strategies as needed (Bonanno & Burton, 2013). This skill is essential for adapting to challenges and changes faced by families during difficult times, fostering family resilience and minimizing stress (Daks dll, 2020).

Family resilience is the ability of families to withstand, overcome, and adapt to adversity (Walsh, 2006). In another study, Walsh (2016) defines resilience as the ability of families to bounce back and adapt to challenging life circumstances. Family resilience measures a family's ability to meet basic needs and return to productivity. Strong physical and non-physical resources, effective problem-solving skills, and the ability to meet social needs contribute to strong family resilience. All family members, including young children, play a role in developing family resilience. Over time, resilience involves multiple processes, from initial responses to crises to subsequent adaptation (Walsh, 1996).

In child development and mental health research, resilience has become a central concept, underpinning studies of children who recover from adversity. When children grow up in critical family environments that can lead to trauma, not only adults but also young children need to develop resilience to avoid developmental setbacks. According to Emmy, dkk (1992), development is influenced by biological risks and the environment in which a child is raised, typically the family. Therefore, to build family resilience, all family members must work together to improve parenting skills and support child development, while also adapting to new routines due to ongoing challenges.

In Indonesia, family resilience is a national priority, as reflected in Law No. 52 of 2009 on Population Growth and Family Development, which emphasizes the need to strengthen family resilience and well-being to achieve balanced population growth and quality families. The strengthening of family resilience is also included in the 'Eight Pillars of Prosperous Family Movement', which outlines eight efforts to strengthen family resilience. The sixth pillar specifically focuses on enhancing family resilience through child development, aiming to educate and socialize family members, particularly children, to become productive human resources.

Given the importance of enhancing family resilience, several studies have examined the relationship between communication and family resilience in Indonesia. Thariq (2017) study on building family resilience through interpersonal communication demonstrated that communication can foster both intrafamily and social

relationships. Setyowati (2005) study showed that family communication patterns positively influence children's emotional development.

Based on these findings, the researcher found a gap in the literature regarding the specific process of communication and family resilience, particularly in families with young children. Therefore, this study aims to examine how the communication process serves as a key factor in building family resilience among families with young children.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research method with a case study approach, where the researcher investigates an event, program, activity, or process of a group of individuals (Creswell, 2012). The case study approach is suitable for this study as it aims to understand how the communication process serves as a key factor in building family resilience among families with young children. The research subjects are three (3) parents from families who have successfully adapted to new situations after facing previous difficulties, namely Family H, Family I, and Family J. Data collection techniques used include interviews, observations, and documentation with thematic data analysis. Thematic data analysis involves three coding stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The coding process can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Coding Process

<i>Open Coding</i>	<i>Axial Coding</i>	<i>Selective Coding</i>
Helping the child understand the changes in the mother's daily activities	Conveying information clearly to avoid ambiguity	communication process
Maintaining open communication by inquiring about each other's work and home life	Building positive interactions	
Respecting differences in opinion	Having guidelines for solving problems	

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

A. Prioritizing clarity in communication to prevent ambiguity

To avoid ambiguity, the H family always prioritizes clarity in communication, especially when communicating with children. When explaining something that they feel is too complex for their child, the H family seeks help from animated videos on YouTube.

“So for example, when I told the kids I got help from YouTube. So on YouTube Kids, there are videos specifically for kids, like illustrations about... about things that might be difficult for children to understand,” (H, June 9, 2024)

Unlike the H family, the I family explains things to their child directly, without the aid of animated videos. However, the goal is the same: to avoid ambiguity for the child. The I family explains that they provide their child with simple explanations.

“My child can be told, and... understand that it’s actually simple, they’re only 1, not even 2 years old yet, as simple as why we have to do this, why we can’t do that, and so on,” (I, June 13, 2024)

Similar to families H and I, family J uses verbal explanations along with illustrations to explain complex things to their child. J admits that even though their child is only 6 years old, they are starting to be able to understand when given explanations about the problems their parents are facing.

B. Fostering Positive Interactions to Mitigate Family Risk Factors

To continue building positive interactions even during times of adaptation due to ongoing problems, the H family explained that asking each other about their respective activities amidst busyness is a way they do it.

“As for positive interactions, we do it every day, asking each other like ‘what’s up at the office?’, and the father also likes to ask the children ‘what did you learn today?’, it’s like that so we can always know each other’s news.” (H, June 9, 2024)

In addition, quality time has also become a routine that H and her husband always do to maintain positive interactions. Quality time is often spent chatting at night, starting with conversations about the children, the difficulties they are currently facing, and finding solutions if there are problems.

“Sometimes when I say quality time, drinking coffee on the porch with my husband, I always have something to talk about, whether it’s about the kids, or there’s something bothering me, sometimes I talk about it there... my husband also does the same thing so that I as his wife know what he’s facing at the office, what problems he has, that’s the positive interaction.” (H, June 9, 2024)

The I family builds positive interactions by agreeing to try not to speak loudly or shout at their children. In her interview, I explained that since childhood, the child has been accustomed to being given reasons that the child can understand when they are forbidden to do something.

“Well, this is an agreement that I have with my husband, we are both like this, maybe it’s a standard for all parents, but maybe there are some differences too, for sure we don’t hit, no matter how angry we are, we don’t give punishment or give warnings by hitting, pinching, pushing, and so on. Secondly, we try our best not to shout.” (I, June 13, 2024)

“We get them used to it from a young age when we forbid them from doing something, we give them the reason that they can understand, so when they can do something, we usually ask them first why they did it.” (I, June 13, 2024)

In building positive interactions with their partner, the I family learned from experience that positive interactions can be built well when both are in a good condition.

“Our experience so far, perhaps the best one, is that when building positive interactions, it can be done when we are both in a good condition to listen, so not just blaming each other but looking for solutions, how come we have a problem, I understand your feelings like this, my feelings are like this, now what’s the solution.” (I, June 13, 2024)

The J family also builds positive interactions with their children by providing understanding of the changes in routine that must be done before deciding to add to their routine by continuing their master's studies. J first invited her children to discuss her study schedule and provided an understanding. This was done with the aim that the child would not feel neglected.

“I try to discuss it with the children, the schedule now, mom is studying, the time will definitely be different, from there talk about the schedule, then about giving understanding too, that little sister doesn’t have to what, don’t have to be afraid because mom is still at home, little sister doesn’t have to worry about being bored like that, mom is sure that little sister is creative, little sister can play without having to have mom by little sister’s side, little sister can take her own toys, make her own, or if little sister needs I tried to encourage them in that way, and thankfully, the discussion became more open and productive” (J, June 23 2024)

In addition, they maintained positive interactions by always making time to play with their children. Family J shared that they always make an effort to play with their children despite their busy schedules. They agreed that childhood is a period of growth and development where children's memories are constantly forming, so they try their best to create beautiful memories for their children at this age, regardless of the circumstances.

C. Having a Way to Deal with Problems

When faced with a marital conflict, H decided to return to her parents' home. This was done to allow both parties to calm down and have time to reflect.

"During an argument with my husband... what I did was... I went back to my mother's house. And my in-laws also agreed, meaning it was better if we were apart for a while." (H, June 8, 2024)

"At that time, it was a cooling-off period. We didn't argue, we only contacted each other to ask about the children. But at that time, when we weren't ready to discuss our problems, when we weren't both calm yet, we didn't discuss the issue." (H, June 8, 2024)

Once both had calmed down and were ready to talk, H and her husband met alone without the children. They asked their parents' permission to discuss and resolve the issue.

"When we were both calm, I contacted my husband to discuss our problems... and we met alone outside at that time." (H, June 8, 2024)

In addition, the routine of spending time talking at night also guided the H family in resolving problems. Conversations would stop if they were not both ready to find a solution. The H family did this to avoid arguing in front of their children. In resolving problems, H focused directly on finding solutions rather than on the root of the problem.

"Arguing in front of the children is forbidden for us. I don't like arguing in front of the children because I'm afraid it will affect their psyche." (H, June 8, 2024)

In addition to their approach to resolving conflicts with their partner, the H family had a specific method for addressing issues with their children. They employed a three-step warning system.

"There's a process, and the children know when I say, 'Don't make me say this three times,' they understand. And when I get angry, I explain to them why. First, because they ignored my three warnings. I explain, 'Brother, sister, why am I angry? I've told you more than three times,' I explain, and I also explain why we're so angry, what caused it." (H, June 8, 2024)

The problem-solving approach used by the H family was also adopted by family I. I admitted that when a problem arose, she would only discuss it with her husband when both of them felt calmer. This was done to avoid saying hurtful things when emotions were running high. This approach was also accompanied by I and her partner's belief that everything could be discussed when a problem occurred. This prevented extreme actions when emotions were running high.

"One thing I agree with my husband on is that everything can be discussed. So whether you're angry, positive or negative, everything can be talked about. So don't take extreme actions before discussing it." (I, June 13, 2024)

Meanwhile, family J resolved conflicts based on the principle that someone always had to give in. J explained that who gave in depended on whose opinion was considered stronger.

"I think the key to resolving conflicts is that someone always has to give in." (J, June 23, 2024)

"So when there's something very urgent or fundamental, I'll give in. When it's something... I'm a detail-oriented person, I look at everything, and when my opinion is stronger, my husband usually follows... that's how we handle it. Someone has to give in." (J, June 23, 2024)

Discussion

A. Avoiding ambiguity

All three participating families were identified as making efforts to explain the situation as clearly and thoroughly as possible so that the children could understand what was happening. This is consistent with Walsh & Firestone (1992), who suggested that ambiguity in communication can lead to depression and limit a family member's ability to cope with a situation. The families also used media to help children understand and avoid ambiguity in the information provided. Providing information appropriate to a child's level of understanding is especially important when the information is complex. Black & Lobo (2008) stated that parents who treat their children as equals and are not selective in providing information are known as parents who overburden their children.

The three participating families, who continued to explain the difficult circumstances they were facing despite their young children's age, also demonstrated that parents were teaching their children social regulation. Parents who try to communicate with their children using calming words and always try to explain any situation that is happening are actually teaching social regulation in their children. This developing social regulation will positively influence self-regulation and social and emotional competence in children. Therefore, when this communication is done well, children will learn to accept and understand any situation their family is going through. Building communication by providing transparent information is also a form of nurturing care, where nurturing care can help children's brains build more connections that will be useful for their social and emotional development (Sunderland, 2006).

The above explanation shows that communicating with children is the same as educating children. Setiawan (2000) stated that there are three communication techniques with children that can build loving relationships within a family. The first is storytelling. Parents can educate their children by encouraging them to tell stories. Accustoming children to storytelling will shape children's personalities to be open, receptive to criticism and suggestions, and able to better express what they want to say. Children who are not accustomed to storytelling tend to be withdrawn and unable to express themselves. The second way is by listening. Listening is an important skill in building family communication. Parents can teach children to listen by always listening to their children's stories until the end before offering solutions. The third way is to empathize. Empathizing means being willing to feel what others feel. Parents need to try to see what the child sees, think what the child thinks, and also try to feel what the child feels. With empathy, parents will better understand and know what their children need.

B. Building positive interactions

The H family fostered positive interactions by engaging in quality time together. This aligns with (Author et al., 1988) assertion that spending time together plays a crucial role in creating continuity and stability within a family. This assertion is supported by research conducted by Milkie, dkk (2004) which indicated that time spent together as a family can reduce risky behaviors.

Meanwhile, the I family cultivated positive interactions by making an effort to avoid yelling at their children. Children often learn how to behave based on how they are treated daily (Black & Lobo, 2008). When they are accustomed to interacting positively with politeness, kindness, and mutual respect, children can grow up to be role models throughout their lives, which is an additional factor in fostering resilience. Children can also thrive when raised in a safe and loving environment free from shouting and hitting.

The I family also believed that positive interactions can only be built when everyone is in a good state. A good state for listening is essential for the continuity of the communication process. The effort to listen, understand, and respect negative emotions is more powerful in increasing resilience than trying to become immune to anger. Readiness to listen will also affect the tone and attitude of our speech to our interlocutor. In building resilience, it is important to pay attention to openness in sharing emotional feelings expressed in behavior, tone, words, and positive communication patterns (Black & Lobo, 2008).

The J family fostered positive interactions with their children by providing understanding of the changes that needed to be made when facing difficult times and by continuing to make time to spend together with their

children. Making time to spend together has been proven to build family health, which can help families become more resilient (Black & Lobo, 2008). Spending time together can build attachment, happiness, learning, enjoyment, and shared experiences (Russell, 1996). Spending time together is also important for children as it can help develop social skills such as problem-solving, compromising, and negotiating.

All three families demonstrated that they always made an effort to maintain positive interactions in the midst of difficulties. Walsh (2016) stated that this is a good thing in building resilience because positive expressions are very important to balance the negative conditions that are occurring Walsh (2006). Especially when taking the time to interact positively with children, as the J family did, it will affect family relationships, which can tolerate greater conflict and more positive communication.

C. Having a Framework for Problem-Solving

All three families shared a common approach to resolving conflicts: they were able to resume effective communication once they had both calmed down. This aligns with the concept of resilience Walsh (2006) which suggests that emotional stress can interfere with problem-solving processes. Such emotional stress can be characterized by an emotional tone of voice, anger, and frustration, which can hinder family members from successfully finding solutions. The action taken by the H family in requesting time to communicate privately when resolving a conflict is also consistent with Walsh (2006) opinion that when a problem arises, it is important to communicate with those involved in the conflict. Walsh also stated that efficient problem-solving occurs when communication runs smoothly and decisions are made based on needs.

CONCLUSION

All three participating families were found to have established guidelines for communication. During information exchange among family members, all participants consistently ensured that ambiguity was avoided, especially when communicating with children. Furthermore, families consistently facilitated communication through positive interactions and had established guidelines for resolving conflicts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The researcher would like to thank all research participants and contributors for their invaluable assistance in conducting this study and preparing this article.

REFERENCES

- Author, E., Mccubbin, H. I., & Mccubbin, M. A. (1988). Typologies of Resilient Families: Emerging Roles of Social Class. In *Source: Family Relations* (Vol. 37, Issue 3).
- Black, K., & Lobo, M. (2008). A Conceptual Review of Family Resilience Factors. *Journal of Family Nursing*, 14(1), 33–55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1074840707312237>
- Bonanno, G. A., & Burton, C. L. (2013). Regulatory Flexibility: An Individual Differences Perspective on Coping and Emotion Regulation. In *Perspectives on Psychological Science* (Vol. 8, Issue 6, pp. 591–612). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691613504116>
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research (4th ed.)*. Pearson.
- Daks, J. S., Peltz, J. S., & Rogge, R. D. (2020). Psychological flexibility and inflexibility as sources of resiliency and risk during a pandemic: Modeling the cascade of COVID-19 stress on family systems with a contextual behavioral science lens. *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science*, 18, 16–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcbs.2020.08.003>
- Emmy E, Werner, & Ruth Smith. (1992). *Overcoming the Odds: High Risk Children from Birth to Adulthood*. CornellUniversityPress.
- Go Setiawan M. (2000). *Menerobos Dunia Anak*. YayasanKalamHidup.
- Lestari S. (2012). *Psikologi Keluarga*. Kencana.

- Milkie, M. A., Mattingly, M. J., Nomaguchi, K. M., Bianchi, S. M., & Robinson, J. P. (2004). *The Time Squeeze: Parental Statuses and Feelings About Time With Children*.
- Muhammad Thariq. (2017). Membangun Ketahanan Keluarga dengan Komunikasi Interpersonal . *JURNAL SIMBOLIKA Research and Learning in Communication Study*, 34–44.
- Russell, D. W. (1996). UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3): Reliability, validity, and factor structure. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 66(1), 20–40. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa6601_2
- Setyowati, Y. (2005). *Pola Komunikasi Keluarga dan Perkembangan Emosi Anak (Studi Kasus Penerapan Pola Komunikasi Keluarga dan Pengaruhnya terhadap Perkembangan Emosi Anak pada Keluarga Jawa)*.
- Sunderland, J. (2006). “Parenting” or “mothering”? The case of modern childcare magazines. *Discourse and Society*, 17(4), 503–527. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926506063126>
- Walsh, F. (2003). *Family Resilience: A Framework for Clinical Practice*.
- Walsh, F. (1996). Special Section Family Resilience: A Concept and Its Application The Concept of Family Resilience: Crisis and Challenge. In *Fam Proc* (Vol. 35).
- Walsh, F. (2016). Family resilience: a developmental systems framework. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 13(3), 313–324. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2016.1154035>
- Walsh, F., & Firestone, S. (1992). Traumatic Loss and Major Disasters: Strengthening Family and Community Resilience FROM INDIVIDUAL TO MULTISYSTEMIC APPROACHES IN TRAUMA RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE Groundbreaking studies of World War II and Vietnam veterans and their families (e.g. In *Figley & McCubbin* (Vol. 46, Issue 2). FPI, Inc. www.FamilyProcess.org