

# The Influence of Family Communication Patterns on Parenting Agreements for Children with Special Needs

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## ABSTRACT

*Children with special needs show their own uniqueness and challenges in parenting. Caring for children with special needs requires creating meaning and cooperation among family members. Family communication patterns have a significant impact on how arrangements for caring for children with special needs are formed and implemented. The importance of family communication patterns in the context of parenting agreements for children with special needs cannot be ignored. The relationship between parents and children is the core interaction in the family system. This research aims to explore the influence of family communication patterns on parenting agreements for children with special needs. This research was designed using a descriptive causality survey method with a quantitative approach with a positivism paradigm to test research hypotheses and descriptive analysis, by collecting data from relevant respondents using a digital questionnaire. The results of the significance and hypothesis tests show that the protective and laissez faire variables have a significant value with H0 being accepted, while pluralistic and consensual have an insignificant value with H0 being rejected.*

**Keywords:** Children with Special Needs, Parenting of Children with Special Needs, Communication Patterns, Family Communication.

## INTRODUCTION

The family is the smallest unit in society (Sidharta 2021). Communication plays an important role in establishing family harmony. In families who have children with special needs, the role of communication becomes increasingly important, especially in making child care agreements. Effective communication is the foundation for increasing and maintaining trust between family members (Shamash & Martin, 2014). Children with special needs show their own uniqueness and challenges in parenting. Caring for children with special needs requires creating meaning and cooperation among family members. Creating meaning in current situations and conditions can bridge the creation of effective communication (Sidharta et al 2024). The dynamics of family

communication patterns in childcare have a major impact on relationships between family members (Anisti et al 2023).

Family communication patterns have a significant impact on how arrangements for caring for children with special needs are formed and carried out. (Ferrel, 2012). Several factors may influence family communication patterns in this context. First, the social stigma that is often still attached to the condition of children with special needs can create obstacles in communicating openly. Second, the family's level of understanding and knowledge about the child's special needs can also influence the quality of communication. In addition, differences in views and understanding between family members, such as between parents and other siblings, can be a determining factor in forming a parenting agreement (Liamputtong & Rice 2021; Barea et al 2021).

Ineffective communication patterns can hinder the discussion, negotiation and agreement processes needed to respond to children's special needs. Children with special needs are not just disabilities but are the result of the interaction of the limitations experienced by a child with special needs and their environment, not just physical or mental, but are a multi-dimensional phenomenon consisting of bodily functions, activity limitations, barriers to participation and environmental factors (Lestari et al., 2018). According to Saraswati in the Disability Data in Indonesia Report, it shows that there are inconsistencies in the disability prevalence figures in Indonesia. For example, the Ministry of Social Affairs stated that in 2010, more than 11 million people in Indonesia lived with disabilities.

However, data from the Ministry of Manpower in the same year only recorded 7.1 million people with disabilities. On the other hand, TNP2K analysis states that based on data from the Ministry of Health RISKESDAS in 2007, around 11% of the population (around 25.5 million people) experienced moderate to severe disabilities. However, if mild disabilities are included, the number jumps to more than 25% of the population (58 million). The BPS report several years later (Susenas 2012) only identified 2.31% of the population (around 5.8 million) living with disabilities. In addition, the World Health Organization (2011) estimates that around 15% of the world's population experiences disability, which means that almost 38 million Indonesians suffer from some form of disability, thus increasing the prevalence of disability which is different from other sources (Saraswati, 2021).

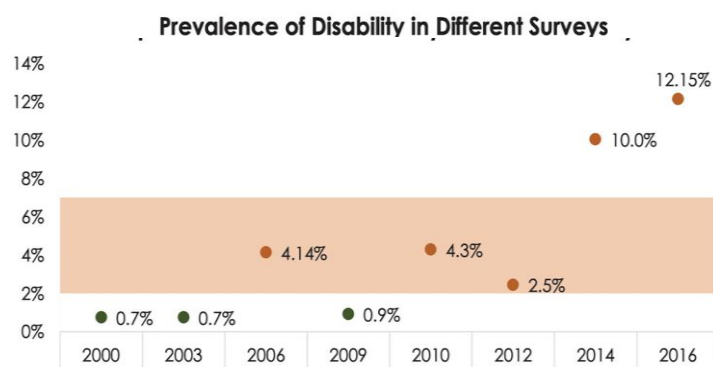


Figure 1: Prevalence of disability in various surveys. Source of Report Disability Data in Indonesia 2021

The importance of family communication patterns in the context of parenting agreements for children with special needs cannot be ignored. The relationship between parents and children is the core interaction in the family system because the quality of their communication or joint parenting significantly influences the implementation of the caregiver's role when managing conflict (Arias & Punyanunt 2017). Families who have children with special needs initially do not accept their child's condition, where

there are reactions of rejection, denial, neglect, distrust and even unwillingness to care for the child until they are a teenager, giving rise to secondary reactions in the form of guilt, anger and even shame for the family members themselves. Family communication patterns can strengthen a family of children with special needs in the growth and development of children with special needs (Mumpuniarti et al., 2017).

Family communication becomes important when someone is in a family group, verbally or nonverbally. Family communication can create, share and regulate meaning in communication between family members as a continuous communication process starting from the past to the reality of family members into the future. Groups formed within families communicate and interact with each other to achieve common goals, get to know each other, and consider individuals as part of the group. Previous research on communication in families with children with special needs has provided valuable contributions, but there are still several shortcomings that need to be addressed through further research with this research. The shortcomings of previous research are: lack of focus on parenting arrangements. Many previous studies focused more on general communication aspects and family dynamics without specifically exploring how communication patterns influence agreements in caring for children with special needs.

More in-depth research on the influence of communication on parenting well-being is urgently needed to fill this gap. This research aims to deepen understanding of communication patterns in families with children with special needs and how these communication patterns influence the formation of parenting agreements. By analyzing the forms of communication patterns in caring for children with special needs, it is hoped that this research can contribute to the development of more effective communication patterns to support the care of children with special needs.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research was designed using a causality descriptive survey method with a quantitative approach with a positivism paradigm to test research hypotheses and descriptive analysis (Sugiyono, 2009). Data collection was carried out using Google Forms For Survey to collect data from respondents through questionnaires (Raju & Harinarayana 2016). The population of this study were families of children with special needs (Autiesme; Hyperactivity-ADHD; Down Syndrome; Cerebral Palsy; Epilepsy) in Jabodetabek. The sample in this study were parents who have children with special needs (Autiesme; Hyperactivity-ADHD; Down Syndrome; Cerebral Palsy; Epilepsy) totaling 150 respondents. This type of quantitative research data is primary data obtained directly from selected respondents through structured interviews using questionnaires. Where this primary data includes family characteristics (X1), family communication (X2), parenting (Y1). The existing data was processed and analyzed using data tabulation with SEM PLS data modeling. Interviews using questionnaires were prepared based on a number of questions related to research variables. The questionnaire has an ordinal and ratio scale. Data that has an ordinal scale measurement will be transformed into an interval or ratio scale for statistical data testing purposes.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The theory of family communication patterns developed by Mary Anne Fitzpatrick and her colleagues is based on the assumption that creating a shared social reality is the basic function of family communication. Families create a shared reality through two communication behaviors: conformity orientation and conversation, which in turn influence family relationships (Littlejohn, 2012). Theoretically there are four types of family communication patterns: Consensual Family; Pluralistic Family; Protective Family; Laissez-faire family (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2006).

In the communication process, we understand the role of the communicator as the party who conveys the message to the communicant, either through the media or directly. The same thing applies in the context of family communication, where messages are exchanged from the communicator to the communicant. Regardless of who is the communicator in family communication, parents are considered as figures who determine and dominate family communication dynamics by providing support for efforts to evaluate and improve effective parenting skills for children with disabilities (Dyches et al., 2012).

This includes the way they build, maintain and the type of communication that exists within the family, which is often referred to as first communication (Isti, 2019). Family communication patterns have been linked to a number of family processes, such as conflict, confirmation and affection, family values, and understanding. They have also been linked to outcomes of communication with children as family members, such as communication apprehension, conflict with romantic partners, resilience, and children's mental and physical health.

Family communication is creating, sharing and managing meaning in interactions between family members as a continuous, complex communication process, changing activities from the past to the reality of family members to the future (Chris Segrin, 2011). Implementing appropriate parenting styles in raising children with special needs will have a real positive impact on the child's functioning at the emotional, social and educational levels (Yaffe, 2015). In general, among children with multi-problem developmental disabilities (Downs syndrome and autism), this parenting style is expressed in high levels of responsiveness, sensitivity and training, and it is associated with improved communicative and social functioning (Dyches et al., 2012).

A deep understanding of the theory of family communication patterns and its application in everyday life is very important, especially in the context of raising children with special needs. By recognizing and implementing appropriate communication patterns, parents can create a family environment that supports their children's emotional, social, and educational development. This emphasizes the importance of the role of parents as the main communicators in the family and the positive impact that can result from effective and responsive communication patterns. This research highlights the relationship between family communication patterns and parenting agreements for children with special needs. Based on the data obtained, protective family communication patterns have the most significant relationship with agreements on caring for children with special needs, namely 46.5%. Meanwhile, other communication patterns such as pluralistic, laissez-faire, and consensual show a much smaller relationship, at 3.6%, 18.8%, and 10.1% respectively.

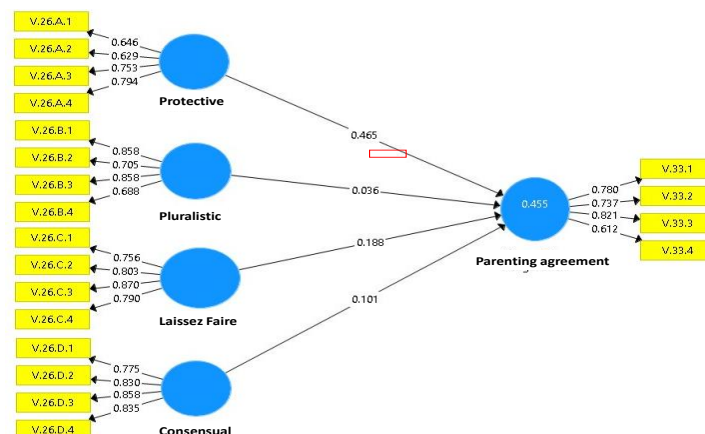


Figure 2 Model of family communication patterns regarding parenting agreements

## ANALYSIS OF PROTECTIVE FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

In protective families, there are several main variables that show a strong relationship with parenting agreements:

1. Family members actively ask questions to parents to clarify understanding and compliance (V.26.A.4). Correlation of 0.794: Family members who often ask parents to clarify instructions and understanding show a high level of directed and explicit communication. This helps in ensuring that all family members clearly understand what is expected in caring for a child with special needs, as well as how best to meet those needs.
2. Parents play a role in forming family communication (V.26.A.3). Correlation of 0.753: Parents have a central role in shaping communication patterns in the family. This includes how information is conveyed, how conflicts are resolved, and how emotional support is provided. A strong parental role in shaping this communication ensures consistency and clarity in parenting.
3. Family members adapt what parents communicate (V.26.A1). Correlation of 0.646: The willingness of family members to adapt to directions and information from parents shows flexibility and acceptance of existing communication structures. This is important to create a cooperative and harmonious environment in parenting.
4. Encourage family members to obey what is communicated by parents (V.26.A.2). Correlation of 0.623: Encouragement to obey parental instructions indicates the level of discipline and internal agreement in the family. This creates an organized system where the needs of children with special needs can be met effectively through cooperation and mutual commitment.

Thus, in a protective family, there is a clear and structured communication pattern that helps in caring for children, especially children with special needs. Several main variables that play an important role in this communication pattern are: First, clarification and understanding: family members who actively ask parents to clarify understanding show directed and explicit communication. Second, the central role of parents: parents play an important role in shaping family communication patterns, including conveying information, resolving conflicts, and providing emotional support. Third, adaptation of family members: The willingness of family members to adapt to directions and information from parents which shows errors and acceptance of the existing communication structure. Fourth, discipline and obedience: Encouragement to obey parental instructions creates an organized and effective system in meeting children's needs through cooperation and mutual commitment. This communication pattern creates a cooperative, harmonious and organized environment in the family, which is very important in raising children with special needs.

## ANALYSIS OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

### 1. Pluralistic (3.6%)

This pattern tends to provide space for family members to express diverse views. However, the low correlation shows that freedom of speech and opinion in this family significantly less supports agreements regarding the care of children with special needs.

### 2. Laissez-faire (18.8%)

Communication patterns with minimal interaction and direction from parents also show low correlation. This may be due to a lack of structure and clear guidelines, which are important in caring for children with special needs.

### 3. Consensual (10.1%)

Although there are elements of open discussion and shared decision making, this pattern also does not show a strong correlation with parenting agreement. This may be because the consensus process takes time and can result in a lack of speed in responding to children's needs.

Thus, based on the results of the analysis, pluralistic family communication patterns tend to provide space for family members to express diverse views. However, this low correlation shows that freedom of speech and opinion in this family is significantly less supportive of agreement regarding the care of children with special needs. Furthermore, the Laissez-faire family communication pattern shows a low correlation.

This may be due to a lack of structure and clear guidelines, which are important in caring for children with special needs. In the Consensual family communication pattern, although there are elements of open discussion and joint decision making, this pattern also does not show a strong correlation with parenting agreement. This may occur because the consensus process takes time and results in a lack of speed in responding to children's needs.

From the table below, the AVE value of the Reflective Construct and the reliability validity of all the variables tested are on average above the standard value, as well as the SRMR for the data fit model which is still below the standard value  $<0.10$ , namely  $0.09$ . The significant value and hypothesis test of the protective and laissez faire variables are significant and  $H_0$  is accepted, while pluralistic and consensual get an insignificant value and  $H_0$  is rejected. From the table below, the AVE value of the Reflective Construct and the reliability validity of all the variables tested are on average above the standard value, as well as the SRMR for the data fit model which is still below the standard value  $<0.10$ , namely  $0.09$ . The significant value and hypothesis test of the protective and laissez faire variables are significant and  $H_0$  is accepted, while pluralistic and consensual get an insignificant value and  $H_0$  is rejected.

**Table 4**  
**Model indicators for family communication patterns**  
**regarding parenting agreements**

Indicator	Standard Results	Protective	Pluralistic	Laissez Faire	Consensual	Parenting Agreement
Loading Factor	$> 0.7$	26.A.1-4	26.B.1-4	26.C.1-4	26.D.1-4	V.33.1-4
AVE Konstruk Reflektif	$> 0.5$	0,50	0,61	0,64	0,68	0,55
Cronbarch Alpha	$> 0.7$	0,70	0,79	0,82	0,84	0,72
Composite Reliability	$> 0.7$	0,80	0,84	0,88	0,84	0,73
SRMR	$< 0.10$	0,09				
p-Value	$< 0.05$	<b>0,000</b>	<b>0,74</b>	0,01	<b>0,45</b>	
t-Value	$> 1.96$	4,19	<b>0,32</b>	2,60	<b>0,72</b>	
R Square		0,5				

Protective communication patterns in the family show a significant correlation with agreement on parenting children with special needs, amounting to 46.5%, higher than other family communication patterns such as Pluralistic (3.6%), Laissez faire (18.8%), and Consensual (10.1%). Factors that strongly influence protective communication patterns involve family members actively asking questions to parents (0.794), parents' role in shaping family communication (0.753), family members'

adjustment to what parents communicate (0.646), and encouragement to family members to comply with parental communication (0.623).

The AVE assessment for the reflective construct and the reliability validity of the tested variables shows an average value above the standard, and the SRMR value for the data fit model remains below the standard value ( $<0.10$ ), namely 0.09. The results of the significance and hypothesis tests show that the protective and laissez faire variables have a significant value with  $H_0$  being accepted, while pluralistic and consensual have an insignificant value with  $H_0$  being rejected.

Protective communication patterns in the family show a significant correlation with agreement in caring for children with special needs, which is higher than other communication patterns such as pluralistic, laissez faire, and consensual.

Factors that greatly influence protective communication patterns include: family members' activeness in asking parents, parents' role in shaping family communication, family members' adjustment to what parents communicate and encouragement for family members to comply with parents' communication. Thus, research shows that protective communication patterns have a more significant impact in the context of caring for children with special needs compared to other family communication patterns.

## RELEVANCE OF RESEARCH TO THEORY

This research is relevant to the theory of family communication patterns developed by Mary Anne Fitzpatrick and her colleagues, which divides family communication patterns into four types: Consensual Family, Pluralistic Family, Protective Family, and Laissez-faire Family. This theory assumes that family communication creates a shared social reality through two dimensions of communication: conformity and conversation orientation.

In the context of this research, it was found that protective communication patterns have a significant relationship with agreements regarding parenting children with special needs, with a significance level reaching 46.5%, which is higher than other communication patterns. Protective communication patterns are characterized by high levels of parental control and low levels of conversational openness, which can be seen from factors such as family members actively asking parents (0.794), parents' role in shaping family communication (0.753), family members' adjustments to other people's messages. parents (0.646), and encouragement to comply with parental communication (0.623).

The results of this research confirm Fitzpatrick's theory that protective communication patterns play an important role in creating strong structures and rules in the family, especially in the context of caring for children with special needs. This is in line with the dominant role of parents in family communication described by Dyches et al. (2012), who emphasize the importance of support and evaluation in improving parenting skills for children with disabilities.

In addition, the results showing a significant relationship between laissez-faire communication patterns and parenting agreements indicate that even though this communication style is more flexible and unstructured, there are still certain aspects that support parenting of children with special needs, although not as strong as a protective pattern.

Overall, this research supports the view that family communication patterns influence the dynamics and effectiveness of parenting, especially in families with children with special needs. This confirms that understanding and implementing appropriate communication patterns can have a positive impact on children's well-being and development.

## CONCLUSION

Protective communication patterns have the most significant impact on parenting agreements for children with special needs. Variables such as active questioning, the central role of parents in communication, adjustment of family members, and compliance with parental directions, all contribute to successful parenting. Meanwhile, more permissive or consensus-based communication patterns showed a weaker relationship with parenting agreement, indicating that communication structure and clarity play a key role in this context.

Based on the research results, protective communication patterns in the family show a very significant relationship with agreements on caring for children with special needs. The significance level achieved was 46.5%, indicating that this communication pattern is more effective compared to other family communication patterns such as Pluralistic (3.6%), Laissez faire (18.8%), and Consensual (10.1%).

The key factors that shape this protective communication pattern include several important aspects. First, family members who actively ask parents play a crucial role. Second, the role of parents in shaping family communication is also very determining. Third, the ability of family members to adapt to the messages conveyed by parents is an important component in strengthening this communication pattern. Finally, encouraging family members to comply with parental communications adds strength to this protective communication pattern.

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) assessment for the reflective construct and the reliability validity of the variables tested shows values that meet the standards. This shows that the measurement instrument used in this research has a high level of validity and reliability. Apart from that, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value for the data fit model is below the standard value ( $<0.10$ ), namely 0.09. This indicates that the model used in this study has a good fit with the data obtained.

The results of the significance and hypothesis tests show that the protective and laissez faire variables have significance values with  $H_0$  being accepted. This indicates that these two variables have a significant relationship with agreements on caring for children with special needs. In contrast, Pluralistic and Consensual communication patterns show insignificant values with  $H_0$  rejected, which means that these two communication patterns do not have a significant relationship in the context of this research.

Overall, this research underscores the importance of protective communication patterns within the family in supporting parenting arrangements for children with special needs. With a deeper understanding of the factors that shape these communication patterns, families can be more effective in creating an environment that supports the development of children with special needs.

## THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The results of this research strengthen the theory of family communication patterns developed by Fitzpatrick, especially in the context of families with children with special needs. The finding that protective communication patterns have a significant relationship with parenting agreement confirms the importance of control and structure in family communication, as outlined in this theory. This research also supports the theory that parents have a dominant role in shaping family communication. Parents who play an active role in guiding family communication can create a more structured and supportive environment for children with special needs. The finding, that protective communication patterns are more effective in the context of caring for children with special needs, indicates that conformity orientation may be more



important than conversational dimensions in these situations. This provides new insights into how these two dimensions interact in specific contexts.

### **PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

For practitioners, especially parents and caregivers, this research shows that implementing protective communication patterns can support more effective parenting for children with special needs. Parents are encouraged to be more active in directing and controlling communication within the family to create a stable and supportive environment. These results can be used as a basis for developing training programs for parents of children with special needs. Such training can focus on developing protective communication skills, such as providing clear directions, building a common understanding, and increasing children's compliance with parental communication.

Family counselors and therapists can use these findings to design more effective interventions. They can help families identify and strengthen protective communication patterns, as well as overcome challenges that may arise in implementing these communication patterns. Policymakers in the fields of education and social welfare can consider these findings in designing support programs for families with children with special needs. Policies that encourage protective communication education and training can provide long-term benefits for families and children.

Thus, this research provides important contributions both theoretically and practically, which can be used to improve the quality of care and welfare of children with special needs through more effective family communication patterns.

### **RESEARCH LIMITATIONS**

A limitation of this study may be that it did not take into account changes in family dynamics and the needs of children with special needs over time. Family dynamics may evolve, and children's needs may change as they get older, taking these limitations into account. Further research with a broader design and involving a larger sample could provide deeper insight into the characteristics of special needs families and the factors that influence their caregiving.

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