

# THE FATHER FIGURE AS AN AGENT OF TRANSFORMATION IN THE EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ATYPICAL CHILDREN

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the importance of the father figure as a powerful agent of transformation in the development and education of atypical children. Based on a theoretical and scientific review, the study seeks to understand the emotional, cognitive, and social impacts of an active father's presence in the context of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), ADHD, and other neurodivergent profiles. Grounded in approaches from neuropsychology, developmental psychology, and attachment theory, the work proposes a reflection on the father's role as an emotional co-regulator, a model of security, and a stimulus for autonomy.

**Keywords:** fatherhood, autism, children

## INTRODUCTION

Historically, the paternal role has been associated with instrumental and disciplinary functions, while the mother has been assigned to the function of care and affection. However, the contemporary scientific literature has shown that the involved emotional presence of the father exerts a profound influence on child development, especially in children with atypical development. Paternal involvement, by integrating the affective bond, active presence and cognitive stimulation, constitutes

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an essential protective factor for the psychological well-being and the advancement of the child's executive functions (CABRERA; FITZGERALD; BRADLEY, 2018).

## **THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND SCIENTIFIC FRAMEWORK**

Research in neuroscience and developmental psychology points out that active paternal interaction is associated with greater emotional regulation, better socio-affective performance, and better sensory integration in atypical children (Feldman, 2017). According to longitudinal studies by Cabrera et al. (2018), parents who actively participate in daily care contribute to the increase of neural plasticity and the child's adaptive capacity. In addition, theories of social cognition highlight that the father figure introduces new patterns of stimulation, challenges, and experiences that complement the emotional and behavioral repertoire.

## **THE FATHER FIGURE AND THE PROCESS OF EMOTIONAL CO-REGULATION**

The concept of emotional co-regulation, widely studied by Siegel (2020) and Schore (2019), refers to the ability of caregivers to help the child regulate their emotional states through safe and responsive presence. In the context of atypical children, this co-regulation becomes even more relevant. Emotionally available parents can mediate moments of sensory overload, behavioral crises, and everyday frustrations, favoring the maturation of the autonomic nervous system and the strengthening of empathy. This affectionate and firm presence helps the development of social and communicative skills.

“The functioning of the parent-child relationship in the early years can serve as a source of emotional security that promotes healthy development in different domains of development throughout life.” (CABRERA, 2020, p. 134).



## **THE PATERNAL FUNCTION IN EDUCATION AND IN STIMULATING AUTONOMY**

In addition to the emotional dimension, the father figure acts as a mediator in the process of building autonomy. Parental engagement in educational and structured play activities promotes the development of executive function, sustained attention, and inhibitory control, aspects that are often challenging in children with ASD and ADHD. Studies by Yogman et al. (2016) show that children who experience playful interactions with their parents demonstrate greater cognitive flexibility and better problem-solving skills. Thus, the father figure contributes to the formation of a richer and more balanced learning environment.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR INTEGRATIVE NEUROPSYCHOLOGY AND CLINICAL PRACTICE**

In the context of integrative neuropsychology, the paternal presence should be seen as a therapeutic component and not just a relational one. The inclusion of the father in the intervention plans and in the family guidelines strengthens the emotional support network and enhances the therapeutic gains. Psychoeducation aimed at parents, teaching strategies of co-regulation, assertive communication and cognitive stimulation, becomes a highly effective resource. The father thus occupies the role of active agent in the process of neuropsychological and emotional rehabilitation.

## **CONCLUSION**

The father figure is an essential pillar in the integral development of the atypical child. Their active participation in creation, education, and therapeutic processes directly impacts behavior, emotional regulation, and learning. Recognizing and fostering the role of the father as an agent of transformation means promoting a new paradigm of care – more empathetic, integrated and based on



secure bonds.

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