

## Family Communication as a Foundation of Mental Health: Roles and Responsibilities

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### Abstract

The family plays a crucial role as the primary foundation for shaping individual behavior, values, and psychological well-being. A nurturing and communicative family environment significantly contributes to the mental health of its members, while conflict, neglect, or poor communication may increase the risk of mental health issues, particularly among adolescents. In today's context, Generation Z faces growing mental health challenges that are often overlooked by parents, leaving adolescents vulnerable to anxiety, depression, and social maladjustment. This study aims to examine the family's roles and responsibilities in promoting adolescent mental health, with particular attention to communication patterns, emotional closeness, and the influence of cultural values in shaping family dynamics. Using a qualitative approach, *in-depth interviews* and *thematic analysis* were employed to explore how family interactions influence the psychological resilience and mental well-being of adolescents. The findings reveal that strong emotional bonds, active listening, and consistent parental support can act as protective factors against mental health disorders, while a lack of family engagement tends to exacerbate psychological stress and maladaptive behaviors. The results also highlight the importance of integrating cultural norms into family communication to strengthen emotional connections. The implications of this research emphasize that families must adopt proactive strategies to foster open dialogue, provide emotional validation, and encourage resilience among adolescents. These findings are expected to inform parents, educators, and policymakers about the vital role of family environments in preventing mental health issues and supporting the holistic development of Generation Z.

**Keywords:** communication; family communication; mental health; role; responsibility

### Introduction

The family is the primary environment in which individuals grow, develop, and learn values that shape their personality over time. This learning process continues throughout a person's life. According to Ahmadi, the family is a crucial institution between individuals and groups, and it is the first social unit to which children belong; thus, the family naturally becomes the initial context for a child's *socialization* process (Annuar & Sa'adah, 2023). A loving, supportive family with healthy communication patterns provides a solid foundation for the mental well-being of all its members. However, when the family environment is unsupportive, characterized by conflict, lack of warmth, or disharmony among its members, it can lead to various mental health issues.

Mental health encompasses spiritual, psychological, and social dimensions. By integrating religious teachings with proper medical care and social support, individuals can attain optimal mental well-being. Mental health is the harmony between the functions

of the soul and the human self, grounded in religious values, which fosters a sense of peace and happiness in life (Zanatul Faizah & Iva Inayatul Ilahiyah, 2024).

Mental health has become a crucial aspect of modern society, yet it is still often overlooked by the older generation. This contrasts with Generation Z, who prioritize mental health as a central concern. Many young people face psychological issues due to limited family communication and insufficient support from their surrounding environment. The role and responsibility of parents are essential in paying attention to their children's mental well-being. Although every child hopes to grow up in a harmonious family, the reality can be quite different. Some parents believe that once their children reach adulthood, they can become entirely independent. However, even as they mature, young people still need parental figures as role models and guides.

Mental health problems that emerge during adolescence require active involvement from the family in creating a supportive environment for their development. Preventive efforts against mental disorders yield the most effective results when initiated early. Research suggests that children who receive minimal affection tend to exhibit psychological reactions such as seeking attention, displaying indifference, observing parental behavior, and in some cases, developing harmful tendencies that affect both themselves and their families. This highlights the importance of familial responsibility through parenting styles and education in shaping behavior and preventing the onset of mental health disorders during adolescence.

Mental health issues in Indonesia require serious attention, particularly given the vital role of the younger generation as the nation's future. When adolescents experience mental health disorders without proper treatment, the impact can significantly hinder their long-term development. This study aims to uncover various factors that influence adolescent mental health in Indonesia and analyze the extent to which these factors contribute to psychological outcomes (Zanatul Faizah & Iva Inayatul Ilahiyah, 2024). Additionally, this research highlights the importance of understanding the family's role and responsibility as the primary source of emotional support through effective family communication in maintaining the respondents' mental well-being. Families can provide the necessary care, empathy, and affection when a member experiences stress, anxiety, or depression. This study explores the responsibility of families in creating a supportive environment conducive to psychological well-being. Furthermore, the research focuses on communication patterns, emotional closeness among family members, and the cultural values that shape these dynamics (Purnama & Farhannaya, 2024).

As the smallest social unit, the family holds the primary key in shaping the attitudes, worldviews, and thought patterns of its members. This underscores the notion that family communication serves as the foundation for character development within each family member (Ariyati et al., n.d.).

Mental health refers to the absence of symptoms of mental disorders and psychological illness, as well as the ability to adapt to oneself, to others, and to the surrounding environment. It also involves the knowledge and actions aimed at developing and maximizing one's innate potential, talents, and dispositions (Arifin et al., 2022).

Each member of the family unit significantly impacts the collective state of mental well-being. Family communication patterns, which are shaped by emotional expressions and behaviors from both parents and children, mutually influence one another. Understanding the roles and responsibilities of each family member in maintaining psychological balance is essential in achieving optimal mental health for the entire family.

Social responsibility is part of the obligation entrusted to every individual to be fulfilled collectively, both within the family environment and in society at large (Tricintiya et al., 2025). As a point of reference, the researcher presents several previous studies that serve as the foundation for this literature review. The first is a journal article by Asriyanti Rosmalina (2022), titled *The Influence of Mental Health on Family Well-Being*, which employs mental health theory and a literature review approach. This study investigates the relationship between mental health and family well-being. The findings conclude that good mental health has a significant influence on overall family well-being (Rosmalina, 2022).

The second reference is a journal article by Sutiyah Heni (2024), titled *The Role of the Family in Maintaining Mental Health in Adolescents Aged 15–18 Years*. This study uses the theory of family roles and applies a quantitative descriptive approach using questionnaires. The study analyzes how families contribute to maintaining adolescent mental health. The results indicate that most respondents demonstrate a strong family role in supporting adolescent mental well-being (Heni, 2024). Furthermore, the family is the primary setting where children learn to express various emotions in response to events they experience (Maulina & Budiyo, 2021).

Another reference is a journal article by Dinda Mariella La Base, Narendra Wirahadi Saputra, Bryan Junus Pritanto, Rajiv Fadillah Wikamto, and Chahya Kharin Herbawani (2023), titled *The Role of the Family Environment in Adolescent Mental Health Disorders in Indonesia: A Literature Review*. This study applies the theory of family environment and mental disorders using a literature review approach. It examines the various factors influencing adolescent mental health within the context of the family environment. The findings indicate that a supportive family environment has a positive impact on adolescent mental health (Mariella La Base et al., 2023). Another relevant study is by Salamah, Puji Yanti Fauziah, and Lutfi Wibawa (2024), titled *The Role of Parents in Children's Mental Health in the Generation Z Era*, which employs the theories of parenting style and emotional support using a descriptive-analytic approach through interviews and observations. This research analyzes the role of parents in shaping children's mental health in the modern era. The results show that good parenting practices significantly influence children's mental well-being.

The fifth reference is a journal article by Ahmad Labiq, Nashciah, and Siti Hulaiyah (2024), titled *The Importance of Family Support in Improving University Students' Mental Health*. This study is based on social support theory and uses a qualitative approach through *in-depth interviews* and focus group discussions (FGDs). It explores the role of the family in creating a supportive environment for students' mental health. The findings reveal that family support is crucial in enhancing both mental well-being and motivation among university students (Ahmad Labiq et al., 2023).

The present study distinguishes itself from previous research by focusing specifically on the analysis of family understanding regarding mental health. Based on preliminary observations, this topic has not yet received significant attention from earlier scholars. The literature review highlights the need for further investigation in this area, positioning it as a valuable new reference for practitioners, mental health observers, and the academic community alike. This study aims to examine the family's roles and responsibilities in promoting adolescent mental health, with particular attention to communication patterns, emotional closeness, and the influence of cultural values in shaping family dynamics. This research provides valuable insights for parents, educators, and policymakers on the

importance of fostering open communication, emotional support, and cultural values within families to enhance adolescents' mental health and resilience.

### **Research Method**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method, allowing direct observation of phenomena without altering the observed variables. In-depth understanding was achieved through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and textual analysis (Creswell & John W., 2021). By applying this approach and methods such as interviews and documentation, the research aimed to generate detailed insights into the subject under investigation.

The subjects included parents (fathers/mothers) as primary figures in the family structure, and children directly affected by family interactions. The research was conducted in Kuningan, selected for its representation of diverse family dynamics in a semi-urban environment. Children and adolescents active on social media and maintaining significant family interactions served as the main informants.

Data collection involved face-to-face interviews, enabling direct dialogue with respondents to gather necessary information. These interviews aimed to explore the perspectives, experiences, and knowledge of the informants related to the research topic. Interviews provided rich, nuanced data, allowing the researcher to seek clarifications and build rapport with participants.

Based on direct observations, the researcher found that family members exhibited distinct communication patterns and emotional responses. Through source triangulation—comparing information from the mother (Ricka, 40 years old), father (Ujang, 47 years old), and son (Saddam, 22 years old)—it was identified that openness in family communication was selective and influenced by role, age, and emotional closeness. The mother was open in certain situations, the father was more emotionally reserved, while the son was reluctant to discuss sensitive topics, fearing misunderstanding.

Using methodological triangulation, the researcher combined in-depth interviews, documentation, and direct observation of daily family interactions. The findings revealed that family communication generally occurred in a warm atmosphere, although the father's dominant tone occasionally caused the son to feel constrained in expressing his opinions. Decision-making was conducted through discussion, but the son felt his views were not fully considered. Conflict resolution was approached passively, with strategies such as temporary withdrawal before dialogue indicating self-regulated emotional management.

To ensure data validity, the researcher verified transcripts with each informant, all of whom confirmed that the documented information accurately reflected their statements. These findings reinforce the effectiveness of the triangulation approach, offering a comprehensive and in-depth portrayal of family communication dynamics.

### **Results and Discussion**

Based on observations and interviews conducted with several informants: the mother (Ricka, 40 years old), the father (Ujang, 47 years old), and the son (Saddam, 22 years old) the researcher analyzed the results using Joseph A. DeVito's (2014) theory of interpersonal communication. This framework served as the analytical foundation for the study, in which several key indicators were identified: (1) openness, (2) emotional support, (3) communication style, (4) trust and respect, (5) decision-making, (6) problem-

solving, (7) the influence of family communication on mental health, and (8) stress management. The following discussion outlines the findings regarding these indicators.

Openness: The findings of this study indicate that self-expression within the family is limited by role dynamics and generational differences. This is consistent with DeVito's theory, which suggests that openness is influenced by the degree of trust and emotional closeness between individuals (Zikri Fariz, 2024).

According to the three informants, the mother reported feeling reasonably comfortable expressing her thoughts, though she noted that openness varies depending on relationship and age. The father indicated that he is open about general matters but tends to be emotionally reserved. The son, meanwhile, stated that he feels comfortable discussing light topics, but finds it difficult to talk about deeper issues due to fear of being misunderstood or reprimanded. Openness is a fundamental aspect of effective communication, in line with DeVito's theory that identifies openness as a key characteristic of interpersonal communication. However, in practice, openness remains influenced by cultural norms, gender roles, and emotional proximity. This is particularly evident in the son, who tends to withhold sensitive matters. In this case, openness is still constrained by context and emotional relationships. The son expressed that he does not yet feel he has a sufficiently safe space to be fully open.

During the interviews, it was concluded that openness within the family is selective and largely dependent on the nature of the relationships between members. The child expressed that he does not feel entirely safe being open, especially on sensitive issues. This suggests a need for improved acceptance and trust within family communication.

The second indicator is emotional support, which is a critical factor in maintaining mental health. In a previous study by Tricintiya et al. (2025), emotional support from the family was found to significantly influence adolescents' psychological stability. These findings underscore the importance of empathy and appropriate responses from family members when one of them is experiencing emotional distress. All three informants confirmed that they receive emotional support from their family (Nugraha et al., 2023). The mother reported feeling supported through active listening and being given space during stressful moments—similar sentiments were expressed by the father. The son noted that while he sometimes received a supportive response, there were also instances when he wished to be heard but instead received advice that felt disconnected from his actual concerns.

Both verbal and non-verbal expressions of emotional support greatly affect psychological comfort. The mismatch in expectations between parents and children highlights the need to improve empathy in intergenerational communication. All three informants acknowledged experiencing a certain level of emotional support. The mother shared that both her husband and child typically express care when she is stressed, either by listening or by giving her time to rest. The father felt supported through the attention shown by his wife and children. The son admitted feeling cared for, although he sometimes felt that his parents' responses did not meet his expectations, which he attributed to generational misunderstandings. Emotional support within the family manifests through attention and empathy. However, the differences in expectations, particularly from the child, indicate that the form of support desired by younger generations often differs from that provided by parents.

The third indicator is communication style. A healthy communication style fosters more open and supportive relationships. Aggressive or overly dominant communication can lead other family members to feel pressured or undervalued. Therefore, assertive

communication patterns need to be further developed to create a mutually supportive environment. A flexible communication style that adapts to the child's age reflects good adaptability. However, complaints from the child highlight the need for more assertive and empathetic, rather than merely instructive, communication. The informants' family communication style tends to be relaxed, yet certain dynamics persist—such as the father's dominance in decision-making and the use of firm tones in specific situations. The son expressed that his parents' communication style sometimes feels too abrupt or “intense,” leaving little room for comfortable dialogue. Both parents acknowledged adjusting their communication based on the child's age: they speak gently with younger children and more casually with teenagers. The father admitted that he sometimes raises his voice when he is tired. The son felt that his parents occasionally judge or blame too quickly.

The fourth indicator is **trust and respect**. These elements are fundamental to effective communication. When a child feels safe and respected, they are more likely to be open. However, if the family's responses are perceived as judgmental, the child tends to withdraw. This aligns with research by Arliman S et al. (2022), which found that parenting style affects a child's mental health. Trust and the valuing of opinions are crucial to building healthy communication. The child's reluctance to open up suggests a need to enhance emotional safety within the family. All informants stated that they felt their opinions were respected. The mother and father felt there was space to express their views, even if those views were not always followed. The son generally felt safe, but admitted that with more personal issues, such as romantic relationships or academic stress, he did not yet feel entirely secure in being open. While all three informants showed mutual respect, from the child's perspective, full trust had not yet developed due to concerns about receiving negative responses. The fourth indicator is **trust and respect**. These elements are fundamental to effective communication. When a child feels safe and respected, they are more likely to be open. However, if the family's responses are perceived as judgmental, the child tends to withdraw. This aligns with research by Arliman S et al. (2022), which found that parenting style affects a child's mental health. Trust and the valuing of opinions are crucial to building healthy communication. The child's reluctance to open up suggests a need to enhance emotional safety within the family. All informants stated that they felt their opinions were respected. The mother and father felt there was space to express their views, even if those views were not always followed. The son generally felt safe, but admitted that with more personal issues, such as romantic relationships or academic stress, he did not yet feel entirely secure in being open. While all three informants showed

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The fifth indicator is decision-making. The decision-making process within the family is participatory, reflecting mutual respect and equitable roles among members. The family involves all members in discussions, indicating a democratic communication practice that enhances a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. Such participation in decision-making demonstrates a democratic approach that fosters emotional engagement (Daulay et al., 2023). From the interviews, it was found that both the mother and father are actively involved in decision-making through joint discussions. The child is also consulted when the decision directly involves him. However, he felt that his opinions were not always taken seriously. The mother stated, "Household decisions, like expenses or education, are usually discussed together." The father emphasized, "Everyone is heard, but the final decision is adjusted to our situation." The son mentioned, "If it's about me, they usually ask me too." These findings indicate that family decision-making is conducted through open discussion, with all members' opinions being considered, particularly when decisions directly affect the child. Collaborative decision-making fosters a sense of being valued and increases family members' self-confidence. Additionally, the family's method of resolving conflict through dialogue and emotional regulation shows a mature approach to problem management.

The sixth indicator is **problem-solving**. A family's ability to resolve conflicts constructively reflects emotional maturity and effective communication. Avoiding or ignoring problems may lead to accumulated psychological stress. In the interviews, all three informants provided similar accounts. The mother explained, "Usually, when there's conflict, we stay silent for a while and talk once things have calmed down." The father added, "I hold back at first, then initiate a conversation later." The son admitted, "When there's conflict, I go to my room and listen to music."

Conflict resolution strategies within the family are carried out through discussions after emotions have settled. Both the mother and father tend to avoid direct confrontation and instead choose the appropriate time to address issues. The son admitted that he often resorts to self-restraint or *me-time*, which refers to activities performed alone that allow individuals to recharge by engaging in enjoyable personal interests. The purpose of such activities is to restore emotional energy and improve one's overall condition (Amhar et al., 2023). During conflicts, the son prefers to isolate himself or divert his attention elsewhere. This strategy can be effective if it stems from a genuine intention to resolve issues. However, if left unaddressed for too long, unresolved conflicts may accumulate and lead to emotional distress. Thus, it is essential to establish habits of open and healthy conflict resolution. In this family, the problem-solving approach involves taking

time to pause and using a calm demeanor. Although resolution is not immediate, this strategy is generally effective in preventing further escalation.

The seventh indicator is **the influence of family communication on mental health**. Communication plays a crucial role in emotional stability. Open, warm, and empathetic communication serves as a natural protective factor against stress and mental pressure within the family. This aligns with WHO's assertion that positive communication supports mental well-being (A. Z. Harahap, 2021). The quality of communication within the family is directly correlated with mental health. Consistent emotional support can reduce the risk of stress and depression. Special approaches and treatment are needed to help individuals develop cognitive processes, connect past, present, and future experiences, and guide them toward socially acceptable behaviors (Novia Zulfa Hanum et al., 2023). Family communication significantly influences emotional conditions. Positive verbal support can enhance mental well-being, whereas negative responses tend to intensify emotional strain. According to the interviews, all three informants acknowledged that family communication affects their mood and stress levels. The mother reported feeling more at ease when communication at home runs smoothly. The son expressed that positive responses when sharing his thoughts help alleviate pressure. Both parents affirmed that warm, open communication greatly influences their emotional state. The son added that encouraging feedback from the family brings relief, whereas dismissive responses tend to increase stress. In essence, based on the interview data, family communication strongly affects emotional well-being. Positive and supportive verbal interactions promote psychological resilience, while harsh or judgmental communication may worsen emotional conditions (F. A. Harahap & Sampurna, 2024).

The final indicator is **stress management**. In the context of family, stress management refers to how individuals respond to emotional pressure or burdens, as well as how the family supports these coping processes. Based on the interviews, each family member exhibited different ways of dealing with stress, but all responses pointed toward the presence of emotional support and the availability of personal space provided by other family members. Stress management within this family reflects a conscious effort to provide emotional support and personal space, particularly from parents toward both their partner and their children. The mother and father reported experiencing tangible support, both verbally and through actions. However, the son still expressed a need for more open emotional space and consistent responses from his parents. Managing stress is crucial in minimizing its negative effects on both mental and physical health. When we are able to regulate stress effectively, we can reduce the body's stress response, such as rapid heartbeat, shallow breathing, and feelings of anxiety (Runtiko, 2022).

This is in line with the WHO's concept (2022) (Yoanita, 2022), which emphasizes that an individual's mental health is significantly influenced by their ability to manage stress and by support from their closest environment, primarily the family. A family that provides a safe space for expressing emotions without judgment helps build stronger emotional resilience for each of its members. In this study, stress management strategies within the family involved simple approaches, such as giving each other space, offering small gestures of care, and maintaining emotional presence. The son tended to isolate himself in order to deal with emotional pressure, yet still felt supported when receiving emotional attention. According to the interviews, the mother stated that her stress levels decreased when she was given time alone and received small acts of assistance from her children. The father reported feeling supported by having time to rest and being accompanied during leisure activities. The son preferred retreating to his room or listening

to music when emotionally overwhelmed. This suggests that the family supports stress management through the provision of space, companionship, and small but meaningful actions. The mother mentioned that simple gestures such as hugs from her children or help with household chores had a significant emotional impact. The father felt supported when allowed personal downtime or when spending relaxing moments with family members.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the significant influence of family communication on the mental health of its members, where both verbal and non-verbal interactions reflect patterns of healthy, supportive relationships. Openness, identified by Devito as a key characteristic of effective interpersonal communication, serves as a foundational element but is often limited by cultural norms, gender roles, and emotional closeness, as seen in children's reluctance to discuss sensitive topics. Emotional support from empathetic and attentive family members acts as a protective factor against psychological stress, while assertive, respectful communication and collaborative decision-making foster feelings of safety, value, and self-confidence. Mature conflict resolution strategies involving dialogue and emotional regulation further contribute to psychological well-being. These results corroborate findings from WHO and Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud, 2022) that emphasize the role of family interactions in shaping mental health. Future research could explore interventions to overcome cultural and emotional barriers to openness in family communication, particularly focusing on enhancing dialogue about sensitive issues among adolescents.

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