

In pursuit of the perfect parent: Parenting narratives in digital therapeutic culture

Mükemmel ebeveynin peşinde: Dijital terapötik kültürde ebeveynlik anlatıları

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Abstract

With the spread of digital culture, parenting has become a discursive field in which expert knowledge circulates rapidly and motherhood and fatherhood are redefined. This study critically examines how digital parenting narratives are constructed through therapeutic culture and the norms, responsibilities, and forms of authority that produce desirable parenting. Accordingly, the Bir Aile Meselesi YouTube channel was designated as the case for a qualitative case study, and the spoken narratives of three parenting-focused episodes were analyzed thematically. The findings reveal a powerful narrative that constructs the child as a unique subject to be understood and the parent as responsible for interpreting the emotional needs underlying the behavior and regulating the relational climate. While compassion, connection, healthy communication, and self-reflexivity offer transformative alternatives to punitive approaches, they also transform parenting into an ongoing project of self-improvement. Although structural problems surrounding parenting are often reduced to matters of individual awareness and inner balance, clinical experience, personal narrative, vulnerability, and discursive appeals to audience participation are mobilized as resources through which speakers claim legitimacy for the channel's therapeutic authority. Ultimately, through a call to abandon perfection, parenting is reframed around a new normative ideal: the "therapeutically competent parent."

Keywords: Digital culture, therapeutic culture, parenting narratives, YouTube

Öz

Dijital kültürün yaygınlaşmasıyla ebeveynlik, uzman bilgisinin hızla dolaşıma girdiği ve annelik ile babalık rollerinin yeniden kurgulandığı bir söylem alanına dönüşmektedir. Bu çalışma, dijital ebeveynlik anlatılarının terapötik kültür aracılığıyla nasıl kurulduğunu sorunsallaştırmakta ve makbul ebeveynliğin hangi normlar, sorumluluklar ve otorite biçimleri üzerinden inşa edildiğini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaca matuf olarak Bir Aile Meselesi YouTube kanalı nitel durum çalışmasının vakası olarak seçilmiştir. Kanalda yayımlanan ve ebeveynliğe odaklanan üç bölümün sözlü anlatıları tematik analiz yoluyla çözümlenmiştir. Analiz sonucunda, incelenen içeriklerde belirgin bir ebeveynlik anlatısının öne çıktığı görülmüştür. Bu anlatıda çocuk, özgün ihtiyaçları anlaşılması gereken bir özne olarak konumlandırılırken ebeveyne, çocuğun davranışlarının ardındaki duygusal ihtiyaçları anlama ve ilişkinin duygusal iklimini düzenleme sorumluluğu yüklenmektedir. Şefkat, bağ, sağlıklı iletişim ve özdeşleşimsellik, cezaya dayalı yaklaşımlara karşı dönüştürücü bir imkân sunarken ebeveynliği sürekli iyileştirilmesi gereken bir özne projesine çevirmektedir. Ebeveynlikle ilgili yapısal sorunlar çoğu kez bireysel farkındalık ve içsel denge meselesine indirgenmekle birlikte klinik deneyim, kişisel anlatı, kırılganlık ve izleyici katılımı, kanalın inşa ettiği terapötik otoriteye özgün bir meşruiyet kazandırmaktadır. Sonuç olarak ebeveynlik anlatısı, mükemmellikten vazgeçme çağrısı içinde "terapötik açıdan yeterli ebeveyn" biçiminde yeni bir normatif ideale karşılık gelecek biçimde çerçevelenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital kültür, terapötik kültür, ebeveynlik anlatıları, YouTube

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Introduction

Digital culture has transformed parenting from a private practice of care conducted within the family into a visible, debatable, and comparable domain of experience subjects to continual improvement. In particular, parenting has become a dense discursive arena on social media platforms in which everyday challenges are shared, expert perspectives circulate, personal experiences enter the public sphere, and norms of ideal motherhood and fatherhood are reproduced (Lupton et al., 2016; Mascheroni et al., 2018; Porfirio et al., 2026). Amid this transformation, parents have come to be constituted as subjects expected to manage their own emotions, improve their communication skills, accurately interpret their children's psychological needs, consciously regulate family relationships, and assume responsibility for their children's care. Thus, digital parenting culture moves child-rearing beyond the realm of practical advice, redefining it through the intersecting imperatives of emotional awareness, psychological literacy, and relational responsibility. This redefinition is closely connected to the growing prominence of psychological knowledge and therapeutic discourse as key interpretive repertoires through which everyday life is understood and organized in contemporary society. Commonly described as a therapeutic culture, this process refers to the increasing tendency for individuals to understand themselves, their relationships, and their problems through psychological categories such as emotion, trauma, vulnerability, self-esteem, self-awareness, and well-being (Amouroux et al., 2023; Salmenniemi, 2022).

Digital platforms may be said to increasingly construct parenting as a domain of self-regulation and work on the self by articulating the psychological repertoire of meaning-making of therapeutic culture with family life. Within this narrative order, the parent is positioned as a subject who, alongside being the traditional authority figure who guides the child's behavior, analyzes their own past, controls their emotional responses, reads the child's inner world through psychological categories, and

regulates communication within the family according to the therapeutic norms. Rather than removing the demand for perfection, this discourse may reformulate it as therapeutic competence: parents are told that they need not be perfect, yet they are still expected to recognize their mistakes, understand their underlying causes, and repair relationships in therapeutically appropriate ways. This tension underpins what this study conceptualizes as the "therapeutically competent parent." Taking this transformation and the tension it produces as its point of departure, this study problematizes how parenting narratives on YouTube are constructed through the lens of digital therapeutic culture and the thematic frameworks within which they are presented.

The extensive literature on therapeutic culture provides a rich foundation for examining the historical development of therapeutic discourse (Lasch, 1979; Rieff, 1966), its operation through practices of power and subjectification (Illouz, 2007; Rose, 1990), and its articulation with neoliberal individualism (Furedi, 2004; Rimke, 2020). In comparison, the intersection of parenting practices and therapeutic culture has received relatively limited scholarly attention, most notably through work on the ideology of intensive mothering (Hays, 1998; Mantilla, 2023) and paranoid parenting (Furedi, 2001). Although recent scholarship on digital therapeutic culture (De La Fabián, 2024; De Vos, 2020; Sari, 2025) has offered important conceptual insights into how platforms reshape the production and circulation of therapeutic discourse, limited attention has been paid to how parenting narratives are constructed on platforms suited to long-form content, such as YouTube. However, this intersection remains underexplored in the Turkish context. To address this gap, this study asks three research questions: Which therapeutic concepts are used to make sense of parenting experiences on YouTube? What narrative frames are used to present parenting problems and the proposed solutions? How does the language of psychological expertise structure parenting guidance? To answer these questions, *Bir Aile Meselesi* (A Family Matter), one of the more visible

YouTube channels producing parenting content in Türkiye, was selected as the case study. The three most-viewed videos on the channel, which extensively engage with parenting experiences through the language of psychological guidance and therapeutic discourse, were analyzed thematically.

This study is expected to contribute to the literature on three levels. At the theoretical level, it aims to bring digital culture, therapeutic culture, and parenting studies together within a shared line of inquiry, thereby revealing the intersection among these fields that has yet to be sufficiently explored. At the empirical level, this study contributes to the limited body of research by identifying thematic patterns in digital parenting narratives articulated in YouTube videos in Türkiye. At the conceptual level, it opens up a discussion of digital therapeutic culture as a distinctive terrain of discursive legitimation and subjectification in which therapeutic authority is constructed through professional expertise, personal experience, and platform-oriented appeals within YouTube video narratives, rather than treating it merely as an extension of therapeutic culture into digital environments.

Therapeutic Culture from the Traditional to the Digital: A Brief Review

Therapeutic culture refers to the transformation of psychological knowledge, psychotherapeutic concepts, and psy-knowledge into a widespread interpretive repertoire that extends beyond the boundaries of the clinical domain and regulates everyday life, family relationships, education, media, work life, and market practices. Within this cultural form, the self ceases to be a fixed structure determined by tradition, fate, or social position and is instead constructed as a project that must be worked on, improved, transformed, and continually developed (Amouroux et al., 2023; Aubry & Travis, 2015; Salmenniemi, 2022). The historical formation of therapeutic culture is closely associated with the rise of modern individualism, transformation of religious authority, institutionalization of psychotherapy, expansion of mental health expertise in the postwar

period, and growth of the self-help industry. Psychological vocabulary has become a powerful cultural code that shapes how individuals understand themselves, their relationships, their suffering, their desires, and their responsibilities, extending beyond its function as a technical language for explaining psychological problems (Cabanais, 2020; Nehring, 2024; Rakow, 2013).

The accumulated literature on therapeutic culture has primarily examined this transformation in terms of the formation of subjects and power relations. Central to this reading are the individual's inward turn, the psychologization of social and structural contradictions as problems of personal adjustment, self-regulation, and emotional inadequacy, and the neoliberal expectation that subjects manage their own happiness, vulnerability, and performance (Lasch, 1979; Rieff, 1966; Rose, 1990). Within this framework, concepts such as happiness, resilience, authenticity, and self-care do not correspond to neutral psychological concepts. Rather, they operate as a normative set of meanings that determine which emotions are acceptable and which forms of selfhood are desirable (Nehring et al., 2020; Rimke, 2020). The articulation of therapeutic discourse with market rationality also transforms the presence of emotional language in the economic sphere. Indeed, this has made it possible for intimacy and the market to become increasingly intertwined, as well as self-interest and emotional reflexivity (Illouz, 2007). Recent studies have added important nuances to this picture. They have shown that therapeutic language enables suffering, trauma, and victimhood to gain public visibility, that it can be articulated with struggles for recognition and justice in certain contexts, and that it is shaped by regional specificities across different geographies (Amouroux et al., 2023; Nehring, 2024; Wright, 2008, 2018).

The articulation of therapeutic culture with digitalization gives rise to a digital therapeutic culture in which psychological truth, expertise, and the self are reconstituted within platform logic. This culture refers to a hybrid structure in which the pre-digital therapeutic ethos is combined with social media platforms, algorithmic visibility, wearable

technologies, self-tracking applications, passive data production and forms of online expertise (De La Fabián, 2024). Within this structure, alongside introspection and self-narrative, the self is constructed as a data object that is measured and monitored through digital traces, likes, typing speed, tone of voice, movement data, and platform interactions, and is expected to be optimized (Lupton, 2016). While social media interfaces embed therapeutic discourse in everyday digital communication, algorithmic circulation reorganizes the visibility and legitimacy of psychological content (De Vos, 2020). The positioning of psychologists on social media through personal branding, performances of authenticity, and audience engagement also demonstrates that therapeutic authority is now produced through digital visibility and relatability, alongside professional competence (Sari, 2025). Nevertheless, the existing literature has given limited attention to how therapeutic discourse is constructed within specific content types and platform-specific narrative structures, as well as to its concrete manifestations in family life; platform economies, local contexts, and the articulation of therapeutic language with everyday relationships require further research (Demir, 2026; Nehring et al., 2020).

This gap provides an opportunity to consider digital therapeutic culture and parenting narratives. Indeed, parenting is increasingly defined by digital platforms in relation to psychological awareness, emotional self-control, appropriate communication, and the responsibility to ensure a child's well-being. Within this narrative order, the parent is positioned, beyond being a caregiver or a figure who guides the child's behavior, as a subject who monitors their own emotions, questions their past experiences, seeks to understand the child's inner world through psychological concepts, and is expected to continually improve their family relationships. This figure overlaps with intensive parenting, the therapeutic reframing of motherhood and fatherhood, and neoliberal expectations of parental self-management (Culic, 2021; Mantilla, 2023; Son & Kim, 2024). Yet the "therapeutically competent

parent" is distinguished by the obligation to recognize mistakes, understand their causes, and repair relationships appropriately, turning the rejection of perfection into a demand for continuous reflexivity and relational repair. Therefore, examining parenting content on platforms such as YouTube, which accommodate long-form audiovisual narratives, is important for understanding how the contemporary imaginary of the family is reconstructed within the language of therapeutic expertise and platform visibility.

Materials and Methods

This study was designed as a single-case study within the qualitative paradigm. A case study is a research design that enables an in-depth examination of a contemporary phenomenon within its own context (Stake, 1995, 2008; Yin, 2017). In this study, the phenomenon under examination is parenting narratives in digital therapeutic culture, while the research context consists of parenting content published on YouTube. Accordingly, the *Bir Aile Meselesi* channel was selected as the single case through which digital therapeutic parenting narratives could be examined in depth. *Bir Aile Meselesi* is a psychological counseling center based in İzmir, Türkiye, that provides psychological counseling services to individuals, families, and organizations. The prevalence of content addressing parenting issues through the language of psychological expertise on the center's YouTube channel was the determining factor in selecting the channel for examining digital therapeutic parenting narratives. The channel was launched on YouTube on October 11, 2016. At the time of the initial screening on April 10, 2026, it contained 237 videos, approximately 192k subscribers, and approximately 11 million views. These figures provide context for the channel's public reach. Moreover, the channel was selected because it was considered an information-rich case and a representative example of parenting channels in Türkiye.

YouTube was selected as the research setting because of the platform's capacity to accommodate long-form audiovisual narratives, its suitability

for communicating expert knowledge to broad audiences, and its ability to make audience engagement metrics visible (Kemp, 2025; Shaikh et al., 2023; Sui et al., 2022). To identify parenting-related content, the channel archive was searched on April 10, 2026, using the Turkish keywords “anne” (mother), “baba” (father), “çocuk yetiştirme” (child-rearing), “çocuk büyütme” (raising children), and “ebeveyn” (parents). After excluding YouTube Shorts and content unrelated to parenting, 58 videos remained. Videos whose titles did not contain at least one of the specified keywords and those published outside the one-year period from April 10, 2025, to April 10, 2026, were excluded. This screening process yielded seven eligible videos. In line with purposive sampling, the three videos with the highest levels of audience engagement, as indicated by their view, like, and comment counts on April 10, 2026, were included in the study: *Çocuk Yetiştirmenin Püf Noktası* (Episode 78 | The Key to Raising Children), *Anne Babalıktan Yoruldum* (Episode 92 | I’m Tired of Parenting), and *Ebeveynlik Rehberi* (Episode 112 | Parenting Guide). The publication dates, duration, and engagement metrics of the selected videos are presented in Table 1. Although audience engagement served as the final selection criterion, the resulting dataset collectively encompassed the study’s core dimensions, including parenting guidance, emotional experiences of parenting, and the language of psychological expertise.

Document analysis was employed for data collection (Creswell, 2017; Merriam, 2018). Within this scope, the selected YouTube videos were treated as audiovisual digital documents, and their verbal content was obtained from the time-stamped transcripts available through YouTube’s “Show transcript” feature. The transcripts were transferred to Word, where the time stamps were removed. Each transcript was then checked against the corresponding video several times and corrected where necessary. This procedure was applied to all three video recordings. The analytic corpus was limited to the spoken content of these videos. Viewer comments were not analyzed directly; only the speakers’ references to such comments were considered part of the spoken narratives. Therefore, this study examines how therapeutic authority is discursively constructed rather than how it is received by viewers. The resulting data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006, 2022) reflexive thematic analysis approach, informed by a critical perspective. Within this approach, themes were understood as interpretive constructions developed through the researcher’s active engagement with the data, rather than as objective entities waiting to be discovered. The critical perspective directs attention to how authority, normality, and ideal parenting are constructed through language. Reflexive attention was also paid to how the researcher’s theoretical positioning and familiarity

Table 1. Overview of Selected Videos (as of April 10, 2026)

Video Title and Cover Image	Upload Date	Duration	Views (approx.)	Likes (approx.)	Comments
Episode 78 The Key to Raising Children 	April 18, 2025	31:31 min.	188k	10k	559
Episode 92 I’m Tired of Parenting 	July 25, 2025	33:08 min.	67k	4k	354
Episode 112 Parenting Guide 	December 15, 2025	44:04 min.	60k	4k	277

with the literature on therapeutic culture shaped the coding and interpretation process.

During the analysis, the finalized transcripts were imported into MAXQDA, and the stages of becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing the themes, naming them, and interpreting them were followed. Meaningful segments of the transcripts were treated as units of coding, with segment boundaries determined by the amount of text required to convey a coherent idea or a discursive position. These segments can range from a phrase to several sentences, depending on the amount of text required to convey a coherent meaning. The initial round of coding was open to emerging patterns from the data. In subsequent rounds, the codes were reviewed, refined, and organized into broader themes. The coding process considered patterns derived from the data as well as sensitizing concepts drawn from the literature on therapeutic culture, including emotional awareness, self-regulation, psychological expertise, parental responsibility, communication, and child well-being. The transition from codes to themes involved an iterative process of comparing and grouping codes into coherent patterns of shared meaning while considering how these patterns reflected, extended, or complicated the discursive formulations in the existing literature. The coding was first conducted in Turkish, after which the code and theme labels were translated into English for reporting purposes. The quotations included in this manuscript were translated from Turkish to English by the author. The English translations were subsequently proofread, and the author reviewed and finalized them to preserve their intended meanings and analytical nuances. Across the three transcripts, the analysis produced 276 coded segments recorded as coded references in MAXQDA. The segments were organized into 23 codes and six themes.

To strengthen the methodological rigor and transparency of the study, the data collection and analysis processes were described in detail, the relevance of the selected videos to the research

purpose was justified, the transcripts were systematically coded, and attention was paid to grounding the interpretations in the data and maintaining theoretical coherence throughout the development of the themes. In addition, the codes, provisional themes, and emerging interpretations were discussed through a peer debriefing process with an academic who has expertise in thematic analysis and has conducted research on parenting (Janesick, 2015). These discussions provided an opportunity to examine the analytical assumptions, consider alternative interpretations, and refine the thematic structure. The purpose of this process was not to establish a coding consensus; final interpretive decisions remained the responsibility of the author. Thus, the peer debriefing process strengthened the reflexivity, coherence, and transparency of this analysis.

Results

Thematic analysis of the transcripts of three videos published on the *Bir Aile Meselesi* YouTube channel identified 276 references, 23 codes, and six themes. The findings show that both children and parents are constructed as objects of psychological interpretations. The parent-child relationship is redefined through therapeutic concepts, and parenting is presented as a process that first requires individuals to work on themselves. Past experiences serve as a framework for explaining current parenting difficulties. These discursive patterns also reveal how digital therapeutic authority is constructed. The themes trace a trajectory from the micro-level of the parent-child relationship to the platform's production of legitimacy, forming a coherent discourse in which they mutually shape and reinforce one another.

The *Reading the Parent* theme (Figure 1) constitutes the largest coding domain in the analysis, revealing how parents are constructed as subjects, the norms against which they are evaluated, and the discursive tools through which this evaluation is produced. Throughout the theme, parenting ceases to be an experiential and lived practice and becomes a domain of performance that must be

continually monitored, evaluated, and improved. The discourse accomplishes this transformation through two main moves: constructing a sharp normative distinction between correct and incorrect forms of parenting, and legitimizing this distinction through psychological, biological, and statistical references. The resulting picture reflects the logic of the therapeutic culture's production of subjects. The parent is positioned as a subject who must reckon with both the child and their own inner world, needs guidance, and awaits external validation.

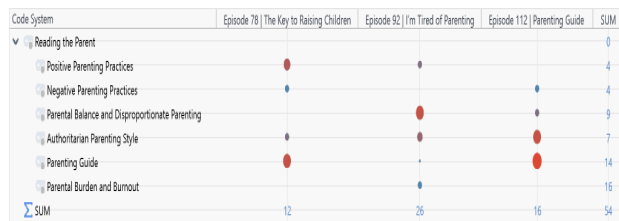


Figure 1. Reading the Parent Theme Code Matrix

An ideal parent is defined as an adult who engages in conversation, acts kindly, opens up, and shows affection. The statement, "...The parent-child relationship is no different. They need our friendship, supervision, and affection," establishes emotional closeness as a fundamental condition of the relationship (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025a). Rushing, yelling, punishing, and constantly giving instructions are behaviors that increase the child's anxiety and damage the relationship. The navigation metaphor constructs controlling parenting as a form of one-way communication (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025c). These assessments are grounded in psychological concepts such as anxiety, trust, and emotional attachment, while normative judgments about parenting practices are legitimized through expert language.

The ideal parent is not a flawless figure. Anger and mistakes are considered acceptable, but they are expected to be managed properly. The statement, "...They get angry but do not overpower; they become upset but do not hurt," illustrates this boundary (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025c). Parents are advised to step back, apologize, and repair their relationships. Thus, the "therapeutically competent parent" is defined less by the absence of mistakes

than by self-monitoring, emotional regulation, and the capacity to repair.

This obligation to self-monitor unfolds alongside the narrative of burnout. Expectations concerning organic nutrition, developmental progress, academic achievement, and happiness expand parental responsibility. Sleep deprivation, paid work, and lack of social support intensify this burden. A study cited in the episode reports burnout rates of 12–18 percent among mothers and 5–9 percent among fathers (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025b). This disparity reveals the unequal distribution of the caregiving burden between the sexes. Fathers are urged to assume direct responsibility rather than act as assistants, waiting for instructions. However, the narrative also contains a tension that reproduces this inequality. Attention, care, and affection are associated with mothers, while play, fun, and social skills are linked to fathers; this distinction is explained as "how the human species works" (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025c). Thus, while the sharing of care is advocated, parental roles are differentiated on neurobiological grounds.

While working conditions and inadequate social support are acknowledged, recommendations focus on lowering expectations, resting, sharing responsibilities, and seeking help from one's immediate social circle. Managing the structural burden is largely left to parents and their families. In this context, the expert voice assumes a regulatory role in parental self-assessment by offering discussion topics and behavioral recommendations. Parents are recognized as knowing their children best; nevertheless, the effective use of this experiential knowledge is tied to expert guidance. Therefore, parenting is constructed as an ongoing project of self-examination and improvement.

The *Reading the Child* theme (Figure 2) reveals that children's behaviors are interpreted as signs with emotional and developmental significance in the examined narratives. Statements grouped under this theme expect parents to interpret the meaning underlying a behavior rather than directly controlling it. The child is thus repositioned from an agent judged by their actions to a subject whose inner world must be read by parents and experts.

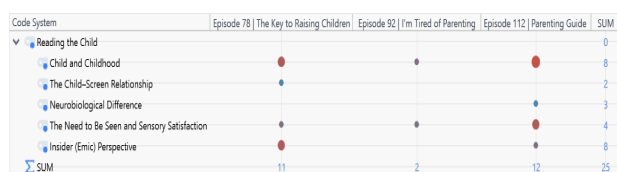


Figure 2. Reading the Child Theme Code Matrix

Childhood is understood as a developmental stage distinct from adult rationality. The statement, “What does it mean to be a child? It means being unreasonable, being demanding [...] resisting, being stubborn,” presents these traits as normal features of childhood rather than moral failings (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025a). Likewise, the observation that “every child has a different attention span, time needed to begin, and capacity to persist” emphasizes the child’s individual rhythm over standardized developmental criteria (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025c). Taken together, these data indicate that understanding the child takes precedence over expecting conformity to adult standards.

This developmental reading acquires a scientific appearance through neuroscience language. The child is described as “unreasonable because the frontal cortex has not developed” and as needing “the parent’s frontal cortex” (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025c). Resistance and impulsivity are thus distinguished from deliberate disobedience and attributed to a developing brain. While normalizing the child’s behavior, this account places the responsibility on the adult. Remaining calm becomes less a choice or virtue than an obligation to provide the self-regulatory capacity that the child does not yet possess.

A child’s well-being is linked to the need to be seen and emotionally nourished. Framing the dinner table as a space where the child is nourished “both physically [...] and emotionally” turns everyday family life into a therapeutic setting (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025a). The need for “a pat on the back, a stroke of the hair, and the words ‘Okay, I’m here’” makes physical closeness a condition of psychological regulation (Bir Aile Meselesi 2025c). The contrast between scheduled activities and “flexible compassion” likewise establishes emotional availability as a primary criterion of parenting (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025b).

Screen use, one of the most complex issues in parent-child relations within digital culture, is similarly reframed through the quality of the relationship rather than as a behavioral problem. The statement, “If you cannot offer something in its place, you cannot take away what they already have,” shifts the solution from prohibition to the parent’s capacity to build closeness and provide alternatives (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025a). This pattern is evident in the statement, “If a child plays with their hair or bites their nails, telling them to stop will not change it. This is an expression of inner unrest. Read it this way” (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025c). Behavior is treated as a sign of an unobserved emotional state. However, this approach, presented as reading from within, relies more on expert interpretation than on the child’s own account. The expert becomes the authoritative interpreter of the emotional truth behind behavior, while the parent is tasked with continual correct interpretation, self-regulation, and an appropriate response.

The *Grammar of the Parent-Child Relationship* theme (Figure 3) shows how the parent-child relationship is reframed as a therapeutic practice in the examined narratives. The grammar metaphor moves the relationship beyond spontaneous closeness, presenting it as a rule-governed system that must be learned, internalized and properly applied. At the center of these statements is the principle of connection before behavior.



Figure 3. The Grammar of the Parent-Child Relationship Theme Code Matrix

Everyday difficulties are explained through the quality of the relationship rather than the child’s specific behavior. “The first thing we do is establish the alliance—that bond—between parent and child,” and problems such as studying and tidying one’s room are expected to “resolve over time” once the bond is repaired (Bir Aile Meselesi,

2025c). If the child still struggles, the bond may be severely damaged, more time may be needed, or a neurobiological difference may exist. Within this framework, the relationship becomes both the source of the problem and the starting point of treatment, while the responsibility for the solution rests largely with the parent.

The redefinition of boundaries makes this relational logic increasingly visible. The statements “Boundaries do not mean rigidity” and “They are established through connection—within the relationship, with kindness” transform boundaries from authoritarian interventions into a form of contact that protects relationships (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025a). Yet authority remains intact. As the statement “Gentle boundaries are also very good for children” suggests, the authority to stop the child is preserved, but its legitimacy depends on avoiding harm and sustaining the bond (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025c). Since care without boundaries is said to exhaust parents, boundaries also become a condition for sustainable care (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025b).

Compassion is similarly presented as a practical regulation technique rather than as a purely moral value. The principle that “the first response is compassion” is described as a braking system that calms both the child’s and parent’s amygdalae during difficult moments (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025c). Here, neuroscientific language lends scientific authority to a normative relational ideal and makes the regulation of emotional responses an essential parental competence. This grammar extends to everyday domestic life. Linking peace at home to lower tension turns conversations at the table and before bedtime into moments of emotional connection. Fifteen minutes each day is prescribed as a practice of emotional nourishment to be maintained consistently as eating daily. Likewise, assigning responsibility is framed less as getting chores done than as “sharing life” and making the child feel like part of a whole (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025a).

Taken together, the data show that continually producing relationships through conversation, compassion, kindness, sharing, and self-regulation becomes parental competence. The statement

“Children heal through relationships. Children learn through relationships” summarizes this understanding (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025a). However, constructing the relationship as grammar also standardizes correct and incorrect forms of intimacy. Thus, parenting becomes a form of therapeutic work that extends beyond experience and intuition, requiring the continual application of rules defined by expert knowledge.

The “*You First*” or *Parental Subjectivation* theme (Figure 4) shows that in the narratives examined, good parenting begins with the parent’s psychological state rather than the child’s behavior. Moving away from the previous themes’ focus on behavior, relationships, and the past, the narrative turns to the parent’s inner world. Self-care thus ceases to be a personal choice and becomes a condition of parental competence.

Code System	Episode 78 The Key to Raising Children	Episode 92 I'm Tired of Parenting	Episode 112 Parenting Guide	SUM
▼ "You First" or Parental Subjectivation				0
• The Imperative of Inner Balance				17
• Acknowledging and Normalizing Fatigue				9
• Knowing How to Seek Support				6
Σ SUM	2	25	5	32

Figure 4. “You First” or Parental Subjectivation Theme Code Matrix

This discursive move explains parenting difficulties through the parent’s internal balance. The statement that “those who struggle in their inner world struggle even more with parenting” points less to the child than to adults “who have issues with themselves” (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025c). The child is cast as a figure who “scratches,” “tickles,” and “triggers” previously hidden unrest (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025a). Rather than being the primary cause of difficulty, the child becomes a diagnostic tool that reveals the parent’s psychological reality. This reading sidelines the social and material conditions of parenting problems and locates their explanation within the individual.

The language of temperament deepens this individualization further. Anxiety, controlling tendencies, dramatization, and impulsivity are listed as risks that intensify fatigue. Women with “impulsive, reactive temperaments” are described as tenser and angrier when sleep-deprived and overstimulated (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025b). Although the

same excerpt mentions a partner's lack of support, the explanatory focus shifts to the woman's temperament: as the link between burnout and unequal caregiving weakens, the experience is framed as a problem aggravated by individual sensitivity.

Within this framework, self-care is legitimized not as a right independent of parenting but as a means of better caring for the child. The statement, "You cannot be a good parent without feeling well as an individual, as a woman, or as a man," makes this logic explicit (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025b). Rest gains value through its contribution to sustainable performance and the capacity to offer compassion to children. Accordingly, "eighty percent-effort parenting" is recommended, as it preserves warmth and compassion (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025b).

However, the narratives do more than pathologize fatigue; they also seek to alleviate the shame surrounding it. By stating that "fatigue is not actually a weakness," they redefine it as an outcome of presence and effort. Encouraging parents to seek help also offers a way to break the silence. Yet the claim that "they may not know how to ask for help" turns inadequate support networks into a skill the individual must acquire (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025b). Even as the statement "this concerns all of us" approaches collective responsibility, the solution remains with the parent who monitors themselves, recognizes their needs, and asks for help. Parents are thus reassured while simultaneously required to work on themselves. The call "You First" consequently carries a tension between the emancipatory language of self-compassion and therapeutic subjectivation that individualizes responsibility.

The *Legacy of the Past vs. the Impasse of the Present* theme (Figure 5) constitutes the most complex and contradictory domain in the analysis. In the narratives examined, burnout was attributed to economic conditions, demanding work schedules, urbanization, and the erosion of support networks, as well as parents' past experiences and psychological characteristics. The coexistence of these two levels reveals why, despite acknowledging structural causes, solutions remain centered on parents' self-work.



Figure 5. The Legacy of the Past vs. the Impasse of the Present Theme Code Matrix

The structural account is clearest in the claim that the "frantic" pace and "compulsory individualism" intensify parental burnout. In the Turkish context, this burden is shaped by the simultaneous operation of capitalist work rhythms and traditional expectations of motherhood. The statement, "The demands persist, while the expectation of the traditional mother figure never diminishes," shows that caregiving responsibilities have not eased with modernization but have expanded through new demands. Likewise, "Motherhood is held sacred. But if it is so sacred, mothers should also be supported" exposes the contradiction between symbolic exaltation and material neglect (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025b).

Moreover, the structural critique does not extend to proposed solutions. After stating that "we cannot change our economic conditions," the narrative recommends relinquishing control and "learning to accept help" (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025b). Thus, a tacit distinction is drawn between social conditions deemed immutable and individual attitudes considered transformable. Although the social sources of the problem remain visible, the intervention shifts to the self-managing parent.

The transmission of the past into present-day parenting deepens this individualization through psychodynamic explanations. "Whatever is in our repertoire, we reflect in our relationship with the child" links the capacity for care and intimacy to experiences inherited from previous generations (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025c). For parents scarred by their own childhoods, the idealization of "I will be this kind of mother," through which they seek to compensate for unmet needs, turns past deprivation into an unsustainable project extending from organic baby food to sleep schedules (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025b). This dynamic fuels both the desire to parent better and parental burnout.

This pattern finds its emotional counterpart in the parents' critical inner voice. Thoughts such as "I have ruined both my own life and a child's" are described as burdens that damage the bond (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025b). Yet such doubt is also treated as evidence of awareness and the capacity for change: "If they regard this as an issue [...] they are fit to be a parent" (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025c). The narrative thus presents the structural impasses of the present as largely immutable, while rendering the legacy of the past open to intervention through awareness and self-work. Consequently, parents are recognized as victims of their circumstances, while being held responsible for managing their psychological consequences.

The *Therapeutic Authority on the Digital Podium* theme (Figure 6) was structurally distinct from the other five themes. Whereas the preceding themes analyze what the discourse says, this theme reveals how it is produced and by whom it is legitimized. Although it comprises only three codes, its having the highest reference density per code is not a coincidence. This is where the legitimizing foundation sustaining the entire narrative is constructed.



Figure 6. Therapeutic Authority on the Digital Podium Theme Code Matrix

The first layer of this foundation is the fusion of personal experiences and professional expertise. Experts shaping the channel's parenting narrative speak as both clinical practitioners and parents, and the fluidity between these identities becomes a source of authority. In the statement, "When we prioritize the bond—I tell parents in sessions—you will see that those issues resolve over time," clinical observation and personal judgment merge into a single claim. Recounting a conflict with their own child, one expert admits, "I cannot always understand what you are feeling and manage the process well" (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025c). However, this

confession does not weaken authority; it reinforces it through the model of a self-reflective parent who recognizes mistakes and repairs the relationship. Therefore, vulnerability becomes both a means of identification and an evidence of therapeutic competence.

Scientific references add a second layer of legitimacy to the claims. Findings from various studies are embedded in everyday narratives, while methodological details remain obscured. Beyond providing information, science transforms normative judgments about relationships and self-regulation into factual claims. For example, after stating, "I think there is a misinterpretation there," the expert locates the error not with the researchers but with those sharing the study (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025a). This positions the expert as an authoritative interpreter who determines the proper meaning of science without rejecting it.

The audience community, the third layer, reveals the platform-specific nature of therapeutic authority. The emergence of an "I am not alone" feeling in the comments is treated as evidence that the episode has worked (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025b). Calls for likes and shares are justified by the goals of reaching more people and growing the channel. Therapeutic benefit, platform engagement, and the circulation of the channel hosts' book thus converge within the visibility economy. Nevertheless, the community is as exclusionary as it is inclusive. Describing commenters who explain why the advice cannot be applied as "internally troubled people" turns criticism from a difference of opinion into a sign of psychological inadequacy (Bir Aile Meselesi, 2025a).

Overall, clinical knowledge, personal testimonies, and discursive appeals to audience participation operate as mutually reinforcing resources for constructing therapeutic authority. Claims made in the preceding themes about children's behavior, proper relationships, parents' inner worlds, and the legacy of the past derive their normative force from this hybrid authority. Thus, the digital therapeutic discourse constructs the expert as someone who knows, lives, and heals alongside the audience it addresses, while turning parenting into an

ongoing project to be learned under the expert's guidance.

Conclusion

With digitalization, parenting has become an experience lived at home but is increasingly judged by standards learned from screens. Expert videos, podcasts, and social media content bring childrearing knowledge into everyday life while generating new criteria for parental self-assessment. Woven from psychology, neuroscience, attachment, and communication, this repertoire redraws the boundaries of "perfect parenting." This study asks what model of parenting these narratives deem desirable, whom they hold responsible, and through which forms of authority they gain credibility. Accordingly, the *Bir Aile Meselesi* YouTube channel was selected as the case study, and its three most popular parenting episodes were thematically analyzed. The analysis examined how parents, children, and their relationships are construed; what kind of subject parents are called to become; and how expert knowledge is legitimized online.

The findings show that digital therapeutic discourse constructs the parent as a relational subject capable of interpreting the emotional meanings underlying a child's behavior. Children are portrayed as beings who need to be seen and understood, and whose developmental and neurobiological characteristics must be recognized. Thus, anger, defiance, screen use, and boundary violations become signs of unmet needs or relational disruption. This approach offers an important departure from punishment- and obedience-based parenting by recognizing children as participants in relationships. However, when parents are tasked with deciphering the meanings behind behavior, this humane approach creates a new regime of responsibility. They are expected to regulate the household's emotional climate, balance boundaries and closeness, control reactions, and repair relational ruptures. The call to abandon perfection transforms rather than eliminates expectations. The concept of the "therapeutically competent parent"

captures this reformulation: competence lies not in avoiding mistakes but in recognizing them, tracing their causes, and repairing relationships appropriately. As the standard softens, parental self-surveillance deepens.

This self-reflexive call crystallizes around the idea of "You First." Calls to restore inner balance, recognize exhaustion, seek support, and practice self-compassion make invisible burnout speakable, opening up space to ease guilt. Yet current conflicts are often traced to parents' childhoods, intergenerational transmission, inner voices, and unresolved emotional burdens. Hereby, parents become both the site of diagnosis and the primary locus of change. When gendered caregiving inequalities, economic hardship, work patterns, time poverty, and inadequate public support remain peripheral, structurally produced difficulties may be recoded as problems of internal balance. Herein lies the study's central tension: while the therapeutic narrative acknowledges parental exhaustion and offers a compassionate language, it locates responsibility for the child's present and future in parental psychological competence. In this way, it operates between relief and obligation, self-acceptance, and continuous self-correction.

Taken together, these results suggest that the normative force of this parenting ideal is closely tied to the hybrid form of therapeutic authority constructed within the video narratives. This authority draws on clinical experience, claims to scientific legitimacy, and experts' parenting stories. Within this configuration, accounts of conflict, exhaustion, and mistakes recast vulnerability, reflexivity, and relationship repair as markers of credible expertise. Colloquial language, personal disclosure, and a shared sense of "we" contribute to a relational mode of authority grounded in affective proximity rather than professional distance. The platform context provides a communicative setting in which authority is articulated through intimacy, authenticity, and appeals to participation. Platform-oriented appeals further situate therapeutic expertise within the communicative environment of YouTube. Rather than diminishing pro-

fessional knowledge, the softening of the author's tone reconfigures expertise through the convergence of clinical knowledge, experiential credibility, and affective proximity.

Overall, this study shows that parenting narratives in digital therapeutic culture construct the ideal of the "perfect parent" through compassionate, relationship-centered language that is attentive to the child's subjectivity. However, this study has several limitations. Most fundamentally, the purposive sample of three episodes from a single channel limits the scope of the interpretations. Because the analysis focuses on spoken discourse, its conclusions concern how therapeutic authority and appeals to participation are constructed discursively within the selected videos. They do not extend to visual framing, body language, viewer responses, recommendation systems, algorithmic circulation, or economic processes through which content gains visibility. Accordingly, calls for likes and shares, references to viewer comments, and the promotion of the channel's book are interpreted as features of spoken narratives rather than as evidence of actual audience engagement or broader platform effects. The researcher's theoretical position likewise shaped the construction of the themes, forming both the limits and the possibilities of interpretation. Future studies could address these limitations by comparing platforms and expert profiles and examining how parenting narratives intersect with gender, class, and working conditions. Audience research, multimodal discourse analysis, and longitudinal studies could further reveal how therapeutic knowledge changes as it moves from the screen to everyday decisions.

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Ethical Approval: Ethical committee approval was not required for this study because The study did not involve human participants, animals, personal data, interviews, surveys, or experimental procedures.

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