

PARENT/CHILD DISTAL RELATIONSHIPS: A LOOK AT COMMUNICATION
USED BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER A PARENTAL ABSENCE

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ABSTRACT

This project examined communication in distal parent-child relationships. Distal relationships are relations in which people are physically separated for a period of time. In this study, the focus was families which had a parent leave their partner and child(ren) for 2 months or longer. The study investigated uncertainty reduction and uncertainty management among family members, using systems theory as a general framework for analysis. Participants were 54 parents and children from families who had a parent separated by incarceration or military deployment. This study found that these participants maintained their relationships while the parent was absent by using a set of communication strategies and by managing their emotional climate with three closeness techniques and three distancing techniques. The findings in this study have implications for research on communication and meaning, regulating closeness and distance in relationships, and use of relational maintenance behaviors.