

Studijní text pro studenty PSY260

Z knihy:

Developmental Psychopathology and Family Process:
Theory, Research, and Clinical Implications

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Intergenerational Transmission of Parenting

Earlier theories on the origins of maltreatment often took the form of main effect models in which childhood experiences of maltreatment were regarded as being the predominant, overpowering force that drove individuals to become maltreating parents (e.g., Steele, 1976). At the other extreme, other researchers have concluded that the intergenerational transmission of parenting disturbances is a "myth to be placed aside" (Kaufman & Zigler, 1989, p. 135). Which view is correct? Most developmental psychopathologists eschew either of these extreme views in favor of the conclusion that there appears to be a modest transmission of parenting disturbances across generations. However, the key to understanding this transmission from a developmental psychopathology perspective lies not only in ascertaining the magnitude of effect, but also in focusing on answers to questions that specify context and process. Central questions include the following: (1) For whom and under what conditions does the risk of experiencing maltreatment carry over and affect an individual's role as a parent? Alternatively, (2) can we identify the people and conditions that are most likely to break the cycle of maltreatment? (3) Why or through what specific channels does this intergenerational transmission of parenting distress operate? The first two questions are geared toward identifying the intrapersonal (e.g., personality, temperament, coping styles) and interpersonal (e.g., social support, family instability, marital quality) moderators that strengthen (i.e., potentiating factors) or weaken (i.e., protective factors) the linkage of parenting problems across generations. The final question focuses on the complementary task of identifying the processes that play a mediating role in maintaining developmental continuity of parenting disturbances. Thus, these are the directions and avenues indicated by the developmental psychopathology perspective for future research on understanding the intergenerational transmission of parenting practices associated with maltreatment.

CONCLUSION

A salient theme in our review of parenting from a developmental psychopathology perspective is the need for broader contextual models of parenting as an influence on child development. Moreover, it is evident that certain additional aspects of parental behavior in families (e.g., the quality of marital relations or the lack thereof), in particular, merit consideration as dimensions of parenting (i.e., significant parental influences on children within families). Thus, in addition to supporting broader, familywide models of influences on children, Chapters 8 and 9 are also relevant to future directions in the conceptualization of parenting as a factor in children's development in families.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Children and the Marital Subsystem

Models of family and child development have focused on parent-child relationships. While these relationships are primary influences on development, it is increasingly apparent that other family factors also affect children's adjustment in families (Belsky, 1984; see Figure II.1). Research over the past two decades provides substantial support for the proposition that interparental relations have considerable influence on children's development in families. Given their relevance for conceptualization of family influences on children, the issues raised by a developmental psychopathology approach to the study of families and children merits consideration at the outset.

The study of marital functioning and child development provides striking examples of the need for more complex models of relations between human development and contexts of development provided by the developmental psychopathology approach. For example, scores of studies, with the earliest published in the 1920s and 1930s (e.g., Towle, 1931; Watson, 1925), document relations between marital discord and child adjustment (Emery, 1982; Grych & Fincham, 1990). Dozens of studies have also documented that children are distressed by exposure to marital conflict. A summary of these studies is shown in Table 8.1, indicating that there is ample evidence based upon carefully controlled studies to document the idea that exposure to adults' anger and conflict is disturbing to children.

Research based on parents' reports of children's reactions to marital conflict in the home also documents these associations. The following example is based upon a mother's report of the reactions of a 20-month-old child.

"I was very upset about, well, I still had the flu virus and I wasn't feeling very well. And the house was a shambles, where the children had been running and

TABLE 8.1. Studies Showing Exposure to Marital Conflict Is Distressing for Children

Study	Sample	Comparison	Response
<u>Studies of behavioral emotional responding</u>			
Cummings, Zahn-Waxler, and Radke-Yarrow (1981)	24 children between 10 and 20 months of age; behavior in the home reported over a period of 9 months	Naturally occurring anger > naturally occurring affection	Distress, no attention and response
Cummings, Iannotti, and Zahn-Waxler (1985)	90 2-year-olds	Adults' anger > adults' positive emotions	Distress
Cummings (1987)	85 5-year-olds	Adults' anger > adults' positive emotions	Negative emotions, positive emotions, preoccupation
El-Sheikh, Cummings, and Goetsch (1989)	34 4- to 5-year-olds	Adults' anger > adults' positive emotions	Freezing, facial distress, postural distress, verbal concern, anger, smiling, preoccupation
Klaczynski and Cummings (1989)	40 first- to third-grade boys	Adults' anger > adults' positive emotions	Facial distress, postural distress, freezing
<u>Studies of self-reported emotions</u>			
Cummings, Vogel, Cummings, and El-Sheikh (1989)	121 4- to 9-year-olds	Hostile verbal and nonverbal anger all friendly interactions	Negative emotional responses (anger, fear, sadness)
Ballard and Cummings (1990)	35 6- to 10-year-olds	Verbal, indirect nonverbal, destructive, and aggressive anger all friendly interactions	Anger, distress
Cummings, Ballard, El-Sheikh, and Lake (1991)	98 5- and 19-year-olds	Unresolved anger partially resolved anger friendly interactions	Anger, sadness, fear
Cummings, Ballard, and El-Sheikh (1992)	60 9- and 19-year-olds	Hostile, verbal, and nonverbal anger all friendly interactions	Negative emotional responses (anger, fear, sadness)

Note. From Cummings and Zahn-Waxler (1992). Copyright 1992 by Springer-Verlag. Adapted by permission.

pulling out toys, and the dishes had not been done, and there were clothes on the floor (they played mommies). So the house was in bad shape. So I put Clara to bed and I made Tommy go to his room to rest. And then I ran down to the kitchen to put away some of the things that were out of the refrigerator in there, and things that would spoil. And Dick was in the kitchen and I yelled at him, 'I don't care if this house stays a mess forever, I am not picking up another

damn thing.' And I screamed to the top of my lungs, I was mad and I was furious. . . . And in a squeaky voice . . . I heard Clara say, 'Mommy, shut up.' She said this about three times. The whole incident didn't last longer than 15 seconds." (Cummings, Zahn-Waxler, & Radke-Yarrow, 1981, p. 1276)

However, matters are far less clear-cut than simply that the occurrence of marital discord directly affects children's adjustment. As we will see, research on the effects of children's exposure to marital conflict aptly demonstrates the importance of multidimensional assessment of both interparental conflict and children's reactions to discord. For example, not all forms of marital conflict are distressing for children to observe as bystanders. Whereas conflicts that include physical aggression between the parents are highly disturbing to children, those that are fully resolved, or constructive, may not be distressing at all (Cummings, Ballard, El-Sheikh, & Lake, 1991; Jenkins & Smith, 1991). As a reflection of the relevance of holism to the assessment of children's reactions, research indicates that children's reactions are indicated by emotional, cognitive, social, and even physiological responding (El-Sheikh, Cummings, & Goetsch, 1989; Katz & Gottman, 1995a), but no one response dimension in isolation is necessarily a reliable index of the impact of marital conflict. Thus, some children do not show distress behaviorally when faced with marital conflict but report covert feelings of anger or distress. Other children even smile or laugh during conflicts, then later act out aggressively toward peers, suggesting that the exposure induced considerable negative emotional arousal (Cummings, 1987).

However, it has clearly been shown that one must look beyond direct relations between exposure to marital conflict and children's reactions to understand the effects of these events on children within families. This illustrates even further the value of a holistic perspective. In particular, parenting practices are affected by high marital conflict, with parents from conflictual marriages more likely to evidence lax or inconsistent discipline, hostility, emotional unavailability or unresponsivity toward children, or other parenting deficits (Erel & Burman, 1995). Moreover, the emotional relationship or attachment between parents and children may be undermined by high marital conflict, with children from conflictual homes more likely to develop insecure attachments (Davies & Cummings, 1994). Interestingly, a recent meta-analysis on relations between marital discord, parenting, and child adjustment suggested that good parent-child relations do *not* moderate the effects of high marital conflict on children; that is, a buffering hypothesis, despite its appeal (Emery, 1982), failed to find support in an important meta-analysis (Erel & Burman, 1995) of the substantial literature in this area.

There is also evidence for the importance of the active organism assumption; that is, characteristics of individual children are factors in outcomes resulting from marital discord. Thus, boys and girls may react quite differently to conflict (Cummings, Iannotti, & Zahn-Waxler, 1985), and these reactions may be mediated by quite different processes of responding to these events (e.g., threat, self-blame; Cummings, Davies, & Simpson, 1994; Grych, Seid, &

Fincham, 1992; Kerig, 1997). As another example of the relevance of individual child characteristics, children who show aggression as a personality characteristic are more prone to react to conflict exposure with emotional arousal (Klaczynski & Cummings, 1989) and aggressivity (Cummings et al., 1985) than children who are less aggressive.

Another fundamental assumption of developmental psychopathology, the principle of directionality, is illustrated by the repeated finding that children are sensitized by repeated exposure to high marital conflict. Thus, children repeatedly exposed to intense marital conflict are more emotionally (e.g., angry, distressed) and behaviorally (aggressive, prone to mediate in parental disputes) reactive to these events and report cognitive reactions indicative of greater threat and self-blame (Cummings, 1994). Heightened reactivity to conflict, in turn, has been related to increased risk for adjustment problems in children. Accordingly, there is evidence for a cumulative effect of exposure to marital conflict on children, which is hypothesized to set in motion more general processes that underlie the greater risk for adjustment problems in children from these home environments (i.e., a greater sense of emotional insecurity about family functioning; Davies & Cummings, 1994). Over time, it is presumed that these cumulative effects influence pathways and trajectories of development, including risk for psychopathology and specific forms of psychopathology.

There also is evidence that the broader family environment moderates the effects of marital conflict on children, further illustrating a holistic perspective on risk factors and children's adjustment. Notably, the risk for adjustment problems associated with marital conflict may vary as a function of parental adjustment, quality of interparental attachments, and family emotional climate, including emotional expressiveness. Socioeconomic and other family factors may also play a role, although these issues have only begun to be explored.

Finally, if we are to agree with Sroufe (1990) that considering the abnormal and normal together is the "essence" of developmental psychopathology, then the study of marital conflict is inherently a good fit; that is, marital conflict is, at the same time, normal and abnormal. It is normal in the sense that it is inevitable, taking place in virtually all marriages, and by no means necessarily dysfunctional or problematic. In fact, the avoidance of important marital and family issues may be far more problematic than their discussion (Gottman, 1994). Marital discussion of significant and real areas of disagreement, which qualifies it as a "conflict" event by most definitions (Shantz, 1987), can be beneficial, helpful, and even necessary, with good outcomes for both parents and children. On the other hand, some forms of conflict are caustic for marriages, poisonous for children, and a major source of emotional and adjustment problems for parents and children alike. Thus, it is important to study all forms of conflict in relation to each other, and to examine the outcomes of the many ways that families handle disagreements to determine the forms are ultimately constructive and "normal," and those that are destructive and "abnormal."

We provide a template from a developmental psychopathology perspective for the matters to be considered in much greater depth as the chapter unfolds. As an introduction, we present a topical overview of what is to come. To stress the importance of these issues for understanding children's normal and psychopathological development, we briefly examine general relations between marital functioning and child adjustment, with a focus on marital conflict, which has been most closely linked with children's adjustment problems. Highlighting the importance of studying the normal and abnormal together, we consider evidence suggesting that the effects of marital conflict vary as a function of the risk status of families and children; thus, risk status is a moderator of the effects of marital conflict on children (see Chapter 5).

Next, we introduce a developmental psychopathology framework for understanding children's development as a function of marital conflict and discuss a variety of pathways through which marital conflicts affect children, examining direct effects of marital conflict on children, including identification of the dimensions of marital conflict associated with risk and vulnerability, and protection and compensation. We then consider indirect effects, that is, effects due to the impact of marital conflict on parenting and family functioning, then examine important moderators of effects (e.g., parental psychopathology, children's gender). Consistent with a holistic emphasis on understanding patterns and processes at an overall level of analysis, we review theoretical models that serve to unify the study of mediating and moderating processes associated with marital conflict. This discussion focuses on the "emotional security hypothesis" as an example of a model that has received empirical support. Finally, we look at a relatively new area for research, that is, research concerning pathways of development associated with marital conflict, and briefly outline future directions. Consistent with the notion that the developmental psychopathology tradition and corresponding research on childhood disorders are only beginning to emerge, we see that the parameters defining *comprehensive* models of factors linking marital conflict to children's adjustment are only beginning to be articulated. Throughout, we note key principles and issues from the developmental psychopathology perspective as they relate to understanding the impact of marital conflict on children.

MARITAL CONFLICT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PSYCHOPATHOLOGY IN CHILDREN

Positive marital relations form a powerful foundation for healthy family functioning. The importance of the support and positive foundation for optimal parenting and family functioning that is provided by healthy, happy, intact marriages merits emphasis at the outset. Thus, marital satisfaction is linked with secure parent-child attachment and with positive father-child and mother-child relationships (Cummings & O'Reilly, 1997). Recent research suggests that secure interspousal relations compensate when marital partners

have had insecure attachments to their own parents in childhood, and, as a consequence, foster the development of secure attachments with their own children (Colin, 1996). There are also numerous correlates of intact marital relations (e.g., more optimal parenting practices) that serve to foster the healthy socioemotional development of children.

On the other hand, conflict-ridden marital relations have been consistently linked with children's adjustment problems, which makes such behaviors immediately relevant to developmental psychopathology models for children's development in families. As we have noted, support for the association between marital conflict and child adjustment has been consistent over the years (Baruch & Wilcox, 1944; Gassner & Murray, 1969; Jouriles, Bourg, & Farris, 1991; Porter & O'Leary, 1980; Rutter, 1970) and is also reported cross-culturally (Lindahl & Malik, 1999) (extensive reviews are provided by Cummings & Davies, 1994a; Grych & Fincham, 1990). However, early research simply established relations between general marital adjustment and adjustment problems in children. The findings did not necessarily implicate marital conflict per se as the causal agent, or clarify the nature of the processes involved. Other aspects of dysfunctional marriages also might contribute to adjustment problems in children, for example, partners' unhappiness with each other or the absence of intimate communication between them (Jouriles, Bourg, & Farris, 1991). Recent work, however, identifies marital conflict as a particularly important aspect of marital functioning with regard to children's development. First, marital conflict has been shown to be typical of distressed marriages. Second, it has been found to be a better predictor of a wide range of children's problems than general marital distress. Finally, marital conflict is more closely associated with children's problems than other individual aspects of distressed marriages (Cummings & Davies, 1994a).

Thus, the notion that "problem" marriages increase the likelihood of "problem" children is thus certainly not new. However, recent work suggests that the way parents handle their differences or conflicts is related to children's risk for psychopathology. As a consequence, research is increasingly concerned with discriminating between constructive and destructive interparental conflict styles from the perspective of the children, on the assumption that understanding such a distinction holds a key to predicting positive and negative outcomes for children due to the quality of interparental relations (Davies & Cummings, 1998). Adult-oriented research on marital quality and trajectories of marital relations over time have shown the importance of differentiating between constructive and destructive marital conflict styles, both for the purposes of scientific explanation and as a foundation for more effective therapeutic interventions (Gottman, 1994; Notarius & Markman, 1993). Consequently, reflecting these emphases in the literature, this chapter carefully examines children's vulnerability or protection due to different ways in which parents handle their differences. Notably, consistent with the view that the normal and abnormal need to be studied together, recent work suggests that when marital conflict is resolved positively, children learn valuable lessons

about handling their own inevitable conflicts that result in more adaptive social conflict resolution strategies with peers and others; that is, conflict can have a positive, as opposed to simply a non-negative, outcome (Beach, 1995; Davies, 1995). On the other hand, children's exposure to interparental hostility and violence is a significant source of adversity and contributes to their risk for psychopathology (Holden, Stein, Ritchie, Harris, & Jouriles, 1998). Oddly, despite the evidence on the association between interparental violence and adjustment problems in children, this was not widely recognized until recently. Accordingly, Jaffe, Wolfe, and Wilson (1990) noted in *Children of Battered Women* that "it was not until the past decade that family discord and spousal violence reached center stage as possible predeterminants of developmental psychopathology" (p. 33).

Relations between marital conflict and children's adjustment problems, often reported in nonclinical samples, are even more robust predictors of childhood disorders in clinical samples, particularly when there is marital violence (Jouriles, Bourg, & Farris, 1991); that is, consistent with the notion that process relations are best illustrated by examining the normal and abnormal together, more powerful effects of marital conflict on children are observed in family environments that are also otherwise at-risk. While mild to moderate relations between marital conflict and child adjustment are found in studies of normal community samples, moderate to strong relations are reported when at-risk samples (e.g., violent marriages) are examined (Fincham & Osborne, 1993; Wolfe, Jaffe, Wilson, & Zak, 1985). Thus, marital conflict is reported as a highly significant factor in children's adjustment in families with parental divorce (Amato & Keith, 1991; Emery, 1988, 1994; Hetherington et al., 1992), parental psychopathology, especially depression (Downey & Coyne, 1990), alcoholism (El-Sheikh & Cummings, 1997; West & Prinz, 1987), and sexual and physical abuse (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Jouriles, Barling, & O'Leary, 1987). Thus, different pictures emerge with regard to the extent of relations between marital conflict and child adjustment as a function of the relative normality of family environments, implicating the broader family environment as significant to the effects associated with high marital conflict. Accordingly, the magnitude of relations between marital conflict and child adjustment is moderated by the overall adaptiveness and level of resources that characterize the family environment.

Consistent with the point that healthy interparental relations form a strong foundation for family functioning and child development, the absence of marital relations can present considerably greater problems. A number of factors may account for this, including a severe lack of socioemotional and financial supports for the custodial parent and children; fewer consistent, close adult-child attachment figures for children; reduced opportunities for parental warmth and supervision, greater stress on the remaining parent; and reduced safety and educational/societal resources associated with conditions of lower socioeconomic status (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). However, the absence of a marital partner should not be understood to mean that children

in single-parent families are not exposed to interadult anger and conflict, or violence, for that matter, in their socioemotional environment. Other adult partners who do not become spouses, relatives, or other adults in the context of unstable family situations may each serve to continue or increase the level of conflict and violence in the child's environment. Moreover, conflict may continue, or worsen, with ex-spouses or ex-partners, despite the absence of current, or even past, formal and legal relations (Wallerstein & Blakslee, 1989).

While marital conflict has traditionally been associated with children's risk for aggressiveness, conduct disorder, and other "externalizing" problems, in fact, it has repeatedly been linked with a variety of other disturbances in children, including behavioral and emotional disturbances, social and interpersonal problems, and school problems (Cummings & Davies, 1994a). In fact, recent research relying on methodologies that are more sensitive to children's covert as well as overt processes of adjustment suggests that marital conflict may be more closely linked with internalizing problems of anxiety, sadness, and insecurity than with "acting-out" disorders per se. In other words, the impact of marital conflict is pervasive rather than specific to any particular disorder, suggesting, again, the importance of broadband or holistic assessments of the effects of these family processes.

On the other hand, it is important to bear in mind that many other factors in families affect children's development besides marital conflict. Furthermore, children are active contributors to their own development and may be quite resilient even in the face of considerable adversity, including extreme marital discord and violence. Relatedly, consistent with a developmental psychopathology perspective and advancing understanding of pathways of development, the children who do not develop disorders in highly adverse circumstances are just as interesting as those who do. Currently, the emphasis is on the study of the psychopathological outcomes that occur in these homes, but it is important also to pay attention to children who do not develop disorders.

A FRAMEWORK FOR A PROCESS-ORIENTED PERSPECTIVE OF THE IMPACT OF MARITAL CONFLICT ON CHILDREN'S ADJUSTMENT

As we saw in Chapter 2, a hallmark of the developmental psychopathology approach is a focus on the processes that account for relations between predictors and outcome variables. A framework that reflects the complexity of family processes and factors associated with the effects of marital conflict on children is presented in Figure 8.1, which makes a distinction between constructive and destructive marital relations. Marital relations are portrayed as having not only direct effects on children's psychological functioning but also indirect effects mediated by effects on parenting. Psychological functioning (i.e., emotional, social, behavioral, cognitive, physiological reactions) is by

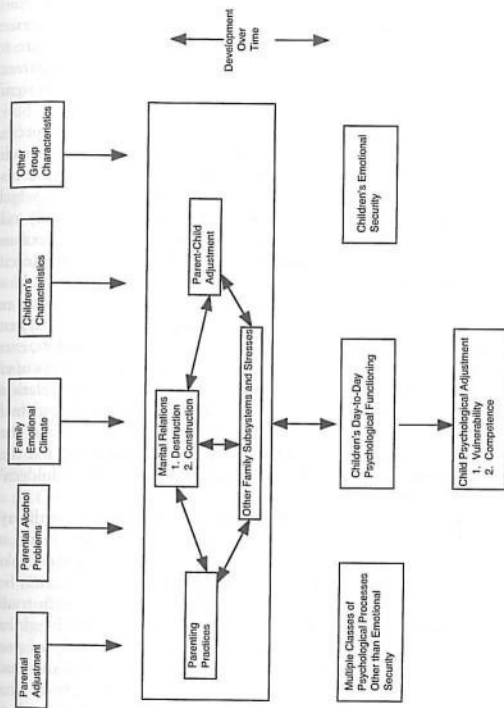


FIGURE 8.1. A framework for the effects of marital conflict on children.

pothesized as mediating children's adjustment, with marital conflict processes either increasing vulnerability or competence. Moderator variables are hypothesized to include family context (e.g., parental adjustment, family emotional climate, socioeconomic scale, and other family factors), and child characteristics (e.g., gender, personality, or temperament). With regard to specific mediating processes of psychological adjustment, children's sense of emotional security is represented as one significant class of psychological processes likely to be affected by marital conflict, either directly, due to exposure to marital conflict, or indirectly, due to the effects of marital conflict on parenting practices. In Figure 8.1, the relevance of pathways of development is signified by the notation "development over time."

The framework in Figure 8.1 thus places emphasis on studying specific contexts of exposure to marital conflict and its effects on the family and individual differences between children in their reactions to it, including their histories of exposure and the multidimensional nature of coping processes, which are central, as is the impact of marital conflict on changes in the family system's overall level of functioning. The intent is to capture a holistic perspective on marital relations, family functioning, and child development. Recent findings in the literature on marital relations and child development have served to underscore the need for a familywide perspective on influences on children's development in families, rather than a focus on any one subsystem (e.g., parent-child) (Emery, Fincham, & Cummings, 1992). Nonetheless, even this relatively complex model does not account for all possible pathways of effect. For example, marital conflict may also have effects on children's relationships with siblings, with implications for processes of adaptation and maladaptation over time. Thus, Stocker and Youngblade (1999) reported that marital conflict is associated with problematic sibling relationships, and that the link between marital conflict and sibling rivalry is mediated by children's self-blame for interparental conflicts.

The model thus provides a basis for conceptualizing multiple pathways of effect associated with marital conflict and incorporates other forms of child and family adversity. Consistent with a developmental psychopathology perspective, emphases are placed on dynamic processes of interaction between multiple intra- and extraorganismic factors, as contrasted with traditional, relatively static notions of associations between relatively global characterizations of marital discord and child outcomes. The study of process is assumed to require the examination of multiple domains and responses (e.g., cognitive, emotional, physiological) and also effects that emerge over time (i.e., "sleeper" effects). For example, with regard to "sleeper effects," a young child exposed to high marital conflict may act as a caretaker for the parents and appear to be functioning well. However, these undue burdens on the child may contribute to the development of problems that emerge much later in development, that is, "sleeper effects," as illustrated in the vignette in Chapter 2.

DIRECT EFFECTS OF EXPOSURE TO MARITAL CONFLICT: DIMENSIONS OF MARITAL CONFLICT ASSOCIATED WITH RISK VERSUS PROTECTION

The effects of exposure to marital conflict on children depend a great deal on precisely how marital conflict is expressed. Marital conflict is normal, even inevitable. Thus, the issue is not whether marital conflict occurs, but how it occurs. Moreover, it is clear that (a) children react to the perceived meaning of conflicts for themselves and their families, not the occurrence, or even the form of the conflict; (b) the meaning is personal and emotional, evident in children's cognitive appraisals, emotional reactions, and coping behaviors; and (c) historical as well as current experience with marital conflict influences reactions.

Moreover, current theory and research suggest that children's stress and coping reactions provide a valuable window into the meaning of marital conflict from their perspective and also reflect broader patterns of response that mediate development (Cummings & Cummings, 1988; Emery, 1989; Davies & Cummings, 1994, 1998; Grych & Fincham, 1990); that is, marital conflict induces powerful emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses in bystanding children (Cummings & Davies, 1994a). Correlational studies have long indicated that children's stress and coping responses are related to their marital conflict history on the one hand, and their risk for adjustment problems on the other (e.g., Cummings & Davies, 1994a; Laumakis, Margolin, & John, 1998; Margolin, Christensen, & John, 1996). Empirical support for mediational models, albeit limited in the measurement of mediating processes, is now reported (e.g., Davies & Cummings, 1998; Harold & Conger, 1997; Harold, Fincham, Osborne, & Conger, 1997). Moreover, recent theory provides a rich conceptual foundation for mediational and moderational models (e.g., Cummings & Davies, 1996; Davies & Cummings, 1994; Emery, 1992; Grych & Fincham, 1990). Thus, there is evidence that children's stress and coping reactions reflect dynamic, process-level mediators of their adjustment over time.

Recent research is beginning to clarify the distinction between constructive and destructive marital conflict styles from the children's perspective. The former class of marital conflict styles might be considered protective or compensatory in terms of their effects on children and family functioning, whereas the latter can be regarded as increasing children's risk for adjustment problems. In the absence of long-term prospective studies and comprehensive, rigorous assessments of critical variables, any conclusions about distinctions between constructive and destructive conflict must be regarded as tentative. Nonetheless, certain tentative conclusions are suggested by current research.

Making distinctions between contexts of development that contribute to the emergence of children's problems versus those elements that foster more positive outcomes is consistent with the notion that contexts of development

need to be carefully defined and, when relevant, desegregated into their constituent parts (e.g., Boyce et al., 1998). This issue is particularly pertinent to the case of marital conflict because of the quite different effects on children depending upon how marital conflict is expressed. Thus, some forms of conflict expression appear to increase children's risk for adjustment problems, whereas other forms may be benign and even teach children valuable lessons about how to handle their own conflict. A reason for focusing on this topic is that understanding the distinction between constructive and destructive marital conflict behaviors can provide a basis for intervention in marital and family problems and also serve as an informed basis for the prevention of the development of problems, as well as full-blown psychopathology, in children.

As we will see later in this volume, prevention is an important direction within the developmental psychopathology tradition. Consistent with the pathways model of development outlined in Chapter 4, research must delineate those specific risk factors for children that predict the later development of problems, before they become severe enough to merit clinical diagnoses. Such models also support clinical or preventive interventions that are instituted before children develop serious problems and are aimed at ameliorating children's problems before they become chronic and severe, and, therefore, more resistant to treatment. We first consider the forms of marital conflict that appear to be associated with increased risk for maladjustment in children.

Physical Aggression or Violence

There is considerable evidence that physical violence in marital disputes is highly distressing to children observing such behaviors and increases their risk for adjustment problems (Emery, 1989). In analogue studies, children report that they perceive conflicts involving aggression as more negative, and they describe more negative emotional reactions to them (e.g., Cummings, Pellegrini, Notarius, & Cummings, 1989). Of course, analogue research conducted in the laboratory, as is the case for all experimental studies, leaves questions about whether the results generalize to other contexts. However, this finding has also received support based upon parental reports of children's reactions in the home (Cummings, Zahn-Waxler, & Radke-Yarrow, 1981). The pattern of results indicates that physical violence is among the most disturbing forms of marital interaction for children, and the form most clearly linked with their adjustment problems. However, other forms of aggression are also disturbing to children and related to adjustment problems, as is interparental violence. Thus, Ballard and Cummings (1990) reported that children react as negatively to analogue presentations of parental aggression toward objects as to interpartner aggression. In addition, Jouriles, McDonald, and Norwood (1996) found that other forms of marital aggression (e.g., insulting or swearing at the partner; throwing, smashing, or kicking something; threatening to hit or throw something at the partner) and marital violence were each correlated

with children's adjustment problems in both a marital therapy and a women's shelter sample. Furthermore, other, assessed forms of marital aggression still related to children's adjustment problems even after controlling for the frequency of marital violence.

Also, some types of conflicts may contain messages that children find as disturbing as marital violence. Thus, Laumakis, Margolin, and John (1998) reported that conflicts involving threats to leave physical aggression elicited similar, high levels of negative reactions from children. Moreover, conflicts involving threats to leave and physical aggression elicited more negative emotional reactions and predictions of negative outcomes than conflicts with name-calling, negative voice, or conflicts with positive affect. These results support the notion that children react to the negative implications of marital conflict for marital and family relationships, and support also the consideration of multiple types and expressions of marital and family conflict and violence in models of the effects of extreme marital discord on children.

Nonverbal Conflict or the Silent Treatment

Nonverbal forms of conflict expression are not adequately assessed by any of the questionnaire instruments used to record rates of different forms of marital conflict in the home. However, children's reactions to analogue presentations of nonverbal conflict, or "the silent treatment," indicate that they are significantly distressed by these behaviors, and, in some studies, reactions are indistinguishable from reactions to overt verbal conflicts. A disadvantage of nonverbal conflict expressions is that they are unlikely to lead to resolution of the possibly significant marital issues that motivated the behavior. A failure to address marital problems over time is associated with problems both for marriages and for children in families (Cummings & Davies, 1994a).

Intense Conflicts and Conflicts about Child-Related Themes

It makes sense that more intense conflicts would be more disturbing than less intense conflicts. Presumably, more intense anger expressions reflect more negative feelings toward the spouse and are more often accompanied by highly negative conflict expressions (e.g., contempt; Gottman, 1994). However, an important caveat is that greater emotionality may sometimes simply reflect expressiveness and be a matter of personal style of communication rather than an index of disrespect or anger toward the spouse. In such instances, intensity would *not* be expected to increase children's distress given that they understood the intent of the communication. There is support (Grych & Fincham, 1993) for the view that more intense conflicts elicit more negative reactions than less intense conflicts, but effects may vary to some extent as a function of children's family history. For example, Nixon and Cummings (1999) found that children from homes experiencing greater stress and distress due to the presence of a disabled sibling had a lower threshold for

intensity of responding emotionally and behaviorally to conflict than children from homes without a disabled sibling.

It makes sense intuitively that child-related themes of conflict would be more disturbing than other themes. Conflicts about child-related themes are linked with adjustment problems (Jouriles, Bourg, & Farris, 1991) and elicit more self-blame from children than conflicts about other issues (Grych & Fincham, 1993). However, themes of child-related conflict have been found either to elicit no differences in children's distress (Davies, Myers, & Cummings, 1996; Davies, Myers, Cummings, & Heindel, 1999) or even to reduce distress reactions, although a recent study was inconclusive on this point (Grych, 1998). Grych has speculated that these surprising results regarding distress reactions may reflect the possibility that children have a greater sense of personal control when conflicts are about them and, thus, less concern about whether something can be done to ameliorate the conflict. Thus, more important than whether themes involve the children may be whether the themes have relatively serious, negative implications for the family, regardless of the presence or absence of child content. Such a conceptualization is consistent with theoretical notions that children evaluate the meaning of conflict in determining how they will respond, rather than simply responding to the overt elements of conflict expression (e.g., emotional expressiveness, thematic content of the discussion). In fact, numerous studies have failed to support the hypothesis that children differentiate between the content of conflict scenarios in their responding when all other elements are made comparable (e.g., the relative seriousness vs. triviality of the issues for the marriage).

Withdrawal

In addition to overt conflict behavior, the withdrawal of parents from conflict may signal marital distress to children. The findings in this regard support the notion that children do not simply react to the expressiveness of conflict behavior. Katz and Gottman (1997a, 1997b) reported that husband withdrawal, indexed by observationally based codes of husband anger and stonewalling, predicts children's increased risk for adjustment problems. Notably, spousal withdrawal has been found consistently to predict future marital distress and is an even more significant predictor of future marital problems than overt marital conflict in some studies (Gottman, 1994). Pertinent to this point, Cox, Paley, and Payne (1997) found that marital withdrawal is more predictive of negative child outcomes than marital conflict. Again, the point is that these behaviors, while perhaps relatively subtle, can be reflective of significant marital distress, and it would appear from recent work that children, as well as spouses, are highly sensitive to the negative meaning of these communications.

In contrast to these forms of conflict expression, which appear to increase children's risk for problems, other ways of handling conflict have been found to have little negative effect and may possibly function as protective or compensatory events in the context of family functioning.

Mutually Respectful, Emotionally Modulated Conflicts

Only one study has examined the issue of mutually respectful conflict styles: Easterbrooks, Cummings, and Emde (1994) reported that toddlers evidenced little distress in reaction to conflictual discussions between parents in a sample that almost always expressed conflicts in mutually respectful, emotionally well-modulated tones. On the other hand, parental anger expression, which was relatively uncommon, was associated with negative emotional reactions by children even in this study.

Conflict Resolution

A long series of analogue studies has demonstrated that children's distress and other negative reactions are dramatically reduced when conflicts are resolved (Cummings & Davies, 1994a). In analogue studies, children are exposed to conflict on video- or audiotaped vignettes enacted by actors unknown to them. Frequently, children are asked to imagine that the actors are their parents and to respond as they would in the home to such conflict scenarios. The highly controlled presentation of stimuli in these analogue studies leaves little doubt that conflict resolution, rather than other factors, was responsible for the reduction in negative responding, which has significant theoretical implications regarding the importance of the meaning of conflicts, rather than simply their occurrence, for children's reactions (discussion to follow). Moreover, a recent field study based on a new questionnaire that assesses conflict resolution reported that marital conflict resolution is more consistently associated with child adjustment (i.e., reduced adjustment problems) than even negative elements of conflict (e.g., frequency, severity) (Kerig, 1996).

Furthermore, conflict resolution may sometimes ameliorate the negative impact of children's exposure to marital violence. Thus, Cummings, Simpson, and Wilson (1993) found ameliorative effects of conflict resolution on children's emotional responses to conflicts that were nonverbal, verbal, or that included physical aggression. However, again, it should be noted that children were responding to analogue presentations in this studies. Also, the actors' resolutions appeared genuine, and there was no history of prior conflict to compromise the apparent sincerity of the resolutions. As we will see later, children react to the meaning of conflicts for marital and family relations based on *both* their past histories of exposure to conflict, and the nature and form of current conflict stimuli. Although the question awaits empirical tests, children's responses to resolution may not be positive if chronic marital violence has occurred in the past within the family, even following supposed resolutions. On the other hand, conflict resolution may be relatively uncommon in high-conflict homes, so that such endings to conflicts might well carry *more*, rather than less, weight for such children. Consistent with this notion, Hennessy, Rabideau, Cicchetti, and Cummings (1994) found that physically abused children from high-conflict homes benefited more, rather than less, from conflict resolution than a comparison group.

However, a distinction should be made between reduced marital violence and constructive conflict. The model for disrespect, hostility, and negativity toward a loved one, indicated by violent behavior, mitigates against marital violence ever being constructive. Nonetheless, the meaning of marital violence for children may be modified by conflict resolutions/apologies; that is, the perception of immediate threat and danger to the self, marriage, and family may be reduced. The extent to which children's emotional security is increased is likely to depend upon the broader pattern of marital interactions. The severity and chronicity of violence is likely to be critical; that is, constructive messages may be more perceptible when marital aggression is relatively low in intensity (e.g., a single, low-intensity behavior) than when violence is intense, prolonged, and chronic. In summary, the relative impact of marital violence followed by resolution/apologies depends upon children's past and current appraisals and emotionality in response to marital conflict and violence; at the same time, children (marriages and families) are likely to benefit from any progress toward resolution and positive endings, even in the most negative family contexts.

Progress toward Resolution and Other Information about Resolution

Analogue studies also indicate that children benefit from any progress toward resolution; that is, distress reactions are reduced even when parents (actors) do not fully resolve conflicts. Furthermore, and somewhat surprisingly, children's distress reactions are much reduced even when adults have resolved conflicts behind closed doors, indicating resolution only by changed (to positive) affect after emerging from another room, entered in the midst of conflict. Children also benefit from hearing brief explanations that indicate conflicts have been resolved (Cummings, Simpson, & Wilson, 1993), or even that conflicts have *not* yet been resolved, but parents expect that they will be (Cummings & Wilson, 1999). Furthermore, children are sensitive to the emotional as well as thematic content of conflict resolution (Shifflet-Simpson & Cummings, 1996); that is, children are slightly more distressed by an angry apology than a friendly apology, but any form of apology elicits much less self-reported concern about the parents (actors) and personal distress than continued conflict.

However, examining children's reactions to specific elements of conflict can provide no more than an approximation of how the average child will react to family conflict, since children react to the meaning of conflict in the context of broader family functioning, including past histories of exposure to conflict and an understanding or interpretation of what parental communications mean. Consider the following:

Eddie and Mike, both preschoolers, were playing together in the living room of Eddie's house. Suddenly, there was a crash from the kitchen as a door slammed, and the children could hear Eddie's parents arguing

loudly. The argument went on and on, with both parents storming about, making demonstrative statements, and slamming kitchen cabinet doors. Mike was scared, because his own parents never fought in such a manner, but looking over at Eddie, he could see that his friend was not concerned at all. Eddie got up and went into the kitchen. When his parents saw him, they stopped fighting and the daddy said, "Your mother makes ravioli the wrong way. My mother did it the right way." The mother said, "Well, it is so sweet that your daddy cares so much about the cooking." The Daddy said, "And your Mother is such a great cook." Next, they kissed a lot and made up.

Eddie knew that his parents were not really all that mad at each other; it was just that they were both very demonstrative, cared a lot about cooking, and enjoyed the fun and stimulation of a vigorous back-and-forth on a topic. On the other hand, Mike's parents, who also had a happy marriage, were reserved and undemonstrative in their interactions about everyday problems. If Mike's parents had ever fought in the same manner as Eddie's parents, the meaning for Mike would have been that his parents' relationship was in a terrible state. The point is, research suggests that children are very sensitive to the meaning of parental communications, even differentiating between relatively subtle nuances of emotional communication and how conflicts end. However, more than that, children appear to take into account past histories of interaction when evaluating how to respond to current events. Thus, in learning that children respond to specific elements of conflicts in certain ways, we are only beginning to understand the impact of specific forms of marital communication on children. Consistent with the developmental psychopathology assumption of holism, it is necessary to understand the broader context and meaning of marital communication in order to understand its effects. Many of these questions ultimately await the conduct of appropriately data-intensive prospective longitudinal research; that is, they are open, empirical questions. However, as we have shown, considerable information suggests of what the answers may prove to be.

DEVELOPMENTAL PATHWAYS AND EXPERIENTIAL HISTORIES

Contextual factors associated with person-environment interactions are assumed to underlie process. Thus, as we have noted, the meaning and interpretation that children ascribe to marital conflict and violence in the broader context of the family may be at least as significant as the occurrence of particular interparental behaviors. Conceivably, children may evidence little negative outcome if parents are very expressive and emotional during conflicts but usually resolve their disagreements. On the other hand, children may have difficulty adjusting when parents rarely fight openly, but any occurrence of con-

flict seems to carry serious implications for the future intactness of the family. Certain nonviolent anger expressions may be as distressing to children as violent behaviors. For example, parental threats to leave the family have been shown in research to upset children as much as exposure to physical violence (Laumakis, Margolis, & John, 1998).

Consistent with the developmental psychopathology premise that one should study the abnormal in relation to the normal, research in this area also emphasizes understanding the development processes underlying both normal development and the development of adjustment problems (Cummings & Davies, 1994a; Emery & Kitzmann, 1995). It is assumed that a focus only on extremes is likely to provide a limited window into mediating processes. With regard to marital conflict, as we have seen, specific types and intensities of conflict elicit very different responses from children, so that a focus on one element of conflict (e.g., overt violence) may yield limited information about the effects of conflict and violence on children, and a potentially narrow, even misleading, perspective on key mediating processes and developmental sequelae. Thus, studies of both harmonious and adverse family contexts are mutually informative and essential to characterize the broader patterns of both expressions of conflict and marital relations and other family and extrafamilial relations, in order to understand the processes that mediate child development outcomes.

Furthermore, from the standpoint of understanding process, children who do not develop problems despite growing up in high-risk environments are just as interesting as those who do, but the focus has traditionally been on those children who develop psychopathology. What protective factors, or personal or environmental sources of resiliency, account for children's adaptive outcomes in very adverse family circumstances? Relatedly, some children from low-risk family environments do develop adjustment problems, and they are at least as interesting in terms of understanding mediating processes as those who develop competently. What stress factors, or personal or environmental sources of vulnerability, explain why some children have difficulty when most do not? Again, the study of the range of family environments around issues of marital conflict and violence is most likely to advance understanding. There has been limited development of these issues and questions to date.

Research on stress and adversity associated with marital conflict has neglected positive processes and events, but the developmental psychopathology perspective also calls attention to the significance of these events for understanding development in adverse family circumstances. The concepts of resiliency, compensatory, and protective factors, in particular, require an understanding of the role of positive processes in children's functioning when there is marital conflict or violence. For example, the *absence* of positive marital communications may be as significant as the presence of negative conflict behaviors. Beach (1995) reported that children's perceptions of low positive marital communications are a significant predictor of children's adjustment problems, independent of conflict behaviors. In conclusion, while significant

progress has been made in desegregating marital conflict as a context for child development, it is undoubtedly the case that other dimensions that have not yet been articulated are important to children's functioning in families and related to the manner in which parents handle their disputes.

Exposure to Marital Hostility and Violence: Persistent, Not Short-Term, Effects

Acts of hostility and violence between the parents may be relatively rare and short-lived, even in discordant marriages. However, the effects of exposure to these events are *not* short-lived or limited to the time of exposure to these events. Children's fundamental notions of the quality and safety of marital and family relations may be profoundly influenced by their relatively infrequent exposure to marital conflict and violence. Thus, these events may have very significant effects on children's *general* patterns of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral functioning. Accordingly, histories of exposure to marital conflict and violence have been linked to patterns of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive coping with stress in other contexts, and these response patterns, in turn, have been linked to risk for adjustment problems (Cummings & Davies, 1994a). Appreciating the potentially wide-ranging impact of children's exposure to relatively infrequent acts of interparental conflict and violence is essential to conceptualizing the mediating processes that may be set in motion by their exposure to violence.

The Sensitization Hypothesis: Accounting for the Direct Effects of Exposure to Marital Conflict

A critical question for researchers concerned with the clinical implications of marital conflict for child development is whether there are cumulative effects of exposure to chronic marital conflict. How or why does exposure result in the development of adjustment problems over time? Following the assumptions of the developmental psychopathology perspective, we would expect to observe maladaptive behaviors in children's dynamic interactions with environmental contexts of marital conflict that would gradually lead, as a function of day-to-day responses to these experiences, to what would be classified as adjustment problems. What would these changes be? At a concrete level, what would be happening to the children? Consider the following examples:

Lois and John came from families with very different relationships between the parents. Lois's parents fought all the time and were very angry with each other. John's parents discussed areas of disagreement periodically but were always mutually respectful and resolved most disagreements. One day, Lois's and John's fathers were both late picking them up from a first-grade school play. In both cases, the mothers were very worried. Both yelled at the fathers, even John's mom, because she was so up-

set. Lois got visibly anxious when her mother behaved that way and tried to make excuses for her father. John, on the other hand, simply went inside to play with his toys and did not even look up at his arguing and distressed parents.

This vignette illustrates a key finding of research on this question. One might expect at a glance that children would get used to marital conflict if it occurred all the time, and perhaps they do learn not to be as surprised by it as children who have little experience with such events. However, they do *not* get used to it. This is the consistent and repeated message of research. It is important to bear in mind that marital conflict is a stressor, even for children to observe as bystanders, and a threatening event in the context of the family. People do not get used to stressors, and repeated stressors, which have even more serious negative implications for the individuals involved as a function of their being repeated, become more, and not, less stressful. At a process level, the repetition of this stressor has effects evidenced by children becoming more dysregulated emotionally, behaviorally, and in their capacity to appropriately control their social behavior. For example, children from high-conflict homes are more aggressive than others following exposure to marital conflict (Cummings, Hennessy, Rabideau, & Cicchetti, 1994).

Thus, the process or mechanism by which exposure to chronic marital conflict leads to children's adjustment problems over time appears to have to do with its effects on children's regulatory capacities, experiences of stress and distress, and capacity for appropriate social behavior, particularly when threatened. Interestingly, some of the research we considered was reviewed in the section on principles. For example, work by Post and colleagues suggests that even biological systems for regulatory arousal in animals are altered by repeated exposure to stress (Post & Weiss, 1997; Post, Weiss, & Leverich, 1994). There is no doubt that marital hostility and violence, and other forms of marital communication that have negative implications for family intactness, continuity, or effective functioning, are significant stressors for children.

Thus, we know that children's conflict histories in the home predict their responses to conflicts; that is, histories of exposure to background anger, marital conflict, and interparental violence are predictors of children's greater emotional (e.g., distress), behavioral (e.g., aggression), social (e.g., mediation in parental disputes), and even physiological (e.g., heart rate, blood pressure, galvanic skin responses; El-Sheikh, Ballard, & Cummings, 1994) reactions, and their own reports of greater perceptions of threat and negativity about future marital interactions. These findings have been observed even in response to presentations of conflict that are the same across groups, so that children's reactions in relation to other groups must be attributed to their past histories rather than the current stimuli. The results suggest that conflict histories lower children's thresholds for responding negatively and increase their reactivity to conflict; hence, the phenomenon has come to be termed the "sensitization hypothesis." This result is reported in field studies of children's reactions to ac-

tual marital conflicts (Cummings, Zahn-Waxler, & Radke-Yarrow, 1981, 1984), laboratory simulations of conflict (Cummings, Iannotti, & Zahn-Waxler, 1985), and parental reports of marital conflict histories and children's reactions (e.g., Ballard, Cummings, & Larkin, 1993; Cummings, Pelligrini, Notarius, & Cummings, 1989; Cummings, Vogel, Cummings, & El-Sheikh, 1989; Gordis, Margolin, & John, 1997; Myers, 1997; O'Brien, Bahadur, Gee, Balto, & Erber, 1997; O'Brien, Margolin, John, & Krueger, 1991; Rogers & Holmbeck, 1997). Thus, Laumakis et al. (1998) reported that children from high-conflict homes evaluated conflicts more negatively than children from low-conflict homes, with boys exposed to high-conflict marriages more likely to report an intervention response, particularly in response to marital physical aggression. As another recent example, Grych (1998) reported that children exposed to higher levels of conflict between their parents perceived the conflicts as more threatening and verbalized more negative expectations about their own efforts to intervene in marital conflicts. Histories of marital violence have been associated particularly with sensitization to parental conflicts (e.g., Cummings, Pelligrini, et al., 1989), which makes sense given the likely emotional impact of violence between the parents on children. Furthermore, when conflict "histories" are artificially created in the laboratory, results are consistent with the predictions of the sensitization hypothesis (e.g., Cummings et al., 1985; Davies, Myers, Cummings, & Heindel, 1999; El-Sheikh & Cummings, 1995; El-Sheikh, Cummings, & Reiter, 1996).

These results have important theoretical implications for understanding the processes that mediate the impact of marital conflict on children's adjustment. They suggest that emotional, behavioral, and social dysregulation in the face of parental conflicts (actors or actual parents) at least partially mediates the direct effects of marital conflict and violence on children; that is, repeated exposure to destructive forms of marital conflict undermines children's capacities for regulating their emotional and behavioral functioning. The weight of the evidence suggests that the reduction in children's regulatory capacities is limited not only to situations of marital conflict but also may be related to a more general reaction tendency in response to distressing or stressful situations (e.g., Ballard, Cummings, & Larkin, 1993; see also Davies & Cummings, 1994). Moreover, repeated exposure to certain destructive forms of conflict is reflected in more negative representations of cognitions about the family. It can be readily seen how such an increased proneness to responses of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive negativity and dysregulation might contribute to children's development of problems over time.

Repeated episodes and instances of dysregulatory functioning in multiple social contexts and situations might result in successive changes in functioning that constitute a gradual emergence of developmental deviations. Cummings and colleagues (Cummings & Cummings, 1988; Cummings & Davies, 1994a) have argued that children's stress and coping reactions provide a powerful window into the meaning of marital conflict from their perspective and also reflect broader patterns of response processes that underlie development, thus

holding out the possibility that these responses index dynamic, process-level mediators of adjustment over time. Interestingly, Davis, Hops, Alpert, and Sheeber (1998) recently reported impressive evidence based upon sequential analyses of observed family interactions that interparental conflict predicted children's aggressive behavior and was linked to increased adjustment problems. Their findings directly implicated interparental conflict in accounting for problems of aggression in children. The emotional security hypothesis, which we describe later as it relates to children's responses to marital conflict, provides a specific theoretical model for explaining how sensitization processes might result in developmental deviations over time.

Other findings support the framework in Figure 8.1. For example, there appear to be consistent individual differences in reactions to conflict organized around patterns of emotional responding (Cummings, 1987); these individual differences appear to be stable over time, with tests indicating stability for periods up to 5 years (Cummings, 1987; Cummings, Zahn-Waxler, & Radke-Yarrow, 1984). Moreover, broader patterns of family violence (e.g., child physical abuse) are associated with increased sensitization to parental conflicts (e.g., Cummings, Hennessy, Rabideau, & Cicchetti, 1994). These findings suggest that processes mediating responses to marital conflict are psychologically meaningful, since they tend to be stable over significant periods of time and relate to broader patterns of behavior and organizations of individual functioning, particularly surrounding emotional regulation. Thus, they may reflect important organizations of children's responses to threat and challenge, and also be related to general patterns of conflict and violence in the family.

MARITAL CONFLICT AND PARENTING: INDIRECT PATHWAYS OF EFFECT

Recent research documents the finding that exposure to marital conflict affects children *both* directly, due to exposure and indirectly, by changing parenting practices (e.g., Harold, Fincham, Osborne, & Conger, 1997; Margolin, Christensen, & John, 1996; O'Brien, Bahadur, Gee, Balto, & Erber, 1997). In fact, a rather substantial literature has emerged to support relations between marital conflict and negative changes in parenting (Erel & Burman, 1995). The relations are illustrated in Figure 8.1.

Demonstrating an indirect pathway, parenting problems have been shown to be mediators of the effects of marital conflict on children (Davies & Cummings, 1994). One possible explanation is provided by the spillover hypothesis, in which distress and hostility accompanying marital conflict are carried over into parenting practices, leading to changes in parental emotional availability (e.g., rejection, hostility, unresponsiveness) or control (e.g., lax monitoring, inconsistent or harsh discipline) (Jouriles & Farris, 1992; Mahoney, Boggio, & Jouriles, 1996; Margolin, Christensen, & John, 1996).

Traditional models of family and child development have focused on parent-child relationships and paid scant attention to broader family functioning, including marital (or interpartner) relations. For example, family violence and abuse are often considered primarily in terms of parents' physical abuse of children. However, marital relations, including conflict, are central to children's well-being. In fact, evidence that the quality of marital relations affects the quality of parent-child relations is quite strong (Erel & Burman, 1995). Thus, marital relations are a significant underlying influence on parenting and the quality of parent-child emotional relationships. These results underscore the importance of a holistic perspective on family functioning and child development, consistent with the precepts of a developmental psychopathology perspective (Emery & Kitzmann, 1995).

Marital Relations and Parenting Practices

Marital relations are predictive of the quality of parenting; that is, the consistency of parenting, the extent to which parenting is hostile or appropriate, the emotional availability of parents, and other parenting dimensions may be affected by the quality of marital relations. Emotional dimensions and qualities of parenting practices are particularly influenced by the quality of marital relations (Davies & Cummings, 1994), with support for causal relations between marital conflict and parenting (Jouriles & Farris, 1992).

For example, relationships marked by the presence of violence or a high frequency of overt conflict have been linked to inconsistent child rearing and disciplinary behavior (Holden & Miller, 1999; Holden & Ritchie, 1991; Stoneman, Brody, & Burke, 1989). Marital conflict has also been associated with increased parental negativity and intrusive control (Hetherington et al., 1992) and low levels of parental warmth and responsiveness (Holden & Ritchie, 1991). Parental rejection has been identified as a mediator of marital conflict for both externalizing and internalizing problems (Faubert, Forehand, Thomas, & Wierson, 1990). Specifically, parental behaviors such as withdrawal and hostility have contributed to the prediction of social withdrawal, depression, and anxiety in children (Denham, 1989; Hoffman-Plotkin & Twentyman, 1984; Pettit & Bates, 1989) and externalizing problems in children (Bousha & Twentyman, 1984). Marital conflict can thus be viewed as an important contributor to disruptions in the parenting process, which impacts a variety of indices of relevant parenting behavior and influence.

Marital Relations and the Attachments between Children and Parents

Marital relations are also predictive of the quality of the emotional bond or attachment that forms between parents and children, that is, the emotional security of the attachment between parents and children (Davies & Cummings, 1994). This fact is particularly important since, as we saw in Chapter 6, the

quality of attachment relations predicts children's outcomes over time, including their risk for adjustment problems. Studies show that increases in marital conflict during the child's first 9 months or even prenatally (Cox & Owen, 1993), are linked to insecure attachment at 12 months of age. Another study found that exposure to high marital conflict at age 1 year predicted insecure attachment at age 3 (Howes & Markman, 1989). Moreover, children's relationships with their parents may also change because of the negative effects on their sense of trust or high regard for parents due to watching them behave in mean or hostile ways toward each other. Thus, the impact of marital conflict on parenting may be quite direct (Owen & Cox, 1997). In summary, the research seems to be quite clear that destructive conflict has a particularly negative impact on emotional relationships within the family.

The Co-Occurrence of Marital Conflict, Divorce, Adversity, and Abuse within the Family

Further highlighting the importance of a holistic perspective on how marital conflict affects children, marital conflict and violence, adversity, and abuse often occur together (e.g., Cummings & Davies, 1994a; Davies & Cummings, 1994; Emery, 1989; Grych & Fincham, 1990). Marital conflict is often a factor in children's adjustment because they reside in families that are characterized as disturbed for other reasons. For example, marital conflict is a significant factor in the effects of divorce on children. It may influence children's development long before the divorce occurs (Block, Block, & Gjerde, 1986), and children's postdivorce adjustment is often related to the extent and form of marital conflict (Amato & Keith, 1991). The effects of custody arrangements following divorce also vary significantly as a function of the type and level of marital conflict (Emery, 1994). There may be a recommendation against joint custody when there is chronic interparental violence, whereas joint custody might otherwise be recommended. As another example, marital conflict and parental depression are highly correlated in both men and women (Whisman, 2000). Recent analyses suggest that marital conflict is a more significant predictor of some forms of adjustment problems than parental depression per se (Cummings, 1995a; Cummings & Davies, 1994b, 1996; Downey & Coyne, 1990). Marital conflict and alcoholism are also interrelated. Interparental conflict and violence are among the most disturbing aspects of parental alcoholism from the children's point of view and may be a predictor of problems in children's adjustment (El-Sheikh & Cummings, 1997; West & Prinz, 1987).

In summary, multiple forms of adversity are associated with marital conflict. Minimally, models of family adversity, violence, abuse, and child development need to incorporate the effects of the marital (or interpartner) system on the functioning of the family. Including marital factors in the equation is likely to increase the prediction of child outcomes, and provide a more sophisticated view of the familial causes of child outcomes at a conceptual level.

Marital Conflict Co-Occurs with Dysfunction in Other Family Systems

As we have seen, a sole focus on the parent-child system offers a limited and oversimplified view of pathways of influence within the family. The behaviors of parents and children in the parent-child interaction are *each* influenced by the quality of the marital relationship, as well as by other family events and relationships outside of the parent-child system (Cummings & O'Reilly, 1997). Relations are frequently reported between marital conflict and violence, and problems in other family systems (Holden & Ritchie, 1991; Katz & Gottman, 1995a; Jouriles, Bourg, & Farris, 1991; Jouriles & Farris, 1992). Marital conflict is correlated with difficulties in parent-child discipline and child-rearing practices, patterns of coercive family interactions, and negative sibling relationships (Cummings & Davies, 1994a, 1995). Furthermore, marital conflict fosters the emotional and psychological unavailability and lack of responsiveness of parents, increasing the insecurity of parent-child emotional bonds and decreasing the quality of parent-child attachments (Davies & Cummings, 1994). Associations have also been reported between marital conflict and various forms of child abuse. Thus, interparental aggression and child physical abuse have been linked (e.g., Jouriles, Barling, & O'Leary, 1987). Marital conflict has also been associated with child sexual abuse (e.g., Browne & Finkelhor, 1986). Thus, interrelations among marital conflict, the functioning of other family systems, and children's problems are indicated. Accordingly, Cummings and Davies (1994a) concluded: "Children's mental health problems do not develop out of parallel and independent disturbances within the family. Rather, disturbances in each family subsystem affect the other subsystems, and broad problems in family functioning are likely to be associated with negative child outcomes" (p. 106).

On the other hand, positive marital relations and conflict resolution styles may foster positive outcomes in other family systems and may be a protective factor and source of resilience. Thus, conflict resolution may ameliorate negative emotional reactions to marital conflict and violence, and may lead to positive outcomes (e.g., Cummings, Simpson, & Wilson, 1993).

The Cumulative Impact of Family Stress

Marital (or interpartner) conflict and violence may be central to negative emotional and behavioral processes in families. Marital discord is associated with children's emotional and behavioral dysregulation, attempts to control or regulate the dysfunctional interactions between the mother and father, and representations of the self and family members' relationships that are more negative and pessimistic about the future (Davies & Cummings, 1994). These negative processes bear similarities to those linked with the impact on children of dysfunction in other family systems, such as coercive parent-child relations or insecure parent-child attachment (e.g., Cummings & Davies, 1994a; Davies & Cummings, 1994). Problems in family functioning also interact with chil-

dren's dispositions in influencing the likelihood that children will develop dysfunctional coping responses, processes, and styles (Davies & Cummings, 1994). Dysfunctional behavioral styles, in turn, are linked with the development of psychopathology.

Figure 8.1 also illustrates how multiple family systems may affect common processes in children. In this regard, it has been proposed, based on a survey of the literature, that "family adversity may affect children's development through its action on common processes and mechanisms. Consequently, . . . joint effects may occur, which could be additive, interactive, or multiplicative" (Cummings & Davies, 1994a, p. 108).

Several recent studies further advance our understanding of these issues. Lindahl (1998) found that dimensions of parental, marital, and family functioning each distinguished whether boys had no behavioral problems, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder, or both ADHD and oppositional defiant disorder (a comorbid group). With regard to marital functioning, oppositional defiant and comorbid groups were found to have experienced much greater marital distress and discord than the control group. In comparing the clinical groups, parenting, marital, and family problems were more elevated for the oppositional defiant and the comorbid groups in relation to the ADHD group. These results indicate that behavior problems may have quite different familial origins depending upon the nature of the disorder, again underscoring the relevance of conceptualizing pathways of development and etiology, including careful differentiations among predictors, mediating and moderating processes, and childhood outcomes.

Owen and Cox (1997) provided additional support for the finding that chronic marital conflict interferes with warm, sensitive, and involved parenting for both mothers and fathers. Chronic marital conflict predicts insecurity in father-infant attachment and is linked with a particularly disturbed dimension of attachment relations, that is, the degree of disorganization in both mother-infant and father-infant attachments (Carlson, 1998). Owen and Cox attributed the effects of marital conflict on attachment disorganization to children's exposure to frightened or frightening parents in the context of repeated interparental conflict situations. Their results thus supported both direct and indirect pathways by which marital conflict can disrupt parenting. Moreover, while most reports of the direct effects of marital conflict have focused on effects influencing children's emotional security about marital functioning, these results provide evidence for how marital conflict may also directly reduce children's emotional security about their own relations with their parents, as illustrated in Figure 8.2. Thus, children's confidence in the availability and sensitivity of their parents may be reduced by observing parents' mean and hostile behavior toward each other (i.e., direct effects) as well as spillover of parental hostility in terms of behavior toward the children (i.e., indirect effects).

Learning, negative reinforcement, and modeling may also be factors in the common impact of marital and parent-child systems on children; that is,

children may learn behavioral and cognitive styles for coping with everyday events from both observing their parents in interparental situations and interacting with them. Thus, Beach (1995) recently reported that maternal attributional styles in analogue conflict situations with a "spouse" were significantly correlated with similar attributional styles in their children's responses to analogue conflict situations with a "peer." Interestingly, statistically significant relations were also found between maternal positive communications and reciprocity in analogue conflict situations with a "spouse" and children's similar behaviors with a "peer," suggesting that children may learn constructive lessons about handling conflict situations from positive parental models.

As another example, children who are *witnesses* of spousal abuse exhibit adjustment problems similar to those of children who are *victims* of parental violence (Jaffe, Wolfe, Wilson, & Zak, 1986; Jouriles et al., 1998). Similarly, exposure to one form of violence in the family may affect reactions to others (e.g., Hennessy, Rabideau, Cicchetti, & Cummings, 1994). With regard to the physical, emotional, and sexual abuse of children, Jaffe, Wolfe, and Wilson (1990) stated that "it is widely acknowledged that . . . different forms of maltreatment also give rise to many of the same developmental adjustment problems, suggesting that very similar psychological processes may be commonly responsible for the children's reactions to trauma" (p. 68).

In summary, there is accumulating evidence that (1) marital conflict is a significant source of adversity and risk for children's adjustment problems in families, and (2) marital conflict and other forms of adversity in the family are interrelated. Similarly, positive marital relations and marital satisfaction may support positive functioning in families, fostering children's adaptive develop-

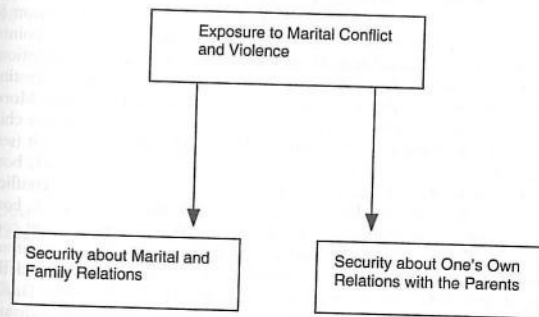


FIGURE 8.2. Marital conflict and direct effects on security of attachment.

ment (Cummings & O'Reilly, 1997). Thus, an emerging literature supports the notion that marital relations are central to an understanding of family processes and events, including the negative impact of extremely adverse family events such as violence or abuse. Marital relations serve as a foundation for emotional processes and their regulation within the family, and thus have a role in modulating, ameliorating, or exaggerating the risk associated with other family events. However, an important caveat is that our understanding of these processes and relationships is at an early stage, and the evidence is far more suggestive than conclusive, particularly since it is based largely on global assessments of family events and their interrelations, correlational analyses, and studies based on concurrent rather than longitudinal assessments of variables.

A MODEL FOR MEDIATING PROCESSES: AN EMOTIONAL SECURITY HYPOTHESIS

As we have noted, another important direction for a developmental psychopathology perspective is the articulation of theory to make sense of the complex empirical directions that are demanded by this approach to the study of the etiology of children's adjustment problems. While relations between marital conflict, violence, and children's adjustment problems are long established, until recently, there was little progress toward articulating theories about mediating processes. In the case of relations between marital conflict and child adjustment, two major theories have been proposed: (1) Davies and Cummings's (1994) emotional security hypothesis, and (2) Grych and Fincham's (1990) cognitive-contextual framework.

These two models, and other recent theoretical directions (Crockenberg & Forgays, 1996; Emery, 1989, 1992; Feldman & Downey, 1994; Wilson & Gottman, 1995), are generally complementary and emphasize similar points. For example, these models highlight children's reactions to and interpretations of marital conflict for themselves, the family, and the marriage, suggesting that it is more than just the occurrence of conflict that affects children. Moreover, the meaning of conflict is personal and emotional, and related to children's appraisals of the conflict as well as their emotional reactions to it (see, especially, Harold, Fincham, Osborne, & Conger, 1997). Furthermore, both models emphasize the significance of the particular context of marital conflict, past as well as present, in children's adaptation and maladaptation; that is, both history of marital conflict and the specific characteristics of any current conflict behaviors are seen as having substantial influence on children's current functioning according to both the cognitive-contextual framework and the emotional security hypothesis. A difference between the theories is that Davies and Cummings emphasize the importance of emotion, whereas Grych and Fincham put more stress on the role of cognition.

We focus here on the emotional security hypothesis, but the other model

also merits examination for further theoretical understanding of these processes. Davies and Cummings (1994) propose that, logically, children's reactions to conflict must be related to and understood within the context of other developmental and family processes, part of the whole of child and family development, and not a new process unrelated to reactions to other family events. Based on the data, which in the view of Davies and Cummings suggest the primacy and immediacy of emotionality in reactions to conflict, and a functionalist perspective positing that emotions serve appraisal and organizing functions (e.g., Campos, Campos, & Barrett, 1989), an emotional security hypothesis describes a key domain of processes mediating relations between marital conflict, violence, and children's adjustment. This hypothesis is described in further detail.

Theoretical Tenets

The emotional security hypothesis specifies a *particular* meaning against which children appraise the implications of marital and family conflict for themselves and their families, suggests how that meaning is personal, and indicates why children respond emotionally (Davies & Cummings, 1994). In important respects, this model builds upon and, in particular, complements the cognitive-contextual model proposed by Grych and Fincham (1990), which stresses how children's cognitive processing and coping behaviors are shaped by the characteristics of marital conflict and contextual factors such as past experience with conflict, gender, expectations, and mood. However, while cognition is acknowledged as being important to coping processes, the present model places greater emphasis on emotionality in the very emotion-laden domain of family conflict and, specifically, the significance of emotional security to children's reactions to marital conflict. Davies and Cummings's (1994, p. 387) key theoretical proposition follows:

Children's concerns about emotional security play a role in their regulation of emotional arousal and organization and motivation to respond in the face of marital conflict. Over time these response processes have implications for children's long-term adjustment. Emotional security is seen as a product of past experience and a primary influence on future responding (to emotionally charged events).

Operationalization in Terms of Specific Component Regulatory Systems

When confronted with marital conflict, children seek emotional security. Thus, emotional security describes the goal of children's functioning in the face of marital conflict. However, various specific regulatory systems are subsumed under the rubric of emotional security as an operating process (Cummings & Davies, 1996). These specific components are separate, but

also interdependent, in the service of emotional security. The definition of emotional security in terms of these specific systems also articulates specific measurement requirements and avenues toward the precise assessment of emotional security as a mediating process in the face of marital conflict. Each component is assumed to be a function of not only current stimuli but also past exposures to interparental relations. In recent research, specific, multi-method strategies toward the operationalization of these processes have been proposed (Cummings & Davies, 1996; Davies & Cummings, 1998).

Emotion Regulation

Consistent with conceptualizations of security in attachment theory, insecurity may be reflected in emotional reactivity characterized by heightened fear, distress, vigilance, and covert negativity. This component is not the equivalent of emotional security, but a subset or component of it. It consists of children's emotional reactivity and arousal, and their capacity to reduce, enhance, and/or maintain their emotionality in the face of conflict. It can be inferred from subjective reports of feelings, overt expression of emotion, and physiological arousal. Because children from high-conflict homes exhibit more distress, fear, aggression, and preoccupation in reaction to parental conflicts (Cummings & Davies, 1994), we suggest that emotion regulation strategies may play a mediating role between exposure to conflict and children's emotional reactivity to it.

Internal Representation of Family Relations

While rarely tested, representations of marital and family relations are expected to be influenced by marital hostility (Davies & Cummings, 1994). Representations most relevant to children's emotional security consist of their interpretation of the meaning and potential consequences of marital conflict for their own well-being. These representations are proffered to be relatively accurate depictions of family life (Bowby, 1973); thus, it follows that children with histories of negative conflict should be prone to developing insecure representations of family relations. Children's internal representations reflect their appraisals of family events and their active processing of the meaning that events have for their own well-being. These appraisals are a reflection of their sense of emotional security and the implication of events for emotional security. As noted by Grych and Fincham (1990), these internal representations also include children's primary assessment of the self-relevance and threat of events, and their secondary appraisal of who is responsible, why these events are occurring, and whether they have adequate coping skills. Insecure representations, in turn, are hypothesized to increase children's risk for psychological disturbance. There is initial support for the hypothesis that negative representations of marital relations serve as a mediator of relations between high conflict and children's adjustment problems (Davies & Cummings, 1998).

Regulation of Exposure to Family Affect

Children may also attempt to regulate their emotional security by controlling their exposure to marital conflict. Emotional security serves a motivational function by guiding children to regulate their exposure to stressful parental emotion. The issues with regard to an assessment of emotional security include the repertoire of children's regulatory activities and behaviors (e.g., forms and styles of mediation behaviors), their threshold for onset, and their appropriateness in specific contexts. Insecurity in this domain may be manifested in the "overregulation" of exposure to parental affect, shown through overinvolvement. Children's behavior as mediators in parental conflict may reflect direct attempts to control parental emotions and thereby minimize negative sequelae for the family. Research has shown that children from high-conflict homes more often use intervention in an attempt to alleviate conflict (Cummings & Davies, 1994). Moreover, there are developmental differences in children's ability to avoid, confront, or effectively intervene in marital conflict and other family disputes.

Specific Theoretical Definition

Emotional security, as a construct, appears to have a shared, implicit meaning in the literature. However, the concept has rarely been subject to precise definition. To address this gap, an explicit definition of emotional security is proposed:

Emotional security is a latent construct that can be inferred from the overall organization and meaning of children's emotions, behaviors, thoughts, and physiological responses, and serves as a set goal by which children regulate their own functioning in social contexts, thereby directing social, emotional, cognitive, and physiological reactions. (Cummings & Davies, 1996, p. 126)

Thus, while recent theory stresses that children react to conflict in terms of their assessment of its meaning for family functioning and their own well-being, the emotional security hypothesis proposes that a particular meaning is especially important, that is, the emotional security implications of conflicts. Building upon attachment theory (Sroufe & Waters, 1977a), emotional security is seen as a paramount factor in children's regulation of emotional arousal, organization of emotion, and motivation to respond in the face of marital conflict. Emotional security is conceptualized from a contextual perspective, emphasizing the interplay between socioemotional and biological processes. While emotional security is described as the set goal of regulatory functioning, as noted earlier, various specific regulatory systems are conceptualized as being subsumed within emotional security as an operating process, that is, emotional regulation, regulation of exposure to family affect, and internal representations of family relations. Thus, similar levels of emotional in-

security may be evidenced by different organizations of emotional and behavioral responding in different children. Therefore, one must consider children's responding in terms of higher-order organizations of responding across multiple domains of functioning in order to evaluate their emotional security. Consider the following example:

LeeAnn is a 4-year-old whose parents fight constantly and rarely resolve their differences. Furthermore, the conflicts often escalate from a relatively conversational discussion of the issues to very hostile remarks exchanged between the parents. Sometimes LeeAnn's mother throws things at the father, and he sometimes pounds the table or wall with his fist. On several occasions, after particularly angry conflicts, the mother has taken LeeAnn and her sister, Kris, to their grandmother's for the night. At this point, whenever her parents even begin to discuss a problem, LeeAnn becomes visibly distressed, sometimes begins to cry, but generally stays away from her parents as much as possible. She now often tells her older sister that she doesn't think that Mommy and Daddy love each other anymore. Even though her parents are warm and responsive to LeeAnn in their own interactions with her, she much less often seeks their help in times of stress and sometimes feels uneasy around them even when they are being nice to her or each other. On the other hand, LeeAnn's 10-year-old sister, Kris, often gets involved in the conflicts when the parents fight, trying as best she can to mediate and umpire the discussion but sometimes also becoming overtly angry with one parent or the other. Kris has also become her mother's confidant, and having taken over many of the household responsibilities, is constantly working to make things go more smoothly within the family, even to the point that she has neglected her own friendships and schoolwork.

Thus, we can conclude that both LeeAnn and Kris experience heightened emotional insecurity in the family on a frequent, even daily, basis due to their parents' frequent and intense conflicts. The fact that a set goal of emotional security is not achieved for these girls in their day-to-day family living is evident in their heightened, day-to-day emotional arousal levels, their obvious negative representations of the well-being of the marriage and family, and various aspects of how they are clearly motivated to regulate exposure to the parents' conflicts. However, emotional insecurity has organized different patterns of responding in the two girls and has motivated different patterns of behavioral responding in direct reaction to the conflicts. Thus, LeeAnn is overtly emotionally dysregulated and has clearly developed more negative representations of the parent-child relationships, the marital relationship, and the family as a source of emotional security. However, LeeAnn does not become involved in the parents' conflicts. On the other hand, while Kris is also very emotionally dysregulated by the parents' problems, her sense of emotional insecurity has motivated very different patterns of behavioral responding, namely, constant efforts to take care of things around the house so that fights

do not start or end as quickly and amicably as possible if they do start. She also tries as much as possible not to reveal her own emotional distress overtly to the parents when they fight, although she sometimes loses control of her own anger.

The emotional security perspective also has important implications for the distinction between constructive versus destructive conflict from the children's perspective. Contexts of marital conflict are evaluated by children in terms of their emotional security implications for the child and the family, and these appraisals in turn serve to motivate and regulate children's emotions, their exposure to marital conflict, and their internal representations of marital relations. In other words, children react not only to the *occurrence* of marital conflict but also to *whether* marital conflict has destructive versus constructive implications for personal and family functioning from their point of view. The example of Edie and Mike, described at the outset of the chapter, illustrates this point. Edie's parents often fought, but she knew from experience that these conflicts did not have negative implications for the family. Thus, due to her evaluation, that her set goal of emotional security was not altered by these events, her functioning did not change due to her parents' conflicts in terms of her own emotional regulation, representations of family, or efforts to regulate exposure to family. The comparison between traditional attachment theory, which has focused on emotional security as derived from parent-child relations, and the emotional security hypothesis of Davies and Cummings merits consideration. According to the emotional security hypothesis, it is limiting to view children's experiences and representations of emotional security *solely* in terms of the attachment relationship as assessed by the Strange Situation. Children's emotional security *also* originates from children's experiential histories with interparental emotional events and other interwoven family factors (e.g., parental adjustment, family emotional climate, child characteristics). Thus, the central hypothesis is that emotional security plays a mediational role in the impact of parent-child relationships (Sroufe & Waters, 1977a), marital relations (Davies & Cummings, 1994), and other family factors (e.g., Cummings & Davies, 1999) on children's adjustment. In particular, it is proposed that destructive marital conflict increases children's vulnerability to adjustment problems by reducing their emotional security. Children have sound reasons for being concerned about destructive marital conflict. Severe interparental conflict increases insecurity by signifying a loved one's unhappiness and possible emotional instability, and raising the possibility of divorce or family dissolution, with accompanying hardships. Children may also fear that parents will become less emotionally responsive to them or carry unresolved hostility from marital conflicts into parent-child interactions.

As we have noted, emotional security is theorized to be a control system within which interrelations among the three component processes (i.e., marital relations, parent-child relations, and exposure to marital conflict) operate with an overarching latent goal of emotional security. Figure 8.2 illustrates this model. Thus, emotional security is at the same time a set goal and a regu-

latory system that governs the expression of the specific component processes according to immediate and historical context, age, gender, and other intra- and extraorganismic influences. For example, insecurity resulting from marital discord may increase children's incentive to reduce their exposure to the threatening event by escaping or intervening in the conflict. By the same token, emotional security is regulated by these response processes. Extending the previous example, the escape or intervention that was originally motivated by felt insecurity subsequently serves as a means of restoring some sense of emotional security, at least in a temporary, superficial way. Notably, the emotional security hypothesis posits the perseveration of emotional security as a significant goal in itself (e.g., see Sroufe & Waters, 1977a), thereby shifting some of the emphasis away from an evolutionary and ethological account of the origins of security. This shift towards a functionalist perspective permits a broader, more inclusive, familywide model of the etiology of emotional security, also providing a theoretical foundation for testable hypotheses about the mediating role of emotional security derived from factors other than parent-child interaction.

Supporting Evidence

For a comprehensive test, a rigorous, multivariate, longitudinal design is required that can effectively test the Davies and Cummings model and distinguish cause-and-effect relations during children's development over time. While the marshaled data can only be suggestive until the model is tested formally in this way, a considerable body of evidence to support more extensive testing has accumulated. The following summarizes some of the suggestive as well as more cogent supporting evidence:

1. The notion of emotional security is consistent with more general family and child development models, specifically, the literature on parent-child attachment. This construct has a long history in psychiatric, psychoanalytic, and clinical traditions. The concept is that emotional security is more than a secure base, but is posited as an internal state. As Sroufe and Waters (1977a) proposed, emotional security is seen as an internal set point that serves as a basis and source of motivation for responding to the environment. The new element is an extension; that is, children's emotional security also derives from the marital relationship, in addition to the parent-child relationship.

2. This notion can explain why negative reactions to conflict are so dramatically ameliorated by conflict resolution, and why children are so sensitive to any evidence about possible resolution, even when resolutions may be much briefer than conflict episodes; that is, children are concerned about the meaning of conflicts for themselves and their families, not just the occurrence of conflict. Conflict resolution greatly changes the familial implications of

otherwise anxiety-arousing social situations. Specifically, conflict resolution changes the emotional security implications of conflict. Moreover, a similar point regarding the applicability of the emotional security construct can be made for the family climate more generally; that is, other forms of family conflict (e.g., parent-child conflict) also induce negative reactions in the children that are similarly ameliorated by conflict resolution.

3. The emotional reactivity construct can account for why children evidence sensitization, rather than habituation, when they have histories of exposure to high marital conflict in the home, especially violence. It makes sense that children from such homes would become more aroused, since these events are more threatening, realistically, for them; that is, when there is high marital conflict, there is more likelihood that conflicts will proliferate to include the children, that a parent will be injured, and that the occurrence of conflicts will have more negative short- and long-term implications for the child and family. Even though these children are more distressed, it makes sense for them to also be more likely to try to intervene in conflicts, given the implications (Emery, 1989). In other words, conflicts pose a greater threat to their sense of emotional security. Similarly, high rates of parent-child conflict, especially when conflicts involve physical aggression, induce heightened reactivity in children, that is, sensitization, and this sensitization may pertain to multiple forms of family conflict (e.g., other forms of conflict involving the parents; Cummings, Hennessy, Rabideau, & Cicchetti, 1994).

4. Emotional reactions predict behavioral responses, aggression, self-reported cognitions and feelings, and even heart rate responses (e.g., Cummings, 1987), whereas other levels of responding thus far have not, which suggests an organizing role of emotionality.

In an analogue test, inducing different emotional states systematically predicted differences in multiple types of reactions to interadult conflicts, supporting the basic proposition that emotionality, or the emotional set point, motivates responding (Davies & Cummings, 1995).

5. The most convincing support is a recent study indicating that multimethod assessments of emotional security mediated relations between qualitative aspects of marital conflict and qualitative differences in child outcomes (Davies & Cummings, 1998). In this concurrent test, support was found for a theoretical pathway, whereby negative marital conflict led to children's adjustment problems as mediated by reduced emotional security about marital relations. By contrast, greater emotional security mediated a pathway between constructive marital conflict properties (e.g., marital conflict resolution) and reduced adjustment problems (Davies, 1995). Of the components of emotional security, children's regulation of negative emotionality in reaction to marital conflict mediated pathways to both internalizing and externalizing (e.g., aggressiveness) disorders, and the children's representations of the quality of marital relations also mediated relations between marital conflict and children's internalizing problems (e.g., anxiety, depression).

Figure 8.3 provides an illustration of the pathways supported in this study for the emotional security processes mediating relations between marital conflict and child adjustment. Notably, consistent with the methodological assumptions of the developmental psychopathology approach outlined in Chapter 3 that constructs should be measured by multiple methods and assessments, each of the psychological variables portrayed in Figure 8.3 were measured by multiple assessments. Moreover, consistent with the statistical approaches for demonstrating process models outlined in Chapter 5, the analyses were based upon structural equation modeling.

These analyses are based on an assumption that subprocesses at this level of assessment provide the best characterization of the mediating processes. Sometimes higher-order patterns may better capture the processes mediating relations between family events and childhood disorders. Pattern-level analyses are consistent with a person-oriented approach to understanding individual differences in organizations of the dynamic processes underlying adjustment. Attachment research has demonstrated the virtues of analyses of patterns of functioning to predict children's development (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Greenberg, Cicchetti, & Cummings, 1990b). With regard to organizations or patterns of responding to interparental conflict, various attempts have been made to assess patterns of children's responding to marital conflict (e.g., Cummings, 1987; El-Sheikh, Cummings, & Goetsch,

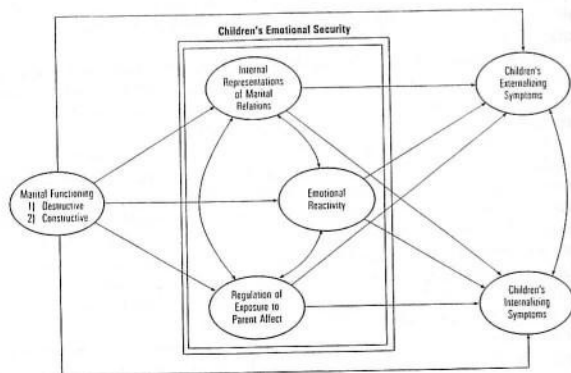


FIGURE 8.3. Marital conflict, mediating processes of emotional security, and child adjustment. From Davies and Cummings (1998). Copyright 1998 from University of Chicago Press. Adapted by permission.

1989). Recent research suggests that certain patterns of avoidance in the context of interparental conflict may possibly signify successful perseveration of emotional security in the interparental subsystem (O'Brien, Margolin, & John, 1995). Notably, however, subprocesses of emotional security are also conceptualized as subsuming multiple domains and dimensions of responding, consistent with an organizational perspective on children's adaptation.

The Distinction between Process and Outcome Variables

The emotional security hypothesis of Davies and Cummings was explicitly inspired by the principles and notions of the developmental psychopathology perspective, which is another reason for its emphasis here. A key issue from the developmental psychopathology perspective is the distinction between process and outcome variables. This notion merits consideration. Descriptive, symptom-based classification systems of child outcomes fail to acknowledge the complex nature of individuals' adaptations and transactions within their environments, leaving major gaps with regard to understanding the processes underlying the development of psychopathology (Cicchetti & Cohen, 1995a). Consequently, such static models of the development of psychopathology have inherent limitations with regard to the adequacy of explanatory models, and relatedly, the adequacy of models for diagnosis, prevention, and treatment (Jensen & Hoagwood, 1997; Richters, 1997). Thus, Sroufe (1997, p. 251) has stated that maladaptation is not something a person "has" . . . [but] the complex result of a myriad of risk and protective factors operating over time." Guided by these notions, process-oriented approaches (e.g., Cummings & Cummings, 1988), or more broadly, the discipline of developmental psychopathology (Cicchetti, Ackerman, & Izard, 1995), aim, as a primary goal, to identify specific processes and process relations-in-context that, over time, underlie what is broadly conceptualized as normal development, psychopathology, and symptomatology. A distinction is drawn between process variables (e.g., indices of emotional security assessed in the specific context of parental or marital relations) and outcome variables (e.g., scores on instruments designed to assess general adjustment beyond relational contexts) at the level of theory, specificity, and level of assessment. For example, illustrating this distinction, a significant body of research on relations between emotional security in close interpersonal relationships and adjustment problems classifies emotional insecurity at a different (i.e., process) level of analysis in relation to outcomes, reflecting that the constructs are distinct domains of functioning in models of developmental psychopathology (Greenberg, Cicchetti, & Cummings, 1990a). By extension, this theory reflects a corresponding "second generation" of research on children and marital problems that aims to move beyond simply documenting correlations between global notions of marital relations and child outcomes, toward understanding the more precise processes that account for or mediate the linkage, both at the level of family

justment and marital conflict, joint study of these variables promises to be mutually informative. It is hypothesized that parental adjustment, particularly depression, will moderate developmental pathways. Furthermore, there has been almost no investigation of relations between *paternal* adjustment, marital conflict, and child adjustment (Cummings & O'Reilly, 1997). It is also important to assess parental adjustment more broadly than depression, in order to explore whether other parental adjustment problems may also moderate effects.

Parental Alcohol Problems

A primary mode through which parental alcohol problems affect children is the marital conflict and discord associated with parental alcohol abuse (West & Prinz, 1987). For example, some studies have reported that children are more distressed by parental conflicts than by alcohol-related behaviors (El-Sheikh & Cummings, 1997). Children of parents with alcohol problems may be especially sensitive to interparental conflicts. Thus, Ballard and Cummings (1990) found that children of parents with alcohol problems were more reactive emotionally to marital conflict than children of parents without alcohol problems. In addition, these children even suggested interventions for interparental behavior that was *not* conflictual in the course responding to a series of maritally conflictual and nonconflictual interactions presented on videotape. For example, children were shown a tape of two adults interacting in a friendly way and asked what they would do in the situation. Typically, children of parents without alcohol problems said "nothing," whereas parents of children with alcohol problems frequently described a response, typically some behavior or act designed to keep the parents in a good mood (e.g., get the parents refreshments, do housework chores). Notably, parental depression, parental alcohol problems, and marital conflict are interrelated (El-Sheikh & Cummings, 1997), so that parental depression and alcohol problems may jointly affect children's functioning by causing disruptions in family processes (West & Prinz, 1987).

Family Emotional Climate

Characteristics of the family emotional climate may also affect children by influencing marital conflict and parent-child relations. Especially important in this regard are *family emotional expressiveness* and *interparental emotional bonds* (i.e., trust, happiness, security). For example, marital anger expressions may reflect a family tendency to express more overtly both positive and negative emotions, a pattern that has been associated with social competence in children (Cassidy, Parke, Butkovsky, & Braungart, 1992). Thus, family emotional expressiveness may act as a protective factor in the context of high levels of family anger. The vignette about Eddie and Mike made this point. Eddie was not distressed about his parents' loud argument because he understood

that such conflicts were usually resolved and had no broader negative implications for the family's functioning. Moreover, there was a high rate of positive affect expression between his parents as well. One possibility, from the perspective of the emotional security hypothesis, is that high rates of positive affect in the proximal context of anger and conflict may reduce children's emotional insecurity, thereby "freeing" them to understand better how people effectively manage and resolve disputes (Davies & Cummings, 1994). However, it was clear that Mike would have been quite distressed if his parents had behaved in such a manner, since, in the context of his family's patterns of expressiveness, such behavior would have indicated problems that could have serious and negative implications for future family stability and happiness. Similarly, the quality of emotional bonds between the parents has implications for how parental conflicts should be interpreted. When parents are securely attached to one another, they are likely to be more effective at parenting, and there is a greater likelihood that children will develop secure attachments to the parents. This relationship holds even if one of the parents has an insecure attachment history, which has otherwise been shown to be linked with insecure attachments between parents and children (Colin, 1996). Other research provides evidence that insecure attachment between adults and more marital conflict are associated, and that parents' histories in this regard are linked with children's functioning in conflict situations (Hall, 1997). Thus, the broader emotional climate in the family may be a significant moderator of the effects of marital conflict, and marital relations more generally, on children, and thus merits consideration in developmental tests of process-oriented models of childhood disorders.

Children's Characteristics

Children's individual *temperaments* may also affect their responses to marital conflict and other marital problems (Emery & Kitzmann, 1995). With regard to emotional security as a mediator of outcomes, temperament has sometimes been viewed as weakly related to emotional security. However, other research suggests a more important role in children's emotional security (Calkins & Fox, 1992; Vaughn et al., 1992) and its interactive effects with attachment on subsequent social development (Kochanska, 1995). Consequently, temperament is conceptualized as (1) a possible precursor of susceptibility to some dimensions of insecurity in the face of marital conflict and hostility (e.g., negative emotional reactivity), or (2) a possible buffer with regard to insecurity, with implications for subsequent social development.

Children's characteristics may also affect interparental functioning; that is, there is a bidirectional nature to family environments. This notion is consistent with the assumption of the developmental psychopathology approach that children actively influence their own adjustment and are not just passive recipients of experience. There is evidence that aggressive children respond with particular arousal to marital conflict or other forms of interadult con-

licts that they witness as bystanders. One study reported that aggressive toddlers showed the greatest increase in aggression toward a same-age peer following exposure to conflict between adults (Cummings, Iannotti, & Zahn-Waxler, 1985). In a second study, children with behavior problems were more distressed than others by exposure to interadult conflict (Cummings, Vogel, Cummings, & El-Sheikh, 1989). A third study found that school-age boys classified by their teachers as aggressive were the most aroused by background anger (Klaczynski & Cummings, 1989).

Despite considerable research on the topic, a clear picture with regard to *gender differences* has not yet emerged. Early work focused on conduct problems, suggesting that boys experienced greater disturbances than girls (e.g., Emery & O'Leary, 1982), perhaps due to males' greater constitutional susceptibility to stress (e.g., Eme, 1979; Zaslow & Hayes, 1986). However, it now appears that girls may manifest distress in forms that are more difficult to detect, resulting in a serious underestimation of the effects of marital conflict. Due to socialization experiences and norms for gender-based aggression, girls may express distress in more socially acceptable ways by internalizing symptoms such as anxiety, worry, and distress (Crockenberg & Forgays, 1996; Lytton, 1991). Close scrutiny of preschoolers' responses in experimental analogues of marital conflict suggests that girls may even be more sensitive and emotionally reactive than boys to interadult conflict. The findings suggest that girls are more threatened by intense conflict, make discriminations between forms of conflict at earlier ages, and are more sensitive to whether conflicts are resolved and conflict histories between the parents are constructive versus destructive (Cummings, Pellegrini, Notarius, & Cummings, 1989; Davies, Myers, & Cummings, 1996; Davies, Myers, Cummings, & Heindel, 1999; El-Sheikh, 1994; El-Sheikh & Cummings, 1995; El-Sheikh, Cummings, & Reiter, 1996; Grych, 1998). Moreover, mediating processes appear to be different for boys and girls, with the appraised destructiveness of interparental conflict related to perceived threat in boys and self-blame related to perceived threat in girls (Cummings, Davies, & Simpson, 1994; Kerig, 1997). Thus, emotional security may be reflected in quite different psychological processes for boys and girls, with different implications for their development of competencies and vulnerabilities. On the other hand, complicating the picture, frequently, no differences are found when boys' and girls' reactions to marital conflict are observed. This is in contrast to the differences in reactions that seem to be more reliably found when children are interviewed about their covert emotional and cognitive reactions. For example, with regard to the former, Davis, Hops, Alpert, and Sheeber (1998) recently reported that both boys and girls evidence aggressive behavioral patterns in response to marital conflict. Thus, the differences in the immediate and observable responses of boys and girls to marital conflict may be relatively small; more important may be the role of their internal reactions that cannot be seen, especially their more subtle, and covert, appraisals and emotional responses, as mediators of differing trajectories of long-term development.

Parent Gender \times Child Gender

Differentiating between children's responses to mothers' and fathers' marital conflict behaviors and parenting practices may further advance understanding of gender differences (Cummings & O'Reilly, 1997). Interparental conflict is uniquely related to children's perceptions of the father-child relationship, even after taking into account perceptions of mother-child relations (Osborne & Fincham, 1996). More specifically, fathers' positive qualities appear to be more likely to deteriorate than those of mothers in the face of marital stress and conflict (e.g., Amato & Booth, 1991; Howes & Markman, 1989; Jouriles & Farris, 1992). If so, it is possible that fathers' parenting practices play a more robust role than those of mothers in linkages between marital conflict and child adjustment. However, plausible hypotheses for this possible difference require further examination. For example, women may be better at compartmentalizing the spousal and parental roles, resulting in less carryover from marital relations to parenting for mothers (Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, & Volling, 1991). Another hypothesis is that motherhood is a more fundamental role than is fatherhood (Belsky, Gilstrap, & Rovine, 1984).

Further complicating the issue, new evidence suggests that one must consider the match between the sex of the parents and children. Girls have been reported to exhibit more negative emotional responses than boys only in response to their fathers' behavior during marital disagreements (Crockenberg & Forgays, 1996). Fathers' parenting quality and relationships with their daughters are particularly prone to decline as marital discord increases (Belsky, Rovine, & Fish, 1989; Booth & Amato, 1994; Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1984; McHale, 1994). On the other hand, interparental conflict has been shown to be a better predictor of negativity in mother-son relations than in mother-daughter and father-son relationships (Osborne & Fincham, 1996). Interestingly, Grych (1998) recently reported that father-to-mother and mother-to-father aggression were each independent predictors of children's adjustment. Another intriguing recent finding is that aggressive behavior directed by adolescents toward the mother in interparental conflict predicted adjustment problems for both boys and girls, but these responses were most significant predictors for boys when the mother had attacked the father, whereas they were most significant for girls when the father had initiated conflict with the mother (Davis et al., 1998).

Race

Race may relate to differences in family systems, sensitivity to contextual factors, and differential attributions about contextual factors. However, there are no published comparisons of black families and white families on marital conflict and its effects on children. The higher incidence of single parents (excluded in this study) and extended families in the black community may possibly affect the nature of marital conflict and its meaning for children. For the

value of research in this area to have pertinence to all families, there is an urgent need for researchers to examine the effects of marital conflict on children in African American and other minority groups, as well as conflict with extended family members or live-in partners, given family structures in different ethnic niches.

Histories of Family Distress

We have seen that children's reactions to marital conflict are a function of their histories of exposure to conflict, with elevated responding associated with histories of greater past exposure. However, there is reason to believe that children's sensitization to marital conflict may reflect more general appraisals of family functioning as well. Thus, studies comparing physically abused and nonabused boys from low socioeconomic backgrounds have reported that abused boys are more likely to become aggressive following exposure, to intervene in marital conflicts, and to benefit in terms of reduced distress reactions by observing the resolution of conflict (Cummings, Hennessy, Rabideau, & Cicchetti, 1994; Hennessy, Rabideau, Cicchetti, & Cummings, 1994). Moreover, children from families that are distressed for reasons other than conflict or abuse histories also appear to be more reactive to exposure to marital conflict, and other forms of family conflict as well. Thus, Nixon and Cummings (1999) found that children with disabled siblings reported more anger, sadness, fear, personal responsibility, and dispositions toward intervening in marital and other forms of conflict involving family members (e.g., parent-child conflict, sibling-peer conflict) than children without disabled siblings. The literature suggests that families with disabled children experience more general distress than other families, including more marital conflict. Interestingly, Nixon and Cummings did *not* find significantly more marital distress in their sample, although maternal depression was elevated in relation to the control group. Other studies found that children *report* distress in response to a variety of types of family conflict other than marital conflict, although reactions are typically significantly greater to marital conflict (El-Sheikh & Cheskes, 1995; Hall & Cummings, 1997), and distress reactions in response to other forms of family conflict are reported less frequently (Grych, 1998).

Behavior problems also may be more elevated in children from families with spousal violence than in families without spousal violence, whether or not the children directly observe the incidents of violence (Jouriles et al., 1998). This may be due to the fact that information about violence is just as upsetting to a child's sense of emotional security as actually observing the events. For example, with regard to positive information about conflict, children's distress is allayed just as much by hearing an explanation that the conflict was resolved as by actually observing the resolution (Cummings, Simpson, & Wilson, 1993). Thus, children's heightened reactivity to marital conflict may reflect an elevated sense of emotional insecurity based on a

familywide analysis of current and past family functioning, and not necessarily a reaction to histories of marital conflict per se, although that is clearly the most commonly reported, and likely the most important, single family predictor of sensitization to marital conflict. On the other hand, children's distress in response to other stresses may be related to marital conflict. For example, El-Sheikh (1997) reported that in comparison to children from low-marital-conflict homes, children from high-marital-conflict homes were more distressed by *mother-child* disputes. These findings also suggest that there may be significant interactions between interparental and other conflict histories in the family in predicting children's adjustment over time (Grych, 1998).

STUDYING DEVELOPMENTAL PATHWAYS PROSPECTIVELY: A DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As noted in Chapter 4, the study of developmental pathways is a critical element of the developmental psychopathology perspective. However, most studies, particularly studies that comprehensively test multiple dimensions of children's stress and coping with marital conflict, and that disaggregate the forms of expression of marital conflict, have been based on cross-sectional designs; that is, data-intensive assessments of multidimensional, multidomain, and multimethod assessments of the effects of marital conflicts on children have typically been based upon cross-sectional research, which has limited capacity to support causal inferences about the course of development over time. Marital conflict has been shown, prospectively, to predict children's adjustment problems (e.g., Block, Block, & Morrison, 1981), but such tests have been based upon limited model testing and assessments with regard to constructs concerning marital relations and children's adjustment (e.g., Harold, Fincham, Osborne, & Conger, 1997; Howes & Markman, 1989). These studies are even more limited in terms of assessing mediating processes and moderating factors that link marital conflict and child outcomes.

While there is not yet firm evidence on developmental pathways associated with marital conflict, some points can be made about age effects based on research to date. The evidence concerning how children are affected early in life by exposure to marital conflict is quite remarkable. Thus, observational studies based on children's reactions to marital conflict in the home indicate that *even 1-year-olds* react, often with vigorous emotional and behavioral responses as bystanders to their parents' conflicts, including overtly angry, even aggressive displays, crying, yelling, distressed vocalizations, and sadness or scared facial expressions (Cummings, Zahn-Waxler, & Radke-Yarrow, 1981). Even at this age, children sometimes try to intervene in their parents' conflicts. For example, in one case, a 1-year-old heard his parents arguing in the kitchen and then urgently cried, "Mommy, mommy!" Hearing her son's cries, the mother had to break off her argument with her husband and go to the living room to see how her son was. The child's response was to smile

broadly! In another instance, a little 1-year-old girl kissed and wiped off her mommy's tears after her mother had a terrible fight with the father. It is remarkable how many parents are unaware of the sensitivity of even very young children to their conflicts.

While young children may not understand the content of the parents' arguments, they are highly sensitive to their conflicts and remain highly sensitive to unresolved and chronic fighting between the parents throughout childhood. As we have noted, some developmental psychopathologists posit that there are stage-salient tasks for children during development. In some instances, relatedly, there are stage-salient stressors. For example, separation from parents is a stage-salient task that reflects the significance of early attachment relations to infant's functioning, but separation from parents becomes dramatically less stressful for children as they get older. From this perspective, it is interesting to note that marital conflict does not appear to be a stage-salient stressor for children; that is, it is stressful for children throughout their development, and there is evidence that adults and the elderly report that marital conflict is stressful for them as well (Hall & Cummings, 1997).

Reactions do change with age. Thus, younger children are also less able to interpret the distinction between resolved and unresolved conflicts, and otherwise understand the implications and causes of conflicts (Davies, Myers, & Cummings, 1996; El-Sheikh & Cummings, 1995; Grych, 1998). They also react in a manner that suggests a greater sense of helplessness and are more prone to self-blame. On the other hand, older children are more likely actually to become involved in the conflicts and may more often become enmeshed in these situations. However, these differences are not at all readily interpretable in terms of making decisions about which age groups or developmental levels are more vulnerable to exposure to high levels of marital conflict. On the other hand, with regard to age effects, it is difficult to disentangle whether developmental level or children's different length of histories of exposure to marital conflict account for differences in patterns of responding. There are a variety of additional complicating factors, such as the possibility that parents fight differently in front of children of different ages, children at different ages are vulnerable to different problems, or furthermore, that there may be differences for boys and girls in the problems exhibited at different ages. There are certainly studies documenting disorders associated with marital conflict at all of the ages of childhood. Thus, the findings to date do not support conclusions that one age or another is more vulnerable to high levels of marital conflict in the family, although expressions of vulnerability may vary with age as well as other factors, such as gender.

CONCLUSION

The study of relations between marital conflict and child adjustment has been guided in recent years by models that are quite consistent with the principles

of the developmental psychopathology approach to uncovering the processes that underlie children's development and risk for adjustment problems (Cummings & Cummings, 1988; Cummings & El-Sheikh, 1991; Davies & Cummings, 1994). Thus, the great progress in understanding that has taken place over the past 10-15 years is a tribute to the utility of this approach for making scientific progress on questions that are complex and quite difficult to study. As we have shown in the course of our discussion, multiple factors and pathways have been implicated as possibly important and as therefore meriting inclusion in future research designed to study these questions. Prospective, longitudinal research is required, and urgently needed, for testing causal pathways over time, including models of mediating and moderating processes. As we have seen, information about pathways of development constitutes a significant gap in our understanding of relations between marriages, children, and families. The potential significance for clinical science and practice of more sophisticated and complex studies for an adequate developmental psychopathology of families and children is notable given the clear links with childhood disorders. In addition, more complex models of mediating and moderating processes that examine development over time are needed, and these fit well with the principles outlined in the developmental psychopathology perspective. Thus, this area of research and theory should have obvious practice implications and, thus, should be a proving ground, in a sense, for the promise of this approach if we are to advance to a second generation of research on the study of childhood disorders.

For example, longitudinal research needs to examine changes in children and marital functioning over time. Thus, it will be especially important to investigate how stability and change in marital conflict forecast change in children's behavior problems, an issue heretofore never systematically studied. Children whose parents reduce marital conflict (or learn to manage it better) should show diminished difficulties. When conflict begins or is exacerbated, there is likely to be an escalation in children's emotional difficulties. The study of these questions has particularly important clinical implications, especially when studies provide insights into the critical processes underlying childhood outcomes. Research that aims to test the tenets of the emotional security hypothesis further is thus especially promising given the already developed theoretical and empirical foundation for the tenets of this model. Fortunately, several laboratories, including investigators with considerable experience in this area, are now undertaking such complex longitudinal studies. Armed with the extensive body of research that has accumulated in recent years about process relations between marital conflict, children's functioning, and child adjustment, investigators in the area of marital relations and children's development are poised to undertake research that comprehensively addresses the questions and issues at hand.

Finally, since the quality of interparental relations has such significant implications for children's development and is a function of the parents' behavior, marital relations might properly be conceptualized as another di-

mension of parenting. The view that marital relations (or the termination or lack of marital relations) are a dimension of parenting is consistent with a holistic perspective on parental behavior in families and the implications of parental behavior for child development. This perspective on marital relations as parenting is consistent with the developmental psychopathology perspective, which emphasizes a broader organizational view of the multiplicity of influences on children's development in families.

CHAPTER NINE

Applications of Developmental Psychopathology: Parental Depression, Families, and Children's Development

In this chapter, we consider yet another approach used by developmental psychopathologists in the study of children and families; that is, instead of being concerned with a specific family subsystem, this chapter examines multiple family processes that affect a specific group of children. Developmental psychopathology is often focused specifically on groups of children at risk for psychopathology.

We illustrate this fact of developmental psychopathology by examining a particular group of children at risk, that is, children of depressed parents. Over the past two decades, parental personality and adjustment have increasingly been regarded as a one of the determinants of a multiplicity of processes linked with family functioning and broader ecological contexts (Belsky, 1984; see Figure II.1). Specifically, we focus on children at risk for adjustment problems as a function of the constellation of familial variables associated with parental depression. Consider the following cases:

Joe's father had been diagnosed with major unipolar depression. Joe's paternal grandfather had also experienced episodes of depression. Nonetheless, Joe's parents were both attentive and responsive as parents, and Joe's father spent a great deal of time with him when he was growing up. Even during his bouts of depression, Joe's father remained attentive and emotionally warm toward Joe except when his symptomatology was particularly severe. Joe's mother was very supportive of her husband, and