



Department of Justice
Canada

Ministère de la Justice
Canada

Canada

BACKGROUND PAPER

AN OVERVIEW OF THE RISKS AND PROTECTORS FOR CHILDREN OF SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

2002-FCY-2E

An Overview of the Risks and Protectors for Children of Separation and Divorce

Prepared by:
Silvia C. Bernardini
Jennifer M. Jenkins

The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto
Department of Human Development and Applied Psychology

Presented to:
Family, Children and Youth Section
Department of Justice Canada

*The views expressed in this report are those of the authors
and do not necessarily reflect the views of
the Department of Justice Canada.*

Aussi disponible en français

This report may be reproduced, in part or in whole, and by any means, without charge or further permission from the Department of Justice, provided that due diligence is exercised in ensuring the accuracy of the materials reproduced; that the Department of Justice is identified as the source department; and that the reproduction is not represented as an official version of the original report.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	iii
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN DIVORCE AND CHILDREN'S ADJUSTMENT	3
2.1 Retrospective Studies.....	3
2.2 Prospective Studies.....	5
3 THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN COMPONENTS OF DIVORCE AND CHILDREN'S ADJUSTMENT.....	6
3.1 Absence of Non-resident Parent	6
3.2 Troubled Parent-Child Relationships	7
3.3 Economic Disadvantage	8
3.4 Parental Conflict	9
4 WAYS IN WHICH FACTORS COMBINE TO INCREASE AND DECREASE DISTURBANCE IN CHILDREN: EXACERBATION AND PROTECTION.....	14
4.1 Exposure to Multiple Risks	14
4.2 Protective Effects.....	15
5 MEASURES USED TO ASSESS THE IMPACT OF DIVORCE ON CHILD ADJUSTMENT	18
5.1 The Assessment of Reliability and Validity	18
5.2 Measures of Marital Adjustment and Satisfaction.....	18
5.3 Measures of Marital Conflict.....	19
5.4 Post-Divorce Measures.....	22
5.5 Measurement of Childhood Disturbance	23
5.6 Purpose of Conflict Measures.....	23
6 SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS.....	25
BIBLIOGRAPHY	29

APPENDIX A: THE SHORT MARITAL TEST	39
APPENDIX B: THE DYADIC ADJUSTMENT SCALE	43
APPENDIX C: THE REVISED CONFLICT TACTICS SCALE	47
APPENDIX D: CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION OF INTERPARENTAL CONFLICT SCALE	53

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canadian children face many stresses that can affect their social and emotional adjustment. The separation and subsequent divorce of parents is one such source of stress. The purpose of this paper is two-fold: to examine the factors related to divorce that put children at risk of maladjustment and protect them from negative consequences; and to review the usefulness of available measures for assessing conflict in families experiencing parental divorce.

We begin by reviewing the empirical research related to the impact of parental separation on the well-being of children. Based on this review, we have concluded that some children of separated and divorced parents are less well adjusted than children of continuously intact families on various indices, including academic achievement, parent-child relationships, and emotional and behavioural adjustment. However, we stress that most children who experience the separation of their parents adjust successfully.

RISK FACTORS

After establishing the association between parental divorce and child maladjustment in section 2, we then consider in section 3 the various factors related to the divorce process that increase the risk of maladjustment in children. Four central components of divorce (absence of non-resident parent, troubled parent-child relationships, economic disadvantage and parental conflict) are reviewed to illustrate that some factors are more strongly related to child behavioural and emotional difficulties than others. For instance, there is little support for the assertion that children experience maladjustment following divorce because of the absence of their non-resident parent alone. Rather, there are indications that other factors related to parental involvement (e.g. payment of child support, authoritative parenting) are more important for a child's well-being than the frequency of contact with the non-resident parent.

Research consistently indicates that troubled parent-child relationships and lowered family income following divorce have a negative impact on child adjustment. Moreover, while the effects of various aspects of divorce on child adjustment is demonstrated in the literature to varying degrees, the association between parental conflict and child maladjustment is unequivocal. Inter-parental anger and conflict are strong predictors of, and risk factors for, child maladjustment *regardless* of the family type in which the child is living: intact, divorced or stepfamily.

There are several policy implications to these findings concerning risk factors. These recommendations are based solely on the divorce and conflict literature we reviewed for this paper, and not on the results of policies and programs which have already been evaluated.

First, since parental conflict has been shown to be a consistent predictor of child well-being, policies and programs that reduce children's exposure to such conflict are likely to be beneficial. For example, preventative programs might take the form of public health or school-based education programs targeted at young adults. Any program that helps young adults develop better problem-solving skills within their relationships, even before they have children, might lead to a decrease in the incidence of children's exposure to parental conflict. In addition,

helping parents who are undergoing a divorce (and the professionals working with them) to understand how exposure to conflict affects children might also serve to decrease interparental conflict. Conflict assessment measures also may be used as screening instruments to target services more effectively. For instance, it is possible that families in high conflict might benefit from different procedures when going through the courts than families experiencing lower levels of conflict.

Second, policies and programs focussed on the economic components of the divorce process would also be beneficial to children. For example, safe-guarding the custodial parents' income would be likely to decrease parental stress, thereby positively affecting the parent-child relationship.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Why do some children manifest difficulties following the divorce of their parents while others appear to cope successfully? This difference can be explained by the fact that divorces differ in their component parts. However, such components do not account for all of the unexplained variations in a child's adjustment. In section 4, we examine how both exposure to multiple risks and the beneficial effects of protective factors must be considered as we try to understand why some children are more negatively affected than others. One of the important findings from research on children's exposure to stressful events is that when several risk factors occur, they combine to multiply detrimental effects in children. One implication of this is that policies or programs geared to reducing the occurrence of even one risk are likely to be beneficial because they reduce the *potency* or negative impact of other risks on child adjustment. For instance, any policy that addresses family income or family benefits for divorced families could also be expected to reduce the impact of high conflict on children. Another implication is the potential benefit of designing policies or programs to address a number of risk factors.

Findings from research on protective factors show that some children do not have adjustment problems following parental divorce because of pre-existing factors (e.g. warmth in the parent-child relationship, positive emotionality) in their lives that help them cope with the stress. This has two implications. First, there are naturally occurring factors in children's lives that protect them; it may be possible to increase the impact of these factors through parental education programs. Second, knowing which children are likely to show more problems in the face of divorce (i.e. those without positive pre-existing factors) helps to target available services to those in need.

MEASUREMENT OF CONFLICT

The measurement of anger-based parental conflict is well established in the research literature. In section 5, we review various general and specific measures and provide details about their psychometric properties. Although general measures are widely used and demonstrate good psychometric properties, specific measures of dyadic *conflict* are better predictors of long-term adjustment in children than are general measures of dyadic *satisfaction*. While the measurement of conflict is well established, the application of conflict measures as clinical instruments (to

make decisions about individual children and families) has not been established. Some steps necessary for their use as clinical instruments are described in section 5.

One of the policy implications of section 5 is that it may be possible to use measures of parental conflict as screening tools to identify vulnerable children and families. Another implication has to do with child measures. In section 5 we also review measures of childhood disturbance, which are well established. If a program or service delivery objective is to identify children who are likely to fare less well following the divorce of their parents, then a good strategy would be to use a well established conflict measure in conjunction with a child adjustment measure.

A review of other measures to examine the components of divorce (payment of child support, the quality of the parent-child relationship) was beyond the scope of this review. However, if such measures were combined with those for conflict and child well-being, our ability to identify those children and families most in need of services would be further increased.

1 INTRODUCTION

Recent reports completed for the Department of Justice Canada have demonstrated that large numbers of Canadian children are exposed to their parents' divorce (e.g. Marcil-Gratton and Le Bourdais, 1999; Stewart, 2000). These studies have suggested that the divorce rate has been increasing steadily in Canada since the late 1970s and peaked in 1987 when approximately 96,200 divorces were recorded. However, after 1987 the rate of divorce decreased to the 1996 statistic of 71,528 divorces, with custody orders for approximately 47,000 children subject of custody orders (Stewart, 2001). In addition, an increasing number of Canadian children are being born to common-law couples. Because common-law couples, in comparison to married couples, appear to have a significantly higher tendency to separate (Marcil-Gratton and Le Bourdais, 1999; O'Connor and Jenkins, 2001), many Canadian children are experiencing the dissolution of their parents' common-law relationship, a factor not included in official divorce statistics in Canada (Stewart, 2001). Thus, either because of parental divorce or the dissolution of common-law relationships, a significant number of Canadian children are experiencing parental separation, and so are living in various types of families (single mother, stepfamilies, single father, etc.). In this report we refer to parental marriage, by which we mean both common-law and legal marriages. When we refer to parental divorce, we mean the dissolution of the parental relationship, regardless of whether parents were legally married.

A recent project (Stewart 2001) concluded that although the negative impact of divorce on child adjustment is well established in the research literature, professionals have been unable to offer an accepted definition of high conflict or a well developed means of identifying high conflict families. Similarly, we concluded that there is little consensus on the relative toxicity of different risk factors for children, of which parental conflict is one. However, as researchers in the area of family conflict, we feel it is worthwhile to outline and review empirical evidence regarding the interrelated issues of divorce, parental conflict, risk and protective factors, and measures of conflict. Therefore, the current project was undertaken, and the following report written, to address: 1) those factors related to divorce that put children at risk of maladjustment and those that protect children from negative outcomes; and 2) the usefulness, including reliability and validity, of available measures for assessing conflict in families experiencing parental divorce.

Throughout the past five decades, numerous retrospective and prospective studies have been conducted to identify the possible negative effects of divorce on the adjustment of children. In section 2, we briefly review these studies and highlight the main findings of the research literature. In section 3, we review the literature related to four components of divorce (absence of non-resident parent, troubled parent-child relationships, economic disadvantage and parental conflict) that are believed to increase the risk of child maladjustment following parental separation. This literature suggests that some components of the divorce process (such as parental conflict) are consistently and strongly related to child behavioural and emotional difficulties, while others have only a weak association with children's adjustment (e.g. absence of non-resident parent). Why do some children demonstrate disturbance following divorce while others seem to cope well? In section 4, we explore this question and discuss how exposure to multiple risks affects child adjustment and how certain factors in children's lives can protect them from the stress of divorce so they are less prone to disturbance. To assess the impact of

parental divorce on child well-being, researchers have used a range of measures. In section 5, we review various measures of marital satisfaction, interparental conflict and post-divorce conflict. Measures are briefly described and the psychometric properties of each are outlined. We conclude with several issues that need to be considered in order to move in the direction of using such research measures in a clinical manner. Finally, in section 6, a summary of the information presented in the entire report is provided, as well as program and policy implications that arise from the reviewed literature.

2 THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN DIVORCE AND CHILDREN'S ADJUSTMENT

Divorce involves considerable changes and stressors for children, such as a decreased standard of living, change in family type, decreased contact with one parent, and interparental conflict. Divorce is one of the most prevalent life stressors experienced by children today (Hetherington, Bridges and Insabella, 1998; Lengua et al., 2000). Therefore, during the past five decades, numerous retrospective and prospective studies have been dedicated to identifying the possible negative effects of divorce on the adjustment of children. What follows is a brief overview of the findings of these studies.

2.1 RETROSPECTIVE STUDIES

Various studies have retrospectively compared children from divorced and married families to examine the implications of parental divorce on child well-being (see Stewart, 2001, for a comprehensive review of this research). Such studies, and qualitative reviews of the research literature, have produced inconsistent findings. Some studies and reviews have found that children from divorced families, compared to children from intact families, experience lower levels of well-being across various domains (e.g. social and emotional functioning) (Hetherington, 1981; Krantz, 1988; Peterson and Zill, 1986). Other studies and reviews have failed to find significant results and have suggested that most children recover from divorce with few enduring negative consequences (Edwards, 1987). Emery (1988) concluded that although divorce is associated with a number of negative child outcomes, serious problems are not markedly over-represented among divorced families.

To clarify the confusion and contradictory nature of the research findings, Amato and Keith (1991a) conducted a meta-analysis to estimate the impact of parental divorce on the well-being of children and adolescents. Including 92 studies conducted prior to 1991 that collectively involved more than 13,000 children, the meta-analysis examined eight of the most frequently studied and reviewed outcomes of child well-being in relation to divorce. They included *academic achievement* (standardized achievement tests, grades, teachers' ratings, and intelligence), *conduct* (misbehaviour, aggression and delinquency), *psychological adjustment* (depression, anxiety and happiness), *self-concept* (self-esteem, perceived competence and internal locus of control), *social adjustment* (popularity, loneliness and cooperativeness), *mother-child relations* (affection, help and quality of interaction), *father-child relations* (affection, help and quality of interaction) and *other*.

Results of the meta-analysis revealed two important trends. First, compared to children from intact homes, children from divorced families did, indeed, experience lower levels of well-being. In fact, more than two thirds of studies included in the meta-analysis found lower levels of well-being in children of divorced parents. Second, while the differences between children of divorced and intact families were statistically significant, the size of the differences (effect size) was small. More specifically, across all eight outcome measures, children from divorced families scored between one fifth and one eighth of a standard deviation below children from intact families. The strongest mean effect sizes (effect sizes are reported in terms of standard

deviations and refer to the magnitude of an association between two variables) were for father-child relations (-.26) and conduct (-.23), and the weakest but still statistically significant effect sizes were for psychological adjustment (-.08) and self-concept (-.09) (Amato and Keith, 1991a). This finding indicates that the stress of divorce may manifest itself most strongly in children's relationships with their fathers and their externalizing behaviour and may have the least amount of impact on children's psychological adjustment and self-concept. It is also of interest to note that these adjustment differences exist not only in the short-term, but may also persist into adulthood to influence subsequent generations of children (Kiernan and Hobcraft, 1997; Kiernan and Mueller, 1998; O'Connor et al., 1999; Rodgers and Prior, 1998). In a second meta-analysis that compared the adjustment of adults who grew up in divorced or intact families, larger but still moderate effect sizes were found (Amato and Keith, 1991b).

Why do different studies produce discrepant results with respect to the effects of divorce on child well-being? In an attempt to answer this question, Amato and Keith (1991a) employed meta-analytic techniques to elucidate study characteristics that account for variations in effect sizes. First, they found that methodologically strong studies (i.e. those that utilized general population samples, control variables or large sample sizes) reported smaller differences between children from divorced and non-divorced families and that methodologically unsophisticated studies may overestimate the effects of divorce on children. Second, the meta-analysis revealed that effect sizes based on the reports of parents were weaker than effect sizes based on other sources. This indicates that divorced parents (usually mothers) may underestimate their children's problems and that researchers and clinicians should not rely solely on parental reports of child functioning.

Although the research literature contains numerous suggestions that divorce has more negative consequences for boys than for girls (Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 1982; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980), the meta-analysis indicated that, in general, boys and girls do not differ in their response to parental divorce. There was one exception to this generality, however, with boys from divorced families exhibiting more difficulty adjusting socially than girls. A fourth factor found to be significantly associated with effect sizes for psychological adjustment, social adjustment, mother-child relations and father-child relations was the age of the child. Effect sizes were largest for children in primary school and high school, and smallest for college-aged children (Amato and Keith, 1991a). Finally, on the basis of longitudinal studies (Hetherington et al., 1982), it was hypothesized that effect sizes would be strongest for studies taking place shortly after the divorce. The results of the meta-analysis indicated that this hypothesis was true only in relation to child conduct problems. Compared to children whose parents had been divorced for more than two years, children whose parents had been divorced for two years or less had more conduct problems. This finding indicates that conduct problems become less pronounced over time (Amato and Keith, 1991a).

Many studies conducted from 1990 reported that children from divorced families scored lower than children from intact families on various outcomes, including academic success, conduct, psychological adjustment, self-concept and social competence following parental separation (Amato, 2000; Juby and Farrington, 2001). In addition, the small effect sizes reported in Amato and Keith's (1991a) meta-analysis (mean effect size of .18) appear to be consistent with those established by studies conducted in the 1990s (mean effect size of .19) (Amato, 2000).

Most outcomes for children are measured on continuous scales. The results for outcomes measured dichotomously show a similar picture. For instance, studies of nationally representative samples in the U.S. indicate that children from divorced families are approximately twice as likely to receive psychological help than are children from married families (Zill, Morrison and Coiro, 1993). McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) analyzed data from five different national surveys of children and families. Such analyses revealed that the risk of dropping out of high school and of teen pregnancy was about twice as great for children from divorced families than for children from married families.

While such data indicate that divorce is a risk factor for various psychological problems among children, the same data highlight that many children “bounce back” from the stress of parental divorce. Therefore, although Zill et al. (1993) found that twice as many 12- to 16-year-old American children from divorced families (21 percent) as intact families (11 percent) received psychological help, 79 percent of those children coped with their parents’ divorce without receiving psychological help. Similarly, most children who experience parental separation do not drop out of high school or get pregnant as teenagers.

2.2 PROSPECTIVE STUDIES

Longitudinal, prospective studies provide another perspective on the effects of divorce on child well-being. While retrospective studies find correlations between parental divorce and child maladjustment, longitudinal studies remind us that correlation is not the same as causation. Thus, the maladjustment of children of divorced families may not be solely due to parental separation. Rather, in light of the fact that divorce is the final outcome of a *process* marked by dissatisfaction, unhappiness and conflict, child maladjustment may also be influenced by factors present prior to the divorce. In fact, the longitudinal studies of Cherlin et al. (1991) found that although children from divorced families exhibited more behaviour problems than children from married families, these problems, at least for boys, were present before the divorce. Amato and Booth (1996) also found that problems in parent-child relationships (including parental reports that their children had given them more than the average amount of problems) were present 8 to 12 years before parental separation. Comparable results were obtained with regards to children’s internalizing and externalizing behaviour, social competence, self-esteem and adolescent substance abuse (Aseltine, 1996; Doherty and Needle, 1991; Hetherington, 1999). In light of such findings, Cherlin et al. (1991) speculated that the observed differences between children from divorced and intact families can be traced to three sources:

- growing up in a dysfunctional family marked by parental difficulties;
- being exposed to prolonged marital conflict; and
- adjusting to various changes following the divorce, such as economic instability, decreased parenting, continued parental conflict, and decreased contact with the non-resident parent.

3 THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN COMPONENTS OF DIVORCE AND CHILDREN'S ADJUSTMENT

In section 2, we saw that while *most* children cope successfully with the stress of parental divorce, children from divorced families are at an increased *risk* of developing adjustment problems. In this section, we review four components of divorce that have been suggested to account for the increased risk of maladjustment in children of divorce. They are:

- absence of the non-resident parent;
- troubled parent-child relationships;
- economic disadvantage; and
- parental conflict.

3.1 ABSENCE OF NON-RESIDENT PARENT

Parents are important resources for children in terms of providing them with attention, assistance, love, support and supervision. However, following parental divorce, children typically have decreased contact with their non-resident parent, usually the father. One large-scale study in the United States found that in the previous five years, 23 percent of fathers had no contact with their children, while an additional 20 percent had not seen their children during the preceding year (Furstenberg and Nord, 1985). Estimates for Canadian children are only a little lower (Marcil-Gratton and Le Bourdais, 1999). A second American study found that approximately one third of fathers saw their children only once or not at all during the previous year, that approximately four out of ten fathers saw their children a few times a year to a few times a month, and that a quarter saw their children once a week or more (Seltzer, 1991). Marcil-Gratton and Bourdais (1999) found that the type of union the parents had prior to their separation influenced the frequency of father-child contact after the divorce. Common-law union prior to separation was associated with less non-resident parental contact after separation than married unions (common law 21 percent versus 11 percent married unions). The age of children at the time of separation has also been found to be an important factor in father-child contact. Contact has been found to be greater when children were older at the time of separation (Le Bourdais, Juby and Marcil-Gratton, 2001).

Does this decreased contact with the non-resident parent account for the maladjustment experienced by some children of divorce? Empirical studies have provided inconsistent findings that generally do not support a positive answer to this question. Some researchers have found no relationship between visitation frequency and child outcomes (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994), while others have found that frequent contact with the non-resident parent is associated with better adjustment, but only when interparental conflict is low (Kelly, 2000; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980).

Amato and Keith (1991a) argued that if decreased contact with the non-resident parent is associated with child maladjustment, then children of divorce should fare no worse than children

who have experienced the death of a parent. To assess this argument, researchers combined the results of 23 studies that included data on children who had experienced the death of a parent and children from divorced and intact families. The results of the meta-analysis indicated that the children whose parent had died were significantly lower in academic achievement, and had more conduct problems and difficulties in psychological adjustment and self-esteem than children in intact families. However, children whose parent died were significantly higher in academic achievement and displayed fewer conduct problems than children of divorced parents. As well, by collapsing all child outcomes into a single category, children whose parent had died had a lower overall adjustment score than children whose parents were still together, *but* functioned at a higher level than children whose parents had divorced.

As noted above, the research literature suggests a weak association between paternal visitation frequency and child well-being. Although researchers have used visitation frequency as an indicator of the general quality of a father-child relationship, relational theorists suggest that this association is problematic. Thus, the frequency of paternal contact is a necessary but *not sufficient* condition for a close relationship to develop between a father and child. Following from this theoretical assertion, Amato and Gilbreth (1999) recently conducted a meta-analysis to examine the association between four dimensions of father involvement, including visitation frequency, payment of child support, feelings of closeness, and authoritative parenting and child adjustment. In accordance with previous research, the results of the meta-analysis indicated that, in general, children do not appear to benefit from *frequent* visitation with their fathers. Rather, what a father *does with his child* when he has contact with him or her is much more important than how often he sees the child. For example, it was found that child support, feelings of closeness, and authoritative parenting were all significantly associated with positive child outcomes, with authoritative parenting being the most consistent predictor of child outcomes.

In conclusion, the literature suggests a weak association between the absence of the non-resident parent or visitation frequency and a child's well-being, and emphasizes that additional mechanisms must be operating in divorced families that have an affect on child well-being.

3.2 TROUBLED PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

A large number of studies have consistently documented that, on average, parents and children from divorced families have less positive relationships than parents and children from intact families (Amato and Keith, 1991a; Hetherington, 1989, 1993). For example, data suggest that divorce is related to significant declines in the quality of parenting, including poor communication, inconsistent warmth and affection, inconsistent discipline, and lower levels of monitoring (Peterson and Zill, 1986; Simons et al., 1999). In addition, as previously noted, prospective studies suggest that difficulties in the parent-child relationship of divorced families were evident prior to the parental divorce (Amato and Booth, 1996). This suggests that the stress of marital difficulties indirectly influences parent-child relationships both before and after the parental divorce.

In a national study of 1,147 American children from divorced and intact families, children were interviewed at two points in time about their relationship with their parents (Zill et al., 1993). Children were interviewed when they were between the ages of 12 to 16 years (Time 1) and 18 to 22 years (Time 2). Of the 1,147 children, 240 of them experienced the divorce of their

parents at the mean age of 6 years. “Poor” parent-child relationships were defined as the child’s positive response to zero or only one of the following: 1) feel close to the parent; 2) satisfied with the amount of affection received from the parent; 3) desire to be the kind of person the parent is; and 4) doing things with the parent that the child enjoys. At Time 2, the fourth item was replaced with a statement to determine how well the youth could share ideas or talk with the parent.

The results of the study indicated that 32 percent of children from divorced families reported they had a poor relationship with their father at Time 1 and 65 percent reported they had a poor relationship with their father at Time 2. In contrast, 14 percent of children from intact families reported they had a poor relationship with their father at Time 1 versus 29 percent at Time 2 (Zill et al., 1993). With respect to the mother-child relationship, in *both* divorced and intact families, only 8 percent of youth reported a poor relationship at Time 1. However, at Time 2, there was a significant increase in the number of children from divorced families who reported a poor relationship with their mother. Specifically, 25 percent of children from divorced families reported they had a poor relationship with their mother, versus 18 percent of children from intact families (Zill et al., 1993). Taken together, these findings suggest that, on average, the father-child relationship in divorced families is significantly worse than that between mothers and their children. In addition, the fact that an increasing number of youth reported poor relationships with their parents as time progressed indicates that divorce may exacerbate normative difficulties in parent-child relationships (Emery, 1999).

A number of studies have linked troubled parent-child relationships with increased internalizing and externalizing of problems among children from divorced families (Lengua et al., 2000). In addition, an intervention program aimed at improving parenting skills has shown that increasing consistent discipline and the positive aspects of the mother-child relationship leads to improvements in children’s adjustment following divorce (Lengua et al., 2000; Martinez and Forgatch, 2001). Thus, empirical data suggest that an additional stressor for children in divorcing families is the increased risk of troubled parent-child relationships and the decreased quality of parenting.

3.3 ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE

According to U.S. statistics, 52 percent of children living with a single mother lived below the poverty line in 1994, as compared to 24 percent of children living with a single father, and 11 percent of children living in two-parent households (Emery, 1999). Since divorced parents fare better than parents who were never married, 38 percent of children with divorced mothers lived below the poverty line in 1994 as compared to 15 percent of children living with divorced fathers (Emery, 1999). In addition, longitudinal data show that the living standards of women and children fall by approximately 10 percent in the first year after divorce (Emery, 1999). These statistics highlight that family status, often associated with parental divorce, is a powerful predictor of child poverty.

Decreased family income following divorce may negatively affect children in a number of indirect ways. For example, children may have to move to a less expensive neighbourhood, which could result in losing contact with friends and supports in the old neighbourhood, moving to a less desirable school, and being exposed to more negative peer groups. In addition, there

may be less money for resources such as books, computers and tutors, which could adversely affect academic achievement. Custodial parents may also have to find employment or work longer hours to support the family. This in turn could result in a significant decline in the quality of parenting as parents are burdened with financial concerns and consumed with the added responsibilities of single parenting. Any of the above noted stressors can affect a child's well-being, and all of these changes can result from decreased economic stability following divorce.

According to the economic disadvantage perspective, children experience maladjustment following the separation of their parents because of a decrease in their standard of living. If this view is valid, then few differences should be observed between children from divorced and intact families once income is statistically controlled. To assess this hypothesis, one would compare children from divorced families with children from intact families on measures of well-being, both before and after controlling for family income. One such study offered support for this hypothesis by finding that differences in children, due to parents' marital status, were reduced by half once income was accounted for (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). A second study found that when children from divorced and intact families were compared, and when income was not controlled for, children from divorced families scored significantly lower than children in intact families on 27 of 34 outcomes. However, when income was statistically accounted for, the number of significant differences between the groups of children decreased from 27 to 13 outcomes (Guidubaldi, Perry and Nastasi, 1987). A recent study (Clarke-Stewart et al., 2000) found that differences between children in one- and two-parent families, on assessments of cognitive and social abilities, problem behaviour and attachment security, were reduced when family income (and the mother's education, which is usually associated with income) was accounted for. Moreover, research has consistently documented a significant association between the father's payment of child support and positive child outcomes following parental divorce (Amato and Gilbreth, 1999).

In conclusion, then, there is ample evidence that divorce is usually accompanied by a decrease in a family's economic standing (Amato and Keith, 1991a; Emery, 1999), and that this financial stress accounts for some of the maladjustment observed in children of divorced parents. However, this same evidence indicates that children in divorced families continue to score below children in intact families on various indices of well-being even after family income is accounted for. Thus, although economic disadvantage accounts for some of the variance, it is not the sole explanation for the impact of divorce on children.

3.4 PARENTAL CONFLICT

The two perspectives that have been discussed up to this point both involve "post-divorce factors." That is, *following* a divorce, children may experience poorer relationships with their parents, they may have less contact with their non-resident parent, and they may experience a decrease in their standard of living. Empirical evidence suggests that these three post-divorce stressors can have a negative effect on children's well-being. However, longitudinal studies indicate that a proportion of adjustment problems observed in children from divorced families can be accounted for by "pre-divorce" factors such as interparental conflict (Cherlin et al., 1991).

Researchers believe that interparental conflict is one of the most important factors associated with maladjustment in children from divorced families (Long et al., 1988). The interparental

conflict perspective takes two distinct forms. The first states that children from divorced families experience maladjustment not because of divorce per se, but because of the interparental conflict they are exposed to prior to the divorce. The second posits that child well-being is inversely related to interparental conflict following divorce. Does empirical support exist for one, or both, of these hypotheses?

3.4.1 Pre-divorce Conflict

In one study, Amato, Loomis and Booth (1995) estimated that 30 percent of divorces involve severe marital conflict (i.e. frequent disagreements, serious quarrels, verbal and/or physical abuse) prior to the divorce. If the hypothesis that interparental conflict prior to divorce, rather than divorce itself, is responsible for child maladjustment, then children from divorced families should be similar in their adjustment to children from intact, high conflict families. In other words, interparental conflict is a risk factor for child maladjustment regardless of parental marital status. Many studies have found support for this hypothesis. For instance, Camara and Resnick (1988) found that marital status (divorced versus intact) was significantly associated with five outcomes of child well-being until measures of conflict were entered into the regression equations. Following the inclusion of conflict measures, marital status was no longer significantly associated with any outcome of child well-being. Block, Block and Gjerde (1986), in one of the earliest studies suggesting that prior marital conflict might explain the negative effects of divorce on children, found that children whose parents subsequently divorced showed disturbance in their behaviour prior to the divorce.

In an attempt to validate the pre-divorce conflict hypothesis, Amato and Keith (1991a) conducted a meta-analysis of eight studies that allowed for the comparison of children from low conflict intact families, high conflict intact families, and divorced families. The results of the meta-analysis revealed that in comparison to children in intact low conflict families, children in intact high conflict families scored significantly lower on measures of well-being. The effect sizes between these two groups of children were substantial for conduct (mean effect size = -0.60), psychological adjustment (-0.68) and self-concept (-0.59). Moreover, children in intact high conflict families scored significantly lower even in comparison to children from divorced families with respect to psychological adjustment (-.31) and self-esteem (-.35). When all outcomes were combined to calculate a single effect size, children in high conflict intact families scored 0.32 of a standard deviation below children in intact low conflict families and 0.12 of a standard deviation below children from divorced families. These findings are consistent with the results of a recent study that found similar rates of delinquency in boys from intact and divorced high conflict families (Juby and Farrington, 2001), which suggests that parental conflict is a risk factor for child maladjustment in both divorced and intact families.

If conflict is harmful for children, does child adjustment improve when highly conflictual marriages are dissolved? In one study, after controlling for parent's age, sex, race, education and children's sex and age, children whose highly conflictual parents separated did better as adults than those that remained married (Amato et al., 1995). A more recent study, based on the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth data set, also examined the question of whether children benefit from the dissolution of high conflict marriages (Morrison and Coiro, 1999). One hundred and thirty-seven children, with a mean age of six years, from disrupted families were studied. It was revealed that 10 percent of the disrupted marriages in the sample were highly conflictual.

The results indicated that children showed more behaviour problems in highly conflictual marriages, but regardless of the level of conflict prior to divorce they showed an increase in behaviour problems following parental separation. The greatest increase in behavioural problems, however, was shown by children whose parents remained married despite frequent conflict. They also found that children who were in high-conflict homes before the separation did not show a drop in behavioural disturbance after the separation. One possible interpretation of this finding was that the benefits of divorce were not yet evident, since the duration between when the children were studied and the divorce was not long.

Taken together, the results of such studies indicate that children from intact high conflict families exhibit lower levels of well-being than children from divorced families. Therefore, interparental conflict is a strong predictor, and risk factor, of child maladjustment *regardless* of the family type.

3.4.2 Post-divorce Conflict

As previously noted, a second hypothesis stemming from the interparental conflict perspective is that children's well-being is inversely associated with the level of post-divorce conflict that persists between parents. Such conflicts are typically about child custody, access and financial support. Several studies have reported data relevant to this hypothesis.

Johnston, Kline and Tschann (1989) found that less conflict and greater parental cooperation following divorce predicted better child adjustment than continued or increased conflict and poor parental cooperation. Guidubaldi et al. (1987) found that a decrease in parental conflict following divorce predicted better adjustment in boys. Long et al. (1988) also examined how changes in interparental conflict following divorce are related to adolescent adjustment. The sample included adolescents from intact families, adolescents who reported high interparental conflict both before and after divorce (the continued high conflict group) and adolescents who reported high interparental conflict before but not after the divorce (the reduced conflict group). Because most of the adolescents in the study were males, it is not clear whether the study's results can be generalized to girls. In any case, the results indicated that adolescents in the reduced conflict group did not differ significantly from adolescents in the intact family group on academic achievement or anxiety and withdrawal. However, adolescents in the continued high conflict group had significantly lower academic achievement and significantly higher anxiety/withdrawal scores than *both* adolescents in the reduced conflict group or intact family group.

In an early study, Johnston, Gonzales and Campbell (1987) examined the effects of child custody disputes on children's well-being. The sample consisted of 56 children between the ages of four and twelve years whose well-being was assessed at the time of the custody dispute and two and a half years later. Half of the sample's parents had been involved in repeated custody disputes that spanned a number of years and thus would be classified as highly conflictual divorces. The results of the study indicated that children subject to custody and access disputes were likely to exhibit symptoms of depression and withdrawal, and to voice somatic complaints. This finding has been replicated by additional related studies which found that severe marital conflict that focusses on the child is more predictive of child behaviour problems than conflict that is not centred on the child (Grych and Finchman, 1993).

In a longitudinal study, Johnston et al. (1989) investigated the emotional, behavioural and social adjustment of 100 children whose parents were involved in disputes over custody and visitation for four and a half years (on average) after separation and two and a half years after legal dispute. Thus, such families would be considered highly conflictual. The study's findings did not indicate that children were better adjusted in either joint or single custody. However, regardless of the parents' socioeconomic status, income level, ethnicity, or the number of children in the family, it was found that children who had more frequent access and made more transitions between parents were more likely to be clinically disturbed. What explains this association? Parents who were more actively hostile at the time of the custody dispute were more conflictual two to three years later. Also, more verbal and physical aggression was present between parents when children had more frequent access to both parents. Thus, the continued conflict between parents, coupled with frequent child access, increased the potential for children to be exposed to parental conflict. This increased exposure to parental conflict in turn explains the higher incidence of emotional and behavioural problems among the children. Also, it was found that children of severe divorce disputes appeared to be more symptomatic in response to making transitions between homes, even when their parents were no longer fighting. This suggests that severe interparental conflict, particularly if it is focussed on the child, can have long-term effects on children's well-being even after the parental conflict ceases.

3.4.3 Aspects of Marital Conflict Related to Child Well-being

Conflict is a frequent feature of close relationships such as between spouses/partners (Eisenberg, 1992; Vuchinich, 1987). If managed well, conflicts can actually serve several positive functions, such as promoting open communication, enabling people to feel that their goals can be met in relationships, and clarifying roles and boundaries (Vuchinich, 1987). However, poorly managed conflicts can result in several negative outcomes, such as the erosion of relational bonds, coercive interactions, and negative social and emotional outcomes for children.

Conflict is a multi-dimensional construct that can take numerous forms. Recent research has focussed on the distinction between the presence of interparental conflict that is covert and that which is overt or anger-based. Covert parental conflict is defined as a passive-aggressive type of conflict that includes unspoken tension, resentment, being upset (Buehler et al., 1998; Jenkins and Smith, 1991), influencing one's child to side with them against the other parent, using one's child to get information about the other parent, and asking one's child to carry messages to the other parent (Buehler et al., 1998). Overt interparental conflict is defined as aggressive hostile conflict marked by angry and/or violent behaviours such as belligerence, screaming, insulting, threatening, contempt, ridiculing and slapping (Buehler et al., 1998).

To date, many studies have looked at the relationship between child adjustment and types of interparental conflict in both intact and divorced families. Buehler and Trotter (1990) found that the frequency of parental conflict was unrelated to youth problem behaviour when anger-based conflict was controlled for. Katz and Gottman (1993) found that a "mutually hostile" (overt) pattern of marital conflict predicted an externalizing behaviour pattern in children three years after initial assessment and that a "withdrawn" (covert) pattern of marital conflict predicted an internalizing behaviour pattern only. Jenkins and Smith (1991) found that in their sample of mothers, fathers and children, anger-based parental conflict was strongly and consistently associated with children's externalizing difficulties after controlling for two other marital

dimensions (covert conflict and parental arguments over child-rearing practices). In addition, they found that children exposed to high frequencies of anger-based parental conflict were significantly more symptomatic than children exposed to lower frequencies of it.

A meta-analysis conducted by Buehler et al. (1997) found that the mean effect size between frequency of parental conflict (or presence of parental conflict) and total youth problem behaviour is small (.19). However, the same meta-analysis revealed that the mean effect size between anger-based parental conflict and youth problem behaviour was .35, greater than that found for the presence of parental conflict. Moreover, in a recent cross-sectional study, Buehler et al. (1998) found that regardless of marital status, the effects of anger-based parental conflict were more strongly associated with youth problem behaviour when parental conflict was frequent. Recently, Jenkins (2000) found that anger-based marital conflicts were significant predictors of children's angry behaviours. More specifically, mothers' and fathers' verbal and physical angry expressions were found to be associated with the presence of anger, but not sadness, in children as rated by peers, teachers and mothers. Thus, exposure to anger-based marital conflicts increased the likelihood that children would themselves exhibit high levels of aggressive behaviours in various interpersonal relationships (e.g. child-peer, child-teacher, child-mother) (Jenkins, 2000).

Compared to other divorce factors associated with child maladjustment (absence of non-resident parent, troubled parent-child relationships and economic disadvantage), the relationship between parental conflict and child maladjustment is consistent and strong (Buehler et al., 1997; Davies and Cummings, 1994; Lengua et al., 2000). As well, although the mere presence of parental conflict is not necessarily harmful to children's well-being, anger-based parental conflict (compared to less hostile or angry conflict) places children at *greater risk* for internalizing and externalizing difficulties regardless of the status of the parents' marriage.

4 WAYS IN WHICH FACTORS COMBINE TO INCREASE AND DECREASE DISTURBANCE IN CHILDREN: EXACERBATION AND PROTECTION

One of the most important findings to have come out of risk research in the last 20 years is that risks do not operate in isolation. In section 2, we saw that even though children who experience parental divorce show more disturbance than children who do not experience divorce, most children are not permanently affected by this experience. What explains why some children show major problems following divorce, while others seem to come through the experience relatively unharmed (Hetherington et al., 1998)?

As we saw in section 3, some of this difference between children can be explained by components of the divorce process (e.g. conflict, economic instability) that contribute to the severity of the stress. Even when we know about the severity of the divorce components, however, there is still a lot of unexplained variation in children's adjustment. The reason for this is that divorce occurs in the context of many other events and circumstances (both before and after the divorce) that put children at risk. Both multiplicative effects of risks on the one hand, and the beneficial effects of protective factors on the other are important for understanding children's adjustment to divorce.

4.1 EXPOSURE TO MULTIPLE RISKS

Factors that increase the level or rate of disturbance in children are called risk factors. The main risk factors for children, apart from divorce and conflict, include harsh parenting (Dodge, Bates and Petit, 1990); mental illness in a parent (e.g. depression); parental substance abuse problems (Quinton and Rutter, 1985); being born to a teenage mother (Brooks-Gunn and Chase-Lansdale, 1995); poverty; being raised in a high-crime neighbourhood (Sampson et al., 1997); experiencing many transitions in parental care (Henry et al., 1996); and having a learning disability (Moffitt, 1993).

Rates of disturbance in children have been examined as a function of how many risks children experience in their lives. This has been done by adding up all the risks to which the child is exposed, regardless of the type of risk. A child raised by a teenage mother, who had an alcoholic father and whose parents divorced would have a score of three risks on a cumulative risk index. Rutter (1979) found that children exposed to one risk showed a rate of disturbance comparable to children who did not experience risk. Children exposed to two risks showed a four-fold increase in their rate of disturbance. Children exposed to four or more risks showed a ten-fold increase in disturbance. Jenkins and Keating (1998) examined data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) to investigate the cumulative effects of risk in a Canadian sample of school-aged children. Their cumulative risk index included exposure to divorce as one of the risks. They found that among children exposed to two risks in their lives, their rate of disturbance, based on teachers' reports, was 16 percent. Children exposed to four or more risks showed a 50 percent rate of disturbance. These data show that risks combine to *multiply* detrimental effects. Another way to express this is that risks potentiate one another.

Most children are not exposed to a large number of serious risk factors. Jenkins and Keating (1998) found that only four percent of children in a nationally representative sample of Canadian children experience four or more risks in their lives. Nonetheless, risk factors do cluster within families. Canadian data on factors that predict divorce can illustrate this effect. O'Connor and Jenkins (2001) looked at the effects of individual, family and community factors in predicting marital breakdown. Factors such as the number of previous relationships, parental depression and low income all predicted the risk of subsequent marital breakdown. This has also been found in other population studies in the United Kingdom and the United States (Capaldi and Patterson, 1991; Dunn et al., 1998; O'Connor et al., 1998). Thus, children experiencing parental divorce are more likely than others to be exposed to multiple serious risks. The same effect is seen with post-divorce risk factors. In section 3, we reviewed research showing that lower family income, more negative parent-child relationships and less contact with the non-custodial parent were potential consequences of parental divorce. Thus, children experiencing parental divorce are often exposed to multiple stressors rather than just one. When this happens their risk of showing disturbance increases markedly, as the effect of multiple risks potentiate one another.

4.2 PROTECTIVE EFFECTS

Another way of approaching the issue of how factors operate in conjunction with one another is to examine how positive aspects of children's lives combine with stressful events or risk to reduce the likelihood that children will be affected negatively. This has been called the study of protective effects. With respect to the consequences of divorce to children, it has been said that there are "winners, losers and survivors" (Hetherington, 1989). Let us now consider a resiliency perspective (Hetherington et al., 1998) to understand the factors that *protect or buffer* children from the stress of divorce.

We must consider an important methodological issue before reviewing the findings on protective factors and divorce. There are basically two methodologies for examining protective effects (Jenkins and Smith, 1990; Rutter and Pickles, 1987). The second method we shall describe is much more instructive than the first. The first involves investigation of a high risk group only. Investigators examine the factors within the high risk group that explain better adjustment in children. For instance, in a group of children undergoing parental divorce (high risk group) it might be found that those with easy temperaments show less disturbance than those with more difficult temperaments. This would lead one to conclude that easy temperament "protects" children undergoing parental divorce from negative outcome. However, if we had a group of children in low risk circumstances (their parents were not undergoing divorce), we would probably also find children with easy temperaments to be showing better adjusted than children with difficult temperaments. What sense does it make to say that these children are "protected" by their easy temperaments when they do not need protection? They do not need protection because they are not at risk.

This criticism led to a second wave of studies on protective effects in which children in high *and* low risk circumstances were investigated, and protective effects were defined as those factors that reduced disturbance among high risk children, but had little or no effect on adjustment among children at low risk (Rutter and Pickles, 1987). This type of protective pattern is assessed by examining the statistical interaction between the risk factor and the protective factor. If the

interaction is significant, this means that the protective factor shows a different relationship to children's outcomes when it occurs in high and low risk circumstances.

Because the study of protection is relatively new, only two studies have examined protective effects in divorced families. Therefore, we have also drawn on studies of family conflict. As conflict often precedes and follows parental separation, such findings are relevant to children exposed to divorce.

Jenkins and Smith (1990) examined protective factors in children experiencing marital conflict in the general population. Fifty-seven children in high conflict homes were compared with 62 children in low conflict homes. The children were between the ages of 9 and 12 years, and children in the two levels of risk were matched for gender, family size, father's social class and geographical area. Two types of effects were seen. Factors such as the quality of the mother-child relationship were found to be associated with children's adjustment in low and high conflict homes. Even if children were not experiencing parental divorce, their adjustment was better if they got along well with their mothers. The father-child relationship showed the same pattern of effect.

On the other hand, three factors were found to operate differently in low and high risk groups of children. For instance, a close relationship with an adult outside the family (usually a grandparent) was associated with better adjustment among children in high conflict homes, but made little difference to adjustment among children in low conflict homes. This acted as a buffer for children in high conflict homes. Similarly, a child in the high risk group who had a close relationship with a sibling or who engaged in an activity in which he or she gained positive recognition benefited from these protective factors. This suggests that there are compensatory processes in development. When children are missing something in their lives because of exposure to stress, other aspects of their environment can compensate.

Formoso, Gonzales and Aiken (2000) also examined protective effects in high conflict families. The sample included 284 10- to 16-year-old boys and girls in families experiencing high or low conflict. They examined the protective effects of parent-child attachment, peer attachment and parental monitoring with respect to the development of conduct disorders (stealing, lying, physical violence, etc.) and childhood depression. Parental attachment and parental monitoring were found to reduce the risk of conduct disorder in girls experiencing high conflict, but no association with disorder was seen among girls experiencing low conflict. The same effect was not seen for boys. The results indicate that in the presence of high family conflict, attachment and parental monitoring may protect girls from exhibiting high levels of conduct problems.

Two studies have examined protective effects for children in divorced families. O'Connor and Jenkins (2001)¹ reported on a representative sample of Canadian families (using NLSCY data), followed up over a two-year period. Some families had experienced a separation over this period. As data concerning children's well-being were available before and after their parent's separation, it was possible to examine changes in children's functioning over the period of the separation and divorce. More importantly, it was possible to examine protective effects. If

¹ Human Resources Development Canada supported this work and we are grateful to that department for allowing us to present these results in this report.

children did show an adverse reaction to the divorce, what were the factors that predicted which children showed a less adverse reaction? Symptoms of anxiety and depression increased as a function of parental divorce, but symptoms of hyperactivity and aggression showed little change. This was largely because children who would later experience parental divorce already showed more problems with hyperactivity and aggression prior to the parental divorce than children whose parents did not divorce subsequently. Warmth in the mother-child relationship was identified as the most important factor protecting children from increases in anxiety and depression following their parents' divorce.

Recently, Lengua et al. (2000) looked at the protective effects of temperament on the relationship between parenting and adjustment problems in children of divorced families. Two aspects of parenting, namely parental rejection and inconsistent discipline, were examined in relation to three aspects of temperament: positive emotionality (smiling, laughing, sensitivity to positive environmental cues), negative emotionality (fear, frustration, sensitivity to negative environmental cues) and regulation (attention, impulsivity and inhibition). The researchers were interested in child depression and conduct difficulties as outcome measures. The sample included 231 mothers and children who had recently experienced divorce (the mean time since the divorce was 1.1 years). The age of the children ranged from 9 to 12 years and the sample was approximately equal in the number of boys and girls.

Children high in positive emotionality were found to show better adjustment when exposed to parental rejection than children low in positive emotionality. Positive emotionality was less strongly associated with children's adjustment if they were not exposed to parental rejection. Illustrating the way that risks can potentiate one another (as described in section 4.1), when children were impulsive in homes characterized by inconsistent discipline, they showed increased problems with depression and conduct disorder. Impulsivity had a less negative impact on children's outcomes when parents were consistent in their discipline. In conclusion, these findings indicate that children who are high in impulsivity may be at greater risk for maladjustment, whereas positive emotionality may help buffer children from the effects of negative parenting in divorced families (Lengua et al., 2000).

5 MEASURES USED TO ASSESS THE IMPACT OF DIVORCE ON CHILD ADJUSTMENT

5.1 THE ASSESSMENT OF RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

For a measure to be a useful assessment tool, it must show good reliability and validity. Reliability estimates provide an indication of the quality of the measure. Do the individual items of the measure agree well with one another so that the measure is coherent (referred to below as internal consistency)? If a person completes the measure on two separate occasions (with a short interval between assessments), are the person's answers similar (referred to below as test-retest reliability)? Reliability estimates greater than .80 are considered good (Bakeman and Gottman, 1986). Depending on the purpose for which the instrument is used, reliabilities slightly lower than this are sometimes acceptable.

Validity is the extent to which the measure actually measures what it says it does. For example, does the measure of marital conflict discriminate between people who are happily married and those who are experiencing significant marital problems? Does it predict marital breakdown over time? Does a new test of marital conflict agree well with a previously established test? Correlations between tests can range from -1.0 to 1.0 with values of zero representing no agreement and values closer to 1.0 representing good agreement. Sometimes other indices that help us evaluate the effectiveness of the measure are also quoted. For instance, with some of the measures described below, researchers assess stability over a long period of time, a year or more. We would expect scores to show agreement over time, but obviously we would not expect this to be as high as the agreement shown for a one-week period. In the following sections we report technical details for those people who will find such details informative. We also provide less technical summaries. Measures have been chosen for description if they have shown promising results with respect to reliability and validity. Some measures have been investigated more fully than others, and these differences are noted.

5.2 MEASURES OF MARITAL ADJUSTMENT AND SATISFACTION

The Short Marital Adjustment Test and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale are measures of general marital satisfaction, as opposed to measures of marital conflict. They both include items that assess elements of marital conflict, but also items that assess non-conflictual elements of the marriage.

5.2.1 The Short Marital Adjustment Test

The Short Marital Adjustment Test (SMAT) was developed by Locke and Wallace (1959) to be a reliable, valid and brief parent-reporting measure of marital adjustment (see Appendix A for full measure). Marital adjustment is defined by the researchers as the degree of "accommodation" between the dyad at a given time (Locke and Wallace, 1959). Individuals are asked to rate various aspects of their marriage, such as their degree of happiness in the marriage and their degree of satisfaction with the decision to marry their spouse; the extent to which the couple agrees or disagrees on various issues such as finances, recreation, friends and sexual relations; the way in which conflicts are handled; and the degree of closeness between the couple (e.g.

engaging in enjoyable activities together, confiding in one another). In total, the measure comprises 15 items organized in a Likert-rating and multiple-choice format.

In the original study, Locke and Wallace (1959) reported a reliability coefficient of .90, based on a sample of 118 couples. This demonstrates that the measure is internally consistent or that the items within the measure relate well to one another. Furthermore, the measure has shown test-retest reliability scores of .75 over three weeks. This suggests relatively good stability in the way that couples rate their marriage. In addition, the measure has been found to clearly discriminate between couples that are well-adjusted and maladjusted (separated, divorced or in marital therapy). For instance, 96 percent of well adjusted couples achieved scores of 100 or more on the SMAT, whereas only 17 percent of maladjusted couples achieved adjustment scores of 100 or more. Therefore, a score of 100 was chosen as the cut-off so that individuals who obtained a score below 100 would be considered to have a maladjusted relationship with their partner and individuals with a score greater than 100 would have a well adjusted relationship with their partner.

5.2.2 The Dyadic Adjustment Scale

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) constructed by Spanier (1976) is a widely used 32-item, self-reporting measure of marital or dyadic satisfaction (see Appendix B for full measure). The SMAT measures various components of dyadic satisfaction, such as dyadic consensus (the extent of agreement/disagreement between the couple on various issues), dyadic satisfaction (“how often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation or terminating your relationship”), dyadic cohesion (“do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?”) and affectionate expression (“do you kiss your mate?”).

The DAS yields both individual component scores and a total dyadic adjustment score. The reliability coefficients for these components of dyadic adjustment range from .73 (affectionate expression subscale) to .94 (dyadic satisfaction subscale). Spanier (1976) reports the reliability coefficient for the total dyadic adjustment score as being .96. In the original study, the measure was administered to a sample of 218 married persons and 94 divorced persons. For each of the 32 items, the divorced individuals were found to differ significantly from the married individuals. Therefore, the measure adequately discriminates between satisfied and dissatisfied couples. In subsequent studies, the DAS was also found to reliably discriminate between distressed and non-distressed spouses (Eddy, Heyman and Weiss, 1991). In a recent study that used the DAS, internal consistency for both mother and father reports was found to be .91 (Davis et al., 1998). The DAS also correlates well with the SMAT. The correlation between the SMAT and the DAS was found to be .86 for married individuals and .88 for divorced individuals.

5.3 MEASURES OF MARITAL CONFLICT

Although numerous studies have used, and continue to use, general measures of marital adjustment/satisfaction to assess the association between unhappy homes and child well-being and marital conflict and child well-being (Davis et al., 1998), recent studies have found that specific measures are more appropriate in predicting child outcomes than general, global measures. Specifically, several researchers have found that interparental conflict is a better predictor of child maladjustment than general marital/dyadic satisfaction in a non-clinical sample

(Buehler et al., 1998; Davies and Cummings, 1994; Emery and O’Leary, 1982). Although general measures of marital satisfaction, such as the SMAT and the DAS, include items that assess dyadic conflict, there are valid and reliable measures that *only* assess dyadic conflict. The following is an overview of two of these measures, namely the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) and the Children’s Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (PIC).

Both the CTS and the PIC have demonstrated very good psychometric properties. In addition, the CTS has been used to collect information from both parents and children and the PIC has been found to be a reliable and valid measure of parental conflict from a child’s perspective. Therefore, both parent and child reports of marital conflict have been well established. The use of child or parent reports have their own individual advantages. Using a parent report is advantageous because it is less intrusive for children. Since child measures have only been developed for children in grade four or above (and are unlikely to be reliable for younger children), parent measures can also be used for young children. The value of the child report lies in its stronger relationship to child outcomes.

5.3.1 The Revised Conflict Tactics Scale

The original CTS, developed by Straus (1979), has recently been revised to increase the scale’s validity and reliability. The scale is now known as the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale or CTS2 (Straus et al., 1996; see Appendix C for full scale) and like the CTS, it assesses the extent to which partners in a dating, cohabiting or marital relationship managed conflicts over a 12-month period by engaging in psychological and physical attacks on one another.

The CTS is the most widely used and validated scale of dyadic conflict. Although many measures of dyadic conflict exist, the CTS offers the most concrete assessment of anger-based dyadic conflicts. Straus et al. (1996) report that as many as 400 studies (collectively involving more than 70,000 participants) have used the CTS. Within these 400 studies, numerous investigations were conducted to assess the measure’s validity and reliability. The CTS has been used with participants of diverse cultural backgrounds and in at least 20 countries, including Hong Kong, India, Japan and Spain. The CTS has also been used as a diagnostic instrument in therapy to assess the severity of conflict and abuse within relationships (Straus et al., 1996).

Both the CTS and the CTS2 are based on conflict theory, which assumes that conflict is an inevitable part of all interactions. Items on the CTS and the CTS2 probe for specific, concrete tactics used by members of a dyad to resolve a conflict. Specific tactics range in severity from passive tactics, such as calm discussions, to forceful tactics, such as physical attacks. Thus, two strengths of the CTS2 are that it focusses on concrete methods of conflict resolution and it assesses a range of conflict tactics. In addition, the measure assesses both what the participant and their partner have done to manage conflicts.

The original CTS, comprising 18 items across three scales (reasoning, verbal aggression and violence), was criticized for being too short and thus not adequately assessing various types of conflict tactics. To improve its validity and reliability, the CTS2 is comprised of 39 items across five scales. Thus, the measure samples numerous conflict tactics and types of inter-partner abuse.

The five scales in the CTS2 are as follows:

Negotiation Scale. The negotiation scale comprises six items that assess actions taken to settle a disagreement through discussion. The scale includes both cognitive (i.e. one partner suggests a compromise) and emotional (i.e. one partner asks the other how he/she is feeling) conflict management tactics. On the CTS, the negotiation scale was called the “reasoning scale” and contained only three items.

Psychological Aggression Scale. The psychological aggression scale comprises eight items that assess the use of both verbal and nonverbal acts of aggression. This scale was called the “verbal aggression scale” on the CTS, but was renamed because it includes aggression items that are nonverbal in nature (e.g. “stomped out of the room”).

Physical Assault Scale. The physical assault scale includes 12 items that assess the use of physical violence to manage dyadic conflicts. This scale was called the “violence scale” on the CTS and included nine items.

Sexual Coercion Scale. This scale was not on the CTS. This new scale assesses an individual’s use of coercion to compel his or her partner to engage in unwanted sexual activity. It includes seven items that probe a range of coercive acts, such as verbal insistence to physical force.

Injury Scale. This scale is also new with the CTS2. It measures the injury inflicted by an individual’s partner and includes six items that assess the degree of pain, tissue or bone damage, and the need for medical attention.

Unlike the CTS, the CTS2 differentiates between minor and severe acts of physical assault, sexual coercion and injury. This distinction was made because research indicates that the etiology and treatment of occasional minor violence is quite different from that of repeated severe assaults (Straus et al., 1996). In addition, items on the CTS2 are arranged in hierarchical order so that initial items depict socially acceptable ways of dealing with conflict (e.g. discussed issues calmly) and final items depict the most severe form of physical assault (used a knife or gun).

Like the CTS, the CTS2 was validated on a sample of college students. This was done because research assessing the validity and reliability of the CTS had established that the factor structure of student data is very similar to that found in national and clinical samples. Initial research assessing the psychometric properties of the CTS2 indicates that, like the CTS, it is highly reliable (coefficients range from .79 to .95). Preliminary evidence of some types of validity has already been established (Straus et al., 1996). Also like the CTS, the CTS2 can be completed by either parents or children. Research using the CTS indicates adequate concordance between mothers’ and fathers’ reports, and between reports by children and parents (Johnston et al., 1989). In addition, like the CTS, the CTS2 can be used to assess conflict within marital dyads (Jenkins, 2000) and post-divorce conflict (Johnston et al., 1987; Johnston et al., 1989).

5.3.2 Children’s Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale

The Children’s Perception of Interparental Conflict (PIC) scale, developed by Grych, Seid and Finchman (1992), is a 48-item, true-false measure that assesses children’s perceptions of various

aspects of marital conflict (see Appendix D for full scale). The PIC includes the following three scales: conflict properties (frequency, intensity and resolution of conflicts), perceived threat (child's feelings of threat and coping efficacy) and self-blame (child's perceptions that he or she is to blame for parental conflict). Children rate parental behaviour on a three-point multiple-choice scale (1=false, 2=sort of true and 3=true). Higher scores indicate increasingly negative forms of conflict or appraisal.

Internal consistency of the PIC has been found to be above that recommended for research instruments (ranges from .78 for self-blame scale to .90 for conflict properties scale), and test-retest correlations (ranges from .70 for conflict properties scale to .76 for self-blame scale) indicate that the PIC is reasonably stable over a two-week period (Grych et al., 1992). The instrument was validated on 9- to 12-year-old children; it was found that school-age children can reliably report their perceptions of parental conflict. In fact, stability of measurement over a 12-month period was adequate (.64, .51 and .47 for the three PIC subscales) and comparable to other well established measures using children's reports (ranges from .38 to .52) (Finchman, Grych and Osborne, 1994). In assessing the PIC's validity, researchers found that children's reports of the frequency, intensity and resolution of conflict were consistently related to ratings of adjustment made by parents, children, children's teachers and peers. In contrast, parental reports of conflict correlated only with parental reports of adjustment. This suggests that a child report measure of parental conflict may be more effective as a screening tool than a parent report instrument when the goal is to target families whose children are adversely affected by conflict. The PIC has been validated for use with college students (Bickham and Fiese, 1997) and it shows high stability and reliability.

5.4 POST-DIVORCE MEASURES

The two measures discussed in this section relate to conflict and family functioning following divorce. Although both measures demonstrate promising psychometric properties, they are fairly new and are thus less well established than the PIC and the CTS. In addition, both the PIC and CTS have been used to assess parental conflict following divorce and have been shown to be highly reliable and valid.

5.4.1 The Post-divorce Parental Conflict Scale

The Post-divorce Parental Conflict Scale (PPCS) is an 82-item, self-report measure that assesses type and level of parental conflict following divorce as reported by the child (Morris and West, 2000). The measure is made up of three scales (verbal hostility, indirect hostility and physical hostility) and ratings are made on a 5-point Likert scale (1=the event never happened, to 5=the event happened everyday) according to the first year after parental divorce and the previous 12 months. Items on the PPCS progress from low conflict and hostility to intense and violent conflict. As well, children separately report behaviours exhibited by their mothers and fathers. Example items include "My mother discussed issues calmly with my father" and "My father threw things at my mother."

Studies using the PPCS have shown good reliability for mother and father subscales (ranging from .80 to .90). For instance, Morris and West (2000) found that for all subscales on the PPCS,

internal consistency was .80 or greater. In addition, the PPCS was found to have good correlations with the PIC (Morris and West, 2000).

5.4.2 The Divorce Adjustment Inventory Revised

The newly revised Divorce Adjustment Inventory or DAI-R (Portes, Haas and Brown, 1991) is a 42-item, parent report instrument that assesses child adjustment and family functioning after parental separation. Five factors are assessed on the DAI-R: conflict and dysfunction; favourable divorce condition and child coping ability; positive divorce resolution; external support systems; and divorce transitions. Ratings are made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Preliminary analyses demonstrate good internal consistency (ranges from .69 for the total scale score to .83 for the family conflict and dysfunction scale) (Portes, Smith and Brown, 2000).

5.5 MEASUREMENT OF CHILDHOOD DISTURBANCE

If a program or service delivery objective is to identify children who are likely to fare less well after a divorce, then a good strategy would be to use a well established conflict measure (like the CTS2 and/or the PIC) in conjunction with a child adjustment measure (the Achenbach Child Behaviour Checklist, CBCL; Achenbach and Edelbrock, 1991). The measurement of childhood disturbance is well established. Although numerous standardized measures exist, the parent form of the CBCL is frequently used in both research and clinical settings. The CBCL is designed to record, in a standardized manner, the behaviour problems and competencies of children between the ages of 4 to 16 years, as reported by their parents. The CBCL is a self-report measure that can be used with parents who have reading skills as low as the fifth-grade level or administered by an interviewer if necessary.

The CBCL yields a Total Behaviour Problem Score as well as a number of different problem profiles, such as an externalizing and internalizing profile. The CBCL is widely used because of its sound psychometric properties, and studies indicate high coefficients of reliability. Test-retest reliability of item scores has been found to be .95 with an inter-interviewer reliability of .95. In terms of the measure's validity, reports indicate that the correlation between the CBCL Total Behaviour Problem Score and the total score of other instruments ranges from .71 to .92. Studies also show that 116 of the 118 behaviour problem items on the CBCL were significantly associated with clinical status, and this also offers support for the measure's validity. (Entire paragraph, Achenbach and Edelbrock, 1991.)

5.6 PURPOSE OF CONFLICT MEASURES

5.6.1 Research Purposes

When conflict measures are used in research studies, researchers are interested in identifying patterns in data between variables, i.e. the association between parental conflict and children's conduct problems. Measures used in research are not typically used to make decisions about individual children or families.

5.6.2 Program Assignment Purposes

To use a conflict measure to screen individual families into different kinds of programs, the psychometric properties of the measure must be well established. Further, there must be demonstrated efficacy of the instrument with the population of interest. It is beyond the scope of this review to outline all the steps that would be advisable before such research instruments are used as measures for assessing individuals. We do, however, raise several issues below that are worthy of consideration.

1. To use a conflict measure to assign families to different types of intervention, the measure must be able to discriminate between families that have transient conflict and those who show high conflict over time. Although predictive validity has been established for the CTS and the PIC, it has not been established for post-divorce conflict measures. The validity of the CTS and the PIC has also not been demonstrated for families undergoing the kind of major reorganization that accompanies divorce.
2. To assign families to different types of intervention, cut-off points must be established. This is usually done on the basis of the distribution. For instance, the top 10 percent of the sample will be considered high conflict. The cut-off point must be low enough to include those families who will benefit from the intervention in question and high enough to exclude people who do not need the intervention. Cut-off points have not been established for most of the conflict measures.
3. If the aim of screening families is to be able to offer services to families who would benefit from particular services, then the use of two instruments, such as a parental conflict measure and a child adjustment measure, should be considered. As we have seen, not all children react adversely to parental conflict or divorce. By screening families according to whether conflict is high within the family and whether children are already showing adjustment difficulties, children and families most in need of service could be targeted.

6 SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Divorce is one of the most prevalent stressors in the lives of Canadian children today; it is accompanied by numerous changes and challenges that have been shown to tax the adjustment of children. To identify the impact of parental separation on the well-being of children, numerous studies have been undertaken. These studies were briefly reviewed in section 2, which showed consistent evidence indicating a significant difference between children from divorced and intact families on various indices of well-being, such as academic success, parent-child relationships and emotional and behavioural adjustment. Children of divorced parents have been found to be less well adjusted than children from continuously intact families. However, we also emphasized that while empirical research illustrates that divorce is a risk factor for child maladjustment, most children cope successfully with the stress of parental separation.

What factors associated with the process of divorce increase the risk of children developing adjustment problems? This question was considered in section 3, where empirical evidence was reviewed related to four central components of divorce (non-residential parental absence, troubled parent-child relationships, economic disadvantage and parental conflict.) The first component discussed was the absence of the non-resident parent from the child's everyday life following divorce. It has been hypothesized that the absence of the non-resident parent, usually the father, accounts for the maladjustment seen in some children from divorced families. In general, strong support for this hypothesis is lacking, because a consistent and significant association has not been established between paternal visitation frequency and child well-being. However, other dimensions of father involvement, such as payment of child support, authoritative parenting and feelings of closeness, can and do have positive effects on children's adjustment following divorce. Therefore, what a father does with his children when he is with them is much more important than the amount of time he spends with them.

A second component of the divorce process that has consistently been found to be stressful for children is troubled parent-child relationships following divorce. Research indicates that the parent-child relationship deteriorates following parental divorce and that divorce may exacerbate normative difficulties between parents and children. Similarly, in section 3 we reviewed research findings that support the claim that decreased family income following divorce is a third component of divorce with a negative impact on child well-being. This association has been consistently demonstrated, as has the finding that the father's payment of child support is associated with positive child outcomes, such as academic success and positive child behaviours.

Although varying degrees of support can be found in the research literature pertaining to the different components of divorce and child adjustment, the association between parental conflict and child maladjustment is unequivocal. High degrees of anger-based parental conflict, both before and after parents separate, is harmful to children. In fact, some research suggests that children from intact high conflict families exhibit lower levels of well-being than children from divorced families. Therefore, anger-based interparental conflict is a strong predictor, and risk factor, of child maladjustment *regardless* of the family type in which the child is living, whether intact, divorced or stepfamily.

There are several policy implications of the above findings but, before considering them, a word of caution is indicated. We have made suggestions about policies and programs that follow logically from the divorce and conflict literature that has been reviewed. Our recommendations are *not* based on the results of policies and programs that have already been evaluated, as this was beyond the scope of this project. The following recommendations must be viewed with this in mind.

First, as anger-based parental conflict has been shown to be a consistent predictor of child well-being, policies and programs that decrease children's exposure to such conflict are likely to be beneficial. For example, preventative programs might take the form of public health or school-based education programs targeted to young adults. Any program that helps young adults towards better problem-solving skills in their relationships, even before they have children, might help decrease children's exposure to subsequent parental conflict. In addition, helping parents who are undergoing a divorce, as well as the professionals working with them, to understand how conflict exposure affects children might also help to reduce children's conflict exposure. It may be possible to use conflict measures as screening instruments to target services more effectively. For instance, it is possible that families in high conflict might benefit from different procedures when going through the courts than families with low conflict.

The second implication of the findings described above is that policies targeted to the economic and parent-child relationship components of the divorce process would also be beneficial to children. For instance, safeguarding the custodial parents' income would be likely to decrease parental stress, thus positively affecting the parent-child relationship.

Why do some children manifest difficulties following the divorce of their parents, while others appear to cope successfully? In section 3, we saw that some of the difference can be explained by the fact that divorces differ in their component parts. For example, when a divorce involves increased economic disadvantage, parental conflict and problems in the parent-child relationship, the stress for the child is greater. However, such components do not account for all of the unexplained variation in children's adjustment. This is because divorce occurs in a context of many other circumstances, both before and after parental separation, that place children at risk for maladjustment. In section 4, we discussed how both exposure to multiple risks and the beneficial effects of protective factors must be considered as we try to understand why some children are more negatively affected by divorce than others. One of the important findings from research on children's exposure to stressful events is that risk factors can potentiate one another: when several risk factors occur, their effects are cumulative. In other words, risks combine to multiply detrimental effects in children. The implication of this is that policies or programs geared to reducing the occurrence of even one risk are likely to be beneficial because they reduce the *potency* or negative impact of other risks on child adjustment. For instance, any policy that addresses family income or family benefits for divorced families could be expected to reduce the impact of high conflict on children.

Findings from research on protective factors show that some children do not show adjustment problems following parental divorce because of pre-existing factors in their lives that help them cope with the stress. Two studies that have examined protective factors in divorced families have found that warmth in the mother-child relationship and a temperament trait, positive emotionality, are important in buffering children from the stress of divorce. This has two

implications. One is that there are naturally occurring factors in children's lives which protect them, and that it may be possible to increase such factors through parental health education programs. The second is that knowing which children are likely to show more problems in the face of divorce (those who exhibit less positive emotionality) helps to target available services to those in need.

The measurement of anger-based parental conflict is well established in the research literature. In section 5, we reviewed various general and specific measures and provided details about their psychometric properties. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale is an example of a general measure of dyadic satisfaction. The Conflict Tactics Scale, on the other hand, is an example of a specific measure of dyadic conflict that has been repeatedly shown to be reliable and valid. Although general measures are widely used, and demonstrate good psychometric properties, specific measures of dyadic conflict have been found to be better predictors of long-term adjustment in children than general measures of dyadic satisfaction. Although the measurement of conflict is well established, the application of conflict measures as clinical instruments (to make decisions about individual children and families) has not been established. Some of the steps necessary for their use as clinical instruments were described in section 5.

Also in section 5, we reviewed measures of child well-being. One of the policy implications is that it may be possible to use measures of parental conflict and child well-being as screening tools to identify vulnerable children and families. As our review of protective factors demonstrated, many children will not show difficulties as a result of divorce. By combining the measurement of parental conflict and child well-being, the ability to identify children most likely to be negatively affected by divorce would be increased. A review of measures to examine component parts of divorce (payment of child support, the quality of the parent-child relationship) was beyond the scope of this review. It is, however, the case that if such measures were combined with those on conflict and child-well-being, our ability to identify those children and families most in need of services would again be increased.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Achenbach, T. M., and C.S. Edelbrock

- 1991 *Manual for the Child Behavior Checklist and Revised Child Behavior Profile*.
Burlington, VT: University Associates in Psychiatry.

Amato, Paul R., and Bruce Keith

- 1991a "Parental divorce and the well-being of children: a meta-analysis." *Psychological Bulletin*, 110: 26-46.
- 1991b "Parental divorce and adult well-being: a meta-analysis." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 53: 43-58.

Amato, Paul R., L. S. Loomis and Alan Booth

- 1995 "Parental divorce, marital conflict, and offspring well-being during early adulthood." *Social Forces*. 73: 895-915.

Amato, Paul R., and Alan Booth

- 1996 "A prospective study of parental divorce and parent-child relationships." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 58: 356-365.

Amato, Paul R., and Joan G. Gilbreth

- 1999 "Non-resident fathers and children's well-being: a meta-analysis." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 61: 557-573.

Amato, Paul R.

- 2000 "The consequences of divorce for adults and children." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 62: 1269-1287.

Aseltine, R. H.

- 1996 "Pathways linking parental divorce with adolescent depression." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. 37: 133-148.

Bakeman, R., and J. M. Gottman

- 1986 *Observing Interaction*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Bickman, N. L., and B. H. Fiese

- 1997 "Extension of the children's perceptions of interparental conflict scale for use with late adolescents." *Journal of Family Psychology*. 11: 246-250.

Block, J. H., J. H. Block and P. F. Gjerde

- 1986 "The personality of children prior to divorce: A prospective study." *Child Development*. 57: 827-840.

- Brooks-Gunn, J., and P. L. Chase-Lansdale
1995 "Adolescent parenthood". In M. Bornstein (ed.), *Handbook of Parenting* (pp. 113-149). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Buehler, Cheryl, and B. B. Trotter
1990 "Nonresidential and residential parent's perceptions of the former spouse relationship and children's social competence following marital separation: theory and programmed intervention." *Family Relations*. 39: 395-404.
- Buehler, Cheryl, C. Anthony, A. Krishnakumar, G. Stone, J. Gerard and S. Pemberton
1997 "Interparental conflict and youth problem behaviors: A meta-analysis." *Journal of Child and Family Studies*. 6: 233-247.
- Buehler, Cheryl, A. Krishnakumar, G. Stone, C. Anthony, S. Pemberton and J. Gerard
1998 "Interparental conflict styles and youth problem behaviors: A two-sample replication study." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 60: 119-132.
- Camara, K. A., and G. Resnick
1988 "Interparental conflict and cooperation: Factors moderating children's post-divorce adjustment." In E. M. Hetherington and J. D. Arasteh (eds.). *Impact of divorce, single-parenting, and stepparenting on children*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Capaldi, D. M., and G. R. Patterson
1991 "Relation of parental transitions to boys' adjustment problems: 1. A linear hypothesis; 2. Mothers at risk for transitions and unskilled parenting." *Developmental Psychology*. 27: 489-504.
- Cherlin, Andrew J., F. F. Furstenberg, P. L. Chase-Lansdale, K. K. Kiernan, P. K. Robins, D. R. Morrison and J. O. Teitler
1991 "Longitudinal studies of effects of divorce on children from Great Britain and the United States." *Science*. 252: 1386-1389.
- Clarke-Stewart, K. Alison, D. L. Vandell, K. McCartney, M. T. Owen and C. Booth
2000 "Effects of parental separation and divorce on very young children." *Journal of Family Psychology*. 14: 304-326.
- Davies, P.T., and E. M. Cummings
1994 "Marital conflict and child adjustment: an emotional security hypothesis". *Psychological Bulletin*. 116: 387-411.
- Davis, Betsy, Hyman Hops, Anthony Alpert and Lisa Sheeber
1998 "Child responses to parental conflict and their effect on adjustment: A study of triadic relations." *Journal of Family Psychology*. 12: 163-177.
- Dodge, Kenneth. A., John. E. Bates and Gregory S. Pettit
1990 "Mechanisms in the cycle of violence." *Science*. 250: 1678-1683.

- Doherty, W. J., and R. H. Needle
 1991 "Psychological adjustment and substance use among adolescents before and after a parental divorce." *Child Development*. 62: 328-337.
- Dunn, J., K. Deater-Deckard, K. Pickering, T. G. O'Connor, J. Golding and the ALSPAC Study Team
 1998 "Children's adjustment and prosocial behavior in step-, single, and nonstep-family settings: Findings from a community study." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. 39: 1083-1095.
- Eddy, J. M., R. E. Heyman and R. L. Weiss
 1991 "An empirical investigation of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale: Exploring the differences between marital 'satisfaction' and 'adjustment.'" *Behavioral Assessment*. 13: 199-220.
- Edwards, J. N.
 1987 "Changing family structure and youthful well-being: Assessing the future." *Journal of Family Issues*. 8: 355-372.
- Eisenberg, A. R.
 1992 "Conflicts between mothers and their young children." *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*. 38: 21-43.
- Emery, Robert, E., and K. D. O'Leary
 1982 "Children's perceptions of marital discord and behavior problems of boys and girls." *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*. 10: 11-24.
- Emery, Robert, E.
 1988 *Marriage, Divorce, and Children's Adjustment*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Emery, Robert, E.
 1999 "Postdivorce family life for children: An overview of research and some implications for policy." In Thompson, R. A., and P.R. Amato (eds.). *The Postdivorce Family: Children, Parenting, and Society*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Finchman, Frank, John H. Grych and Lori N. Osborne
 1994 "Does marital conflict cause child maladjustment? Directions and challenges for longitudinal research." *Journal of Family Psychology*. 8: 128-140.
- Formoso, D., N. A. Gonzales and L. S. Aiken
 2000 Family conflict and children's internalizing and externalizing behavior: Protective factors." *American Journal of Community Psychology*. 28: 175-199.
- Furstenberg, F. F., and C. W. Nord
 1985 "Parenting apart." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 47: 893-904.

- Grych, John, Michael Seid and Frank Finchman
 1992 "Assessing marital conflict from the child's perspective: The Child's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale." *Child Development*. 63: 558-572.
- Grych, John, and Frank Finchman
 1993 "Children's appraisals of marital conflict: Initial investigations of the cognitive-contextual framework." *Child Development*. 64: 215-230.
- Guidubaldi, J., H. K. Cleminshaw, J. D. Perry and C. S., McLoughlin
 1983 "The impact of parental divorce on children: Report of the nationwide NASP study." *School Psychology Review*. 12: 300-323.
- Guidubaldi, J., J. D. Perry and B. K. Nastasi
 1987 "Growing up in a divorced family: Initial and long-term perspectives on children's adjustment." In S. Oskamp (ed.). *Applied Social Psychology Annual: Family Processes and Problems*. Newbury, CA: Sage Press.
- Henry, B., A. Caspi, T.E Moffitt and P.A. Silva
 1996 "Temperamental and familial predictors of violent and non-violent criminal convictions: From age 3 to age 18." *Developmental Psychology*. 32: 614-623.
- Hetherington, E. M.
 1981 "Children and divorce." In Henderson, R. (ed.). *Parent-Child Interaction: Theory, Research, and Prospect*. New York, NY: Academic Press.
- 1989 "Coping with family transitions: Winners, losers, and survivors." *Child Development*. 60: 1-14.
- 1993 "An overview of the Virginia Longitudinal Study of Divorce and Remarriage with a focus on early adolescence." *Journal of Family Psychology*. 7: 39-56.
- 1999 "Should we stay together for the sake of the children?" In E. M. Hetherington (ed.). *Coping With Divorce, Single Parenting, and Remarriage: A Risk and Resiliency Perspective*. Mahway, NJ: Erlbaum Press.
- Hetherington, E. M., M. Cox and R. Cox
 1981 "Effects of divorce on parents and children." In Lamb, M. (ed.). *Nontraditional Families*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum Press.
- Hetherington, E. M., M. Bridges and G. M. Insabella
 1998 "What matters? What does not? Five perspectives on the association between marital transitions and children's adjustments." *American Psychologist*. 53: 167-184.

Jenkins, Jennifer, and Marjorie A. Smith

1990 "Factors protecting children living in disharmonious homes: Maternal reports." *Journal of the American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry*. 29: 61-69.

1991 "Marital disharmony and children's behavior problems: Aspects of a poor marriage that affect children adversely." *Journal of Child Psychology*. 32: 793-810.

Jenkins, Jennifer, M., and Daniel P. Keating

1998 *Risk and Resilience in Six and Ten-Year-Old Children*. Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada (W-98-23E).

Jenkins, Jennifer M.

2000 "Marital conflict and children's emotions: The development of an anger organization." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 62: 723-736.

Johnston, Janet, R. Gonzales and L. E. Campbell

1987 "Ongoing postdivorce conflict and child disturbance." *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*. 15: 493-509.

Johnston, Janet, M. Kline and J. M. Tschann

1989 "Ongoing postdivorce conflict: Effects on children of joint custody and frequent access." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. 59: 576-592.

Juby, Heather, and David Farrington

2001 "Disentangling the link between disrupted families and delinquency." *British Journal of Criminology. Special Issue*. 41: 22-40.

Katz, Lynn. F. and John M. Gottman

1993 "Patterns of marital conflict predict children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors." *Developmental Psychology*. 29: 940-950.

Kelly, Joan B.

2000 "Children's adjustment in conflicted marriage and divorce: A decade of review of research." *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. 39: 963-973.

Kiernan, K. E., and J. Hobcraft

1997 "Parental divorce during childhood: Age at first intercourse, partnership, and parenthood." *Population Studies*. 51: 41-55.

Kiernan, K., and G. Mueller

1998 "The divorced and who divorces?" *Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, paper 7*. London: London School of Economics.

Krantz, S. E.

- 1987 "The impact of divorce on children." In Dornbusch, S. M. and M. H. Strober (eds.). *Feminism, Children, and the New Families*. New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1988.

Le Bourdais, Céline, Heather Juby and Nicole Marcil-Gratton

- 2001 *Keeping Contact with Children: Assessing the Father/Child Post-separation Relationship from the Male Perspective*. Ottawa: Department of Justice Canada (CSR-2000-3E).

Lengua, Liliana, S. A. Wolchik, I. N. Sandler and S. G. West

- 2000 "The additive and interactive effects of parenting and temperament in predicting adjustment problems of children of divorce." *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*. 29: 232-244.

Locke, Harvey, and Karl Wallace

- 1959 "Short marital-adjustment and prediction tests: their reliability and validity." *Marriage and Family Living*. 21: 251-255.

Long, Nicholas, E. Slater, R. Forehand and R. Fauber

- 1988 "Continued high or reduced interparental conflict following divorce: Relation to young adolescent adjustment." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. 56: 467-469.

Marcil-Gratton, Nicole, and Celine Le Bourdais

- 1999 *Custody, Access and Child Support: Findings from the NLSCY*. Report presented to the Child Support Team. Ottawa: Department of Justice Canada.

Martinez, C. R. J., and M. S. Forgatch

- 2001 "Preventing problems with boys' noncompliance: Effects of a parent training intervention for divorcing mothers." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. 69: 416-428.

McLanahan, S., and G. Sandefur

- 1994 *Growing Up With a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Moffitt, T. E.

- 1993 "The neuropsychology of conduct disorder." *Development and Psychopathology*. 5: 135-151.

Morris, Melanie, and Chuck West

- 2000 "An evaluation of the Post-Divorce Parental Conflict Scale." *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*. 33: 77-91.

Morrison, Donna R., and M. J. Coiro

- 1999 "Parental conflict and marital disruption: Do children benefit when high-conflict marriages are dissolved?" *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 61: 626-637.

- O'Connor, T. G., N. Hawkins, J. Dunn, K. Thorpe, J. Golding, and the ALSPAC Study Team
1998 "Family type and maternal depression in pregnancy: Factors mediating risk in a community sample". *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 60: 757-770
- O'Connor, T. G., K. Thorpe, J. Dunn, J. Golding and the ALSPAC Study Team
1999 "Parental divorce and adjustment in adulthood: Findings from a community sample." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. 40: 777-790.
- O'Connor, Thomas, and Jennifer M. Jenkins
2001 *Coping With Parents' Marital Transitions: Understanding Why Children in the Same Family Show Different Patterns of Adjustment*. Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada.
- Peterson, James L., and Nicholas Zill
1986 "Marital disruption, parent-child relationships, and behavior problems in children." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 4: 295-307.
- Portes, P., R. Haas and J. H. Brown
1991 "Identifying family factors that predict children's adjustment to divorce: An analytic synthesis." *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*. 15: 87-103.
- Portes, Pedro, Tracy Smith and Joseph Brown
2000 "The Divorce Adjustment Inventory-Revised: Validation of a parental report concerning children's post-custody adjustment." *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*. 33: 93-109.
- Quinton, D., and M. Rutter
1985 "Family pathology and child psychiatric disorder: A four-year prospective study." In A. R. Nicol (ed.), *Longitudinal studies in child psychology and psychiatry* (pp. 91-134). Chichester, England: Wiley.
- Rodgers, B., and J. Pryor
1998 *Divorce and Separation: The Outcomes For Children*. York, England: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Rutter, M.
1979 "Protective factors in children's responses to stress and disadvantage". In M. W. Kent and J. E. Rolf (eds.), *Primary prevention in psychopathology, Vol. 3: Social competence in children* (pp. 49-74). Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- Rutter, M., and A. Pickles
1987 "Psychosocial Resilience and Protective Mechanisms." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. 57: 316-331.

- Sampson, R. J., S. Raudenbush, F. Earls and J. Holton
 1997 "Neighborhoods and violent crime: a multilevel study of collective efficacy." *Science* (August 15, 1997).
- Seltzer, J. A.
 1991 "Relationships between fathers and children who live apart: The father's role after separation." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 53: 79-101.
- Simons, Ronald, K. Lin, L. C. Gordon, R. D. Conger and F. O. Lorenz
 1999 "Explaining the higher incidence of adjustment problems among children of divorce compared with those in two-parent families." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 61: 1020-1033.
- Spanier, Graham
 1976 "Measuring dyadic adjustment: New scales for assessing the quality of marriage and similar dyads." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 38: 15-28.
- Stewart, Ron
 2001 *The Early Identification and Streaming of Cases of High-Conflict Separation and Divorce: A Review*. Ottawa: Department of Justice Canada. 2001-FCY-7E.
- Straus, Murray
 1979 "Measuring intrafamily conflict and violence: The Conflict Tactics Scales." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 41: 75-88.
- Straus, Murray, Sherry Hamby, Sue Boney-McCoy and David Sugarman
 1996 "The Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2)." *Journal of Family Issues*. 17: 283-316.
- Vuchinich, S.
 1987 "Starting and stopping spontaneous family conflicts." *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 49: 591-601.
- Wallerstein, Judith S., and J. B. Kelly
 1980 *Surviving the Breakup: How Children and Parents Cope with Divorce*. London: Grant McIntyre.
- Zill, Nicholas, D. R. Morrison and M. J. Coiro
 1993 "Long-term effects of parental divorce on parent-child relationships, adjustment, and achievement in young adulthood." *Journal of Family Psychology*. 7: 91-103.

APPENDIX A:
THE SHORT MARITAL TEST

APPENDIX A

MARITAL-ADJUSTMENT TEST

1. Check the dot on the scale line below which best describes the degree of happiness, everything considered of your present marriage. The middle point, "happy," represents the degree of happiness which most people get from marriage, and the scale gradually ranges on one side to those few who are very unhappy in marriage, and on the other, to those few who experience extreme joy or felicity in marriage.

0	2	7	15	20	25	35
•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Very Unhappy			Happy			Perfectly Happy

State the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your mate on the following items. Please check each column.

	Always Agree	Almost Always Agree	Occasionally Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree
2. Handling family finances	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. Matters of recreation	5	4	3	2	1	0
4. Demonstrations of affection	8	6	4	2	1	0
5. Friends	5	4	3	2	1	0
6. Sex relations	15	12	9	4	1	0
7. Conventionality (right, good, or proper conduct)	5	4	3	2	1	0
8. Philosophy of life	5	4	3	2	1	0
9. Ways of dealing with in-laws	5	4	3	2	1	0
10. When disagreements arise, they usually result in: husband giving in 0, wife giving in 2, agreement by mutual give and take 10.						
11. Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together? All of them 10, some of them 8, very few of them 3, none of them 0.						
12. In leisure time do you generally prefer: to be "on the go" —, to stay at home —? Does your mate generally prefer: to be "on the go" —, to stay at home —? (Stay at home for both, 10 points; "on the go" for both, 3 points; disagreement, 2 points.)						
13. Do you ever wish you had not married? Frequently 0, occasionally 3, rarely 8, never 15.						
14. If you had your life to live over, do you think you would: marry the same person 15, marry a different person 0, not marry at all 1?						
15. Do you confide in your mate: almost never 0, rarely 2, in most things 10, in everything 10?						

APPENDIX B:
THE DYADIC ADJUSTMENT SCALE

APPENDIX B

DYADIC ADJUSTMENT SCALE

Most persons have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

	Always Agree	Almost Always Agree	Occasionally Disagree	Frequently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree
1. Handling family finances	5	4	3	2	1	0
2. Matters of recreation	5	4	3	2	1	0
3. Religious matters	5	4	3	2	1	0
4. Demonstrations of affection	5	4	3	2	1	0
5. Friends	5	4	3	2	1	0
6. Sex relations	5	4	3	2	1	0
7. Conventionality (correct or proper behavior)	5	4	3	2	1	0
8. Philosophy of life	5	4	3	2	1	0
9. Ways of dealing with parents or in-laws	5	4	3	2	1	0
10. Aims, goals, and things believed important	5	4	3	2	1	0
11. Amount of time spent together	5	4	3	2	1	0
12. Making major decisions	5	4	3	2	1	0
13. Household tasks	5	4	3	2	1	0
14. Leisure time interests and activities	5	4	3	2	1	0
15. Career decisions	5	4	3	2	1	0
	All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
16. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?	0	1	2	3	4	5
17. How often do you or your mate leave the house after a fight?	0	1	2	3	4	5
18. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?	5	4	3	2	1	0
19. Do you confide in your mate?	5	4	3	2	1	0
20. Do you ever regret that you married? (or lived together)	0	1	2	3	4	5
21. How often do you and your partner quarrel?	0	1	2	3	4	5
22. How often do you and your mate "get on each other's nerves?"	0	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX C:
THE REVISED CONFLICT TACTICS SCALE

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX: Part 3

The CTS2 follows in the form to be administered.

RELATIONSHIP BEHAVIORS

No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, want different things from each other, or just have spats or fights because they are in a bad mood, are tired, or for some other reason. Couples also have many different ways of trying to settle their differences. This is a list of things that might happen when you have differences. Please circle how many times you did each of these things in the past year, and how many times your partner did them in the past year. If you or your partner did not do one of these things in the past year, but it happened before that, circle "7."

How often did this happen?

1 = Once in the past year

2 = Twice in the past year

3 = 3-5 times in the past year

4 = 6-10 times in the past year

5 = 11-20 times in the past year

6 = More than 20 times in the past year

7 = Not in the past year, but it did happen before

0 = This has never happened

APPENDIX C Continued

APPENDIX: Part 3 Continued

1. I showed my partner I cared even though we disagreed.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
2. My partner showed care for me even though we disagreed.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
3. I explained my side of a disagreement to my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
4. My partner explained his or her side of a disagreement to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
5. I insulted or swore at my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
6. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
7. I threw something at my partner that could hurt.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
8. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
9. I twisted my partner's arm or hair.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
10. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
11. I had a sprain, bruise, or small cut because of a fight with my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
12. My partner had a sprain, bruise, or small cut because of a fight with me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
13. I showed respect for my partner's feelings about an issue.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
14. My partner showed respect for my feelings about an issue.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
15. I made my partner have sex without a condom.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
16. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
17. I pushed or shoved my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
18. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
19. I used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make my partner have oral or anal sex.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
20. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
21. I used a knife or gun on my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
22. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
23. I passed out from being hit on the head by my partner in a fight.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
24. My partner passed out from being hit on the head in a fight with me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
25. I called my partner fat or ugly.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
26. My partner called me fat or ugly.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
27. I punched or hit my partner with something that could hurt.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
28. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
29. I destroyed something belonging to my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
30. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
31. I went to a doctor because of a fight with my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
32. My partner went to a doctor because of a fight with me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
33. I choked my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
34. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
35. I shouted or yelled at my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
36. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
37. I slammed my partner against a wall.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
38. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
39. I said I was sure we could work out a problem.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
40. My partner was sure we could work it out.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
41. I needed to see a doctor because of a fight with my partner, but I didn't.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
42. My partner needed to see a doctor because of a fight with me, but didn't.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
43. I beat up my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
44. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0

APPENDIX C Continued

APPENDIX: Part 3 Continued

45. I grabbed my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
46. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
47. I used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make my partner have sex.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
48. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
49. I stomped out of the room or house or yard during a disagreement.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
50. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
51. I insisted on sex when my partner did not want to (but did not use physical force).	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
52. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
53. I slapped my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
54. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
55. I had a broken bone from a fight with my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
56. My partner had a broken bone from a fight with me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
57. I used threats to make my partner have oral or anal sex.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
58. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
59. I suggested a compromise to a disagreement.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
60. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
61. I burned or scalded my partner on purpose.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
62. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
63. I insisted my partner have oral or anal sex (but did not use physical force).	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
64. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
65. I accused my partner of being a lousy lover.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
66. My partner accused me of this.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
67. I did something to spite my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
68. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
69. I threatened to hit or throw something at my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
70. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
71. I felt physical pain that still hurt the next day because of a fight with my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
72. My partner still felt physical pain the next day because of a fight we had.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
73. I kicked my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
74. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
75. I used threats to make my partner have sex.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
76. My partner did this to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
77. I agreed to try a solution to a disagreement my partner suggested.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0
78. My partner agreed to try a solution I suggested.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 0

APPENDIX D:
CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION OF INTERPARENTAL CONFLICT SCALE

APPENDIX D

Family Disagreements

I live with ____ both my mom and my dad
____ only one of my parents
____ another relative (e.g., grandmother, aunt)

In every family there are times when the parents don't get along. When their parents argue or

disagree, kids can feel a lot of different ways. We would like to know what kind of feelings *you* have when *your* parents have arguments or disagreements.

If your parents don't live together in the same house with you, think about times that they are together when they don't agree or about times when both of your parents lived in the same house, when you answer these questions.

T = True
ST = Sort of True
F = False

Frequency

- 1.* I never see my parents arguing or disagreeing
- 10. They may not think I know it, but my parents argue or disagree a lot
- 16. My parents are often mean to each other even when I'm around
- 20. I often see my parents arguing
- 29.* My parents hardly ever argue
- 37. My parents often nag and complain about each other around the house

Intensity

- 5. My parents get really mad when they argue
- 14.* When my parents have a disagreement they discuss it quietly
- 24. When my parents have an argument they say mean things to each other
- 33. When my parents have an argument they yell a lot
- 38.* My parents hardly ever yell when they have a disagreement
- 40. My parents have broken or thrown things during an argument
- 45. My parents have pushed or shoved each other during an argument

Resolution

- 2.* When my parents have an argument they usually work it out
- 11. Even after my parents stop arguing they stay mad at each other
- 21.* When my parents disagree about something, they usually come up with a solution
- 30.* When my parents argue they usually make up right away
- 41.* After my parents stop arguing, they are friendly toward each other
- 48. My parents still act mean after they have had an argument

Content

- 3. My parents often get into arguments about things I do at school
- 22. My parents' arguments are usually about something I did
- 31. My parents usually argue or disagree because of things that I do
- 39. My parents often get into arguments when I do something wrong

Perceived Threat

- 7. I get scared when my parents argue
- 17. When my parents argue I worry about what will happen to me

- 26. When my parents argue I'm afraid that something bad will happen
- 35. When my parents argue I worry that one of them will get hurt
- 42. When my parents argue I'm afraid that they will yell at me too
- 47. When my parents argue I worry that they might get divorced

Coping Efficacy

- 6.* When my parents argue I can do something to make myself feel better
- 15. I don't know what to do when my parents have arguments
- 25.* When my parents argue or disagree I can usually help make things better
- 34. When my parents argue there's nothing I can do to stop them
- 46. When my parents argue or disagree there's nothing I can do to make myself feel better
- 51. When my parents argue they don't listen to anything I say

Self-Blame

- 9.* I'm not to blame when my parents have arguments
- 19. It's usually my fault when my parents argue
- 28. Even if they don't say it, I know I'm to blame when my parents argue
- 43. My parents blame me when they have arguments
- 50.* Usually it's not my fault when my parents have arguments

Triangulation

- 8. I feel caught in the middle when my parents argue
- 18.* I don't feel like I have to take sides when my parents have a disagreement
- 27. My mom wants me to be on her side when she and my dad argue
- 36. I feel like I have to take sides when my parents have a disagreement
- 44. My dad wants me to be on his side when he and my mom argue

Stability

- 13. My parents have arguments because they are not happy together
- 23. The reasons my parents argue never change
- 32. My parents argue because they don't really love each other
- 49. My parents have arguments because they don't know how to get along