



Considerations for determining parenting arrangements: factors that influence outcomes

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Summary: Parenting Arrangements – Factors to consider

There has been much written on factors that should be considered when making post-divorce/separation parenting arrangements. However most reports focus on discrete factors, or supporting specific models (i.e., shared care, care in families with single identifiable issues) or do not draw clear links to the existing body of evidence. This document represents a synthesis of elements, factors and experiences worthy of consideration in determining parenting arrangements, drawing on research on factors affecting general child development, as well as exploring specific post- divorce/separation research and drawing a link to child outcomes.

This document consists of three parts. Section one describes important findings on the effects of divorce on children from a risk and resiliency perspective and lists a number of important considerations. Section two explores the impact of time spent parenting, providing a description of how time has been conceptualized in divorce/separation and parenting research, and lists the core themes/findings from the academic research. Finally, section three lists and describes common factors that are important for child outcomes.

Risk and Resiliency

It has become generally accepted that there is a variety of risk and protective factors that can impact on children’s adjustment and outcomes (longer term effects) during and after divorce/separation. These factors function to make it more or less likely that children will experience long and short term adjustment issues (i.e., internalizing/externalizing behavioural problems; dropping out of school; poor academic performance; substance (ab)use; poor physical health; and teenage pregnancy), particularly if several factors are present simultaneously. It is important to consider the circumstances of children and their families when working to mitigate risk and promote positive adjustment among children. These factors can be present (or absent) in many different combinations, and each will require a tailored approach to determining parenting arrangements that are best for children.¹

Time Spent Parenting

Research also outlines the role of parenting time and how the parenting arrangement unfolds in terms of time divisions. In general, according to current research, important considerations relevant to the creation of parenting arrangements include:

- a. Children need to spend as much quality time with each parent as possible, based on their best interests and other relevant factors associated with positive adjustment and outcomes.
- b. There is no standard amount or percentage of parenting time that works for all families. Rather it depends on the individual circumstances and characteristics of the family. Determining the time children will spend with each parent requires consideration of relevant factors that contribute to supporting positive adjustment, reducing risk, and mitigating negative outcomes for children.

¹ We generally speak about children when reviewing the broad themes and outcomes among children of divorce. When speaking about children, we are not implying that these themes only apply in families with more than one child.

- c. It is not just the amount of time spent parenting, but the quality (e.g., activities and engagement) of time that is important for children's outcomes and adjustment. Parents who engage in a variety of activities with their children feel more competent as parents, and have the opportunity for high quality parent-child interactions. This experience for parents and children is one aspect of developing a strong parent-child relationship and contributes to positive outcomes for children.
- d. Consistency and predictability are important for children's adjustment in all families and in families negotiating and determining parenting arrangements. However, this includes flexibility – particularly flexibility to meet the children's needs. When making and considering parenting arrangements, it is important to put realistic arrangements in place for the family, ones that can work for at least a period of time, rather than arrangements that quickly break down.

Individual and Family Factors Relevant to Determining Parenting Arrangements

When determining the specifics of the arrangements there is no one arrangement that will work for all families. Rather there are a number of key factors to consider that come together to determine outcomes for children post-divorce/separation. The list below begins to illustrate the complexity of the process and the multiple considerations for parents and decision-makers to consider. These individual and family level factors include:

- a. Individual characteristics of the child and the parents including: the child's temperament, their age/stage of development, and whether they have exceptionalities (i.e., physical, mental or psychological)²; and parental characteristics such as temperament, mental health, substance abuse issues and parenting capacity.
- b. The parent-child relationship and factors that affect it including: the current strength of the parent-child relationship, and the parent's willingness and opportunity to engage in quality parenting. Children are better adjusted and have more positive relationships with their parents when parents are sensitive and responsive to them.
- c. The parenting style of both parents. Children will do best and positively adjust to divorce/separation when parents are supportive, engaging, encouraging, affectionate and consistent. This is most often described as quality parenting which broadly includes: sufficient parenting time with children; parental responsiveness to children; parental interaction with children; and emotional security.
- d. The relationship between parents can have direct and indirect, along with positive and negative effects on children. It is best for children when parents communicate and engage in neutral or positive interactions - pervasive conflict negatively affects children. Parents who are distracted or angry will generally be less sensitive and responsive which, as a pattern of parenting, can negatively impact children's adjustment.
- e. The environment and family context of parents and children can affect children's adjustment. Children do best when there is a supportive social network, sufficient social

² A child who is significantly above or below the average in some respect (intellectual, behavioural, physical) and often requires special consideration and accommodations that would affect child rearing responsibilities (e.g., therapies, alternative academic arrangements) in any family.

and economic resources and a consistent, stable and predictable environment. For example, families with sufficient resources move less often and can reside in better neighbourhoods. Not having these resources is a risk factor for poor adjustment and has been associated with dropping out of school, delinquency and later criminality regardless of family configuration.

- f. The new relationships among parents and second/third/fourth families are also important to consider. They have the potential to increase the complexity of the situation and have a negative impact on children, but can also protect existing parent-child relationships and create strong social networks for children, parents and (step) families.
- g. Practical issues can have a very important effect on determining appropriate post-divorce/separation arrangements. Some of these issues include: work arrangements and flexibility; distance between homes; and socioeconomic status of the two households.
- h. Finally, there is evidence that intervention and support for parents and children can help bolster some of the key parent and child factors mentioned above. This includes skill development, and support for parents to maximize their capacity to parent.

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Section 1: The Effects of Divorce on Children from a Risk and Resiliency Perspective

At one time, it was thought that family breakdown led to problems with child adjustment. However, as social science research in the area developed, it became evident that rather than the divorce/separation itself leading to poor outcomes, it was more that the separation or divorce made it more likely that some children could experience child adjustment risk factors (i.e., lower income, parental conflict, losing contact with a parent, poor parenting behaviours).

Impact of Divorce

Divorce is one of many experiences that can cause stress for children. In general, researchers have shown that compared to children in intact families, children who experience the dissolution of their parents' relationship may be more likely to experience some health/mental health problems, behavioural problems (internalizing and externalizing), difficulties in school (learning, behavioural difficulties and dropping out of school) and more difficulties with their social relationships (Amato, 2010; Ambert, 2009; D'Onofrio, 2011; Weaver & Schofield, 2015). Currently, the consensus is that risk factors associated with the transition and post-divorce experiences can negatively impact children. These risk factors can exist both pre- and post-divorce and are not unique to divorced/separated families (Amato, 2010; Ambert, 2009; D'Onofrio, 2011; Rappaport, 2013; Weaver & Schofield, 2015). When risk factors are controlled, on average children of divorce are indistinguishable from children from intact families after they have adjusted to the transition (Amato, 2004; Hetherington, Bridges & Insabella, 1998; Mackay, 2005; O'Conner, 2004).

The important point here is that the experiences of children can make them either more resilient and protect them from poor outcomes, or contribute to their risk of adjustment and behavioural problems. These factors are important to identify, assess and consider when determining how to reduce the impact of divorce on children, especially when making parenting arrangements.

Risk and Protective Factors

There is a large body of social science research on child outcomes. This research points to the risk and protective factors that function to make it more or less likely that children become well adjusted, socially competent teens, young adults and adults. Social competence is a complex concept that encompasses an individual's ability to negotiate and navigate the social environment, to develop and maintain relationships, to manage interpersonal interactions, to adapt/adjust to changes, and to engage in problem-solving. It broadly includes social skills, social communication and interpersonal communication (e.g., Rose-Krasnor, 1997; Rubin & Rose-Krasnor, 1992; Semrud-Clikeman, 2007; Spitzberg, 2003). For children who are at risk for adjustment, behavioural problems include: internalizing (e.g., shyness and anxiety) and externalizing behaviours (e.g., aggression, acting out), poor academic functioning and dropping out of school, delinquency and later criminal behaviour, substance (ab)use, poor physical health and teenage pregnancy (e.g., Begle, Dumas & Hanson, 2010; Ben-Aryeh, Fronos, Casas & Korbin, 2013; Durlak, 1998; Goldstein & Brooks, 2012; Hindley, Ramchandani & Jones, 2006; Iwaniec, Larkin & Higgins, 2006; Korbin & Krugman, 2014; Lansford, Dodge, Pettit, Bates,

Crozier & Kaplow, 2002; Ronan, Canoy & Burke, 2009; Runyan, Wattam, Ikdea, Hassan & Ramiro, 2002; Sinno, Charafeddine, Makati & Holt, 2013).

This risk/resiliency lens highlights that children from all families (regardless whether they are from intact or divorced families) have varied life experiences. These experiences can be either beneficial or detrimental to outcomes and adjustment. It is clear that it is not just one factor that leads to positive or negative outcomes but rather there is an additive effect of these factors (e.g., Amato, 2005; Cagnetti & Chmil, 2014; Rappaport, 2013). There are several common factors identified in child development research that can function to put children at risk or protect them from negative adjustment (e.g., Ben-Aryeh, et al., 2013; Boninio, Cattelino & Ciairano, 2005; Durlak, 1998; Kelly, 2012; Rappaport, 2013; Sinno, et al., 2013; Goldstein & Brooks, 2013; Weaver & Schofield, 2015). Protective factors include:

- a. At least one strong parent-child relationship characterized by positive emotional connections, adaptability and good communication
- b. Parenting that is sensitive and responsive to the children's needs, and authoritative in nature (clear boundaries, consistent, but not rigid and punitive)
- c. Consistency and predictability in social interactions as well as in the environment
- d. Availability of social support and social networks including, family members, friends or other involved adults upon whom children can rely.

Risk factors include:

- a. Exposure to or involvement in pervasive interparental conflict and family violence
- b. Uninvolved parents both in terms of time and the parent-child relationship
- c. Parenting style that is intrusive or unsupportive
- d. Poverty or lack of resources and negative neighbourhood influence
- e. Individual parental factors, for example, mental health issues, substance use
- f. Individual child factors, for example, difficult temperament, mental and physical health, issues

These resiliency and risk factors are important predictors of outcomes and adjustment for all children in all families. This includes children who are experiencing or have experienced divorce/separation (Kelly, 2012; Rappaport, 2013).

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Section 2: Time Spent Parenting

In all families, children do best when they have two positively involved parents who spend quality time with them. In separated or divorced families, parenting arrangements need to provide children with as much time as reasonably and practically possible with each parent - taking into account the best interests as well as needs and characteristics of children, the characteristics of the parents and their parenting, and the wider environment (e.g., their social supports). However, research indicates that the amount of time itself does not lead to positive outcomes. What matters more for child outcomes and adjustment from the research appears to be experiences that children have with their parents – both in terms of the parent-child interactions (i.e., the quality of the parenting) as well as the type of activity (i.e., parenting across different activities of daily living). To maximize the potential impact of positive interactions, children need to spend sufficient time with their parents. While research suggests that there is no set amount of parenting time that works for all children and parents, there are factors that should be considered when determining, on an individual basis, what will work best for the children and family. Thus, time spent with parents is one important factor that needs to be considered alongside of the others discussed in this paper.

How Much Time is Ideal?

The current consensus is that it is in children's best interests to spend as much quality time as possible and practical with each parent given their individual and family characteristics. There is also general agreement that there is not one arrangement that works for all children. "As much time as possible" does not necessarily equate to 60/40 or 50/50 shared care for all families. Research has not provided a definitive answer on the specific number of hours or the frequency of parent-child visits needed for positive child adjustment and outcomes. Rather, the best arrangements are determined on a case-by-case basis (Cognetti & Chmil, 2014; Cyr, 2007; Miller, 2014; McIntosh, Pruett & Kelly 2014) considering and balancing the multiple factors important to child adjustment (see below for factors affected by time and Section Three for more information on general child and family factors) (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Cashmore, Parkinson & Taylor, 2008; Carlson, 2006).

One consideration in determining the amount of time that parents spend with their children includes the importance of having parents engage in activities of daily living with children (e.g., morning and evening routines, having opportunities to teach and) rather than just being a "Disneyland parent" following a separation or divorce (Stewart, 1999; see Section 3 for more detail). Thus, rather than a specific amount of time, children benefit from having a relationship with parents that include a variety of different parenting behaviours as well as experiences and activities (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Ulveseter, Breivik & Thuen, 2010). Sufficient time and opportunities for these various parenting activities benefit both children (i.e., with respect to positive adjustment and the quality of the parent child relationship) and their parents (i.e., fostering strong parenting skills) (Cashmore, Parkinson, Weston, Patulny, Redmond, Qu, Baxter, Rajkovic, Sitek & Katz, 2010; Kaspiw Gray, Weston, Moloney, Hand, Qu et al., 2009).

Time Spent Parenting and Child and Parent Factors

The time that either parent spends in parenting activities is important to children's adjustment post-divorce, but research has indicated that it not necessarily the amount of time in itself that is important. Instead, the amount of time is associated with a host of variables that affects the adjustment of children in all families. These other important factors, most notably the quality of parenting, are discussed at length in Section 3. Some of the factors that have been shown to be important include:

- a. Spending sufficient and continuous time with a parent contributes to opportunities for children to develop secure attachments with parents (Kelly & Lamb, 2000; Lamb, Bornstein & Teti, 2002).
- b. Spending more time interacting with fathers has been linked to positive adjustment and cognitive development for children, strong psychological well-being and decreases in delinquency and behavioural problems (Amato & Rivera, 1999; Harris, Furstenberg & Marmar, 1998; Marsiglio, Day & Lamb, 2000; Tamis-LeMonda Shannon, Cabrera & Lamb, 2004).
- c. When a parent has more parenting time (especially when they have both agreed to it), children (and adults) often report stronger and more positive parent-child relationships³ (see generally, Cashmore, et al., 2010; Fabricius, 2003; Fabricius, Sokol, Diaz & Braver, 2012; Frank, 2007; Sroufe & McIntosh, 2011) (for continuity of care see Berger, Brown, Joung, Melli & Wimer, 2008; Cyr, 2006; Kaspiw, et al., 2009; McIntosh, 2009; Melli & Brown, 2008; Shaffer, 2007; Smyth, 2010; Smyth & Moloney, 2008; Swiss & Le Bourdais, 2009). Having sufficient time with a parent allows for opportunities to develop and use parenting skills and supports the development of a strong parent-child relationship (Shaffer, 2007).
- d. When a parent has more time with children they are more satisfied with arrangements, which can have a positive impact on the child as well (Cashmore et al 2010; Sinha, 2014; Swiss & Le Bourdais 2009). Notably, there are conflicting reports regarding children's satisfaction with their arrangements depending on the amount of time they spend with a parent – some studies report children are generally more satisfied with the parenting time (Lodge & Alexander, 2010) and others indicate that there is no difference for those in shared care versus sole mother care (Cashmore et al., 2010).⁴ However, children in sole custody often express a desire for more contact with the other parent (Altenhofen, Biringen & Mergler, 2008; Bauserman, 2012; Cashmore et al., 2010; Fabricius & Hall, 2000; Melli & Brown, 2008; Nielsen, 2011; Neoh & Mellor, 2010; Parkinson, Cashmore & Single, 2005; Parkinson & Smyth, 2004; Smith & Gollop, 2001).

³ Most studies have focused on the nature of father-child relations in custody and access arrangements. This is due to the fact that, in recent history most children lived predominantly with their mothers following divorce/separation.

⁴ The definition of what constitutes shared care is different in this Australian research (i.e., 35–65% of nights with each parent while sole care would be less than 35% or greater than 65%) to what would be considered shared custody in Canada (i.e., at least 40% of time with each parent).

- e. When parents have more time with children they feel more confident as parents and engage in more positive parenting (i.e. authoritative parenting) (Fabricius et al. 2012; Jones & Mosher, 2013; Shaffer, 2007).⁵
- f. When parents⁶ have more parenting time (especially when they have agreed to it), they are less likely to lose contact with their children over the longer term (Berger, et al., 2008; Cyr, 2006; Kaspiew, et al., 2009; McIntosh, 2009; Melli & Brown, 2008; Shaffer, 2007; Smyth, 2010; Smyth & Moloney, 2008; Swiss & Le Bourdais, 2009). This finding is consistent across various samples including young American adults, British children, American college students, Canadian college students, Hispanic American college students, and German adolescents (Aquilino, 2010; Dunn Cheng, O'Connor & Bridges, 2004; Laumann & Emery, 2000; Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001; Schwartz & Finley, 2005; Struss, Pfeiffer, Preus & Felder, 2001). Further, when noncustodial parents maintain consistent contact with children, they may be more likely to pay support (Bartfeld, 2003; Bartfeld & Meyer, 2003; Juby, Marcil-Gratton & Le Bourdais, 2005; Nepomnyaschy, 2007; McLanahan, Seltzer, Hanson & Thomson, 1994; Seltzer, Schaefer & Charng, 1989).⁷

Stability of and Changes to Arrangements

Consistency, stability and predictability are important environmental factors for children when promoting positive adjustment, particularly for younger children. This does not mean that there should be no transitions or that arrangements should never change, but rather, that these decisions need to be made on a case-by-case basis considering all relevant factors, and reviewed periodically. Some of the factors to consider relating to characteristics of the arrangements themselves include:

- a. Response to change and uncertainty differs among children, but it affects all children to some degree. Changes in parenting arrangements (which affect both the social and physical environment) can be stressful for some children and adolescents – especially when the changes are not initiated by or a result of a change in the children's own needs (less control and predictability) (Lodge & Alexander, 2010).
- b. As children get older, most (depending on their temperament and other factors) require greater flexibility in the arrangements. In general, however, adolescents want flexibility to adjust the schedule to meet their needs rather than their parents adjusting it for their own (Lodge & Alexander, 2010).
- c. Some children find it more difficult to manage substantial time between two homes for many different reasons (e.g., their temperament, want to spend time with neighbourhood friends, difficulty dealing with change) (Cashmore et al., 2010). When children spend

⁵ Note: These findings need to be cautiously interpreted – time alone was not a powerful predictor in this study because frequency counts were inconsistent. See for instance Amato & Gilbreth, 1999.

⁶ Most studies have focused on the nature of father-child relations in custody and access arrangements. This is due to the fact that, in recent history most children lived predominantly with their mothers following divorce/separation.

⁷ Having sufficient economic resources is a very important factor to child adjustment. When children are in low income families they are exposed to a host of other potential risk factors that are associated with this condition (e.g., insufficient/poor nutrition, more negative neighborhood influences and lack of social cohesion).

significant time with both parents they need to feel like they have a home with each parent, and not feel as if they are staying at the parent's home (not their own) or living out of a suitcase (Cashmore et al., 2010; Smart & May, 2004).

- d. For some children transitions between homes is an issue, not only because of how they adapt to change, but also because of how their parents deal with the transitions. For example, if parents are inflexible or argue about children's things (i.e., what clothes they bring back and forth, what happens if the children forget items in one home or another) children and adolescents tend to be less satisfied with their shared arrangements (Cashmore et al., 2010). Not only can the transition be a source of stress (the act of packing up or anticipating the change) but for some children the different household rules, times, routines, activities, beliefs, discipline and diet can also be stressful (Cashmore et al., 2010).
- e. Change in parenting arrangements may be needed when there are additional transitions in the post-divorce family such as moving, re-partnering etc. Multiple or frequent family structure transitions can be difficult for children (e.g., changes such as divorce, cohabitation, a second divorce, end of cohabitation, new cohabitation) not only because of the impact on stability and predictability, but also the increased pressure/stress they bring (e.g., moves to a new neighbourhood (especially a less affluent one), new partners for one or both parents) (e.g., Beck, Cooper, McLanahan, Brooks-Gunn, 2010; Cavanagh & Huston, 2008; Magnuson & Berger, 2009; Manning & Lamb, 2003; Sun & Li, 2009; Teachman, 2008).
- f. There is some mixed evidence that the changes in the family structure and re-partnering can make children feel less comfortable with the parent, feel not welcome in the home and attribute a new relationship as a source of difficulty (Cashmore et al., 2010). The adverse impacts of frequent transitions on child outcomes can include delinquency, drug use, poor academic performance and behavioural problems. These impacts would likely depend on how situations are handled by both parents.
- g. On the other hand, not all transitions are negative or neutral in their impact, some have a positive impact. For example, transitions can lead to a better familial situation, greater social support or access to better resources.

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Section 3: Factors Affecting Outcomes for Children

Below we address the multiple factors which seem to be particularly relevant to post-separation divorce functioning for children and parents, including: 1) characteristics of the child; 2) characteristics of the parent(s); 3) the type of parenting; 4) the parent-child relationship; 5) the inter-parental relationship; 6) conflict; 7) family violence; 8) the environment, financial issues, repartnering and interventions; and 9) practical issues. When developing parenting arrangements post-divorce/separation, these factors are among the most important to consider on a case-by-case basis (Brinig, Frederick & Drozd, 2014; Pruett & DiFonzo, 2014).

Characteristics of the child

There are individual characteristics of children that can impact their adjustment in all families. Characteristics may include biological, psychological, pathological and/or physiological factors (Ben-Aryeh et al., 2013; Masten, 2001; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Although these characteristics have been identified and studied predominantly in a broad child development framework, there are some child related factors that would be particularly relevant to consider post-divorce/separation, outlined below.

Temperament

In all families, *the children's temperament* – how children approach their environments (social as well as physical) – is an important indicator of outcomes and a factor impacting the type of parenting needed.⁸ There are several well accepted dimensions of child temperament and some of these include level of: behavioural inhibition (i.e., fear of the unknown, both social and environmental), irritability or frustration tolerance, activity level, attention span, persistence and sensory sensitivity (e.g., Zentner & Bates, 2008). In addition to impacting how a child will respond to their environment, these traits impact the level of skill and effort needed to engage in positive, quality parenting. Further, temperament can impact the continuity of parent-child relationship as some research suggests that fathers are more likely to maintain contact/spend more time with children who are well adjusted but disengage from those with behavioural or academic problems (Swiss & Le Bourdais, 2009). This is more often the case when children reside primarily with mothers.

Although children may demonstrate a range of behaviours related to temperament, there are three general categories into which many children fall, including easy, slow to warm up and difficult.⁹ For example, children with an “easy” temperament adapt quickly and well to new environments, they are most often smiling and in a good mood. These children would likely have an easier time with transition and adjustment to change. They are easy to parent – they require less energy and fewer parental resources (patience, sensitivity). Other children, namely those slow to warm up, or children with a difficult temperament may find it more challenging to adapt to change and transitions. The children at the extreme end may also require much higher level of parenting

⁸ Temperament describes how a child (or even an adult) approaches and reacts to the world. It refers to stable individual differences in these reactions. There have been different approaches taken to studying temperament, but there are several generally agreed upon dimensions of a child's temperament.

⁹ Today these groups are more commonly referred to as spirited, sensitive or challenging.

resources (social/emotional as well as time and money). This would be particularly true of the more sensitive children who tend to exhibit fear of the unknown or uncertainty, have high levels of irritability and activity, and/or a lower attention span.

Existing health, mental health or social/intellectual challenges

Existing health, mental health or social/intellectual challenges of the child can function as risk factors for later child adjustment problems. There is also some research indicating that families of children with disabilities report higher levels of marital strain and conflict and an increased incidence of separation or divorce (Statistics Canada, 2008).

Children with some of these existing challenges may require more of a parent's resources (social, emotional and time) and family resources (including relationships, time, financial), particularly following a divorce/separation. In this context, existing physical health, mental health and social conditions may affect the child's ability to adapt to and manage change and will increase the necessity of coordination of supports and resources (e.g., professionals, special programs) or children to function (Strohschein, 2005). In these cases, there may be a requirement for increased inter-parental involvement.

Children's age and stage of development

A considerable amount of research explores the impact of the child's age and stage of development on how they adjust to divorce/separation (e.g., Health Canada, 2000; O'Connor, 2004). While it is clear that the age of children is not enough to predict child outcomes, research documents some age-related issues that can arise which include: problems children may have understanding divorce; self-blaming for divorce/separation; emotional struggles with family structure changes; and possible adjustment problems. Research suggests that not only do older children have the capacity to make their wishes known, when their views are considered (as part of the decision-making process), older children feel more in control and more satisfied with the arrangements (e.g., Cashmore & Parkinson, 2008; Kelly, 2012; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001; Smith, Taylor & Tapp, 2003).

Some research on parenting practices examining time-spent parenting have shown that the age of the children is associated with the time that they spend with each parent. For example, shared custody might be more common for children in middle childhood, lower for young children and adolescents and spending a majority of time with the father more prevalent for older children (Cashmore et al., 2010, Kaspiw et al, 2009, Le Bourdais Juby & Marcil-Gratton, 2002; Manning, Stewart & Smock, 2003; Seltzer, 1991;).

Currently there is no consensus on what parenting arrangements are most appropriate for infants and children under four years of age (e.g., McIntosh, Smyth & Kelaher, 2013; McIntosh, Smyth, Kelaher, Wells & Long, 2011; Nielsen, 2014). The debate generally focuses on time spent parenting for young or very young children where some argue against overnight parenting arrangements because of adjustment and attachment problems (especially among young children less than 2 or 3 years old). Others argue that overnights do not directly have an impact on child adjustment (generally for children over 2 or 3 years old) (Kelly & Lamb, 2000; McIntosh et al, 2013; McIntosh et al., 2011; McIntosh, Smyth, Kelaher, Wells & Long, 2010; Nielsen, 2014; Pruett, Ebling & Insabella, 2004; Solomon & George, 1999; Tornello, Emery, Rowen, Potter, Ocker & Xu, 2013; Warshak, 2000; Warshak, 2002).

Characteristics of the parents

The characteristics of the parents (e.g., mental health, parenting capacity) are important in all families. They can affect not only the parent's adjustment to parenting arrangements and the inter-parental relationship quality, but the quality of the parenting they provide. These characteristics are important because in all families, parental functioning is one of the best predictors of child development, outcomes and adjustment (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Alenhofen et al., 2008; Sandler, Wolchik, Winslow, Mahrer, Moran & Weinstock, 2012). However, there is general acceptance that the characteristics of the parent is one of several factors that must be evaluated when determining parenting arrangements, alongside environmental dimensions, available and accessible resources, sources of stress, interpersonal factors, inter-parental factors, child characteristics, parenting practices and the quality of parenting (e.g., Belsky, 1984).

Mental health, psychiatric illness or personality disorders

There is well-developed literature on the relationship between depression or other psychological problems and parenting skills/behaviours, which consequently impact child outcomes. In general, the mental health of the parent can have an impact on emotional, social and academic adjustments for all children across all age groups, contributing to an increased likelihood of internalizing (anxiety/depression) or externalizing (attention-deficit/defiant behaviour, aggression) behaviours in children (Belsky, 1984; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Pruett, Williams, Insabella & Little, 2003; Gefland & Teti, 1990; Hardie & Landale, 2013; Lovejoy, Graczyk, O'Hare & Neuman, 2000; Rishel, 2012; Turney, 2011a; Turney, 2011b; Turney, 2012). For instance, a large body of work has developed identifying an association between child behavioural adjustment and parent-child problems and certain personality traits of the parent (DeGarmo, Reid, Leve, Chamberlain & Knutson, 2010; Febres, Shorey, Zucosky, Brasfield, Vitulano, Elmquist, Ninnemann, Labrecque & Stuart, 2014; Harold, Elam, Lewis, Rice & Thapar, 2012; Jurma, 2015; Wilson & Durbin, 2010). For instance, depressed and hostile parents may be less involved and less affectionate with children which can contribute to internalizing and externalizing behaviours (Barnard & McKeganey, 2004; Boutelle, Eisenberg, Gregory & Neumark-Sztainer, 2009; Riggs, Chou & Pentz, 2009; Weaver & Schofield, 2015).

Substance abuse

When parents currently abuse drugs and/or alcohol or have an untreated and current substance abuse/addiction problem, children are at an increased risk for adverse behavioural, psychological and achievement outcomes. This is because substance abuse can impact the quality of parenting offered to children. Some outcomes for children when parents have a current and untreated substance abuse issue might include: being defiant and over-reactive, having poor academic achievement, and developing substance abuse problems of their own (Fals-Stewart, Kelley, Fincham, Golden & Logsdon, 2004; Irner, Teasdale & Olofsson, 2012; McMahon & Giannini, 2003; Osborne & Berger, 2009).

Demographics and resources

Some demographic characteristics of parents are associated with the likelihood that parents will apportion their time with the children more equally including: parental education and income level (generally higher levels) (King, Harris & Heard, 2004; Swiss & Le Bourdais, 2009)¹⁰; the work/employment status of the parents (more likely when mothers work), and the work schedules of parents (less flexible schedule or weekend/evening work make is less likely) (Juby et al., 2005; Kalmijn, 2015).

Type of parenting

Child development research clearly shows that the quality of parenting is one of the best predictors of child well-being and outcomes in all families (e.g., Adamsons & Johnson, 2013; Amato, 2000; Amato, 2005; Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Cyr, 2006; Cyr, Di Stefano & Desjardins, 2013; Fabricius et al., 2012; Fehlberg, Smyth, Maclean & Roberts, 2011; Gilmore, 2006; Gilmore, 2010; Nielsen, 2011; Pruett & DiFonzo, 2014; Rutter, 1999). These studies indicate that the quality of parenting, the psychological and the relational environment for children, and family characteristics have a stronger association with positive child outcomes than the actual living arrangements/family structure. However, there is a collection of characteristics which, if present, is more likely to result in families that have a shared arrangement that leads to better outcomes and adjustment for children (e.g., parents can act in business-like manner; parents have more resources; high quality parenting, lower levels of conflict).

Quality parenting

The quality of parenting has been defined in many similar ways generally including the umbrella concepts of warmth, sensitivity, and responsiveness (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013; Fabricius et al., 2012). Within these, characteristics of quality parenting include: supportiveness/closeness, active involvement and monitoring, appropriate and authoritative discipline, consistency (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001). Regardless of the type of parenting arrangement, quality parenting has been linked to fewer externalizing behaviours (aggression, defiance, criminal activity), stronger academic performance, better overall well-being and fewer internalizing behaviours (depression, anxiety, mental health problems) (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Bricklin & Elliot, 2013; Kuehnle & Drozd, 2012; Nielsen, 2011; Prazen, Wolfinger, Cahill & Kowaleski-Jones, 2011; Sandler, Miles, Cookston & Braver, 2008; Sandler et al., 2012; Smyth, 2009; Stewart, 2003). Children also benefit from strong parent-child communication especially when there is dialogue and constant transmitting of life ideas and values, trust and respect (Ngai, Cheung, To, Liu & Song 2013; Popov & Ilesanmi 2015). Finally, there is some emerging evidence suggesting that quality parenting can offset the negative impact of parental conflict after divorce (Pruett et al., 2003; Sandler et al., 2008; Sandler et al., 2012).

Poor quality parenting consists of the opposite characteristics of those noted above and could include: rigidity (little flexibility), harshness or coerciveness, preoccupation (i.e., lack of

¹⁰ However, there has been some suggestion that fathers with very low incomes might show higher levels of contact than those in low income categories as they do not generally report employment income and may have more time to spend with their children. The parents with low income and who report employment may have more shift work or inflexible schedules that affect their ability to have greater contact with children (Swiss & LeBourdais 2009).

attention to the child), low involvement and low support (Kelly, 2012; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Oppenheim & Koren-Karie, 2012; Sandler et al., 2008). It is thought that poor parenting is cyclical in that poor parenting impacts behaviour problems which influence poorer parenting that can then be characterized by punitive parenting, less involvement, reduction in supervision which then continues to impact behavioural problems (Popov & Ilesanmi, 2015).

The parent-child relationship

There is a large body of child development research showing that a positive and supportive parent-child relationship makes an important contribution to children's adjustment (Chan, 2011; Eisenberg, Zhou, Spinrad, Valiente, Fabes & Liew, 2005; Neighbors, Forehand & Bau, 1997). In general, the parent-child relationship is one of the most important experiences for both children and parents. In addition to some of the characteristics of the parent (covered above), there are other factors that contribute to the development or continuation of a good parent-child relationship.

Past parent-child relationship

There is strong evidence showing that the parent-child relationship before divorce is a good predictor of the post-divorce parent-child relationship (Amato, 2010; Amato & Booth, 1996; Booth & Amato, 2001). Based on this work, it is generally accepted that continuing with pre-existing relationships is important for positive adjustment and outcome for children. However, parent-child relationships can change – strong pre-existing relationships can become weaker and weaker ones can become strong and supportive.

Parental involvement

Parental involvement refers to the degree to which parents are involved or engaged with and accessible to their children, and take responsibility for their children (e.g., Lamb, 2000). This can include involvement at home, in the school or community, and in activities/hobbies/sports. This work reiterates the importance of doing more than being in the physical presence of a child (i.e. in the house when a child is playing in the other room), but rather connecting and interacting. Children with involved parents tend to have better short and long-term outcomes with respect to development and behaviour (Carlson, 2006; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2010; Jeynes, 2012; Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid & Bremberg, 2008; Stacer, & Perrucci, 2013). Some work has shown that having two involved adults can offer greater frequency and degree of engagement (Cooper, 2010; Dufur, Howell, Downey, Ainsworth & Lapray, 2010; Myers & Myers, 2014).

Attachment

Attachment is the measurement of the connection between a child and a parent/caregiver. The importance of attachment has been demonstrated across many different cultures (Ahnert, Pinquart & Lamb, 2006; Bretherton, 2010; van Ijzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz 2008). To assess attachment, trained professionals measure concepts including emotional and physical care giving, constant involvement (in daily life) and emotional investment. The child development research consistently shows that when there is secure attachment, there are multiple positive

outcomes for children and adults (e.g., developmental, behavioural, emotional) (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson & Collins, 2005).

Attachment has become important to those studying the impact of divorce and parenting arrangements post-divorce because researchers want to understand how a change in family structure might affect the nature of the connection between children, parents and child adjustment. However, it is important to note that the attachment research is based on social science assessment tools used to measure attachment between children and caregivers/parents. These laboratory tools provide empirical data on attachment. There is little consensus that these tools should be used to determine custody and access arrangements (Byrne, O'Connor, Marvin & Whelan, 2005; Dale & Ludolph, 2012; Fabricius et al., 2012; Smith, Coffino, van Horn & Lieberman, 2012; Solomon, 2013).

Attachment research consistently shows children are more likely to thrive when they have at least one secure attachment (Lopez, 1995; Slater, 2007). It is clear that children can have positive and strong attachments to both parents in addition to caregivers; in fact they benefit from having more than one positive attachment (Ahnert et al., 2006; Althenhofen, Sutherland & Biringen, 2010; Bretherton, 2010; Brown, Mangelsdorf & Neff, 2012; Brown, McBride, Shin & Bost 2007; Brumariu, & Kerns, 2010; Cassidy, 2008; Dale & Ludolph, 2012; Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, 2011; Kochanska & Kim, 2013; Lamb, 1977; Solomon, 2013; Suess, Grossmann & Sroufe, 1992; Waters & McIntosh, 2011). This means that promoting the development of more than one secure attachment is ideal as the potential for positive outcomes increases when children have sufficient access to both parents (or multiple caregivers). Importantly, children can have different quality (e.g., secure, insecure) of attachment to different adults in their lives – if they are not securely attached to one parent, they could have a secure attachment to another parent or adult (Kerns, Tomich, Aspelmeier & Contreras, 2000; Verschueren & Maccoen, 1999).

Consistent themes from the research show that children with an insecure attachment, particularly a disorganized attachment, with both parents in infancy are at the highest risk for behavioural problems (Kuehnle & Drozd, 2012; Smith et al., 2012; Sroufe et al., 2005). On the other hand, secure attachment has been associated with increased self-esteem, resourcefulness, peer competence and romantic relationship competence.

The inter-parental relationship

The relationship between ex-spouses/partners can impact their ability to be good parents and this can influence the parent-child relationship and outcomes for children (e.g., Amato & Booth, 1996). For example, a distracted or angry parent may not be as sensitive or responsive to children's needs and may be more likely to put children in the middle of inter-parental conflict.

Co-parenting is broadly defined by McHale and Irace (2011) as:

a shared activity undertaken by those adults responsible for the care and upbringing of children. This joint enterprise serves children best when each of the co-parenting adults is capable of seeing and responding to the child as a separate person with feelings and needs different from their own and when the adults find ways to work together to co-create a structure that adequately protects and nurtures the child. (p. 16)

The co-parenting relationship can best help children adjust to divorce when there is: joint planning; coordination among activities for the children; parental support and agreement; recognized value in the contribution of each parent; flexibility; effort to agree or build consensus on children's needs; coordination in child rearing practices and boundaries between parental responsibilities; low conflict; and mutual respect and maturity (Fabricius et al., 2012; Smith, 2004). In these cases, a strong co-parenting relationship allows for active and positive involvement of the parents (Hardesty, Khaw, Chung & Martin, 2008; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Pruett, & Pruett 2009) regardless of the structure of the family (Carlson, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008).

When parents can cooperatively co-parent, there is more likely to be increased child-parent contact as strong relations promote and facilitate contact (Fabricius et al., 2012; Smith, 2004; Sobolewski & King, 2005; Waller, 2012). It is widely accepted that it is best for children's well-being that parents are able to maintain a neutral/positive and cooperative co-parenting relationship (Hayden, Schiller, Dickstein, Seifer, Sameroff, Miller, Keitner & Rasmussen, 1998; Jaffe, Crooks & Bala, 2005; McHale & Irace, 2011; McHale, Kuersten-Hogan, Lauretti & Rasmussen, 2000; Schoppe, Mangelsdorf & Frosch, 2001; Sobolewski & King, 2005). Practically speaking, when parents have a neutral/positive relationship, it may be easier to make changes to arrangements and develop parenting arrangements, and parents may engage more frequently in supporting the child's relationship with the other parent. Conversely, it can be emotionally and psychologically harmful for children when parents have a negative or hostile relationship, cannot operate in the child's best interest, or fixate on time arrangements (McIntosh & Chisholm, 2008; Pruett et al., 2003).

Conflict

Inter-parental conflict is a distinct concept from family violence. It is generally accepted that conflict is multi-dimensional in nature (e.g., varying along lines of frequency, severity, response, degree of involvement of both parents, and the potential impacts on children) (e.g., Ayoub, Deutsch & Maraganore, 1999; Birnbaum & Bala, 2010; Harold et al., 2014; Neighbors et al., 1997; Saini, Redmond, Polak, & Yadeta, 2010). It is important to note that some conflict is normal in relationships and it can be neutral or positive with respect to its effect on child outcomes and parent-child relations. For example, when it is infrequent, resolved in a prosocial manner, contained, and does not involve or implicate the child conflict does not have a negative effect. In fact, this type of conflict can aid in skill development and future modelling of effective conflict resolution.

In all families, what matters most is the frequency and degree (occasional and based on discrete issues versus persistent, frequent, and hostile) and degree to which it is resolved (resolved quickly versus unresolved and ongoing). It is also generally accepted that conflict prior to divorce is not a good predictor of conflict after divorce. (Altenhofen et al., 2008; Buchanan, Maccoby & Dornbusch, 1991; Cyr, 2007; Drapeau, Gagné, Saint-Jacques, Lépine & Ivers, 2009; Emery, Otto & Donohue, 2005; Fabricius et al., 2012; Gilmore, 2004; Gilmore, 2006; McIntosh & Long, 2005; Pruett, et al., 2004; Sandler et al., 2008; Stewart, 2001; Spruijt, de Goede & Vandervalk, 2004).

Research on conflict suggests that children exposed to or involved in (i.e., put in the middle of) persistent and unresolved conflict (both violent and non-violent) are more likely to demonstrate

internalizing and externalizing behavioural problems and social adjustment problems (e.g., Ayoub et al., 1999; Fomby & Osborne, 2010; Harold et al., 2012; Jouriles, Rosenfield, McDonald & Mueller, 2014; Kelly, 2012; McIntosh & Chisolm 2008; Saini et al., 2010).

Potential developmental and behavioural consequences of conflict include:

- a. poor social competence (i.e., peer problems poor self-esteem and cognitive/academic problems lack of concentration; academic performance problems)
- b. internalizing behaviours (i.e., emotional problems; anxiety, withdrawal, depression and suicidal thoughts)
- c. externalizing behaviours (i.e., aggression, impulsivity, delinquency, attention difficulties); and
- d. modelling of conflict, violent or vulnerable behaviours, post-traumatic stress disorder and its symptoms (nightmares, dissociation, flashbacks);, substance abuse, and lack of future parenting competency, trust issues, or difficulties in future relationship formation

There is some suggestion that when families experiencing conflict on the higher level of the spectrum adopt arrangements that include substantially shared time the arrangements are more likely to break down (e.g., McIntosh et al., 2011). When the arrangements break down, there is often a shift to sole mother custody.

Family Violence¹¹

The existence of violence in the family¹² is a “devastating reality for many Canadians regardless of their social, economic or cultural backgrounds” (Department of Justice, 2014b, p.16) and of paramount concern for all (e.g., survivors, service providers, as well as decision-makers).

Generally, family violence is understood as the use of abusive behaviour “to control and/or harm a member of their family, or someone with whom they have an intimate relationship”

(Department of Justice, 2014a). It can be experienced as one or more forms of physical, sexual, emotional and/or financial abuse or neglect (Department of Justice, 2014a, b; Neilson, 2013). It may be isolated to a single incident, it may be longstanding, or it may be a situational experience (e.g., after divorce, with substance use/abuse, anxiety). From a research and policy perspective, different typologies of violence allow for precision when talking about violence and when creating measures to deal with violence (e.g., intimate partner violence, domestic violence and family violence; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2003; Johnson, 2006; Johnston & Campbell, 1993; Johnson & Ferraro, 2000).

Current and future safety concerns in the context of family violence along with the short and long-term consequences from exposure and experiences with violence are important

¹¹ This section, while focused on family violence will not attempt to provide a detailed explanation and coverage of the nature and description of this type of violence. Rather we will highlight this factor as one that have important implications for children’s outcomes and making parenting arrangements in the best interests of children. For additional information refer to Department of Justice, 2014a, b; Jaffe et al., 2005, 2008; Neilson, 2013.

¹² Family violence is a broad term that includes intimate partner violence and domestic violence. It refers to a set of complex phenomenon to which there are conflicting accounts and differences in terminology. For the sake of this discussion, family violence is used to describe violence that can take place within the context of the family, among all members. When it is discussed below, much of the research presented focuses on violence between intimate partners but we acknowledge that this is not the only type of relationship through which violence can be perpetrated.

considerations when determining parenting arrangements post-separation/divorce. When there is family violence, research findings emphasise protecting the safety and well-being of parents and children and respecting victims and witnesses of violence (Johnston, Lee, Olesen & Walters, 2005; Jaffe et al., 2005).

There is a strong consensus that experiencing and/or being exposed to family violence before, during or after divorce puts children at risk of emotional and behavioural problems (e.g., Bourassa, 2007; Cunningham & Baker, 2004, 2007; Edleson, 1999; Evans, Davies & DiLillo, 2008; Febres et al., 2014; Geffner, Igelman & Zellner, 2003; Herrenkohl, Sousa, Tajima, Herrenkohl & Russo, 2010; Holt, Buckley & Whelan, 2008; Jaffe et al., 2005; Kitmann, Gaylord, Holt & Kenny, 2003; Moylan, Herrenkohl, Sousa, Tajima, Herrenkohl & Russo, 2010; Narayan, Cicchietti, Rogosch & Toth, 2014; Rigterink, Katz & Hessler, 2010; Rossman, Hughes & Rosenberg, 2013; Schnurr & Lohman, 2013; Siegler, 2013; Sousa, Herenkohl, Moylan, Tajima, Klika, Herenkohl & Russo, 2011; Trickett & Schellenbach, 1998). Importantly, exposure to family violence can have the same effects as being subject to violence (e.g., Brinig, Frederick & Drozd, 2014). The impact of family violence on children is pervasive and can include emotional, behavioural, social, health, academic, relationship (intimate and non-intimate), and vocational adjustment issues. Experiences of domestic violence for young children and older youths can have negative consequences, including higher levels of internalizing (e.g., withdrawal, anxiety, depression) and externalizing behaviours (e.g., delinquency, aggression), lower academic and cognitive functioning (e.g., reading, verbal abilities, dropping out of school) and less well developed social skills (e.g., difficulties in interactions with peers and poor peer relations). Research has also found a higher level of alcohol use among and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder for children experiencing or exposed to family violence as they get older (see references above).

These negative outcomes can be seen immediately or longer term, even into adulthood. Some work shows that there is an increased risk of negative outcomes when children both witness and are involved in family violence and that living in homes with violence can put children more at risk of experiencing violence and/or neglect (e.g., Bourassa, 2007; Edelson, 1999; Sousa et al., 2011). Aside from the direct impact of violence, there are indirect effects of violence too, affecting the quality of the parenting, the parent-child relationship with both parents and the well-being of the parent (which in turn can negatively affect the children) (Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 1998; van Horn & Lieberman, 2002; Levendosky, Leahy, Bogat, Davidson & von Eye, 2006). It should be noted that not all children who come from homes where there is family violence will be affected in the same manner or to the same degree. The type of attachment to the non-violent parent, the quality of the parenting, their ability to prevent children from having further exposure to violence are all important factors and can protect children from negative effects of violence (e.g., Graham-Bermann, DeVoe, Mattis, Lynch & Thomas, 2006; Osofsky, 1999; Pruett et al., 2003; Sandler et al., 2008; Sandler et al., 2012).¹³

The overarching message about family violence in the context of making a parenting arrangement involves first considering the presence or absence of family violence and the form it took as well as protective factors that are in place (e.g., positive parenting, secure attachments, social supports, and other factors mentioned previously) (see for example, Jaffe et al., 2008). The

¹³ See the protective factors associated with conflict above.

existence and nature of the family violence, as well as other pertinent circumstances need to be examined to determine the appropriate parenting arrangement in any particular case.

The social and physical environment for parents and children

Child outcomes and adjustment in all families can also be impacted by the social and physical environment of parents and children. The factors below will be important to consider in determining parenting arrangements that are in the best interests of their children.

Socioeconomic status

Research clearly shows that socioeconomic status (SES) is at least partially linked to child-well-being in all families. There are health, cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural outcomes that are impacted by SES. The effects in some cases begin before birth and last into adulthood. In general, when children have more resources available to them they do better in the long term (Bornstein & Bradley, 2012; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Braveman, Egerter & Williams, 2011; Cohen, Janicki-Deverts, Chen & Matthews, 2010; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Ryan, Claessens & Markowitz, 2015; Weaver & Schofield, 2015). Lower SES has also been linked to an increased frequency in or absolute number of transitions for children.

Child's relationships

Recent work has emphasized that while most parenting arrangement discussions focus on child-parent relations, often overlooked are the important relations between siblings and friends and the impact they have on children's adjustment (e.g., Davies, 2015).

A supportive social network

A supportive social network is an important factor protecting all children of negative adjustment (e.g., Sandler, Miller, Short, & Wolchuk, 1989). Further, parents adjust better to divorce and are able to offer more quality parenting when they have social support and a network of resources in the community (Castillo & Fenzl-Crossman, 2010; DeGarmo, Patras & Eap, 2008; Leslie & Grady, 1985; McDermott, Fowler & Christakis, 2013). This might include involvement with immediate family and/or emotional support among peers, colleagues and extended family. This type of support can help sustain a quality relationship with children.

Repartnering – New relationships, remarriage and cohabitation:

Remarriage and repartnering post-divorce/separation is common and these transitions and new relationships are important to consider in post-divorce/separation arrangements for children. For example, one might consider how they will be handled, and the impact on parental involvement. Practically speaking, the complexity of parent-child contact may increase when multiple families are involved. Instead of repartnering having a negative or positive impact on adjustment in itself, it appears that it is the factors associated with this transition that affect children most (Anderson & Greene, 2013) including: affecting the number of transitions the children experience (i.e., having stable relationships versus a series of serial short term ones), changing the dynamics of parental interaction (i.e., increase or decrease conflict); changing the nature or frequency of parental involvement with children (i.e., increase or decrease contact and engagement -especially

for non-resident father); the development of new relationship between the new partner and the children (i.e., positive and supportive, neutral or negative) (Coleman, Ganong, Russell & Frye-Cox, 2015; Flouri, 2006; Fomby & Osborne, 2010; Ganong & Coleman, 2004; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Juby, Billette, Laplante & Le Bourdais, 2007; Kelly, 2012; Manning & Smock, 1999; Manning et al., 2003; Qu & Weston, 2010; Stephens, 1996; Swiss & Le Bourdais, 2009; Tach, Mincy & Edin, 2010). In addition to adding the new partner, there may also be new children (from a former relationship, or as a product of the new relationship). The introduction of these new individuals can also affect the existing post-divorce relationship. Any of the factors are risk or protective factors that can have an impact on children's adjustment in positive or negative ways.

New step-parents (or stable partners) can contribute positively through developing new kinship/familial bonds, acting as an additional source of support for children, engaging in positive parenting contributions, sustaining the biological parent's involvement (Bray & Berger, 1993; Bray & Kelly, 1998; Coleman & Ganong, 1997; Coleman, Ganong & Russell, 2012; Coleman et al., 2015; Crosbie-Burnett, 1984; Crosbie-Burnett & Giles-Sims, 1994; Ganong, Coleman, Fine & Martin, 1999; Ganong, Coleman & Jamison, 2011; King, 2007; Papernow, 2006; Manning, & Lamb, 2003; Saint-Jacques, 1995; Sweeney, 2010; White and Gilbreth, 2001).

Bolstering or Supporting Post-divorce/separation adjustment - Intervention for children and parents

Given some of the environmental experiences of children and parents, there is evidence showing that universal and/or targeted intervention and training programs can have a powerful impact on parent and child adjustment. Research demonstrates that when programs provide parenting tools, parenting strategies and identify at risk families, children show greater success across various outcomes, including reduced delinquency.

Evidence has shown that parental skill development can enhance the quality of parenting and improve negative parent-specific issues or characteristics. For example, random control trials clearly show that when mothers participate in parenting programs, children have fewer behavioural problems and stronger mother-child relations, receive effective discipline and exhibit improved post-divorce coping (Vélez, Wolchick, Tein & Sandler, 2011). Interventions and services for families include: mediation; parent education; parent coordination; custody evaluations; supervised access programs; legal education and outreach initiatives; and parenting programs and lessons (online, at home or in class) (e.g., Saini et al., 2010).

Parental training/education and information can improve the parent-child relationship and have positive impacts on outcomes for children across all age ranges and among multiple outcomes including developmental tasks, social competencies, social relations, self-concept, risk-taking behaviours and cognitive competencies (Almeida, Abreu-Lima et al., 2012; Farris, Bert, Nicholson, Glass & Borkowski, 2013; Sandler, Schoenfelder, Wolchik & MacKinnon, 2011; Sandler et al., 2012; Vélez, Wolchik, Tein & Sandler, 2011). Programming that includes parenting lessons, education on skill development and home visits by public health nurses have a longstanding impact in preventing crime and child delinquency across all types of families and especially for at risk families (Mihalic, Elliott, Fagan & Hansen, 2001). Recent work has shown that an online version of a parenting education program can help reduce parental conflict, help

parents control anger and improve self-assessments of parental abilities and enhance coping abilities following divorce (Becher, Cronin, McCann, Olson, Powell & Marczak, 2015).

For some parents, there may be barriers to accessing parenting programs and services, some of which include: lack of time; competing commitments; lack of awareness; lack of feeling of need; difficulties with child care; isolation of community; and stigma or privacy concerns with participation.

Practical Considerations

Apart from the host of empirically supported factors that can affect children's adjustment discussed above, there are other important considerations that need to be taken into account when determining parenting arrangements. These factors affect families differently and provide further support for the fact that arrangements need to be tailored to individual families. These considerations include (but are not limited to; Bricklin & Elliot, 2013; Kuehnle & Drozd, 2012; McIntosh & Chisholm, 2008; McIntosh, et al., 2010):

- a. *Making/complying with child support arrangements:* The payment of child support can help with child adjustment, mostly through mitigating the negative impacts of insufficient economic resources and confirming to children that their parents continue to care for them (Huang, 2009; Huang, Han & Garfinkel, 2003; Kelly, 2007; Kushner, 2009; Manning & Lamb, K, 2003; Menning, 2002). An association between paying support and maintaining contact with children post-divorce has been identified (Huang, 2009; Juby et al, 2007; Menning, 2006). In addition, some studies report a positive link between the payment of child support and some child adjustment factors (Furstenberg et al., 1987; King & Sobolewski, 2006; McLanahan, Seltzer, Hanson, & Thomson, 1994) and academic achievement (Argys, Peters, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998; King, 1994a). For example, positive benefits of paying support and continued contact include increased likelihood of the children completing high school and entering college (e.g., Menning, 2002; 2006).
- b. *Geographical proximity (distance between homes, proximity to friends and proximity to schools/work for children):* When children and parents live closer together, there is generally more sharing of parenting time (Cooksey & Craig, 1998; Le Bourdais et al., 2002; Manning, Stewart & Smock, 2003; Seltzer, 1991). Transitions are also easier and faster when parents live closer together and children have better access to their peer groups (which is associated with higher satisfaction with arrangements) (Cashmore et al., 2010).
- c. *Financial capacity of both parents:* Although parents may want to substantially share parenting time, it is more costly to create two homes for children with duplicates of all necessities (bedroom, toys, recreation). This may affect what arrangements are made for children – including decisions on alternative arrangements (e.g., parents alternating in and out of the family home or continuing to live together after divorce/separation for the sake of the children's care).
- d. *Parental Employment Situation:* Parental availability may be affected by work schedules (shift work, night shift, seasonal work, out of town working) and whether there is

flexibility possible in their working time. This availability may affect the arrangements that will be made.

- e. *Potential of relocation*: Whether one parent will want to or need to relocate at some point for various reasons (e.g., work, health, financial situation, family commitment/obligations). This issue is a very difficult one for families and the courts to resolve post-divorce/separation (Bala, Bertrand, Wheeler & Holder, 2012; Braver, Ellman & Fabricius, 2003; Saini, 2013).

Conclusion

Parents, researchers, social service workers, decision-makers, policy-makers and communities should be concerned about the well-being and long/short term outcomes for children in all family contexts. All of the factors and considerations from the research that were outlined above are important for all children and are especially important to consider when making parenting arrangements. Using the evidence and considering these factors allows decisions to be made in the best interest of the child, and allows for decisions to be based on the unique circumstances of the family.

When it comes to post-divorce/separation adjustment there is a large base of research that sets out a number of important considerations. Among the most important findings, it is clear that family breakdown does not cause child maladjustment and that no one post-divorce/separation family arrangement will work for all families. Instead, negative adjustment and poor outcomes are a product of a complex interplay of risk factors and protective factors, such as those discussed herein, that can affect each family to a different degree. This means that arrangements for children need to be developed with consideration of a host of factors that affect/apply to a particular family.

This report reviewed a number of important findings, addressing the time spent parenting, the quality of parenting, consistency and predictability in parenting, and pervasive and ongoing conflict. Other important considerations included: characteristics of the parent and child; safety of the child; social supports for children and parents; and practical elements. The factors and considerations outlined in this report are important to children's post-divorce/separation adjustment, and should be considered when developing and implementing parenting arrangements. It is clear that individuals and families are not static entities, nor should arrangements for them be. Rather, arrangements will need to change based on any number of factors. Making parenting arrangements that are sensitive to the adjustment and outcome of children is a complex process with multiple considerations that need to be addressed and balanced. There is no-one-size-fits-all and even when appropriate arrangements are made, expect that they will need to be adjusted over time to facilitate the best possible outcome and adjustment for children.

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