



CHAPTER 14

The Family

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Summary of Topics

Key Themes in the Family

- **Sociocultural Influence** How does the socio-cultural context influence family processes?
- **Child's Active Role** How does the child play an active role in family processes?
- **Interaction Among Domains** How do family processes interact with other domains of development?

Seven-year-old Joey looked at his loaded dinner plate and announced, "I'm not hungry. Can I just have dessert?" "No, you may not!" his embarrassed mother replied as she turned toward her house guest. "I can't think why he gets like this. He's stubborn as a mule." The guest wondered why no one mentioned that Joey, in full view of his mother, had eaten most of a gift box of cookies before dinner.

"I don't want this! It stinks! You stink!" Joey shouted. He pushed away his plate, got up from the table, and ran to the television, which he turned up to full volume.

"Turn that down this minute or go to your room!" his mother ordered. Joey ignored her. "He's been like this since his father and I split up," she told her guest in a lowered voice. "Everything's so different now. I feel like I have to be two parents instead of one. He used to be such a good boy." Spying Joey reaching for the cookie box, she warned, "Don't take that cookie!" Joey removed his hand from the box and gave his mother a mournful, pleading look. "All right, but just one!" she conceded. Joey took two and returned to the TV.

This episode represents only one brief experience in Joey's life, but the accumulation of experiences such as this within the context of the family can have a distinct effect on the developing child. Families are central to the process of **socialization**, the process by which children acquire the social knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes valued by the larger society. Parents, siblings, and others within the family unit are the people with whom the child usually spends the most time and forms the strongest emotional bonds, and they thus exert an undeniable influence in the child's life.

The study of the impact of the family is no simple matter. For one thing, the child's experiences within the family can be affected by other factors, such as divorce or parental employment status, that can change the nature of interpersonal dynamics within the family. Joey's family experiences both before and after his parents' separation, for example, can have potentially long-lasting effects on his development. Moreover, the direction of influence within families runs along several paths. Just as parents and siblings affect the child's behavior, the child affects the reactions of other family members. Because the family experience includes fluid, constantly changing effects and outcomes for its various members, studying the influence of the family presents a special research challenge to developmental psychologists.

In a sense, virtually every domain of development is deeply influenced by the family environment. Cognition, moral awareness, gender identity, and emotional growth are all nurtured largely within the family. In this chapter we focus on the roles specific family members play in the child's social development, with special attention to adaptive and maladaptive patterns of interaction. We will also see how the family itself is a structure in flux, shaped by cultural values and shifting demographic trends such as divorce and maternal employment. The effects of these changes in family structure on the individual child's development are a major concern for developmental psychologists.

socialization Process by which children acquire the social knowledge, skills, and attitudes valued by the larger society.

Understanding the Family

Historians, sociologists, and anthropologists who study the family as a social unit point to the changes in its structure and functions over the last two centuries. With the industrialization of nineteenth-century America, for example, the extended family, in which secondary relatives such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, or cousins lived in the same household as the primary family, gave way to the nuclear family, consisting solely of parents and their offspring living in a single household. Similarly, as we saw in the chapter titled “Themes and Theories,” the modern notion that families are havens for nurturing the child’s growth and development was not always prevalent. As we look back in history, we see that the family has been a changing social structure, and all signs indicate it will continue to take different shapes in the future to reflect larger social, economic, and historical trends.

KEY THEME Sociocultural Influence

The Demographics of the American Family

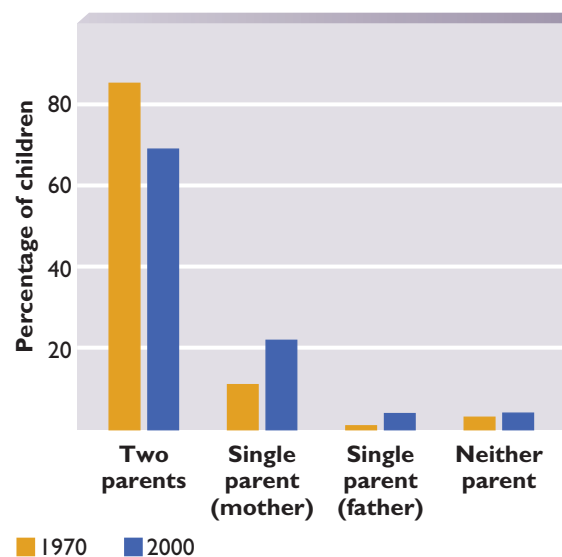
No one family structure typifies contemporary American society. The 1950s model of a two-parent family with two children and a nonworking mother no longer applies. For example, as Figure 14.1 shows, only 69 percent of children younger than eighteen years lived with two parents in 2000, compared with 85 percent in 1970. Today 26 percent of American children live with only one parent (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). High rates of divorce and single-parent births have contributed to this trend. Projections are that about 50 percent of current marriages will end in divorce (compared with about 15 percent in 1960), and about 32 percent of all births are to single women (Bumpass, 1990; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001, 2002). Moreover, about 5 percent of children live with their grandparents (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001), and a growing number live with gay or lesbian parents. Finally, more than 70 percent of married women with children younger than eighteen years work outside the home, compared with about 45 percent in 1975. All of these changes in family structure have distinct implications for the child’s experiences within the family.

A Systems Approach

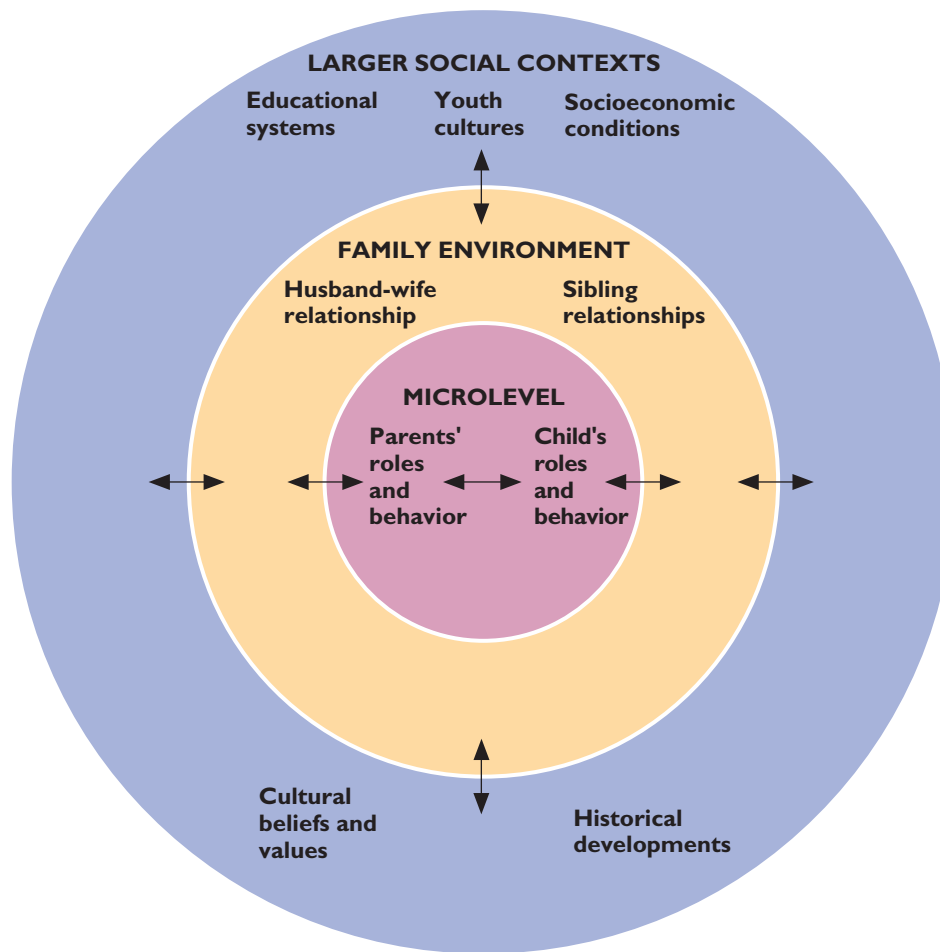
Many child development researchers have found it fruitful to focus on family dynamics, the interactions among all members of the group, rather than on the structure of the family per se as they study the impact of the family. An important influence on

FIGURE 14.1
Demographic Changes in
Family Structure

The percentage of children living with two parents has declined since 1970, and the percentage living with a single parent (most frequently the mother) has increased dramatically. About one-fourth of American children live with a single parent. The higher rates of divorce and single-parent births have contributed to this trend.



Source: Adapted from U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001.

**FIGURE 14.2**

The Systems Model of the Family

According to systems theorists, reciprocal influences among family members occur at three levels: the individual or microlevel, the family environment, and the larger social context. At the microlevel, parent and child influence each other directly. Within the family, relationships among particular individuals, such as husband and wife, can affect interactions with children. Finally, larger social factors, such as the presence of economic stress, can affect parent-child relations. The individual child's development is thus embedded in this network of multidirectional interactions.

Source: Adapted from Peterson & Rollins, 1987.

contemporary thinking about the family is **systems theory**. The premise is that all members influence one another simultaneously and the interactions flow in a circular, reciprocal manner. In systems theory (see Figure 14.2), the individual child's development is understood as being embedded in the complex network of multidirectional interactions among all family members (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Cox & Paley, 1997).

Systems theory assumes that families undergo periods of stability and change. The family tends to adapt to maintain a state of *homeostasis*, or equilibrium. Thus, as children attain milestones such as going to school or entering adolescence, the family system must readjust to absorb the child's new routines or demands for independence. At other times families may experience crises, such as financial hardship, moving, or divorce. In these instances, changing external circumstances require the child and all other family members to adapt to the new situation. Systems theory, then, regards families as dynamic, self-regulating social groups (Minuchin, 1988).

Families usually contain several subsystems, such as the relations maintained between spouses, among siblings, and between parent and child. A single family member is usually a member of more than one subsystem at the same time. The child has a relationship with each parent, as well as with one or more siblings; mothers and fathers are spouses as well as parents. The quality of each of these separate relationships can have an impact on other relationships. Thus, for example, when parents have high-quality marital relationships, their relationships with their children are warmer, and their children show more favorable psychological adjustment (Davies & Scummings, 1998; Harold et al., 1997; Miller et al., 1993). Siblings have more positive interactions with one another, too (MacKinnon, 1988). Within the systems

systems theory Model for understanding the family that emphasizes the reciprocal interactions among various members.

KEY THEME**Sociocultural Influence**

model, family members have reciprocal influences on one another, and there are several layers of such interactions.

The family system itself is embedded in larger social networks, including the economic, political, legal, and educational forces that are part of the larger culture. Events in the workplace, school, and other extrafamilial settings can affect individual family members and hence the interactions that occur within the family unit. When one or both parents becomes unemployed, for example, the family experiences stress that often is expressed in increased conflict between parents and children (Flanagan, 1990). In other instances, both parents may be employed outside the home, and their experiences of stress at work can have an impact on the quality of interactions with their children (Crouter & Bumpus, 2001). The *social ecology* of child development—that is, the direct or indirect impact of broad sociocultural factors on the child’s social, cognitive, and emotional growth—is critical to understand, according to developmental psychologists.

FOR YOUR REVIEW

- What major changes have occurred in the structure of American families in the past thirty years?
- What does it mean to take a systems approach to understanding the family? Give examples of how influences on one subsystem within the family can have consequences for another subsystem.

Parents and Socialization

In most cultures, the primary agents of the child’s socialization are parents. As we will see in the next two chapters, teachers, peers, and broader social factors also play a significant role; but perhaps no other individuals in the child’s life have the powerful influence on future behaviors, attitudes, and personality that parents do.

Parents affect children’s socialization in three primary ways. First, they socialize their children through direct training, providing information or reinforcement for the behaviors they find acceptable or desirable. Parents may, for example, encourage their children to share with playmates or instruct them on how to become acquainted with an unfamiliar peer. Second, as they interact with their children, parents serve as important models for the children’s attitudes, beliefs, and actions. For example, parents who are warm, engaging, and verbally stimulating tend to have children who are popular in school. Finally, parents manage other aspects of their children’s lives that in turn can influence children’s social development. Parents choose the neighborhood in which the family lives; they also may enroll children in sports programs, arrange birthday parties, and invite children’s friends to spend the night, all of which influence children’s peer networks (Parke et al., 1988; Parke & O’Neil, 1999).

Of course, parents’ major concerns and activities shift as the child develops. Parents of infants focus on caregiving activities and helping the child to learn such skills as self-feeding, dressing, and toileting. By the time their child is two years old, parents begin more deliberate attempts at socialization. Parents of preschoolers help their children to regulate their emotions—to control angry outbursts, for example—and start to instill social skills, such as polite forms of speech and sharing during play with peers. Parents of elementary school children are likely to be concerned with their children’s academic achievement. When their children approach adolescence, most parents encourage independent, rational, and value-based decision making as their youngsters prepare to enter their own adult lives.

Parental roles also shift with development. Throughout early childhood, parents closely monitor much of their children’s activity. Once children enter school, parents play less of a supervisory role. They begin to expect their children to be cooperative members of the family by avoiding conflicts and sharing in household tasks. Parents

and children begin to negotiate as they make decisions and solve family problems. Finally, during adolescence, parents observe children's participation in the larger social world, in school and community activities and close personal relationships with peers. While parents are encouraging independence in some domains, such as school achievement, they may also be exerting more control in other domains, such as their children's social activities (Maccoby, 1984; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; McNally, Eisenberg, & Harris, 1991).

As this quick sketch suggests, the child's own development often precipitates shifts in parental roles. As the child's language and cognitive skills mature, parents place greater expectations on her social communication behaviors. As she enters school, parents nurture greater independence. The physical changes associated with puberty often signal to parents that more mature child-adult interactions, such as deferring at times to the child's wishes rather than rigidly restricting his activities, are warranted (Steinberg, 1981). As systems theory suggests, the individual child's development within the family represents an ongoing give-and-take between child and parent, necessitating continual readjustment by all members to reinstate family equilibrium.

Styles of Parenting

Even the casual observer of parents interacting with their children in public places such as parks, shopping malls, and supermarkets will notice markedly different styles of parental behavior. Some parents are extremely controlling, using crisp, firm commands devoid of explanations to restrict their children's behavior. Others seem not to notice as their charges create chaos and pandemonium. Researchers have established that the pattern of interactions a parent adopts is an important variable in influencing the child's later development.

In a landmark series of observational studies, Diana Baumrind (1971, 1973) recorded the interpersonal and behavioral styles of nursery school children as they engaged in normal school activities. She also watched as they worked on a series of standardized problem-solving tasks, such as completing a set of puzzles. In addition, Baumrind gathered information on parenting styles by observing how mothers interacted with their children in both play and structured teaching settings, watching parents and their children in the home, and interviewing parents about their child-rearing practices. The children and parents were observed again when children were eight or nine years old. Based on these extensive observations, Baumrind identified several distinct patterns of parenting.

Some parents, Baumrind found, were extremely restrictive and controlling. They valued respect for authority and strict obedience to their commands and relied on coercive techniques, such as threats or physical punishment, rather than on reasoning or explanation, to regulate their children's actions. They were also less nurturant toward their children than other parents in the study. Baumrind identified this group as **authoritarian parents**. The second parenting style belonged to the group she called **permissive parents**. These parents set few limits and made few demands for mature behavior from their children. Children were permitted to make their own decisions about many routine activities such as TV viewing, bedtime, and mealtimes, for example. Permissive parents tended to be either moderately nurturant or cool and uninvolved. The third group of parents was high on both control and nurturance. These **authoritative parents** expected their children to behave in a mature fashion but tended to use rewards more than punishments to achieve their ends. They communicated their expectations clearly and provided explanations to help their children understand the reasons for their requests. They also listened to what their children had to say and encouraged a dialogue with them. Authoritative parents were distinctly supportive and warm in their interactions with their children. Figure 14.3 summarizes the characteristics of these three parental styles, as well as a fourth style, *uninvolved parents*, which has been described in later research and will be discussed shortly.



Research has shown that parents who expect mature behavior from their children, provide explanations for their requests, and are supportive and warm in their interactions have children who display instrumental competence. These parents display what is called an *authoritative style*.

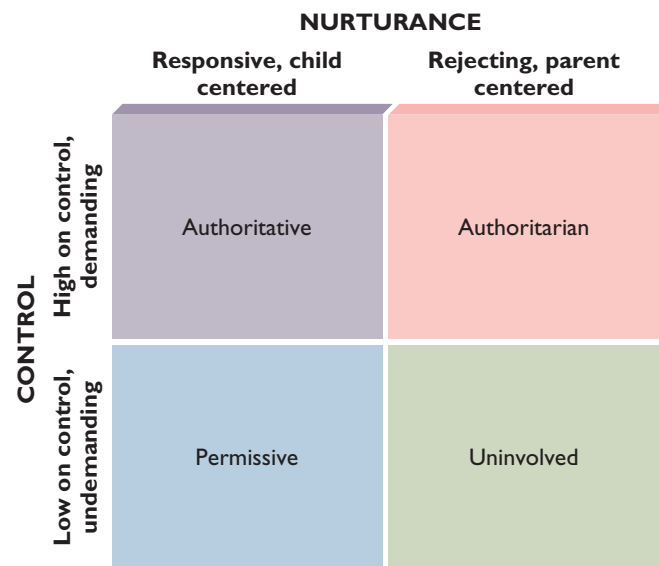
authoritarian parent Parent who relies on coercive techniques to discipline the child and displays a low level of nurturance.

permissive parent Parent who sets few limits on the child's behavior.

authoritative parent Parent who sets limits on a child's behavior using reasoning and explanation and displays a high degree of nurturance.

FIGURE 14.3
Patterns of Parenting
as a Function of Control
and Nurture

Four parenting styles can be identified in terms of the extent to which parents set limits on the child's behavior (control) and the level of nurturance and responsiveness they provide.



Source: Adapted from Maccoby & Martin, 1983.

Baumrind found a cluster of behavioral characteristics in children linked with each parental style. The offspring of authoritative parents were friendly with peers, cooperative with adults, independent, energetic, and achievement oriented. They also displayed a high degree of self-control. This set of characteristics often is termed **instrumental competence**. In marked contrast, children of authoritarian and permissive parents did not exhibit the social responsibility and independence associated with instrumental competence. Children who had authoritarian parents appeared unhappy; also, boys tended to be aggressive, whereas girls were likely to be dependent. Children of permissive parents, on the other hand, were low on self-control and self-reliance.

KEY THEME

Interaction Among Domains

The effects of parenting style extend to other dimensions of child development and reach into the adolescent years. Authoritarian parenting, especially with its use of coercive techniques for controlling behavior, is associated with less advanced moral reasoning and less prosocial behavior (Boyes & Allen, 1993; Krevans & Gibbs, 1996), lower self-esteem (Loeb, Horst, & Horton, 1980), and poorer adjustment to starting school (Barth, 1989). Extremely controlling parenting and the use of coercive techniques are also associated with higher levels of aggression in children (Maccoby & Martin, 1983), poor peer relations (Pettit et al., 1996; Putallaz, 1987), and lower school achievement in adolescence (Dornbusch et al., 1987). In contrast, by the time children reach adolescence, those with authoritative parents show more prosocial behaviors, fewer problem behaviors such as substance abuse, greater academic achievement, and higher self-confidence than adolescents whose parents use other parenting styles (Baumrind, 1991; Lamborn et al., 1991; Radziszewska et al., 1996).

Researchers have also identified a fourth parenting style: the **uninvolved**, or *neglectful*, parent (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). These parents seem to be uncommitted to their parental role and emotionally detached from their children, often giving greater priority to their own needs and preferences than to the child's. These parents may be uninterested in events at the child's school, unfamiliar with his playmates, and have only infrequent conversations with him (Pulkkinen, 1982). Uninvolved parenting is related to children's lower self-esteem (Loeb et al., 1980), heightened aggression (Hatfield, Ferguson, & Alpert, 1967), and lower control over impulsive behavior (Block, 1971). As older adolescents, children with uninvolved parents show more maladjustment, lack of creativity, and greater alcohol consumption than adolescents who experienced other parenting styles (Weiss & Schwarz, 1996). Some researchers believe that uninvolved parenting may present the greatest risks of all to healthy long-term development (Steinberg et al., 1994).

instrumental competence

Child's display of independence, self-control, achievement orientation, and cooperation.

uninvolved parent Parent who is emotionally detached from the child and focuses on his or her own needs as opposed to the child's.

Why does authoritative parenting work so well? Several explanations are possible. First, when parents make demands for mature behavior from their children, they make explicit the responsibilities individuals have toward one another when they live in social groups. When parents set forth clear, consistent guidelines for behavior, they make the child's job of sorting out the social world much easier. Second, when parental demands are accompanied by reasonable explanations, the child is more likely to accept the limitations on her actions. Third, when parents take into account the child's responses and show affection, he is likely to acquire a sense of control over his actions and derive the sense that he has worth. Studies confirm that adolescents who have authoritative parents have a healthy sense of autonomy and personal responsibility, and feel a sense of control over their lives (Glasgow et al., 1997; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989). Thus the net outcome of authoritative parenting is a competent child who shows successful psychological adjustment.

Effective Parenting

Baumrind's research showed that the most desirable developmental outcomes are associated with parenting that has two key characteristics: responding to the child's needs and actions with warmth and nurturance and setting limits on the child's behavior. These themes echo the discussion of sensitive parenting and attachment presented in the chapter titled "Emotion."

No matter what the age of the child, whether he is a toddler exhibiting a fierce temper tantrum or an adolescent testing a curfew, research shows that parenting based on strong expressions of warmth, involvement with children's lives, and clear limit setting results in successful developmental outcomes. Even when families are faced with stresses and challenges, these techniques can mitigate potentially negative long-term outcomes for children.

- **Parental Warmth** A series of recent studies has singled out parental warmth, the tendency of parents to express positive emotions and approval toward their children, as an important feature of effective parenting. Children whose parents express warmth and support tend to have higher self-esteem, greater empathy, and fewer behavioral problems (Cox & Harter, 2003; Zhou et al., 2002). Among adolescents, who may begin to experiment with risky behaviors, parental support and warmth are related to a decreased likelihood of teen pregnancy, less aggression, and less association with deviant peers (Scaramella et al., 1998; Young et al., 1995). On the other hand, parental negativity is related to less compliance on the part of the child, poor peer relationships, and delinquency (Deater-Deckard et al., 2001; Isley et al., 1999; Simons et al., 2001). Parental warmth may even serve as a protection of sorts for children who are highly aggressive as youngsters and who are at risk for later developmental problems. When these children experience warm and affectionate parenting, they are less likely to show the declines in empathy, school problems, and adulthood unemployment that many other children in this category display (Hastings et al., 2000; Kokko & Pulkkinen, 2000).

Parental warmth probably works in a number of ways. One outcome of parental warmth and supportiveness is the child's perception of his or her own competence. As we see in the chapter titled "Self and Values," parental support is an important contributor to the growth of children's self-esteem, which in turn has consequences for many other aspects of the child's social and cognitive development. Moreover, warm parents, in their expression of positive emotions, may encourage a process of "emotion matching" in their children. Positive parental emotions are associated with positive emotions in children (Kochanska, 1997). Similarly, Kee Kim and associates found that a high level of negative affect expressed by parents of adolescents predicted the rate at which adolescents increased their own expressions of negative affect (Kim et al., 2001).

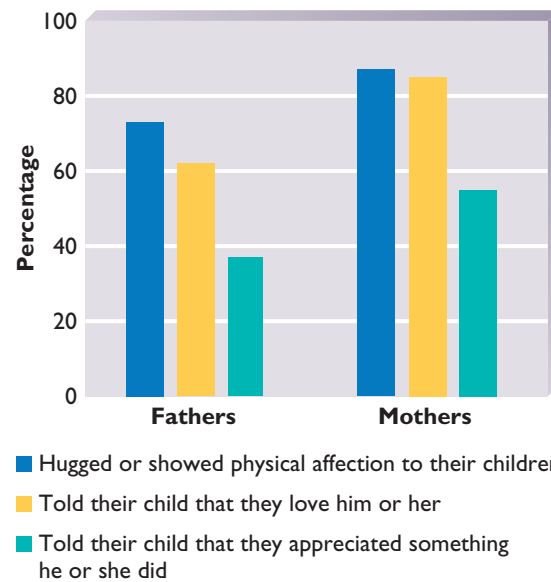
A recent survey shows that many fathers and mothers report showing warmth and affection to their children every day (see Figure 14.4) (Child Trends, 2002b). Given the importance of parental warmth in child rearing, these statistics are encouraging to see.

 **SEE FOR YOURSELF**
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Resources for Parents

KEY THEME
Interaction Among Domains

FIGURE 14.4
Expressing Parental Warmth

To what degree do mothers and fathers express warmth to their children? This graph shows the percentage of fathers and mothers who say they provide various visible signs of warmth to their children (under age 13) on a daily basis. Numerous studies confirm that parental warmth is a key feature of effective parenting.



Source: Child Trends Databank, 2002b.

- Parental Control** Effective parenting also includes the ability of parents to control their children's behavior, setting limits when appropriate. However, researchers are finding that a distinction needs to be made between *behavioral control*, monitoring and regulating the child's actions, and *psychological control*, intrusive and domineering parenting that can interfere with the child's growing autonomy. Gregory Pettit and his colleagues found that adolescents whose parents were high on monitoring (that is, they were aware of their activities, friends, and how they spent their time) were less likely to become involved in delinquent behaviors. In contrast, parents who exerted a high degree of psychological control were more likely to display delinquent behaviors and also expressed higher levels of anxiety and depression (Pettit et al., 2001). Research is increasingly pointing to the importance of parents monitoring and supervising their children's behaviors (Herman et al., 1997); parents need to be involved! At the same time, parents must respect their children's need to develop a sense of identity and independent decision making. Oftentimes, overbearing and controlling parents are simply exerting their power in a style reminiscent of authoritarian parenting. It should not be surprising that the consequences of this approach to parental control are often negative (Barber & Harmon, 2002).

- Punishment** In recent decades, the most widely discussed parental control technique has been *punishment*, the administration of an aversive stimulus or withdrawal of rewards to decrease the frequency of undesirable behaviors (see the chapter titled "Basic Learning and Perception"). A form of power assertion, punishment can include spanking, sharp verbal rebukes, or the loss of such privileges as TV viewing time or playtime with friends.

Laboratory studies carried out in the tradition of learning theory show that certain ways of administering punishment are more effective than others. One important factor is making sure the punishment closely follows the child's transgression so that the child makes the connection between her behavior and the consequences. Another powerful factor is providing an explanation for why the behavior is not desirable (Parke, 1969). The effectiveness of punishment also depends on the consistency with which it is applied. As we saw in the case of Joey and the cookies at the beginning of the chapter, children become particularly disobedient and aggressive when parents prohibit a behavior on one occasion and permit it on another. Consistency among caregivers (**interagent consistency**) and consistency of one caregiver from one occasion to the next (**intra-agent consistency**) are both important in giving children clear, unambiguous messages about acceptable and unacceptable behaviors (Deur & Parke, 1970; Sawin & Parke, 1979).

interagent consistency

Consistency in application of disciplinary strategies among different caregivers.

intra-agent consistency

Consistency in a single caregiver's application of discipline from one situation to the next.

CONTROVERSY: THINKING IT OVER**Should Parents Spank Their Children?**

Most often, when parents think of punishment, they think of spanking the child. In a survey of almost one thousand parents, Murray Straus and Julie Stewart found that 94 percent of parents of three- and four-year-olds reported striking their children in the previous year. Infants and adolescents were spanked less often (Straus & Stewart, 1999). However, even half of adolescents report being hit by their parents, with an average of six to eight times in a year (Straus & Donnelly, 1993). Thus, in the United States, many parents resort to physical punishment, at least on occasion, to control their child's behavior.

What Is the Controversy?

Many psychologists believe that physical tactics such as hitting and spanking should not be used at all. Some groups of lay individuals feel so strongly about the negative effects that they are working to make physical punishment of children illegal. Others maintain that moderate spanking in the context of a warm, supportive family life has no long-lasting negative effects.

What Are the Opposing Arguments?

Many researchers argue that by using physical punishment, parents are serving as models for aggression. Following the tenets of social learning theory, we should not be surprised if the chief lesson children learn from parents who spank is that physical aggression is a way to resolve conflicts (Parke & Slaby, 1983). Also, an overreliance on physical punishment may set the stage for child abuse (Parke & Collmer, 1975). Caught up in the escalating emotions of a confrontation with their children, parents who are already willing to spank, hit, or pinch do not have far to go before they cause more serious physical injury.

A contrasting position is that occasional spanking has no long-lasting negative effects. In fact, spanking, judiciously used, may be a necessary tactic when children are unrelentingly noncompliant. In this line of thinking, parents should consider spanking only when other nonphysical disciplinary tactics have failed. When parents are warm and supportive, however, an occasional spanking is not harmful; rather, it may be necessary to help children learn to be compliant and to regulate their own behavior (Baumrind, 1996).

What Answers Exist? What Questions Remain?

Some research suggests that the children of parents who use occasional spanking do not have different profiles from children whose parents never spank. In one study of twenty-one-month-olds, for example, children whose mothers used frequent physical punishment scored lower on their ability to regulate their behaviors. However, children whose mothers used occasional physical punishment did not differ from children whose mothers never spanked them—both fared better than the high-physical-punishment group (Power & Chapieski, 1986). Additional evidence suggests that the link between spanking and aggression in children, and spanking and child abuse, is not necessarily clear. For example, since 1995, when Sweden passed a law to ban physical punishment, aggression in teenagers has increased (and not decreased), as has the number of cases of child abuse (Baumrind, 1996).

Supporting the other side of the debate are the results of a recent meta-analysis of eighty-eight studies evaluating the impact of physical punishment on children. The findings indicated that physical punishment had a strong relationship to the child's immediate compliance. However, there was also a strong association between the use of physical punishment and child abuse. Lesser, but still significant, associations were found between increased use of physical punishment and heightened aggression, risk for mental health problems, and lower moral internalization in children (Gershoff, 2002).

The meta-analysis has been criticized for including studies in which physical punishment was more extreme than an occasional spanking (Baumrind, Larzelere, & Cowan, 2002). What kinds of studies might provide more compelling evidence about the appropriateness of spanking? Moreover, what are the potential effects on parents and children when experts take a position on an issue such as this one before the research fully settles the controversy?

RESEARCH APPLIED TO PARENTING

Managing Noncompliant Children

After her dinner guest left and Joey was put to bed (with yet another struggle), his mother sat exhausted on the couch and thought about the difficulties she was having in controlling her child's behavior. Her embarrassment in front of her guest was just a small problem compared to the negative cycle in which she and Joey always seemed to end up. She loved her child beyond words, but things were just too far out of control and she needed help. A friend had suggested that she see a clinical psychologist for advice. She went to her dresser drawer and pulled out the psychologist's card; she would call Dr. Nagle in the morning.

At the visit with Dr. Nagle two weeks later, Joey's mother described some examples of her son's noncompliant behavior. Dr. Nagle nodded knowingly and then spoke of the need for parents to maintain reasonable control over their child's behavior. "Just how can I do that?" asked Joey's mother. "I don't believe in spanking. What else can I do to get him to listen to me?" Dr. Nagle then proceeded to outline the elements of a parent behavior management program.

One of the most common problems parents face is the oppositional behavior their children show, often beginning at age two or three. A parent makes a request (e.g., "Time to go to bed"), and the child simply refuses to comply, adding a loud "No!" for emphasis. The child's response may reflect a healthy, growing desire for independence and self-assertion. But this pattern, if repeated for a length of time, can quickly lead to conflicts with parents and frustration on their part. For the child, persistent noncompliance has the potential to lead to major behavior problems, including aggression.

Rex Forehand and his colleagues (Forehand & McMahon, 1981; Wierson & Forehand, 1994) have described some basic behavior management techniques that can help parents control children's negative behaviors without resorting to spanking or physical punishment. They are based on having parents avoid two kinds of traps: a negative reinforcement trap and a positive reinforcement trap. In the first case, a parent issues a command, but the child whines, protests, and does not listen. If the parent gives in, the child has received a negative reinforcement, learning that whining will remove an aversive stimulus (the parent's commands). In the second case, the child's noncompliance receives a positive consequence—that is, extra attention—if parents spend a lot of time and effort talking with her about why she should obey. Therefore, parents should try to adhere to the following principles:

1. *Attend to the child's appropriate behavior each day.* Children will learn that attention and rewards follow when they behave as parents expect them to. When attending to the child's desirable behavior, avoid using commands, questions, and criticisms, all of which are associated with the child's noncompliance.
2. *Ignore inappropriate behaviors that are minor, such as crankiness and whining.* The lack of attention should cause the behavior to decrease.
3. *Give clear, succinct commands and reward the child with verbal praise for following them.* Do not engage in a long discussion with the child (which amounts to too much attention), but make sure the child understands what is expected.



One effective technique for managing a child's behavior is the use of "time-out," sending the child to a neutral area for a specific amount of time after she or he misbehaves. Time-out has been found to reduce or eliminate a variety of behavior problems among children.

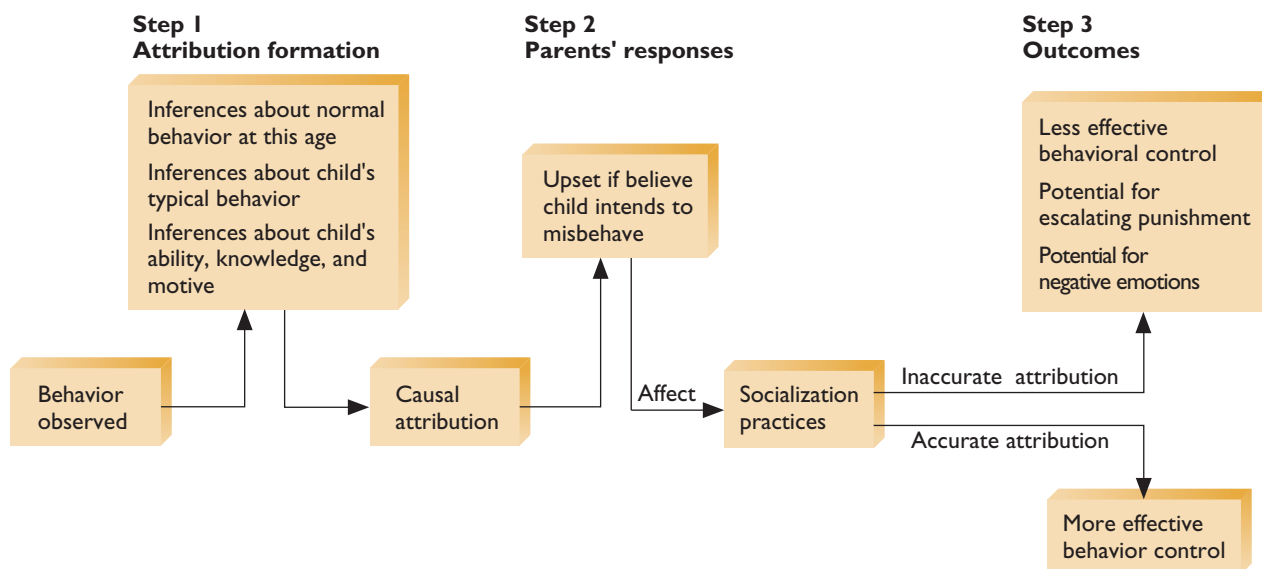
4. Use a technique called time-out if the child does not comply with a command. Remove the child from all possible sources of reward, even subtle or accidental ones. Take him immediately to a quiet, neutral place and leave him alone there until a short period of time, usually two to five minutes, has elapsed. Time-out has been found to be effective in reducing or eliminating a variety of troublesome behaviors in children, including temper tantrums, fighting, and self-injurious behaviors (Varni, 1983). Time-out also gives both children and parents the opportunity to "cool down" after all parties have become aroused.

The techniques just described have been found to significantly reduce noncompliance in children who were referred to a clinic for their behavior problems. Not only did their behavior improve relative to their pretreatment baseline; it also compared favorably with that of a group of control children who had not been referred to the clinic (Forehand & Long, 1988). Although the focus of this intervention was on families experiencing serious difficulties with child behavior management, many parents can benefit from using the techniques just outlined.

Factors That Influence Parenting Strategies

As they engage in interactions with each other, parents and children interpret each other's behaviors; these judgments, in turn, influence the specific behaviors they display toward each other. In addition, parents hold beliefs about their own competence and effectiveness as parents; these beliefs are also related to the quality of parenting (Coleman & Karraker, 1998). Finally, children's behaviors, specifically the extent to which they escalate the intensity of interactions, can determine parental styles. In short, parenting strategies arise from a complex interplay of cognitions and reactions to the dynamics of the situation.

- **Parental Cognitions** One way to understand parents' cognitions is in terms of their *attributions* about children's behaviors: Why are their children acting the way they do? Theodore Dix and Joan Grusec (1985; Dix, 1993) hypothesize that the kinds of attributions parents make about the causes of their children's behaviors will influence the parenting strategies they adopt. If, for example, a parent believes his three-year-old is throwing a tantrum at the dinner table because she wants her dessert



Source: Adapted from Dix & Grusec, 1985.

FIGURE 14.5
The Attribution Model of Socialization

Dix and Grusec (1985) hypothesize that parents' judgments about the child's intentionality in misbehaving are critical in determining their response. Parents become more upset if they believe the child intended to transgress and select more forceful control strategies than they do if they believe the transgression was unintentional. If their attributions are correct, they will effectively control behavior. If they make an incorrect attribution, however, they will be less effective, may escalate the level of punishment, and may produce negative emotions in themselves and the child.

immediately, he will probably insist that she first eat all her vegetables. If, on the other hand, the parent suspects the child is ill, he will probably remove the child from the dinner table and nurture and console her.

Figure 14.5 presents a schematic diagram of Dix and Grusec's (1985) attribution model of socialization. The flow of events proceeds as follows. First, the parent observes the child's behavior and judges whether it is typical for the child or normative for her age group. The parent assesses whether the child has the skills, knowledge, and motive to behave intentionally in a certain way. Do most three-year-olds throw tantrums to get dessert? Is throwing a tantrum a typical behavior for that child? Parents make a causal attribution about the child's intentions. Next, parents' attributions affect their emotional and behavioral responses to the child. Parents become more upset and act more forcefully if they believe the child intends to misbehave—in this case, screaming for the explicit purpose of getting dessert. Finally, if parents have made the correct attribution, they will be effective in controlling the child. But if they are wrong, the child may continue to misbehave, and both parents and child may feel negative emotions rising.

Research confirms that parents make more attributions about children's intentions as the children get older. Furthermore, when parents believe that a child intends to misbehave, they feel more upset and think it is important to respond forcefully (Dix et al., 1986; Dix, Ruble, & Zambarano, 1989). Mothers who tend to attribute hostile intentions to children's actions are likely, in fact, to use harsh discipline practices; their children, in turn, tend to have problems with aggression in school (Nix et al., 1999).

Another dimension of parental cognitions is their beliefs about their own *efficacy*: Do parents see themselves as competent and able to control their children's behaviors? For example, some parents see themselves as powerless relative to their children. Oftentimes, in an attempt to regain their power and control, these parents engage in conflict and harsh discipline with their children (Bugental & Lewis, 1998; Bugental et al., 1997). However, their inconsistent style may send mixed messages to the child. For example, a harsh command might be followed by "just kidding" or some other form of appeasement (Bugental, Blue, & Cruzcosa, 1989). Children tend to become inattentive when they experience this type of ambiguous communication style from adults and may thus become unresponsive to their requests (Bugental et al., 1999). Parental beliefs about their own efficacy can be influenced by

diverse factors, including financial stress (Brody, Flor, & Gibson, 1999), the degree to which the child's temperament challenges the parent (Teti & Gelfand, 1991), and the parent's "working models" of interpersonal relationships (Grusec, Hastings, & Mammone, 1994).

Finally, it is important to consider the different goals that parents have as they raise their children. These goals typically extend beyond simply controlling their children's behavior—parents want their children to be happy, have strong values, and have a trusting and loving relationship with them. Parents rely on different strategies depending on the goals they have in mind. When parents want to quickly resolve a disagreement with the child, for example, they most often use power assertion. When they wish to teach a child specific values, on the other hand, they tend to use explanation and open communication (Hastings & Grusec, 1998).

● **The Child's Characteristics and Behaviors** In his **control theory**, Richard Bell (1968; Bell & Harper, 1977) suggests that children play a distinct role in the types of behaviors that parents display toward them. Parents and children have upper and lower limits of tolerance for the types of behavior each shows the other. When the behavior of one approaches the other's upper limit, the recipient tries to reduce the excessive behavior with increasing levels of intensity. Thus, for example, a parent whose son is having a temper tantrum might first try to talk to him, then remove him to his room, and finally resort to physical punishment. Likewise, if the child's behavior approaches the parent's lower limits—in the child's shyness or withdrawal at the doctor's office, for example—the parent may try to stimulate the child by coaching her to speak and then promising her a reward if she vocalizes.

Control theory implies that when children's behavior pushes parents to their upper limits, parents will respond with more forceful and firmer control techniques. Furthermore, some children may transgress to this extent more frequently than others. Support for this idea comes from research that shows that aggressive, difficult children elicit more negative reactions from adults than more compliant, non-aggressive children (Anderson, Lytton, & Romney, 1986). In addition, in a recent study of identical and fraternal twins and biologically related and unrelated siblings, genetic factors accounted for the relationship between parents' negativity and adolescent problem behaviors (Neiderhiser et al., 1999). The idea that the child's inborn temperament influences parental reactions is consistent with these data.

The research of Grazyna Kochanska and her colleagues is adding to the growing body of evidence that some children are easier to socialize than others. Some children, she finds, display *committed compliance*. Even as fourteen-month-old infants, these children seem eager to respond to their mothers, imitating them eagerly as they teach or complying quickly and enthusiastically with their requests. Other children may comply with parental requests only as particular situations demand, and still others seem to be generally unresponsive to their parents (Forman & Kochanska, 2001). These qualities of the child are, in turn, related to parenting styles. When children display committed compliance, for example, parents are less likely to use power-assertive techniques (Kochanska, 1997). Another study involving school-age children shows similar findings: Mothers who scolded, yelled, and used other ineffective discipline techniques reported that their children were very difficult to manage during their first five years of life. These children had frequent temper tantrums, were strong-willed, did not obey, and were very active (Stoolmiller, 2001).

Children's cognitions about their parents' demands probably also make a difference in how they react. Do children see their parents' requests as fair and appropriate? Are children motivated to comply? Do they feel internally motivated rather than pressured by others to respond? These are some of the factors that likely play a part in the tone and outcomes of parent-child interactions (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994). Researchers are just beginning to explore the role of children's cognitions in parent-child interactions.

KEY THEME**Child's Active Role**

control theory Hypothesis about parent-child interactions suggesting that the intensity of one partner's behavior affects the intensity of the other's response.

Problems in Parenting

There is no doubt that being a parent presents special rewards but also distinct challenges. In some instances, such extreme maladaptive styles of interaction develop between parent and child that physical and psychological harm can occur to both. Understanding the dynamics of these families is essential to any attempt at intervention and also provides an even greater understanding of how all families, both healthy and dysfunctional, work as systems.

- **Coercive Cycles** Sometimes, problems in parenting result from a pattern of escalating negative reciprocal interactions between parent and child called **coercive cycles**. Gerald Patterson and his colleagues (Patterson, 1982, 1986; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992) conducted extensive longitudinal studies of boys who exhibited pathological aggression and concluded that they acquired their behavior from routine family interactions in which both parents and children engaged in coercive behavior.

In Patterson's studies, preadolescent boys labeled as highly aggressive by schools, courts, or the families themselves were compared with nonaggressive boys from "normal" families over a period of several months. Detailed observations were made of family interactions in the home, including the sequences of behaviors displayed by parents, the target children, and their siblings. Patterson learned that the families of antisocial boys were characterized by high levels of aggressive interaction that rewarded coercive behaviors. When younger, the antisocial boys exhibited minor negative behaviors, such as whining, teasing, or yelling, in response to the aggression of another family member. About 70 percent of these behaviors were reinforced by the acquiescence of the child's interaction partner; in other words, the parent or sibling backed down, and the submission negatively reinforced the child's aggression. In addition, although parents were observed to nag, scold, or threaten their children, they seldom followed through on their threats. Such sequences between the target child and other family members occurred as often as hundreds of times each day in the aggressive families. Over time, the target boys' aggression escalated in frequency and progressed to physical assaults.

At this point, many parents attempted to control their sons' aggressive behaviors, but in doing so they too became highly aggressive. The chains of coercion increased in duration to form long bursts of negative interactions and often resulted in hitting between parent and child. After extended experience in these maladaptive familial exchanges, boys became out of control and acted violently in settings outside the home, such as the school. Aggression in school was related, in turn, to poor peer relations and academic failure, adding to the chain of negative events in the boys' lives.

Can such extreme patterns of aggression be controlled? Patterson and his colleagues have intervened in the maladaptive interactions of aggressive families by training parents in basic child management skills (Patterson et al., 1975). They focused on teaching parents to use discipline more effectively by dispensing more positive reinforcements for prosocial behaviors, using reasoning, disciplining consistently, and setting clear limits on even minor acts of aggression. Children significantly decreased their rates of deviant behavior after only a few weeks, and the results were maintained for as long as twelve months after the initial training period (Patterson & Fleischman, 1979). As an added benefit, parents' perceptions of their children became more positive (Patterson & Reid, 1973).

- **Child Abuse** In 2000, more than 800,000 children in the United States were the victims of abuse or neglect (National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, 2002). Table 14.1 shows some of the characteristics of children who are the victims of maltreatment. Aside from the immediate physical and psychological consequences of abuse, children who are the victims of family violence are predisposed to a number of developmental problems. Maltreated infants and toddlers are more likely to be anxiously attached to their mothers than are children who are not

coercive cycles Pattern of escalating negative reciprocal interactions.

maltreated (Egeland & Sroufe, 1981a; Schneider-Rosen et al., 1985). These children are thus vulnerable to the social, emotional, and cognitive impairments associated with insecure attachment. Preschool and school-age children with a history of abuse score lower on tests of cognitive maturity and academic engagement and manifest low self-esteem and school learning problems (Eckenrode, Laird, & Doris, 1993; Hoffman-Plotkin & Twentyman, 1984; Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001). Emotionally, they may display withdrawal and passivity or, on the other hand, aggressive, oppositional patterns of behavior, patterns that are linked to their generally poor relationships with peers (Salzinger et al., 1993; Shonk & Cicchetti, 2001). They also frequently display symptoms of clinical depression (Sternberg et al., 1993). Finally, abused and neglected children are at risk for delinquency and violent criminal behavior in adulthood (Widom, 1989) and may be prone to become abusive parents themselves (Egeland, Jacobvitz, & Papatola, 1987).

The causes of abuse are neither simple nor easily ameliorated. Research on the interaction patterns in abusive families suggests that they differ in several respects from those in nonabusive families. Perhaps most significantly, parents in abusive families tend to rely on coercive or negative strategies to modify their children's behavior, even for routine or mild discipline problems. In one study, abusive and nonabusive mothers were observed as they engaged in a sequence of preparing a meal, playing, and cleaning up with their preschool-age children. Abusive mothers relied heavily on power-assertive techniques, such as threats, humiliation, or physical contact, to alter their children's behavior, whereas nonabusive mothers used predominantly positive strategies, including reasoning, bargaining, or modeling. Abusive mothers issued more than twice as many commands to their children as nonabusive mothers and also were inconsistent in reinforcing their children's compliance (Oldershaw, Walters, & Hall, 1986). As we saw earlier, inconsistent punishment usually leads to the persistence of undesirable behaviors in children.

Certain characteristics of children are also more commonly observed in abusive families. Parents often describe the abused child as irritable, difficult to put to sleep, and prone to excessive crying (Ounsted, Oppenheimer, & Lindsay, 1974). A group at special risk for abuse is premature infants, who tend to have high-pitched, aversive cries and a less attractive appearance (Parke & Collmer, 1975). Abusive parents become especially sensitized to some of the child's objectionable behaviors and show

KEY THEME

Interaction Among Domains



How Can Child Abuse Be Stopped?

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KEY THEME

Child's Active Role

Number of Victims		826,162
Rate per 1,000		11.8
Gender	Male	48
	Female	52
Age of Victim	1 year and younger	14
	2–5 years old	24
	6–9 years old	25
	10–13 years old	20
	14–17 years old	15
	18 and older	1
Type of Maltreatment	Neglect	56
	Physical Abuse	21
	Sexual Abuse	11
	Psychological or Emotional Abuse	8
	Medical Neglect	2
	Other and Unknown	28

TABLE 14.1

Characteristics of Victims of Child Maltreatment

The table shows some of the characteristics of American children who experienced child abuse or neglect, as well as the specific type of maltreatment they experienced (expressed in terms of percentages), for the year 1999. The percentages for type of maltreatment reflect the fact that some children experience multiple forms of abuse and neglect.

Source: Child Trends Databank, 2002a.

heightened emotional reactivity to the child's cries or noncompliance (Frodi & Lamb, 1980; Wolfe et al., 1983). Older children in abusive families tend to be more aggressive and less compliant than children of similar ages from control families (Bousha & Twentyman, 1984; Egeland & Sroufe, 1981). Thus both parental and child factors may contribute to a pattern of physically and psychologically harmful interactions.

Finally, abusive families tend to be isolated from the outside world and have fewer sources of social support than nonabusive families. In one study, abusive parents reported they were less involved with the community than nonabusive parents were; they tended not to join sports teams, go to the library, or take classes (Trickett & Susman, 1988). In another study, some mothers who were at risk for becoming abusive because of their own family history had normal, positive relationships with their children. These mothers also had extensive emotional support from other adults, a therapist, or a mate. In contrast, high-risk mothers who subsequently became abusive experienced greater life stress and had fewer sources of psychological support (Egeland, Jacobvitz, & Sroufe, 1988).

How can the spiral of abuse be broken? Researchers suggest that interventions should teach basic parenting skills, provide parents with mechanisms to cope with their emotional tension, and offer social support such as child care or counseling services (Belsky, 1993; Wolfe, 1985). Especially promising are programs in which home visitors provide parent education and support (MacMillan et al., 1994). Moreover, observers have noted our society's general acceptance of violence as a means of solving problems. This tendency is evident in the widespread endorsement of physical punishment as a technique for disciplining children, as well as in the pervasive displays of violence in the media (Belsky, 1980, 1993; Hart & Brassard, 1987). Altering broader societal attitudes about violence may thus be an additional and necessary step in breaking the cycle of child abuse. Finally, a national study of more than six thousand households showed that violence toward children was more prevalent in families experiencing unemployment, substance abuse, and financial difficulties (Wolfner & Gelles, 1993). As daunting as the task may seem, a broad attack on more general social problems may help to ameliorate the problem of child abuse.

KEY THEME**Sociocultural Influence****ATYPICAL DEVELOPMENT****Posttraumatic Stress Disorder**

Approximately one-fourth to one-half of children who are the victims of physical or sexual abuse experience the symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder or PTSD (Dubner & Motta, 1999; Famularo et al., 1994; Wolfe, Sas, & Wekerle, 1994). This diagnosis was originally formulated in studies of adults' responses to extremely stressful events such as wars and natural disasters, but many of the symptoms have also been observed in children who have experienced psychological traumas. Chief among those symptoms is the reexperiencing of the traumatic event; children may show repetitive, intrusive thoughts or have vivid flashbacks of the episode. They may also show sleep disturbances and nightmares, have angry outbursts, suffer from stomachaches and headaches, display signs of depression, and have difficulties in school (Milgram, 1998; Yule, 1998).

Physiological changes in the central nervous system may accompany PTSD. Studies with animals and adult humans have shown that extreme stress is associated with decreases in the size of the hippocampus and declines in short-term memory performance (Bremner, 1999; Bremner & Narayan, 1998). More volatile functioning of the neurochemical system that responds to stress has also been observed in adults and adolescents who have experienced trauma (Golier & Yehuda, 1998; Southwick, Yehuda, & Charney, 1997). The possibility that stress can cause permanent changes to the structure of the brain and affect children's learning abilities is particularly disturbing.

KEY THEME**Interaction Among Domains**

The most successful treatments of PTSD in children and adults have used a cognitive-behavioral approach (Foa & Meadows, 1997). Typically, the child is given relaxation training along with suggestions for how to control thoughts about the traumatic event. For example, in one study of four sexually abused children who were given this type of intervention, all four reported a decline in the symptoms of PTSD (Farrell, Hains, & Davies, 1998). Because of the seriousness of the problems associated with PTSD in children, many researchers are eager to devise more precise ways to diagnose and treat this disorder.

Cultural and Social Class Variations in Parenting

Do broader sociocultural beliefs and values play a role in parental socialization practices? If so, do children show specific patterns of behavior as a result of their different cultural experiences? Recent research suggests that the answer to both questions is yes.

KEY THEME

Sociocultural Influence

● **Cross-Cultural Differences** Beatrice Whiting and Carolyn Pope Edwards (1988) have provided an extended analysis of variations in parenting by comparing societies as diverse as rural Kenya, Liberia, and the Philippines with urban America. Despite vast differences in economic, social, and political conditions, many similar, overarching patterns are apparent in the ways parents socialize their children. With infants and toddlers, the universal emphasis is on nurturance, that is, providing routine care along with attention and support. By the time the child reaches age four or five years, most parents shift their focus to control, correcting or reprimanding misbehavior. Finally, when children reach school age, parents become concerned with training their children in the skills and social behavior their cultural group values.

At the same time, though, Whiting and Edwards (1988) observed notable differences. For example, mothers from rural villages in Kenya and Liberia emphasized training children to do chores responsibly and placed a high premium on obedience. From an early age, children were taught how to care for the family's fields and animals, and they assumed a major role in caring for younger siblings. Children were



Children's socialization experiences are influenced by cultural values and beliefs. For example, in rural Kenya, children care for the family's fields and animals and have responsibility for younger siblings. Children growing up in such communities were found to display a high degree of compliance to mothers' requests.

punished for performing tasks irresponsibly and were rarely praised. Consistent with this orientation to child rearing was the family's dependence on women and children for producing food. Because women in these cultures typically had an enormous workload, they delegated some tasks to children as soon as children were physically capable of managing them; because accidents and injury to infants and the family's resources must be prevented, deviant behaviors were not tolerated in children. Children growing up in these communities were highly compliant to mothers' commands and suggestions.

An even more controlling style characterized the Tarong community in the Philippines, in which subsistence farming was the mainstay but responsibilities for producing food were more evenly distributed among the group's members. When the mother did not rely so heavily on her children to work for the family's survival and when the goals of training were thus less clear, arbitrary commands and even punishing became more common. Children were scolded frequently for being in the way of adults or playing in inappropriate places. By middle childhood, Tarong children showed a marked decline in their tendency to seek attention from or be close to their parents.

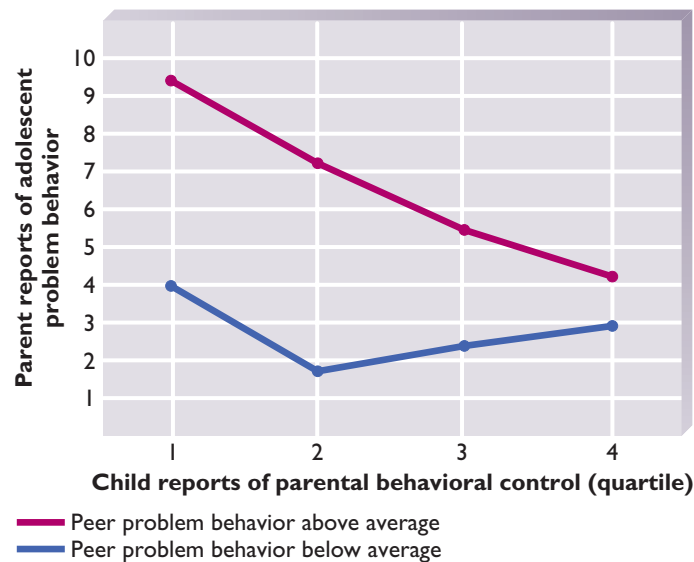
These patterns provided a striking contrast to the "sociability" that characterized the middle-income American mothers in the sample. Interactions between mothers and children consisted of significant information exchange and warm, friendly dialogues. Mothers emphasized verbalization, educational tasks, and play, and they were liberal in their use of praise and encouragement. Because children in American society normally do not work to ensure the economic survival of the family unit, firm training and punishing were not part of these parents' styles. The emphasis on verbalization and educational activities was consistent with the high value Americans place on social interactions and schooling.

Other researchers examining parent-child relationships in Asian cultures have reaffirmed the idea that culture affects parenting styles. Japanese mothers use less physical punishment and more verbal reasoning to control their children than American mothers (Kobayashi-Winata & Power, 1989). Japanese culture emphasizes responsibilities and commitments to others, a socialization goal that is achieved more effectively through reasoning than through power-assertive techniques. Japanese children, in fact, comply with rules at home and in school more than their American counterparts do. Similarly, when Chinese parents are asked to describe their child-rearing practices, they report a greater emphasis on control and achievement in children than American parents (Chao, 1994; Lin & Fu, 1990). In Chinese society, character development and educational attainment are highly valued, and parental practices follow directly from these larger societal goals.

As Whiting and Edwards (1988) point out, parents around the world resemble one another in numerous ways because of the universal needs children have as they grow and develop. But it is also true that the specific ecology of each culture, its socialization goals, and the demands it places on the family unit can dramatically shape parenting practices and the course of the individual child's socialization.

● **Social Class and Ethnic Differences** Reliable social class differences exist in parenting practices. Middle-class mothers use induction, or reasoning, as they discipline their children more frequently than do lower-class mothers, who tend to use power-assertive techniques. Middle-class mothers also praise their children liberally and generally verbalize more than lower-class mothers, who in turn more frequently utter such commands as "Do it because I say so!" and dispense less positive reinforcement (Hoffman, 1984).

Social class (typically defined by the father's occupation) by itself, however, is not a variable that provides neat or meaningful explanations, because it is usually associated with other variables, such as access to health care, nutrition, physical environment, and educational experiences. Moreover, even within low-income families, significant variations in parenting styles can occur; a single characteristic style may not exist. For example, among low-income families, older mothers and mothers who are more religious tend to rely less on power-assertive parenting styles than younger



Source: Adapted from Mason et al., 1996.

FIGURE 14.6
Effective Parenting and
Peer Influences

The style of parenting that best predicts successful developmental outcomes may depend on other influences in the child's life. For example, researchers have found that for lower- and working-class adolescents, a more controlling style of parenting may lead to fewer problem behaviors if peers exert a negative influence. In this study, adolescents were divided into two groups: those who were above and below average in their exposure to negative peer influences. The amount of control parents exhibited was divided into four categories, from least to most control (where 1 was equal to least control). As the graph shows, for adolescents exposed to higher-than-average negative peer influences, greater parental control was associated with fewer behavior problems. Levels of parental control mattered less for adolescents exposed to lower-than-average negative peer influences.

mothers or those who are less religious (Kelley, Power, & Wimbush, 1992). Another factor to consider is how parenting practices might be related to the type of peer influence to which children are exposed. In one recent study, African American adolescents from lower- and working-class families were divided into two groups, those who were above and below average in their exposure to peer problem behaviors. As Figure 14.6 shows, for adolescents exposed to negative peer influences, fewer behavior problems occurred when parents exerted more control over their children. When exposure to negative peer influences was lower, the type of parental control made less of a difference (Mason et al., 1996). Although we have seen in much of this chapter that high parental control is associated with negative child outcomes, under some circumstances this type of parenting may actually be advantageous.

Vonnie McLoyd (McLoyd, 1990; McLoyd et al., 1994) has provided an extended analysis of the growing literature on families under economic stress that illuminates the effects of social class. Because African American children experience a disproportionate share of the problems of poverty (a rate of 41 percent for African American children at the time of her analysis compared with 13 percent for Caucasian children), McLoyd focused on the social and family dynamics that can affect this racial minority. In McLoyd's analysis, economic hardship has a serious negative impact on children's socioemotional development because of the psychological distress it causes parents. Parents under stress have a diminished ability to provide nurturant, consistent, involved care for their children. Children growing up with poverty are thus at risk for depression, poor peer relations, lower self-esteem, and conduct disorders. In one study of African American mothers, mothers' job loss was related to the tendency to report symptoms of depression. This fact was, in turn, related to their use of punishment and less parental nurturance (McLoyd et al., 1994). Similar findings have been reported for Caucasian middle-class families from the midwestern United States during a time of economic downturn. Rand Conger and his colleagues (Conger et al., 1992) found that parents who experienced economic hardship reported greater emotional distress; this factor, in turn, was related to less skillful parenting. The disruptions in parenting were associated with adjustment problems among the adolescent boys in the sample. These seventh-graders reported more feelings of hostility and depression than those whose families were not experiencing economic hardship. The effects of financial stress have been observed in many types of families. Both one- and two-parent families of African American and European American backgrounds show more negative parent-child relationships in the context of financial strain (Conger et al., 2002; Gutman & Eccles, 1999; Jackson et al., 2000).

The demands poverty makes on many African American families may be related to unique family structures that are adaptive for their situation and help them to cope. For example, a significant number of African American children grow up in an extended family. About 10 percent of African American children younger than eighteen years—three times as many as Caucasian children—grow up with a live-in grandparent (Beck & Beck, 1989). Extended family members often bring additional income, child care assistance, and emotional support and counseling to families under stress, especially when the parent is single (Wilson, 1986). Extensive networks of social support have, in turn, been associated with responsive and involved parenting styles among low-income African American mothers (Burchinal, Follmer, & Bryant, 1996). Among African American adolescents, those who perceived their families as having extensive social support from relatives also perceived their homes as being organized and their parents as being involved in their schooling; these beliefs were linked to fewer problem behaviors, greater self-reliance, and higher grades in school than for adolescents whose perceptions differed (Taylor, 1996). The higher levels of involvement of African American families in religion also have a positive impact on children. Children of religious parents show less aggression and depression than those whose parents are less involved in religion (Brody, Stoneman, & Flor, 1996). Thus, although economic stress can have a negative effect on family dynamics, it can also foster alternative family structures and socialization goals that help to meet the needs of children.

FOR YOUR REVIEW

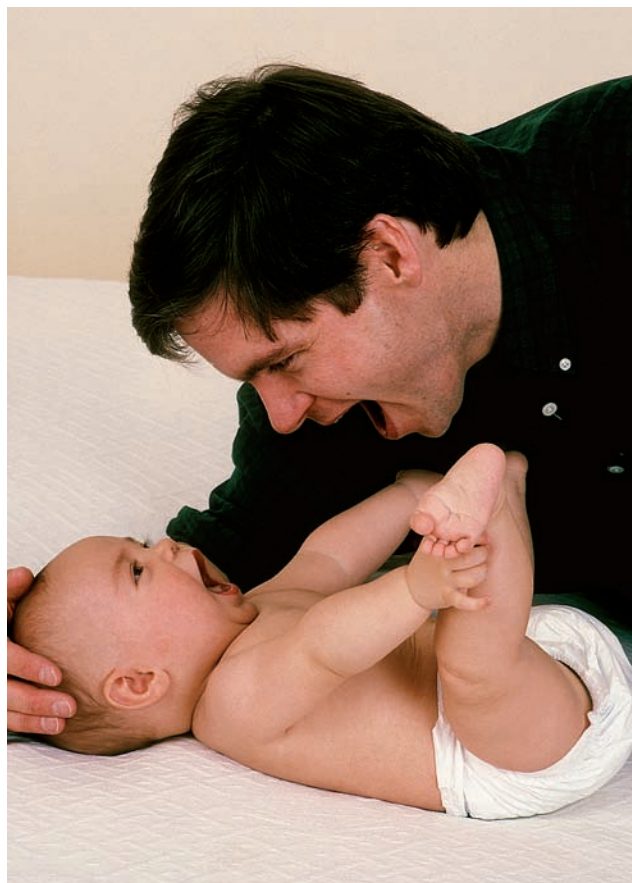
- What are the characteristics of the four major styles of parenting? What child behaviors are associated with each parental style?
- What are some of the specific effects of parental warmth on the developing child?
- Which principles of learning theory help to explain effective punishment?
- What are some ways that parents can effectively manage the noncompliant behavior of their children?
- In what ways do parental cognitions play a role in parenting strategies?
- What are some ways in which the characteristics of the child can influence parenting strategies?
- How do coercive cycles of maladaptive parent-child interactions arise? What can be done to intervene in these maladaptive interactions?
- What are some of the factors associated with the incidence of child abuse?
- In what ways do parenting strategies vary across different cultural and socioeconomic groups?

Relationships with Mothers, Fathers, and Siblings

Because women traditionally have been seen as the primary caregivers for children, most studies of parenting practices in the psychological literature have focused on mothering. Two decades of research on fathers, however, as well as even more recent studies of sibling relationships, have provided a much broader understanding of how each distinct relationship within the family influences the individual child's development.

Mothering Versus Fathering: Are There Differences?

For the most part, mothers still bear most of the responsibility for child rearing in American society, whether or not they are employed outside the home. However, the



When given the opportunity, fathers respond to their children by touching, holding, and vocalizing to them in much the same way that mothers do. They do, however, engage in more physical play with their children than mothers. When fathers participate in child care, their children show favorable developmental outcomes.

number of fathers participating in child care is increasing. For example, the number of single fathers who have custody of their children rose to more than 3 million in 2000. In addition, fathers assume primary child care responsibilities in about 20 percent of the families in which both parents are employed (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). Research resoundingly reveals that fathers are significant figures in their children's lives and are clearly competent in their parental role.

In this chapter, as well as in the chapter titled "Emotion," we have underscored maternal sensitivity and responsiveness as key factors in fostering optimal child development. Studies have shown that fathers are just as responsive as mothers to the signals of their infants, and, when given the opportunity, they interact with their babies in ways similar to mothers. One team of researchers measured the physiological responsiveness of mothers and fathers as they observed quiet, smiling, or crying babies on a video monitor (Frodi et al., 1978). Mothers and fathers showed similar changes in heart rate, blood pressure, and skin conductance when the babies smiled or cried. In another study of maternal and paternal behaviors toward infants in the newborn nursery, Ross Parke and Sandra O'Leary (1976) found that fathers were just as likely as mothers to hold, touch, and vocalize to their babies.

After the newborn period, fathers and mothers begin to manifest somewhat different styles of interacting with their infants. When they play face to face with their babies, fathers tend to provide physical and social stimulation in staccato bursts, whereas mothers tend to be more rhythmic and soothing (Yogman et al., 1977). Fathers engage in physical and unpredictable "idiosyncratic" play with their infants—throwing them up in the air, moving their limbs, and tickling them—whereas mothers spend more time in caregiving activities or calm games such as "pat-a-cake" (Lamb, 1997; Yogman, 1982). As a consequence, infants prefer fathers when they wish to play and seek out mothers when they desire care and comfort. This dichotomy in parental styles of interaction continues at least until middle childhood (Russell & Russell, 1987).

Despite their responsiveness and competence as parents, most fathers spend less time with their children than mothers do. In general, fathers spend about one-third the time mothers do in direct contact with their children, even when the mother works outside the home (Ishii-Kuntz & Coltrane, 1992; Lamb et al., 1987). This pattern has been found in diverse ethnic groups and cultures, including African American, Chinese, and Japanese families (Hossain & Roopnarine, 1994; Ishii-Kuntz, 1994; Sun & Roopnarine, 1996).

Why are fathers relatively uninvolved? Some may hold traditional beliefs about which family member should be responsible for child care. Another reason may be that fathers are not confident in their caregiving skills. Because males typically are not exposed to child care through such experiences as baby-sitting and home economics courses, they may feel insecure about feeding, bathing, or diapering a child (Lamb et al., 1987). On the other hand, some circumstances predict greater father involvement in child care: fewer hours at work, the fact that the mother works, and the father's memories of his own relationship with his father (Gottfried, Bathurst, & Gottfried, 1994; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2000a; Radin, 1994). In some cases, the father may have learned to extend his caregiving role from observing the participation of his father; in other cases, he may be trying to have a better relationship with his own children than he had with his uninvolved father.

Demographers project that more and more children will be cared for by fathers for longer periods of time (Casper & O'Connell, 1998). It seems, then, that the concept of the father as an equal partner in parenthood is starting to emerge (Pleck & Pleck, 1997).

● **The Father's Influence on Child Development** Do fathers have a different influence than mothers on the process of child development? During the 1960s and 1970s psychologists believed they do, based on studies of the effects of father absence, especially on boys. Boys growing up without fathers were more likely to have problems in academic achievement, gender-role development, and control of aggression (Biller, 1974; Lamb, 1981). An important theoretical construct driving much of the research was *identification*: the idea that boys assimilate the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of their fathers as they form an intense emotional bond with them. Presumably, boys without fathers did not have an identity figure or model for appropriate masculine, instrumentally competent behavior and thus suffered deficits in cognitive, social, and emotional domains.

Identification with the father may be less important than other variables, however. Michael Lamb (1987) points out that the effects of father absence may result not from the loss of a masculine identity figure for the son but from the loss of a source of emotional and financial support for the entire family. The tension and stress that result may produce maladaptive patterns of parenting, which in turn generate undesirable developmental outcomes for boys. Boys may be particularly vulnerable because they seem to be more generally susceptible than girls to the effects of deviant environments (Rutter, 1986).

A more contemporary view is that fathers make recognizable contributions to family life in general and child development in particular but that those contributions simply reflect aspects of good parenting. In other words, good fathering resembles good mothering, and the child will thrive by having two parents who fill those roles instead of just one. For example, one recent study showed that the mere presence of a father was not associated with benefits to children's development. Instead, it was only when fathers were nurturant and involved with their children that children showed higher cognitive and social functioning (Black, Dubowitz, & Starr, Jr., 1999). Several other studies also show that a father's warmth and involvement is associated with children's competence and academic achievement and with less rigid gender-role stereotypes (Radin, 1981, 1994; Wagner & Phillips, 1992). This influence holds true even when children live in single-parent families with their mothers but have contact with their biological fathers (Coley, 1998).

Siblings

Like parents, siblings serve as important sources of the child's social attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Although they may not wield as much power as parents, siblings certainly do attempt to control one another's behaviors (ask anyone who is not an only child!) and may be models for both desirable and undesirable actions. An emerging body of research on sibling relationships has provided yet another perspective on how families influence development.

- **The Only Child** One way to assess the impact of siblings on development is to examine children who have none. Are there notable differences between only children and children with one or more sisters or brothers? Popular opinion depicts the only child as spoiled, demanding, self-centered, and dependent (Thompson, 1974). But research evidence suggests the contrary, that only children may enjoy the benefits of having their parents' exclusive attention. Toni Falbo and Denise Polit (1986) summarized the results of 115 studies of only children and concluded that overall, only children showed higher achievement and intelligence scores than children with siblings. In addition, only-borns ranked higher on measures of character—that is, tendencies toward leadership, personal control, and maturity—than children with siblings. No overall differences emerged between only children and children with siblings on assessments of sociability and personal adjustment.

In explaining these findings, Falbo and Polit (1986) found support for the hypothesis that features of the parent-child relationship account for the advantages only children enjoy in certain domains. Only children were found to have more positive relationships with their parents than children having siblings. This effect probably occurs because parents of one child have more time to spend with their son or daughter and generally have high-quality interactions with their child (Falbo & Cooper, 1980). Parents and children in one study, for example, exchanged more information in mealtime conversations in one-child families than in families having two or three children (Lewis & Feiring, 1982). First-time parents are also more anxious about their child-rearing techniques and may thus be more vigilant and responsive to their child's behaviors (Falbo & Polit, 1986).

Falbo and Polit's (1986) meta-analysis showed that parent-child relations in one- and two-child families are actually more similar than different. Only when a third child is born does the quality of parent-child relations diminish significantly. Parents of more than two children probably become more relaxed about their child-rearing strategies and also have significantly more demands placed on their time. The result is less responsiveness and fewer deliberate attempts to instruct their children, aspects of parenting found to be related to cognitive achievements.

- **Family Size and Birth Order** Children growing up in contemporary American society have fewer siblings than children in earlier eras. In 2000, the typical American family with children had one or two children (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). Many children thus grow up with only one other sibling. Does the size of the family make any difference in child development?

In general, children from smaller families have higher intelligence test scores, achieve higher levels of education, and display greater self-esteem (Blake, 1989; Wagner, Schubert, & Schubert, 1985). As we have just seen, one reason for these effects may be that parents in larger families have less time to spend with their children and may not provide the kind of cognitive stimulation children in smaller families receive. Another important factor is financial circumstances: Parents with a larger number of children often experience greater economic stress, which in turn may diminish the quality of their parenting (Rutter & Madge, 1976).

Regardless of family size, the child's birth order, whether first born or later born, can also be a factor in development. Like only children, first-borns tend to score higher on IQ tests and have higher achievement motivation than other children

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(Glass, Neulinger, & Brim, 1974; Zajonc, Markus, & Markus, 1979). They also tend to be more obedient and socially responsible (Sutton-Smith & Rosenberg, 1970). All these effects probably stem from the greater attention parents give to their first children. Later-borns seem to have an advantage in the social sphere, however. Youngest siblings tend to have better peer relationships than first-borns and are more confident in social situations (Lahey et al., 1980; Miller & Maruyama, 1976).

● **The Impact of a Sibling's Arrival** The birth of a sibling can have a dramatic effect on the life of a first-born child. Research on the consequences of a second child's arrival generally confirms that "sibling rivalry" is no myth. Judy Dunn and Carol Kendrick (1982) followed the progress of family relationships among forty first-born children who experienced the arrival of a sibling sometime between their first and fourth birthdays. Dunn and Kendrick observed normal home routines during the mother's last month of pregnancy and again when the baby sibling was one, eight, and fourteen months old. They also interviewed the mother at each stage about the older child's eating and sleeping habits, moods, and other routine behaviors.

For the majority of children, the arrival of a sister or brother led to marked changes in behavior; they became more demanding, clingy, unhappy, or withdrawn. Accompanying these changes in their behavior were significant decreases in maternal attention toward them; mothers engaged in less joint play, cuddling, and verbalization with their first-borns and in general initiated fewer interactions with them. At the same time, restrictive and punitive maternal behaviors increased. Over time, Dunn and Kendrick (1982) noted, two distinct patterns of sibling relationships emerged. Among some sibling pairs, almost all interactions eventually became friendly and positive; for others, a persistent pattern of hostility and aggression became the norm. The first pattern was more likely if mothers had previously prepared the older child for the newborn's arrival by referring to the infant as a person with needs and desires. Engaging the older child in caring for the infant also seemed to have positive consequences. In contrast, negative relationships between siblings resulted if the older child experienced a sharp drop in maternal contact. The discrepancy in pre- and postsibling maternal contact made the most difference: Children who had less contact with their mothers before the sibling's birth were less profoundly affected by her attention to the new infant.

This young boy's reaction to a new sibling is typical. Although many children become clingy, withdrawn, or demanding when a new sibling first arrives, these reactions can be diminished if parents prepare the older child for the infant's arrival and involve him in the infant's care. Adjustment is also more difficult if the older child perceives that he must compete for the parents' affection and attention.



The timing of a sibling's arrival may also be important. Researchers have noted a drop in the security of a child's attachment to the mother following the birth of a second child. However, the decrease in attachment security was less noticeable if the older child was twenty-four months of age or younger (Teti et al., 1996). Younger children may not yet have the social cognitive capacities to see the new arrival as a threat or cause of change in family routines.

The arrival of a sibling demands a big adjustment for the older child, especially because another individual begins to compete for the parents' attention and affection. Siblings are aware of the differential treatment parents may knowingly or unwittingly bestow on them (Kowal & Kramer, 1997; McHale et al., 1995). The greater the perceived discrepancy is, the greater the sibling conflict will be (Dunn, 1988). But certainly not all aspects of sibling relationships are negative. Dunn and Kendrick (1982) noted that in certain circumstances, siblings fill a void in parent-child relationships. When the mother and her older child have difficulties in their interactions, siblings may provide the attention and affection missing from the maternal relationship, thus helping to keep the family system in equilibrium. When parents display a high degree of marital conflict or even undergo divorce, siblings show an increase in emotional closeness and positive, friendly behavior toward one another (Dunn, 1996).

● **Sibling Interactions Among Older Children** How do older children interact as siblings? For one thing, children tend to fight more with their siblings than with their friends. When fifth- through eighth-graders were asked to describe conflicts with their siblings, they reported that they allowed quarrels with siblings to escalate, whereas they tried to resolve conflicts with friends. Most of the time, siblings fight about privacy and interpersonal boundaries (Raffaelli, 1989). Typically, parents do not intervene in sibling conflicts, and when they do not, those conflicts continue (Perozynski & Kramer, 1999). On the other hand, when parents discuss each child's needs (as opposed to using controlling tactics), subsequent conflicts between siblings are less likely (Kramer, Perozynski, & Chung, 1999). Siblings also express more positive behaviors with one another when their fathers, in particular, are nurturant and try to be fair to each child (Brody, Stoneman, & McCoy, 1992). Researchers have noted that the degree of conflict in sibling relationships is related to the amount of aggression a child shows in school, whereas the amount of warmth in sibling relationships is linked to emotional control and social competence in school (Garcia et al., 2000; Stormshak et al., 1996).

Whether positive or negative in character, sibling relationships in early childhood tend to remain stable through middle childhood (Dunn, Slombowski, & Beardsall, 1994) and then typically change from middle childhood through adolescence. Duane Buhrmester and Wyndol Furman (1990) administered the Sibling Relationship Questionnaire to third-, sixth-, ninth-, and twelfth-graders to assess several dimensions of sibling interactions. Older siblings reported being more dominant and nurturant toward their younger siblings, and younger siblings confirmed that they received more often than dispensed dominance and nurturance. These differences between older and younger siblings apparently disappear over time, however. The older children in the sample reported having more egalitarian relationships with their siblings, as well as less intense feelings of both warmth and conflict. Initial differences in power and nurturance usually disappeared when the younger sibling was twelve years old, by which time she or he had become more competent and needed less guidance and emotional support.

Although the presence of siblings may mean the child has fewer opportunities to interact with parents, it also provides the context for developing other unique skills. Older siblings have opportunities to become nurturant and assertive, and younger siblings have more models for a range of behaviors than only children. Although many children grow up with siblings, we are just beginning to understand the role brothers and sisters play in child development.

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FOR YOUR REVIEW

- What are the major differences between mothers and fathers in parenting styles?
- In what ways do fathers make important contributions to child development?
- How do family size and birth order have an impact on child development?
- In what ways can parents facilitate a child's transition to having a new sibling?
- How do sibling interactions change as children get older?

Families in Transition

As we saw at the start of this chapter, the traditional nuclear family has been slowly disappearing from mainstream American society. Single-parent families, dual wage-earner families, and reconstituted families (in which adults who remarry bring their respective children into new families) are becoming more and more prevalent and offer new circumstances to which children must adapt. What are the effects of these emerging family structures on child development? Research shows that child development is influenced not so much by changes in family structure per se as by the ways in which structural changes affect interpersonal relations within the family.

Maternal Employment

In the past three decades, the percentage of married women with children in the labor force has increased dramatically. The working mother is now the norm. What is the effect of maternal employment on child development?

When psychologists compare children of employed mothers with children of women who remain at home, few differences emerge on measures of cognitive achievement and socioemotional development, at least among middle-class participants. If anything, daughters of employed mothers derive some benefit; they are likely to show greater independence, greater achievement, and higher self-esteem than daughters of nonworking mothers (Gottfried et al., 1994; Hoffman, 1989). Apparently these girls profit from having a successful, competent role model, at least as the larger society recognizes these qualities. (Women who remain at home “work” too, but traditionally have not been afforded recognition or status for that role.) When a mother returns to work seems not to be an important factor. In an analysis of data collected from several thousand participants in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Elizabeth Harvey (1999) found that the timing of mother's entry or return to the work force was not associated with children's development. The number of hours mothers work can make a difference, however. Two recent studies of mostly Caucasian middle-class women found that the more hours mothers worked, the lower was the academic achievement of their preschool and early school-age children (Brooks-Gunn, Han, & Waldfogel, 2002; Goldberg, Greenberger, & Nagel, 1996). On the other hand, comprehensive longitudinal studies of children from infancy through age twelve have found that although academic achievement was negatively related to the number of hours the mothers worked when children were ages five and six, this relationship was modest and was not apparent as children grew older (Gottfried et al., 1994; Harvey, 1999).

For low-income families, maternal employment is related to some clear benefits for children. One longitudinal study examined 189 second-graders; most were born to adolescent mothers, and 41 percent lived in households with incomes below the poverty level. For this sample, maternal employment during the child's first three years was associated with greater household income, a higher-quality home environment as assessed by the HOME inventory (see the chapter titled “Intelligence”), and

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When mothers work, their children are less likely to hold stereotyped beliefs about gender, probably because they see both parents in multiple roles.

higher mathematics achievement in school for the child compared with the effects when mothers did not work (Vandell & Ramanan, 1992).

In general, the clearest effect of maternal employment involves the gender-role attitudes of both sons and daughters. As we saw in the chapter titled “Gender,” when mothers work outside the home, their children are less likely than children of at-home mothers to hold stereotypical beliefs about males and females and more likely to see both sexes as competent (Hoffman, 1989). When both mother and father work, sons and daughters have the opportunity to see both parents in multiple roles—as powerful, competent wage earners and nurturant, warm caregivers—a factor that probably contributes to more egalitarian beliefs.

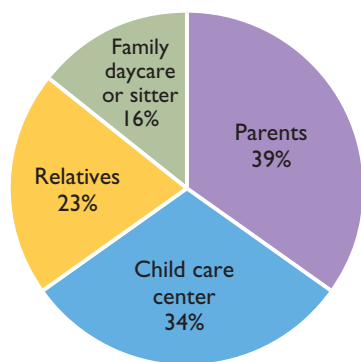
Overall, maternal employment is not a simple, “neat” variable in studying child development. Some mothers work out of sheer economic necessity, whereas others are more concerned with realizing personal or career goals, for example. As researchers point out, the impact of maternal employment is better understood through its effects on family dynamics, parental attitudes, and the alternative child care arrangements the family chooses (Beyer, 1995; Hoffman, 1989). It is to these factors that we now turn our attention.

● **Maternal Employment and Parent-Child Interaction** Mothers who work full time outside the home spend less time caring for their children, whether infants or high school age, than mothers who stay at home (Hill & Stafford, 1980). In terms of direct, one-to-one mother-child interaction, however, no significant differences have been found between employed and nonemployed mothers (Richards & Duckett, 1994). Employed mothers often compensate for the time they miss with their children during the workweek by allocating more time for them during mornings and evenings (Ahnert, Rickert, & Lamb, 2000). Some studies show that fathers assume more responsibilities for child care when the mother works (Pederson et al., 1982; Pleck, 1983), although they sometimes find their new roles to be challenging, particularly in the early part of infancy (Grych & Clark, 1999; Vandell et al., 1997).

Overall, what matters more than whether or not the mother works is her attitude toward mothering and work and why she is working or staying home. In one study of mothers of infants, women who remained at home contrary to their preference had higher scores on tests of depression and stress than mothers who preferred to be at home and were not in the labor force and employed mothers who valued their positions in the work world (Hock & DeMeis, 1990). We saw earlier in this chapter that parental stress has been implicated as a factor in less consistent and less nurturant parenting. On the other hand, when maternal employment produces tension, parenting practices also may suffer. Researchers have found that mothers who worked more than forty hours per week, for example, were more anxious and unhappy and had less sensitive and less animated interactions with their infants than mothers who worked less than forty hours per week (Owen & Cox, 1988). In another recent study, parents who experienced higher levels of stress at work had more conflicts with their adolescent children (Crouter et al., 1999).

In general, family factors continue to predict child outcomes, even though when mothers work, their children may be enrolled in full-time child care. Variables such as child-rearing style, parental psychological well-being, and sensitivity are associated with children's cognitive and social development irrespective of the child's caregiving context (NICHD Early Child Care Research Group, 1998b).

● **The Effects of Daycare** About one-fourth of children enter child care during the first five months after birth, according to one national survey. About half begin regular child care before they turn three (Singer et al., 1998). Child care arrangements take various forms, from in-home care provided by a relative or paid caregiver to group care in a formal, organized center. As Figure 14.7 shows, about 40 percent of children under age six are cared for by their parents. Of those who receive full-time nonparental care, the largest percentage attends organized child care centers. There has been a steady increase in the last thirty years in the proportion of children attending child care centers as opposed to family daycare or being cared for by a relative or a sitter (Hofferth, 1996).



Source: National Center for Educational Statistics, 2001.

FIGURE 14.7

Child Care Arrangements for Children Age 6 and Under, 2000

This chart shows the percentage of American children who receive different forms of child care. Forty percent of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers are cared for by parents. Of the remainder, most attend a formal child care center.

One area in which some (but not all) researchers have noted an effect of daycare is in intellectual performance. Daycare children tend to outperform children reared at home by parents on standardized tests of IQ, as well as measures of problem-solving ability, creativity, language development, and arithmetic skills (Clarke-Stewart & Fein, 1983). Daycare programs that stress cognitive activities have a greater effect on IQ scores than those that simply provide caregiving (McCartney et al., 1985). Moreover, the effect of daycare on intellectual achievements shows up years later, when children are in elementary school. In one study that examined the academic achievements of sixth-graders, the amount of time children had spent in high-quality daycare centers during infancy was positively related to their mathematics grades and their tendency to be enrolled in programs for gifted children (Field, 1991). In two other studies, conducted in Sweden, children who had daycare experience performed better on measures of verbal and mathematics abilities and obtained better grades in school seven years later and beyond than children who had no experience with out-of-home care (Andersson, 1992; Broberg et al., 1997).

Daycare is also associated with effects in the realm of social development. Specifically, children with experience in daycare are more socially competent with peers. They show more frequent nonnegative interactions, more complex and reciprocal play, and more positive engagement with peers compared with children not in child care. Important to note is the finding that responsiveness of caregivers in daycare centers was associated with these positive peer interactions (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2001). In addition to showing more positive behaviors, some studies suggest that daycare children may display more aggression with peers and noncompliance with adults (Bates et al., 1994; Baydar & Brooks-Gunn, 1991). However, a national study of more than one thousand children in daycare centers across the United States found that the amount of time spent in child care did not predict children's problem social behaviors at age three (NICHD Early Child Care



Research shows that daycare has few negative effects on young children and may even facilitate cognitive and social development. High-quality centers generally have small group size, favorable staff-to-child ratios, and responsive, warm caregivers.

Research Network, 1998a). If there are negative effects, they may arise from more prolonged experiences in daycare or experiences in low-quality centers (Lamb, 1998).

It is important to remember that many studies of daycare have been conducted in high-quality centers, often associated with universities and populated by children from middle- to upper-class families. But not all parents have the opportunity or financial resources to send their children to such high-caliber programs. In a disturbing report on the quality of child care centers in the United States, only 14 percent of centers were judged to offer care that promotes children's development; most provided only custodial-level care, and 12 percent were found to jeopardize children's development (Children's Defense Fund, 1996). What are the effects of less-than-excellent programs on children? Research suggests that when children are enrolled in low-quality centers before age one, they have more difficulty with peers and are distractible and less task oriented in kindergarten than children who are enrolled at later ages and those who attend high-quality centers (Howes, 1990). Children in low-quality child care also tend to score lower on tests of cognitive and language skills than children in high-quality care (Burchinal et al., 2000; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2000b; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). Evidence is accumulating that quality of child care makes a difference. Thus it is essential that parents be aware of the elements of high-quality daycare.

● **Choosing a Daycare Center** Both the federal government and many states have set minimum requirements for daycare services that regulate the qualifications of teachers, staff-child ratios, the size and safety of the physical facility, and the provision of nourishing meals. Although the guidelines and laws provide for minimum standards, most parents are concerned with providing their children with the best possible care during the hours they are at work. Alison Clarke-Stewart (1993) has drawn on the expanding body of research findings on daycare to compile the following suggestions for parents:

- Center-based care is more likely to include educational opportunities for children than home-based care, such as that provided by baby-sitters and family daycare. On the other hand, children are more likely to receive one-to-one supervision and authoritative discipline in home-based care.

- Children are most likely to thrive intellectually and emotionally in programs that offer a balance between structured educational activities and an open, free environment.

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- The caregiving environment should provide ample physical space (at least twenty-five square feet per child) and a variety of materials and activities to foster sensorimotor, social, and cognitive development.
- Class size should be small (fewer than ten children) and should include children within a two-year age range. Small centers (fewer than thirty children) usually have better staff-child ratios than centers with more children.
- The interaction style of the caregiver is a key aspect of quality care. The caregiver should be actively involved but not restrictive with the children. The caregiver should also be responsive and offer positive encouragement.
- Caregivers who have training in child development and continuing opportunities for education are most likely to provide high-quality care.
- The individual characteristics of the child should be taken into account. Some children will probably do well in a program that balances structure and openness; others may profit from either more structure or a more flexible and relaxed program.

Other important factors include a high staff-child ratio and low staff turnover. Research shows, for example, that when the staff-child ratio is at least one to three for infants, one to four for toddlers, and one to nine for preschoolers, the quality of caregiving and of children's activities within the center are both good. Likewise, when the overall class size is six or fewer for infants, twelve or fewer for toddlers, and eighteen or fewer for preschoolers, children have better quality experiences than those in larger groups (Howes, Phillips, & Whitebook, 1992).

In essence, the qualities of good daycare mirror the qualities of good parenting. In fact, the reason that factors such as good staff-child ratios and education of caregivers are important is because they are related to the quality of caregiving (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2002). In choosing a daycare center, parents should seek a warm, responsive environment that provides the child, at least some of the time, with opportunities for structured play and prosocial learning.

The Effects of Divorce

As we pointed out at the start of this chapter, the statistics are dramatic: The divorce rate among couples in the United States has tripled since 1960, and estimates suggest that 40 percent of children will live through the divorce of their parents in the current decade (Cherlin, 1992; Furstenberg, 1994). Far from being an atypical event, divorce affects a significant proportion of American children. Unfortunately, the effects of divorce on children are rarely positive; the absence of one parent, the emotional and financial tension, and sometimes continuing conflicts between parents that accompany divorce frequently lead to a range of psychological problems for both boys and girls, at least in the period immediately following the breakup of the family. The ability of children to cope with the stresses of divorce, particularly in the long run, depends on a number of variables. Most important is the way parents manage the transition in family structure.

A major longitudinal study of the effects of divorce on parents and children conducted by E. Mavis Hetherington and her associates illuminated how parental separation affects children and how the nature of parent-child interactions changes (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1982). The researchers compared two groups over a period of two years, a sample of forty-eight preschool-age, middle-class children whose parents divorced and another group of forty-eight middle-class children matched on several variables, such as age and sex, whose families were intact. In all the divorced families, mothers had custody of their children. During the course of the study, the researchers made several assessments of both parents and children, including parental interviews, observations of parent-child interactions in the laboratory and at home, observations and ratings of children's behavior in the home and at school, and personality tests.

The results of the study indicated that the worst period for most children was the first year after the divorce, when they exhibited many negative characteristics such as aggression, distractability, and noncompliance. The extent of their undesirable behaviors even surpassed those of children from intact families with a high level of conflict, and it was particularly noticeable in boys. Two years after the divorce, many of the effects on children had diminished, especially for girls. In a six-year follow-up, however, many boys continued to show patterns of aggression and noncompliance, academic difficulties, poor relations with peers, and extremely low self-esteem (Hetherington, 1989).

A look at family interaction styles after divorce helps to account for the poor initial adjustment of children. Hetherington and her colleagues noted that soon after they separated from their husbands, mothers tended to adopt a more authoritarian style of parenting (Hetherington et al., 1982). They gave out numerous commands and prohibitions and displayed little affection or responsiveness to their children. These mothers were undoubtedly having problems coping with their new status as single parents in both emotional and practical terms. At the same time, the fathers withdrew, participating little in the management of their children's behavior. Children, particularly boys, became less compliant, and mothers in turn responded with increased restrictiveness and punitiveness. Caught up in a spiral of frustration, helplessness, and feelings of incompetence, these mothers responded negatively to many of their children's behaviors, even those that were neutral or positive, and, despite their harsh threats, followed up on few of the directives they gave. The result was a coercive cycle of parent-child interaction such as that described earlier in this chapter and typified by this chapter's opening scene between Joey and his mother.

Other researchers have confirmed that many children show heightened aggression, lower academic achievement, disruptions in peer relationships, and depression after their parents' divorce than they had previously (Camara & Resnick, 1988; Stolberg & Anker, 1984; Wallerstein, Corbin, & Lewis, 1988). Sibling interactions also suffer. Carol MacKinnon (1989) observed elementary school-age children as they played games with their siblings in the laboratory. Siblings whose parents had been divorced for one year or longer showed more teasing, quarreling, physical attacks, and other negative behaviors toward one another than children from intact families. Children ages six to eight years seem to have the most difficulty adjusting to divorce; they are old enough to recognize the seriousness of the family's situation but do not yet have the coping skills to deal with feelings of sadness and guilt that often accompany the change in family structure (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Older children often have a better understanding of divorce and the notion that conflicts between parents must somehow be resolved (Kurdek, 1989). However, even adolescents often suffer negative psychological consequences after their parents divorce. Adolescent boys in particular were found to be more likely to use alcohol or illicit drugs after their parents separated than boys in a control group whose parents remained married (Doherty & Needle, 1991).

For some individuals, the aftermath of divorce may last well into young adulthood. According to data collected as part of a major longitudinal study in Great Britain, young adults whose parents had previously divorced reported more depression, anxiety, and other emotional problems than adults from intact families (Chase-Lansdale, Cherlin, & Kiernan, 1995). In addition, in a twenty-year follow-up of her original sample, Hetherington (1999) found that young adults whose parents had divorced were less likely to finish high school, had smaller social networks, experienced more conflicts with siblings and friends, and had more conflicts in their own marriages. The results of another longitudinal study show that adults whose parents had divorced were more likely to experience a break-up of their own marriages (Amato, 1999).

● **Adjusting to Divorce** The consequences of divorce are not always so grim for all children. Hetherington (1989) observed that after six years, some of the children in her original study recovered from the family crisis and showed a healthy adaptation to their new family lifestyle whether or not their mothers remarried. These

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children displayed few behavior problems, high self-esteem, successful academic performance, and positive relations with peers.

What factors were associated with this favorable pattern of adjustment? For one thing, mothers of children in this group had become less authoritarian and more authoritative in their parental style, encouraging independence but also providing a warm, supportive climate for their sons and daughters. If the mother was not available, many of these children had contact with some other caring adult, such as a relative, teacher, or neighbor. In addition, several children in this category had responsibility for the care of another individual: a younger sibling, an aging grandparent, or someone with a physical or emotional problem. These relationships may have offered children an opportunity to feel needed and provided an alternative source of emotional gratification and support. In contrast, mothers of children with long-lasting adjustment problems continued to manifest coercive styles of interaction. Mothers and sons were especially likely to fall into this pattern. Children are also more likely to show successful adjustment to divorce when conflict between divorced parents is low, when the child does not feel “caught” between the two parents, and when the child does not feel that he or she will be abandoned (Amato & Rezac, 1994; Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991; Wolchik et al., 2002). Maintaining a close relationship with grandparents can also help (Lussier et al., 2002).

Divorce represents a difficult transition for all members of the family. Some of the effects of divorce on children may actually be due to personal attributes in parents that are passed on genetically to children. Parents and children may share biological predispositions for low social and academic skills, and these may be the very characteristics that lead to marital problems for parents, as well as problematic postdivorce behaviors in children (O'Connor et al., 2000). However, research also suggests that a key variable to understanding the effects of divorce is the quality of relationships among all family members: the more conflict and negative emotion associated with the process and the more prolonged the maladaptive patterns of interaction, the worse the outcomes for the child. In addition, the child's overall adjustment needs to be considered in the broader context of factors such as socioeconomic status, neighborhood, and parental emotional state. These risk factors operate in a similar fashion whether the parents are divorced or not (Deater-Deckard & Dunn, 1999).

● **Custody Arrangements** After divorce, most children reside with their mothers, in large part because of long-standing societal beliefs about the privileged nature of mother-child relationships. Yet when children live with their mothers after a divorce, they are more likely to experience economic hardship than if they live with their fathers. Studies have found that income for divorced women with children declines an average of 30 percent, whereas income for fathers declines much less or even increases (Burkhauser et al., 1991; Weitzman, 1985). Children living with their mothers also typically show a dramatic impairment in relationships with their fathers. For example, according to one national study, more than a third of the children in the sample did not see their fathers *at all* or saw them only a few times a year (Selzer, 1991).

Many states now have laws that favor joint custody of children following divorce. In most cases, this means both parents have equal responsibility for making decisions about the child's medical care and education; that is, they have *joint legal custody*. In other cases, children reside for substantial periods of time with each parent; this arrangement refers to *joint physical custody*. A recent meta-analysis of studies comparing the effects of joint custody versus sole custody shows that joint custody—whether it is legal or physical—generally has greater benefits for children. Children in joint custody display higher self-esteem and fewer behavioral and emotional problems than children in sole custody. An important factor related to these benefits is the ability of children to spend time with each parent; also, parents of children in joint custody tend to have fewer conflicts than parents in a sole-custody situation (Bauserman, 2002). Researchers have also reported that parental participation in a wide range of activities, even everyday ones such as shopping and watching TV to-

gether, predicted children's successful adjustment better than the frequency of special trips or activities (Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996).

● **Relationships with Stepparents** Approximately 75 to 80 percent of divorced individuals remarry, the majority within five years after their divorce (Cherlin, 1992). As a consequence, about 35 percent of children born in the early 1980s will live with a stepparent (Glick, 1989). For children who have just experienced the separation of their parents, the introduction of a new "parent" can represent yet another difficult transition even though parental remarriage holds the promise of greater financial security and emotional support for both parents and children (Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993).

Like divorce, a parent's remarriage often leads to aggression, noncompliance, poor peer relations, and academic difficulties among children (Bray, 1988; Zill, 1988). In fact, children with stepparents often resemble children with single parents on measures of problem behavior, academic success, and psychological adjustment (Hetherington & Henderson, 1997). As Figure 14.8 shows, a survey of more than ten thousand children in grades six through twelve showed that children in stepfamilies look similar to children from single-parent families in the number of school-related problems experienced; both groups have more problems than children from two-parent families (Zill, 1994). The child usually has more difficulty adjusting when stepparents have larger numbers of their own children, when children from two previous marriages are assimilated into one family, and when the custodial parent and stepparent have a new biological child of their own (Hetherington, 1999; Hetherington, Henderson, & Reiss, 1999; Santrock & Sitterle, 1987; Zill, 1988). Adolescents have more problems adjusting to their new families than younger children, perhaps because their growing autonomy leads them to be more confrontational with parents (Brand, Clingempeel, & Bowen-Woodward, 1988; Hetherington & Jodl, 1994). Even if children had shown previous adjustment to the remarriage of their parents, problems can resurface in adolescence (Bray, 1999). In addition, girls in the middle school and adolescent years do not adjust as well as boys to parental remarriage; girls especially withdraw from their stepfathers (Brand et al., 1988; Vuchinich et al., 1991).

Drawing from data collected in a national survey of parent-adolescent relations, Frank Furstenberg (1987) found that stepparents had reservations about their ability to discipline and provide affection to stepchildren. At the same time, stepchildren corroborated that stepparents were less involved than their biological parents in care

KEY THEME

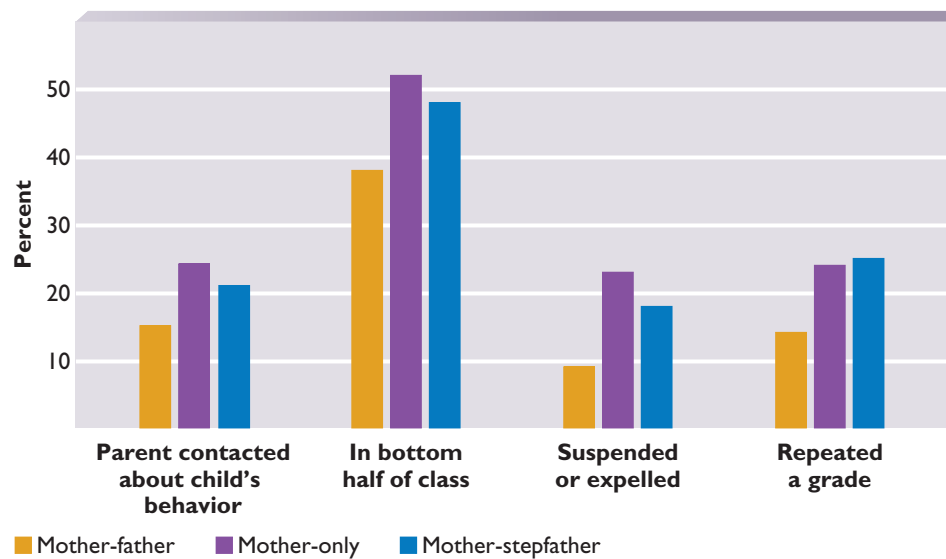
Interaction Among Domains



Children often have a difficult time adjusting to the presence of stepparents, generally because stepparents do not take an active role in disciplining and showing affection to their "new" children. Problems are more likely to occur when children from each parent's prior marriage become part of the new "blended" family.

FIGURE 14.8
Family Type and Percentage
of Children Experiencing
Problems in School

According to a national study involving more than ten thousand children in grades six through twelve, children living in stepfamilies resemble those living in single-parent homes (with their mothers) in the patterns of difficulties they show in school. Both groups have more problems than children living in two-parent families, probably due to differences in parenting styles among the groups.



Source: Adapted from Zill, 1994.

and supervision. Other researchers examining stepparent-stepchild relationships over time confirm that stepparents typically do not fit the profile of authoritative parenting described earlier in this chapter (Hetherington & Jodl, 1994), and thus the benefits of that parenting style for children are not realized. If anything, stepparents often look like the disengaged parents described at the beginning of this chapter; they provide less support for and control over the behavior of their stepchildren compared with their biological children (Mekos, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1996). Moreover, when stepparents do exert control, adolescents tend to show greater aggression, non-compliance, and other problem behaviors (Kim, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1999).

Some difficulties in stepfamilies may stem from the uncertain social roles of stepparents. Stepparents believe that they should play an active role in parenting but are also reluctant to become too involved with their stepchildren (Fine, Coleman, & Ganong, 1999). The advice given by one sixteen-year-old stepson reveals just how delicate a balance stepparents must strike:

The stepparent first would be to give room to the children, but still on the same spectrum, keep control basically, keep disciplining but I wouldn't say that you should make them, kinda let them ease into it. You shouldn't jump into something right away which is completely new. (Fine et al., 1999 p. 283)

Parental remarriage presents special challenges to all family members that researchers are just beginning to explore.

Single-Parent Families

At the start of this chapter, we pointed out that approximately one-third of American children are born to single mothers. A substantial number of these mothers, almost half, are of African American descent, and many live in conditions of poverty (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). Children growing up in single-parent families are at greater risk for a broad array of developmental problems, including poor academic achievement, behavior problems, and high-risk behaviors such as substance abuse (Barber & Eccles, 1992; Demo & Acock, 1996; Turner, Irwin, & Millstein, 1991).

Information from several recent studies suggests some of the factors that are associated with more successful child outcomes in single-parent families. One of these is more involved parenting (Avenevoli, Sess, & Steinberg, 1999). In a study of almost two hundred inner-city African American and Latino families, most of whom earned less than \$20,000 per year, adolescent boys from mother-only families showed fewer

problem behaviors when mothers used effective discipline strategies (firm but warm), allowed for the child's growing autonomy, provided a structured family environment, and facilitated the growth of relationships with other male family members (Florsheim, Tolan, & Gorman-Smith, 1998). When parents are too punitive, however, children may not fare so well. In a study of 290 single-parent, poor families, most of whom were African American, children with fewer behavior problems and better school readiness had parents who were less likely to use harsh discipline (Zaslow et al., 1999). Another factor is the involvement of mothers in religion. Among single-parent, poor African American families in the rural south, maternal religiosity was related to use of "no-nonsense" parenting (firm but warm), higher quality of mother-child relationships, and more maternal involvement in school. These latter variables, in turn, were linked to the child's overall successful development in cognitive, social, and behavioral domains (Brody & Flor, 1998).

Studies of single-parent families, as well as families who are undergoing other types of transitions, emphasize that it is important to find ways to promote healthy, positive interactions between parents and children. Effective parents are involved and nurturant and provide firm, steady guidance to their children. When parents are stressed or distracted, or when they are unaware of the importance of parenting style, they are less likely to engage in successful interactions with their children. Assistance with child care, parent training programs, and counseling support for families experiencing stress are some of the societal programs that can be helpful.

FOR YOUR REVIEW

- What are some of the effects of maternal employment on child development? How are mother-child interactions affected?
- What has research shown about the effects of daycare on the cognitive and social development of children?
- What are some important factors to consider in selecting a daycare center?
- What are the effects of divorce on child development? What factors can help children adjust to the divorce of their parents?
- What are some typical characteristics of stepparent-child relationships?
- What factors are associated with successful outcomes in single-parent families?

CHAPTER RECAP

SUMMARY OF DEVELOPMENTAL THEMES

■ **Sociocultural Influence** *How does the sociocultural context influence family processes?*

Many goals parents have for their children's socialization are governed by attitudes the larger society holds, values and beliefs that change over time. Parents will emphasize cooperation, achievement, and sociability, for example, to the extent that the larger social group values these characteristics. Culture also influences who participates in child care and to what extent; in some cultures, for example, fathers and siblings take part in many routine child care tasks. Finally, economic and social trends, such as family size, single parenthood, maternal employment, alternative child care, divorce, and remarriage, can alter family structures. The changes in family dynamics these factors introduce can have far-reaching consequences for child development.

■ **Child's Active Role** *How does the child play an active role in family processes?*

As integral members of the family system, children can have significant effects on interactions with parents, siblings, and others. The dramatic physical and cognitive changes associated with development require parents and siblings to adapt to the rapidly altering capabilities and needs of the child. In general, parents and siblings react to the child's growing independence and competence by displaying less dominance and regulation. In addition, the child's behaviors may influence the parents' choice of discipline style; for example, aggressive, difficult children may elicit more authoritarian parenting and premature children may be at risk for abuse.

■ Interaction Among Domains *How do family processes interact with other domains of development?*

The child's experiences within the family, particularly the type of parenting style to which the child is exposed, can have broad consequences for development. For example, children who experience authoritarian parenting show less advanced moral reasoning, lower self-esteem, poorer relations with peers, poorer

school adjustment, and higher levels of aggression than children who experience authoritative parenting. Similarly, interactions with siblings often provide children with opportunities to develop such social skills as nurturance and assertiveness. Finally, transitions in families can introduce both new opportunities and new stresses that can affect children's emotional, social, and cognitive development.

SUMMARY OF TOPICS

Understanding the Family

- Families play a key role in the child's *socialization*, his or her acquisition of the social knowledge, skills, and attitudes valued by the larger society.
- The demographics of the family have changed in the past thirty years such that more children live in single-parent families, with grandparents, with gay or lesbian parents, or in families in which both parents work outside the home.
- Social scientists conceptualize the family in terms of *systems theory*, in which the reciprocal interactions among various members are recognized.

Parents and Socialization

- Parenting has been categorized according to four general styles: *authoritarian*, *permissive*, *authoritative*, and *uninvolved*. The key dimensions in which these styles differ include the degree of parental warmth and the extent of parental control.
- The child's instrumental competence is generally associated with authoritative parenting.
- Parental warmth is related to a number of desirable outcomes among children, including higher self-esteem, greater empathy, and fewer behavioral problems such as aggression.
- Desirable child outcomes, including fewer delinquent behaviors, are also associated with parental behavioral control, as distinguished from psychological control.
- Parenting strategies can be influenced by the kinds of attributions parents make about children's behaviors, their beliefs in their own efficacy, and their socialization goals.
- Characteristics of the child, such as his or her temperament style or degree of committed compliance, are often related to parenting strategies.
- Problems in parenting, such as coercive cycles and child abuse, illustrate how power assertion can lead to escalating levels of violence within the family.
- Cross-cultural and social class variations in parenting reflect the pressures exerted by larger social forces, such as the degree to which children must contribute to the family's subsistence or the amount of economic stress on parents.

Relationships with Mothers, Fathers, and Siblings

- Even though fathers typically spend less time with their children than do mothers, they behave similarly when they are given the opportunity. One difference is that fathers engage in more physical interactions with their infants and young children than mothers.
- Sensitive, responsive fathering is associated with many desirable outcomes in children in the cognitive and social domains.
- The presence of siblings usually means that parents have less time to spend with later-born children, a factor that may help explain the generally higher achievement of only and first-born children.
- Preschool-age children have both aggressive and prosocial exchanges, and older siblings are more dominant and nurturant than younger siblings. These differences among siblings diminish as they get older.

Families in Transition

- Maternal employment is associated with higher levels of achievement, independence, and self-esteem in girls and less stereotyped gender-role attitudes in both boys and girls.
- More important than the fact of maternal employment is the mother's interaction style and the quality of substitute care the child receives. Mothers who are satisfied with their life circumstances and who display adaptive parenting techniques tend to have well-adjusted children.
- Studies of daycare generally show that children who attend high-quality daycare are more cognitively and socially competent than children who are reared solely at home by their parents. High-quality child care provides the same sensitive, responsive caregiving that good parenting provides.
- Children whose parents divorce evidence socioemotional and academic difficulties, especially boys. Many effects disappear after the first year, particularly among girls.
- Parental separation typically means increased stress on the family, a factor that can lead to ineffective parenting. Successful adjustment to divorce among children is associated with shifts from power-assertive to authoritative parenting, as well as low parental conflict after separation.
- Children, especially adolescents, often have difficulty adjusting to the remarriage of their parents. These difficulties stem, in part, from the reluctance of stepparents to exhibit nurturance or control in their interactions with their stepchildren.