

Key Evidence Messages on Parental Conflict

December 2013

Welcome to the second bulletin from the Relationships Alliance!

The Relationships Alliance comprises organisations working to strengthen couple relationships. Alliance members are Relate, OnePlusOne, The Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships and Marriage Care.

What is the purpose of this bulletin?

This monthly bulletin, produced by OnePlusOne, delivers a set of Key Evidence Messages (derived from recent research) that are of relevance to those interested in strengthening couple relationships including practitioners, policy-makers, commissioners, and Local Authorities to help them make informed and evidence-based decisions.

The Key Evidence Messages represent a summary of high quality and robust research and are drawn from a wide range of sources including recent research papers, latest statistical releases, unpublished literature, and research in progress. The evidence is carefully selected on the basis of its high quality research scope (e.g. reviews of reviews, meta-analyses), research design, methodology, and analyses.

This bulletin and suggested subsequent bulletins

This second bulletin presents Key Evidence Messages in the area of Parental Conflict. It focuses on:

- what parents commonly argue about;
- the impact of conflict between parents for children; and
- why some children are more affected than others

For a more in depth review of this topic, including findings from interventions, there is a book written by OnePlusOne and associates, due to be published by The Policy Press later in January 2014 (1).

The first bulletin, released in September 2013, focused on understanding Relationship Quality. Provisional ideas for future messages include:

- couple relationship interventions;
- relationship difficulties faced by new parents and ways in which these can be alleviated;
- the impacts of parental separation on children and ways in which this can be managed;
- use and attitudes to relationship support;
- factors contributing to relationships stability; and
- the benefits of stable relationships.

Relevance to policy and Practice

The bulletins will close by including implications for research, policy, and practice and a full reference list. Please note that the full journal papers will not be available due to Copyright restrictions.

Get in touch

Research@oneplusone.org.uk

Feedback on these Key Evidence Messages is always welcome, as is interest in hearing about how they may have been used. We would also be like to hear suggestions of relationship topics where Key Evidence Messages would be beneficial.

KEY EVIDENCE MESSAGES – PARENTAL CONFLICT

1. How common is conflict in couple relationships?

Some level of conflict or disagreement within families, including between parents, is a necessary and relatively 'normal' part of life (2). Different types of conflict behaviour, ranging from passing comments to more overt aggression, make accurate estimates of the prevalence of conflict difficult to obtain (1). However, surveys and online pools give some indication of the frequency of couple's disagreements, for example a recent survey found that, on average, some couples argue twice a week and arguments are followed by around two hours of withdrawn silence (3). At the outset, it is important to note that this review, and conflict in this context, does not detail the nature and detrimental effects of domestic violence.

2. What do couples usually argue about?

Data from a randomly sampled, nationwide phone survey of adults in an existing couple relationship reveal that the most frequently reported issue that couples argue about in first marriages is money followed by children. For those previously divorced, the order was reversed, with children rated as the top argument starter and money generally rated next (4). Similarly, in a large qualitative study (involving 176 adults in a romantic relationship), issues around parenthood and raising children were the most frequently mentioned relationship difficulty. Other commonly reported issues included financial difficulties; health and well-being; friends, family and in-laws; and infidelity. The extent to which these issues impacted on a couple's relationship was linked to two main underlying issues: control and communication within the relationship (5). Some research suggests that the surface topics of

many conflicts, may act as a 'smoke-screen', hiding fundamental underlying issues within a relationship (6).

Conflict is an important part of working through these underlying issues. How partners manage conflict, rather than conflict itself, is what matters to the relationship. When partners handle conflict well it tends to stimulate problem-solving discussion and act as a powerful motivator for change (6,7).

As identified above, a frequent topic of conflict for couples is around children and parenting. This is particularly true for those who have separated from the other parent. Conflict regarding children may be characteristic of ex-partners as they struggle to co-parent their child or children (8, 9) and may also feature in new relationships involving step and blended families (10, 11, 12).

Conflict between parents, whether they are apart or still together, can have implications for children and therefore is the particular focus of the current bulletin. It is not simply the presence of conflict per se which affects outcome for children, but rather the characteristics of this conflict and how parents deal with it that seems to matter most (13).

3. What is destructive conflict?

Conflict is associated with relationship distress, physical and mental ill health, as well as divorce (14), however conflict which is managed productively is linked to later relationship happiness (15). What matters it seems, is how conflict is handled and whether couples can ensure that the negative ways of relating with one another do not outweigh positive ways of relating, such as being warm and affectionate (16). Research suggests that couples who relate to each other with warmth, affection and humour (positive emotionality) even during

disagreements, somehow protect themselves from the potentially damaging impact of poor problem solving and communication skills (17).

Without that emotional warmth, destructive behaviours like the 'silent treatment', withdrawing, and failing to resolve arguments can be particularly destructive to relationships (18). Other damaging behaviours include verbal and physical hostility and aggression, and reacting with scorn and contempt. Not only do these ways of dealing with conflict put the relationship at risk, they are also destructive for the children who witness them (19). Note that the specific effects of domestic violence, clearly destructive, is not included in this report.

How conflict is handled is of primary importance when explaining child outcomes. Destructive conflict involves behaviours that evoke negative reactions in children, and is typically characterised by the following features: physical or verbal aggression (20, 21, 22); sulking or the 'silent treatment'(23); getting caught up in highly intense or heated arguments (13) and withdrawing or walking away from an argument (24). Children are particularly upset when they, or issues relevant to them, are the subject of an argument (25, 26). Constructive conflict involves behaviours such as calm discussion and problem-solving support in the context of otherwise destructive conflict behaviours (27, 13).

How conflicts are resolved and how parents relate to each other following the end of a conflict are also important factors in distinguishing between constructive and destructive conflict. If a conflict is completely resolved it may counteract the negative impact of exposure to conflict (28, 29, 30). This 'resolution' needs to be genuine, however; children are not fooled when parents tell them things have been sorted out but fail to relate to each other in positive ways (31, 32).

There is emerging evidence that children can learn behaviours that are helpful in their relationships with others from observing parents handling conflict well (33). Young children exposed to constructive conflict show more pro-social behavior (such as reasoning, problem-solving skills and resolving differences), with their peers a year later, compared to those exposed to destructive conflict (34). However, it is acknowledged that further research is required to expand our understanding of this (1).

4. What impact can conflict between parents have for children?

When parents handle conflict in a destructive (see above) rather than in a more constructive way, it can have negative consequences both for parents and their children. There is an extensive body of evidence, documenting children's reactions to parental conflict. This demonstrates that, in general, children are highly sensitive to parental conflict and their distress is apparent from an early age. For some children, their distress in the face of parental conflict translates into long-term psychological, social and physical difficulties (for reviews see 13, 1).

A common outcome of destructive conflict between parents is the development of emotional or behavioural difficulties for children such as depression or aggression (35, 36). Children's repeated exposure to destructive inter-parental conflict can undermine children's capacity to regulate negative feelings of anger, sadness, or fear (37, 38, 39).

Children's own social relationships can also be affected. Children from high conflict homes are more likely to have poor interpersonal skills, problem-solving abilities and social competence (40, 41, 42). As a result, children and young people in high conflict homes may have difficulties getting on with others, such as parents (43), siblings (44), teachers, peers (45) and, in the longer term, romantic partners (40, 46, 47).

Difficulties can extend into school, with children less able to settle, more likely to have trouble getting on with peers, and less likely to achieve academically (48). One explanation for these difficulties focuses on sleep problems, whereby sleep problems predict difficulties with attention and concentration at school (49). Another explanation centers on children's adjustment at school (50, 51, 52). Children who develop negative representations of the relationship between their parents and with their parents are more likely to develop negative pictures of other relationships, including relationships with peers (35, 53). In addition, the energy, attention and skills required to process hostile peer behaviour means children have limited resources left to manage their responses and stay focused on their school work (52).

Children are also at risk of a range of health difficulties (54, 55), including: digestive problems, fatigue (56), reduced physical growth (57), and headaches and abdominal pains (58). They may also suffer with problems sleeping (59). These problems have been linked to children's physiological responses to inter-parental conflict, such as the body's flight and fight systems (e.g. Autonomic Nervous System) or hormonal mechanisms that manage the release of cortisol, adrenaline and other hormones (60, 61).

5. How does inter-parental conflict affect children?

Conflict between parents affects children in two key ways. First, conflict impacts how couples parent and the quality of relationship between parent and child (i.e. conflict between parents 'spills over' to the parent-child relationship). Parenting may be affected in a number of ways, with parents adopting a range of behaviours, from highly intrusive and hostile parenting through to lax, disinterested parenting, which are associated with negative developmental outcomes for children (62, 63). Both the family systems theory and social learning theory have been used to explain how parenting and the parent-child relationship is affected by inter-parental conflict. The family systems theory suggests that negative feelings and mood in the couple relationship are transferred into the parent-child relationship (64, 65). Meanwhile, the social learning theory proposes that parents represent important role models and that children copy negative ways in which their parents relate to one another (62, 65).

The second key way conflict affects children is through children's own understanding, experience and response to conflict between parents (13). Different theories have been put forward to specify the exact nature in which children's reactions to conflict affect their wellbeing such as the Cognitive-Contextual Framework, Emotional Security Theory, Emotion Specific Theory and Family-wide Perspective (66, 13, 67, 68). Key elements of these theories include: how parents express and manage conflict, how children make sense of and understand inter-parental conflict; their emotional reactions to it, such as fear, anger, or sadness; how conflict affects children's sense of security in their relationship with each parent and the relationship between the parents; how children behave in response to their understanding

and feelings; and the physiological reactions to conflict triggers (67, 13).

Research has also focused on how family relationship patterns are passed from one generation to the next. Until recently it could be argued that shared genes may explain this 'intergenerational transmission' of troubled ways of relating. However, new research using samples of children and parents who are not genetically related provide evidence that this is not the case. Family environmental factors such as inter-parental conflict and harsh parenting practices affect children's psychological development irrespective of whether parents and children are genetically related or not (69).

6. Why are some children affected more than others?

For some children, conflict between parents is a serious source of stress with debilitating implications for their social, emotional and behavioural development (2). A range of factors have been identified that help explain why some children are more vulnerable to the impact of conflict between parents than others.

Boys and girls may experience and react to conflict differently, although with equally deleterious outcomes for both. This relates to differences in how girls and boys react to conflict, socialisation into different roles for boys and girls, and interactions between the sex of the parent and the sex of the child (70). Older children appear to be more vulnerable to the impact of conflict between parents than younger children (71). This may be explained, however, by a number of factors, including, a failure to fully capture the impact on younger children and the interplay of age and developmental stage in affecting how children's respond to conflict. It may also simply mean that older children have become more sensitive to conflict because they have been exposed to it for a longer period of time compared to younger children.

Children's temperaments can also serve to increase or reduce their vulnerability to inter-parental conflict. Children with a difficult temperament are more vulnerable to the impact of conflict between parents (72, 73). Biological factors, including specific genetic susceptibilities and early brain development, may also explain why some children are at greater risk, both short-

term and long-term, for negative outcomes. This appears to result from high levels of inter-parental conflict and discord as well as the perpetuation of conflict-based behaviours across generations (intergenerational transmission; 69). In addition, children's physiological makeup can play an important role in differentiating between children who are at greater risk of poor outcomes. For example, some children's nervous systems help them to regulate their feelings and responses to conflict more effectively than other children (74).

Children's coping strategies can also be important. In general, emotion-focused strategies, that help children to distance themselves from parental conflict, are associated with better outcomes for children than problem-solving strategies that may result in children becoming embroiled in the situation (75).

A warm sibling relationship can buffer children from the impact of a high conflict home (76). However, sibling relationships can also suffer. Complicated alliances and divisions can emerge within families, or one child may protect him or herself by deflecting parental anger towards a sibling (62). There is some evidence that friendships or a relationship with a supportive adult outside of the family can protect children from the impact of a high conflict home. This effect is evident regardless of child gender, ethnicity, temperament or social information-processing patterns (77).

7. How can conflict interventions help?

A range of approaches to supporting parents have been developed and assessed over recent years, though few have focused directly on couple conflict alone. One approach is to support couples in developing their parenting skills in order to prevent or minimise the 'spillover' of conflict into parenting. However, parent education programmes are more effective with parents in conflict if they include a couple relationship component compared to those which deal only with parenting issues (78, 79).

Such couple focused interventions can be targeted at those who are at increased risk of experiencing conflict, such as new or expectant parents (80, 81). As well as those who may already be experiencing conflict, either as intact couples (82, 83) or parents who have separated (9).

Another approach is to prevent couple relationship difficulties emerging in the first place. Programmes which have used early relationship education or marriage preparation report some improvements in relationship outcomes. However, the effect appears to diminish over time (84) and couples may need help in adopting relationship skills in everyday interactions, especially for partners in deprived circumstances or experiencing more complex difficulties (85, 86, 87). Refresher sessions focusing on the retention of the skills would appear to be useful.

Although the extent to which programmes focus on conflict and the stage of intervention vary, a common finding is that couple-based programmes, which include a specific conflict component, can improve aspects of the couple relationship (83). The most effective programmes in improving couple communication and relationship satisfaction, whether targeted at couples early in their relationship or later, include a behavioural skills training element alongside information about couple relationships (80, 81).

Furthermore, research conducted over the past 30 years has conclusively demonstrated that a number of different modalities of couple counselling and couple psychotherapy are also effective at reducing couple conflict and improving communication between couples, and can result in large and clinically significant reductions in relationship distress (88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93).

Conflict interventions have typically focused on the couple relationship and parenting. A more direct way in which children are influenced by inter-parental conflict is through their own interpretations and understanding of the conflict (48). Interventions which help children and young people to understand and cope with their feelings following inter-parental conflict may also be useful, perhaps as a supplementary element to existing couple-based programmes. However there appears to be less development within this area. Also, few of the existing conflict interventions report on the direct impact for children.

A later set of Key Evidence Messages will outline the impact of a range of different interventions supporting couple relationships.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH, POLICY & PRACTICE

These key evidence messages on Parental Conflict have a number of implications for policy-makers and practitioners:

1. Children exposed to conflict between parents are at risk of a range of negative outcomes. This suggests a need for practitioners and policy makers to raise awareness about the impact of interparental conflict on children and to support families at risk of experiencing more destructive styles of conflict.
2. Practitioners and those in regular contact with parents are in a prime position to identify families either at risk of or struggling with conflict.
3. The first step in helping families who are currently, or at risk of, experiencing conflict is to understand why parental conflict matters and how it can impact on children. It is important to remember that it is not the conflict per se which matters but how parents argue.
4. Identifying signs of direct and indirect destructive conflict and whether a family is experiencing problems is key. Practitioners are also well placed to signpost parents to helpful sources of support or deliver more structured interventions themselves.
5. Practitioners' insights into families lives and the wants, needs and challenges faced by particular groups of parents means they can offer valuable information to intervention programme developers.
6. In order to tailor intervention programmes appropriately they can help identify the specific needs and requirements of different groups, especially groups of 'at risk' or hard to reach parents.
7. It is important to acknowledge the promise of some conflict intervention programmes. Such approaches include relationship education/marriage preparation programmes, including ongoing relationship enrichment opportunities (to remind people of those skills), as well as counselling and couple psychotherapy.
8. Whatever the nature of the support provided to couples, practitioners are likely to benefit from training in identifying signs of relationship distress, information on conflict and its impact on the family, and in signposting parents to other forms of support such as counselling or psychotherapy.
9. Strategies to encourage and enable parents to seek help may include: normalising difficulties by making information easily available; reducing the stigma attached to seeking support; raising awareness of different types of support; providing robust evidence on the effectiveness of interventions; and making support more accessible by exploring innovative methods of delivery. Exploring different approaches will also enable programme developers to identify the most cost-effective avenues of support.
10. Policymakers can play a role by making information widely available to parents.
11. Providing funding for research into both the short and long-term effects of interventions is also crucial to identify the most effective approaches to support families.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Reynolds, J., Houlston, C., Coleman, L., & Harold, G. (in press). *Parental conflict: outcomes and interventions for children and families*, Bristol: Policy Press.
2. Harold, G. T., & Leve, L. (2012). Parents as partners: how the parental relationship affects children's psychological development. In A. Balfour, M. Morgan & C. Vincent (Eds.), *How Couple Relationships Shape Our World: Clinical Practice, Research and Policy Perspectives*. London: Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships.
3. OnePoll (2009). Rows. Available from http://www.onepoll.com/op_press_view.php?width=800&height=600&id=563.
4. Stanley, S. M., Markman, H. J., & Whitton, S. W. (2002). Communication, Conflict, and Commitment: Insights on the Foundations of Relationship Success from a National Survey. *Family Process*, 41(4), 659–675.
5. Ramm, J., Coleman, L., Glenn, F., & Mansfield, P. (2010). Relationship difficulties and help-seeking behaviour - Secondary analysis of an existing data-set. London: OnePlusOne.
6. Gutteridge, R. (2003). *Enduring relationships: the evolution of long-lasting marriages*, Keele University, PhD Dissertation.
7. Reynolds, J., with OnePlusOne (2008) *Supporting Couple Relationships: A Sourcebook for Practitioners*. London: OnePlusOne.
8. Harold, G. T., & Murch, M. A. (2005). Inter-parental conflict and children's adaptation to separation and divorce: Implications for family law, policy and practice. *Child and Family Law Quarterly*, 17(2), 185–206.
9. Sigal, A., Sandler, I., Wolchik, S., & Braver, S. (2011). Do parent education programs promote healthy postdivorce parenting? Critical distinctions and a review of the evidence. *Family Court Review*, 49(1), 120–139.
10. Dunn, J., O'Connor, T. G., & Cheng, H. (2005). Children's Responses to Conflict Between Their Different Parents: Mothers, Stepfathers, Nonresident Fathers, and Nonresident Stepmothers. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 34(2), 223–234.
11. Gelatt, V. A., Adler-Baeder, F., & Seeley, J. R. (2010). An Interactive Web-Based Program for Stepfamilies: Development and Evaluation of Efficacy. *Family Relations*, 59(5), 572–586.
12. Portrie, T., & Hill, N. R. (2005). Blended Families: A Critical Review of the Current Research. *The Family Journal*, 13(4), 445–451.

13. Cummings, E. M., & Davies, P. T. (2010). *Marital Conflict and Children: An Emotional Security Perspective*. New York: The Guilford Press.
14. Clements, M. L., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2004). Before they said 'I do': discriminating among marital outcomes over 13 years based on premarital data. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(3), 613-626.
15. Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. H. (1999). Conflict in marriage: Implications for working with couples. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 50, 47-77.
16. Driver, J., Tabares, A., Shapiro, A., Young Nahm, E., & Gottman, J. (2003) Interaction patterns in marital success and failure: Gottman Laboratory Studies. In F. Walsh (Ed.) *Normal Family Processes (3rd Edition): Growing Diversity and Complexity*, 493-513. New York: The Guildford Press.
17. Bradbury, T. N., & Karney, B. R. (2004). Understanding and Altering the Longitudinal Course of Marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(4), 862-879.
18. Birditt, K. S., Brown, E., Orbuch, T. L., & McIlvane, J. M. (2010). Marital Conflict Behaviors and Implications for Divorce Over 16 Years. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(5), 1188-1204.
19. Goeke-Morey, M. C., Cummings, E. M., Harold, G. T., & Shelton, K. H. (2003). Categories and continua of destructive and constructive marital conflict tactics from the perspective of U.S. and Welsh children. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 17(3), 327-338.
20. Cummings, E. M., Davies, P. T., & Campbell, S. B. (2000). *Developmental psychopathy and family process. Theory, research and clinical implications*. New York: The Guildford Press.
21. Davies, P. T., Harold, G., Goeke-Morey, M. C., Marcie, C., & Cummings, E. M. (2002). Child emotional security and interpersonal conflict. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 67(3), 1-115.
22. Kitzmann, K. M., Gaylord, N. K., Holt, A. R., & Kenny, E. D. (2003). Child witnesses to domestic violence: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 71(2), 339-352.
23. Ablow, J. C., & Measelle, J. R. (2009). Capturing young children's perceptions of marital conflict. In M. C. Schulz, M. Kline Pruett., P. K. Kerig, & R. D. Parke (Eds.). *Strengthening couple relationships for optimal child development: lessons from research and intervention*. Washington DC: American Psychological Association.
24. Sturge-Apple, M., Davies, P. T., & Cummings, E. M. (2006). Hostility and withdrawal in marital conflict: effects on parental emotional unavailability and inconsistent discipline. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 13(4), 227-238.
25. Amato, P. R. (2005). The impact of family formation change on the cognitive, social, and emotional well-being of the next generation. *Future Child*, 15(2), 75-96.
26. Shelton, K. H., & Harold, G. T. (2007). Marital Conflict and Children's Adjustment: The Mediating and Moderating Role of Children's Coping Strategies. *Social Development*, 16(3), 497-512.
27. Cummings, E. M., Goeke-Morey, M. C., & Papp, L. M. (2003). Children's responses to everyday marital conflict tactics in the home. *Child Development*, 74, 1918-1929.
28. Cummings, E. M., Vogel, D., Cummings, J. S., & El Sheikh, M. (1989). Children's responses to different forms of expression of anger between adults. *Child Development*, 60, 1392-1404

29. Cummings, E. M., Ballard, M., El Sheikh, M. (1991). Responses of children and adolescents to interadult anger as a function of gender, age, and mode of expression. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 37, 543-560.
30. Goeke-Morey, M. C., Cummings, E. M., & Papp, L. M. (2007). Children and marital conflict resolution: Implications for emotional security and adjustment. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21(4), 744-753.
31. Winter, M. A., Davies, P. T., Hightower, A. D., & Meyer, S. (2006). Relations among family adversity, caregiver communications, and children's family representations. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20, 348-351.
32. Morton, J. B., Trehub, S. E., & Zelazo, P. D. (2003). Sources of inflexibility in 6-year-olds' understanding of emotion in speech. *Child Development*, 74, 1857-1686.
33. Cummings, E. M., Goeke-Morey, M. C., & Papp, L. M. (2004). Everyday marital conflicts and child aggression, *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 32, 191-202.
34. McCoy, K., Cummings, E. M., & Davies, P. T. (2009). Constructive and destructive marital conflict, emotional security and children's prosocial behavior. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 50(3), 270-279.
35. Grych, J. H., Harold, G. T., & Miles, C. J. (2003). A prospective investigation of appraisals as mediators of the link between interparental conflict and child adjustment. *Child Development*, 74(4), 1176-1193.
36. Cummings, E. M., Schermerhorn, A. C., Davies, P. T., Goeke-Morey, M. C., & Cummings, J. S. (2006). Interparental discord and child adjustment: Prospective investigations of emotional security as an explanatory mechanism, *Child Development*, 77(1), 132-152.
37. Buehler, C., Lange, G., & Franck, K. L. (2007). Adolescents' Cognitive and Emotional Responses to Marital Hostility. *Child Development*, 78(3), 775-789.
38. Harold, G. T., Shelton, K. H., Goeke-Morey, M. C., & Cummings, E. M. (2004). Marital conflict, child emotional security about family relationships and child adjustment. *Social Development*, 13(3), 350-376.
39. Siffert, A., & Schwarz, B. (2011). Parental conflict resolution styles and children's adjustment: children's appraisals and emotion regulation as mediators. *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 172(1), 21-39.
40. Du Rocher Schudlich, T. D., Shamir, H., & Cummings, E. M. (2004). Marital conflict, children's representations of family relationships, and children's dispositions towards peer conflict strategies. *Social development*, 13, 171-191.
41. Lindsey, E. W., Coldwell, M. J., Frabutt, J. M., & MacKinnon-Lewis, C. (2006). Family conflict in divorced and non-divorced families: possible consequences for boys' mutual friendship and friendship quality. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 23(1), 45-63.
42. Finger, B., Eiden, R. D., Edwards, E. P., Leonard, K. E., & Kachadourian, L. (2010). Marital aggression and child peer competence: a comparison of three conceptual models. *Personal Relationships*, 17, 357-376.
43. Benson, M., Buehler, C., & Gerard, J. (2008). Interparental hostility and early adolescent problem behaviour spillover via maternal acceptance, harshness, inconsistency, and intrusiveness. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 28(3), 428-454.
44. Stocker, C. M., & Youngblade, L. (1999). Marital conflict and parental hostility: Links with children's sibling and peer relationships. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 13, 598-609.

45. Parke, R., Kim, M., Flyr, M., McDowel, D. J., Simplinks, S., Killian, C., & Wild, M. (2001). Managing marital conflict: links with children's peer relationships. In J. H. Grych & F. D. Fincham (Eds.) *Interparental Conflict and Child Development: Theory, Research and Application*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
46. Kinsfogel, K., & Grych, J. H. (2004). Interparental conflict and adolescent dating relationships: Integrating cognitive, emotional, and peer influences, *Journal of Family Psychology*, Vol. 18(3), 505-515.
47. Cui, M., & Fincham, F. D. (2010). The differential effects of parental divorce and marital conflict on young adult romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships*, 17(3), 331-343.
48. Harold, G. T., Aitken, J. J., & Shelton, K. H. (2007). Inter-parental conflict and children's academic attainment: a longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 48(12), 1223-1232.
49. El Sheikh, M., Buckhalt, J. A., Cummings, E. M., & Kellar, P. (2007). Sleep disruptions and emotional insecurity are pathways of risk for children, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 48(1), 88-96.
50. Davies, P. T., Woitach, M. J., Winter, M. A., and Cummings, E. M. (2008). Children's insecure representations of the interparental relationship and their school adjustment: the mediating role of attention difficulties. *Child Development*, 68, 571-591.
51. Sturge-Apple, M., Davies, P. T., Winter, M. A., Cummings, E. M., & Schermerhorn, A. C. (2008). Interparental conflict and children's school performance: the explanatory role of children's internal representations of interparental and parent-child relationships. *Developmental Psychology*, 44(6), 1678-1690.
52. Bascoe, S. M., Davies, P. T., Sturge-Apple, M. L., & Cummings, E. M. (2009). Children's representations of family relationships, peer information processing, and school adjustment. *Development Psychology*, 45(6), 1740-1751.
53. Schermerhorn, A. C., Cummings, E. M., & Davies, P. T. (2008). Children's representations of multiple family relationships: organisational structure and development in early childhood. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 22, 89-101.
54. Troxel, W. M., & Matthews, K. A. (2004). What are the costs of marital conflict and dissolution to children's physical health? *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 7(1), 29-57.
55. El-Sheikh, M., Cummings, E. M., Kouros, C. D., Elmore-Staton, L., & Buckhalt, J. (2008). Marital psychological and physical aggression and children's mental and physical health: direct, mediated, and moderated effects. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 76(1), 138-148.
56. El-Sheikh, M., Harger, J., & Whitson, S. M. (2001). Exposure to interparental conflict and children's adjustment and physical health: the moderating role of vagal tone, *Child Development*, 72(6), 1617-1636.
57. Montgomery, S. M., Bartley, M. J., & Wilkinson, R. G. (1997). Family conflict and slow growth. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*. 77(4), 326-330.
58. Stiles, M. (2002). Witnessing domestic violence: the effect on children. *American Family Physician*, 66(11), 2052-2067.
59. Mannering, A. M., Harold, G. T., Leve, L. D., Shelton, K. H., Shaw, D. S., Conger, R. D., ... Reiss, D. (2011). Longitudinal associations between marital instability and child sleep problems across infancy and toddlerhood in adoptive families. *Child Development*, 82(4), 1252-1266.

60. Katz, F. (2001). Physiological processes as mediators of the impact of marital conflict. In J. H. Grych & F. D. Fincham (Eds.) *Interparental Conflict and Child Development. Theory, Research and Application*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
61. El-Sheikh, M., Kouros, C. D., Erath, S., Cummings, E. M., Keller, P., & Stanton, L. (2009). Marital conflict and children's externalising behaviour: pathways involving interactions between parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous system activity. *Monograph of Society for Research into Child Development*, 74(1), vii-79.
62. Cox, M., Paley, B., & Harter, K. (2001). Interparental conflict and parent-child relationships. In J. H. Grych, & F.D. Fincham (Eds.) *Interparental Conflict and Child Development: Theory, Research and Application*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
63. Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J., Mangelsdorf, S. C., Brown, G. L., & Szewczyk Sokolowski, M. (2007). Goodness-of-fit in family context: infant temperament, marital quality, and early coparenting behavior. *Infant Behavior and Development*, 30(1), 82-96.
64. Erel, O., & Burman, B. (1995). Interrelatedness of marital relations and parent-child relations: a meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 118(1), 108-132.
65. Margolin, G., Oliver, P. H., & Medina, A. M. (2001). Conceptual issues in understanding the relation between interparental conflict and child adjustment: integrating developmental psychopathology and risk/resilience perspectives. In J. H. Grych, & F.D. Fincham (Eds.) *Interparental Conflict and Child Development: Theory, Research and Application*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
66. Crockenberg, S., & Langrock, A. (2001). The role of specific emotions in children's responses to interparental conflict: a test of the model. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15(2), 163-182.
67. Grych, J. H., & Fincham, F. D. (Eds.) *Interparental Conflict and Child Development: Theory, Research and Application*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
68. Harold, G. T., & Conger, R. D. (1997). Marital conflict and adolescent distress: the role of adolescent awareness. *Child Development*, 68(2), 333-350.
69. Harold, G. T., Elam, K. K., Lewis, G., Rice, F., & Thapar, A. (2012). Interparental conflict, parent psychopathology, hostile parenting, and child antisocial behavior: examining the role of maternal versus paternal influences using a novel genetically sensitive research design. *Development and Psychopathology*, 24(04), 1283-1295.
70. Davies, P. T., & Lindsay, L. L. (2001). Does gender moderate the effects of marital conflict on children? In J. H. Grych, & F.D. Fincham (Eds.) *Interparental Conflict and Child Development: Theory, Research and Application*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
71. Rhoades, K. A. (2008). Children's Responses to Interparental Conflict: A Meta-Analysis of Their Associations With Child Adjustment. *Child Development*, 79(6), 1942-1956.
72. Ramos, M. C., Guerin, D. W., Gottfried, A. W., Bathurst, K., & Oliver, P. H. (2005). Family conflict and children's behaviour problems: the moderating role of child temperament. *Structural Equation Modelling*, 12, 278-298.
73. Whiteside-Mansell, L.
74. El-Sheikh, M. & Erath, S. A. (2011). Family conflict, autonomic nervous system functioning, and child adaptation: state of the science and future directions. *Development and Psychopathology*, 23(2), 703-721.

75. Shelton, K. H., & Harold, G. T. (2008). Pathways Between Interparental Conflict and Adolescent Psychological Adjustment: Bridging Links Through Children's Cognitive Appraisals and Coping Strategies. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 28(4), 555-582.
76. Grass et al.
77. Criss, M. M., Pettit, G. S., Bates, J., Dodge, K. A., & Lapp, A. (2002). Family adversity, positive peer relationships and children's externalising behaviour: a longitudinal perspective on risk and resilience. *Child Development*, 73(4), 1220-1237.
78. Webster-Stratton and Reid
79. Cowan, C. P., Cowan, P. A., & Barry, J. (2011). Couples' groups for parents of preschoolers: ten-year outcomes of a randomized trial. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 25(2), 240-250.
80. Petch, J., & Halford, W. K. (2008). Psycho-education to enhance couples' transition to parenthood. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 28(7), 1125-1137.
81. Pinquart, M., & Teubert, D. (2010). Effects of parenting education with expectant and new parents: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 24(3), 316-327.
82. Cummings, E. M., Faircloth, W. B., Mitchell, P. M., Cummings, J. S., & Schermerhorn, A. C. (2008). Evaluating a brief prevention program for improving marital conflict in community families. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 22(2), 193-202.
83. Faircloth, W. B., Schermerhorn, A. C., Mitchell, P. M., Cummings, J. S., & Cummings, E. M. (2011). Testing the long-term efficacy of a prevention program for improving marital conflict in community families. *Journal of Applied Marital Psychology*, 32(4), 189-197.
85. Knutson, L., & Olson, D. H. (2003). Effectiveness of PREPARE program with premarital couples in community settings. *Marriage and Family*, 6(4), 529-546.
86. Carroll, J. S., Doherty, W. J. (2003). Evaluating the effectiveness of premarital prevention programs: a meta-analytic review of outcome research. *Family Relations*, 52, 105-118.
87. Blanchard, V. L., Hawkins, A. J., Baldwin, S. A., & Fawcett, E. B. (2009). Investigating the effects of marriage and relationship education on couples' communication skills: A meta-analytic study. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 23(2), 203-214.
88. Fawcett, E. B., Hawkins, A. J., Blanchard, V. L., & Carroll, J. S. (2010). Do premarital education programs really work? A meta-analytic study. *Family Relations*, 59(3), 232-239.
89. Christensen, A., Atkins, D. C., Berns, S., Wheeler, J., Baucom, D. H., & Simpson, L. E. (2004). Traditional Versus Integrative Behavioral Couple Therapy for Significantly and Chronically Distressed Married Couples. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 72(2), 176-191
90. Crowe, M. & Ridley, J. (2000) *Therapy with Couples: a Behavioural-Systems Approach to Marital and Sexual Problems*, 2nd edition. Oxford: Blackwell.
91. Emmelkamp, P.M.G., Van der Helm, M. Macgillavry, D., & Van Zanten, B. (1984). Marital therapy with clinically distressed couples: a comparative evaluation of system-theoretic, contingency contracting and communication skill

92. Leff, J., Vearnals, S., & Brewin, C., et al. (2000). Randomised controlled trial of antidepressants versus couple therapy in the treatment and maintenance of people with depression living with a partner: clinical outcome and costs. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 177, 1123-1130.

93. Snyder, D., & Halford, W. (2012). Evidence-based couple therapy: current status and future directions. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 34(3), 229-249.

