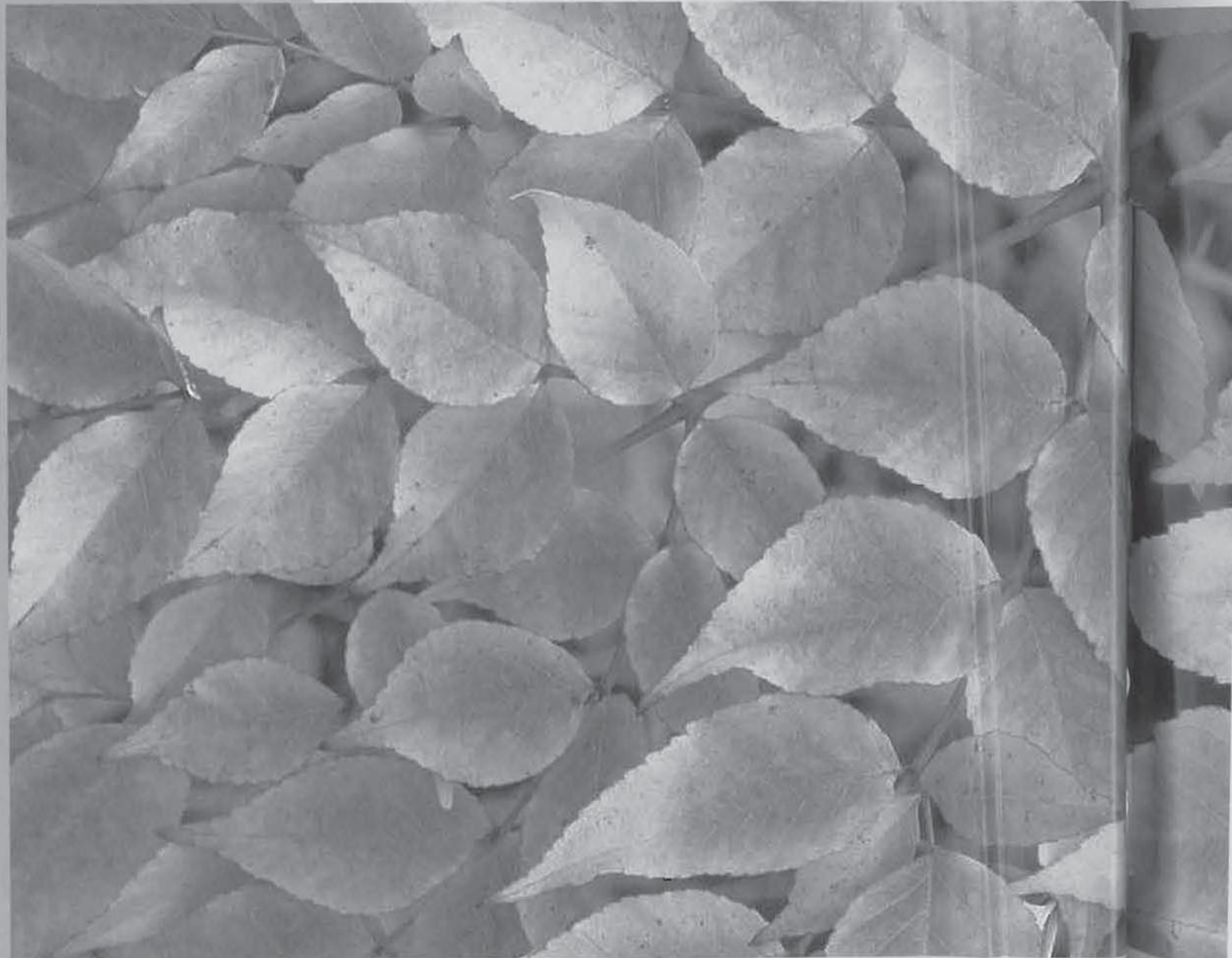


FOURTH
EDITION

Development Through the Lifespan

Laura E. Berk

Illinois State University



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Dedication

In loving memory of my parents,

Sofie Lentschner Eisenberg and Philip Vernon Eisenberg

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Erikson's Theory: Industry versus Inferiority

According to Erikson (1950), children whose previous experiences have been positive enter middle childhood prepared to redirect their energies from the make-believe of early childhood into realistic accomplishment. Erikson believed that the combination of adult expectations and children's drive toward mastery sets the stage for the psychological conflict of middle childhood, **industry versus inferiority**, which is resolved positively when children develop a sense of competence at useful skills and tasks. In cultures everywhere, adults respond to children's improved physical and cognitive capacities by making new demands, and children are ready to benefit from those challenges.

In industrialized nations, the beginning of formal schooling marks the transition to middle childhood. With it comes literacy training, which prepares children for a vast array of specialized careers. In school, children discover their own and others' unique capacities, learn the value of division of labor, and develop a sense of moral commitment and responsibility. The danger at this stage is **inferiority**, reflected in the pessimism of children who have little confidence in their ability to do things well. This sense of inadequacy can develop when family life has not prepared children for school life or when teachers and peers destroy children's feelings of competence and mastery with negative responses.

Erikson's sense of industry combines several developments of middle childhood: a positive but realistic self-concept, pride in accomplishment, moral responsibility, and cooperative participation with age-mates. How do these aspects of self and social relationships change over the school years?



The industriousness of middle childhood involves mastery of useful skills and tasks. As these young musicians participate in their school orchestra, they become more aware of one another's unique capacities and come to view themselves as responsible, capable, and cooperative.

Self-Understanding

In middle childhood, children become able to describe themselves in terms of psychological traits, to compare their own characteristics with those of their peers, and to speculate about the causes of their strengths and weaknesses. These transformations in self-understanding have a major impact on children's self-esteem.

Self-Concept

During the school years, children refine their *me-self*, or self-concept, organizing their observations of behaviors and internal states into general dispositions, with a major change taking place between ages 8 and 11. Consider the following self-description by an 11-year-old:

My name is A. I'm a human being. I'm a girl. I'm a truthful person. I'm not pretty. I do so-so in my studies. I'm a very good cellist. I'm a very good pianist. I'm a little bit tall for my age. I like several boys. I like several girls. I'm old-fashioned. I play tennis. I am a very good swimmer. I try to be helpful. I'm always ready to be friends with anybody. Mostly I'm good, but I lose my temper. I'm not well-liked by some girls and boys. I don't know if I'm liked by boys or not. (Montemayor & Eisen, 1977, pp. 317–318)

Instead of specific behaviors, this child emphasizes competencies: "I'm a very good cellist" (Damon & Hart, 1988). She also clearly describes her personality, mentioning both positive and negative traits: "truthful" but short-tempered, "a good cellist [and] pianist" but only "so-so in my studies." Older school-age children are far less likely than younger children to describe themselves in extreme, all-or-none ways (Harter, 2003).

These qualified self-descriptions result from school-age children's frequent **social comparisons**—judgments of their appearance, abilities, and behavior in relation to those of others. For example, Joey observed that he was better than his peers at spelling but not so good at social studies. Whereas 4- to 6-year-olds can compare their own performance to that of one peer, older children can compare multiple individuals, including themselves (Butler, 1998).

What factors are responsible for revisions in self-concept during middle childhood? Cognitive development affects the changing *structure* of the self. School-age children, as we saw in Chapter 9, can better coordinate several aspects of a situation when they reason about their physical world. Similarly, in the social realm, they combine typical experiences and behaviors into psychological dispositions, blend positive and negative characteristics, and compare their own characteristics with those of many other peers (Harter, 1999, 2003).

The changing *content* of self-concept is a product of both cognitive capacities and feedback from others. Sociologist George Herbert Mead (1934) proposed that a well-organized psychological self emerges when the child's I-self adopts a view of the me-self that resembles others' attitudes toward the child.

Mead's ideas indicate that *perspective-taking skills*—in particular, an improved ability to infer what other people are thinking—are crucial for the development of a self-concept based on personality traits. School-age children become better at "reading" others' messages and incorporating these into their self-definitions. As they internalize others' expectations, children form an *ideal self* that they use to evaluate their *real self*. As we will see, a large discrepancy between the two can undermine self-esteem, leading to sadness, hopelessness, and depression.

In middle childhood, as children enter a wider range of settings in school and community, they look to more people for information about themselves. Their self-descriptions now include frequent reference to social groups: "I'm a Boy Scout, a paperboy, and a Prairie City soccer player," said Joey. And as children move into adolescence, although parents and other adults remain influential, self-concept is increasingly vested in feedback from close friends (Oosterwegel & Oppenheimer, 1993).

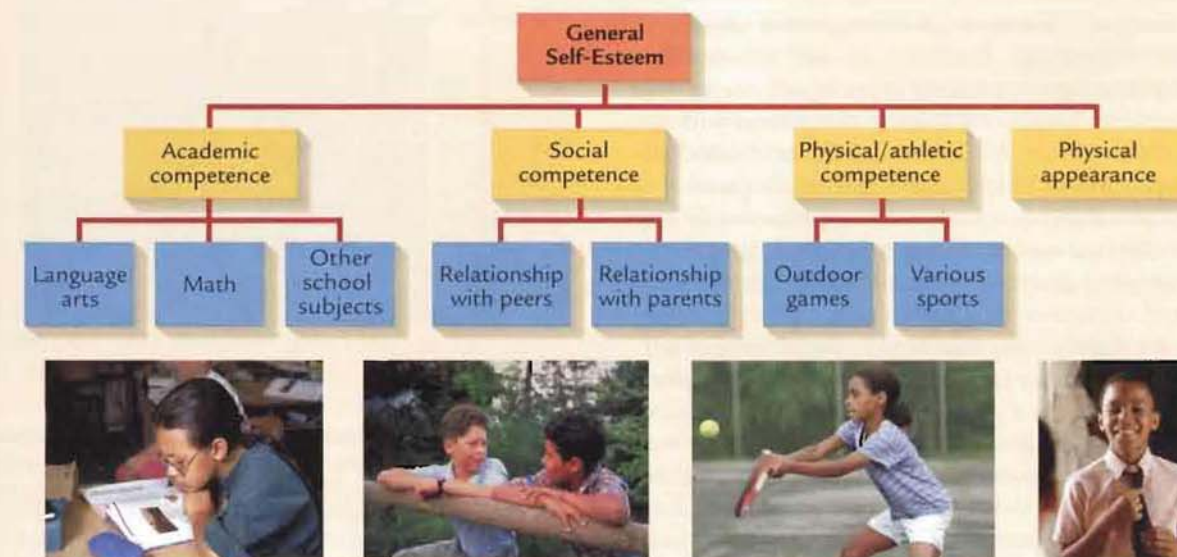
But recall that the content of self-concept varies from culture to culture. In earlier chapters, we noted that Asian parents stress harmonious interdependence, whereas Western parents stress independence and self-assertion. These differences are also evident in many subcultures in Western nations. In one study, researchers gathered children's self-descriptions in a Puerto Rican fishing village and an American small town (Damon, 1988). Whereas the Puerto Rican children often described themselves as "polite," "respectful," and "obedient," the American small-town children mostly mentioned individual interests, preferences, and skills.

Development of Self-Esteem

Recall that most preschoolers have extremely high self-esteem. But as children enter school and receive much more feedback about how well they perform compared with their peers, self-esteem differentiates, and it also adjusts to a more realistic level.

■ **A Hierarchically Structured Self-Esteem.** Researchers have asked children to indicate the extent to which statements such as, "I am good at homework" or "I'm usually the one chosen for games," are true of themselves. By age 6 to 7, children have formed at least four broad self-evaluations—academic competence, social competence, physical/athletic competence, and physical appearance. Within these are more refined categories that become increasingly distinct with age (Marsh, 1990; Marsh & Ayotte, 2003; Van den Bergh & De Ryck, 2003). Furthermore, the capacity to view the self in terms of stable dispositions permits school-age children to combine their separate self-evaluations into a general psychological image of themselves—an overall sense of self-esteem (Harter, 1999, 2003). As a result, self-esteem takes on the hierarchical structure shown in Figure 10.1.

Children attach greater importance to certain self-evaluations than to others. Although individual differences exist, during childhood and adolescence, perceived physical appearance correlates more strongly with overall self-worth than any other self-esteem factor (Hymel et al., 1999; Klomsten, Skaalvik, & Espnes, 2004). Emphasis on appearance, in the media and in society, has major implications for young people's overall satisfaction with themselves.



■ **FIGURE 10.1 Hierarchical structure of self-esteem in the mid-elementary school years.** From their experiences in different settings, children form at least four separate self-esteems: academic competence, social competence, physical/athletic competence, and physical appearance. These differentiate into additional self-evaluations and combine to form a general sense of self-esteem. (Photo credits: Far left: © Mary Kate Denny/PhotoEdit; Middle left: © Myrleen Ferguson Cate/PhotoEdit; Middle right: © Mitch Wojnarowicz/The Image Works; Far right: Charles Gupton/Stock Boston, LLC)

Changes in Level of Self-Esteem. Self-esteem declines during the first few years of elementary school as children evaluate themselves in various areas (Marsh, Craven, & Debus, 1998; Wigfield et al., 1997). Typically, the drop is not great enough to be harmful. Most (but not all) children appraise their characteristics and competencies realistically while maintaining an attitude of self-respect. Then, from fourth grade on, self-esteem rises for the majority of young people, who feel especially good about their peer relationships and athletic capabilities (Cole et al., 2001; Twenge & Campbell, 2001).

Influences on Self-Esteem

From middle childhood on, individual differences in self-esteem become increasingly stable (Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2003). And positive relationships emerge between self-esteem, valuing of various activities, and success at those activities. Academic self-esteem predicts how important, useful, and enjoyable children judge school subjects to be, their willingness to try hard, and their achievement (Jacobs et al., 2002; Valentine, DuBois, & Cooper, 2004). In one study, school-age children's academic self-worth was associated with educational attainment in early adulthood (Guay, La Rose, & Boivin, 2004). Children with high social self-esteem are consistently better-liked by classmates (Harter, 1999). And as we saw in Chapter 9, sense of athletic competence is positively associated with investment and performance in sports.

A profile of low self-esteem in all areas is linked to anxiety, depression, and increasing antisocial behavior (DuBois et al., 1999; Robins et al., 2001). What social influences might lead self-esteem to be high for some children and low for others?

Culture. Cultural forces profoundly affect self-esteem. An especially strong emphasis on social comparison in school may explain why Chinese and Japanese children, despite their higher academic achievement, score lower in self-esteem than North American children—a difference that widens with age (Hawkins, 1994; Twenge & Crocker, 2002). In Asian classrooms, competition is tough, and achievement pressure is high. At the same time, because their culture values social harmony, Asian children tend to be reserved about judging themselves positively but generous in their praise of others (Falbo et al., 1997).

Girls score slightly lower than boys in overall sense of self-worth, partly because they feel less confident about their physical appearance, academic competence, and athletic abilities (Marsh & Ayotte, 2003; Young & Mroczek, 2003). Girls may think less well of themselves because they internalize negative cultural messages.

Compared with their Caucasian agemates, African-American children tend to have slightly higher self-esteem, possibly because of warm, extended families and a strong sense of ethnic pride (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000). Finally, children and adolescents who attend schools or live in neighborhoods where their SES and ethnic groups are well-represented feel a

stronger sense of belonging and have fewer self-esteem problems (Gray-Little & Carels, 1997).

Child-Rearing Practices. Children whose parents use an *authoritative* child-rearing style (see Chapter 8) feel especially good about themselves (Carlson, Uppal, & Prosser, 2000; Feiring & Taska, 1996). Warm, positive parenting lets children know that they are accepted as competent and worthwhile. And firm but appropriate expectations, backed up with explanations, seem to help children evaluate their own behavior against reasonable standards.

Controlling parents—those who too often help or make decisions for their child—communicate a sense of inadequacy to children that is linked to low self-esteem, as are repeated disapproval and parental insults (Kernis, 2002; Pomerantz & Eaton, 2000). In contrast, overindulgent parenting is correlated with unrealistically high self-esteem, which also undermines development. These children tend to lash out at challenges to their overblown self-images and to have adjustment problems, including meanness and aggression (Hughes, Cavell, & Grossman, 1997).

North American cultural values have increasingly emphasized a focus on the self that may lead parents to indulge children and boost their self-esteem too much. As Figure 10.2 illustrates, the self-esteem of American young people has risen sharply over the past few decades—a period in which much popular parenting literature advised promoting children's self-esteem (Twenge & Campbell, 2001). Yet compared with

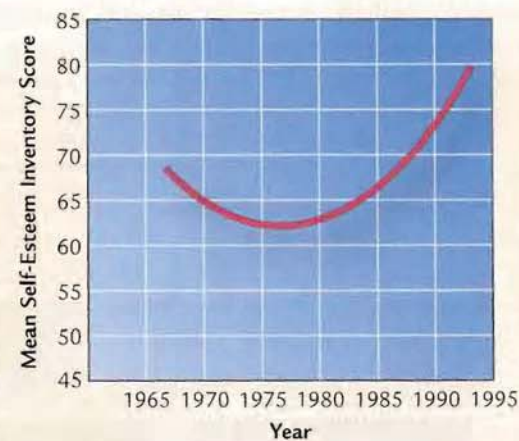


FIGURE 10.2 Cohort effects for U.S. junior high school students' self-esteem from 1965 to 1995. Self-esteem dropped slightly during the late 1960s and 1970s as the divorce rate skyrocketed, schools became larger and more impersonal, and poverty increased. From 1980 on, a period of considerable public focus on boosting children's self-esteem, average self-esteem rose sharply. Self-esteem scores for younger and older students showed a similar rise. (From J. M. Twenge & W. K. Campbell, 2001, "Age and Birth Cohort Differences in Self-Esteem: A Cross-Temporal Meta-Analysis," *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 5, p. 337. Adapted by permission.)

previous generations, American youths are achieving less well and displaying more antisocial behavior and other adjustment problems (Berk, 2005). Research confirms that children do not benefit from compliments ("You're terrific") that have no basis in real attainment (Damon, 1995). Rather, the best way to foster a positive, secure self-image is to encourage children to strive for worthwhile goals. Over time, a bidirectional relationship emerges: Achievement fosters self-esteem, and self-esteem, in turn, promotes good performance (Guay, Marsh, & Boivin, 2003).

What can adults do to promote, and to avoid undermining, this mutually supportive relationship between motivation and self-esteem? Some answers come from research on the precise content of adults' messages to children in achievement situations.

Making Achievement-Related Attributions. *Attributions* are our common, everyday explanations for the causes of behavior—our answers to the question "Why did I [or another person] do that?" Notice how Joey, in talking about the spelling bee at the beginning of this chapter, attributes his disappointing performance to *luck* (Belinda got all the easy words) and his usual success to *ability* (he *knows* he's a better speller than Belinda). Joey also appreciates that *effort* matters: "I knocked myself out studying those spelling lists."

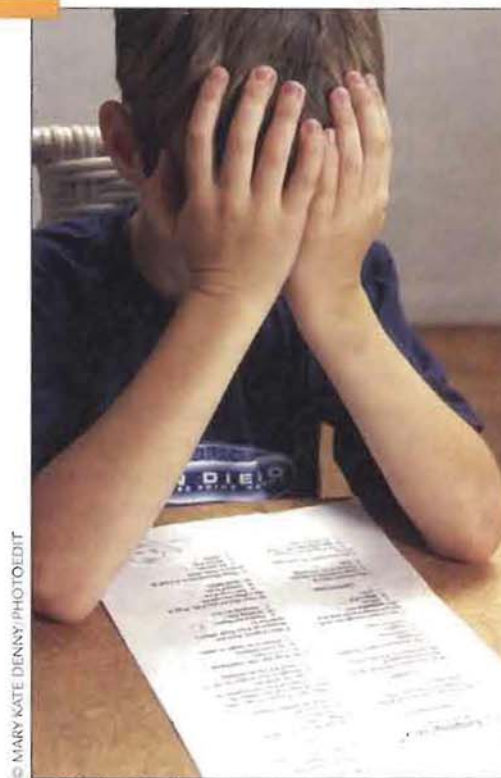
Cognitive development permits school-age children to separate all these variables in explaining performance (Dweck, 2002). Those who are high in academic self-esteem and motivation make **mastery-oriented attributions**, crediting their successes to ability—a characteristic they can improve through trying hard and can count on when facing new challenges. And they attribute failure to factors that can be changed or controlled, such as insufficient effort or a very difficult task (Heyman & Dweck, 1998). So whether these children succeed or fail, they take an industrious, persistent approach to learning.

In contrast, children who develop **learned helplessness** attribute their failures, not their successes, to ability. When they succeed, they conclude that external factors, such as luck, are responsible. Unlike their mastery-oriented counterparts, they believe that ability is fixed and cannot be changed by trying hard (Cain & Dweck, 1995). When a task is difficult, these children experience an anxious loss of control—in Erikson's terms, a pervasive sense of inferiority. They give up without really trying.

Over time, the ability of learned-helpless children no longer predicts their performance. Because they fail to make the connection between effort and success, these children do not develop the metacognitive and self-regulatory skills necessary for high achievement (see Chapter 9). Lack of effective learning strategies, reduced persistence, and a sense of loss of control sustain one another in a vicious cycle (Pomerantz & Saxon, 2001).

Influences on Achievement-Related Attributions. What accounts for the different attributions of mastery-oriented and

Repeated negative evaluations of their ability can cause children to develop learned helplessness—the belief that ability cannot be improved by trying hard. When faced with a challenging task, this learned-helpless child is overwhelmed by negative thoughts and anxiety.



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learned-helpless children? Adult communication plays a key role. Parents of children with a learned-helpless style tend to set unusually high standards while believing that their child is not very capable and must work harder than others to succeed. When these children fail, the parent might say, "You can't do that, can you? It's OK if you quit" (Hokoda & Fincham, 1995). When the child succeeds, the parent might give feedback that evaluates the child's traits ("You're so smart"). Trait statements promote a fixed view of ability, leading children to question their competence in the face of setbacks and to retreat from challenge (Mueller & Dweck, 1998).

Teachers' messages also affect children's attributions. Teachers who are caring and helpful and emphasize learning over getting good grades tend to have mastery-oriented students (Anderman et al., 2001). In a study of 1,600 third to eighth graders, students who viewed their teachers as providing positive, supportive learning conditions worked harder and participated more in class—factors that predicted high achievement, which sustained children's belief in the role of effort. In contrast, students with unsupportive teachers regarded their performance as externally controlled (by their teachers or by luck). This attitude predicted withdrawal from learning activities and declining achievement—outcomes that led children to doubt their ability (Skinner, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Connell, 1998).

For some children, performance is especially likely to be undermined by adult feedback. Girls tend to receive messages from teachers and parents that their ability is at fault when

they do not do well, and negative stereotypes (for example, that girls are weak at math) undermine their interest and performance (Bleeker & Jacobs, 2004; Cole et al., 1999). Despite their higher achievement, girls more often than boys blame poor performance on ability. And as Chapter 9 revealed, low-SES ethnic minority students often receive less favorable feedback from teachers, especially when assigned to homogeneous groups of poorly achieving students—conditions that result in a drop in academic self-esteem and achievement.

Fostering a Mastery-Oriented Approach. Attribution research suggests that well-intended messages from adults sometimes undermine children's competence. An intervention called *attribution retraining* encourages learned-helpless children to believe that they can overcome failure by exerting more effort. Most often, children are first given tasks that are hard enough that they will experience some failure, followed by repeated feedback that helps them revise their attributions: "You can do it if you try harder." After they succeed, children receive additional feedback—"You're really good at this" or "You really tried hard on that one"—so that they view their success as due to both ability and effort, not to chance. Another approach is to encourage low-effort children to focus less on grades and more on mastering a task for its own sake (Hilt, 2004; Horner & Gaither, 2004).

Attribution retraining is best begun early, before children's views of themselves become hard to change. An even better approach is to prevent learned helplessness, using the strategies summarized in Applying What We Know below.

Ask Yourself

Review

How does level of self-esteem change in middle childhood, and what accounts for these changes?

Apply

Should parents promote children's self-esteem by telling them they're "smart" or "wonderful"? Is it harmful if children do not feel good about everything they do? Why or why not?

Connect

What cognitive changes, described in Chapter 9, support the transition to a self-concept emphasizing competencies, personality traits, and social comparisons?

Reflect

Recall your own attributions for academic successes and failures when you were in elementary school. What are those attributions like now? What messages from others may have contributed to your attributions?

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Emotional Development

Greater self-awareness and social sensitivity support gains in emotional competence in middle childhood. Changes take place in experience of self-conscious emotions, emotional understanding, and emotional self-regulation.

Self-Conscious Emotions

In middle childhood, the self-conscious emotions of pride and guilt become clearly governed by a sense of personal responsibility. An adult need not be present for a new accomplishment to spark pride or for a transgression to arouse guilt (Harter & Whitesell, 1989). Also, children no longer report guilt for any mishap, as they did earlier, but only for intentional wrongdoing, such as ignoring responsibilities, cheating, or lying (Ferguson, Stegge, & Damhuis, 1991).

Pride motivates children to take on further challenges. And guilt prompts them to make amends and to strive for self-improvement. But harsh, insensitive reprimands from adults ("Everyone else can do it! Why can't you?") can lead to intense shame, which (as noted in Chapter 8) is particularly destructive. As children form an overall sense of self-esteem, they may take one or two unworthy acts to be the whole of self-worth. A shame-induced, sharp drop in self-esteem can trigger withdrawal, depression, and intense anger at those who participated in the shame-evoking situation (Lindsay-Hartz, de Rivera, & Mascolo, 1995; Mills, 2005).

Emotional Understanding

School-age children's understanding of mental activity means that, unlike preschoolers, they are likely to explain emotion by referring to internal states, such as happy or sad thoughts, than to external events (Flavell, Flavell, & Green, 2001). Also, around age 8, children become aware that they can experience more than one emotion at a time, each of which may be positive or negative and differ in intensity (Pons et al., 2003). For example, recalling the birthday present he received from his grandmother, Joey reflected, "I was very happy that I got something but a little sad that I didn't get just what I wanted."

Appreciating mixed emotions helps children realize that people's expressions may not reflect their true feelings (Saarni, 1999). It also fosters awareness of self-conscious emotions. For example, 8- and 9-year-olds understand that pride combines two sources of happiness—joy in accomplishment and joy that a significant person recognized that accomplishment (Harter, 1999). Furthermore, children of this age can reconcile contradictory facial and situational cues in figuring out another's feelings, whereas younger children rely only on the emotional expression (Hoffner & Badzinski, 1989).

As with self-understanding, gains in emotional understanding are supported by cognitive development and social experiences, especially adults' sensitivity to children's feelings and willingness to discuss emotions. Together, these factors lead to a rise in empathy as well. As children move closer to adolescence, advances in perspective taking permit an empathic response not just to people's immediate distress but also to their general life condition (Hoffman, 2000). As Joey and Lizzie imagined how people who are chronically ill or hungry feel and evoked those emotions in themselves, they gave part of their allowance to charity and joined in fundraising projects through school, community center, and scouting.

Emotional Self-Regulation

Rapid gains in emotional self-regulation occur in middle childhood. As children engage in social comparison and care more about peer approval, they must learn to manage negative emotion that threatens their self-esteem.

By age 10, most children shift adaptively between two general strategies for managing emotion. In **problem-centered coping**, they appraise the situation as changeable, identify the difficulty, and decide what to do about it. If this does not work, they engage in **emotion-centered coping**, which is internal, private, and aimed at controlling distress when little can be done about an outcome (Kliewer, Fearnow, & Miller, 1996; Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994). For example, when faced with an anxiety-provoking test or an angry friend, older school-age children view problem solving and seeking social support as the best strategies. But when outcomes are beyond their control—for example, after receiving a bad grade—they opt for distraction or try to redefine the situation: "Things could be worse. There'll be another test." Compared with preschoolers, school-age children more often use these internal strategies to manage emotion, due to an improved ability to reflect on thoughts and feelings (Brenner & Salovey, 1997).

Furthermore, through interacting with parents, teachers, and peers, school-age children become more knowledgeable about socially approved ways to display negative emotion. They increasingly prefer verbal strategies ("Please stop pushing and wait your turn") to crying, sulking, or aggression (Shipman et al., 2003). Young school-age children justify these more mature displays of emotion by mentioning avoidance of punishment or adult approval, but by third grade, they begin to emphasize concern for others' feelings. Children with this awareness are rated as especially helpful, cooperative, and

Ways to Foster a Mastery-Oriented Approach to Learning

Strategy	Description
Provision of tasks	Select tasks that are meaningful, responsive to a diversity of student interests, and appropriately matched to current competence so that the child is challenged but not overwhelmed.
Parent and teacher encouragement	Communicate warmth, confidence in the child's abilities, the value of achievement, and the importance of effort in success. Model high effort in overcoming failure. (For teachers) Communicate often with parents, suggesting ways to foster children's effort and progress. (For parents) Monitor schoolwork; provide scaffolded assistance that promotes knowledge of effective strategies and self-regulation.
Performance evaluations	Make evaluations private; avoid publicizing success or failure through wall posters, stars, privileges to "smart" children, and prizes for "best" performance. Stress individual progress and self-improvement.
School environment	Offer small classes, which permit teachers to provide individualized support for mastery. Provide for cooperative learning and peer tutoring, in which children assist each other; avoid ability grouping, which makes evaluations of children's progress public. Accommodate individual and cultural differences in styles of learning. Create an atmosphere that sends a clear message that all students can learn.

Sources: Hilt, 2004; Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998.



These children are conducting a fundraiser to help the thousands of pets who were injured or left homeless by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Their efforts are an adaptive strategy for managing the intense fear they may have felt after witnessing on television the widespread destruction caused by the hurricane.

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socially responsive by teachers and as better-liked by peers (Garner, 1996; McDowell & Parke, 2000).

When emotional self-regulation has developed well, school-age children acquire a sense of *emotional self-efficacy*—a feeling of being in control of their emotional experience (Saarni, 2000). This fosters a favorable self-image and an optimistic outlook, which further help children face emotional challenges. Emotionally well-regulated children are upbeat in mood, empathic, and prosocial (Zeman, Shipman, & Suveg, 2002). In contrast, poorly regulated children impulsively unleash negative emotion, a response that interferes with prosocial behavior and peer acceptance.

Understanding Others: Perspective Taking

We have seen that middle childhood brings major advances in **perspective taking**, the capacity to imagine what other people may be thinking and feeling. These changes support self-concept and self-esteem, understanding of others, and a wide variety of social skills. Robert Selman's five-stage sequence describes changes in perspective-taking skill, based on children's and adolescents' responses to social dilemmas in which characters have differing information and opinions about an event.

As Table 10.1 indicates, at first children have only a limited idea of what other people might be thinking and feeling. Over time, they become more aware that people can interpret the same event quite differently. Soon, they can "step into another person's shoes" and reflect on how that person might regard their own thoughts, feelings, and behavior, as when they say something like, "I thought you would think I was just kidding when I said that." (Note that this level of perspective taking is

similar to second-order false belief, described on page 305 in Chapter 9.) Finally, older children and adolescents can evaluate two people's perspectives simultaneously, at first from the vantage point of a disinterested spectator and later by referring to societal values. The following explanation reflects this ability: "I know why Joey hid the stray kitten in the basement, even though his mom was against keeping it. He believes in not hurting animals. If you put the kitten outside or give it to the pound, it might die."

Experiences in which adults and peers explain their viewpoints contribute greatly to children's perspective taking. Good perspective takers, in turn, are more likely to display empathy and sympathy and to handle difficult social situations in effective ways—among the reasons they are better-liked by peers (FitzGerald & White, 2003). Children with poor social skills, especially the angry, aggressive styles discussed in Chapter 8, have great difficulty imagining others' thoughts and feelings. They often mistreat adults and peers without feeling the guilt and remorse prompted by awareness of another's viewpoint. Interventions that provide coaching and practice in perspective taking help reduce antisocial behavior and increase empathy and prosocial responding (Chalmers & Townsend, 1990).

Moral Development

Recall from Chapter 8 that preschoolers pick up many morally relevant behaviors through modeling and reinforcement. By middle childhood, they have had time to internalize rules for good conduct: "It's good to help others in trouble" or "It's wrong to take something that doesn't belong to you." This change leads children to become considerably more independent and trustworthy. They can take on many more responsibilities, from running errands at the supermarket to watching younger siblings (Weisner, 1996). Of course, these

advances occur only when children have had the consistent guidance and example of caring adults.

In Chapter 8, we also saw that children do not just copy their morality from others. As the cognitive-developmental approach emphasizes, they actively think about right and wrong. An expanding social world, the capacity to consider more information when reasoning, and perspective taking lead moral understanding to advance greatly in middle childhood.

Learning About Justice Through Sharing

In everyday life, children frequently experience situations involving **distributive justice**—beliefs about how to divide material goods fairly. Heated debate arises over how much weekly allowance is appropriate for siblings of different ages, who should sit where on a long car trip, or how six hungry playmates should share an eight-slice pizza. William Damon (1977, 1988) has traced children's concepts of distributive justice over early and middle childhood.

Even 4-year-olds recognize the importance of sharing, but their reasons often seem self-serving: "I shared because if I didn't, she wouldn't play with me" or "I let her have some, but most are for me because I'm older." In middle childhood, children express more mature notions of distributive justice. Their reasoning develops in an age-related, three-step sequence:

1. *Strict equality* (5 to 6 years). Children in the early school grades focus on making sure each person gets the same amount of a treasured resource, such as money, turns in a game, or a treat.
2. *Merit* (6 to 7 years). Slightly older children say extra rewards should go to someone who has worked especially hard or otherwise performed in an exceptional way.
3. *Equity and benevolence* (around 8 years). Finally, children believe that special consideration should be given to those at a disadvantage—for example, that a child who cannot produce as much or who does not get any allowance should be given more. Older children also adapt their basis of fairness to fit the situation, relying more on equality when interacting with strangers and more on benevolence with friends (McGillicuddy-De Lisi, Watkins, & Vinchur, 1994).

According to Damon (1988), the give-and-take of peer interaction makes children more sensitive to others' perspectives, which in turn supports their developing ideas of justice. Advanced distributive justice reasoning is associated with a greater willingness to help, share, and cooperate with others (Blötner & Bearison, 1984; McNamee & Peterson, 1986).

Moral and Social-Conventional Understanding

During the school years, children construct a flexible appreciation of moral rules. By age 7 to 8, they no longer say truth telling is always good and lying is always bad but also consider



Children's ideas about distributive justice—how to divide material goods fairly—develop gradually in middle childhood. The child on the right understands that fairness should include benevolence. He shares with two younger children who do not have access to a special treat.

prosocial and antisocial intentions. They evaluate very negatively certain types of truthfulness, such as bluntly telling a classmate that you don't like her drawing (Bussey, 1999). And although both Chinese and Canadian schoolchildren consider lying about antisocial acts "very naughty," Chinese children— Influenced by collectivist values—are more likely than their North American age-mates to rate lying favorably when the intention is modesty, as when a student who has thoughtfully picked up litter from the playground says, "I didn't do it" (Lee et al., 1997).

As their ideas about justice advance, children take into account an increasing number of variables. As a result, they start to clarify and link moral imperatives and social conventions. School-age children, for example, distinguish social conventions with a clear *purpose* (not running in the school hallways to prevent injuries) from ones with no obvious justification (crossing a "forbidden" line on the playground). They regard violations of purposeful social conventions as closer to moral transgressions (Buchanan-Barrow & Barrett, 1998). With age, children also realize that people's *intentions* and the *contexts* of their actions affect the moral implications of violating a social convention. In a Canadian study, 8- to 10-year-olds stated that because of a flag's symbolic value, burning it to express disapproval of a country or to start a cooking fire is worse than burning it accidentally. They also stated that public flag burning is worse than private flag burning because of the emotional harm inflicted on others. But they recognized that flag burning is a form of freedom of expression, and most agreed that it would be acceptable in a country that treated its citizens unfairly (Helwig & Prencepe, 1999).

Children in Western and non-Western cultures reason similarly about moral and social-conventional concerns (Neff & Helwig, 2002; Nucci, 2002). When a directive is fair and caring, such as telling children to stop fighting or to share candy, school-age children view it as right, regardless of who states it—a principal, a teacher, or a child with no authority. Even in

Table 10.1 Selman's Stages of Perspective Taking

Stage	Approximate Age Range	Description
Level 0: Undifferentiated perspective taking	3–6	Children recognize that self and other can have different thoughts and feelings, but they frequently confuse the two.
Level 1: Social-informational perspective taking	4–9	Children understand that different perspectives may result because people have access to different information.
Level 2: Self-reflective perspective taking	7–12	Children can "step into another person's shoes" and view their own thoughts, feelings, and behavior from the other person's perspective. They also recognize that others can do the same.
Level 3: Third-party perspective taking	10–15	Children can step outside a two-person situation and imagine how the self and other are viewed from the point of view of a third, impartial party.
Level 4: Societal perspective taking	14–adult	Individuals understand that third-party perspective taking can be influenced by one or more systems of larger societal values.

Sources: Selman, 1976; Selman & Byrne, 1974.

Korean culture, which places a high value on deference to authority, 7- to 11-year-olds evaluate negatively a teacher's or principal's order to engage in immoral acts, such as stealing or refusing to share—a response that strengthens with age (Kim, 1998; Kim & Turiel, 1996).

Understanding Individual Rights

When children do challenge adult authority, they typically do so within the personal domain. As their grasp of moral imperatives and social conventions strengthens, so does their conviction that certain choices, such as hairstyle, friends, and leisure activities, are up to the individual (Nucci, 1996).

Notions of personal choice, in turn, enhance children's moral understanding. As early as age 6, children view freedom of speech and religion as individual rights, even if laws exist that deny those rights (Helwig & Turiel, 2002b). And they regard laws that discriminate against individuals—for example, denying certain people access to medical care or education—as wrong and worthy of violating (Helwig & Jasiobedzka, 2001). In justifying their responses, children appeal to personal privileges and, as they transition to adolescence, to the importance of individual rights for a fair society.

At the same time, older school-age children place limits on individual choice. Fourth graders faced with conflicting moral and personal concerns—such as whether or not to befriend a classmate of a different race or gender—typically decide in favor of kindness and fairness (Killen et al., 2002). Partly for this reason, prejudice usually declines in middle childhood.

Understanding Diversity and Inequality

By the early school years, children associate power and privilege with white people and poverty and inferior status with



Children who collaborate with members of other racial and ethnic groups are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward those who differ from themselves. These boys have many opportunities to work toward common goals at a summer camp.

people of color. They do not necessarily acquire these views directly from parents or friends (Aboud & Doyle, 1996). Rather, they seem to pick up prevailing societal attitudes from implicit messages in the media and elsewhere in their environments.

Studies in diverse Western nations confirm that by age 5 to 7, white children generally evaluate their own racial group favorably and other racial groups less favorably or negatively (Aboud, 2003; Nesdale et al., 2004). Many minority children of this age, in a reverse pattern, assign positive characteristics to the privileged white majority and negative characteristics to their own group. In one study, researchers asked African-American 5- to 7-year-olds to recall information in stories either consistent or inconsistent with stereotypes of blacks. The children recalled more stereotyped traits, especially if they agreed with negative cultural views of African Americans (Averhart & Bigler, 1997). Similarly, Native Canadian children recall more positive attributes about white Canadians and more negative attributes about Native Canadians (Corenblum, 2003).

But recall that with age, children pay more attention to inner traits. The capacity to classify the social world in multiple ways enables school-age children to understand that people can be both “the same” and “different”—that those who look different need not think, feel, or act differently (Aboud & Amato, 2001). Consequently, negative attitudes toward minorities decline. After age 7 or 8, both majority and minority children express in-group favoritism, and white children's prejudice against out-group members often weakens (Ruble et al., 2004).

Nevertheless, the extent to which children hold racial and ethnic biases varies, depending on the following factors:

- **A fixed view of personality traits.** Children who believe that people's personality traits are fixed rather than changeable often judge others as either “good” or “bad.” Ignoring people's motives and circumstances, they readily form prejudices on the basis of limited information. For example, they might infer that “a new child at school who tells a lie to get other kids to like her” is simply a bad person (Levy & Dweck, 1999).
- **Overly high self-esteem.** Children (and adults) with very high self-esteem are more likely to hold racial and ethnic prejudices (Baumeister et al., 2003; Bigler, Brown, & Markell, 2001). These individuals seem to put down disadvantaged individuals or groups as a way of justifying their own extremely favorable self-evaluation.
- **A social world in which people are sorted into groups.** The more adults highlight group distinctions for children, the more likely white children are to display prejudice (Bigler, Brown, & Markell, 2001).

These findings offer guidance in how to reduce racial and ethnic prejudices. One promising approach involves inducing children to view others' traits as changeable, by discussing with them the many possible influences on those traits. Intergroup

contact, in which racially and ethnically different children become personally acquainted by collaborating on projects, is also helpful (Pettigrew, 1998). And long-term contact in neighborhoods, schools, and communities seems most effective. In support of this view, 5- and 6-year-olds attending a racially mixed school held generally positive out-group attitudes based on their everyday experiences (Aboud, 2003). Classrooms that expose children to diversity early and encourage them to value it prevent them from forming negative biases that are hard to overcome.

Ask Yourself

Review

How does emotional self-regulation improve in middle childhood? What implications do these changes have for children's self-esteem?

Apply

Ten-year-old Marla says her classmate Bernadette will never get good grades because she's lazy. Jane believes that Bernadette tries but can't concentrate because her parents are divorcing. Why is Marla more likely than Jane to develop prejudices?

Connect

Cite examples of how older children's capacity to take more information into account enhances their emotional and moral understanding.

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Peer Relations

In middle childhood, the society of peers becomes an increasingly important context for development. Peer contact, as we have seen, contributes to perspective taking and understanding of self and others. These developments, in turn, enhance peer interaction. Compared with preschoolers, school-age children resolve conflicts more effectively, using persuasion and compromise (Mayeux & Cillessen, 2003). Sharing, helping, and other prosocial acts also increase. In line with these changes, aggression declines. But the drop is greatest for physical attacks (Tremblay, 2000). As we will see, other types of hostile aggression continue as children form peer groups.

Peer Groups

Watch children in the schoolyard or neighborhood, and notice how often they gather in groups of three to a dozen or more. By the end of middle childhood, children display a strong desire for group belonging. They form **peer groups**, collectives that generate unique values and standards for behavior and a social structure of leaders and followers. Peer groups organize on the basis of proximity (being in the same classroom) and similarity in sex, ethnicity, and popularity (Cairns, Xie, & Leung, 1998).



Peer groups first form in middle childhood. These girls have probably established a social structure of leader and followers as they gather for joint activities. Their body language suggests that they feel a strong sense of group belonging.

The practices of these informal groups lead to a “peer culture” that typically consists of a specialized vocabulary, dress code, and place to “hang out.” As children develop these exclusive associations, the codes of dress and behavior that grow out of them become more broadly influential. At school, children who deviate are often rebuffed. “Kissing up” to teachers, wearing the wrong kind of shirt or shoes, or tattling on classmates can be grounds for critical glances and comments. These customs bind peers together, creating a sense of group identity. Within the group, children acquire many social skills—cooperation, leadership, followership, and loyalty to collective goals.

Most school-age children believe a group is wrong to exclude a peer (Killen et al., 2002). Nevertheless, children do exclude, often using relationally aggressive tactics. And peer groups—at the instigation of their leaders, who can be skillfully aggressive—frequently oust no longer “respected” children. These cast-outs are profoundly wounded, and many find new group ties hard to establish. Their previous behavior toward outsiders may reduce their chances of being included elsewhere. Excluded children often turn to other low-status peers for group belonging (Bagwell et al., 2001). By associating with peers who have poor social skills, they reduce their opportunities to learn socially competent behavior.

School-age children's desire for group membership can also be satisfied through formal group ties such as scouting, 4-H, and religious youth groups. Adult involvement holds in check the negative behaviors associated with children's informal peer groups. And through working on joint projects and helping in their communities, children gain in social and moral maturity (Vandell & Shumow, 1999).

Friendships

Whereas peer groups provide children with insight into larger social structures, one-to-one friendships contribute to the development of trust and sensitivity. During the school years,

friendship becomes more complex and psychologically based. Consider the following 8-year-old's ideas:

Why is Shelly your best friend? Because she helps me when I'm sad, and she shares. . . . What makes Shelly so special? I've known her longer, I sit next to her and got to know her better. . . . How come you like Shelly better than anyone else? She's done the most for me. She never disagrees, she never eats in front of me, she never walks away when I'm crying, and she helps me with my homework. . . . How do you get someone to like you? . . . If you're nice to [your friends], they'll be nice to you. (Damon, 1988, pp. 80–81)

As these responses show, friendship has become a mutually agreed-on relationship in which children like each other's personal qualities and respond to one another's needs and desires. And once a friendship forms, *trust* becomes its defining feature. School-age children state that a good friendship is based on acts of kindness that signify that each person can be counted on to support the other. Consequently, older children regard violations of trust, such as not helping when others need help, breaking promises, and gossiping behind the other's back, as serious breaches of friendship (Hartup & Abecassis, 2004; Selman, 1980).

Because of these features, school-age children's friendships are more selective. Whereas preschoolers say they have lots of friends, by age 8 or 9, children name only a handful of good friends. Girls, who demand greater closeness than boys, are more exclusive in their friendships (Markovitz, Benenson, & Dolensky, 2001).

In addition, children tend to select friends similar to themselves in age, sex, race, ethnicity, and SES. Friends also resemble one another in personality (sociability, aggression), peer popularity, academic achievement, and prosocial behavior (Hartup,

1996). Children probably choose companions much like themselves to increase the supportiveness of friendship. But the friendship opportunities offered by children's environments also affect their choices. In integrated schools and in classrooms with mixed-race collaborative learning groups, students report more cross-race friendships (Slavin & Cooper, 1999).

Over middle childhood, friendships remain fairly stable, usually lasting for several years. Through them, children learn the importance of emotional commitment. They come to realize that close relationships can survive disagreements if friends are secure in their liking for one another (Rose & Asher, 1999). In this way, friendship provides an important context in which children learn to tolerate criticism and resolve disputes.

Yet the impact of friendships on children's development depends on the nature of those friends. Children who bring kindness and compassion to their friendships strengthen each other's prosocial tendencies. When aggressive children make friends, the relationship often magnifies antisocial acts. Aggressive girls' friendships are high in exchange of private feelings but full of jealousy, conflict, and betrayal (Grotperter & Crick, 1996). Among aggressive boys, friendships involve frequent expressions of anger, coercive statements, physical attacks, and enticements to rule-breaking behavior (Bagwell & Coie, 2004; Crick & Nelson, 2002; Dishion, Andrews, & Crosby, 1995). These findings indicate that the social problems of aggressive children operate within their closest peer ties.

Peer Acceptance

Peer acceptance refers to likability—the extent to which a child is viewed by a group of age-mates, such as classmates, as a worthy social partner. Unlike friendship, likability is not a mutual relationship but a one-sided perspective, involving the group's view of an individual. Nevertheless, certain social skills that contribute to friendship also enhance peer acceptance. Better-accepted children tend to have more friends and more positive relationships with them (Gest, Graham-Bermann, & Hartup, 2001).

Researchers usually assess peer acceptance using self-reports that measure *social preferences*—for example, asking children to identify classmates whom they “like very much” or “like very little.” Another approach assesses *social prominence*—children's judgments of whom most of their classmates admire. The classmates children identify as prominent (looked up to by many others) show only moderate correspondence with those they say they personally prefer (LaFontana & Cillessen, 1999).

These self-reports yield four general categories of peer acceptance:

- **Popular children**, who get many positive votes
- **Rejected children**, who are actively disliked
- **Controversial children**, who receive many votes, both positive and negative
- **Neglected children**, who are seldom chosen, either positively or negatively

About two-thirds of students in a typical elementary school classroom fit one of these categories (Coie, Dodge, & Copotelli, 1982). The remaining one-third are considered *average* in peer acceptance.

Peer acceptance is a powerful predictor of psychological adjustment. Rejected children, especially, are unhappy, alienated, poorly achieving children with low self-esteem. Both teachers and parents rate them as having a wide range of emotional and social problems. Peer rejection in middle childhood is also strongly associated with poor school performance, absenteeism, dropping out, substance use, antisocial behavior, and delinquency in adolescence and with criminality in young adulthood (Bagwell, Newcomb, & Bukowski, 1998; Laird et al., 2001; Parker et al., 1995).

However, earlier influences—children's characteristics combined with parenting practices—may largely explain the link between peer acceptance and adjustment. School-age children with problems in peer relationships are more likely to have experienced family stress due to low income, insensitive child rearing, and coercive discipline (Cowan & Cowan, 2004). Nevertheless, as we will see, rejected children evoke reactions from peers that contribute to their unfavorable development.

■ **Determinants of Peer Acceptance.** Why is one child liked while another is rejected? A wealth of research reveals that social behavior plays a powerful role.

Popular Children. Many popular children are kind and considerate. These **popular-prosocial children** usually combine academic and social competence, performing well in school and communicating with peers in sensitive, friendly, and cooperative ways (Cillessen & Bellmore, 2004). But other popular children are admired for their socially adept yet belligerent behavior. This smaller subtype, **popular-antisocial children**, includes “tough” boys—athletically skilled but poor students who cause trouble and defy adult authority—and relationally aggressive boys and girls who enhance their own status by ignoring, excluding, and spreading rumors about other children (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Rodkin et al., 2000; Rose, Swenson, & Waller, 2004).

Despite their aggressiveness, these youths are viewed as “cool” by peers, perhaps because of their athletic ability and sophisticated though devious social skills. Although peer admiration gives these children some protection against lasting adjustment difficulties, their antisocial acts require intervention (Prinstein & La Greca, 2004). With age, peers like these high-status, aggressive youths less and less and may eventually reject them.

Rejected Children. Rejected children display a wide range of negative social behaviors. The largest subtype, **rejected-aggressive children**, show high rates of conflict, physical and relational aggression, and hyperactive, inattentive, and impulsive behavior. They are more extremely belligerent than popular-aggressive children and are also deficient in perspective taking and emotion regulation. For example, they tend to mis-

interpret the innocent behaviors of peers as hostile and to blame others for their social difficulties (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Crick, Casas, & Nelson, 2002). In contrast, **rejected-withdrawn children** are passive and socially awkward. These timid children are overwhelmed by social anxiety, hold negative expectations for how peers will treat them, and worry about being scorned and attacked (Hart et al., 2000; Ladd & Burgess, 1999).

As early as kindergarten, peers exclude rejected children. Soon rejected children's classroom participation declines, their feelings of loneliness rise, their academic achievement falters, and they want to avoid school (Buhs & Ladd, 2001). Rejected children generally have few friends, and some have none—a circumstance that predicts severe adjustment difficulties (Ladd & Troup-Gordon, 2003). Both types of rejected children are at risk for peer harassment. But as the Biology and Environment box on page 342 reveals, rejected-withdrawn children are especially likely to be targets.

Controversial and Neglected Children. Controversial children display a blend of positive and negative social behaviors that engenders mixed peer opinion. They are hostile and disruptive, but they also engage in positive, prosocial acts. Though some peers dislike them, they have qualities that protect them from social exclusion (Newcomb, Bukowski, & Pattee, 1993). But like their popular-antisocial counterparts, they often bully others and engage in calculated relational aggression to sustain their dominance (DeRosier & Thomas, 2003).

Finally, perhaps the most surprising finding is that neglected children, once thought to be in need of treatment, are usually well-adjusted. Although they engage in low rates of interaction and are considered shy by classmates, they are just as socially skilled as average children. They do not report feeling especially lonely or unhappy, and when they want to, they can break away from their usual pattern of playing by themselves (Harrist et al., 1997; Ladd & Burgess, 1999). Neglected children remind us that an outgoing, gregarious personality style is not the only path to emotional well-being.

■ **Helping Rejected Children.** A variety of interventions exist to improve the peer relations and psychological adjustment of rejected children. Most involve coaching, modeling, and reinforcing positive social skills, such as how to initiate interaction with a peer, cooperate in games, and respond to another child with friendly emotion and approval. Several of these programs have produced lasting gains in social competence and peer acceptance (Asher & Rose, 1997). Combining social-skills training with other treatments increases their effectiveness. Rejected children are often poor students, whose low academic self-esteem magnifies negative reactions to teachers and classmates. Intensive academic tutoring improves both school achievement and social acceptance (O'Neil et al., 1997).

Still another approach focuses on training in perspective taking and solving social problems. Many rejected-aggressive children are unaware of their poor social skills and do not take responsibility for their social failures (Mrug, Hoza, & Gerdes,



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These boys both enjoy playing baseball, but they want to spend time together mainly because they like each other's personal qualities. A defining feature of their friendship is mutual trust. Each child counts on the other for support and assistance.

children meet responsibilities in homework, after-school lessons, and chores. Fathers, especially those with sons, focus on achievement-related and recreational pursuits (Collins & Russell, 1991). But when both parents are present, fathers engage in as much caregiving as mothers.

Although school-age children often press for greater independence, they know how much they need their parents' continuing support. In one study, fifth and sixth graders described parents as the most influential people in their lives (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). They often turned to mothers and fathers for affection, advice, enhancement of self-worth, and assistance with everyday problems.

Siblings



In addition to parents and friends, siblings are important sources of support for school-age children. Yet sibling rivalry tends to increase in middle childhood. As children participate in a wider range of activities, parents often compare siblings' traits and accomplishments. The child who gets less parental affection, more disapproval, or fewer material resources is likely to be resentful (Brody, 2004; Dunn, 2004).

For same-sex siblings who are close in age, parental comparisons are more frequent, resulting in more quarreling and antagonism and poorer adjustment. This effect is particularly strong when parents are under stress as a result of financial worries, marital conflict, or single parenthood (Jenkins, Rasbash, & O'Connor, 2003). Parents whose energies are drained become less careful about being fair. Children react especially intensely when fathers prefer one child. Perhaps because



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Although sibling rivalry tends to increase in middle childhood, siblings also provide one another with emotional support and help with difficult tasks.

fathers, overall, spend less time with children than mothers, their favoritism is more noticeable and triggers greater anger (Brody, Stoneman, & McCoy, 1992).

To reduce this rivalry, **siblings often strive to be different from one another**. For example, two brothers I know deliberately selected different athletic pursuits and musical instruments. If the older one did especially well at an activity, the younger one did not want to try it. Parents can limit these effects by making an effort not to compare children, but some feedback about their competencies is inevitable. As siblings strive to win recognition for their own uniqueness, they shape important aspects of each other's development.

Although conflict rises, **school-age siblings continue to rely on each other for companionship and assistance**. When researchers asked siblings about shared daily activities, children mentioned that **older siblings often helped younger siblings with academic and peer challenges**. And both offered each other help with family issues (Tucker, McHale, & Crouter, 2001). **When parents are distant and uninvolved, siblings sometimes fill in and become more supportive of one another**.

Only Children

Although sibling relationships bring many benefits, they are not essential for healthy development. Contrary to popular belief, only children are not spoiled but are even advantaged in some respects. North American children growing up in one-child families are higher in self-esteem and achievement motivation, do better in school, and attain higher levels of education (Falbo, 1992). One reason may be that only children have somewhat closer relationships with parents, who may exert more pressure for mastery and accomplishment. However, only children tend to be less well-accepted in the peer group, perhaps because they have not had the opportunities that sibling interaction offers in practicing conflict resolution skills (Kitzmann, Cohen, & Lockwood, 2002).

Favorable development also characterizes only children in China, where a one-child family policy has been strictly enforced in urban areas for more than two decades to control overpopulation. Compared with agemates who have siblings, Chinese only children are advanced in cognitive development and academic achievement (Falbo & Poston, 1993; Jiao, Ji, & Jing, 1996). They also feel more emotionally secure, perhaps because government disapproval promotes tension in families with more than one child (Yang et al., 1995). Chinese mothers usually ensure that their children have regular contact with first cousins (who are considered siblings). Perhaps as a result, Chinese only children do not differ from agemates with siblings in social skills and peer acceptance (Hart et al., 2003). The next generation of Chinese only children, however, will have no first cousins.

Divorce



Children's interactions with parents and siblings are affected by other aspects of family life. Joey and Lizzie's relationship,



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Limiting family size has been a national policy in the People's Republic of China since 1979. In urban areas, the majority of couples have no more than one child.

ties. Since the 1960s, many studies have reported that marital breakup is quite stressful for children. But the research also reveals great individual differences (Hetherington, 2003). How well children fare depends on many factors: the custodial parent's psychological health, the child's characteristics, and social supports within the family and surrounding community.

Immediate Consequences. "Things were worst during the period Drake and I decided to separate," Rena reflected. "We fought over division of our belongings and the custody of the children, and the kids suffered. Sobbing, Lizzie told me she was 'sorry she made Daddy go away.' Joey kicked and threw things at home and didn't do his work at school. In the midst of everything, I could hardly deal with their problems. We had to sell the house; I couldn't afford it alone. And I needed a better-paying job."

Rena's description captures conditions in many newly divorced households. Family conflict often rises as parents try to settle disputes over children and possessions. Once one parent moves out, additional events threaten supportive interactions between parents and children. **Mother-headed households typically experience a sharp drop in income.** In the United States and Canada, the majority of single mothers with young children live in poverty, getting less than the full amount of child support from the absent father or none at all (Children's Defense Fund, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2005b). They often have to move to lower-cost housing, reducing supportive ties to neighbors and friends.

The transition from marriage to divorce typically leads to high maternal stress, depression, and anxiety and to a disorganized family situation (Hope, Power, & Rodgers, 1999). "Meals and bedtimes were at all hours, the house didn't get cleaned, and I stopped taking Joey and Lizzie on weekend outings," said Rena. As children react with distress and anger to their less secure home lives, discipline may become harsh and inconsistent. Contact with noncustodial fathers often decreases over time (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Fathers who see their children only occasionally are inclined to be permissive and indulgent, making the mother's task of managing the child even more difficult.

In view of these changes, it is not surprising that about 20 to 25 percent of children in divorced families display severe problems, compared with about 10 percent in nondivorced families (Greene et al., 2003; Martinez & Forgatch, 2002; Pruett et al., 2003). At the same time, reactions vary with children's age, temperament, and sex.

Children's Age. Five-year-old Lizzie's fear that she had caused her father to leave is not unusual. Preschool and young school-age children often blame themselves for a marital breakup and fear that both parents may abandon them (Pryor & Rodgers, 2001). Even many older children, with the cognitive maturity to understand that they are not responsible for their parents' divorce, react strongly, becoming unruly and escaping into undesirable peer activities, especially when family conflict is high and supervision of children is low (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Simons & Chao, 1996). But not all older children react this way. Some—especially the oldest child in



FIGURE 10.3 Divorce rates in ten industrialized nations.

The U.S. divorce rate is the highest in the industrialized world, far exceeding divorce rates in other countries. The Canadian divorce rate is the sixth highest. (Adapted from Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006b; United Nations, 2001.)

the family—display more mature behavior, willingly taking on extra family and household tasks as well as emotional support of a depressed, anxious mother. But if these demands are too great, children may eventually become resentful, withdraw from the family, and engage in angry, acting-out behavior (Hetherington, 1999).

Children's Temperament and Sex. When temperamentally difficult children are exposed to stressful life events and inadequate parenting, their problems are magnified. In contrast, easy children are less often targets of parental anger and also cope more effectively with adversity.

These findings help us understand sex differences in response to divorce. **Girls sometimes respond as Lizzie did, with internalizing reactions such as crying, self-criticism, and withdrawal or, more often, with demanding, attention-getting behavior.** But in mother-custody families, boys are at greater risk for serious adjustment problems (Amato, 2001). Recall from Chapter 8 that boys are more active and noncompliant—behaviors that increase with exposure to parental conflict and inconsistent discipline. Coercive mother-child interaction and impulsive, defiant behavior on the part of sons are common in divorcing households.

Perhaps because their behavior is so unruly, **boys receive less emotional support from mothers, teachers, and peers.** And as Joey's behavior toward Lizzie illustrates, the coercive cycles of interaction between boys and their divorced mothers soon spread to sibling relations (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). These

outcomes compound adjustment difficulties. After divorce, children who are challenging to rear generally get worse (Hanson, 1999).

Long-Term Consequences. Rena eventually found better-paying work and gained control over the daily operation of the household. Her own feelings of anger and rejection also declined. And after several meetings with a counselor, Rena and Drake realized the harmful impact of their quarreling on Joey and Lizzie. Drake visited regularly and handled Joey's unruliness with firmness and consistency. Soon Joey's school performance improved, his behavior problems subsided, and both children seemed calmer and happier.

Most children show improved adjustment by two years after divorce. Yet overall, children and adolescents of divorced parents continue to show slightly lower academic achievement, self-esteem, and social competence and to have more emotional and behavior problems (Amato, 2001). Children with difficult temperaments are especially likely to drop out of school, to be depressed, and to display antisocial behavior. And divorce is linked to problems with adolescent sexuality and with development of intimate ties. Young people who experienced parental divorce—especially more than once—display higher rates of early sexual activity and adolescent parenthood (Wolfinger, 2000). And other lasting difficulties occur for some, in the form of reduced educational attainment, troubled marriages, poor parent-child relationships, and divorce in adulthood (Amato & Cheadle, 2005).

The overriding factor in positive adjustment following divorce is effective parenting—how well the custodial parent handles stress and shields the child from conflict, and the extent to which each parent uses authoritative child rearing (Leon, 2003; Wolchik et al., 2000). Where the custodial parent is the mother, contact with fathers is important. The more paternal contact and the warmer the father-child relationship, the less children react with defiance and aggression (Dunn et al., 2004). **For girls, a good father-child relationship protects against early sexual activity and unhappy romantic involvements. For boys, it seems to affect overall psychological well-being.** In fact, several studies indicate that outcomes for sons are better when the father is the custodial parent (Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996; McLanahan, 1999). Fathers' greater economic security and image of authority seem to help them engage in effective parenting with sons. And boys in father-custody families may benefit from greater involvement of both parents because noncustodial mothers participate more than noncustodial fathers in their children's lives.

Although divorce is painful for children, remaining in an intact but high-conflict family is much worse than making the transition to a low-conflict, single-parent household (Greene et al., 2003). Divorcing parents who set aside their disagreements and support one another in their child-rearing roles greatly increase the chances that their children will grow up competent, stable, and happy. Caring extended-family members, teachers, siblings, and friends also reduce the likelihood that divorce will result in long-term difficulties (Hetherington, 2003; Lussier et al., 2002).

Divorce Mediation, Joint Custody, and Child Support. Awareness that divorce is highly stressful for children and families has led to community-based services aimed at helping families through this difficult time. One such service is **divorce mediation**, a series of meetings between divorcing adults and a trained professional aimed at reducing family conflict, including legal battles over property division and child custody. Research reveals that mediation increases out-of-court settlements, cooperation and involvement of both parents in child rearing, and parents' and children's feelings of well-being (Emery, 2001).

An increasingly common child custody option is **joint custody**, which grants the mother and father equal say in important decisions about the child's upbringing, as a means of encouraging both to remain involved in their children's lives. In most instances, children reside with one parent and see the other on a fixed schedule, much like the typical sole-custody situation. But in other cases, parents share physical custody, and children move between homes and sometimes schools and peer groups. These transitions can be especially hard on some children. Joint-custody parents report little conflict—fortunately so, since the success of the arrangement depends on parental cooperation. And their children—regardless of living arrangements—tend to be better-adjusted than children in sole-maternal-custody homes (Bauserman, 2002).

Finally, many single-parent families depend on child support from the absent parent to relieve financial strain. All U.S. states and Canadian provinces have procedures for withhold-

ing wages from parents who fail to make these payments. Although child support is usually not enough to lift a single-parent family out of poverty, it can ease its burdens substantially. Noncustodial fathers who have generous visitation schedules and who often see their children are more likely to pay child support regularly (Amato & Sobolewski, 2004). Applying What We Know below summarizes ways to help children adjust to their parents' divorce.

Blended Families

"If you get married to Wendell, and Daddy gets married to Carol," Lizzie wondered aloud to Rena, "then I'll have two sisters and one more brother. And let's see, how many grandmothers and grandfathers? A lot!" exclaimed Lizzie.

Life in a single-parent family is often temporary. About 60 percent of divorced parents remarry within a few years. Others cohabit, or share a sexual relationship and a residence with a partner outside of marriage. Parent, stepparent, and children form a new family structure called the **blended**, or **reconstituted, family**—a complex set of new relationships. For some children, this expanded family network is positive, bringing more adult attention. But most have more problems than in stable, first-marriage families. Switching to stepparents' new rules and expectations can be stressful. In addition, children often view steprelatives as intruders. But how well they adapt is, again, related to the quality of family functioning



Adapting to life in a blended family is stressful for children. When stepparents build warm relationships with children before moving into their parenting role and form a cooperative "parenting coalition" with their partner, they provide consistency in child rearing, limit loyalty conflicts, and ease children's adjustment.

(Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). This depends on which parent forms a new relationship and on the child's age and sex. As we will see, older children and girls seem to have the hardest time.

Mother-Stepfather Families. Since mothers generally retain custody of children, the most common form of blended family is a mother-stepfather arrangement. Boys tend to adjust quickly, welcoming a stepfather who is warm, who refrains from exerting his authority too quickly, and who offers relief from coercive cycles of mother-son interaction. Mothers' friction with sons also declines as a result of greater economic security, another adult to share household tasks, and an end to loneliness (Visher, Visher, & Pasley, 2003). In contrast, girls adapt less favorably. Stepfathers disrupt the close ties many girls have established with their mothers, and girls often react with sulky, resistant behavior (Bray, 1999).

Note, however, that age affects these findings. Older school-age children and adolescents of both sexes display more irresponsible, acting-out behavior than their peers in nonstep-families (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2000). Some parents are warmer and more involved with their biological children than with their stepchildren. Older children are more likely to notice and challenge unfair treatment. And adolescents often view the new stepparent as a threat to their freedom, especially if they experienced little parental monitoring in the single-parent family. Still, many teenagers have good relationships with both fathers—a circumstance linked to better adjustment (White & Gilbreth, 2001).

Father-Stepmother Families. Remarriage of noncustodial fathers often leads to reduced contact with their biological children, as these fathers tend to withdraw from their "previous" families (Dunn, 2002). When fathers have custody, children typically react negatively to remarriage. One reason is that children living with fathers often start out with more problems. Perhaps the biological mother could no longer handle the unruly child (usually a boy), so the father and his new part-

ner are faced with a youngster who has behavior problems. In other instances, the father has custody because of a very close relationship with the child, and his remarriage disrupts this bond (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1996).

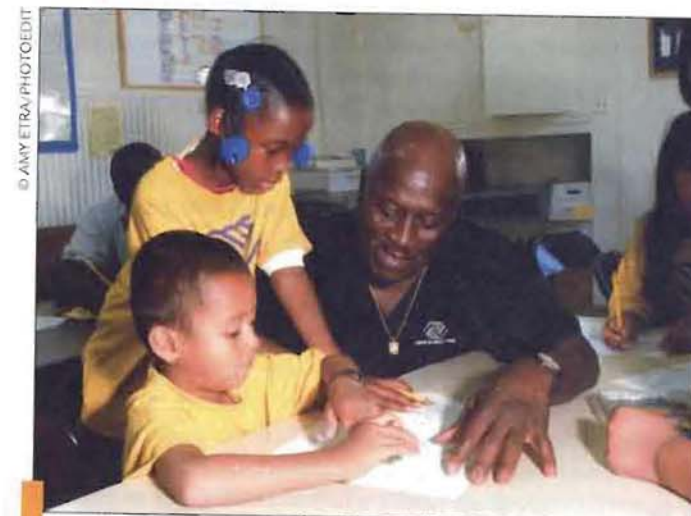
Girls, especially, have a hard time getting along with their stepmothers, either because the girl's bond with her father is threatened or because she becomes entangled in a loyalty conflict between the two mother figures. But the longer girls live in father-stepmother households, the more positive their interaction with stepmothers becomes (Hetherington & Jodl, 1994). With time and patience, most girls eventually benefit from the support of a second mother figure.

Support for Blended Families. Family life education and therapy can help parents and children adapt to the complexities of blended families. Effective approaches encourage stepparents to move into their new roles gradually by first building a warm relationship with the child before engaging in more active parenting (Visher, Visher, & Pasley, 2003). Counselors can help couples form a cooperative "parenting coalition" to limit loyalty conflicts and provide consistency in child rearing. This allows children to benefit from the increased diversity that stepparent relationships bring to their lives.

Unfortunately, the divorce rate for second marriages is even higher than for first marriages. Parents with antisocial tendencies and poor child-rearing skills are particularly likely to have several divorces and remarriages. And the more marital transitions children experience, the greater their difficulties (Dunn, 2002). These families usually require prolonged, intensive therapy.

Maternal Employment and Dual-Earner Families

Today, single and married mothers are in the labor market in nearly equal proportions, and more than three-fourths of those



In this after-school program in Los Angeles, children spend time productively and enjoyably while their parents are at work. A community volunteer helps children with learning and completing homework. Children who attend high-quality "after-care" fare better in emotional and social adjustment.

Helping Children Adjust to Their Parents' Divorce

Suggestion	Rationale
Shield children from conflict.	Witnessing intense parental conflict is very damaging to children. If one parent insists on expressing hostility, children fare better if the other parent does not respond in kind.
Provide children with as much continuity, familiarity, and predictability as possible.	Children adjust better during the period surrounding divorce when their lives have stability—for example, the same school, bedroom, baby-sitter, playmates, and daily schedule.
Explain the divorce and tell children what to expect.	Children are more likely to develop fears of abandonment if they are not prepared for their parents' separation. They should be told that their mother and father will not be living together anymore, which parent will be moving out, and when they will be able to see that parent. If possible, mother and father should explain the divorce together. Parents should provide a reason for the divorce that the child can understand and assure children that they are not to blame.
Emphasize the permanence of the divorce.	Fantasies of parents getting back together can prevent children from accepting the reality of their current life. Children should be told that the divorce is final and that they cannot change this fact.
Respond sympathetically to children's feelings.	Children need a supportive and understanding response to their feelings of sadness, fear, and anger. For children to adjust well, their painful emotions must be acknowledged, not denied or avoided.
Engage in authoritative parenting.	Provide children with affection and acceptance as well as reasonable demands for mature behavior and consistent, rational discipline. Parents who engage in authoritative parenting greatly reduce their children's risk of maladjustment following divorce.
Promote a continuing relationship with both parents.	When parents disentangle their lingering hostility toward the former spouse from the child's need for a continuing relationship with the other parent, children adjust well. Grandparents and other extended-family members can help by not taking sides.

Source: Teyber, 2001.

with school-age children are employed (Statistics Canada, 2005b; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006b). In Chapter 6, we saw that the impact of maternal employment on early development depends on the quality of child care and the continuing parent-child relationship. This same is true in later years.

Maternal Employment and Child Development. When mothers enjoy their work and remain committed to parenting, their children show favorable adjustment—higher self-esteem, more positive family and peer relations, less gender-stereotyped beliefs, and better grades in school. Girls, especially, profit from the image of female competence. Regardless of SES, daughters of employed mothers perceive women's roles as involving more freedom of choice and satisfaction and are more achievement- and career-oriented (Hoffman, 2000).

These benefits reflect parenting practices. Employed mothers who value their parenting role are more likely to use authoritative child rearing and coregulation. Also, children in dual-earner households devote more daily hours to doing homework under parental guidance and participate more in household chores. And maternal employment leads fathers to take on greater child-rearing responsibilities, with a small but increasing number staying home full-time (Gottfried, Gottfried, & Bathurst, 2002; Hoffman & Youngblade, 1999). Paternal involvement is associated with higher intelligence and achievement, more mature social behavior, and a flexible view of gender roles in childhood and adolescence, and with generally better mental health in adulthood (Coltrane, 1996; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004).

But when employment places heavy demands on the mother's schedule or is stressful for other reasons, children are at risk for ineffective parenting (Brooks-Gunn, Han, & Waldfogel, 2002; Costigan, Cox, & Cauce, 2003). Negative consequences are magnified when low-SES mothers spend long days at low-paying, physically exhausting jobs—conditions linked to maternal depression and to harsh, inconsistent discipline (Raver, 2003). In contrast, part-time employment and flexible work schedules are associated with good child adjustment. By preventing work-family role conflict, these arrangements help parents meet children's needs (Frederiksen-Goldsen & Sharlach, 2000).

Support for Employed Parents and Their Families. In dual-earner families, the husband's willingness to share responsibilities is a crucial factor. If the father is uninvolved, the mother carries a double load, at home and at work, leading to fatigue, distress, and little time and energy for children.

Employed mothers and dual-earner parents need assistance from work settings and communities in their child-rearing roles. Part-time employment, flexible schedules, job sharing, and paid leave when children are ill help parents juggle the demands of work and child rearing. Equal pay and employment opportunities for women are also important. Because these policies enhance financial status and morale, they improve the way mothers feel and behave when they arrive home at the end of the working day.

Child Care for School-Age Children. High-quality child care is vital for parents' peace of mind and children's well-being, even in middle childhood. But not all 5- to 13-year-olds have round-the-clock supervision. An estimated 2.4 million in the United States and several hundred thousand in Canada are **self-care children**, who regularly look after themselves during after-school hours. Self-care increases with age and also with SES, perhaps because of the greater safety of higher-income neighborhoods. But when low-SES parents lack alternatives to self-care, their children spend more hours on their own (Casper & Smith, 2002).

Some studies report that self-care children suffer from low self-esteem, antisocial behavior, poor academic achievement, and fearfulness. Others show no such effects. Children's maturity and the way they spend their time seem to explain these contradictions. Among younger school-age children, those who spend more hours alone have more adjustment difficulties (Vandell & Posner, 1999). As children become old enough to look after themselves, those who have a history of authoritative child rearing, are monitored by parental telephone calls, and have regular after-school chores appear responsible and well-adjusted. In contrast, children left to their own devices are more likely to bend to peer pressures and engage in antisocial behavior (Coley, Morris, & Hernandez, 2004; Steinberg, 1986).

Before age 8 or 9, most children need supervision because they are not yet competent to handle emergencies (Galambos & Maggs, 1991). But throughout middle childhood, attending after-school programs with well-trained staffs, generous adult-child ratios, and stimulating activities is linked to better emotional and social adjustment (Pierce, Hamm, & Vandell, 1999). And low-SES children who participate in "after-care" enrichment activities (scouting, music, or art lessons) show special benefits, including better school grades and fewer behavior problems (Posner & Vandell, 1994; Vandell, 1999).

Ask Yourself

Review

Describe and explain changes in sibling relationships during middle childhood.

Apply

Steve and Marissa are in the midst of an acrimonious divorce. Their 9-year-old son Dennis has become hostile and defiant. How can Steve and Marissa help Dennis adjust?

Connect

How does each level in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory—microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem—contribute to the effects of maternal employment on children's development?

Reflect

What after-school child-care arrangements did you experience in elementary school? How do you think they influenced your development?

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Some Common Problems of Development

We have considered a variety of stressful experiences that place children at risk for future problems. Next, we address two more areas of concern: school-age children's fears and anxieties and the consequences of child sexual abuse. Finally, we sum up factors that help children cope effectively with stress.

Fears and Anxieties

Although fears of the dark, thunder and lightning, and supernatural beings persist into middle childhood, children's anxieties are also directed toward new concerns. As children begin to understand the realities of the wider world, the possibility of personal harm (being robbed, stabbed, or shot) and media events (war and disasters) often trouble them. Other common worries include academic failure, parents' health, physical injuries, and peer rejection (Muris et al., 2000; Silverman, La Greca, & Wasserstein, 1995).

Children in Western nations mention exposure to negative information in the media as the most common source of their fears, followed by direct exposure to frightening events (Muris et al., 2001). Nevertheless, only a minority of parents have rules about what TV programs their school-age children and young teenagers can watch, restrict their activities on the computer, or know what sites they visit on the Web (Media Awareness Network, 2001; Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005).

As long as fears are not too intense, most children handle them constructively, using the more sophisticated emotional regulation strategies that develop in middle childhood. Consequently, fears decline with age, especially for girls, who express more fears than boys throughout childhood and adolescence (Gullone, 2000). But about 5 percent of school-age children develop an intense, unmanageable fear called a **phobia**. Children with inhibited temperaments are at high risk, displaying phobias five to six times more often than other children (Ollendick, King, & Muris, 2002).

For example, in *school phobia*, children feel severe apprehension about attending school, often accompanied by physical complaints (dizziness, nausea, stomachaches, and vomiting). About one-third of children with school phobia are 5- to 7-year-olds for whom the real fear is separation from their mother. Family therapy helps these children, whose difficulty can often be traced to parental overprotection (Elliott, 1999).

Most cases of school phobia appear around age 11 to 13, during the transition from middle childhood to adolescence. These children usually find a particular aspect of school frightening—an overcritical teacher, a school bully, or too much parental pressure to achieve. A change in school environment or parenting practices may be needed. Firm insistence that the child return to school, along with training in how to cope with difficult situations, is also helpful (Csoti, 2003).

Severe childhood anxieties may arise from harsh living conditions. In inner-city ghettos and war-torn areas of the world, a great many children live in the midst of constant danger, chaos, and deprivation. As the Lifespan Vista box on page 352 reveals, these youngsters are at risk for long-term emotional distress and behavior problems. Finally, as we saw in our discussion of child abuse in Chapter 8, too often violence and other destructive acts become part of adult-child relationships. During middle childhood, child sexual abuse increases.

Child Sexual Abuse

Until recently, child sexual abuse was considered rare, and children's claims of abuse were often dismissed by adults. In the 1970s, efforts by professionals and media attention led to recognition of child sexual abuse as a serious and widespread problem. About 90,000 cases in the United States and 14,000 cases in Canada were confirmed in the most recently reported year (Trocomé & Wolfe, 2002; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005c).

Characteristics of Abusers and Victims. Sexual abuse is committed against children of both sexes, but more often against girls. Most cases are reported in middle childhood, but for some victims, abuse begins early in life and continues for many years (Trickett & Putnam, 1998).

Typically, the abuser is male—a parent or someone the parent knows well—often a father, stepfather, or live-in boyfriend, somewhat less often an uncle or older brother. In a few instances, mothers are the offenders, more often with sons (Kolvin & Trowell, 1996). Abusers make the child comply in a variety of distasteful ways, including deception, bribery, verbal intimidation, and physical force.

You may wonder how any adult—especially a parent or close relative—could possibly violate a child sexually. Many offenders deny their own responsibility. They blame the abuse on the willing participation of a seductive youngster. Yet children are not capable of making a deliberate, informed decision to enter into a sexual relationship! Even older children and adolescents are not free to say yes or no. Rather, the responsibility lies with abusers, who tend to have characteristics that predispose them toward sexual exploitation of children. They have great difficulty controlling their impulses and may suffer from psychological disorders, including alcohol and drug abuse. Often they pick out children who are unlikely to defend themselves or to be believed—those who are physically weak, emotionally deprived, socially isolated, or affected by disabilities (Bolen, 2001).

Reported cases of child sexual abuse are linked to poverty, marital instability, and resulting weakening of family ties. Children who live in homes with a constantly changing cast of characters—repeated marriages, separations, and new partners—are especially vulnerable. But children in economically advantaged, stable families are also victims, although their abuse is more likely to escape detection (Putnam, 2003).

Milestones

Development in Middle Childhood

Age

Physical

Cognitive

Language

Emotional/Social

6-8
YEARS

- Slow gains in height and weight continue until adolescent growth spurt (290)



- Lateralization of the cerebral cortex strengthens; brain plasticity declines (125)
- Permanent teeth gradually replace primary teeth (290)
- Writing becomes smaller and more legible (295)
- Drawings become more organized and detailed and include some depth cues (295)
- Games with rules and rough-and-tumble play become common (296-297)



- Dominance hierarchies become more stable, especially among boys (297)

- Thought becomes more logical, as shown by the ability to pass Piagetian conservation, class inclusion, and seriation problems (298-299)
- Understanding of spatial concepts improves, as illustrated by ability to give clear, well-organized directions and to draw and read maps (299)
- Attention becomes more selective, adaptable, and playful (302)



- Uses memory strategies of rehearsal and organization (302)
- Views the mind as an active, constructive agent, capable of transforming information (304)
- Awareness of memory strategies and the impact of psychological factors (such as focusing attention) on task performance improves (304-305)

- Vocabulary increases rapidly throughout middle childhood, eventually exceeding 40,000 words (315)
- Word definitions are concrete, referring to functions and appearance (315)
- Language awareness improves (315)



- Self-concept begins to include personality traits and social comparisons (330-331)



- Self-esteem differentiates, is hierarchically organized, and declines to a more realistic level (331-332)
- Self-conscious emotions of pride and guilt are governed by personal responsibility (335)
- Recognizes that individuals can experience more than one emotion at a time (335)
- Attends to facial and situational cues in interpreting another's feelings (335)
- Understands that people may have different perspectives because of access to different information (336)
- Becomes more responsible and independent (336-337)
- Distributive justice reasoning shifts from equality to merit to equity and benevolence (337)



- Peer interaction becomes more prosocial, and aggression declines (339)