INTRODUCTION

Parents of children between the ages of 5 and 12 years—the period commonly referred to as middle childhood—face challenges arising from both maturational changes in children and from socially imposed constraints, opportunities, and demands impinging on them. Children in diverse societies enter a wider social world at approximately the age of 5 years and begin to determine their own experiences, including their contacts with particular others, to a greater degree than previously. Between the age of 5 years and adolescence, transitions occur in physical maturity, cognitive abilities and learning, the diversity and impact of relationships with others, and exposure to new settings, opportunities, and demands. These changes inevitably alter the amount, kind, content, and significance of interactions between parents and children. In this chapter we address the impact of the distinctive challenges and achievements of middle childhood on parent–child relationships and on the processes of socialization within families.

The chapter includes five main sections. The first section provides a brief overview of historical considerations in the study of parenting of 5- to 12-year-old children. The second section outlines key normative changes in children that affect parenting during middle childhood. The third section reviews changes in parent–child relationships in which parenting issues are embedded. The fourth section distills findings from research on the issues of parenting and of parent–child relationships that are especially linked to the distinctive changes of the period. These include adapting processes of control, fostering self-management and responsibility, facilitating positive relationships outside the family, and maintaining contacts with schools and other out-of-home settings. The concluding section underscores the key themes from research and notes persistent questions about the distinctiveness of parenting during middle childhood.
HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD PARENTING

In diverse cultures, early-middle childhood historically has marked a major shift in children’s relationships with adults. The age of 6 or 7 years was the time at which children were absorbed into the world of adults, helping to shoulder family responsibilities and working alongside their elders. Well into the 18th century in Western nations, many children left home by the age of 6 or 7 years to work as servants in other households (Aries, 1962). If children remained at home, their parents became more like supervisors or overseers. The assumption that children were capable of tasks now largely reserved for adults was consistent with a general attitude toward forcing infants and young children toward behavioral rectitude and submissiveness to authority (see French, in Vol. 2 of this Handbook).

Only in recent times have changing concepts of the family and the advent of formal schooling removed children of this age from wide participation in adult society. In industrialized nations today, the ages of 5 to 12 years have continued to be set apart from younger ages because they correspond to the beginning of compulsory schooling. Schooling provides a distinctive social definition of children and social structures that constrain and channel development during this period. This secular change has meant that, rather than taking on adult responsibilities, as was the case in earlier periods, children in middle childhood are primarily concerned with preparation for eventual responsibility. Children’s preparation for adulthood is conducted not only by parents, but also by institutions and persons outside of the family. Thus the central contemporary issue of parenting during middle childhood is how parents most effectively adjust their interactions, cognitions, and affectional behavior to the changing characteristics of children in order to maintain appropriate influence and guidance during age-graded transitions toward greater autonomy (Maccoby, 1992). The next section outlines these changes and some implications for parent–child relationships.

NORMATIVE CHANGES IN CHILDREN DURING MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

To most parents in industrialized societies, middle childhood is less distinctive as a period of development than infancy, toddlerhood, or adolescence. The ages of 5 to 12 years nevertheless universally are set apart by major transition points in human development (Rogoff, Pirrotta, Fox, and White, 1975). In this section we briefly review changes in children that set the stage for transitions in parenting during middle childhood. These changes include cognitive competence and the growth of knowledge, transitions in social contexts and relationships, increased vulnerability to stress, altered functions of the self, and self-regulation and social responsibility.

Cognitive Competence and the Growth of Knowledge

Cognitive changes greatly expand children’s capacities for solving problems and gaining necessary information to become increasingly competent and resourceful. For parents, changes in children’s cognitive competence necessitate alterations ranging from the content of conversations, strategies for control and influence over children’s behavior, and expectations regarding competence and self-regulation.

Three characteristic changes of middle childhood are noteworthy. One is a growing ability to reason in terms of abstract representations of objects and events. For children younger than 5 to 7 years old, cognition characteristically involves limitations on the number of objects that can be thought about at one time, and systematic or abstract reasoning is relatively rare (Edwards and Liu, in Vol. 1 of this Handbook). Between the ages of 5 and 9 years, most children gain capacities that enable them to reason effectively about increasingly complex problems and circumstances; and by 10 to 12 years of age, children begin to show increased abilities for generalizing across concrete instances and for systematic problem solving and reasoning. Second, children begin to organize tasks more maturely and independently than in early childhood. This more planful behavior entails
adopting goals for activities, subordinating knowledge and actions in the service of a superordinate plan, and monitoring one’s own activities and mental processes. Third, increases occur in both the opportunity and the capacity for acquiring information and for using new knowledge in reasoning, thinking, problem solving, and action. Compared with younger children, 5- to 12-year-old children thus can solve more difficult, abstract intellectual problems in school and can master increased, more complex responsibilities at home and in other common settings (Case, 1998; DeLoache, Miller, and Pierroutsakos, 1998; Fischer and Bullock, 1984).

These cognitive expansions are accompanied by increased challenges to integrate knowledge and abilities for understanding self and others, relationships, communities, and societies. Children in middle childhood contrast sharply with younger children in their abilities for greater social understanding. Compared with younger children, 6- to 12-year-old children evaluate others with greater accuracy and more often view classmates as teachers and other children do (Malloy, Sugarman, Montvilo, and Ben-Zeev, 1995; Malloy, Yarlas, Montvilo, and Sugarman, 1996). Children in middle childhood also increasingly distinguish among psychological traits (e.g., shy–outgoing, nice–mean, active–inactive) (Heyman and Gelman, 2000). In interactions with others, 5- to 12-year-old children, relatively more than younger children, adopt the perspectives of others, which helps them to infer possible reasons for others’ behaviors (Crick and Dodge, 1994; Dunn and Slomkowski, 1992). These growing social cognitive skills underlie the further growth of social competence during middle childhood, including skills for describing and explaining conditions and events (e.g., Whitehurst and Sonnenschein, 1981), for deceiving others and for detecting their deceptions (e.g., DePaulo, Jordan, Irvine, and Laser, 1982; Watson and Valtin, 1997), and for predicting the behavior of other children (e.g., Droge and Stipek, 1993; Heyman and Dweck, 1998). Whereas preschool children are “ruthless stereotypers” (E. Maccoby, personal communication, October 12, 1996), children in middle childhood increasingly recognize similarities as well as differences in female and male gender roles (Serbin, Powlishta, and Gulko, 1993; Welch-Ross and Schmidt, 1996). Concepts of parent–child relationships move toward the idea that parents and children mutually have responsibilities to each other, rather than focus on parents as those who satisfy children’s needs (Selman, 1980).

Children in middle childhood, in addition to growth in interpersonal understanding, increasingly understand many broader conditions of life. Compared with younger children, 5- to 12-year-old children generally grasp basic notions related to fundamental life experiences such as conception, illness, and death (Bibace and Walsh, 1981; Lazar and Torney-Purta, 1991), although many of their beliefs about human biology remain inaccurate and simplistic (Morris, Taplin, and Gelman, 2000). At the group and the societal levels, 5- to 12-year-old children generally manifest a strong sense of fairness, both in the distribution of resources and in equal treatment under the law (Helwig, 1998; McGillicuddy-De Lisi, Watkins, and Vinchur, 1994). Moreover, they increasingly believe in the right of children of their age to some degree of self-determination and self-expression (Helwig, 1997; Ruck, Abramovitch, and Keating, 1998).

For parents generally, the characteristic reasoning patterns of 5- to 12-year-old children necessitate more elaborate and compelling explanations and justifications in order to have the same degree of impact that, in earlier years, parents could achieve by distracting or admonishing a child.

The experiences of adoptive parents of 5- to 12-year-old children illustrate some of the challenges stemming from cognitive changes. Preschool children can and often do label themselves as adopted, but greater cognitive capacities in middle childhood make it possible to form a more complex understanding of what adoption means. For example, only after the age of 6 years do children typically identify adoption and birth as alternative paths to parenthood (Brodzinsky, Smith, and Brodzinsky, 1998). Later, children recognize that their adoptive parents’ joy in having them as children necessarily involves the loss of parenting rights for their birth parents, which sometimes precipitates a sense of loss for their biological family. Children in middle- to late-middle childhood (ages 8 to 12.5 years) question their parents about a significantly greater number of adoption-related issues than younger children do (Wrobel, Kohler, Grotevant, and McRoy, 1998), and parents face pressing decisions about how to address the child’s curiosity while preserving a positive view of
the child’s adoptive status and heritage (Brodzinsky and Pinderhughes, in Vol. 1 of this Handbook). Thus cognitive change underlies distinctive patterns of behavior and responsiveness during middle childhood and, consequently, alters the demands on parents.

Social Contexts and Relationships

Parents of 5- to 12-year-old children also encounter additional burdens and responsibilities because social networks expand significantly during middle childhood. Whereas most of children’s exchanges with others during infancy and early childhood occur in their families, 5- to 12-year-old children spend less time in the company of adults and family members, relative to peers and other adults outside of the family. The shifts are most pronounced between the ages of 5 and 9 years. Not until early adolescence, however, do contacts with peers, rather than those with adults, dominate social networks (Feiring and Lewis, 1991a, 1991b; Steinberg and Silk, in Vol. 1 of this Handbook).

Middle childhood experiences exert considerable pressure to create and maintain connections with peers (Hartup, 1996; Ladd and Pettit, in Vol. 5 of this Handbook). Entering school especially increases the number and kinds of developmental tasks and influences that children encounter. For parents, these experiences outside the family often necessitate their monitoring children’s activities and choices of companions at a distance and create new challenges in fostering positive behavior and development (also see Crouter and Head, in Vol. 3 of this Handbook).

The need for social support from a variety of others, moreover, is more apparent in middle childhood than in earlier years. Contrary to stereotypes, perceptions of parents as sources of both emotional support and instrumental help typically remain stable across age groups during middle childhood (Hunter and Youniss, 1982). Children from 5 to 12 years old, however, recognize that others, some of them outside the family, serve significant social needs in their lives (Bryant, 1985; Furman and Buhrmester, 1992; Reid, Landesman, Treder, and Jaccard, 1989; Zarbatany, Hartmann, and Rankin, 1990).

To maintain these extended networks, children must learn to cooperate on more complex tasks and to work without extensive oversight by adults (Ladd and Pettit, in Vol. 5 of this Handbook). By the ages 10 to 12 years, children become notably more skilled in using goal-directed planful strategies to initiate, maintain, and cooperate within peer relationships. One implication of these skills is greater ability to manage conflicts with peers (Parker and Gottman, 1989; Selman and Schultz, 1989). Consequently, parents may spend less time in direct management of peer relations. Children who do not gain these skills are at a disadvantage for optimal social development and at risk for a variety of later problems (Parker and Asher, 1987).

Peer relationships play a role that is increasingly complementary to that of parents during middle childhood (Hartup, 1996). Over the years from age 5 to age 12, children increasingly view their peers as important sources of intimacy, as well as companionship. Although parents and peers influence children toward similar values and behaviors in most cases, peers also often provide experience and expectations in areas in which families typically have limited impact, especially in areas based on an understanding of give-and-take with others of equal power and status (e.g., collaborative tasks). For the most part, however, parental and peer influences are reciprocal: Families provide children with basic skills for smooth, successful peer relationships; and children often “import” knowledge, expectations, and behavioral tactics from their interactions with peers that stimulate parents’ adjustments to their children’s maturing abilities (Collins, 1995; Youniss, 1980; also see Ladd and Pettit, in Vol. 5 of this Handbook).

Parents’ roles increasingly involve facilitating children’s lives at school. Classrooms, playgrounds, and school buses provide ready access to peers and also opportunities for more diverse contacts than many children would otherwise encounter (Hartup, 1996). Varying settings between elementary and middle schools, however, may complicate children’s efforts to form and maintain stable relationships with peers (Eccles, Lord, and Buchanan, 1996; Epstein, 1989). The social field for children initially
is the classroom, and most interactions are with only one teacher and the same group of students throughout the day, whereas in the later grades the entire school is the social field, with multiple teachers, classrooms, and common spaces (Minuchin and Shapiro, 1983). For parents, monitoring of school experiences may entail more effort as the number of teachers and settings increases (see Crouter and Head, in Vol. 3 of this Handbook). Additionally, many parents must arrange for and interact with out-of-home childcare personnel and with adults who provide instruction and supervision in out-of-school learning and recreational settings (Dryfoos, 1999; Honig, in Vol. 5 of this Handbook; Vandell and Shumow, 1999). Clearly the transitions of middle childhood generate new tasks for parents as well as developmental challenges for children.

**Risks and Coping**

The problems of parenting during middle childhood are exacerbated by an increase in risks and stressors for children, relative to early childhood. Although children between the ages of 5 and 12 years are generally the healthiest segment of the population in industrialized countries (Shonkoff, 1984), for many the physical transitions of middle childhood and the secular trend toward earlier puberty hasten exposure to some of the health risks of adulthood. Accidents, the major cause of death during childhood, increase between the ages of 5 and 12 years. During the past two decades, tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use have become more common for children in the middle childhood age group; moreover, middle childhood experiences increase the risk of beginning to use alcohol and tobacco by middle adolescence (Dishion, Capaldi, and Yoerger, 1999; Shonkoff, 1984).

**Neighborhoods.** The broadening of opportunities for children to interact in environments outside the home frequently also broadens potential sources of risk. Children’s perceptions of the neighborhood are linked to their socioemotional adjustment. Reported feelings of loneliness vary with children’s perceptions of their neighborhood as problematic or child friendly and by the degree of perceived support from neighbors. Negative neighborhood characteristics are linked to poorer socioemotional functioning (Chase-Lansdale, Gordon, Brooks-Gunn, and Klebanov, 1997). Inner-city 9- to 12-year-old children who rated their neighborhoods high on economic disadvantage and personal exposure to stressful life events and low on personal support tend to be more involved in antisocial behavior and drug use (Dubow, Edwards, and Ippolito, 1997).

The impact of neighborhood characteristics on middle childhood development is often difficult to pin down, perhaps because familial influences are consistent and more direct sources of influence that frequently either extend or actively counteract neighborhood influences (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1997; Chase-Lansdale and Gordon, 1996; Dubow et al., 1997; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, and Klebanov, 1994). For example, parents with negative perceptions of their neighborhoods supervise children more closely (Dubow et al., 1997). On the other hand, neighborhood characteristics can exacerbate familial difficulties. Low-income African American children living in a single-parent family show especially high levels of aggression if they also live in a financially disadvantaged neighborhood, whereas children from similar economic and family conditions in a middle-income neighborhood are no more aggressive than other children (Kupersmidt, Griesler, DeRosier, Patterson, and Davis, 1995). Middle-income neighborhoods do not unequivocally serve as a protective factor or potentiator of developmental opportunities, however; the particular opportunities and limitations impinging on children are more important than economic advantage per se.

**Exposure to violence.** The broader environments of middle childhood carry, for many children, increased risk of exposure to violence (Finkelhor and Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994; Lorion and Saltzman, 1993; Osofsky, Wewers, Hann, and Fick, 1993; Richters and Martinez, 1993). Studies show the risk of exposure to violence to be as great for 5- to 8-year-old children as for 10- to 12-year-old children. The ready availability of weapons to individuals of all ages increases the likelihood of being a victim or a perpetrator of violence during the middle childhood years. Although the impact
of violence surely concerns parents, even parents in high-risk neighborhoods seriously underestimate the extent to which their children report exposure to violence (Hill and Jones, 1997).

Experiencing violence, as a victim or a witness, influences children’s sense of security and hope in the world (Lewis and Osofsky, 1997). Ethnographic research with African American children in an urban school revealed that children persistently discuss daily violent events in their community, and their discussions reflect the insidious presence of these experiences in the children’s minds (Town, 1996). Children’s perceptions of violence in their communities are correlated positively with their reports of fearfulness, distress, and depression at home and at school (Bell and Jenkins, 1993; Hill, Levermore, Twaine, and Jones, 1996; Martinez and Richters, 1993; Osofsky et al., 1993). Exposure to violence and victimization at home are associated with a variety of emotional and behavior problems and diminished school performance (Emery, 1989).

Parents may play a role by monitoring the degree of risk associated with extrafamilial settings and by imposing appropriate safety measures, including training children to respond to high-risk situations. Furthermore, parents are critical sources of social support to children in coping with risky, threatening conditions. Children who perceive that persons are available with whom they can talk, discuss problems, and so forth, cope more effectively with the stress of multiple personal and social changes during middle childhood and the transition to adolescence (Dubow and Tisak, 1989; Dubow, Tisak, Causey, Hryksho, and Reid, 1991; Hirsch and Rapkin, 1987).

**Development of Self-Concept, Self-Regulation, and Social Responsibility**

Parents and other significant adults (e.g., teachers, coaches) also play a significant role in the growing capacities of 5- to 12-year-old children for functioning as responsible individuals (Eccles, 1999). Attaining mature self-regulatory capacities requires knowledge of the self, emotions, and cognitive capacities to focus on long-term goals and to take account of others’ views and needs.

**Self and self-regulation.** During middle childhood, children’s descriptions of themselves become more stable and more comprehensive (Byrne and Shavelson, 1996; Damon and Hart, 1988). This shift partly reflects the growth of cognitive concepts and awareness of cultural norms and expectations for performance. In addition, self-evaluation intensifies as exposure to more varied persons and social contexts stimulates comparisons among self and others and provides evaluative feedback about characteristics, skills, and abilities (Eccles, 1999; Pomerantz, Ruble, Frey, and Greulich, 1995). Linked to changing concepts of self are greater capacities for self-control and self-regulation. For most children, impulsive behavior declines steadily from early childhood into middle childhood (Maccoby, 1984).

Parents and adult mentors can further capacities for self-regulation by exposing children to standards of conduct and models of socially valued behaviors and by providing rewards and punishments in accord with those standards (Smith and Smoll, 1990). Parents’ and teachers’ impact on motivation is greatest when their encouragement emphasizes opportunities for learning and mastery rather than stresses the need to succeed at social or task goals (Erdley, Cain, Loomis, Dumas-Hines, and Dweck, 1997; Kamins and Dweck, 1999). Furthermore, parents can stimulate cognitive components of self-regulation through discussion and reasoning that invoke principles for discerning right from wrong and that emphasize the consequences of transgressions (Chapman and McBride, 1992; Dunn and Slomkowski, 1992; Eisenberg and Valiente, in Vol. 5 of this Handbook; Walker and Taylor, 1991).

As self-regulation increases during middle childhood, parents develop new expectancies (see Goodnow, in Vol. 3 of this Handbook). Parents ordinarily expect more autonomy and independence in tasks at school and at home, including peer-group activities (Hartup, 1984). Parents gradually allow children to assume more responsibility for interacting with health care personnel and for mastering and acting on information and instructions about medication, specific health practices, and evolving life-style issues with implications for physical and mental well-being (Shonkoff, 1984; also see...
Hickson and Clayton, in Vol. 5 of this Handbook; Meadow-Orlans, in Vol. 4 of this Handbook; Melamed, in Vol. 5 of this Handbook). These transitions lay the groundwork for greater autonomy in adolescence and young adulthood.

**Vulnerability and coping.** Children from 5 to 12 years old generally may be vulnerable to different stressors than children of other ages (Compas, 1987; Maccoby, 1984). For example, children of these ages generally are less distressed by short-term separations from parents than are younger children, but they grieve more intensely and over a longer period of time over the death of a parent (Rutter, 1983). Certain resources for coping with stress, moreover, may be more readily available to 5- to 12-year-old children than to younger children (Rudolph, Dennig, and Weisz, 1995). Among these are greater knowledge of strategies for coping with uncontrollable stress, which may modulate the degree of children’s vulnerability (Altshuler and Ruble, 1989; Band and Weisz, 1988; Finnegans, Hodges, and Perry, 1996) and availability of social support (Dubow et al., 1991).

**NORMATIVE CHANGES IN PARENT–CHILD RELATIONSHIPS**

Concurrent with these individual changes of middle childhood are characteristic patterns of parent–child interactions and relationships that distinguish this period from earlier and later years of life.

**Interactions and Affective Expression**

Interactions between parents and children become less frequent in middle childhood. Parents are with children less than half as much as before their children started in school (Hill and Stafford, 1980). This decline in time together is relatively greater for parents with lower levels of education.

When parents and children are together, moreover, parents and children both show less overt affection during middle childhood than previously (McNally, Eisenberg, and Harris, 1991; Newson and Newson, 1968, 1976; Roberts, Block, and Block, 1984). Children also report that parents are less accepting toward them, especially during the later years of middle childhood (Armentrout and Burger, 1972). Despite a decrease in displays of physical affection, when their children are between the ages of 3 and 12 years, however, parents report little change in their enjoyment of parenting, having positive regard for their child, or having respect for the child’s opinions and preferences (McNally et al., 1991; Roberts et al., 1984).

Parents and children alike are less likely to display and experience negative emotions in these interactions. Emotional outbursts, such as temper tantrums and coercive behaviors of children toward other family members, ordinarily begin to decline in early childhood (Goodenough, 1931; Newson and Newson, 1968, 1976; Patterson, 1982). This trend continues during middle childhood, and the frequency of disciplinary encounters also decreases steadily between the ages of 3 and 9 years (Clifford, 1959). Nevertheless, several emotional characteristics of interactions with 5- to 12-year-old children may complicate parents’ management of their relationships with children. Compared with preschool children, 5- to 12-year-old children are more likely to sulk, become depressed, avoid parents, or engage in passive noncooperation with their parents (Clifford, 1959). Furthermore, children become increasingly likely to say that their conflicts with parents come about because parents provide inadequate help or do not spend enough time with the child, or (among older children) because parents fail to meet parent role expectations or there is a lack of consensus on familial and societal values (Fisher and Johnson, 1990).

**Mother–Child and Father–Child Relationships**

Some aspects of relationships are differentiated by gender. In general, mothers and children spend more time together than do fathers and children (Collins and Russell, 1991; Parke, in Vol. 3 of this
When both parents are with the child, however, mothers and fathers initiate interaction with children with equal frequency, and children initiate similar numbers of interactions with each parent (Noller, 1980; Russell and Russell, 1987). As in early life, fathers typically are involved relatively more in physical/outdoor play interactions, whereas mothers interact more frequently in connection with caregiving and household tasks. In observational studies with both parents present, though, fathers and mothers engaged in caregiving to a similar degree.

Both positive and negative emotional expressions and conflictual interactions are more likely in mother–child than in father–child interactions (Bronstein, 1984; Russell and Russell, 1987). This may reflect the greater amount of time and greater diversity of shared activities involving mothers. There is some indication that interactions of mothers with sons are marked by greater emotional expression than those of mothers with daughters, although whether these emotions are relatively more positive or negative is inconsistent across studies (for reviews, see Collins and Russell, 1991; Lytton and Romney, 1991).

Researchers frequently fail to find evidence of several differences commonly expected for interactions of children with mothers and with fathers. Both mothers and fathers increase their attention to school achievement and homework during middle childhood (McNally et al., 1991; Roberts et al., 1984). Furthermore, studies of parental reinforcements for instances of behaviors such as competitiveness, autonomous achievement, or competence in cognitive or play activities generally show negligible differences between mothers and fathers (Bronstein, 1984; Russell and Russell, 1987). Collins and Russell (1991) argued that few parental differences first emerge in middle childhood. Furthermore, the degree to which mother–child and father–child relationships are complementary, rather than overlapping, is more likely to change during adolescence than during middle childhood.

Mutual Cognitions

Parents’ and children’s cognitions about each other and about issues of mutual relevance also change during middle childhood, especially the latter part of the period. Parents’ knowledge of their children’s daily activities and preferences increase during the middle childhood years (Crouter, Helms-Erikson, Updegraff, and McHale, 1999; Miller, Davis, Wilde, and Brown, 1993; also see Crouter and Head, in Vol. 3 of this Handbook). Children from 10 to 11 years of age and their parents tend to agree on the topics for which parents’ authority is legitimate, but disagreement becomes more likely during adolescence (Smetana, 1989). Late-middle childhood is an important time for achieving more mutual cognitions. Alessandri and Wozniak (1987) found that 10- to 11-year-old children perceived their parents’ beliefs about them less accurately than 15- to 16-year-old children did. Following those same 10- to 11-year-old children for 2 years, however, the researchers found that the children, who were now aged 12 to 13 years, were more accurate in their perceptions of what their parents believed about them (Alessandri and Wozniak, 1989).

Maccoby (1984; Maccoby and Martin, 1983) and Collins (1995) have speculated that mutual cognitions are more significant determinants of relationship qualities in middle childhood than in earlier periods. By the time a child reaches middle childhood, shared experiences have created extensive expectancies about the probable reactions of both parents and children. These expectancies then guide each person’s behavior in interactions with the other. The rapid changes of late-middle childhood, in particular, stimulate both parents and children to adapt their beliefs and perceptions about the other to maintain their relationship over time.

To summarize, changes in parent–child relationships create new paradigms for interaction that affect when and how parents will respond to the behavior of children during middle childhood. Although partly resulting from adaptations to developmental changes that have already occurred, these relational patterns also affect responses to further changes during and beyond middle childhood. In the next section we examine findings from research on parenting of 5- to 12-year-old children.
3. Middle Childhood

ISSUES IN PARENTING DURING MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

Changes in children and parent–child relationships raise the question of whether middle childhood is a distinctive period of parenting. This section addresses two related questions: What distinctive tasks devolve on parents during the middle childhood years, and what characteristics of effective parenting have emerged in studies of 5- to 12-year-old children? These questions are examined in research findings on four central issues of parenting entailed by the developmental changes of middle childhood: adapting control processes, fostering self-management and a sense of responsibility, facilitating positive relationships with others, and managing experiences in extrafamilial settings.

Adapting Control Processes

Changes in interactions between parents and children, together with changing demands from age-graded activities and experiences, necessitate different strategies for exerting influence over children’s behavior. These strategies may involve different disciplinary practices than those of childhood, more extensive shared regulation of children’s behavior, and altered patterns for effective control.

Disciplinary practices. Parenting young children typically involves distraction and physically assertive strategies for preventing harm and gaining compliance. When their children are in middle childhood, however, parents report less frequent physical punishment and an increasing use of techniques such as deprivation of privileges, appeals to children’s self-esteem or sense of humor, arousal of children’s sense of guilt, and reminders that children are responsible for what happens to them (Clifford, 1959; Newson and Newson, 1976; Roberts et al., 1984). These techniques may reflect changes in parents’ attributions about the degree to which children should be expected to control their own behavior and also a greater tendency to regard misbehavior as deliberate and thus warranting both parental anger and punishment (Dix, Ruble, Grusec, and Nixon, 1986).

Maccoby (1984) speculated that children’s responses to parents’ control attempts during middle childhood are affected by changes in children’s concepts of the basis for parental authority. Whereas preschoolers view parental authority as resting on the power to punish or reward, children in early-middle childhood increasingly believe parental authority derives from all the things that parents do for them. After the age of approximately 8 years, children invoke parents’ expert knowledge and skill also as reasons to submit to their authority (Braine, Pomerantz, Lorber, and Krantz, 1991). Maccoby (1984) speculated that parental appeals based on fairness, the return of favors, or reminders of the parents’ greater knowledge and experience may become more effective during middle childhood, with parents less often feeling compelled to resort to promises of reward or threats of punishment. This line of reasoning implies that, during their children’s middle childhood, parents may find it easier to follow the disciplinary practices that have been found most effective in fostering patterns of self-regulated, socially responsible behavior, namely, an emphasis on the implications of children’s actions for others (induction), rather than on use of parents’ superior power to coerce compliance (Hoffman, 1994).

Parents’ effectiveness as disciplinarians depends in part on the clarity with which they communicate expectations and reprimands (Grusec and Goodnow, 1994). Children tend to “tune out” when instructions and reprimands are conveyed in an ambiguous manner, as when a parent is inexplicit or reprimands the child while smiling. Such ineffective messages often result from a parent’s sense of powerlessness or lack of control over the child’s behavior, but also exacerbate behaviors parents wish to correct (Bugental, Blue, and Cruzcossa, 1989; Bugental, Lyon, Lin, McGrath, and Bimbela, 1999).

Coregulation. Decreasing face-to-face interactions during middle childhood put additional pressures on parents’ strategies for exerting control over children’s behavior. Different methods are appropriate because of the age and the capabilities of children and also because children must
be trained to regulate their own behavior for longer periods of time. At the same time, children’s increased capabilities to be planful and goal directed and to communicate plans and wishes to parents more effectively permit greater collaboration on mutually acceptable plans and more effective monitoring through conversations about children’s activities (Maccoby, 1984, 1992).

Maccoby (1984) specified the responsibilities of both parents and children in this cooperative process. First, parents must stay informed about events occurring outside their presence and must coordinate agendas, that link the daily activities of parents and child. Second, they must effectively use the times when direct contact does occur for teaching and feedback. Third, they must foster the development of abilities that will allow children to monitor their own behavior, to adopt acceptable standards of good and bad behavior, to avoid undue risks, and to know when they need parental support or guidance. This process is reciprocal: Children must be willing to inform parents of their whereabouts, activities, and problems so that parents can mediate and guide when necessary.

**Effective control in middle childhood.** Maccoby’s formulation implies that effective parental control processes are tantamount to training of skills for self-regulation. A key component of effective control is parental monitoring, which requires careful attention to children’s behavior and associated contingencies. Monitoring is integral to child-centered control techniques, in which parents exert influence by sensitively fitting their behavior to behavioral cues from children, rather than allowing the parents’ own needs to drive parent–child interactions (Maccoby and Martin, 1983). Ineffective parental monitoring repeatedly has been linked to antisocial behavior in middle childhood and adolescence (Patterson, 1982, 1986; Tolan and Loeber, 1993; see Crouter and Head, in Vol. 3 of this Handbook).

The effectiveness of monitoring, however, depends on the parents’ general style of control. Children are most likely to manifest positive developmental outcomes when parents practice child-centered patterns of discipline, accompanied by clearly communicated demands, parental monitoring, and an atmosphere of acceptance toward the child (authoritative parenting) (Baumrind, 1989; Maccoby and Martin, 1983; Maccoby, 1992). For example, attentive, responsive care appears to be positively linked to the development of self-esteem, competence, and social responsibility. The meager evidence now available from other cultures indicates that optimal childrearing practices frequently include somewhat more restrictiveness than is usually implied by North American findings with middle-socioeconomic families (e.g., Chao, 1994; Chao and Tseng, in Vol. 4 of this Handbook; Rohner and Pettingill, 1985; Rohner and Rohner, 1981). In every society, however, responsiveness to children’s needs and support for their development appears to foster competent, responsible behaviors (see Steinberg and Silk, in Vol. 1 of this Handbook; Harkness and Super, in Vol. 2 of this Handbook). Darling and Steinberg (1993) have argued that a context of responsive, supportive, child-centered parental style affects the impact of specific parental practices, such as monitoring of children’s behavior.

The research findings on which these generalizations are based generally do not provide definitive evidence that parenting characteristics cause particular constellations of child characteristics, but studies from which causal effects can be inferred imply that the characteristics above constitute the currently best description of effective parenting (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, and Bornstein, 2000). A striking example comes from a prevention program intended to foster more effective parenting following divorce (Forgatch and DeGarmo, 1999). School-age sons of recently divorced single mothers often manifest increased academic, behavioral, social, and emotional problems relative to sons of nondivorced mothers, and the divorced mothers themselves commonly behave toward their sons in a more coercive and less positive manner than nondivorced mothers do (Hetherington, Bridges, and Insabella, 1998). The prevention program provided yearlong training and discussion groups that encouraged mothers to use the effective parenting principles previously described during this postdivorce period. No intervention was provided to the children. At the end of 12 months, treatment group mothers generally showed less coercive behavior toward children and
fewer declines in positive behavior than control-group mothers. Moreover, the degree of change in the mothers’ behavior over the course of 12 months significantly predicted the degree of change in the children’s behaviors, both at home and at school. By changing the mothers’ behavior, these researchers changed the children’s behavior, thus demonstrating that effective parenting causes improved child behavior.

Parents of 5- to 10-year-old children describe their childrearing along two dimensions: nurturance–restrictiveness (ranging from positive, facilitating reactions to negative, interfering reactions) and power (amount of active control exerted by the parent, including both rewards and punishments) (Dekovic and Janssens, 1992; Emmerich, 1962). Researchers have found no evidence of change in parents’ behavior on these dimensions during middle childhood (e.g., Emmerich, 1962). Moreover, children’s perceptions of firmness of control show little variation across groups from ages 9 to 13 years (Armentrout and Burger, 1972). Most experts now believe that firmness alone is an inadequate indicator of effective control. Lewis (1981) argued that, in many families, firmness of control coexists with responsive, child-centered parenting, which in turn enhances children’s motivation to respond positively to their parents.

To summarize, middle childhood does not induce dramatic changes in parents’ typical styles of childrearing. As in other periods, effective childrearing entails both attentiveness and responsiveness to children’s needs and expectations of age-appropriate behavior. Nevertheless, during middle childhood patterns from earlier life are altered in ways that fundamentally affect the exchanges between parents and children and the implications of those exchanges for further development. These changes involve a gradual transition toward greater responsibility for children in regulating their own behavior and interactions with others.

Fostering Self-Management and Social Responsibility

Alterations in parents’ management and control activities partly result from children’s own developing self-management skills. Although parents do not abruptly relinquish control any more than children abruptly become autonomous, children’s enhanced self-management skills probably contribute to a gradual transition from parental regulation of children’s behavior to self-regulation by the child (Maccoby, 1984, 1992).

This implicit transfer of regulatory responsibility is a hallmark of adolescent development (Steinberg and Silk, in Vol. 1 of this Handbook), but Maccoby (1984) has argued that the transfer process begins earlier and lasts longer than has commonly been assumed. She contends that the transfer of power from parents to children involves a three-phase developmental process: parental regulation, coregulation, and, finally, self-regulation. In the intermediate period of coregulation, parents retain general supervisory control but expect children to exercise gradually more extensive responsibilities for moment-to-moment self-regulation. This coregulatory experience in turn lays the groundwork for greater autonomy in adolescence and young adulthood.

In several formulations (Collins, Gleason, and Sesma, 1997; Grusec and Goodnow, 1994; Kuczynski, Marshall, and Schell, 1997), coregulation, rather than autonomous self-regulation, is treated as the norm for both parent–child and other relationships. Interdependence is essential to social relationships at every age, and socialization entails more mature and complex forms of interdependence with age. Maccoby (1992, p. 1013) has characterized the effective goal of authoritative parenting as “inducing the child into a system of reciprocity.” Training for autonomy is seen, not as preparing children for freedom from the regulatory influences of others, but as enhancing capabilities for responsible exercise of autonomy, while recognizing one’s interdependence with others (Collins et al., 1997). Thus parenting in middle childhood is less a matter of gradually yielding control than of transforming patterns of responsibility in response to new characteristics and challenges.

Variations in parents’ behavior toward children are correlated with several distinctive aspects of self-management and responsibility: incidence of prosocial and undercontrolled, often antisocial,
behavior; internalization of moral values; and increasing responsibility for self-care and for collective well-being. These links are discussed in the following three subsections.

**Incidence of prosocial and antisocial behavior.** For most children, behaviors that benefit others increase and those that harm others decline beginning in early childhood (for a review, see Coie and Dodge, 1998). During middle childhood several common changes imply that prosocial behavior probably becomes more likely and undercontrolled antisocial behavior less likely. Among these are declining tendencies to behave impulsively, increases in planfulness and other executive processes, greater capacity for understanding the impact of one’s actions on others, and knowledge of what is required for helpfulness (Barnett, Darcie, Holland, and Kobasigawa, 1982). Children in middle childhood also increasingly know the appropriate conditions for displaying anger and aggression (Underwood, Coie, and Herbsman, 1992).

Parents contribute to the development of prosocial norms in several ways. Parents’ own positive coping with frustration and distress serve to influence children’s regulation of their emotions (Kliewer, Fearnow, and Miller, 1996). Parents’ use of explanations that emphasize the implications of children’s behavior for others also is associated with helpful, emotionally supportive behavior toward others (Hoffman, 1994). Furthermore, parents generally are perceived as sources of social support (Furman and Buhrmester, 1992). When children perceive that they can talk with others, discuss problems with them, and so forth, they generally are more likely to show prosocial behaviors and attitudes, such as empathy, tolerance of differences, and understanding of others (Bryant, 1985).

Middle childhood is especially significant in the development of the control of hostile aggressive actions. Although the overall likelihood of aggressive behavior is reduced relative to early childhood, 5- to 12-year-old children’s aggression is more often hostile and person oriented than in early childhood (Hartup, 1974). Parental behaviors and family environments marked by harsh parental discipline repeatedly have been associated with the likelihood of antisocially aggressive behavior (Pinderhughes, Dodge, Bates, Pettit, and Zelli, 2000; Tolan and Loeber, 1993). A key linking the two appears to be the development of a bias toward interpreting the actions of others as intentionally harmful (Dodge, Bates, and Pettit, 1990). Children generally regard acts that are unintended, unforeseeable, and unavoidable as less blameworthy and less deserving of retaliation than other actions. Habitually aggressive children frequently show biases toward attributing hostile intent to others in ambiguous situations (Dodge, 1980). These biases are most likely in children who have experienced a history of harsh parental discipline in early childhood (Weiss, Dodge, Bates, and Pettit, 1992). In general, antisocial behavior is highly likely when children have repeatedly experienced indifferent, unresponsive behavior from their parents (Patterson, 1982). Antisocial tendencies place children at risk for peer rejection and school failure during middle childhood and for involvement in antisocial behavior in adolescence and young adulthood (Patterson, DeBaryshe, and Ramsey, 1989). Thus antisocial behavior is the nexus of a longitudinal process linking ineffective parenting and personal and social dysfunction (Finkelhor and Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994).

Mass media portrayals of antisocial and prosocial behavior consistently have been shown to influence spontaneous behavior after viewing. Children who spend relatively small amounts of time with television and other electronic media generally show fewer antisocial behaviors and fare better on many school and other tasks (Wright et al., in press). On the average, children in middle childhood devote 3 to 4 hr per day to television viewing, more time than any other age group in the first two decades of life. This amount varies greatly, however, depending on the child’s gender, socioeconomic status, and many other factors. Parents’ own viewing habits and the degree to which they attempt to regulate their children’s viewing influence both the amount and the kind of exposure to media models of positive and negative social behaviors (Dorr, Rabin, and Irlen, in Vol. 5 of this Handbook; Huston and Wright, 1998). Parents can help to reduce the negative impact of television viewing by watching programs with children, providing explanations for complex situations and events, helping children differentiate between reality and fiction, and encouraging children to make responsible choices about the content of media.
Internalization of moral values. Parents enhance social understanding by appealing to concerns for others and stimulating more cognitively complex reasoning about moral issues (Hoffman, 1994; Walker and Taylor, 1991). During middle childhood these parental techniques may become more effective, because of children’s increasing abilities for understanding others’ experiences and feelings (Flavell and Miller, 1998). The implications for behavior come from the well-established correlation between parental disciplinary approaches based on warmth, other-oriented induction, and infrequent use of coercive discipline without explanations and signs of “conscience”—confessing misdeeds, offering reparations, feeling guilty (Eisenberg and Valiente, in Vol. 5 of this Handbook; Turiel, 1998).

The term responsibility encompasses broad behavioral expectations, including “... (a) following through on specific interpersonal agreements and commitments, (b) fulfilling one’s social role obligations, and (c) conforming to widely held social and moral rules of conduct” (Ford, Wentzel, Wood, Stevens, and Siesfeld, 1989, p. 405). Parental practices associated with the development of prosocial behavior and acquisition of moral values during middle childhood can be regarded as factors in the development of responsibility generally (Eisenberg and Valiente, in Vol. 5 of in this Handbook).

More specific strategies, however, involve parental expectations regarding household tasks and other activities considered relevant to the welfare of the family as a whole. Parents generally believe that expecting children to carry out household tasks not only provides valuable work experience, but also teaches about expected relationships with others (Goodnow, in Vol. 3 of this Handbook; Goodnow and Collins, 1990). Goodnow (1988) views division of responsibility for household tasks as an instance of distributive justice, referring not only to the distribution of labor for efficiency’s sake, but also distribution in the sense of relational goals such as obligation, justice, and reciprocity. Warton and Goodnow (1991) found developmental progressions from middle childhood into adolescence in the understanding of distribution principles, such as direct-cause responsibility (“people should take care of the areas that they mess up”). This progression involves moving from a direct assertion of responsibility (e.g., “It’s Mom’s job”) or an emphasis on some concrete details of the situation, to the understanding of the principle (“John should clean up the playroom because he and his friends were playing down there, and I wasn’t involved”), followed by a move toward a modified, rather than rigid, use of the principle (e.g., “John made this mess, but he has to do his paper route on time; he’ll help me out some other time”). Although parents of 5- to 12-year-old children are most likely to be dealing with the first two phases of this progression, discussions emphasizing the third view of equality may have impact on the growth of concepts of responsibility during middle childhood. Amato (1989) reported that, for 8- to 9-year-old children, rearing environments characterized by high levels of parental control and parental support, along with high allocation of household responsibility, are associated with broad competence at tasks.

To summarize, fostering self-management and responsibility probably involves a more gradual process than is implied by the common image of parents’ transferring control to their children. Coregulatory processes, in which parents allocate responsibilities for gradually broader self-management to children while retaining oversight, probably influence children through two key processes: (1) training for effective self-management and (2) enhancing capacities for interdependence, both with persons more powerful than they and with persons of equal power (Baumrind, 1989).

Facilitating Positive Relationships

Parents’ relationships with their children during middle childhood and also in earlier periods influence the development of supportive relationships during middle childhood and also enhance competence in and beyond the ages 5 to 12 years. This is apparent from the impact of parents on their children’s relationships with each other and on their relationships with peers.

Sibling relationships. Sibling relationships become increasingly positive, egalitarian, and companionable during middle childhood (Dunn, 1992; Dunn and McGuire, 1992). The degree to
which this occurs, however, is related to parental interactions with both siblings. In a study of 10- to 11-year-old girls and their 7- to 9-year-old sisters, the daughters whose mothers were above average in responsiveness to their daughters’ needs showed more prosocial behavior and less hostility toward their siblings than the daughters of mothers who were below average in responsiveness (Bryant and Crockenberg, 1980). In other studies, rates of positive, negative, and controlling behaviors directed by mothers toward each child are correlated positively with the rates of such behaviors directed by siblings toward each other (Stocker, Dunn, and Plomin, 1989).

Parents’ treating siblings differently has also been linked to negative relationships between the siblings. This is apparent from several related research findings. One such finding is that the children of parents who responded more extensively to one child over the other were more likely to behave with hostility toward one another (e.g., Bryant and Crockenberg, 1980). Another is that rates of fathers’ and mothers’ positive behavior directed to each child were associated with siblings’ positive behavior toward each other; and both negative parental behavior generally and differences in behavior toward the children were associated with negative sibling interactions (Brody, Stoneman, and McCoy, 1992). This was especially likely when one child’s temperament was more difficult than the other child’s (Brody, Stoneman, and Gauger, 1996).

It is not possible to say whether parents’ treating children differently during middle childhood affects sibling relationships more than differential behavior in other life periods. Children who perceive that they are treated less positively than their sibling, however, are somewhat more likely than their sibling to show negative personality adjustment in adolescence (Daniels, Dunn, Furstenberg, and Plomin, 1985).

**Peer relationships.** Parents facilitate their children’s positive peer relationships indirectly and directly throughout childhood (Parke, MacDonald, Beitel, and Bhavnagri, 1988). Indirect or stage-setting effects subsume the advantages of positive, accepting, secure parent–child relationships on children’s capacities for forming and maintaining smooth, prosocial relationships with others (e.g., Contreras, Kerns, Weimer, Gentzler, and Tomich, 2000; Dishion, 1990). Direct or intervention effects refer to parents’ management of their children’s relations with other children and the transmission of specific social skills for effective interactions with peers (Parke and Bhavnagri, 1989).

In general, the parental correlates of positive relations with peers in middle childhood parallel the more extensive findings from studies of preschool children (Hartup, 1984). In middle childhood, mothers and fathers of well-liked children are emotionally supportive, infrequently frustrating and punitive, and discouraging of antisocial behavior in their children (e.g., Dekovic and Janssens, 1992). The families of these children are generally low in tension and are marked by affection toward, and parental satisfaction with, their children. Furthermore, social skills that are significant to successful peer relationships (e.g., self-confidence, assertiveness, and effectiveness with other children) are correlated with a history of affection from both parents and dominance from the same-gender parent (Parke et al., 1988). In research with 8- and 9-year-old children and their parents, popularity with peers was positively correlated with children’s perceptions of positive relationships with parents and observational measures of fathers’ receptivity to children’s proposed solutions on a teaching task (Henggeler, Edwards, Cohen, and Summerville, 1991). These findings imply both direct and indirect links between parent and peer relationships, but leave open the question of how such links come about. Relevant evidence on one possible process comes from a study of 5- and 6-year-old middle-socioeconomic European American children and their parents (Cassidy, Parke, Butkovsky, and Braungart, 1992). The children in this study were more cooperative and interacted more smoothly with peers if their parents were emotionally expressive.

The relation was most pronounced for children who showed understanding of emotions, including emotional expressions, experiences, conditions, and effective action and feeling responses. Thus the impact of the emotional tenor of parent–child relationships may be especially great for those children who are capable of inferring positive principles of interpersonal behavior from experiences with parents and siblings. Later research revealed that positive relationships with parents contribute...
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to children’s developing abilities for regulating their emotions, and this ability in turn makes the child more effective in interactions with peers (Contreras et al., 2000).

Parent–child interaction patterns also have been linked to less positive behavior in middle childhood (Dishion, 1990; McFadyen-Ketchum, Bates, Dodge, and Pettit, 1996; Patterson, 1982, 1986; Patterson and Bank, 1989; Schwartz, Dodge, Pettit, and Bates, 1997; Vuchinich, Bank, and Patterson, 1992). In two cohorts of boys, aged 9 to 10 years, Dishion (1990) found that erratic monitoring and ineffective disciplinary practices marked the families of rejected boys, as did higher levels of family stress, lower socioeconomic status, and evidence of more behavioral and academic problems for the boys themselves. Parents’ ineffective disciplinary practices increased the likelihood of peer rejection by enhancing the likelihood of antisocial behavior and academic failure. Later analyses of these data, along with data from a 2-year follow-up (Vuchinich et al., 1992), showed a reciprocal relation between parental ineffectiveness and child behavior: Parental discipline in these families was ineffective partly because the children behaved antisocially, but the ineffective discipline also helped to maintain these antisocial tendencies.

In addition to the association between parenting and antisocial behavior, the family environment, including parents’ marital conflict and parental disagreement on childrearing standards and practices, has been linked to children’s antisocial tendencies and poor relationships with peers (Gonzales, Pitts, Hill, and Roosa, 2000; Grych, in Vol. 4 of this Handbook; McCloskey, Figueredo, and Koss, 1995).

These diverse pieces of evidence indicate that parent–child and peer relationships are linked through complex, multiple processes (Ladd and Pettit, in Vol. 5 of this Handbook).

Timing of effects. Considerable uncertainty exists about whether links between parent–child relationships and interpersonal competence during middle childhood reflect concurrent relationships or the longer history of interactions between parent and child. Current longitudinal research indicates impressive stabilities between parent–child relationships in infancy and early childhood and extrafamilial relationships in middle childhood (e.g., Elicker, Englund, and Sroufe, 1992; Sroufe, Carlson, and Shulman, 1993). These findings come from research on attachment or individuals’ feeling of confidence in the responsiveness of one person in particular (see Bornstein, in Vol. 1 of this Handbook; Cummings and Cummings, in Vol. 5 of this Handbook).

In these studies, security of attachment to caregivers when children were 12 and 18 months old was associated with a variety of indicators of children’s competence with peers at 10 to 12 years of age (Elicker et al., 1992; Sroufe et al., 1993; Sroufe, Egeland, and Carlson, 1999). The securely attached children were more likely to be rated highly by adults on broad-based social and personal competence and were less dependent on adults. These children also spent more time with peers, were more likely to form friendships, and were more likely to have friendships characterized by openness, trust, coordination, and complexity of activity. They also spent more time in, and functioned more effectively in, groups and were more likely to follow implicit rules of peer interactions than children with histories of insecure attachment. An example comes from research on same-gender versus cross-gender peer interactions. During middle childhood, frequency of cross-gender interactions is negatively correlated with social skills and popularity. Insecurely attached children more frequently engaged in cross-gender interactions than securely attached children did (Sroufe, Bennett, Englund, Urban, and Shulman, 1993). In general, the links between security of attachment and social competence with peers in middle childhood are similar to links found in preschool (Sroufe et al., 1993; Sroufe et al., 1999). That is, at the ages of 5 to 12, children show similar patterns of orientation to peers and teachers as they did in early childhood; and both the early and the middle childhood patterns are correlated with attachment measures taken during the first 2 years of life.

These correlations may mean that relationships with parents have similar characteristics across time. Parents who provide responsive, child-centered care in infancy might be more likely to adapt those patterns of care to the support and the guidance needed by children in later years, thus providing continuity of care. The researchers suggest two other possibilities. One is that the patterns of behavior formed in early relationships may persist, eliciting characteristically different patterns of
reactions from others in later life. That is, positive relationships with peers may result from skillful interpersonal behavior by the securely attached child. A second possibility is that children carry forward from early relationships an internal working model of interpersonal relationships (Bowlby, 1973). Internal working models are inferred cognitive representations or prototypes of one’s key relationships that incorporate behaviors, feelings, and expectancies of reactions from others.

These possibilities are not mutually exclusive, and all three may contribute to the complex linkages between familial and peer relationships. Longitudinal analyses imply that early relationships are probably linked to middle childhood peer competence by means of internal working models (Fury, Carlson, and Sroufe, 1997). Children’s internal working models of relationships were assessed at the ages of 4, 8, and 12 years. There were clear contrasts among groups varying in early attachment scores in early and middle childhood measures of internal working models. Together, infant attachment scores and later measures of internal working models accounted for 44% of the variance in ratings of social competence when children were at the age of 12 years; early attachment alone, however, was not reliably related to later social competence. Important questions remain, such as whether and how representations themselves are affected by variations in relationships after infancy, but findings to date imply that parenting in middle childhood partly is rooted in relational patterns established in earlier periods of life.

Beyond middle childhood. It should be noted that temporal linkages between familial and extrafamilial relationships run forward, as well as backward, in time. Rejection by peers, which consistently has been linked to relationships with parents and siblings in childhood, is a compelling marker of long-term developmental disadvantage (Parker and Asher, 1987). Individuals with unsatisfactory peer relationships in childhood face greater risks for behavioral problems, school failure, and emotional maladjustment in childhood and adolescence and for mental health problems and criminality in adulthood. Parent–child relationships appear to affect these developmental outcomes by their impact on antisocial behavior and academic failure in middle childhood (Patterson et al., 1989) and even on long-term unemployment in adulthood (Kokko and Pulkinnen, 2000).

More positive linkages to parent–child relationships have also been documented. Franz, McClelland, and Weinberger (1991) reported longitudinal follow-ups of individuals who were first studied at the age of 5 years, together with their mothers. The participants were measured at the age of 41 years on an indicator of “conventional social accomplishment,” defined as having a long, happy marriage, children, and relationships with close friends at midlife (Vaillant, 1977). Having a warm and affectionate father and mother at the age of 5 years was correlated with affiliative behaviors and reports of good relationships with significant others 36 years later. These characteristics of parents also were associated with higher levels of generativity, work accomplishment, psychological well-being, lower level of strain and less use of emotion-focused coping styles in adulthood. In a separate analysis with this same sample, parents’ characteristics when individuals were 5 years old were associated with these same individuals’ empathic concern at the age of 31 years (Koestner, Franz, and Weinberger, 1990). As in the shorter-term longitudinal findings previously described, a variety of possible processes may account for this link between middle childhood familial relationships and these varied adult characteristics.

Parent–peer cross pressures. One widely invoked possible linkage between parent–child and peer relationships in middle childhood is an inverse one: namely, that increasing involvement with peers may be associated with decreasing engagement with and influence of parents. This linkage, though, has only limited and narrow support in the literature. A more common finding is that attitudes toward both parents and peers are more favorable than unfavorable throughout middle childhood and adolescence (Collins, 1995; Steinberg and Silk, in Vol. 1 of this Handbook). Within this general stability, however, some change does occur. For example, the number of children reporting positive attitudes toward parents declines moderately during middle childhood, although attitudes toward peers generally do not become more favorable during this period.
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With respect to endorsement of attitudes held by parents versus peers, the inverse relation occurs only for antisocial behavior and, furthermore, is not especially intense before to puberty (Hartup, 1984). In a cross-sectional study of children aged 9, 12, 15, and 17 years, Berndt (1979) charted age-related patterns of conformity to parents and peers regarding prosocial, neutral, and antisocial behaviors. Antisocial behavior, in this instance, referred to such activities as cheating, stealing, trespassing, and minor destruction of property. Children and adolescents alike conformed to both parents and friends regarding prosocial behavior; there was some decline across ages in conformity to parents, but not peers, on neutral behaviors; and conformity to peers regarding antisocial behaviors increased between the ages of 8 and 15, but not beyond. Thus there is relatively little evidence that pronounced parent-peer cross pressures are the norm in middle childhood.

More disruptive shifts may occur in families in which parents fail to maintain age-appropriate, child-centered control patterns. Several studies indicate that conformity to peers may be more likely in families in which relationships with parents are perceived as unsatisfactory. Fuligni and Eccles (1993) collected self-report questionnaires on this topic from 1,771 children from 12 to 13 years old. They found that children who believed their parents continued the same patterns of power assertion and restrictiveness they had used in earlier years were higher in an extreme form of peer orientation. Furthermore, those who perceived few opportunities to be involved in decision making, as well as no increase in these opportunities, were higher in both extreme peer orientation and peer advice seeking. Studies of school-age children and early adolescents who are on their own in the afterschool hours also show greater susceptibility to peer influence cross pressures when parent-child relationships are less warm and involve less regular parental monitoring (Galambos and Maggs, 1991; Steinberg, 1986).

Social support for parents. Parents’ perceptions of a supportive network beyond the family also influence their behavior and children’s development (Cochran and Niego, in Vol. 4 of this Handbook). For example, interventions with troubled families are more effective when parents perceive that social support is available to them (Wahler, 1980), whereas isolation from community support systems often typifies abusive families (e.g., Azar, in Vol. 4 of this Handbook; Emery and Laumann-Billings, 1998).

To summarize, qualities of relationships with parents have significant implications for development in and beyond middle childhood. Furthermore, linkages to other periods indicate that middle childhood experiences are inextricable from developmental influences and processes across the lifespan. A variety of possible processes may link middle childhood family relationships to both earlier and later functioning.

Managing Extrafamilial Experiences

As children move into settings beyond the family, parents increasingly must monitor extrafamilial settings and negotiate with nonfamilial adults on behalf of children. Of these settings, the most prominent is school. In addition, many parents must arrange for afterschool care by others or must establish and monitor arrangements for self-care by children.

School. Children in the United States typically spend almost as much time in school as at home. Schools advance both academic knowledge and knowledge of cultural norms and values and provide essential supports for learning literacy skills, which greatly extend cognitive capacities in many different areas (Fischer and Bullock, 1984). Experiences in school also affect children’s views of their own abilities to learn and their actual achievement and adjustment (Eccles, Wigfield, and Schiefele, 1998).

Family experiences are linked to children’s successful adaptation to the demands of schooling (Epstein and Sanders, in Vol. 5 of this Handbook). A history of shared work and play activities with parents is positively linked to a smooth entry into school, whereas early interactions characterized by a controlling parent and a resisting child, or by a directing child, are correlated with poor adjustment.
Several parental characteristics are linked to both short-term and long-term academic motivation: providing a cognitively stimulating home environment, regardless of socioeconomic level (Gottfried, Fleming, and Gottfried, 1998), values favoring the development of autonomy rather than conformity (Okagaki and Sternberg, 1993), and emphasizing goals associated with learning, rather than goals associated with performance and evaluation (Ablard and Parker, 1997).

Children express more satisfaction with school when the authority structure of classrooms is similar to the authority practices they encounter at home (Epstein, 1983; Hess and Holloway, 1984). Furthermore, parenting styles consistently have been linked to school success. Authoritative styles that emphasize encouragement, support for child-initiated efforts, clear communication, and a child-centered teaching orientation in parent–child interactions are associated with higher achievement than are strategies characterized by punishment for failure, use of a directive teaching style, and discouragement of child-initiated interactions (Baumrind, 1989; Pianta and Nimetz, 1991). These correlations occur in studies with both European American and African American families and with adolescents as well as with younger children (Steinberg, Elmen, and Mounts, 1989). These latter findings implicate authoritative parenting in higher school grades and lower incidence of behavior problems in school, compared with authoritarian or permissive parenting styles. In addition to parental control strategies, lower school achievement during middle childhood has been linked with family environments characterized by interparent and parent–child hostility (Feldman and Wentzel, 1990).

Parents’ expectations regarding children’s achievement also are implicated in school success (Stevenson and Newman, 1986). Expectations have an impact from the beginning of schooling. Entwisle and Hayduk (1982) examined United States parents’ expectations for their children’s school performance each year between the ages of 5 and 9. For middle-socioeconomic children and children of blue-collar parents, parents’ expectations were strong influences on children’s first marks. The influence of blue-collar parents on children after the age of 6 years appeared to be considerably less than that of their middle-class counterparts (Alexander and Entwisle, 1988; Hoff, Laursen, and Tardif, in Vol. 2 of this Handbook).

In European American middle class families, parental expectations are correlated with achievement into the preadolescent years (Frome and Eccles, 1998; Stevenson and Newman, 1986). Changes in expectations often occur during the early school years, however, and these changes are difficult to explain. Children’s performances in school may affect these expectations, of course. Alexander and Entwisle (1988) found a significant impact of first-grade (age 6 years) achievement on parents’ subsequent expectations for children’s school performance. In other instances, contrasting expectations emerge for children who are equivalent in classroom grades and in test scores. For example, although parents’ expectations for math performance do not differ by gender at the beginning of school, males are expected to do better than females by the beginning of the second grade (age 7) (Entwisle and Baker, 1983).

High parental expectations also appear to be key factors in cross-national differences in school achievement during middle childhood. Stevenson and Lee (1990) examined parental correlates of substantially lower levels of academic achievement by children in the United States, compared to China and Japan. They found that parents in the United States have lower expectations for and assign less importance to school achievement than Asian parents do; furthermore, mothers in the United States are more likely to regard achievement primarily as a reflection of innate ability, whereas Asian mothers emphasize the importance of hard work in attaining academic excellence. Compared with parents in China and Japan, as well as immigrant parents in the United States, parents born in the United States are more likely to believe that general cognitive development, motivation, and social skills are more important than academic skills (Huntsinger, Jose, Liaw, and Ching, 1997; Okagaki and Sternberg, 1993; Stevenson and Lee, 1990). Thus, not only expectations about children’s achievement, but the importance assigned to mastery of school tasks per se, affect the impact of parents on their children’s school experiences (Huntsinger, Jose, and Larson, 1998).
Family difficulties, such as divorce, are also linked to children’s school learning and to their emerging self-concepts (Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, in Vol. 3 of this *Handbook*). In the first year or two after a divorce, children from one-parent families frequently miss school, study less effectively, and disrupt their classrooms more often. Furthermore, teachers observe difficulties in their general social behavior, including their relations with friends. Girls are seen to be more dependent, and boys are perceived as more aggressive and less able to maintain attention and effort at assigned tasks and, in general, to be less competent academically. On the other hand, one important context may compensate for difficulties in the other, as when family members provide support for school difficulties, or teachers and classmates help to buffer children’s distress over family problems (Hetherington et al., 1998; Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, in Vol. 3 of this *Handbook*).

Parents’ involvement with schools and with children’s school-related tasks also is correlated positively with children’s school achievement in middle childhood. Parental involvement is variously defined as expectations of school performance, verbal encouragement, direct reinforcement of school-relevant behaviors, general academic guidance or support, and children’s perceptions of parents’ influence on school progress (Fehrman, Keith, and Reimers, 1987). Correlations are less impressive in the secondary grades (usually after the age of 12), perhaps because common forms of parental involvement are perceived as intrusions on autonomy.

The most studied area of parental involvement in schooling is homework. Leone and Richards (1989) found that 11- and 12-year-old students in the top one third of their classes spent significantly more time on homework, including time spent working with a parent on school assignments. Other studies have shown negative correlations, perhaps because parents are more likely to become involved in homework when children have not been doing well on their own. Even under these conditions, though, test scores generally improved when parents became involved, especially when parents have been trained in how best to help their children complete homework assignments (Miller and Kelley, 1991). Parental attitudes toward the importance of homework, like attitudes toward the importance of school achievement generally, vary across nationally. For example, parents in China, Japan, and Taiwan value school achievement more highly than U.S. parents do (Chao and Tseng, in Vol. 4 of this *Handbook*; Chen and Stevenson, 1989).

Several factors influence the impact of parental involvement. One factor is parents’ general style of childrearing. Among authoritative parents (those who characteristically showed responsive, child-centered behavior and clear expectations for child behavior), involvement was highly correlated with academic achievement, in comparison with involvement of authoritarian (restrictive, parent-centered, controlling) parents. Authoritative parents’ involvement is likely perceived as reflecting interest in and support for children’s school-related activities, whereas authoritarian parents’ involvement may be interpreted as intrusive, controlling, and implying disrespect and lack of trust for the child (Darling and Steinberg, 1993).

**Afterschool care.** At the start of the 21st century, 78% of parents with children aged 6 to 13 years participate in the workforce. Because children spend only 6 hr each day in school and these 6 hr frequently do not correspond to parents’ work schedules, large numbers of children are alone without immediate adult supervision for significant amounts of time (Capizzano, Tout, and Adams, 2000; Vandell and Shumow, 1999). Estimates put the number of children who spend unsupervised time at 3.6 to 4 million. Afterschool childcare arrangements vary by age of children, ethnicity, parents’ availability and whether parents have traditional or nontraditional work hours.

Parents’ and children’s reports offer discrepant views of typical afterschool arrangements, with children reporting more time alone and less happiness with the arrangements and whether or not the child actually adhered to the arrangement (Belle, 1999). Frequent changes occur in afterschool arrangements, because of unsatisfactory arrangements, changing age, ability and desires of the child, expense, perceived danger, degree of structure in the arrangements, and balancing children’s needs with familial or parental work needs. In the latter years of middle childhood (ages 10 to 12 years),
many families from all ethnic and income groups begin a transition to letting children be on their own, rather than being supervised directly by an adult, during the afterschool hours (Capizzano et al., 2000; Kerrebrock and Lewis, 1999; Vandell and Shumow, 1999).

Few general differences in academic performance or psychosocial status are apparent when children in adult-care arrangements are compared with those in self-care arrangements. Vandell and Corasaniti (1988) reported that 8- and 9-year-old children in center care showed lower academic achievement and lower acceptance by peers than children in other care arrangements, including mother care. Surprisingly, “latchkey” children—children who are at home alone after school—were not generally disadvantaged relative to mother-care children. The reasons for the deficits observed in children cared for in centers are not clear.

Negative effects are most likely when children on their own are not monitored regularly and when they are free to spend time away from home with peers (Galambos and Maggs, 1991; Steinberg, 1986; Vandell and Shumow, 1999). These arrangements are more common in the preadolescent years than the early elementary years. Older children are more susceptible to peer influences and more likely to engage in problem behaviors than children who stay at home and those who are in regular telephone contact with parents. The negative effects from being allowed to roam may result partly from generally less positive parent–child relationships. For girls particularly, permissive self-care arrangements are associated with lowered perceptions of parental acceptance and higher levels of parent–child conflicts (Galambos and Maggs, 1991). Among these preadolescents and younger children alike, regular arrangements for parental monitoring and clear expectations for letting parents know where the child is seem to overcome the potential negative effects of self care (Galambos and Maggs, 1991; Steinberg, 1986; Vandell and Corasaniti, 1988).

By contrast, school-age childcare programs clearly benefit children’s development compared with self-care. Although this conclusion may reflect the generally more positive developmental course of the middle-socioeconomic children who participate, the greatest benefits clearly come from programs that are well suited to the developmental level of the child, that offer flexible programs, and that feature a well-educated staff and low child-to-staff ratios (Vandell and Shumow, 1999). One study showed that 11- to 13-year-old children who participated for 2 years in an afterschool enrichment program with a comparable group of children who did not had improved attitudes toward school, improved behavior at school, better grades, and less tension at home (Dryfoos, 1999; also see Huston et al., 2001).

In summary, parents’ involvement in children’s lives away from home entails many of the same principles and processes that determine their effectiveness in direct interactions. Appropriate monitoring, in the context of warm, accepting relationships, is associated with positive school adjustment and academic achievement and with benign impact of self-care arrangements. Children with better relationships with their parents appear to be better able to understand the necessity for afterschool care, even if it is not their preference (Belle, 1999). Although these areas of children’s lives require different forms of parental involvement, the general style of parents’ relationships with children is a key factor in the impact of out-of-home experiences on development during middle childhood.

CONCLUSIONS

Parenting during middle childhood encompasses adaptation to distinctive transformations in human development that affect not only the current well-being of children, but carry significant implications for later life. The age of 5 to 7 years is universally regarded as “the age of reason” (Rogoff et al., 1975). In non-Western cultures children are assumed to develop new capabilities at this age and are often assigned expanded roles and responsibilities in their families and communities. Although the transition to adultlike responsibilities is less pronounced in Western industrialized societies, 5- to 12-year-old children are expected to show greater autonomy and responsibility in some arenas.
The unique experiences of individual children in middle childhood partly reflect changes experienced by virtually all children of this age and also the interpersonal relationships and the characteristics of particular communities and social institutions. Such factors as urban versus rural residence, family and domestic group status, parental and nonparental childcare arrangements, tasks typically assigned to children, and the role of women in the society have all been demonstrated to affect important dimensions of childhood socialization in both industrialized and developing countries.

Common changes in children and in relationships have raised two key questions that underlie the framework outlined in the chapter. One is the question of whether parenting during middle childhood is distinctively different from parenting in other age periods. Although the particular forms of parental behavior and parent–child interaction vary considerably, certain issues arise in virtually all families of 5- to 12-year-old children in industrialized societies: exercising regulatory influence while facilitating increasing self-regulation, maintaining positive bonds while fostering a distinctive sense of self, providing groundwork for effective relationships and experiences outside of the family (Collins, 1984, 1995). These issues are integral to parent–child relationships from a child’s birth, although often in less obtrusive or more rudimentary forms than in middle childhood, and they remain central in the adolescent years and, to a lesser degree, in early adulthood (White, Speisman, and Costos, 1983).

The distinctiveness of parenting 5- to 12-year-old children largely arises from the relative novelty and salience of issues specific to this age period. Middle childhood is a period of intensifying transitions, many of which require parents to extend their activities on behalf of the child to interactions with others, including teachers, peers, and other families. In addition, behaviors of children toward parents change as the result of cognitive, emotional, and social transitions. Consequently, both the scope of the issues and the methods available for addressing them are altered in middle childhood.

Current models of socialization imply that the most effective parental responses to changes in children’s behavior combine child-centered flexibility and adherence to core values and expectancies for approved behavior (Baumrind, 1989; Darling and Steinberg, 1993; Dix, 1991; Grusec and Goodnow, 1994; Hoffman, 1994; Maccoby, 1992). This combination may be more complex in middle childhood than in other periods. Furthermore, the balance between ensuring continuity and adapting to child-driven change may be more difficult to maintain in and after middle childhood than in early childhood. The capacity for age-appropriate adaptation, however, probably is not exclusive to effective parenting in this period, but is inherent in the characteristics of effective parenting at every age.

One question that is not directly addressed in this chapter concerns the linkages between parenting and individual development during middle childhood and in later periods. These associations are more often implicit than explicit. Nevertheless, research findings have documented some key connections. The most extensively duplicated finding is that parenting styles marked by authoritativeness toward children, but clearly child-centered attitudes and concerns, are correlated with a variety of positive outcomes that attain salience in middle childhood and that are predictive of successful adaptation in later life. These include peer acceptance, school success, competence in self-care, and competence and responsibility in a broad array of tasks. Equally well established is the finding that parenting behavior and attitudes dominated by parental concerns, rather than child characteristics and needs, are associated with less positive outcomes on all of these variables. The latter must be regarded as middle childhood risk factors for long-term dysfunction.

A caveat is that studies do not tell us whether experiencing negative conditions for the first time in middle childhood affects later development differently in either kind or degree than experiencing parenting problems over a longer period. Nevertheless, the documented consequences of these negative conditions for 5- to 12-year-old children leave little doubt that effective parenting powerfully affects development both during and after middle childhood.
REFERENCES


3. Middle Childhood


