Psychosocial Development in Middle Childhood

Chapter 14
Guideposts for Study

1. How Do Self-Concept and Self-Esteem Change in Middle Childhood, and How Do School-Age Children Show Emotional Growth?

2. What Are the Effects of Family Atmosphere and Family Structure, and What Part do Siblings Play in Children’s Development?
Guideposts for Study

- 3. How do Relationships with Peers Change in Middle Childhood, and What Factors Influence Popularity and Aggressive Behavior?
- 4. How do Children Respond to the Stresses of Modern Life?
The Developing Self

- **Self-Concept Development**
  - 3rd stage of the neo-Piagetian self-concept development
  - Representational systems
    - Real self
    - Ideal self
    - Global self-worth
The Developing Self

- **Self-Esteem**
  - **Industry versus inferiority**
    - Children learn skills valued in their society
      - Read
      - Write
      - Count
      - Use computers
    - Successful resolution of this stage is **competence**
The Developing Self

- **Emotional Growth**
  - More aware of their own and others’ feelings
  - Understand conflicting emotions
  - Aware of culture’s “rules” for emotional expression
  - Emotional self-regulation
    - Control of emotions, attention, and behavior
The Developing Self

- **Prosocial Behavior**
  - Relatively free from negative emotion
  - Cope with problems constructively
  - Parental response to emotions has an effect on prosocial development and social skills
The Child in the Family

- **Family Atmosphere**
  - Parenting issues: coregulation and discipline
    - Transitional stage in which parent and child share power
    - Less direct management and more discussion
    - Children must bear consequences of behavior
The Child in the Family

- **Family Atmosphere**
  - Effects of parents’ work
- **Factors**
  - Child’s age, sex, temperament, and personality
  - Status of mother’s work (full-time, part-time)
  - Partner support
  - Socioeconomic status
  - Kind of care the child receives before/after school
  - Structured care versus self-care
The Child in the Family

- **Family Atmosphere**
  - **Poverty and parenting**
    - 18 percent of U.S. children live in poverty
    - Children who live in poverty are more likely to have emotional or behavioral problems
  - Family characteristics most damaging to children
    - Unstimulating home environment
    - Lack of maternal sensitivity
    - Unstable adult relationships
    - Psychiatric problems
    - Violent or criminal behavior
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Two Parents in Same Household</th>
<th>Father and Mother Not in Same Household</th>
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<td>United States</td>
<td>70.7</td>
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</table>

The Child in the Family

- Family Structure
  - Many two-parent families are stepfamilies, resulting from divorce and remarriage
  - Growing number of single-parent families, gay and lesbian families, and grandparent-headed families
  - Father’s involvement is directly involved in the child’s well-being and physical, cognitive, and social development
NOTE: Estimates refer to children ages 0–17 who are related to the householder. In 2006, the average poverty threshold for a family of four was $20,614 in annual income.
The Child in the Family

- **Family Structure**
  - When parents divorce
    - Adjusting to divorce
      - May negatively affect parenting
      - Family standard of living likely to drop
      - Relationship with noncustodial parent may suffer
      - Adjustment may depend on...
        - Age or maturity
        - Gender
        - Temperament and psychosocial adjustment
The Child in the Family

- **Family Structure**
  - **Custody, visitation, and co-parenting**
    - Mother usually gets custody but paternal custody is increasing
    - Children adjust better when father pays child support
    - Cooperative co-parenting
    - Joint custody
    - Legal custody
    - Physical custody
The Child in the Family

Family Structure

Long-term effects of divorce

In adolescence

- Increased risk of antisocial behavior and dropping out of school

In adulthood

- Increased risk of serious social, emotional, or psychological problems
- Lower SES
- Marriages tend to be of poorer quality and more likely to end in divorce
The Child in the Family

- **Family Structure**
  - Living in a one-parent family
    - Percentage of children living with one parent
    - More than 50% of African American children live with a single parent – 19% of non-hispanic white children – 26% of Hispanic children
    - Tend to lag socially and educationally
  - Factors
    - Age
    - Level of development
    - Financial circumstances
    - Geographical moves
    - Paternal involvement
The Child in the Family

- **Family Structure**
  - Living in a cohabitating family
    - Similar to married families
    - Parents tend to be more disadvantaged
    - More likely to break up
    - Worse emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes
The Child in the Family

- **Family Structure**
  - **Living in a stepfamily**
    - 15 percent of U.S. children
    - Loyalties to biological parent may interfere with forming ties
    - Studies found that boys may benefit from a stepfather, however, girls may feel a threat to her independence or relationship with her mother
The Child in the Family

- Family Structure
  - Living with gay or lesbian parents
    - Studies show no consistent difference between homosexual and heterosexual parents in emotional, social, academic, or psychological problems of children
The Child in the Family

Family Structure

Adoptive families

- Open adoptions are more common
- Cognitively, adoption is beneficial
- Foreign born adoptions have quadrupled since 1978
  - Transracial: Asian or Latin American
  - No significant problems with psychological or school adjustment
The Child in the Family

- **Family Structure**
  - Living with grandparents
    - “Skip generation” families
- **Causes**
  - Teenage pregnancy
  - Substance abuse
  - Illness
  - Divorce
  - Early death
The Child in the Family

- Sibling Relationships
  - Factors that determine roles and relationships
    - Number
    - Spacing
    - Birth order
    - Gender
  - Can be a laboratory for conflict resolution
  - Influence each other’s gender development
The Child in the Peer Group

- Positive and Negative Effects of Peer Relations
  - Develop skills needed for sociability and intimacy—gain a sense of belonging
  - Offer emotional security
  - May reinforce prejudice
  - Can foster antisocial tendencies
    - Shoplifting
    - Drugs
The Child in the Peer Group

- **Gender Differences in Peer-Group Relationships**
  - Engage in different types of activities
    - **Boys**
      - Play in large groups with well-defined leadership hierarchies
      - More competitive and rough-and-tumble play
    - **Girls**
      - More intimate conversations
      - Prosocial interactions and shared confidences
The Child in the Peer Group

- Popularity
  - Sociometric popularity
    - Five peer status groups
      - Popular
      - Rejected
      - Neglected
      - Controversial
      - Average
  - Perceived popularity
The Child in the Peer Group

- **Friendship**
  - Seek out same age, sex, ethnicity, and interests
  - Involves equal give-and-take
  - Learn to communicate and cooperate
  - Quarrels help to resolve conflicts
  - Friendlessness has long-term effects
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 0: Momentary playmateship (ages 3 to 7)</td>
<td>On this undifferentiated level of friendship, children are egocentric and have trouble considering another person’s point of view; they tend to think only about what they want from a relationship. Most very young children define their friends in terms of physical closeness and value them for material or physical attributes.</td>
<td>“She lives on my street” or “He has the Power Rangers.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1: One-way assistance (ages 4 to 9)</td>
<td>On this unilateral level, a “good friend” does what the child wants the friend to do.</td>
<td>“She’s not my friend anymore because she wouldn’t go with me when I wanted her to” or “He’s my friend because he always says yes when I want to borrow his eraser.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Two-way fair-weather cooperation (ages 6 to 12)</td>
<td>This reciprocal level overlaps stage 1. It involves give-and-take but still serves many separate self-interests, rather than the common interests of the two friends.</td>
<td>“We are friends; we do things for each other” or “A friend is someone who plays with you when you don’t have anybody else to play with.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3: Intimate, mutually shared relationships (ages 9 to 15)</td>
<td>On this mutual level, children view a friendship as having a life of its own. It is an ongoing, systematic, committed relationship that incorporates more than doing things for each other. Friends often become possessive and demand exclusivity.</td>
<td>“It takes a long time to make a close friend, so you really feel bad if you find out that your friend is trying to make other friends too.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4: Autonomous interdependence (beginning at age 12)</td>
<td>In this interdependent stage, children respect friends’ needs for both dependency and autonomy.</td>
<td>“A good friendship is a real commitment, a risk you have to take; you have to support and trust and give, but you have to be able to let go too.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Child in the Peer Group

- Aggression and Bullying
  - Instrumental aggression
    - Aimed at achieving an objective
  - Hostile aggression
    - Intended to hurt another person
The Child in the Peer Group

- **Aggression and Bullying**
  - **Gender differences in aggressiveness**
    - **Boys**
      - Tend to aggressive when a group is forming, as they compete for dominance
    - **Girls**
      - Seek status through more manipulative means involving indirect or relational aggression
The Child in the Peer Group

- Aggression and Bullying
  - Types of aggression and social information processing
    - Instrumental (proactive) aggressors
      - View force as an effective way to get what they want
    - Hostile (reactive) aggressors
      - Self-defense or retaliation
      - Hostile attribution bias
The Child in the Peer Group

- Aggression and Bullying
  - Does media violence stimulate aggression?
    - Images seen become primary role models and sources of information of how people behave
    - Study: The best predictor of aggressiveness at age 19 was the degree of violence in the shows they had watched as children
The Child in the Peer Group

- **Aggression and Bullying**
  - **Bullies and victims**
    - Both exhibit psychological problems
    - Both tend to be disliked
  - Risk factors for being bullied
    - Anxious or depressed
    - Cautious
    - Quiet
    - Submissive
    - Cry easily
    - Argumentative and provocative
Stress and Resilience

- Stresses of Modern Life
  - David Elkind’s “hurried child”
  - Children are more susceptible to psychological harm from a traumatic event
- Resilient children
  - Protective factors
    - Good family relationships
    - Good cognitive functioning
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Typical Reactions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age 5 or less</td>
<td>Fear of separation from parent</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Crying, whimpering, screaming, trembling</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Immobility or aimless motion</td>
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<td>Frightened facial expressions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Excessive clinging</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Regressive behaviors (thumb sucking, bed-wetting, fear of dark)</td>
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<td>Ages 6 to 11</td>
<td>Extreme withdrawal</td>
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<td>Disruptive behavior</td>
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<td>Inability to pay attention</td>
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<td>Stomachaches or other symptoms with no physical basis</td>
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<td>Declining school performance, refusal to go to school</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Depression, anxiety, guilt, irritability, or emotional numbing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Regressive behavior (nightmares, sleep problems, irrational fears, outbursts of anger or fighting)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ages 12 to 17</td>
<td>Flashbacks, nightmares</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Emotional numbing, confusion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Avoidance of reminders of the traumatic event</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Revenge fantasies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Withdrawal, isolation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Substance abuse</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Problems with peers, antisocial behavior</td>
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<td>Physical complaints</td>
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<td>School avoidance, academic decline</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sleep disturbances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Depression, suicidal thoughts</td>
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</table>

Source: NIMH, 2001a.