

Risk and Protective Factors in Young Children's Adjustment to Parental Divorce: A Review of the Research

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This article reviews the literature on parental divorce and early childhood development, using developmental psychopathology as an organizing framework. With respect to young children, three questions are addressed: How does parental divorce affect developmental outcomes? What risk and protective factors influence adaptation? How does early parental divorce affect later adjustment? Because this review is unique in its focus on divorce-related issues specific to young children, limitations of existing research are noted and directions for future research are suggested.

The process of divorce brings about many changes in children's lives, such as changes in contact with each parent and changes in parental emotions and behavior. Of concern here is how these changes might affect development in early childhood. Research shows that divorce may increase the risk of negative outcomes for older children, although most children who experience parental divorce adjust well (Amato, 2001). According to 2000 census data, 28% of divorced or separated parents had at least one child under the age of 6 (Fields & Casper, 2001). The developing social and cognitive abilities of preschool children and their greater dependency on their parents compared with older children may lead to different responses to parental divorce than those seen in older children (Hetherington, Stanley-Hagan, & Anderson, 1989). For example, preschool-age children may be more likely to feel responsible for their parents' divorce and to fear abandonment and separations than are older children (Wallerstein, 1983). However, little attention has been given to the developmental outcomes associated with parental divorce for these younger children.

Most research on children's adjustment to parental divorce has focused on school-age children, despite the argument of some researchers (e.g., Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000) that early childhood may be a sensitive period, when major family changes may have a greater impact than they would at later ages. Other scholars have argued that parental divorce does not have more negative effects on children of a particular age but that differential effects can be seen at different developmental stages (e.g., Hetherington et al., 1989). Despite the fact that this remains a debated issue in the literature, other reviews (e.g. Amato, 2000; Kelly, 2000) lack in-depth attention to research on young children's adjustment to divorce and how it may be different or similar to that of older children.

The purpose of this article is to better understand how parental divorce relates to development in early childhood. First, a review of both qualitative and quantitative research on outcomes associated with parental divorce in early childhood is offered, followed by a comparison of research on outcomes associated with parental divorce for preschool-age children and research on outcomes for older children. Then research on risk and protective factors that may influence young children's adjustment to parental divorce is presented, with attention to the issue of whether the same risk and protective factors influence younger and older

children's adjustment to divorce. Finally, research on how parental divorce in early childhood is related to later developmental outcomes is reviewed. The developmental psychopathology framework is used to organize the research findings and to suggest implications for research and practice.

Theoretical Framework and Criteria for Study Selection

Developmental psychopathology provides a useful framework for understanding how parental divorce may affect adaptation in early childhood for several reasons. First, developmental psychopathologists highlight the importance of considering one's developmental level to understand adaptation to a major life change (Cicchetti, 1993). This perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding how young children's developmental abilities and limitations affect their adaptation to parental divorce. Second, developmental psychopathology is concerned with understanding the origins and course of individual patterns of behavioral adaptation over time (Sroufe & Rutter, 1984). As such, the process of divorce brings about a number of changes in a child's environment, all of which may influence adaptation in the domains of social, emotional, and cognitive development. Finally, developmental psychopathologists emphasize that adaptation during one developmental stage influences individuals' adaptation to later developmental tasks (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2002; Sroufe & Rutter). Therefore, the developmental psychopathology perspective is useful for understanding how adjustment to parental divorce during early childhood affects later development. According to this perspective, there is not necessarily an exact correspondence between early adaptation and later adaptation. Rather, there is coherence in the individual's general pattern of adaptation (Sroufe & Rutter). For example, forming insecure attachment relationships in infancy is related to relatively poor relationships with peers and teachers in early and middle childhood and poor romantic relationships in adolescence (Sroufe, Egeland, & Carlson, 1999). Early experiences do not entirely determine later adaptation, but early experiences do affect the internal resources the individual has available to meet later challenges (Cicchetti & Rogosch). Specific to divorce, many children experience a stressful period following their parents' divorce but accomplish salient developmental tasks after the initial crisis period is over (Hetherington, 1989). Some children do not successfully adapt to their parents' divorce, and their development in later periods is affected. Developmental psychopathology attempts to explain such individual patterns of adaptation over time by understanding the risk and protective factors that may influence adaptation.

From this perspective, certain issues must be addressed to

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understand a child's adaptation to parental divorce (Cicchetti, 1993). Using the developmental psychopathology perspective, three key issues were chosen to focus and organize this review: How does parental divorce affect the accomplishment of salient developmental tasks for young children? What are the multiple risk and protective factors that affect young children's adjustment to divorce? How does the experience of parental divorce during early childhood affect later outcomes?

Studies included here were located using several methods. Computerized databases (PsycInfo and Sociological Abstracts) were searched, pairing the key word *divorce* with a variety of other key words including *young children*, *early childhood*, *preschool*, *infants*, and *toddlers*. Because there are few studies that have examined outcomes associated with parental divorce for preschool children, the search was not limited by year of publication. After generating a list of studies, other citations were located through the references included in these studies. In addition, review articles on divorce and child outcomes were examined to locate still other studies that reported data on divorce and young children. The primary criterion for inclusion in this review was that the study examined associations between parental divorce and child outcomes in children age 5 and under. Both qualitative and quantitative studies that met these criteria were included. Studies that included a broader age range, but did not report analyses that specifically examined outcomes in preschool children were excluded. In total, 24 published studies were located that reported on outcomes associated with parental divorce in early childhood (see Tables 1 and 2).

Parental Divorce and Developmental Outcomes in Early Childhood

According to the developmental psychopathology perspective, understanding a child's developmental level is necessary to understand how the child might adapt to parental separation and divorce (Sroufe & Rutter, 1984), because developmental level influences one's perceptions of and responses to experiences. Further, stressful life events, such as parental divorce, may interfere with the accomplishment of developmentally salient tasks. Following is a review of research on relationships between parental divorce and developmental outcomes.

Divorce and Behavior Regulation

Throughout the preschool years, children develop greater self-control and the ability to regulate their behavior (Maccoby, 1980). However, young children still may have difficulty regulating their behavior when intense feelings such as fear, anger, or sorrow are involved. The process of parental divorce may evoke strong emotions in children that affect their behavior regulation, because in early childhood stress often is expressed behaviorally because of children's limited verbal abilities.

Several early studies found relationships between parental divorce and behavior problems in young children. However, these findings are difficult to interpret, because other family processes that are likely to relate to children's behavior were either not examined or were examined in a limited way. For example, in a study of 90 preschool children, teachers rated children with divorced parents ($N = 30$) higher in behavior problems (Hodges, Buchsbaum, & Tierney, 1983). For children with divorced parents, more time spent with caregivers other than parents was related to less anxiety, suggesting the possibility of poor parent-child relationships in the divorce group. However, the quality of

parent-child relationships was only assessed with mothers' self-reports. In a second study of 52 preschool children, teachers rated children in the divorce group ($N = 26$) as more withdrawn in structured situations and less withdrawn in unstructured situations than the 26 children with continuously married parents (Hodges, Wechsler, & Ballantine, 1979). One explanation for these findings is that teachers may be biased reporters, viewing the behavior of children whose parents are divorced more negatively than the behavior of children whose parents are married. In addition, married parents rated their children as more cooperative than did divorced parents, and it is unclear whether other family processes might account for some of these differences. For example, it may be possible that the married parents used more effective parenting techniques than the divorced parents, which may result in more cooperative child behavior. A third study of 115 kindergarteners demonstrated that single-parent status (due to divorce) was related to lower social competence, after controlling for socioeconomic status (SES; Guidubaldi & Perry, 1984). However, the groups were categorized as single-parent ($N = 26$) and two-parent families ($N = 89$), and some of those in two-parent families may have been residing with a stepparent. Therefore, the group difference found may be due to living in a single-parent household rather than experiencing parental divorce. Finally, a study comparing 38 children with divorced parents and 42 children with continuously married parents found no differences in social functioning between the two groups (Jacobs, Guidubaldi, & Nastasi, 1986).

Divorce changes many aspects of family life for young children. For example, divorce often involves changes in the financial standing of one or both parents (especially the mother), access to one or both parents, and parents' emotional state and behavior (Amato, 2000). Because young children are more dependent on their parents than are older children, it is especially important to consider how the process of divorce changes the family context. Recent studies that have considered the effects of divorce along with other family processes on children's development have found fewer associations between divorce and children's outcomes than did earlier studies. For example, a longitudinal study of 340 mothers (73 never married, 97 separated or divorced, and 170 continuously married) found that parental marital status was not a predictor of child outcomes, but other family variables (maternal education, family income, depression, and parenting ability) were significantly associated with child outcomes (Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, McCartney, Owen, & Booth, 2000). A second study of 99 preschoolers with divorced mothers and 99 preschoolers with continuously married mothers demonstrated that relationships between divorce and child outcomes were largely indirect (Pett, Wampold, Turner, & Vaughan-Cole, 1999). Although there was a direct pathway of a small magnitude ($r = .19$) from parental divorce to child behavior problems, maternal strain and mother-child interaction quality mediated the relationship between divorce and child behavior problems. Divorce was associated with greater maternal strain, which was associated with more behavior problems. In addition, divorce was related to lower maternal supportive behavior and more negativity, both of which were associated with more behavior problems. These studies are particularly informative, because both used relatively large samples and multiple methods (observation and parental report) to assess constructs.

Predivorce marital functioning also may affect children's adjustment to divorce. A longitudinal study of 92 families (Heinicke, Guthrie, & Ruth, 1997) found that children whose parents

Table 1
Parental Divorce and Child Outcomes in Early Childhood

Study (<i>n</i> = 17)	Sample	Child Outcomes	Method	Main Findings	Methodological Weaknesses
Bretherton et al., 1997	50 divorced mothers recruited from court records and preschools	Cognitive	M interviews, questionnaires	76% of mothers reported children asking them about a variety of divorce-related issues	Information about divorce-related issues provided spontaneously by mothers, not systematically assessed
Carlson, 1998	157 mothers from larger longitudinal study recruited from public health clinics	Attachment	Hospital records; M-C observations; M, T, C, questionnaires; C interviews	IP status (NM, D, or S) at birth related to attachment disorganization at 12-18 months	Inclusion of NM, D, and S mothers in one group
Clarke-Stewart et al., 2000	340 families (73 NM; 97 D; 170 CM) from larger study (<i>N</i> = 1,384)	Behavior problems, attachment, cognitive	C, P-C observations; M questionnaires and interviews; home environment assessment	Parental marital status not associated with child outcomes when other family variables controlled	Behavior problem assessments only completed by mothers
Guidubaldi & Perry, 1984	115 children (26 1-P, 89 2-P families) recruited from all kindergarten classes in a school district	Behavior, cognitive	Standardized cognitive assessments, T reports	IP status related to lower social competence and academic functioning, with SES controlled	Unclear whether 2P group includes remarried families
Heinicke et al., 1997	92 families recruited from hospitals when expecting first child	Behavior	M, F interviews; M, F, T questionnaires; P-C observations	Divorce related to fewer behavior problems and more prosocial behavior, if low predivorce marital quality.	Only 17 of 92 families were divorced; some analyses compared groups with small <i>N</i> s (e.g., <i>N</i> = 5)
Hodges et al., 1979	52 P-C dyads (26 D, 26 CM) recruited from preschools	Behavior	C observations; P, T questionnaires	D group higher in behavior problems; risk factors: lower parental income, younger parental age, greater father contact	Family process variables not assessed; length of time since separation not controlled
Hodges et al., 1983	90 M-C dyads (30 D, 60 CM) recruited from preschools	Behavior	M, T questionnaires	D group higher in behavior problems; risk factor: gender (male); protective factor: more time spent with nonparent caregivers	Nonstandardized child behavior measures; low alphas on several subscales
Hodges et al., 1991	45 divorced mothers and children recruited from divorce records	Developmental delay in social, motor, language domains	M questionnaire, standardized developmental assessment	Infrequent visitation related to greater delay; more frequent visitation related to F-C relationship quality (positive and negative), dependency on mother after visits, and less stranger distress	Father income and education not controlled
Jacobs et al., 1986	80 families (38 D, 42 CM) recruited from day care centers	Behavior, cognitive, peer relations, physical well-being	P, T questionnaires; P, C interviews; standardized cognitive assessments	D group had higher cognitive scores; protective factor: social support	Possible initial group differences in IQ not assessed
Johnston & Campbell, 1988	56 high-conflict divorcing couples from counseling service	Behavior, quality of play	P-C observations; P, T, and relative reports	Behavior problems reported after transitions between homes and when interparental conflict was high; disruptions in play behavior observed	Atypical sample; specific information about some assessments not provided; no comparison group
Johnston et al., 1987	56 high-conflict divorcing couples from counseling service	Behavior problems	Clinical ratings of P-C observations; P, C questionnaires	No gender differences in behavior problems	Atypical sample; no comparison group
Najman et al., 1986	8,556 pregnant women recruited from prenatal clinics	Behavior problems	M questionnaires	More marital transitions related to behavior problems; risk factor: interparental conflict	All data obtained from M reports
Page & Bretherton, 2001	66 divorced M-C dyads recruited from court records, preschools	Behavior; attachment	P-C observations, C attachment story completion task, P interviews, T questionnaires	Attachment stories with themes of C comfort seeking and F positive discipline related to better peer relationships	No comparison group
Pett et al., 1999	198 M-C dyads (99 D; 99 CM) recruited from randomly selected preschools	Behavior	P-C observations; M, T questionnaires	Divorced status related to maternal strain; significant pathways found from maternal strain to lower maternal support to greater maternal negativity to child behavior problems	Low interrater reliability on some scales; some M-C interactions included other family members, others did not

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Study (<i>n</i> = 17)	Sample	Child Outcomes	Method	Main Findings	Methodological Weaknesses
Poehlmann & Fiese, 1994	45 families (16 D, 29 CM) recruited from community as part of larger study	Cognitive	Home environment assessment, standardized cognitive assessments, M questionnaires	Divorced status related to less stimulating home environment, which related to lower cognitive functioning	Small <i>N</i> in divorce group
Solomon & George, 1999	126 M-C dyads (82 D, 44 CM)	Attachment	M-C observations, M questionnaires	Overnight visitation, high interparental conflict, low interparental communication, and maternal inability to comfort infant related to disorganized attachment	Analyses do not examine relative contributions of visitation schedules and parenting variables to attachment disorganization
Whiteside & Becker, 2000	12 studies that included children who experienced divorce before age 5	Behavior; cognitive	Meta-analysis; primarily M reports	In divorce group, maternal depressive symptoms positively related to child behavior problems and maternal warmth negatively related to child behavior problems; risk factor: interparental conflict; protective factors: father contact, interparental cooperation	Most data obtained from other reports; limited number of studies included; some studies had small sample sizes (e.g., <i>N</i> = 16)

Note: M = mother; F = father; P = parent; C = child; T = teacher; D = divorced; CM = continuously married; NM = never married; S = separated; IP = single parent; 2P = two parent; SES = socioeconomic status.

had low-quality marriages and divorced demonstrated fewer behavior problems and more prosocial behavior than did children whose parents had low-quality marriages and stayed together. This study had several strengths, such as the longitudinal design and the use of multiple methods, including observations of couple and parent-child relationships. However, the group of families who divorced during the study period was small (17 of 92), and some analyses compared small groups (*N* = 5), so the results require replication with a larger sample.

Divorce and Attachment

The formation of attachment relationships is a primary developmental task of infancy. Based on the history of infant-caregiver interaction, the infant develops a secure or insecure attachment relationship with each caregiver (Bowlby, 1969). Secure attachment is characterized by the ability to use the caregiver as a secure base, freely exploring the environment when the caregiver is near, and attempting to gain comfort and protection from the caregiver when distressed. In contrast, infants with an insecure attachment do not effectively use the caregiver to gain comfort when distressed. Secure attachment in infancy is associated with more positive developmental outcomes later in childhood, such as higher self-esteem and better peer relationships, than is insecure attachment (Belsky & Cassidy, 1994). A form of attachment distinct from secure or insecure attachment has been observed in infants whose parents are abusive or frightening (Main & Hesse, 1990). This attachment pattern, termed “disorganized,” is characterized by bizarre, disoriented, or disorganized behaviors and is associated with behavioral and emotional problems in later developmental periods (Carlson, 1998).

For young children, parental divorce often involves frequent and sometimes extended separations from parents; theoretically, such separations may disrupt attachment security (Bowlby, 1969). Research suggests that interparental conflict also may decrease attachment security (Howes & Markman, 1989; Johnston & Campbell, 1988; Owen & Cox, 1997). Signs of disorganized attachment have been observed in preschoolers who experience a high-conflict parental divorce, specifically sudden changes of emotional state, freezing with a “dazed” expression, and assuming a fearful posture, such as curling up in a fetal position (Johnston & Campbell). Further, studies of married parents found associations between marital conflict and insecure or disorganized attachment (Howes & Markman; Owen & Cox).

Few studies have systematically examined the relationship between parental divorce and attachment. A study of 157 mother-infant dyads identified maternal marital status as a statistically significant predictor of disorganized attachment (Carlson, 1998). However, marital status was defined as single versus married, so divorced subjects and never-married single parents were grouped together. Therefore, it is unclear whether divorce actually was associated with attachment disorganization. Regression analyses identified several other maternal characteristics that were statistical predictors of attachment disorganization, with maternal sensitivity being the strongest predictor. A second prospective longitudinal study of 340 families, which compared three groups of parents (single and never married, separated or divorced, and continuously married), found no significant relationship between parental marital status and children’s attachment security, when maternal education and family income were controlled.

A third study investigated differences in attachment security in three groups of infants and toddlers. Group 1 included separated or divorced parents with overnight visitation (*N* = 55);

Table 2
Parental Divorce in Early Childhood and Outcomes in Later Development Periods

Study (N = 7)	Sample	Outcomes	Method	Main Findings	Methodological Weaknesses
Allison & Furstenburg, 1989	Probability sample of 1,197 P-C dyads with children aged 7-11	Behavior problems, psychological distress, academic difficulty	P, C interviews; T questionnaires; P, C telephone interviews	Early parental divorce related to problem behavior, academic difficulty, and psychological distress in middle childhood and adolescence	Nonstandardized outcome measures; single-item measure of academic difficulty; 9 of 14 scales had low alphas
Beckwith et al., 1999	86 young adults recruited in infancy for longitudinal study, from pre-maturely born infants at a hospital	Adult attachment	P-C observations, interviews	Negative life events (including parental divorce) in childhood related to insecure adult attachment at age 18	Relationships between specific events and later attachment not examined
Hetherington, 1989, 1993, 1999; Hetherington et al., 1982	144 families (72 D, 72 CM) recruited from court records and nursery schools when target child was 4 years old; sample expanded to 450 by young adult phase	Behavior problems, social competence, academic competence	Multiple forms of data (e.g., interviews, questionnaires, observations, standardized assessments) from multiple sources (e.g., P, T, C, peers)	Divorced group had more behavior problems at ages 6, 10, 15, and 24; risk factors: gender (male); poor parenting quality, interparental conflict, lack of contact with noncustodial father; protective factors: warm, structured school and home environment	Original sample included only White, middle-class subjects; mothers had custody in all divorced families
Kalter & Rembar, 1981	144 children with divorced parents seen for psychiatric evaluation at outpatient clinic	Emotional disturbance, presenting complaints (e.g. behavior problems, academic problems, physical symptoms)	Clinical evaluations	Early parental divorce related to later P-C role reversal, academic problems, and aggression	All data obtained from clinical evaluations; no standardized measures of behavior problems
Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Wallerstein et al., 2000	60 families (131 children) from divorce counseling center, recruited from community	Behavior; play quality, social relationships, work competence	P, C interviews; C observations, questionnaires	Behavior problems and disrupted play observed in preschool period; early parental divorce related to lower work and social functioning in adulthood	Atypical sample; nonindependent observations due to inclusion of siblings from the same family in the sample
Woodward et al., 2000	Unselected birth cohort of 1,265 children born in New Zealand in mid-1977	Parent and peer attachment; parental bonding	P, C interviews; T assessments; psychometric tests; medical and official records	Early parental separation related to less close attachment to parents in adolescence, with other family variables controlled	All outcome data obtained by subject self-report
Zill et al., 1993	National probability samples of 1,147 children	F-C and M-C relationship quality; behavior problems, receipt of psychological help, dropping out of school	P, C interviews; C telephone interviews; T questionnaires	Early parental divorce associated with poor F-C relationship in young adulthood	Some constructs assessed with nonstandardized measures; no validity data provided

Note: M = mother; F = father; P = parent; C = child; T = teacher; D = divorced; CM = continuously married.

Group 2 included separated or divorced parents without overnight visitation ($N = 29$); and Group 3 included continuously married parents ($N = 42$; Solomon & George, 1999). Significantly more infants in the overnight visitation group were classified as having a disorganized attachment than in the married group. For the overnight visit group, disorganized attachment was associated with high parental conflict, low parental communication, and mothers' inability to provide comfort and reassurance when the infant was distressed before and after visits. It is not clear whether the overnight visits or parenting quality contributed more to the child's attachment disorganization.

According to attachment theory, children develop mental representations of relationships, based on their early attachment experiences. These mental representations, which include perceptions of the self and others, may affect later social and emotional development (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). One study investigated attachment representations of 66 preschool children (ages 4.5–5 years) whose parents had divorced at least 2 years before the study (Page & Bretherton, 2001). Children were asked to complete stories about their families that were coded for attachment-related themes. Children whose stories included themes of seeking comfort from their mothers when distressed or themes of fathers using nonharsh, nonphysical discipline had better relationships with their peers. There was no comparison group of children with married parents, but the results support the findings of other studies that emphasize the influence of parent-child relationship quality on children's adjustment to divorce (Emery, 1999).

Divorce and Cognitive Development

Young children's understanding of divorce. The effect of a stressful series of events, such as those that occur when parents divorce, on development is likely to be influenced by the child's cognitive processing of the events. Preschoolers' thought is often egocentric; thus, they have limited ability to take others' perspectives (Flavell, Miller, & Miller, 1993). They are likely to blame themselves for their parents' divorce and have difficulty understanding why their parents are divorcing. An intensive study of 131 children from 60 families suggested that preschool children are more likely than older children to feel responsible for causing the divorce, whereas older children are likely to hold one parent responsible for the divorce (Wallerstein, 1983). A second, qualitative study of 56 preschoolers from an ethnically diverse group of high-conflict divorcing families described differences between younger and older preschoolers in understanding of parental conflict (Johnston & Campbell, 1988). The younger preschoolers (ages 2–3) neither verbally nor in their play indicated any awareness of what their parents were fighting about, although they demonstrated emotional distress. Older preschoolers (ages 4–5) demonstrated greater awareness of their parents' conflicts and focused on sorting out their parents' conflicting claims.

Qualitative data from a study of 50 divorced mothers indicated that despite their limited understanding, preschool children are curious about parental divorce (Bretherton, Walsh, Lependorf, & Georgeson, 1997). The majority of the mothers (76%) reported that their children (ages 4.5–5) asked them about divorce-related issues, including parents' feelings for each other (46%), parental reunions or affection (36%), reasons for the divorce (12%), why the parents lived apart (24%), the father's girlfriend or life (26%), and why they could not see their father whenever they wanted (46%).

The results of these studies provide rich, descriptive information on preschool children's understanding of divorce. Nonetheless, large-scale studies with representative samples also are needed to determine whether the patterns observed in these qualitative studies are generalizable to the larger population.

Cognitive performance. During the preschool years, children develop many new cognitive abilities, such as symbolic representation and language skills (Flavell et al., 1993). Disruptions that occur during the divorce process may affect family characteristics and processes, such as economic standing and parental responsiveness, that are associated with children's cognitive performance (Carter & Murdock, 2001).

Early studies utilized research designs that compared the cognitive functioning of children whose parents divorced with children of continuously married parents, focusing on the direct effects of divorce on children's functioning. For example, a study comparing 38 children from divorced families and 42 children from nondivorced families found that, contrary to prediction, the children from divorced families scored higher on a test of cognitive functioning (Jacobs et al., 1986). IQ was not assessed, so it is unclear whether the group difference reflects initial differences in IQ rather than differences caused by parental divorce. A second study of 45 infants and toddlers found that infrequent contact with the father was associated with greater delay in language development (Hodges, Landis, Day, & Oderberg, 1991). Although it is possible that lack of access to the father resulted in decreased stimulation and language interaction, higher paternal income was also related to the frequency of contact with the child. Thus, it is not clear whether higher income, frequency of contact, or a combination of both variables accounts for the delay in language development. Finally, a study of 115 kindergarteners demonstrated that single-parent status (because of divorce) was associated with lower academic functioning, with SES controlled (Guidubaldi & Perry, 1984). Because parenting quality was not assessed, it is not clear whether the group differences might be caused by differences in parents' behavior.

More recent studies have examined the influence of parental marital status in concert with other family process variables. For example, a longitudinal study of 340 families found that children in separated or divorced families performed more poorly on tests of cognitive ability at 15 and 24 months than did children from continuously married families (Clarke-Stewart et al., 2000). However, when family variables were considered (i.e., maternal education, family income, maternal depression, and Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment scores [HOME; support and cognitive stimulation provided to the child]), maternal marital status was not related to children's cognitive functioning. Again, these findings suggest that the family context has a more important relationship with children's development than the divorce itself. This study did examine predivorce differences in cognitive functioning between children whose parents eventually divorced and those whose parents stayed married; they did not find any differences, suggesting that the divorce process may bring about changes in the family context that affect children's cognitive development. Finally, a study of 45 mothers with toddlers found that marital status was not directly related to toddlers' cognitive performance, but marital status was related to HOME scores, with divorced mothers providing a less stimulating environment; in turn, this was associated with lower cognitive functioning for toddlers (Poehlmann & Fiese, 1994). However, the findings should be interpreted cautiously because of the small group sizes (29 married and 16 divorced mothers).

Symbolic play. In addition to investigating cognitive development using traditional standardized assessments, observing children's play can provide insight into their level of cognitive development. The sophistication of children's play is an indicator of their mastery of symbolic representation—an important cognitive advance in early childhood (Vygotsky, 1933/1978). One study investigated the quality of play demonstrated by 56 preschool children from high-conflict divorcing families (Johnston & Campbell, 1988). Most of the children's play was constrained in some way. Some children refused to play or engaged in low-level play, such as manipulating objects. Children's pretend play had a static (pretending dolls were sleeping or watching TV) or stereotypical (feeding a doll) quality. Most children either avoided play themes involving conflict or began to develop play themes of an aggressive nature, and as the conflict in their play escalated, their play became disrupted, and they became frightened. Finally, some children used play to resolve dilemmas, repeating the same play themes involving conflict until they found a way to resolve the conflict. These findings suggest that high levels of conflict may affect the quality of children's play. The level of play observed was generally lower than is typical for their ages. The sample was atypical; however, 42 of the 56 couples reported that at least one episode of physical aggression had occurred in the past 12 months, so the results are not generalizable to most children whose parents divorce. More systematic observations of play in nonclinic samples are needed to better understand how divorce and family conflict can affect the development of symbolic play.

In summary, research has demonstrated links between parental divorce and young children's emotional, social, and cognitive development. However, on the whole, this research suggests that other family processes play a more important role in children's development than does divorce itself. Many of the studies that have investigated family processes in concert with parental divorce found that parental divorce often has indirect effects on children through its effects on parental emotional state, economic standing, and behavior. Further, methodologically weaker studies typically found stronger associations between parental divorce and negative outcomes for children than reported in studies with stronger research designs.

Comparing Outcomes for Younger and Older Children

The question arises as to whether the outcomes associated with parental divorce for younger children are similar to or different from those found in the research on older children. Studies suggest that parental divorce increases both groups' risk of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems and lower cognitive performance. The outcomes studied for preschool and school-age children have been somewhat different, reflecting the different developmental tasks that are salient during early and middle childhood. For example, researchers have found that school-age children whose parents divorce have lower self-esteem than those whose parents remain married (Amato & Keith, 1991). Yet self-esteem in younger children with divorced parents has not been investigated. Theoretically, self-esteem is developing during the preschool years, and children are thought to develop a unitary self-concept around age 8, so self-esteem is a developmentally salient outcome for school-age children. Conversely, attachment is a common focus in studies of parental divorce with samples of younger children, whereas only a few

studies have investigated attachment representations in older children.

Multiple Influences on Adjustment

As suggested by research on developmental outcomes associated with parental divorce, there are multiple influences on young children's adjustment to divorce. Because family life is dynamic, many family changes occur before, during, and after the divorce process that can affect children's adjustment. Specifically, there are risk factors, such as interparental conflict, that increase the likelihood of negative outcomes, and there are protective factors, such as parental responsiveness, that buffer the individual from negative outcomes and increase the likelihood of adaptation (Cicchetti, 1993). Following, the multiple influences on young children's adjustment to divorce are discussed, focusing on certain environmental risk and protective factors: family demographic characteristics, maternal emotional well-being and parenting quality, interparental conflict, social support, contact with the nonresident parent, and child characteristics.

Family Demographic Characteristics

Parental income and age are associated with children's behavioral outcomes following parental divorce. Specifically, a study comparing 26 preschoolers with divorced parents and 26 preschoolers with married parents found that lower parental income and younger parental age were associated with maladjustment in the divorced group (Hodges et al., 1979). Although the sample size in this study was small, a strength of this study is that child outcomes were assessed with observer ratings rather than maternal reports. Also, a multimethod longitudinal study of 340 parents identified maternal education as another protective factor (Clarke-Stewart et al., 2000). Maternal education predicted positive outcomes, such as cognitive performance, social ability, secure attachment, and positive mother-child interaction, regardless of maternal marital status.

Maternal Emotional Well-Being and Parenting Quality

In a longitudinal study of 340 mothers and young children, maternal depression and lower HOME scores predicted children's behavior problems beyond the influences of maternal education and income, regardless of whether their parents were divorced (Clarke-Stewart et al., 2000). Similarly, a meta-analysis of 12 studies demonstrated that, within divorced families, maternal depressive symptoms were associated with more child behavior problems, and maternal warmth was associated with fewer child behavior problems (Whiteside & Becker, 2000). Finally, a study of 198 families found that for divorced families ($N = 99$), maternal strain was associated with lower maternal support, which predicted greater maternal negativity, which was associated with children's behavior problems (Pett et al., 1999).

Interparental Conflict

A large body of research has demonstrated that conflict between married parents is associated with negative outcomes for children (see Grych & Fincham, 2001). Interparental conflict is likely to be a risk factor for children with divorced parents, as well. As suggested by a study of 50 divorced mothers with young children, communication between divorced spouses often is difficult (Bretherton et al., 1997). Only about one third of the

mothers in this study, who had been divorced for at least 2 years, reported that they were able to communicate well or reasonably well about parenting issues with the child's father. A meta-analysis of 12 studies found that greater hostility between divorced parents was associated with more problems for young children (Whiteside & Becker, 2000). Findings from a longitudinal study of 8,556 mothers found that mothers who reported lower interparental conflict and fewer partner changes had children with fewer behavior problems and that interparental conflict was a stronger predictor of child behavior problems than was the number of partner changes (Najman et al., 1997). However, these results should be interpreted cautiously, because mother reports were used to assess all constructs, so the associations may result from shared method variance. Another study found that interparental conflict and lack of communication were associated with attachment disorganization in infants who had frequent overnight visits with their fathers (Solomon & George, 1999). Importantly, studies that use multiple methods and multiple informants to assess interparental conflict are lacking and could provide a more complete picture of how postdivorce interparental conflict affects young children's development.

Social Support

Social support may alleviate parenting stress and buffer children from negative outcomes associated with parenting stress (Cochran & Niego, 1995). During the process of divorce, high parental stress is typical and social support may be particularly important for parents and children (Hetherington, 1989). One study of 38 children with divorced parents and 42 children with continuously married parents found that social support is a protective factor for children (Jacobs et al., 1986). Support from extended family was positively associated with social functioning for the divorced group. Further, support from day-care providers was associated with better social and cognitive skills for these same children. Because this is a single study with a small convenience sample, replication is needed before conclusions are drawn about the influences of social support on young children's functioning following parental divorce.

Contact With the Nonresident Parent

Contact with the nonresident parent often declines following parental divorce, and many children completely lose contact with him or her (Emery, 1999). It has been hypothesized that more contact with the nonresident parent benefits children, but research findings are mixed. In several studies of older children whose parents had divorced, the amount of contact had little influence on child outcomes (Emery). Studies of young children that have examined the influence of contact with the nonresident parent on child outcomes also have mixed findings.

One study of infants and toddlers discussed earlier (Solomon & George, 1999) found high rates of attachment disorganization in infants who had frequent overnight visits with their fathers. Because several maternal characteristics were related to attachment disorganization in that group, it is unclear whether the overnight visits or the mother's parenting quality was a more important predictor of attachment disorganization. A second study (Hodges et al., 1979) comparing 26 children whose parents had divorced with 26 children whose parents had not divorced also found links between more contact with the father and negative outcomes (i.e., higher parent and teacher ratings of aggression and lower parent ratings of cooperation). For children in the divorce group, the length of time since their parents sep-

arated was not controlled and ranged from 5 to 48 months. Longitudinal research demonstrates that distress, which typically subsides over time, is common in the first 2 years following parental divorce (Hetherington, 1989). Therefore, it is possible that the children who had experienced a recent separation were distressed and that this may have affected the results. Finally, a study of 45 infants and toddlers with divorced parents found that contact with the nonresident father is related to delays in language development and to a pattern of both positive and negative behaviors, including both tension and affection toward the father, dependency on the mother, and less distress at being left with a stranger (Hodges et al., 1991). Relying on mother reports to assess child behavior, it is possible that mothers' feelings about visitation influenced their reports of child behavior. Further research that controls for the amount of time since separation and uses multiple methods and informants to assess child outcomes will provide a clearer understanding of how contact with nonresident parents affects young children.

The research on contact with the nonresident parent also raises the question of whether it is contact with the nonresident parent or the frequency of transitions between homes that affects children's outcomes. Two descriptive studies suggest that transitions between homes may be difficult for young children. In a study of 50 divorced mothers, 81% of the mothers reported that their child (ages 4.5–5 years) had experienced difficulty with transitions, particularly the return to the mother's house after spending time at the father's house (Bretherton et al., 1997). Mothers reported the following problems: children not wanting to leave the father's house and clinginess and behavior problems upon returning to the mother's house. Interestingly, all of the mothers had divorced at least 2 years before the study, so the transition process was not new.

A second study of high-conflict divorcing families discussed earlier also reported a variety of transition difficulties (Johnston & Campbell, 1988). According to reports from both parents, more than half (58–71%) of the preschoolers demonstrated difficulty when transitioning between homes, such as tension or apprehension, resistance to separation, regressive behavior, and aggressive behavior.

Although research suggests that frequent transitions between homes may be difficult for young children, the benefits of contact with the nonresident parent may outweigh the difficulties that children experience with frequent transitions in the long run. Further research is needed to clarify the long-term effects of contact with the nonresident parent on children. Whether contact with the nonresident parent is positive or negative for the child is likely to depend on a number of factors, including the quality of the parent-child relationship. A meta-analysis of 12 studies by Whiteside and Becker (2000) found no direct relationship between father contact and child outcomes. They did find that more frequent father contact was associated with a better father-child relationship, and this, in turn, was associated with fewer internalizing symptoms. Further, predivorce father involvement predicted a better postdivorce father-child relationship, suggesting the importance of considering predivorce family characteristics to understand how such contact affects children.

Child Characteristics

Gender. Characteristics of the child, such as gender and temperament, also may influence children's outcomes. Amato's (2001) meta-analysis of 67 studies, primarily of older children, found no gender differences in most domains of adjustment, ex-

cept that boys had more conduct problems than girls. Less is known about how outcomes associated with parental divorce in younger children may differ by gender. In fact, most studies of younger children have used samples too small to compare boys and girls. One study of 56 children whose parents were involved in high-conflict divorces found no significant gender differences in young children's adjustment to parental divorce (Johnston, Gonzalez, & Campbell, 1987). A second study that investigated long-term outcomes associated with parental divorce, also found no differences in self-reported attachment to parents of boys and girls ($N = 120$) whose parents had divorced when they were preschoolers (Woodward, Fergusson, & Belsky, 2000).

Other studies suggest that there may be some differences in outcomes for boys and girls, but clear patterns of differences have not been replicated across studies. For example, in one study, social support from extended family and day-care providers was associated with different outcomes (all positive) for boys and girls with divorced parents (Jacobs et al., 1986). In a second longitudinal study, boys with separated or divorced parents ($N = 97$) had lower cognitive scores at 15 months of age than did girls, but girls with separated or divorced parents demonstrated more negative behavior with their mothers at 6 and 15 months of age than did boys (Clarke-Stewart et al., 2000). Importantly, marital status was unrelated to problems when other family variables were included in the regression models. Finally, in a study of 66 preschoolers with divorced parents, children's representations of attachment themes in a story completion task were associated with peer relationship quality in different ways for boys and girls (Bretherton et al., 1997). For boys, themes of child-father attachment, child-father empathy, and child-mother empathy were associated with higher teacher ratings of social competence. For girls, the same themes were associated with lower teacher ratings of social competence. The authors suggested that girls who included themes of child-parent empathy appeared to take responsibility for their parents' emotional well-being; such emotional role-reversal can lead to emotional and behavioral problems for the child (Emery, 1999).

Temperament. The only study to investigate the role of temperament examined how temperament in infancy predicted adjustment at age 10 for children whose parents divorced (Hetherington, 1989). For children with difficult temperaments, increased stress was associated with less adaptability, even when high levels of support were available. For children with easy temperaments and high levels of support, moderate stress was related to greater adaptability. Clearly children with difficult temperaments may have more difficulty managing stress than do children with easy temperaments. A strength of this study is that temperament was assessed by nurses and parents during infancy, several years before parental divorce. However, the study families were primarily White and middle class, so studies with more diverse samples are needed to replicate these findings.

Comparing Risk and Protective Factors for Younger and Older Children

This review has identified several risk and protective factors that may affect how young children adjust to their parents' divorce. Many of these factors for younger children are similar to those identified for older children. Parenting quality, maternal emotional well-being, and interparental conflict are important factors associated with children's adjustment to parental divorce for both groups of children. However, the research reviewed

here, which focused on young children, suggests that there are important differences in the risk and protective factors between the two groups. Specifically, the dimensions of parenting quality that are important for children's adjustment to divorce may differ by children's developmental stage. Studies of older children have assessed parental monitoring of children's activities and parental involvement (e.g., Capaldi & Patterson, 1991; Kurtz, 1994; Martinez & Forgatch, 2002; Simons, Lin, Gordon, Conger, & Lorenz, 1999), whereas studies of younger children typically have focused more on parental warmth and responsiveness (Heinicke et al., 1997; Hodges et al., 1983; Pett et al., 1999; Whiteside & Becker, 2000) or cognitive stimulation (Clarke-Stewart et al., 2000; Poehlmann & Fiese, 1994). It is likely that parental warmth and responsiveness are important protective factors throughout childhood and adolescence, but parental monitoring and involvement becomes more important in middle childhood and adolescence as children spend more time involved in activities outside the home and with peers. On the other hand, parental cognitive stimulation may be most important in early childhood before children enter school, particularly for children who do not attend high-quality child-care centers, but parental monitoring of schoolwork becomes important during middle childhood.

A second difference in the literature on risk and protective factors affecting older and younger children's adjustment to divorce is that the relationship between the nonresident parent and child has been studied more extensively with older children. For both groups, findings are mixed regarding the effects of frequent contact with nonresident parents on children's adjustment. However, results of a recent meta-analysis (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999) of studies that primarily included older children showed that contact with the nonresident parent has a modest but positive effect on children's well-being. Further, the quality of the relationship between the nonresident parent and child has been addressed more frequently in studies of older children's adjustment (e.g., Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996; Simons et al., 1999), whereas only frequency of contact typically is examined in studies of younger children (Hodges et al., 1979, 1991). Extending this research to include the quality of contact with the nonresident parent would be informative.

Finally, the literature on interparental conflict suggests that children may be more negatively affected by interparental conflict when they become involved in their parents' conflicts (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991; Johnston et al., 1987), a behavior common in older rather than younger children (e.g., Davies, Myers, & Cummings, 1996; Johnston, Kline, & Tschann, 1989). Therefore, involvement in interparental conflict may be a significant risk factor for older children. Younger children lack sophisticated language or problem-solving skills, which may diminish their involvement in parental conflicts. However, there may be other ways that young children become involved in their parents' conflicts (e.g., a parent threatens to cut off the other parent's contact with the child). Further research is needed to gain a better understanding of whether and how such involvement occurs in younger children.

Early Experience and Later Development

Researchers who use the developmental psychopathology framework suggest that an individual's adaptation to a major change may have both immediate and long-term effects on development (Sroufe & Rutter, 1984). Early experience may influ-

ence later development in a number of ways. For example, early experience may result in immediate negative outcomes that continue over time or may change one's coping style or self-concept, which may influence later adaptation. As noted earlier, parental divorce is likely to bring about many changes in the family environment that influence both short- and long-term outcomes for children.

Few studies have followed young children whose parents divorced over time; however, research supports the general hypothesis that early experience affects later functioning. The most comprehensive study of relationships between parental divorce in early childhood and later outcomes is the Virginia Longitudinal Study (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1982; Hetherington, 1989, 1993, 1999). The original sample included 144 families (72 divorced; 72 continuously married) with a 4-year-old child. Data were collected when children were age 6, 10, 15, and 24. Most children whose parents divorced experienced distress for a 2-year period following the divorce, but many children emerged from this stressful period without lasting problems. However, parental divorce did increase children's risk for behavior problems at all data collection points. A number of risk and protective factors were identified that predicted whether children whose parents divorced experienced problems. Risk factors included gender (male), poor parenting quality (fewer maturity demands, lower quality communication, less warmth, inconsistent discipline, lack of control), interparental conflict, and lack of contact with nonresident fathers. Children who were in home and school environments characterized by warmth, structure, and clear rules were less likely to develop problems. Further, risk and protective factors for children who had experienced parental divorce in early childhood changed over time. In young adulthood, gender was no longer a risk factor, and for those who married, marital quality became a more important risk-protective factor than the parent-child relationship.

Other studies have focused on relationships between early parental divorce and a more narrow range of later outcomes. A longitudinal study that followed 86 individuals from infancy until age 18 (Beckwith, Cohen, & Hamilton, 1999), found that experiencing parental divorce before age 5 was significantly associated with the development of an insecure-preoccupied state of mind regarding attachment in adulthood. Adults with a preoccupied state of mind appear to be overwhelmed with emotion when describing their own childhood experiences and are likely to have insecurely attached infants (Van Ijzendoorn, 1995). However, the preoccupied group also experienced other negative life events, including physical and sexual abuse, serious physical illness, and death of a parent, so it is unclear how parental divorce may have combined with some of these other negative life events to influence attachment representations. A second prospective longitudinal study followed children from birth to age 16 and found that children whose parents separated when they were young (under age 5) felt less closely attached to their parents than did children whose parents separated when they were older (Woodward et al., 2000). The relationship between early parental separation and later attachment to parents remained significant after controlling for other family factors, including demographic characteristics, interparental conflict, and early mother-child interaction.

A clinical study of 144 children with divorced parents also suggests linkages between early parental divorce and later functioning (Kalter & Rembar, 1981). For school-age children (ages 7–11.5 years), early parental separation (before age 5.5) was as-

sociated with later parent-child role-reversal and academic problems. For adolescent girls, early parental separation was positively related to aggression and academic problems. In contrast, for adolescent boys, early parental separation was negatively associated with aggression. Because this was a clinical sample, the results are not generalizable to nonclinic populations. However, two studies using data from a larger, longitudinal, nationally representative study of 2,279 children (Allison & Furstenberg, 1989; Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993) also found that early parental separation was associated with more negative outcomes than was later parental separation. In fact, in a study that included 1,197 of the children (Allison & Furstenberg), early parental divorce was associated with parent and teacher reports of child problem behaviors, parent reports of academic difficulty and delinquency, and child reports of distress. Furthermore, in the second study (Zill et al.), which included 1,147 of the children, early parental divorce was related to poorer father-child relationships in young adulthood. There were no significant relationships between early parental divorce and later mother-child relationships, behavior problems, receipt of psychological help, or dropping out of high school.

Finally, findings from a 25-year longitudinal study of 131 children from 60 families (Wallerstein et al., 2000) documented different types of problems associated with parental divorce at different developmental periods. In the preschool period, Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) observed the following behaviors: regression, aggression, guilt, emotional neediness, and disrupted play. In adulthood, those whose parents divorced when they were younger were functioning less well in work and relationships than were those whose parents divorced later.

Although several studies report negative long-term effects of parental divorce on children, the results should be interpreted cautiously for several reasons. First, the role of other family factors such as parenting quality has not been examined in much of the research on the long-term effects of parental divorce. Second, it is possible that the children whose parents divorced would have experienced the same negative outcomes, or more problems, had their parents remained married. Although many of the studies reviewed here are longitudinal studies, they rely on correlational methods rather than experimental methods, so it is not possible to infer a causal relationship between early parental divorce and later outcomes.

Directions for Future Research

Several directions for future research result from this review. The developmental psychopathology perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding individual adaptation with respect to developmentally salient issues. Because many of the studies of young children's adjustment to parental divorce have assessed outcomes similar to those assessed in studies of older children (e.g., internalizing and externalizing behaviors and cognitive performance), more research investigating issues that are developmentally salient for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers is needed. For example, research that systematically investigates how unpredictability and frequent transitions that arise during the divorce process, or parental sensitivity surrounding transitions, is warranted.

The developmental psychopathology perspective also emphasizes that multiple risk and protective factors interact and influence individual adaptation to stressful events. Several risk and protective factors, primarily within the family context, have

been identified that likely affect young children's adjustment to divorce. Commonly, existing studies have taken one of two approaches: (a) comparing children with divorced parents with children with continuously married parents on various outcome measures with little or no attention to other family process variables or (b) statistically controlling family process variables to identify direct relationships between divorce and child outcomes. Although these studies have provided useful information, they fail to shed light on how multiple family changes that occur during the divorce process interact to influence children's development. There is a need for research that moves beyond attempting to identify direct effects of divorce on development and focuses instead on divorce-related changes in the child's ecological context. Specifically, research that examines family processes before parental divorce, the changes that divorce sets in motion in the family environment, and the processes by which divorce and family changes affect child outcomes is needed. As an illustration of this type of research, Buehler and Gerard (2002) compared several models of how marital conflict might be related to child outcomes: the spillover, redundancy, independent-additive, and interactive models. The spillover model suggests that the effects of marital conflict on child outcomes are either fully or partially mediated by parenting quality. The redundancy model proposes that mental conflict and parenting quality are highly intercorrelated and that both constructs actually capture some other phenomenon, such as interpersonal functioning. In contrast, the independent-additive model suggests that marital conflict and parenting quality have independent effects on children. Finally, the interactive model proposes that marital conflict and parenting quality interact to influence children's development. Investigating various process models before and after parental divorce may prove a fruitful approach for better understanding how multiple risk and protective factors in the child's environment function to influence child outcomes.

Finally, consideration of how early experiences affect adaptation at later points in time is a key component of the developmental psychopathology approach. A few studies have demonstrated links between early experience and later outcomes, but the pathways by which parental divorce in early childhood affects later development remain unexplored, and the circumstances in which parental divorce has positive long-term effects on children have received insufficient attention. The developmental psychopathology perspective emphasizes the importance of longitudinal research for understanding how individual adaptation changes over time and for understanding how the same event can produce similar or different developmental pathways for individuals in different circumstances. Research that follows children whose parents divorce over time and investigates multiple aspects of the family environment is needed to better understand how parental divorce can ultimately lead to negative outcomes for some children and positive outcomes for others.

Implications for Practitioners

The research reviewed here suggests that young children are affected by the family transitions of parental divorce. Several implications of the research on divorce and young children can be derived from the principles of developmental psychopathology. First, it is critical for practitioners working with divorcing families to understand children's developmental level in order to understand how they may be affected by divorce. Some important considerations are the following: What are the child's cog-

nitive and memory abilities? How much can the child understand about the divorce? Is the child's memory developed enough to remember a parent who is away for long periods of time? What social or emotional tasks are typical of the child's developmental period? Is this a developmental period when stranger anxiety or separation anxiety is typically high? How will the child handle frequent transitions and separations from a parent? These considerations are particularly important for professionals and parents involved in making custody decisions and creating parenting arrangements. The challenge is for parents and professionals to create parenting arrangements that balance the conflicting needs of young children for infrequent transitions and frequent contact with both parents. Although frequent transitions are likely to be difficult for young children, extended separations from parents also may be difficult because of the strong attachment relationships, limited memory, and lack of understanding of time that characterize the early childhood period. When creating or modifying parenting arrangements, parents should be aware that behavioral changes are likely when a young child experiences frequent transitions between homes.

This review also highlights the multiple factors that influence children's adjustment to divorce. Research clearly indicates that parenting quality is a key factor influencing children's adjustment to divorce. Practitioners can emphasize to parents that they *do* have some control over how their children cope with divorce and that their relationship with their child is important for their children's development. In particular, helping parents find ways to have positive, supportive interactions with their child, reduce interparental conflict, improve their own emotional well-being, provide their child with cognitive stimulation, and provide reassurance surrounding transitions between parents' homes will benefit young children.

Finally, the review of research suggests that parental divorce may have both immediate and long-term effects on children's development. However, it should be emphasized again that methodologically weak studies have found stronger associations between parental divorce and negative outcomes for children. The research on long-term outcomes highlights the importance of recognizing behavioral changes that persist following a divorce, addressing problems as early as possible, and periodically reassessing children's needs is important. Longitudinal research suggests the need to recognize that children may need support immediately following parental divorce, as well as during later developmental periods. As children's cognitive abilities change, they may look back on past events and reinterpret them, gaining new understanding and insight and also potentially experiencing new difficulties. For example, as egocentric thought diminishes and the ability to consider others' perspectives increases, children may understand that the divorce was not their fault and feelings of relief may result. In addition, as time passes and children are better able to understand the meaning of divorce, they are likely to realize that the divorce is permanent, bringing about sad or unpleasant emotions. Consideration of early experiences, the child's current family environment, and the child's current developmental level can aid practitioners in determining potential sources of problems. Although divorce is likely to be difficult for young children, a supportive family environment can buffer them from potential problems that may arise.

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