Developmentally sensitive child dialogues reveal that children's own self-appraisals are linked to their perceptions of their parents' strengths and weaknesses and to the support they report receiving from significant others in their lives.

Dialogues with Children About Their Families

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In this chapter, we describe a dialogue technology for probing young children's perceptions of their families and themselves. First, we posit that both subjective and objective data are critical to the study of family functioning, and that the perceptions of all family members can provide insights into family processes. A conceptual model for viewing family functioning and the contribution of children's perceptions is presented in this section. Second, we describe a set of new instruments, Dialogues About Families, designed to tap children's perceptions about themselves and their families. The dialogues concern (1) children's attributions about behavioral qualities in themselves and other family members, (2) their perceptions of and satisfaction with different types of social support, and (3) their understanding of family goals and values and their perceptions of different family members' priorities. Because there have been no

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methods previously available to study all family members throughout the developmental span of early childhood through adulthood, assessment of the reliability and validity of data from a new methodology is critical. Third, we selectively highlight developmental patterns in how children actually perceive their families. We focus on the interdependencies in family members' satisfaction with social support, their attributions about behavioral qualities in one another, and their own self-concepts. Generally, older children evaluate their parents in a more differentiated and less positive manner than do younger children. Somewhat surprising, however, is the finding that despite the increasing importance of peers in children's lives in later middle childhood, their reliance on and satisfaction with parents does not decline. Most importantly, children's perceptions of their parents' strengths and weaknesses are very strongly linked to their own self-appraisals. Finally, we identify several areas of future inquiry that directly address theories about the processes that contribute to both change and stability in the family environment.

Conceptual Framework and Methodological Rationale

The impetus for designing Dialogues About Families came from two sources: (1) a review of research on the family, revealing that reports by children are only rarely included and (2) a review of research in the areas of self-reflection and metacognition that highlights the central role and potentially mediating influence that children's perceptions have in their lives. Since children are difficult to assess with the methods commonly utilized with adults (for example, paper-and-pencil questionnaires, open-ended questions), we developed a Vygotskian-style dialogue method for interviewing young children about themselves, their parents, and their social networks. Considerable emphasis has been placed on assessing the reliability and validity of this dialogue method for interviewing young children, especially children who vary in temperament (for example, shyness and distractibility), reading and language skills, and family context. The results of these investigations as well as some of the insightful, contextually rich information provided by children are included in this chapter.

The conceptual framework guiding the content of these dialogues is a broad social-ecological perspective on families (see Landesman, Jaccard, and Gunderson, in press, for further elaboration). This model draws heavily from theoretical advances in developmental psychology, family therapy, sociology, and anthropology and includes four major elements: (1) goals and values, (2) strategies to realize goals, (3) resources, both physical and social, available to the family, and (4) individual experiences and behavioral qualities of family members. This conception is referred to as the GSRI model of family development to indicate the four major elements (goals, strategies, resources, and individuals). Many of the items in Dialogues About Families reflect these important areas of family life.

Central to the GSRI model is the assumption that individuals' perceptions mediate, to a considerable degree, their present and future behavior, which in turn may alter their socioemotional environments.

Guided by this model, Dialogues About Families was designed to assess *families as systems.* Specifically, each of the child dialogues has a parallel (self-administered) adult instrument that yields data suitable for comparing and combining family members' perceptions. The use of Dialogues About Families along with parental instruments provides the first opportunity, to our knowledge, to gather psychometrically robust data from all family members about comparable perceptions of one another, their social support, and their goals and values (see Exhibit 1). (Companion tools for direct observation of families and for observer ratings of family members and their relationships have been developed and used in

Exhibit 1. Basic Assumptions Underlying Dialogues About Families

1. *Events, perceptions, and reports of events are not synonymous.* Objective events that occur within the family and the perception of these events are not identical, for either children or adults. Further, when family members report on what occurs within the family, additional transformations are expected. These transformations are attributable in part to individual variables (see assumption 3) and in part to the contexts in which the reporting occurs.

2. *Perceptions are important to a family's functioning and developmental course.* Perceptions affect the development of individuals and the social contexts in which individuals operate. Actual events and the perceptions of the events by family members are assumed to influence the consequences of the events. In turn, both the events and their perceptions contribute to the developmental course of the family unit. "Perceptions" here are conceptualized broadly to include the particular experiences remembered, the duration and salience of those memories, the meaning ascribed to the events, the affective connotation of the events and experiences, and the substantiative details individuals provide when reporting about family events and experiences.

3. *Individuals have predispositions that affect their perceptions.* In principle, many individual variables predispose individual family members to particular biases in how they perceive behavioral events and in how willing they are to report on their experiences. These individual variables include developmental (for example, age, prior experience, and level of cognitive and emotional maturity) and normative (for example, cohort, gender, and role) components, as well as person-specific and idiographic elements (for example, personality or temperamental orientations, biological influences, and intelligence).

4. *Perceptions about major dimensions of family functioning are relatively stable, except during periods of disruption and change.* Reports of perceptions held by individual family members show reasonable stability and cohesion, especially when their families are functioning in ways they perceive as typical.

5. *Perceptions can be transformed into events.* When perceptions of family members about their family and one another are shared, the perceptions are transformed into behavioral events, which then are subject to further perceptions. Family members share their perceptions both directly and indirectly with one another, sometimes shortly after an event, other times far removed from the actual time of the event. The sharing of family members' experiences becomes an integral part of the family's behavior.

the Seattle Family Behavior Study. See Reid and Landesman [1989] and Landesman and Jaccard [1985]. These two tools serve the collection of independent perspectives on family members' expression of behavioral qualities, social support, and goals. Both tools are available from Sharon Landesman Ramey on request.)

To be sure, developmental inquiry about children's perceptions of their families has been limited by many difficulties, including developmental characteristics of children themselves. Foremost are the challenges presented by children's rapidly changing cognitive and verbal skills. As a result of these changes, instruments suitable for one age are not suitable for another. Using different measures to study children of different ages often obscures developmental transformations.

Children also vary considerably in their ease and enthusiasm in conversing with adults. The range in sociability, evident even when differences in both general and verbal intelligence are controlled, is another important factor that affects children's responses. Additional factors include children's distractibility, especially on self-administered instruments or those that do not provide personally engaging materials, as well as the markedly idiosyncratic ways children interpret items and questions. Rarely do existing assessment tools permit checking for children's attention and exploring children's comprehension so that the task presentation or the scoring can accommodate these differences.

Finally, children differ significantly in their ability to abstract and to engage in "what if" games. These differences limit the utility of projective techniques for understanding a child's perceptions of his or her family and selective relationships. Just as importantly, children's responses to open-ended questions frequently are fascinating, but rarely are they reliable and amenable to systematic comparison across children. That is, the failure to mention something spontaneously does not mean that an event or experience either has not occurred or is not important to a child.

All of the above characteristics of children's test behavior were considered in formulating Dialogues About Families. The method we developed to interview young children is based largely on work by Vygotsky (1978), who recognized that successful interviews with children utilize a basic dialogue unit, rather than a monologue, and engage children as active collaborators. These interviews do not rely on paper-and-pencil tasks, use of open-ended questions, children's verbal and academic skills, or projective techniques. Further, every session involves monitoring the child's level of understanding and engagement in the task. Each instrument in Dialogues About Families consists of related *dialogue stems.* Children responded to these dialogue stems by manipulating props (for example, picture cards, a ranking board, and a barometer with a movable marker to indicate "amount"), which facilitate focused attention and understandability. Throughout the assessment, children have the oppor-

tunity to ask questions, and the examiner determines each child's level of understanding at the beginning and the end of the session.

In addition, assessment of children's perceptions of families must be sensitive to human subjects' concerns, including the need for (1) exercising caution in probing about potential unhappiness, distress, and dissatisfaction; (2) obtaining informed consent from both parents and children; (3) establishing rapport and trust, so children are not reluctant to share actual feelings and perceptions; and (4) training examiners in how to handle any child reports indicative of possible neglect, abuse, or serious distortions. These concerns are as important to address in the study of normally developing children as they are in the study of exceptional children and high-risk families. (Children and parents must be informed in advance of the sessions that any possible signs of neglect or abuse of any family member will be reported to the appropriate authorities in a manner consistent with state guidelines.)

Collectively, Dialogues About Families provides an opportunity for systematically mapping children's emerging perceptions of self and of other family members and for delineating the mediating role of these perceptions in the development of children's social, emotional, and cognitive competencies. The information provided by children during these systematic child dialogues provides a complementary and distinct perspective to that obtained through parent interviews and ratings, direct behavioral observations, and standardized family assessments. Moreover, Dialogues About Families has utilized Vygotskian interactive methodology to probe areas of family development delineated in social-ecological theory and empirical research during the 1980s. Each instrument was constructed to accommodate supplementary dialogue stems specifically related to other theoretical or clinical areas of interest.

Description of Dialogues and Their Psychometric Properties

"What I'm Like and What Others in My Family Are Like." This tool consists of two parts: Part A is the child's self-description on a set of behavioral dimensions; Part B is the child's evaluation of mother, father, sibling(s), and other(s) on the same dimensions. The behavioral dimensions in this instrument typically are referred to as temperament or personality; their selection, however, was based on empirical work that indicated that these qualities were highly valued by parents of children five to fourteen years of age. In 1985, Landesman, Jaccard, and Reid conducted an intensive study of fifty-two heterogeneous families, randomly selected (telephone screening) to represent different types of middle-class families. In their homes, mothers and fathers were interviewed individually (with an average interview time of seventy-five minutes).

They identified qualities in their own children that they viewed as "most positive" and "most negative." Parents provided behavioral examples of how their children expressed these qualities, traits, or characteristics. From a content analysis of parents' responses involving category identification and individual response classification by four independent raters, the investigators identified behavioral qualities that were highly salient and important to the majority (over 65 percent) of parents. Parents expressed their commitment to promoting positive qualities, as well as to minimizing negative qualities. Further, when asked about current problems, parents spontaneously mentioned these same child behavioral qualities more frequently than any others. Accordingly, the investigators constructed an instrument based on behavioral dimensions highly valued by parents, both mothers and fathers, in a population-based cohort, rather than using an arbitrary set of temperament or personality variables. Ratings by children and parents of themselves and other family members in terms of these valued qualities may be sensitive to mediating factors that relate to a family's overall functioning and success. Table 1 lists these behavioral qualities in their positive and negative terms, as described by parents and children.

To determine whether children have a good understanding of these parent-valued characteristics, Reid and Landesman conducted a pilot study of sixty-five children (four to fourteen years of age) and learned that the behavioral dimensions "organized," "flexible (not stubborn)," "emotionally stable," and "outgoing/friendly" were not well understood by the children, especially those under eight years of age. Accordingly, the children's own terms and examples of the ten positive qualities in Table 2 are included in the final version of "What I'm Like and What Others in My Family Are Like."

In Part A, "What I'm Like," the examiner orients the child to the session and shows the child ten cards, each presenting a behavioral quality in either word or picture form (depending on the child's reading level). The examiner adapts the following introduction to the child's developmental level: "Here are cards that show some things parents really like about young people your age. Almost all young people have some or all of these things, like being happy or being helpful. We would like you to use these cards to tell us about *yourself.*" The child is given an opportunity to explore the props and ask questions. Children are assured their answers will remain confidential: "I won't tell anyone about your answers, because they are your answers and feelings, *unless* you tell me something that could be harmful to you or someone else." In addition to cards, other props are a wooden ranking board into which the cards are inserted and a rating barometer with key labels and a red, movable level-indicator. Similar props are used in the other child dialogue instruments, with appropriate changes on the barometer's labels to reflect the content

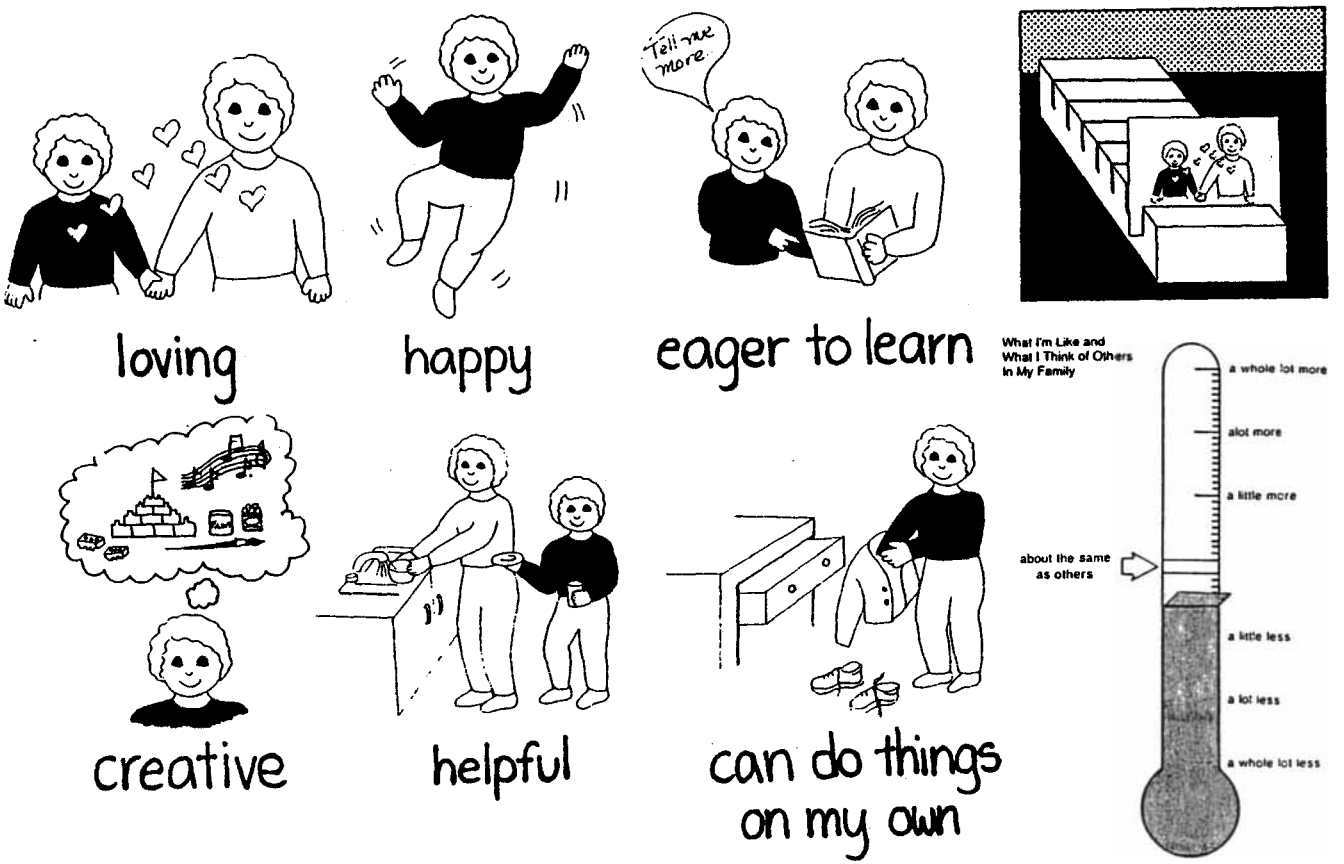
Table 1. Behavioral Qualities Most Highly Valued by Middle-Class Parents of Children Five to Fourteen Years of Age and Their Children's Definitions

Parents' Terms Positive (and Opposite)	*Children's Terms*
Cooperative/helpful (noncompliant/ unhelpful)	I am helpful
Creative (unimaginative/lacks spontaneity)	I am good at finding new ways to do things
Emotionally stable (emotionally volatile)	(Non-reliable data)
Flexible (stubborn/non-adaptable)	(Non-reliable data)
Happy (sad)	I am cheerful
Honest (deceitful)	I tell the truth and don't hide things
Independent/able to do things on own (dependent/clings to parent)	I can do things on my own
Inquisitive/eager to learn (lacks curiosity)	I like to try new things
Loving/affectionate (aloof)	I am a loving person who shows people how much I care about them
Outgoing/friendly (shy/withdrawn)	(Non-reliable data)
Organized (disorganized/scattered)	(Non-reliable data)
Responsible/trustworthy (undependable/ unreliable)	People can trust me to do things
Self-confident/likes self (insecure/has low self-esteem)	I like myself and know I am good at doing things
Sensitive/caring (insensitive to others)	I think about how other people feel

of each dialogue. Figure 1 shows a sample of six cards, the ranking board, and the barometer.

After initial orientation, the examiner asks the child to place the card with the quality that describes him or her "the very best" in the first slot of the ranking board. Then the examiner asks the child to look at the remaining cards, distributed on a table top in front of the child, and to select the card that describes him or her "the second best" or "next best." This line of inquiry proceeds until all cards are ranked. Following the rank ordering of the qualities, the examiner probes the child about "how much" of each behavioral quality he or she has "compared to other children your same age." The examiner reminds the child "that there are no right or wrong answers" and "I am interested in how you really feel

Figure 1. Props Used to Administer "What I'm Like and What Others in My Family Are Like"



and think." The child uses the indicator on the barometer to indicate how much of each quality he or she perceives in himself or herself. The 60-point scale ranges from -30, which is "a whole lot less than other children my age," to +30, which indicates "a whole lot more than other children." The session summary for each subject contains both a ranking and a rating on each behavioral quality. This summary indicates (1) the salience and importance of certain behavioral qualities to the child's perception of "self" and (2) the child's sense of self-worth, via his or her quantitative descriptions in comparison to other children. Such data provide an opportunity for systematic study of children's perceptions of their *most* and *least* distinguishing characteristics, as well as overall positive self-appraisals. When parallel instruments are used in which parents rank and rate their children on the same dimensions, a broader perspective on children's individual differences can be obtained. From the family profile data, a variety of theoretically important quantitative indices can be generated, including estimates of perceived similarities and differences among family members, for either select dyads or the entire family; scores of overall positive appraisal of the child; and major discrepancies in perceptions of self versus others.

Part B, "What Others in My Family Are Like," is constructed in a fashion parallel to Part A. The examiner asks the child to arrange (rank) the cards in the order that best describes the other family member in question (for example, mother, father, sibling) from most salient (for example, "When you think about your mother, which one of these cards is the *best* way to describe her?") to least salient. Then, the child uses the barometer to rate each family member on all qualities, comparing the family member to others who play the same role (for example, "How happy do you think your mother is, *compared to other mothers*?").

A study of the psychometric properties of "What I Am Like and What Others in My Family Are Like" indicates that children provide reliable reports on themselves and their parents. A population-based study of 339 children (148 boys, 191 girls; 269 white, 70 black), ranging from six to twelve years of age (see Reid and Landesman, 1989), involved administering the dialogues to children, in their homes, twice within a four-week period by the same examiner. Test-retest correlations of the children's overall appraisals were .71 for overall descriptions of self, .71 for mother, and .73 for father. Test-retest reliability also was examined using the kappa statistic, which corrects "agreement by chance." The kappas indicate that the stability of children's rankings was higher for the first three (.78, .52, and .49) and last two qualities (.53 and .67) than for the middle-ranked qualities (M = .33). These findings indicate that children's self-appraisals yield a pattern similar to adults', with highest reliabilities for qualities they feel describe them the "best" and "least" (see Reid, Landesman, Jaccard, and Rabkin, 1987).

In a manner recommended by Harter and Pike (1984), we queried children after the completion of the instrument about their understanding of each behavioral quality. An independent content analysis by independent raters of children's open-ended responses revealed that more than 95 percent of the children had good comprehension and understanding of the behavioral dimensions that they had been ranking and rating for themselves and their parents. Children generally provided highly specific and perceptive responses that revealed keen observations of the expression of these qualities in their own and their parents' behaviors. Examples of the personalized nature of some of the children's responses include "I know my dad is *independent* because when something breaks he always says 'let's try to fix it ourselves' (before asking for help)," "My mom is *responsible* because when she carpools she always get us there *on time,*" and "I am a *creative* person because I want to be an actress and I make up plays in my head when I walk home from school." Not surprisingly, the reasons children provide for descriptions of themselves are frequently linked to the recognition they have received from significant others (for example, "I know I am *honest* because my mom tells me that I am," and "I got an award for being the most *loving* child in the gym when a student got hurt, therefore I know I am loving").

It is interesting that children's perceptions of their parents are related not only (egocentrically) to instances of parental behavior toward them (for example, "My dad is *loving* because he hugs and kisses *me*") but also to the children's observations of their parents' behavior toward others, both inside and outside the home (for example, "My dad is *eager to learn* because he is in business for himself and is always learning new things, like computer programming," and "I know my parents are *loving* people because they love each other"). The advances in social cognition that occur during the middle childhood period were illustrated in a number of the children's responses in which an understanding of less readily apparent or more subtle aspects of behavioral expression was revealed. For example, several children said that a parent who is *loving* "remains fair even when angry [with me]." Additionally, in describing self-confidence, several children mentioned that self-confident people "let others know what they got wrong as well as what they got right."

"My Family and Friends." This instrument yields information about children's reports of (1) perceived availability of individuals in their networks to provide different types of social support and (2) their satisfaction with the help they receive. The content of the dialogues is based on research with adults, emphasizing the differentiation of social support into four types (emotional, informational, instrumental, and companionship support; see Cohen and Willis, 1985), and on empirical work with children, focusing on the importance of emotional security (Bretherton and Waters, 1985). In addition, one dialogue stem concerns conflict, since

even close supportive relationships may involve anger and negative interactions (Berndt and Perry, 1986; Braiker and Kelly, 1979; Furman and Buhrmester, 1985). "My Family and Friends" consists of twelve dialogue stems that cover the following social situations: (1) sharing positive and negative feelings, (2) pleasure at success, (3) doing something bad, (4) feeling understood, (5) feeling admired, (6) wanting to learn something, (7) needing information, (8) needing help with schoolwork, (9) needing help with chores, (10) being with someone who makes you feel happy, (11) doing fun things, and (12) getting upset (for details, see Reid and Landesman, 1988).

"My Family and Friends" begins with the child identifying the key persons in his or her active social network. Cards with each person's name are written; for very young or developmentally delayed children, drawings or photographs can be used. The examiner introduces the session as follows: "All of us talk to or go to different people for different things. Right now, I would like to know whom you turn to when you want different things, and what that is like for you." A wooden ranking board and large rating barometer (similar to the one pictured in Figure 1, but with labels corresponding to the content of the social support dialogues) are incorporated as props.

For each dialogue stem, the examiner asks the child to place the name cards in the ranking board, one at a time, in an order indicating to whom the child goes first, second, and so on in a particular social support situation. For example, the child may be asked, "If you did something that you felt really bad about, that no one knew about, who [sic] would you talk to?" or "When you want to just 'hang out' or do really fun things, who [sic] do you go to first?" After ranking the cards, the child uses the barometer to rate how satisfied he or she is with the support received from each individual. The examiner then inquires, "When you talk to your brother when you're feeling 'badly,' how much better do you feel?" or "When you go to your father for information, how much do you really learn?"

The social support data are scored in terms of the prioritization of whom the child turns to for each type of support and how satisfied the child is with each type of support received from each person. Additional summary scores include an average level of satisfaction with each type of social support (regardless of who provides the support), an overall summary score for each person in the network, satisfaction ratings for each person across the four types of support, and a total conflict score. When data from the parallel parental report "Your Child's Social Network" are gathered, then scores can be computed to indicate the nature and degree of concordance (versus discrepancy) between children's and parents' perceptions of the child's social network. Further, similarities between how parents and children perceive their *own* social networks can be examined.

(Information and documentation of other, parallel social support instruments for parents can be obtained from the authors.)

The test construction of "My Family and Friends" involved a study similar to that for "What I'm Like and What Others in My Family Are Like" and is described in detail elsewhere (Reid, Landesman, Treder, and Jaccard, 1989). Briefly, use of "My Family and Friends" in a population-based study of 249 children (105 boys, 144 girls; 205 white, 44 black), ranging from six to twelve years of age, yielded relatively reliable and valid reports about the quality of and differentiation within their social support networks. The intraclass test-retest correlations for rankings and ratings were .68 for rankings and .69 for ratings, which are in the acceptable "high moderate" range for social and personality inventories with children. The internal consistency of the support types was satisfactory, *M* Cronbach alpha = .72. The alphas were the highest for the five emotional dialogue stems, with all scores greater than .72. The internal consistency was higher for children's ratings of family members (*M* Cronbach alpha = .77) than for their ratings of nonfamily members (*M* Cronbach alpha = .61).

Additionally, a repeated-measures analysis of variance on children's responses detected significant effects for the type of social support ($F[2.75,440.48] = 86.07$, $p < .001$), the source of support ($F[3.28,525.02] = 69.29$, $p < .001$), and the interaction between support type and source ($F[8.30,1328.44] = 135.76$, $p < .001$). These findings support the conclusion that children's reports differ as a function of both who is rated and what type of social support is considered. Thus, from at least six years old and beyond, children reliably distinguish differences in the ability of particular individuals to provide specific types of social support to them.

A listing of children's own descriptions of their emotional, informational, instrumental, and affiliative needs is reported elsewhere (Reid, Landesman, Treder, and Jaccard, 1989). Children's responses were consistent with the general definitions of social support provided by Cohen and Willis (1985), yet the responses provided personalized insights into the many highly specific, day-to-day social support needs of children. Especially noteworthy were the serious concerns children expressed in relation to their informational needs. Middle childhood is characterized by rapid expansion and acquisition of knowledge. In addition to learning school-related information, numerous children expressed needs to learn about personal safety and world events.

"My Family and Friends" was designed with an expandable format, so that modifications for use with clinical and special populations can be made readily. The sensitivity of the instrument has encouraged its use in research that identifies sources of risk and protection in the responses of young children (see Cauce, Reid, Landesman, and Gonzales, in press).

In particular, profile analysis of a child's social support has been used to identify salient support sources that may contribute to children's resilience, as well as deficits in support that potentially put the child at-risk socially or emotionally. Cases of support deficits include children who report seeking help from their parents but continually feel very disappointed with the minimal help received and children who report having no friends or siblings in whom to confide.

"What Is Important in My Family." This instrument is a relatively brief dialogue that probes the child's perceptions of family goals and priorities. The five major goal domains of family functioning identified were selected because of their theoretical significance for parenting activities and for child outcomes. These major goal domains were confirmed by a pilot study in which parents spontaneously mentioned goals and values that clustered in these areas. The five goal areas are (1) *fostering personal ("character") development:* helping family members acquire beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral orientations adaptable across a variety of life situations; (2) *careproviding:* providing for family members' physical needs and promoting health; (3) *promoting within-family relationships:* establishing and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships in the family; (4) *educating and training:* fostering academic skills, as well as facilitating skills related to future vocational competence; and (5) *maintaining societal norms and order:* encouraging family members to function cooperatively outside the family and helping them understand cultural norms, expectations, and laws.

In administering "What Is Important in My Family," the examiner talks with the child about a set of cards depicting the five goal areas of family functioning. The examiner says, "Here are some cards that show things families feel are important to do. Let's look at these pictures carefully and think about what they mean." The child then provides examples of how families might encourage each of their children (1) "to try to be a good person, to live a good life, and to do what is important," (2) "to be healthy and keep their home nice," (3) "to love and get along with people in their own family," (4) "to do 'good' in school and to learn as much as they can about how the world works," and (5) "to know the rules and manner for getting along with others outside their family; to be a good citizen."

In Part A, "What I Think Is Important in Families," the examiner asks the child to select the card that depicts the goal "which you, *yourself,* think is the *most* important thing for families to do" and to place that goal card in the first slot of the ranking board. This continues until all cards are ranked. Then the child rates the importance of each area, using the barometer. In Part B, "What Others in My Family Think Is Important," the child's perceptions of the importance of these family goals to each parent are obtained. The child is encouraged to "Look at the cards and think about how important each of these goals or activities is to

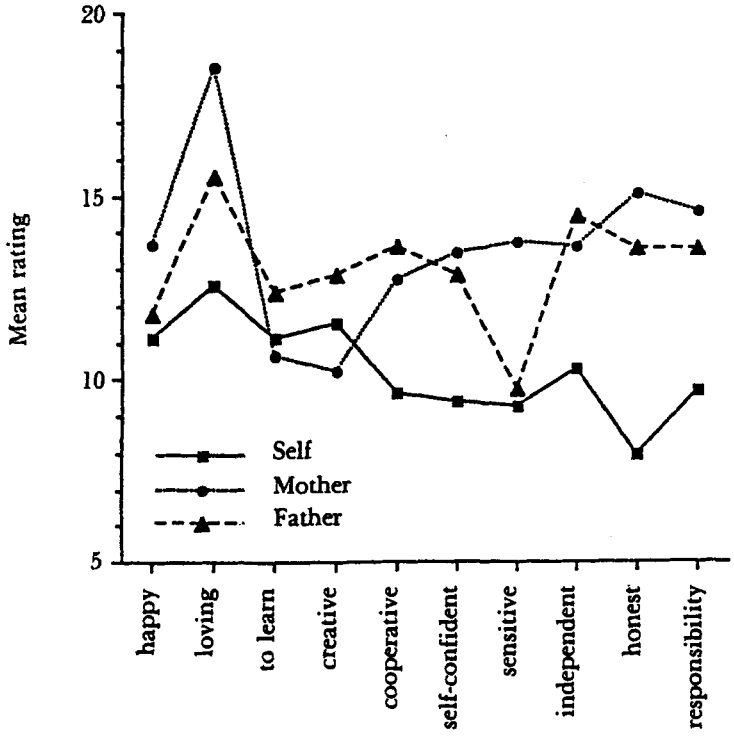
your (mother/father)." Then the child is asked to "Select the card that you think your (mother/father) would say is the most important thing for families to do." The child proceeds to rank all cards and then to complete a rating for each card to answer "How important do you think (goal area) is to your (mother/father)?"

Developmental Patterns in Children's Perceptions of Their Families and Themselves

As "first-hand reporters," children provide well-differentiated and highly personalized reports of themselves, family members, and their relationships. Figure 2 presents children's mean ratings of self, mother, and father on the ten personality/temperament characteristics from "What I Am Like and What Others in My Family Are Like." On average, children rated themselves highest on "loving" and "creative," rated their mothers highest on "loving" and "honest," and described their fathers as highest on "loving" and "independent." Note that children tended to rate their parents higher than themselves on all qualities except "eager to learn" and "creative," two areas in which they rated their mothers the lowest.

Table 2 reports the developmental trends found in children's appraisals of self, mother, and father. Age differences were examined by conducting multivariate analyses of variance, followed by one-way analyses of variance when the MANOVA was significant. In most of the analyses, the developmental trends were examined by comparing children six to nine years of age (early elementary school) with those ten to twelve years of age (preadolescent), because these age groups correspond to two theoretically important age groups within the middle childhood period. The preadolescents, in contrast to the younger children, had significantly less positive appraisals of themselves ($F[10,327] = 2.42$, $p = .0085$), their mothers ($F[10,326] = 3.14$, $p = .0008$), and their fathers ($F[10,170] = 2.21$, $p = .0192$) across the ten qualities. Self-appraisals of creativity and eagerness to learn showed particularly large declines across the two age groups, although the children did not rate their parents lower on these qualities as a function of their own age. In contrast, the two areas in which the children's perceptions showed large shifts concerned how happy and loving they saw their mothers and fathers. What would be especially important to study are potential behavioral correlates associated with children's shifts in how they perceive parents and in their own self-esteem. Further, the degree to which parents' perceptions of their children shift across these age periods would be valuable to delineate, particularly in relation to objective events and to their own children's self-appraisals. For example, are parents' perceptions of their children highly correlated with their children's own perceptions?

Figure 2. Children's Mean Ratings of Self, Mother, and Father from the Dialogue "What I Am Like and What Others in My Family Are Like"



Another developmental change in the children's perceptions was the declining ratings of their mothers' honesty. Theoretically, this may be a function of children's increased social cognitive capacities, especially the ability to perceive relationships in less absolute and more multifaceted ways (Flavell, 1982; Selman, 1980). Another potential contributor to this developmental shift may be the "natural" disillusionment that social psychologists hypothesize occurs across time in any relationship. Also, a less uniformly positive and more critical stance toward one's parents has been hypothesized as necessary for "differentiation" of self and successful adolescent development (Loevinger, 1976; Marcia, 1976).

Table 3 displays the mean support and conflict ratings that children provided for each relationship, based on "My Family and Friends." The

Table 2. Mean Ratings of Self, Mother, and Father by Children Six to Nine and Ten to Twleve Years of Age

	Self		*Mother*		*Father*	
Quality	*6–9 (N=161)*	*10–12 (N=177)*	*6–9 (N=161)*	*10–12 (N=176)*	*6–9 (N=82)*	*10–12 (N=99)*
Cooperative	10.80 (12.60)	8.56 (10.77)	13.15 (14.02)	11.83 (11.48)	15.11 (13.03)	12.35 (11.51)
Creative	13.52 (13.32)	9.75 (12.32)	9.67 (15.25)	10.23 (13.70)	11.91 (16.66)	13.61 (13.19)
Happy	12.06 (12.61)	10.23 (12.01)	15.87 (12.00)	11.69 (12.08)	13.22 (12.98)	10.52 (11.24)
Honest	8.60 (15.66)	5.90 (11.27)	17.24 (13.56)	13.09 (12.11)	13.48 (13.01)	13.59 (11.45)
Independent	10.46 (14.41)	10.02 (11.10)	14.65 (13.06)	12.62 (11.89)	15.21 (13.94)	13.85 (11.36)
Eager to learn	14.02 (14.63)	8.44 (12.79)	11.09 (14.56)	10.13 (12.24)	12.16 (14.34)	12.49 (13.25)
Loving	14.14 (13.39)	11.06 (11.05)	21.20 (10.70)	16.01 (10.61)	17.41 (13.10)	13.94 (11.04)
Responsible	11.72 (13.87)	7.83 (11.00)	15.28 (12.91)	13.87 (12.08)	14.85 (13.25)	12.42 (12.00)
Self-confident	10.35 (13.69)	8.50 (12.08)	15.20 (12.98)	11.76 (11.37)	14.70 (13.22)	11.24 (10.45)
Sensitive	10.19 (14.56)	8.44 (12.35)	14.65 (14.78)	12.88 (11.03)	8.46 (15.37)	10.75 (11.97)

Note: Parenthetical values are standard deviations of means. Ratings are on a 60-point scale ranging from -30 to +30.

multivariate approach to repeated-measures analysis was used to determine the extent to which the children's reports of perceived support and conflict varied as a function of the social relationship and the child's age. Separate MANOVAs were conducted for each type of support and for conflict. When the MANOVA for relationship × age was significant, all possible pairwise comparisons of sources of support were conducted to determine which types of social relationships were perceived as providing more support.

Significant relationship effects were found for all four areas of support and for conflict: emotional (F [2,236] = 198, $p < .0001$), instrumental (F [2,236] = 254, $p < .0001$), informational (F [2,236] = 172, $p < .0001$), companionship (F [2,236] = 212, $p < .0001$), and conflict (F [2,236] = 150, $p < .0001$). These findings indicate that children can recognize distinct social support resources within their social networks. (Due to space limitations, only multivariate test statistics are provided here. However, all

Table 3. Children's Mean Satisfaction Ratings of Social Support and Conflict by Relationship

Relationship	*Emotional*	*Informational*	*Instrumental*	*Companionship*	*Conflict*
Parent	42.21	43.02	42.10	41.21	28.53
(N = 339)	(7.22)	(7.03)	(7.47)	(9.26)	(15.46)
Sibling	28.68	23.01	25.57	33.69	41.07
(N = 242)	(12.39)	(15.61)	(14.28)	(12.54)	(11.94)
Friend	34.88	24.89	22.86	43.21	20.82
(N = 337)	(10.01)	(13.41)	(13.16)	(7.64)	(11.94)
Relative	32.30	28.98	21.89	35.77	14.47
(N = 285)	(11.80)	(15.11)	(16.41)	(13.18)	(15.62)
Teacher	25.63	40.56	22.15	18.83	23.91
(N = 336)	(12.47)	(10.02)	(10.37)	(16.34)	(17.08)

Note: When a child had more than one person in a given provider category, then the person rated the highest or most salient was used to calculate the means. Parenthetical values are standard deviations of means. Ratings are on a 51-point scale from 0 to 50.

comparisons among the types of relationships documented in Table 3 were significant [$p < .05$].)

In general, the children perceived their parents to be the best multipurpose providers in their individual networks of social support. Parents tended to be viewed as the best source of emotional, informational (along with teachers), and instrumental support. Not surprisingly, friends were seen as a good source of companionship and were rated significantly better in this area than parents, siblings, and teachers. Friends also were rated highly on emotional support (second only to parents); however, they generally were not perceived as a good source of informational and instrumental assistance.

The children perceived their siblings as a good source of general companionship, unlike teachers, who were rated as a good source of information about "how the world works," but as a relatively poor source of fun companionship and emotional support. Children's ratings for perceived conflict showed a quite different pattern. Siblings were rated as the source of most conflict, parents and teachers next highest, and friends as the least likely source of conflict.

Significant age × relationship interactions were found for emotional support (F [2,326] = 12.2, $p < .0001$), companionship support (F [2,326] = 8.2, $p < .0001$), and conflict (F [2,326] = 5.1, $p < .01$). Specifically, developmental differences were found in children's perceptions of the emotional support, companionship, and conflict they experience with teachers and friends. While children of all ages perceived their teachers as a good source of informational support, only the children six to nine years of age perceived their teachers as a good source of emotional support and com-

panionship. In contrast, preadolescent children clearly preferred their parents and friends over teachers as sources of emotional support and companionship. Similarly, the preadolescent children perceived their relationships with their teachers to be significantly more conflictual than did the younger children. This is consistent with teachers' and parents' reports that during the early elementary school years, children very much want their teachers to like them, and they tend to see teachers as friends or perhaps as mother surrogates. However, as they approach adolescence, strong positive attachments with teachers seem to decline for the majority.

These developmental findings about children's relationships with their parents and friends corroborate work by others (for example, Berndt and Perry, 1986; Cauce, 1986; Furman and Buhrmester, 1985; Hunter and Youniss, 1982), although the present data involve younger children and provide a more detailed profile of children's social support and self-ratings. In particular, the findings from our sample (kindergarten to sixth-grade children) extend the findings from Hunter and Youniss' (1982) sample (fourth- to tenth-grade children), suggesting that within the period spanning from early childhood through adolescence, the level of support and intimacy with parents remains relatively constant, while intimacy with friends increases with age.

Table 4 shows children's ratings of the importance of family goals for themselves and their parents during the dialogue "What Is Important in My Family." Children rated "having good family relationships" as the most important family goal for themselves and for their mothers, while they perceived "educational/vocational goals" as being the most important to their fathers. Rather surprising was the fact that no significant developmental differences were found in children's ratings of goals. Table 4 provides select examples of children's conceptions of each goal area, based on systematic probes. Overall, more than 90 percent of the children provided examples clearly relevant to each goal area.

In sum, the children's perceptions of their families speak to the centrality of family members in their social support networks. The children perceived high amounts of positive social support from their parents and strongly endorsed the importance of within-family relationships as a major goal. However, for the older age groups, the reported relationships with adults (both parents and teachers) in their lives became less uniformly positive and more differentiated. Similarly, during later middle childhood, children reported having more complex appraisals of their *own* strengths and weaknesses, as rated relative to their peers. The reported sibling relationships are noteworthy for their high degree of both affiliation and conflict. And friends were reported to be a good source of emotional support and companionship. Moreover, as we move from the younger children to the preadolescents, the increasing value of friendships did not decrease the importance they assigned to receiving emotional support, information, and direct assistance from their parents.

Table 4. Percentage of Children Ranking Each of the Five Domains of Family Functioning as First, with Select Examples

Domain	*For Self*	*For Mother*	*For Father*	*Examples*
Fostering personal ("character") development	24.5	14.7	19.2	"Be nice and kind to other people" "Think about how others feel" "Always do the best I can" "Always try to do what is right" "Do what's important to me"
Providing care	12.0	21.5	14.3	"Brush my teeth or exercise" "Make my bed and pick up my room" "Eat the right foods, like vegetables" "Put in a fire alarm even though it costs money"
Promoting within-family relationships	28.0	30.4	22.0	"Share and get along with each other" "Try not to fight with my brother or take his things" "Give hugs and kisses and say 'I love you'" "Hang out together" "Sit down and talk with mom if I have a problem"
Education and training	16.8	21.8	30.2	"Study every day and do homework" "Read books and go to the library" "Try my hardest to do well" "Listen to mom tell stories of kids who didn't do well in school"
Maintaining societal norms and order	18.6	11.2	14.2	"Be polite and considerate" "Think about others first, take turns" "Keep friends for a long time" "Know how your city or country is doing and vote"

Note: The examples represent the responses most frequently given during the content validity study.

Interdependencies Among Children's Subjective Appraisals

Analyses were conducted to examine how the children's perceptions related to different aspects of their families. In particular, we explored the ways in which children's self-appraisals, perceptions of parents, and overall satisfaction with emotional support were related in order to evaluate a central assumption in the GSRI framework of how families function: perceptions of self and others and of the adequacy of social resources are interlinked, due to the presence of reciprocal influences in the family (see Hinde and Stevenson-Hinde, 1987, 1988). First, simple correlations were conducted between self-appraisals and children's reported satisfaction with the emotional support they received from all of their relationships (corrected for different sizes of children's social networks). We selected emotional support to illustrate this interdependency principle, in part because research on infants and toddlers suggests that emotional support or security is related to later autonomy and the child's sense of self (Bretherton, 1985; Sroufe and Fleeson, 1986), and because so little is known about emotional bonds and self-perception during middle childhood. Also, we had learned in prior analyses (Reid, Landesman, Treder, and Jaccard, 1989) that ratings of emotional support correlated highly with the other types of support: with companionship ($r = .74$, $p < .0001$); with instrumental help ($r = .69$, $p < .0001$); and with informational assistance ($r = .71$, $p < .0001$). The correlation of $r = .41$ ($p < .0001$) between children's perceptions of total emotional support and their own self-appraisals supports an interpretation that children's views of their own behavior are intimately linked to their perceptions of the support they receive from others. A similar correlation of $r = .42$ ($p < .0001$) was found between children's perceptions of social support from their mothers and their own self-appraisals; the correlation between perceived social support from their fathers and positive self-image is of comparable magnitude ($r = .38$, $p < .0001$).

Next, we considered how similar children's ratings of themselves and their parents were for the ten behavioral qualities. The correlation between self-appraisal and mother appraisal was $r = .65$ ($p < .0001$), and between self-appraisal and father appraisal $r = .65$ ($p < .0001$), suggesting that children's perceptions of themselves are linked, as hypothesized, to their impressions of their parents.

This set of intercorrelations indicates that children's perceptions are not neatly compartmentalized during middle childhood. Further analyses support the nonindependence of family goals, child and family characteristics, and developmental and social conditions. That is, we found interesting statistical associations among children's reported perceptions of themselves and their perceptions of significant others within their

social worlds. What remains to be understood are the developmental pathways contributing to these linkages and how these influence the responses of children and parents to one another's behavior.

Concluding Remarks and Future Directions

This chapter describes Dialogues About Families, a new methodology for obtaining personalized family information from children. With a presentation format based on cognitive developmental theory and designed for application across a wide developmental age range, psychometrically robust data on perceptions of the family and self can be collected. The contents emanate from a family systems perspective and address three important areas in child and family development: attributions about valued qualities in self and parents, perceptions of diverse types of social support, and appraisals of family goals and values. Parallel adult instruments complement the information obtained from children and permit a synthesis of data to profile the family as a unit.

The rationale underlying Dialogues About Families is that (1) both behavioral events and the perceptions of those events (for example, interpretations and memories of the events and their salience for family members) influence the consequences of events and the evolution of the family as a system and (2) individual family members vary in how they perceive behavioral events due to individual and developmental variables, such as age, birth order, gender, cohort, individual history, biological influences, and personality or temperament. The rich variation in individual family members' interpretations of events and the role of these perceptions in motivating future family behavior underscore the need for reliable and systematic methods for interviewing all family members about critical aspects of family life.

The chapter provides an overview of the administration of Dialogues About Families with young children. Children's reports indicate that they value family relationships, perceive their parents as an important source of support and assistance, and recognize differential strengths and weaknesses in their parents and in themselves. Siblings and friends are valued sources of companionship, although siblings (unlike friends) are also seen as a significant source of conflict. Appraisals of parents become more complex as children become older, and more instances of conflicts with parents are reported as children approach preadolescence.

We think that the sensitivity of Dialogues About Families to the child's viewpoint makes this a valuable method for studying families, especially for research on how children's perspectives can contribute to observed differences in their patterns of behavioral and emotional adjustment, both within and outside the family. When using both the child and the parallel adult instruments, Dialogues About Families provides,

for the first time, an opportunity to gather systematic data from early childhood through adulthood and to simultaneously appraise all family members on the same dimensions. As a methodology, it allows us to examine family processes (1) cross-sectionally, by studying the interdependencies of people who are at different stages in the life cycle but are bound within the same family unit and (2) longitudinally, by charting the ontology of family processes.

The methods required to move "beyond the dyad" in family research and to gather, analyze, and interpret data from parents and their children are unavoidably time-consuming and complex. Yet, without such endeavors, profiles of families lack the dimensionality and mutually independent qualities that in principle characterize families and contribute significantly to child outcomes. When combined with behavioral methods, Dialogues About Families permits the examination of personalized meaning of events over time and leads us to a more dynamic understanding of families and the children that grow up in them.

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