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How Parents Contribute to Children's Psychological Health:

The Critical Role of Psychological Need Support

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Anyone observing young children in a playground will easily notice remarkable differences among them. Some of the children explore the playground with curiosity and have a great time; others are more withdrawn and feel uncomfortable with other children around. At home some children may accept parental rules or negotiate constructively with the parents; others may feel forced to comply with parental rules or even react defiantly against them. Later, in adolescence, some youngsters willingly share their thoughts and feelings with parents; others disclose much less and may even be secretive. How can these differences among the children's and adolescents' emotional, social, and behavioral adjustments be explained? Although different determinants, including genetics, temperament, and a variety of social-contextual influences, play roles in young people's development, this chapter will focus on the role of parents. Specifically, we address how parental supports or thwarts for children's basic psychological needs either promote or diminish the children's mental health, social adjustment, and psychological growth.

Basic Psychological Needs and Children's Psychosocial Adjustment

Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000) argues that children's psychosocial adjustment depends to a substantial degree on satisfactions of three basic psychological needs, namely, the needs for autonomy, competence, and

relatedness (see also Chapter 4, this volume). Satisfaction of the need for autonomy manifests in experiences of volition, psychological freedom, authenticity, and ownership of one's behaviors and choices. When the need for competence is satisfied, children feel efficacious and able to deal with optimally challenging tasks. The need for relatedness is satisfied when children feel appreciated by and closely connected to important people. In SDT, psychological need satisfactions are considered essential and universal nutrients for healthy psychological development (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When children's psychological needs are satisfied , they report more well-being, engage activities with interest and spontaneity (intrinsic motivation), more easily accept guidelines for important behaviors (internalization), display more openness in social relationships, and are more resilient when faced with adversity and distress (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013).

While much research on psychological need satisfaction involved university students and adults (e.g., Chen, Vansteenkiste, et al., 2015), recent research has also demonstrated the importance of the psychological needs for children's and adolescents' adjustment. For example, Veronneau, Koestner, and Abela, 2005) found among 3rd and 7th graders that satisfaction of each of the three needs was related to positive affect. Satisfaction of the need for competence in particular predicted decreases in depressive symptoms across a 6-week interval. Luyckx, Vansteenkiste, Goossens, and Duriez (2009) found psychological need satisfaction to be critical for adolescents' thorough exploration of identity options and stronger commitments to identity choices.

Recent work has also focused on people's dark sides resulting from psychological need frustration (e.g., Bartholomew et al., 2011). When social-contextual factors are thwarting of children's needs, the needs are likely to be frustrated, leaving the children feeling controlled (autonomy frustration), inferior (competence frustration), and lonely (relatedness frustration). In SDT need frustration is not equated with an absence of need satisfaction.

Rather, frustration ensues when the psychological needs are actively undermined rather than merely unsatisfied. Because frustration results from intruding on the children's sense of self, it is a serious threat that renders the children vulnerable to ill-being and psychopathology (Ryan, Deci, & Vansteenkiste, 2015). Research increasingly supports the notion that psychological need frustration is particularly predictive of maladaptive developmental outcomes. It has been shown, for instance, that need frustration is related to physiological indicators of stress (Bartholomew et al., 2011), interpersonal problems (Costa, Ntoumanis, & Bartholomew, 2015), and eating-disorder symptoms (Boone et al., 2014).

The Nurturing Role of Parents in Children's Development

Given the pivotal role of the basic psychological needs in children's and adolescents' well-being and adjustment, a key developmental question is how socialization figures, and parents in particular, affect psychological need satisfaction and psychological need frustration. SDT argues that parents, in interaction with other key individuals (i.e., the children's teachers and peers), play a crucial role in the nurturing versus thwarting of children's psychological needs. Paralleling the distinctions among the three needs, differences in parents' style of interacting with children are conceptualized with three concepts (Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997; Joussemet, Landry, & Koestner, 2008): (a) relatedness supports or *involvement* (e.g., respect and warmth), (b) competence supports or *structure* (e.g., offering clear expectations, adequate help, and non-critical feedback), and (c) *autonomy support* (e.g., acknowledging the children's perspective, providing choice, and encouraging exploration).

Each of these contextual, need-supportive concepts has a need-thwarting dark side just as each of the need satisfactions has a need-frustration dark side. For instance, relatedness thwarts are characterized by parental behaviors that are cold, neglectful, and rejecting; competence thwarts are demeaning and chaotic; and autonomy thwarts include pressuring demands and coercion. Importantly, being low in need supports does not necessarily mean

that parents will be actively and intrusively thwarting of children's needs (Skinner, Snyder, & Johnson, 2005), and similarly, being low in need thwarting does not necessarily mean that parents will be actively and happily supportive of children's needs. However, when parents are actively need supportive, it has been shown that they will foster experiences of need satisfaction (and subsequent well-being and positive adjustment), and when parents are actively need thwarting it has been shown to bring about experiences of need frustration (and subsequent ill-being and maladjustment).

We do note that there is not a simple one-to-one association between one of the parental need-supportive dimensions and satisfaction of the children's corresponding need (Grolnick et al., 1997), or between a parental need-thwarting dimension and frustration of the children's corresponding need. Each of the dimensions of need-supportive parenting is to some extent relevant to satisfaction to each of the three needs. For example, when parents take their children's perspective in a conversation, the children are likely to feel some relatedness satisfaction and also some indication of parental trust in the children's capabilities. In this regard, the graphical representation in Figure 1 is a simplification of reality, for there could be an arrow from each support to each need satisfaction, and from each thwart to each need frustration.

In the remainder of this chapter we focus on the three dimensions of need-supportive parenting for our primary goal is the facilitation of greater self-determination. [Those interested in further discussion of need-thwarting parenting are referred to Assor, Kanat-Maymon, and Roth, (2014); Grolnick, (2003); and Soenens and Vansteenkiste (2010)]. In discussing need-supportive parenting we describe the basic attitude underlying each dimension as well as their more specific manifestations (Vansteenkiste & Soenens, 2015). We also provide a selective discussion of research relevant to each dimension.

Relatedness Support

The basic attitude behind relatedness-support is characterized by love, care and a genuine desire to support the child (Vansteenkiste & Soenens, 2015). Parents supporting their child's need for relatedness deeply care about the child's well-being and enjoy being in the child's company (Deci & Ryan, 2014). These parents engage in warm and sensitive interactions with the child, interactions that build a child's sense of attachment security (Bowlby, 1988). As a consequence, a child feels protected and learns to trust and rely on the parent when experiencing distress. This supportive orientation can be contrasted with a cold parental orientation, where parents are largely unavailable, unresponsive to a child's requests for support, or even rejecting.

A basic requirement for all need-supportive parenting is parental presence and involvement. Parents who support children's need for relatedness spend a sufficient amount of time in the presence of their children and get at least minimally involved in the children's activities (e.g., Grolnick, Kurowski, & Gurland, 1999). However, parental involvement and investment of time is not a sufficient condition for children to feel deeply connected to their parents. Research shows that there is no straightforward association between the amount of time parents spend with their children and children's well-being (Milkie, Nomaguchi, & Denny, 2015) nor between parental involvement in the child's activities and the children's motivation for and performance in these activities (e.g., homework: Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007).

For children to really benefit from their parents' involvement and presence, the *quality* of parents' involvement needs to be sufficiently high. In this regard, it is important for parents to be mentally present, to be alert to the children's feelings, and to proactively consider the impact of situations on the children's feelings. For instance, parents can try to anticipate how the children will respond to an episode of separation (e.g., leaving the children with a babysitter) or to a potentially painful situation (e.g., a doctor's visit). By announcing what will

happen, these situations may become less emotionally unpredictable and overwhelming and parents can proactively help children to regulate their emotions. When a child actually experiences emotional distress or physical pain, parents high on relatedness need-support react in a responsive fashion. They offer comfort and they are available for help. In doing so, they provide a safe haven for the children to turn to when feeling upset (Bowlby, 1988).

In addition to being involved, alert, and responsive, parents high on relatedness need-support are warm and affectionate. This warmth can be expressed emotionally, through friendly, humorous, and positive interactions with the child as well as physically (e.g., through hugs, kisses, or an embrace). A final element of parental relatedness need-support is engagement in joint activities. Parents can engage in enjoyable and interesting activities with their children one-on-one (e.g., father and son playing basketball or playing a board game) or with the family as a whole (e.g., making a trip, going to a music festival, travelling together). While activities with an individual child can strengthen the parent-child bond, activities with the family can build a sense of cohesion and collective identity in the family.

There is a longstanding tradition of research, some of which is rooted in attachment theory, demonstrating the importance of parents' relational need support for children's development. Relatedness need support has been shown to predict a plethora of adaptive outcomes, including secure attachment representations (van Ijzendoorn, 1995), self-worth (Brummelman et al., 2015), social competence (Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005), and social skills contributing to social competence such as adequate emotion regulation (Davidov & Grusec, 2006) and empathy (Soenens, Duriez, Vansteenkiste, & Goossens, 2007). In contrast, cold and rejecting parenting has been found to predict a host of developmental problems, including internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Putnick et al., 2015).

Structure

Parents who provide structure assist their children in building a sense of competence. Their basic attitude involves a focus on the development of their children's skills and emerging abilities. They are process-oriented, meaning that they are interested in discovering the children's talents and in providing support to nurture these talents (Reeve, 2006; Vansteenkiste & Soenens, 2015). They are aware that children learn through trial and error and that wide individual differences exist in the timing and rhythm of children's development of capacities. Parents who provide structure take into account these individual differences and try to provide a level of support and help that is attuned to the child's developmental level and possibilities. Parental structure can be contrasted with chaos, which is characteristic of parents who do not match their level and type of involvement to the child's abilities. They fail to provide clear guidelines for adequate behavior and they provide vague or even confusing guidelines. They give unwanted help and irrelevant information, and, at times, they can even become explicitly critical of the children's behavior and achievements.

The components of structure can be organized according to the timing with which they are typically used; that is, before, during, or after competence-relevant activities (Reeve, 2006). Two important elements are particularly relevant prior to children's engagement in an activity. When a child is about to start an activity, parents high on structure provide clear guidelines, they communicate limits about which behaviors are allowed and which are not. They also discuss consequences that might follow if rules are not followed, but they do that in an informative rather than controlling fashion. Further, they provide the necessary help for the child to set goals and, if needed, also offer a step-by-step script so children know how to achieve the introduced goals. Parents who provide structure also attend to the kinds of activities their children engage in. Specifically, they try to stimulate activities and create conditions that are optimally challenging to the children. Activities that slightly exceed the children's developmental level but are still within reach (i.e., activities in the children's zones

of proximal development) stimulate the children to learn new skills (Vygotsky, 1978). For parents to create these optimally challenging conditions, they need to be aware of the children's abilities and present the activities in ways that are not overwhelming to the children. It is also important for parents to openly convey their trust in the children's abilities to do well and master new skills.

Parents can also provide structure during the children's engagement with activities. They can do so by monitoring the children's progress in a process-oriented fashion. When parents and children agreed upon a rule, parents high on structure are consistent in following up on this rule. They signal to the children in non-intrusive but consequent ways when agreements are not respected. Further, parents high on structure provide adequate help during children's engagement in the tasks. They are available in case the children ask for help. When their help is solicited, parents give advice or they break down the task into smaller units to make the task more feasible to the children. There is a thin line between appropriate and inappropriate help—that is, information and instruction—with inappropriate help defined as help that is unwanted or that is excessive, in which case the parents are essentially taking over the task, thereby precluding a possible learning opportunity for the children. Yet, parents may also provide too little help such that children feel like they are left helpless. The provision of help in a way that really contributes to the children's competence again requires an accurate parental assessment of the children's abilities and need for assistance.

Both during and after the children's engagement in a task or activity, parents can provide structure by giving informational feedback. Ideally, this feedback is process-oriented and focused on the children's efforts and strategies (e.g., "You seem to have found a good way of studying this course") rather than on the person as a whole (e.g., "You are so smart") (Kamins & Dweck, 1999). Even when children did not do well at a task, parents can be supportive. To encourage self-reflection, prior to the parents giving their own take on the

situation, they may invite the children to reflect on what happened, and perhaps whether they see different ways they might try the task next time. This will allow the feedback interchanges to be learning experiences and allow the children to feel a sense of ownership. That is, when children are able to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, they are likely to develop a stronger willingness to improve their skills and to build a sense of mastery and a feeling of control over their own development. During the interchange, the parents may need to provide some informational feedback by pointing out things that did go well that the children did not notice. They may also formulate suggestions and hints in specific and constructive ways.

In sum, there is more to structure than rule-setting and the communication of expectations. Clear expectations and rules are a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for children to develop a sense of competence (Mouratidis, Vansteenkiste, Michou, & Lens, 2013). Children are more likely to feel competent when parents also provide adequate help, give process-oriented feedback, and assist the children in reflecting upon their learning process. Further, structure is relevant not only to activities that involve learning (e.g., homework) and play (e.g., games) but also to rule-compatible behavior. Also when teaching children to behave well (according to moral, conventional, or prudential standards), parents can provide structure by communicating clear guidelines, by giving advice about how to respond in challenging situations, and by giving constructive feedback on the children's behavior.

Compared to research on supports for relatedness and autonomy, there is less research on parental structure, although a relevant study on teachers providing structure to adolescents did predict more student behavioral engagement (Jang, Reeve, & Deci, 2010). Further, studies are beginning to show that parental structure is related to important motivational and developmental outcomes in different life domains, including academic competence, engagement, and performance (e.g., Farkas & Grolnick, 2010; Grolnick, Raftery-Helmer,

Flamm, Marbell, & Cardemil, 2015), feelings of competence during unsupervised time (e.g.,

activities with friends in the absence of parents; Grolnick et al., 2014), and engagement and

positive experiences during parent-child conversations about sensitive topics such as sexuality

(Mauras, Grolnick, & Friendly, 2013). In contrast, parental chaos has been found to relate to

problem behaviors such as substance use and delinquency (Skinner et al., 2005).

Autonomy-Support

Parental autonomy-support is the parenting concept most unique to SDT. Autonomy-

supportive parents tend to focus on their children's perspectives. Rather than prioritizing their

personal agenda, they are interested in the children's point of view (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, &

Leone, 1994; Vansteenkiste & Soenens, 2015). Also, they unconditionally accept the children

as they are (Rogers, 1961). As a result, children experience a sense of volition and feel able to

be who they want to be. Autonomy-supportive parents are confident that children are

naturally inclined to grow and develop in a positive direction (Landry et al., 2008), so they do

not feel a constant need to intervene in the children's development. Instead, they are patient,

they respect the children's pace of development, and they display a sincere curiosity for what

happens in the children's lives. Autonomy support can be contrasted with a more controlling

approach, where parents impose their own frame of reference and subsequently evaluate or

even judge the children in light of their capacity to meet expectations and standards that

matter primarily to the parent (Grolnick, 2003).

A first important feature of autonomy-support is parental fostering of task enjoyment.

As much as possible, autonomy-supportive parents try to emphasize the intrinsic value of

activities, they capitalize on children's interest or they add fun elements to promote the

children's enjoyment of activities (Reeve, 2009). Even seemingly uninteresting activities,

such as brushing teeth and cleaning up, can be made more fun by making a game out of it, by

telling stories, or by appealing to children's fantasies. This appeal to the children's inner

motivational resources can be contrasted with an approach relying on external contingencies, such as rewards and threats of punishment such as removal of privileges.

Further, autonomy-supportive parents allow input and encourage dialogue. They leave room for negotiation, offer choices, and encourage initiative (Soenens et al., 2007). Such a participative approach allows children to explore possibilities and different roles and to have a say in important decisions. Of course, parents cannot always allow their children to make decisions freely. Sometimes they introduce rules that set limits to the children's behavior. But even in these instances parents can be autonomy-supportive by providing a meaningful rationale. Rather than simply imposing a rule or giving a parent-centered reason for following a rule, they given explanations that are relevant to the children. Doing so helps children accept and internalize the personal importance of the rule (Deci et al., 1994).

Autonomy-supportive parents are attuned to the children's rhythms and pace of development. When a child gets stuck on a task (e.g., homework), they help patiently and leave room for the child to come up with a solution rather than taking over the learning process. This requires that parents trust the child's natural capacity to develop skills (Landry et al., 2008). Parental support for autonomy also entails an open attitude towards children's negative emotions, oppositional behaviors, and diverging opinions. Rather than minimizing negative emotions, suppressing undesirable behavior, or invalidating different opinions, autonomy-supportive parents show an active interest in these "deviant" feelings, behaviors, and opinions. Rather than perceiving those as irritating, they curiously explore their meaning or role to fully understand the children's perspectives. For instance, even when children defy parental rules, autonomy-supportive parents pay attention to children's reasons for doing so and to the feelings that elicited reactance. Having heard the children's opinions, they acknowledge the children's perspective and perhaps flexibly adjust the rule or, if the rule cannot be changed, explain why the rule is meaningful.

Finally, autonomy-supportive parents rely on inviting rather than coercing or pressuring language. They say things such as "You can try to …", "I suggest that you.. ", and "I propose that you …" instead of "You have to …", "You must …", and "I expect you to …". Pressuring language can be quite overt and explicit but also more subtle. Psychologically controlling parents (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010) or parents relying on conditional regard (Assor et al., 2014) in particular tend to pressure children in insidious ways by expressing disappointment non-verbally or by appealing to feelings of shame and guilt.

Autonomy-supportive parenting has been found to predict need satisfaction and high-quality motivation in different domains of life, including school (Grolnick et al., 1991), sports (Gagné, Ryan, & Bargmann, 2003), and friendships (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2005). When children perceive their parents as autonomy-supportive, they engage in activities with a sense of volition and because they want to rather than because they have to. Autonomy support is also related to high-quality motivation in the context of adherence to parental rules. Children of autonomy-supportive parents display deeper internalization of parental rules (Vansteenkiste, Soenens, Van Petegem, & Duriez, 2014). They follow these rules because they accept and understand the rules rather than because they feel compelled to do so. Relatedly, autonomy-support fosters open and honest communication in parent-child relationships (Bureau & Mageau, 2014; Wuyts, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, & Van Petegem, 2015). Possibly because of these beneficial effects of parental autonomy support on children's need satisfaction and motivation, autonomy-support is related to adjustment in specific domains of life and to children's and adolescents' overall well-being (Joussemet, Koestner, Lekes, & Landry, 2005). Parental autonomy-support also contributes to key developmental skills, such as adequate emotion regulation (Brenning, Soenens, Van Petegem, & Vansteenkiste, 2015), cognitive self-regulation (Bindman, Pomerantz, & Roisman, 2015), and altruism and moral development (Roth, 2008).

In contrast, controlling parenting has been shown to predict need frustration (Mabbe, Soenens, Vansteenkiste, & Van Leeuwen, in press), secrecy in parent-child relationships (Tilton-Weaver, Kerr, Pakalniskeine, Tokic, Salihovic, & Stattin, 2010), maladaptive motivational orientations such as amotivation (Garn & Jolly, 2015) and oppositional defiance (Vansteenkiste et al., 2014), and developmental problems such as internalizing distress (Soenens, Luyckx, Vansteenkiste, Duriez, & Goossens, 2008) and externalizing behaviors (Joussemet, Vitaro, et al., 2008).

About the Interplay between the Three Dimensions of Parental Need Support

To fully understand the role of parents in children's satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs, it is important to consider the interplay of the three dimensions of parental need support. Of particular relevance is the interplay between structure and autonomy-support. Some developmental scholars tend to confuse autonomy-support with parental permissiveness, leniency, and an absence of rules (Baumrind, 2012). However, autonomy-support can be (and ideally is) combined with structure, in which case parents provide clear guidelines for behavior and at the same time respect the children's perspectives (e.g., by providing a rationale and leaving room for the children's voices). Autonomy-supportive parents are more likely to provide structure in a way that fosters competence and autonomy because their communication of expectations and their provision of assistance is better attuned to the child's abilities, preferences and interests. In line with this reasoning, Sher-Censor, Assor, and Oppenheim (2015) showed that maternal communication of expectations for behavior (as a feature of structure) was related negatively to adolescents' externalizing problems only when mothers at the same time scored high on perspective taking (as a feature of autonomy-support). The combination of structure and autonomy-support probably helped adolescents to understand the importance of the expectations and to experience more self-endorsement while behaving in accordance with them.

While the combination of structure and autonomy-support gives rise to a harmonious experience of satisfaction of several needs, other parental behaviors give rise to a conflicting relationship between different needs. A case in point is conditional regard, a parenting practice characteristic of parents who provide more love and affection than usual when the child meets parental expectations and who withdraw their affection and appreciation when the child fails to meet standards (Assor, Roth, & Deci, 2004). While this parental practice may yield at least momentary and superficial satisfaction of the need for relatedness, it is a controlling practice undermining children's feelings of autonomy and competence. Research even shows that the detrimental effects of conditional regard are more pronounced when it is combined with parental warmth (Kanat-Maymon & Assor, 2010). This combination of conditional regard and warmth may create a loyalty conflict, where children strongly feel that they need to choose between having a close bond with their parent and preserving a sense of autonomy. Such internal conflicts ultimately give rise to feelings of resentment towards parents and to emotional costs in children (Assor et al., 2004, 2014).

The Role of Cultural, Developmental, and Individual Differences

The SDT-based argument that need-supportive parenting appeals to basic and fundamental needs that universally foster children's growth is a strong statement that may lead one to wonder whether in this perspective on parenting there is room for contextual and individual differences in effects of need-supportive parenting.

An important notion in SDT speaking to this issue is the notion of *functional significance* (Deci & Ryan, 1987). This notion refers to differences in the way people appraise and interpret events. Most things that happen to people can be interpreted in different ways by different people. For instance, a reward to one child for doing homework may have an informational value indicating that he or she did a good job, but another child who gets the reward may interpret it as a control to get him or her to do more homework (Deci, Koestner,

& Ryan, 1999). Depending on factors such as age, culture, and personality, different children may interpret such practices differently.

For example, Pomerantz and Eaton (2000) showed that with increasing age elementary school children were more likely to view parental involvement in homework as signaling incompetence and as a threat to their autonomy. As regards culture, several studies have shown that children and adolescents living in collectivist societies have more benign interpretations of potentially autonomy-suppressing parenting practices than children from individualist societies (Miller, Chakravarthy, & Das, 2008; Rudy, Carlo, Lambert, & Awong, 2014). Finally, to capture personality-based differences in the way social events are appraised, SDT distinguishes between autonomous and controlled causality orientations (Deci & Ryan, 1985), although as a general orientation this typically emerges clearly only in later adolescence. Research shows that individuals high on the autonomous orientation are inclined to see the informational value of interpersonal (e.g., parental) behaviors, whereas individuals high on the controlled orientation tend to more easily experience interpersonal behaviors as pressuring and intrusive. In fact, a study by Hagger, & Chatzisarantis (2011) showed that individuals who were high in autonomy interpreted rewards as informational and those high in controlled orientation interpreted them as controlling.

The fact that there are contextual and individual differences in children's appraisal and perception of parental behavior does not contradict SDT's claims about the universal importance of the psychological needs. The universality claim in SDT deals with individuals' experiences of need satisfaction and need frustration. While children may differ in the way they interpret potentially autonomy-supportive practices, subjectively felt autonomy is said to be beneficial for all children. Indeed, SDT argues that children's perceptions of parental behavior in terms of need support or need thwarting ultimately affect the children's developmental outcomes. When parental practices are experienced as supportive of the three

psychological needs, they will foster well-being and adjustment. In contrast, when practices are experienced as a threat to these needs, they will undermine development and increase the risk for ill-being. Consistent with these claims, evidence shows that subjectively experienced need-supportive and need-thwarting parenting are related to outcomes similarly across developmental periods (Joussemet, Landry, & Koestner, 2008), across cultures (Ahmad, Vansteenkiste, & Soenens, 2013; Chirkov & Ryan, 2001), and irrespective of children's personality (Mabbe et al., in press).

We also note that there are limits to the degree to which parental behavior can be interpreted in various ways (Soenens, Vansteenkiste, & Van Petegem, 2015). Although children may differ somewhat in the way they perceive parental practices, there are real and important mean-level differences between parental practices in terms of how need-supportive and motivating they are. For instance, meta-analyses have shown that while rewards generally undermine intrinsic motivation (Deci et al., 1999), the provision of choice typically enhances it (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). Thus, while children may vary in the degree to which they perceive rewards as controlling, they are unlikely to perceive the provision of choice as more controlling than the provision of rewards. In line with the notion that certain practices are generally more need-supportive than others, Chen, Soenens, et al. (2015) showed that while Chinese adolescents had a more benign interpretation of parental guilt-induction than Belgian adolescents, both Chinese and Belgian adolescents perceived guilt-induction as more controlling and need-thwarting than parental autonomy-support. Thus, autonomy-supportive practices were perceived to be generally more favorable to adolescents' development across cultures.

Clearly, SDT highlights children's agency in the socialization process (Reeve, 2013; Soenens et al., 2015). Rather than being passive recipients of environmental influences, children give meaning to parental behaviors and actively develop perceptions and

representations of their parents. In addition, children also differ in the way they cope with need-thwarting parental behaviors (Skinner & Edge, 2002). While some children respond to controlling parental behavior constructively (e.g., by negotiating and by trying to create a compromise between the parents' goals and their own), other children respond defiantly or in other ways that may contribute to their own need frustration such as simply complying passively. Although these responses appear to be quite different, in both cases children experience frustration of their need for autonomy because they do not stay true to their personal goals and preferences. Future research on these coping responses may reveal why some children are more resilient to need-thwarting parenting than others and why need-thwarting parenting is related to different developmental problems in different children. For instance, while passive compliance may give rise to internalizing difficulties, oppositional defiance may render children more vulnerable to externalizing problems.

Conclusion

Children have a natural tendency to develop towards higher levels of psychosocial maturity as they grow older (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Parents can contribute to this psychological-growth process by supporting children's needs for relatedness (e.g., by being warm and responsive), competence (e.g., by providing clear guidelines and by giving positive feedback and help), and autonomy (e.g., by recognizing the child's perspective and by encouraging initiative). When parents thwart these very same needs, they risk forestalling children's development or even increasing vulnerability to psychopathology. Various factors (including age, cultural background, and personality) affect the degree to which potentially need-supportive parental behaviors are actually experienced by children as need-supportive. Regardless, the subjective experience of parental need support is universally related to better psychosocial adjustment, resilience, and well-being.

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Figure 1

Conceptual Model of the Associations among Parental Support for Children's Needs, Needs Experiences, and Developmental Outcomes