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FAMILY CONFLICT AS A RISK FACTOR FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS IN CHILDREN

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to better understand the relationship between parents and their children when conflict is present. More specifically, the intent is to study how conflict can be classified as a risk factor and impact the child's adjustment.

More knowledge will be given about the whole construct of conflict and how it is intertwined with different family dynamics. It has been shown that conflict does not always have negative effects on the child's adjustment, since it's possible to differentiate between constructive and destructive conflict; in the former case, positive outcomes can be reached. On the other hand, destructive forms of conflict, together with stress and other negative situations the child is exposed to, can increase the likelihood of the development of psychopathologies during childhood. In addition, externalizing and internalizing problems figure as two of the main symptoms of child maladjustment.

Furthermore, variables such as family dynamics and structure, parenting styles together with parental styles of conflict, and the ability to regulate one's emotions will be considered when looking for moderation and mediation effects. Different theoretical frameworks will be explained, with a focus on two main theories that have studied parental conflict's effects on children.

Coping strategies and possible interventions will be explained. Children can develop and show different coping strategies according to the attachment style they have built and the parenting style adopted by the parents. In addition, coping strategies are key elements to differentiate between children who will be more likely to have adjustment problems from those who will not. In conclusion, possible designs for prevention programs and interventions will be discussed, with a particular focus on what clinicians should pay attention to.

CHAPTER 1

Family and Conflict

1.1 Family dynamics and structure

We can start by defining family as a group of people, bonded by a particular set of rules that goes beyond the ones that usually characterize groups. It has peculiar dynamics and follows a scripted structure. As within any group, families can present conflict, but this does not always lead to negative effects. Still, it represents a variable worth studying with more attention, especially when the safety and development of children are involved.

Family dynamics represent the specific pattern that relatives follow during interactions, the roles they invest in the relationship, and all the factors that influence said interactions. Furthermore, family members can be the principal source of relationship security or stress, based on what the family provides. In a secure and supportive system, children are more likely to be exposed to love, advice and warmth, and to live in a caring environment. At the same time, family can also represent a primary source of stress, where children are often exposed to arguments and destructive forms of conflict (Jabbari et al., 2024).

1.2 Conflict definition

Conflict is a phenomenon that is usually present in every family, and we can assume that anything related to specific family dynamics that the child experiences is a key element for their development. The latter represents one of the main reasons why it is necessary to analyze what the consequences of parental and interparental conflicts lead to. For instance, parental conflicts can affect the child's adjustment that, as a result, may lead to negative effects in the domains of social, cognitive, and educational functions (Barthassat, 2014).

Scientific literature points out that child maladjustment is mainly influenced by family conflict. It has been shown that parents who are involved in high-conflict marriages are

more detached when interacting with their children, use harsher discipline, and experience more episodes of depression compared to parents in low-conflict marriages. As a consequence, children can develop internalizing and externalizing problems due to the aforementioned issues (Xerxa et al., 2020). Both internalizing and externalizing problems represent the most studied variables that affect the child's adjustment. Externalizing behavior can be defined as a group of behavioral issues that are externally expressed by the child and reflect on the environment. These patterns of behavior can be – for instance – delinquency or aggression. On the other hand, anxiety and depressive symptoms are the results of an internalizing behavior, more specifically characterized by problems affecting the internal psychological environment of the child (Van Eldik et al., 2020). In addition, other than internalizing and externalizing problems, evidence suggests that marital conflict is also associated with deficits in the cognitive competency area and with social maladjustment (Camisasca et al., 2017).

As already stated, conflict does not always lead to negative outcomes, given the existence of both *constructive* and *destructive* forms of conflict. Behavioral patterns can be classified as constructive or destructive based on conflict reactions, them being behavioral, emotional, and cognitive responses. It has been shown that when conflict produces more positive reactions than negative ones, leading to more emotional security, we can define it as constructive. On the contrary, when conflict produces more negative reactions, it is identified as destructive and can lead to less emotional security for the child. For these reasons conflict behavioral patterns can be placed on a continuum from constructive to destructive, based on how threatened the child's emotional security is. Attempts to find positive conflict resolutions and to give explanations for the conflict itself are characteristics that belong to constructive conflict styles. On the other hand, destructive conflict styles are characterized by verbal and/or physical aggression, violence, and hostility. In addition to potential emotional implications of the two conflict styles, moderators and mediators have been taken into account and measured to study implications for the relationship between parental conflict and children's responses. Age, gender, temperament, and past conflict experiences are considered for the child while conflict resolution skills, gender, parenting styles, and psychological control for parents (Barthassat, 2014).

1.3 Parental and interparental conflict

Barthassat (2014) defines parental conflict as a variable reflecting a disagreement that can lead to a change in the interaction of the parents, which can be placed on a continuum that goes from very positive to very negative. Parental conflict can have negative effects on children, especially when it includes aggression and hostility that are child-related, and when there is *triangulation*; the latter happens when parents get their children involved in their conflicts (Lange et al., 2022).

Van Eldik et al., (2020) define six different dimensions of interparental conflict, them being *relationship quality, frequency of conflicts, hostile behavior, disengaged behavior, constructive behavior, and child-related conflict*. Relationship quality has to do with the level of quality, happiness, and adjustment of the interparental relationship, reflected in the satisfaction, cohesion, expression of affection, and consensus on topics in the parental relationship. Frequency of conflicts reflects how often parents display disagreements and engage in conflicts. Hostile behavior is when parental conflicts present particularly intense nonverbal, verbal, or physical anger. Disengaged behavior is found when parental conflicts show negative behaviors that are characterized by episodes of detachment and withdrawal, whereas constructive behavior leads to the resolution of parental conflicts through problem-solving strategies, a calm way of handling discussions, and a manifestation of affection towards the children. Child-related conflict is linked with how often parents have disagreements or argue about topics related to their children.

It's known that conflicts are an unavoidable variable in family life. Scientific literature shows that interparental conflicts represent one of the main factors influencing the family environment, especially for children and adolescents. It has been shown that an increased amount of interparental conflict can lead to less emotional warmth and a negative style of communication with regard to the parents, and an increase in problems with peers when it comes to the children, due to a lack of prosocial behavior. Furthermore, evidence suggests that interparental conflicts have a direct effect on the child's well-being by damaging their perception of security in the family system, and by making the attachment bond weaker. Lastly, interparental conflict negatively interferes with parenting behavioral patterns which can lead to problems for the child (Hess, 2022).

1.4 Theories and Models

Two theoretical frameworks will be taken into account since they represent key elements when the impact of conflict on the well-being of children is discussed. *The Cognitive-Contextual Framework* of Grych and Fincham (1990) seeks to explain how parental conflicts are related to the child's problematic behavior, while *The Emotional Security Hypothesis* of Davies and Cummings (1994) analyzes the perception that the child has of their relationship with their parents (Barthassat, 2014).

The aforementioned theories will be useful in explaining why being exposed to conflict may increase the child's vulnerability to psychopathology and are of great importance for the description and acknowledgment of the appraisal and processing of interparental conflict (Van Eldik et al., 2020).

Three principal child response domains are explained in said theories: emotional and behavioral responses, and cognitive appraisals. Emotional responses represent the extent to which a child manifests feelings of anger, sadness, fear, and distress as a response to interparental conflict, whereas behavioral responses reflect the child's attempts to be involved in or circumvent parental conflict. Lastly, cognitive appraisal represents cognitive processes involved in interparental conflicts and the appraisal of possible consequences for the functioning of the family; as a result, when the child is exposed to destructive interparental conflict, this can generate negative internal working models (Van Eldik et al., 2020). Internal working models are characterized by views of the self and other important people in the child's life. They are developed over the child's lifespan based on their experiences and they're used as a guide for behavioral choices over one's life (Scharfe, 2017).

1.4.1 The Cognitive-Contextual Framework

According to Grych and Fincham (1990), intensity, content, duration, and resolution are the principal characteristics of parental conflicts, and they have cumulative effects; the more intense, unresolved, and prolonged the conflicts are, the more stress the child will experience. The Cognitive-Contextual Framework states that parental conflict, when

perceived as a stressor, consequently generates two processes that then influence the coping behavior of the child. The theory also affirms that context has an important effect on the two processing stages and that the contextual factors can be *distal* and *proximal*. Distal contextual factors are stable and describe thoughts and feelings that the child has before the conflict starts; they are represented by variables such as past experience with conflict, emotional climate, temperament, and gender. At the same time, proximal contextual factors are characterized by expectations on how the conflict will evolve and on the child's emotional state. During the primary processing stage, children perceive the conflict characteristics and evaluate the extent to which these can be a threat to their safety. Conflict characteristics and evaluation of danger lead to emotional appraisal and reactions. If the conflict is perceived as negative, the secondary processing stage is activated, in which assumptions are made to guess the reasons behind the conflict. This process supposes the presence of advanced cognitive skills – we can, therefore, assume that only older children have access to it. Furthermore, it has been shown that two different forms of coping behavior can be developed during the secondary processing stage: emotion-focused strategies and problem-focused strategies. These two coping mechanisms are supposed to reduce emotional arousal and, in addition, can help with the regulation of feelings and the possibility of changing the stressful situation itself. To conclude, older children will have more coping strategies than younger ones, because they developed more refined cognitive abilities that allow them to use emotion-focused strategies (Barthassat, 2014).

1.4.2 The Emotional Security Hypothesis

Emotional security represents the extent to which children perceive their attachment figures as available when needed (Barthassat, 2014). According to Davies and Cummings (1994), emotional security depends on past experiences that the child developed concerning parental conflict and how these experiences can influence future patterns of behavior. As a consequence, emotional security will vary based on the perception of the conflict. Emotional security also represents a possible mediator of the relationship between the conflict and the child's condition and well-being (Barthassat, 2014).

It has been shown that emotional security has an impact on functional abilities: it affects how children regulate their emotional arousal, how they try to regulate their parents' emotions, and the child's internal representations. As a result, more negative emotions will lead to a reduced ability to self-regulate and to a worse judgment of the parental conflict – likewise, children who develop positive emotions will have a different and more optimistic attitude when tackling the conflict. The more threatened by the conflict the child feels, the more they will try to regulate their parents' emotions. This regulation can lead to a momentary reduction of negative emotions, but will also have consequences for both parents and children: parents will not pay attention to important issues and children will develop poor coping strategies (Barthassat, 2014).

The effects that parental conflicts have on the child are moderated by the extent to which parents solve the conflict, by the emotional reaction of the child, and by their perception of emotional security. Conflict resolution can then be placed on a continuum that goes from complete resolution to no resolution (Barthassat, 2014).

Children who are progressively exposed to destructive parental conflict might experience emotional insecurity characterized by emotional reactivity, regulation problems related to parental affection exposure, and specific internal working models of the interparental relationship. Scientific literature also shows that emotional distress is a direct reaction to the exposure to interparental conflict. In these circumstances, children activate coping mechanisms that include being directly involved in the conflict or avoiding the conflict. Both mechanisms relate to higher levels of the child's psychological maladjustment (Camisasca et al., 2017).

In addition to these two principal theoretical frameworks, other theories and models that are considered important when studying the child's maladjustment will be presented: *The ABC-X model of family stress* (Rosino, 2016), the *Family Stress Model* (Masarik & Conger, 2017), and physiological theories.

1.4.3 Stress-related theories

Stress is an important variable to be considered when discussing family conflict. Jones et al. (2021) suggest that when parents report high levels of stress, there is a consistent risk of child maltreatment. This is because when parental stress is high, it can be more difficult for parents to have a positive attitude toward the child. The authors also state that higher stress levels - in particular of the parents - can lead to increased levels of family conflict and poor child outcomes.

The literature presents different theoretical frameworks to study and explain how families are affected by stress and which coping strategies are used.

The ABC-X model of family stress (Rosino, 2016): in the model, we have the stressor event (A), the resources that the family has at that moment (B), how seriously the family perceives the stressor (C), and the probability of experiencing a crisis (X). Looking at the dynamics, a stressor can be heightened or alleviated by the resources available in the family. One resource can be – for instance – the ability to manage conflicts. In addition, the perception of the stressor itself can lead to a family crisis (Jones et al., 2021).

The Family Stress Model (Masarik & Conger, 2017) focuses on how economic stressors can affect parents and children, and results from mediation analysis highlight the associations among economic stressors, confused and disorganized parents, and child complications (Jones et al., 2021).

About physiological theories, it is known that stress also has biological effects on the body. These effects influence the emotional reactions and the emotion regulation ability of a person, leading to problems in interpersonal relationships. Stress stimulates the sympathetic nervous system and triggers the fight or flight response, which in turn affects one's emotions, thoughts, and body perceptions. As a result, we can witness physical aggression, disruptive anger manifestation, and arguing inside the relationship. Regulation of emotions and the ability to calm the sympathetic nervous system becomes more difficult, leading to higher chances of experiencing conflict. To conclude, problems in the emotion regulation processes of the parent-child dyad together with the overall

effects of stress, can lead to emotional or behavioral problems in children (Jones et al., 2021).

CHAPTER 2

Child Maladjustment

2.1 Impact of conflict on children: emotional, behavioral and social implications

Hypothesis on how conflict can affect children are mostly based on the idea that interparental conflict problems are not limited to the couple, instead they “transfer” into the parent-child relationship. Research shows that a child can be “entrapped” in the conflict through triangulation. This happens because parents unintentionally use it to reduce their own and the couple’s stress. The ways parents can use triangulation vary from attributing full responsibility to the child for their conflict to avoidance of parental existing problems concentrating all their focus on the child’s behavior. Additionally, parents can push their children to take sides, figuring as an “ally” to them, to create a coalition against the other caregiver. This particular strategy is extremely dangerous since the child is too entangled with one parent and way too isolated from the other. The latter usually happens in divorced or separated families, in which parents often feel the need to fight for the attention and affection of their children. Furthermore, children affirm that the experience of their parents fighting is extremely upsetting. Witnessing the conflict also has a considerable impact on children compared to when it happens away from them, when they are not directly involved and when they are not present during the dispute. Studies that investigated divorce, found that only direct experience of parental conflict could predict child maladjustment (Grych, 2005).

Due to the negative nature of stressful situations and chronic exposure to them, children are more likely to develop psychopathologies during childhood. However, this rule does not apply to everyone: not all children will develop psychopathological symptoms since they will have built different coping abilities toward stressful situations and circumstances, together with a different emotional regulation (Compas et al., 2017).

When exposed to destructive forms of conflict, children tend to show distress that can lead to multiple reactions. For instance, a child can feel pulled into the conflict, being more involved in parental dynamics that are not in their interest. In addition, children can manifest aggressive behavior and have general behavioral dysregulation. Internalizing and externalizing problems are not the only consequences that have been analyzed: scientific literature shows additional links to peer and romantic relationship problems. Studies have shown that there are also possible repercussions related to the physiology of the child: for instance, an increase in children's cortisol levels, sleeping problems which are then linked to behavioral and emotional implications, in addition to academic hardships in subjects like mathematics, and difficulties in verbal and nonverbal achievements. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that physical violence can lead to child maladjustment, and a link has been found between children's mental and physical health and interparental aggression (Cummings & Schatz, 2012).

Xerxa et al., (2020) conducted a longitudinal study to test how family conflict and parental separation affect the child's adjustment. They took measurements of family conflict both before the child was born and until the child was 9 in addition to evaluations from parents, in the same period. Results show that conflict between parents predicted family conflict and parental separation and that parents' evaluation of the conflict was a predictor of child maladjustment. This study agrees with pre-existing literature, being consistent with the hypothesis that when family conflict and parental separation are present, they predict behavioral and emotional issues for the child. However, it is important to specify that parental separation alone, does not predict problematic behavior.

For children, family conflict can also represent the chance that the parents will separate or divorce. In addition, the emotional stability and security of children who already live in this situation are threatened by the thought of becoming an active part of the conflict and that they will be forced to pick a side between the two caregivers (Grych, 2005).

We've already seen how destructive forms of conflict – unlike constructive ones – can threaten the child's emotional security and lead to problems in their adjustment. When exposed to constructive conflicts, children can experience decreasing levels of their

emotional and behavioral insecurity. To explain some of these relations, we have empirical findings showing that the relationship between the child's prosocial behavior and interparental conflict patterns of behavior are mediated by emotional security. Furthermore, latest studies highlighted links between constructive forms of marital conflict, parenting behavior, and school improvements (Cummings & Schatz, 2012).

2.1.1 Externalizing and internalizing problems

When talking about behavioral implications of conflict, internalizing and externalizing problems are known to be possible risk factors for many psychological issues that can also lead to dangerous behavioral patterns in adulthood. They are rooted in environmental factors and genes inherited from parents, and practitioners should pay attention to their nature to understand the best way to intervene (Nikstat & Riemann, 2020).

One of the main purposes of the meta-analysis conducted by Van Eldik et al., (2020) was to group data from the existing scientific literature in regard to connections among the topics of interparental relationships and child maladjustment. As previously mentioned in the first chapter, the meta-analysis highlighted that internalizing and externalizing problems are some of the major symptoms of child maladjustment.

Scientific literature defines internalizing behavioral problems as the ones that reflect on the self, such as depression symptoms, feelings of anxiety, withdrawal, and emotional difficulties. On the other hand, externalizing behavioral problems are explicitly manifested in the external environment, for instance, hyperactivity, hostility, aggression towards people and objects, impulsivity, and deviant behavior (Nikstat & Riemann, 2020).

2.2 Coping strategies

It has been found that children's first attempts at regulation start at a very early age, in a shared process with their caregivers. Self-soothing strategies appear in the child's first year of life and set the ground for the development of future coping processes for the next twenty years. During this period, the child can become more and more capable of

handling challenging situations. Necessary elements that contribute to a great and functional collection of coping skills are known to be the existence of stress in moderate quantities, constructive coping representations, and adequate scaffolding, the latter being the help given to children by an older person. Despite what we could expect, some children tend to develop maladaptive coping mechanisms that are rigid, involve negative behavioral patterns, and are fixed on negative strategies like avoidance. In addition, it has been shown that these unhealthy coping strategies are connected to later psychopathology developments during childhood (Wadsworth, 2015).

In their study, Camisasca et al. (2017) examine if and how Internal Working Models (IWMs) of attachment are moderators for the association between the child's distress experienced during the conflict, their coping strategies, and their coping efficacy. Looking at the results, they found that children vary in their coping strategies and coping efficacy based on their IWMs. Coping efficacy represents the extent to which a person has the ability to deal with emotions and demands that a specific situation requires. As previously stated in the first chapter, children who develop insecure attachment styles, when facing a conflict, can use coping strategies that activate negative emotions and lead them to be involved in or to escape the conflict itself. It has been shown that both mechanisms are linked with a boost in the child's psychological maladjustment. Looking at evidence from their study, the authors found that regardless of the IWMs, high levels of interparental conflict that the child experiences can predict inefficacy in coping strategies and elevated emotional distress reactions. Looking back at the two main contextual frameworks we can find support for the results mentioned above. Parental conflict, when destructive (meaning that it has high intensity, lasts long over time, and is not resolved) can lead children to experience more emotional reactivity (Davies & Cummings, 1994) and to have worse coping strategies that lack effectiveness (Grych & Fincham, 1990). In addition, scientific literature shows that when active coping strategies are used, together with the child's distraction and support request, all of these can function as protective factors for the child. Furthermore, asking for help and seeking assistance to help with the expression of emotions can lessen the psychological maladjustment of both children and adolescents. The aim should be to develop new pathways when thinking about family conflict through cognitive structural changes (Camisasca et al., 2017).

2.3 How we can intervene

The great impact of family conflict on the child's emotional, behavioral, and social development, in addition to academic repercussions and health problems, is already known (Cummings & Schatz, 2012). To have great knowledge about internalizing and externalizing problems and other related disorders during childhood and adolescence is a fundamental priority in establishing functional interventions, prevention programs, and treatments (Compas et al., 2017).

As previously mentioned, family conflict together with parental separation can predict child maladjustment, and conflict right before and during the pregnancy is a predictor of emotional and behavioral issues. The two dynamics of conflict and separation represent risk factors for the child. Clinicians should pay attention to family patterns and interactions especially when there are elevated conflict levels and when parental separation is a possible outcome. In these specific circumstances, proactive interventions would be beneficial for the child's adjustment, since children still run the risk of developing emotional and behavioral problems. One preventive measure could be to design and improve interventions in schools or through the healthcare system that consider the emotional and behavioral status of children who live in families where conflict and/or separation are present. Additionally, it has been shown how parental separation could represent a valid solution to be considered when intense family conflict is experienced (Xerxa et al., 2020).

As stated in the first chapter, stress is an important variable that needs to be considered when discussing family conflict since it strongly influences the interactions between parents and the dyadic parent-child system. Jones et al., (2021) found that parental stress can be connected to mental health outcomes of the child through family conflict, and this is significant since it represents useful knowledge to design future interventions. There are existing risk factors that can't be modified with interventions, but what practitioners can work on is parental stress and its impact on the family system and the conflict itself. Interventions can help parents build strong coping strategies and cultivate positive interactions with their children which are useful to alleviate detrimental stress outcomes.

The authors describe how some clinicians pay attention only to parental training and/or child problems, whereas they should take into account the family system as a whole.

In his research, Grych (2005) aims to explain how it's not always the interparental conflict that increases chances for the development of child maladjustment, but instead the characteristics of that conflict and how it is handled. For these reasons, prevention programs could represent solutions for parents to learn effective strategies to manage conflict in order to reduce stress exposure and to foster better parent-child relationships. In addition, prevention programs can be useful in raising awareness among parents about topics like triangulation and how it can be detrimental to their children, and teach them ways to differentiate their own needs and their children's. Further research has shown that attention should be additionally put on programs for children. Children's programs may help them build up adequate ways to face challenging family scenarios and boost their confidence in their coping strategies, making them less susceptible to parental conflict. Prevention programs can therefore help both parents and children. Parents are given conflict resolution skills and techniques to make the conflict less destructive. They learn ways to cultivate better relationships and instructions to keep children away from the conflict to avoid them being caught in the middle of it. The latter is important since children frequently tend to feel they are the cause of the conflict.

In their study, Cummings and Schatz (2012) focus on a different approach regarding possible intervention programs. The authors present a translational research in which theory, research data, and results behind the study can be directly translated into prevention program topics. According to translational research, the design of the intervention and its topics should have its foundation in proven research. Looking at fundamental aspects, it's important to consider the ideal target of the intervention and the type of content, so that changes can last longer over time. In addition, there's a higher chance of knowing the possible interventions' outcomes beforehand, making it possible to anticipate whether the program will be successful or not. These specific prevention programs aim to make research findings helpful for community families. They concentrate on how interparental conflicts affect children and their emotional security and adjustment.

In the first chapter, the difference between constructive and destructive conflict has been explained. This difference is fundamental for practitioners to consider when it comes to designing prevention programs, helping them create interventions that will fit the situation best. Cummings and Schatz (2012) show that how the child emotionally reacts during a conflict can help clinicians understand the type of parenting and their behavior and the usual development of conflicts inside the family, which can all be used in the prevention program design procedures. As previously stated, an increase in constructive conflict administration can foster the child's emotional security and lessen the effect of their maladjustment. The latter is one of the main ambitions of conflict prevention programs and interventions.

CONCLUSION

In the first chapter, a general definition of family dynamics and its structure has been given, highlighting that the family system follows a peculiar set of rules. It's now known that conflict is an inevitable variable which is present in every group of people, thus also in every family. Conflict can be classified as constructive and destructive, and based on this differentiation, it will lead to different outcomes. A major focus has been put on destructive forms of conflict since scientific literature shows how they represent a major risk factor for the development of adjustment problems in children. In addition, a definition of parental and interparental conflict has been given, with a particular focus on the six dimensions of interparental conflict and how they contribute to the shaping of different conflict dynamics. These six dimensions can additionally help analyze the parent-child relationship. Furthermore, it has been found that stress is a variable worth considering when investigating how conflict affects the family system, the parent-child dyad, and the child itself. Lastly, a description and explanation of the main theoretical frameworks and models have been provided.

The second chapter offers an overview of the principal implications that conflict has on children. Scientific literature points out that children can develop problems in the social, emotional, and behavioral spheres. Externalizing and internalizing problems represent two of the major symptoms of child maladjustment. Furthermore, the construct of triangulation has been explained, as an important factor to take into account since it is a problem that occurs especially in divorced/separated families and a major source of stress for children. Coping strategies have been described in the way they are created and established from a very early age by children, focusing on their functions and how they can help prevent or not adjustment problems.

Not all children will develop adjustment problems when exposed to conflict, even in destructive forms. The latter is because everyone develops different IWMs and attachment styles growing up. Based on their IWMs and attachment styles children will have different coping strategies which will vary in their efficacy.

Recommendations to practitioners are given to help them design functional prevention programs for parents and children. Suggestions on what to focus on are listed, to establish proper interventions and help clinicians tackle problems that may arise inside the family system as soon as possible. Prevention measures can be spread throughout school programs and the healthcare system, making parents more aware of dangerous dynamics for their children and, on the other hand, helping children develop fine coping skills to help them face stressful scenarios.

In conclusion, more research is needed to find additional links between conflict and possible negative implications for children, with a particular focus on the design and development of more prevention programs to help parents navigate parenthood. The sooner a difficult situation is identified, the better its management will be, if and when proper instruments are given.

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