

Part III

Self-Determination Theory and Healthy Psychological Development

Synthesis

Chapters in this part explore the role of self-determination in healthy psychological development. Chapter 13 explores 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. Chapter 14 discusses the nature of self-determination in the context of adolescent identity development. The chapter reviews definitions of adolescence and the many factors that contribute to the onset and offset of this critical developmental period. Then, two theoretical perspectives for understanding adolescence are introduced: Identity development and the nature of self-determination development during this epoch. The chapter closes with some thoughts on future directions for research on self-determination development during adolescence.

Chapter 13

How Parents Contribute to Children's Psychological Health: The Critical Role of Psychological Need Support

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Abstract Although different determinants, including genetics, temperament, and a variety of social-contextual influences, play roles in young people's development, the role of parents is paramount to healthy psychosocial adjustment. When children's psychological needs are satisfied, children report more well-being, engage in activities with more 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. This chapter will focus on 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.

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 Some of the children explore the playground with curiosity and have a great time; others are more withdrawn and feel uncomfortable with other children around.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

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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 and Ryan 2000; Ryan and 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 Chap. 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 others, especially their parents during infancy and childhood. In SDT, psychological need satisfactions are considered essential and universal nutrients for healthy psychological development (Deci and Ryan 2000). When children's psychological needs are satisfied, the children report more well-being, engage activities with more 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 and Ryan 2013).

While much of the research on psychological need satisfaction has involved university students and adults (e.g., Chen et al. 2015), recent research has also demonstrated the importance of the psychological needs for children's and adolescents' adjustment. For example, Veronneau et al. (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 et al. (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 et al. 2016). 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 et al. 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 socializing agents—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' styles of interacting with children are conceptualized with three concepts (Grolnick et al. 1997; Joussemet et al. 2008a): (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 et al. 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, thus supporting the children's autonomy need, the children are likely to feel some relatedness satisfaction and also some indication of parental trust in their capabilities. In this regard, the graphical representation in Fig. 13.1, in which each need support and need thwart predicts only the corresponding need satisfaction and need frustration, 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.

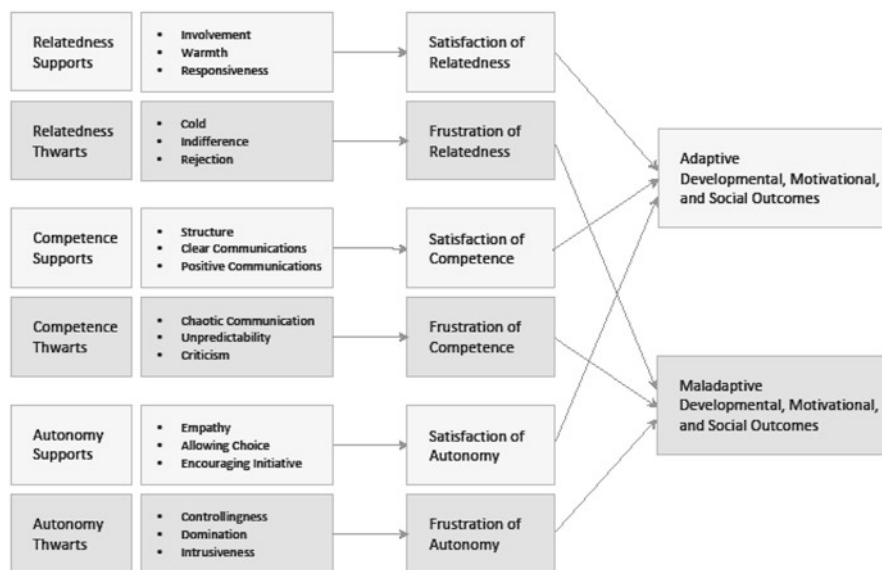


Fig. 13.1 Conceptual model showing: (1) Examples of each of the three basic psychological need supports and each of the need thwarts; (2) Relations from each of these supports and thwarts to the corresponding need satisfactions and frustrations; and relations from the satisfactions and frustrations to adaptive and maladaptive outcomes

In the remainder of this chapter we focus on the three dimensions of need-supportive parenting for our primary goal is to facilitate greater self-determination. [Those interested in further discussion of need-thwarting parenting are referred to Assor et al. (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 and 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 and 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 and 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 the child's requests, 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 et al. 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 the children's well-being (Milkie et al. 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 et al. 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 children actually experience 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 their children as well as physically (e.g., through hugs, kisses, or embraces). 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., taking a trip, going to a music festival, or having a family picnic beside a lake). While activities with an individual child can strengthen the parent-child bond, activities with the family can build a sense of family cohesion and collective identity.

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 healthy 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 et al. 2005), and social skills contributing to social competence such as adequate emotion regulation (Davidov and Grusec 2006) and empathy (Soenens et al. 2007a). 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 (Competence Support)

Parents who provide structure assist their children in building a sense of competence. Their basic attitude involves a focus on development of the children's skills and emerging abilities. These parents are process-oriented, meaning that they are interested in discovering the children's talents and in providing support to nurture the talents (Farkas and Grolnick 2010; Reeve 2006; Vansteenkiste and Soenens 2015). They are aware that children learn through trial and error and that substantial individual differences exist in the timing and rhythm of children's developing 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 children's developmental levels and possibilities. Structure can be contrasted with chaos, which is characteristic of parents who do not match their level and type of involvement to what the children need. They provide unclear or confusing guidelines for adequate behavior, and they are inconsistent in the feedback they provide. They give unwanted help and irrelevant information, and, at times, they may become explicitly critical of the children's behavior and achievements.

The components of structure can be organized in terms of whether they are operative before, during, or after the children's engagement in competence-relevant activities (Reeve 2006). Two important elements are particularly relevant prior to children's engagement. When a child is about to begin an activity, parents high on structure provide clear guidelines at whatever level of specificity is needed. If needed, they communicate limits about what behaviors are allowed and what are not, and they may discuss the consequences of not following guidelines. Of course that needs to be done in an informative rather than controlling fashion. Further, they provide the necessary help for the child to set goals and, if needed, offer a step-by-step script so children know how to achieve the target 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 do not overwhelm 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 by monitoring the children's progress in a process-oriented fashion. When parents and children have agreed upon a rule, parents high on structure are consistent in following up on the 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 providing appropriate and inappropriate help—that is, providing information and instruction—with inappropriate help being unwanted or excessive, such that the parents are essentially taking over the task and 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 meaningfully contributes to the children's competence thus requires an accurate parental assessment of the children's abilities and need for assistance.

Both during and after the children's engagement in an activity, the appropriate form of structure involves 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 for this course") rather than on the person's worth (e.g., "You are so smart") (Kamins and Dweck 1999). Even when children do 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, parents may need to provide some informational feedback by pointing out things that went 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 necessary, but not sufficient, for children to develop a sense of competence (Mouratidis et al. 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 et al. 2010). Further, a few studies have shown that parental structure is related to important motivational and developmental outcomes in different life domains, including academic competence, engagement, and performance (e.g., Farkas and Grolnick 2010; Grolnick et al. 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 et al. 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 that is most unique and most central to SDT. Autonomy-supportive parents tend to focus on their children's perspectives. Rather than prioritizing their own personal agendas, the parents are interested in the children's point of view (Deci et al. 1994; Vansteenkiste and Soenens 2015). Also, they unconditionally accept the children as they are (Rogers 1961) so the 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 evaluate or judge the children in light of whether they meet expectations and standards held by the parents (Grolnick 2003; Grolnick and Pomerantz 2009).

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 the activities (Reeve 2009). Even seemingly uninteresting activities, such as brushing teeth and cleaning up, can be more fun by making games out of them, by telling stories, or by appealing to children's fantasies. This appeal to the children's inner motivational resources is profoundly different from an approach that relies on external contingencies such as rewards and threats of punishment.

Autonomy-supportive parents allow input from their children and encourage dialogue. They leave room for negotiation, offer choices, and encourage initiative (Soenens et al. 2007b). Such a participative approach allows children to explore possibilities 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 and hearing the children's point of view. Rather than simply imposing a rule, they give explanations that are relevant to the children. Doing so helps the children internalize the personal importance of the rule (Deci et al. 1994; Koestner et al. 1984).

When autonomy-supportive, parents are attuned to the children's rhythms and pace of development. If a child gets stuck on a task (e.g., homework), they help

patiently and leave room for the child to try to come up with a solution rather than taking over the learning process. This requires parents to 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 and 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 et al. 2003), and friendships (Soenens and Vansteenkiste 2005). When children perceive their parents as autonomy-supportive, they engage in activities with a sense of volition, 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 et al. 2014). They follow these rules because they accept and understand them rather than because they feel compelled to do so. Relatedly, autonomy-support fosters open and honest communication in parent-child relationships (Bureau and Mageau 2014; Wuyts et al. 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 et al. 2005). Parental autonomy-support also contributes to key developmental skills, such as adequate emotion regulation (Brenning et al. 2015), cognitive self-regulation (Bindman et al. 2015), and altruism and moral development (Roth 2008).

In contrast, controlling parenting has been shown to predict need frustration (Mabbe et al. 2016), secrecy in parent-child relationships (Tilton-Weaver et al. 2010), maladaptive motivational orientations such as amotivation (Garn and Jolly 2015), oppositional defiance (Vansteenkiste et al. 2014), and developmental

problems such as internalizing distress (Soenens et al. 2008) and externalizing behaviors (Joussemet et al. 2008b).

The Interplay Among the Three Dimensions of Parental Need Support

To fully understand the role of parents supports for children's satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs, it is important to consider the interplay of these three dimensions. 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 often 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 ways that fosters competence and autonomy because their communication of expectations and their provision of assistance are better attuned to the children's abilities, preferences, and interests. In line with this reasoning, Sher-Censor et al. (2015) showed that maternal communication of expectations for behavior (a feature of structure) was related to fewer externalizing problems in adolescents only when mothers also scored high on perspective taking (a feature of autonomy-support). The combination of structure and autonomy support seemed to help adolescents understand the importance of the expectations and to experience more self-endorsement while enacting the behaviors.

While the combination of structure and autonomy-support gives rise to harmonious satisfaction of multiple needs, other parental behaviors give rise to a conflicting interaction between needs. A case in point is conditional regard, a parenting practice characteristic of parents who provide more love and affection than usual when a child meets their expectations and who withdraw their affection and appreciation when the child fails to meet the standards (Assor et al. 2004). While this parental practice may yield a short-term and superficial satisfaction of the need for relatedness, it is a controlling practice that not only undermines children's feelings of autonomy and competence but also leaves the children feeling like they are not really loved for who they are. Research even shows that the detrimental effects of conditional regard are more pronounced when it is combined with parental warmth (Kanat-Maymon and 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 for the 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 concept in SDT that speaks to this issue is *functional significance* (Deci and Ryan 1985). This notion refers to differences in the way people appraise and interpret events. Most things that happen to people can be interpreted somewhat differently by different of the people. For instance, a reward to one child for doing homework might have an informational value indicating a job well done, but, if given to another child, it might be interpreted it as a control to get more homework done (Deci et al. 1999). Depending on factors such as age, culture, personality, and developmental experiences, different children may interpret practices differently.

For example, Pomerantz and Eaton (2000) found 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 may have more benign interpretations of potentially autonomy-suppressing parenting practices than children from individualist societies (Miller et al. 2011; Rudy et al. 2014). Finally, to capture personality-based differences in the way social events are appraised, SDT distinguishes between autonomous and controlled causality orientations (Deci and 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. As an example, a study by Hagger and 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 concerns the consequences of 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 similarly to outcomes across developmental periods (Joussemet et al. 2008a), across cultures (Ahmad et al. 2013; Chirkov and Ryan 2001), and irrespective of children's personality (Mabbe et al. 2016).

We also note that there are limits to the degree to which parental behavior can be interpreted in various ways (Soenens et al. 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 rewards generally undermine children's intrinsic motivation (Deci et al. 1999), and the provision of choice typically enhances it (Patall et al. 2008). Thus, while children may vary in the degree to which they perceive rewards as controlling, there is a general tendency for them to experience rewards as more controlling than choice. In line with the notion that certain practices are generally more need-supportive than others, Chen et al. (2016) 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 and 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.

Conclusions

Children have a natural tendency to develop towards higher levels of psychosocial maturity as they grow older (Deci and Ryan 2000). Parents can contribute to this psychological-growth process by supporting children's need for relatedness (e.g.,

by being warm and responsive), need for competence (e.g., by providing clear guidelines and by giving positive feedback and help), and need for autonomy (e.g., by recognizing the children'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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