Family functioning and child behavior problems

A study on the relationship between family functioning and child behavior problems, and the effectiveness of an early intervention parent program to enhance family functioning

Nicole M.C. van As

Family functioning and child behavior problems

A study on the relationship between family functioning and child behavior problems, and the effectiveness of an early intervention parent program to enhance family functioning

Nicole M.C. van As

Family functioning and child behavior problems

A study on the relationship between family functioning and child behavior problems, and the effectiveness of an early intervention parent program to enhance family functioning

Een wetenschappelijke proeve op het gebied van de Sociale Wetenschappen

Proefschrift

Ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen,
volgens besluit van het College van Decanen in het
openbaar te verdedigen op
donderdag 9 september 1999
des namiddags om 3.30 uur precies

door

Nicole Maria Catharina van As
geboren op 16 februari 1968
te Nijmegen

Voorwoord

Nu dit proefschrift af is, wil ik graag iedereen die bij de totstandkoming ervan een rol heeft gespeeld, bedanken.

Allereerst zijn dat mijn beide promotoren, Jan Janssens en Jan Gerris, voor hun ondersteunende rol gedurende de jaren dat ik aan het onderzoek gewerkt heb. Jan Gerris dank ik voor de manier waarop hij in de dissertatiebesprekingen de grote lijn van het onderzoek bewaakte en voor zijn constructieve commentaar. De dagelijkse begeleiding van mijn werkzaamheden lag bij Jan Janssens: hem bedank ik voor zijn grote toegankelijkheid en zijn snelle en kundige commentaar. Ook kon ik altijd bij hem terecht met vragen en opmerkingen; hij wist altijd wel even tijd te maken. Ik heb de onderlinge samenwerking als zeer prettig ervaren!

Mijn collega's en collega-aio's wil ik graag bedanken voor de prettige onderlinge sfeer en de mogelijkheid om te kletsen over de dagelijkse beslommeringen en onderzoeksperikelen.

Verder wil ik mijn paranimfen Bart en Elma bedanken voor hun bijdrage aan 'de grote dag'.

Berry en Josephine wil ik graag bedanken voor hun belangstelling, hun vertrouwen in een goed resultaat van het promotieproject en hun niet aflatende stimulans ('Heb je nou al een datum?').

Bart, Hanneke en Michael: bedankt voor jullie belangstelling, de e-mailtjes en de gezelligheid!

Tot slot wil ik Marco bedanken als mijn dagelijkse steun en toeverlaat. Voor mij heeft een thuissituatie waarin ik mezelf kon zijn en waarin meer belangrijk was (en is) dan het schrijven van een proefschrift zeker bijgedragen aan het slagen van het project.

Contents

Introduction

In this dissertation study, the relationship between family functioning and child behavior problems is explored. In the literature, the development of child behavior problems in the context of the family is described extensively. There are however various theoretical approaches that emphasize different aspects of family functioning. In this study we try to present an overview of the most important aspects of family functioning. We also examine the relationships that can be expected among those aspects of family functioning. Although many different aspects of family functioning can be distinguished, we suspect that these aspects are related. As we explain in the first chapter, the literature on the relationship between aspects of family functioning and child behavior problems is mainly based on studies comparing families experiencing severe child rearing difficulties with families experiencing no child rearing difficulties and on clinical experiences with families referred for treatment. In our study, we compared families with mild forms of child rearing difficulties with families experiencing no child rearing difficulties, to examine whether the relationships between family functioning and child behavior problems that are described in the literature can be replicated for mildly disturbed families as well. Furthermore, we explored the possibilities of improving family functioning by means of a newly developed parent program, focusing at family members' communication and problem solving skills. When family functioning in mildly disturbed problem families can be enhanced by offering the parents the parent program, this may have important implications for family intervention and prevention. Hopefully, the use of the parent program may help preventing families from moving from the stage of mild child rearing difficulties to the stage of more severe difficulties.

In this study, three major research questions are addressed. First, we examined whether mildly disturbed problem families differed from normal families on aspects of family functioning. In order to answer this question, we compared a group of 28 problem families to a group of 26 normal families on aspects of family functioning, that is, on parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, family structure, and the communication between family members. The parents in the problem families experienced child rearing difficulties because of mild forms of externalizing behavior problems of their 10 to 14 year old child. Second, relationships among aspects of family functioning were examined. To answer this question, we examined correlations among aspects of family functioning in the group of 54 families (that is, 28 problem families plus 26 normal families). Third, the effectiveness of our newly developed parent program, 'Parents and children talking together' was examined. For this part of the study, the parents of the group of 28 problem families followed the parent program.

In the <u>first chapter</u> of this study, relationships between child behavior problems and aspects of family functioning are described from the literature. The concept of family function-

ing is clarified by reviewing some of the most influential theoretical approaches to family functioning, that is, the parenting approach, the intergenerational approach, the structural approach, and the communication approach. Thus, child behavior problems are related to parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, family structure, and the communication between family members, respectively. Furthermore, we analyzed the theoretical relationships that can be expected among aspects of family functioning. Although in each approach different aspects of family functioning are emphasized, it is argued that these aspects are not independent from each other. Finally, in the first chapter the research questions are summarized.

In the second chapter, the literature on parent education programs is reviewed. The most influential types of parent programs are described, that is, Adlerian, client centered, behavior modification, rational emotive, and combination parent programs. First, we examined the theoretical assumptions that underlie each type of program. Furthermore, we examined for each type of program, which aspects of family functioning are addressed, whether changes in parental behavior (behavioral counseling) or in parental cognitions, attitudes, and knowledge (reflective counseling) are aimed at, and what is known about the effectiveness of the program. Thus, an overview of the theoretical approaches on parent programs is presented, against which our newly developed parent program can be compared.

In the third chapter, the parent program 'Parents and children talking together' is presented. We explained why we decided to develop a new parent program. Furthermore, a short description of the content of each of the seven sessions of the program is presented. Finally, the program 'Parents and children talking together' is placed against the types of parent education programs that were described in the second chapter.

In the fourth chapter, the participants and measurement instruments of this study are presented. Questionnaires were used to measure parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, family structure, and the communication between family members. Furthermore, observations were used to examine the communication between family members.

The fifth chapter consists of the results of the study for each of the three major research questions, that is, differences in family functioning between the group of problem and normal families, relationships among the various aspects of family functioning, and the effectiveness of the parent program 'Parents and children talking together'.

The sixth chapter, finally, consists of a discussion of the results to each of the three major research questions and relevant conclusions.

1. Relationships between child behavior problems and family functioning

In this chapter we focus on the development of child behavior problems. First, we consider the various types of behavior problems and define what we mean by child behavior problems in the context of this study. Second, we focus on aspects of family functioning that are related to child behavior problems. We consider parenting skills, the parent-child relationship, family structure, and parent-child communication respectively, as aspects of family life that may contribute to the origin and maintenance of child behavior problems. Third, we consider how these different aspects of family functioning might be related to each other. Finally, we summarize the research questions resulting from our theoretical analysis.

1.1 Child behavior problems

Concerning child behavior problems, there is general consensus in the literature that a distinction can be made between two major dimensions, that is, externalizing and internalizing behavior (Achenbach, 1966; Breen & Altepeter, 1990; Serbin, Schwartzman, Moskowitz, & Ledingham, 1991; Smets, 1985). Externalizing behavior refers to behavior characterized by failure to control emotions and impulses, often resulting in aggressive, noncompliant, and disruptive behavior. Typically, other persons in the child's environment (parents, siblings) suffer more than the child him/herself. Internalizing behavior refers to behavior characterized by overcontrol of emotions and impulses often resulting in, for example; social withdrawal, shyness, timidity, fearfulness, inhibition, isolation, avoidance, and oversensitivity. Typically the child with internalizing problems suffers more than persons in his or her environment. In this study, we focus on children with externalizing behavior problems (although there is evidence that these two types of disorders significantly overlap (Breen & Altepeter, 1990)).

In the literature different terms have been applied to describe externalizing behavior problems, for example; antisocial behavior, conduct disorders, acting out behavior, aggression, disruptive behavior, or delinquency.

Lahey and Loeber (1994) used the term disruptive behavior disorders when writing about externalizing behavior problems. They state that there is a development of disruptive behaviors in childhood from the diagnostic category of oppositional defiant disorders to the diagnostic category of conduct disorders. Oppositional defiant disorders refer to 'irritable' behaviors, like temper tantrums, blaming others, and being angry, irritable, annoying, and argumentative. Conduct disorders refer to an enduring pattern of more serious violations of the rights of others and of social rules and norms, and vary from what Lahey and Loeber call 'intermediate' conduct disorders, such as bullying,

fighting, vandalizing, lying, and setting fires to what is called 'advanced' conduct disorders, such as cruelty, truancy, stealing, running away, and breaking and entering. According to Lahey and Loeber, there is a developmental pyramid of disruptive behavior, with relatively large numbers of children occasionally showing oppositional behaviors (and some of them showing a consistent pattern of oppositional behavior), with some of these oppositional children proceeding to intermediate conduct disorders. Some of these mildly conduct disordered children proceed to advanced conduct disorders. Thus, almost all children with conduct disorders have previously shown (and still show) oppositional behaviors. However, not all children with oppositional behaviors progress to the next levels of intermediate and advanced conduct disorders. Thus, the authors hypothesize that there is a continuum from oppositional defiant behaviors to conduct disorders. When children move from one level of disruptive behavior to the next, they add new behaviors to their repertoire (while still performing lower level behaviors). Breen and Altepeter (1990) suggest that oppositional behaviors are a less severe form of conduct disorders. The distinction between oppositional defiant disorders and conduct disorders is supposed to be one of severity, and not a qualitative one (Breen & Altepeter, 1990; Gardner, 1992; Lahey & Loeber, 1994; Lytton, 1990). Forehand and Long (1991) also suggest that there is a development in externalizing behavior problems, as they state that aggressive behaviors typically start in the preschool years and that noncompliance to parental commands may be at the start of the development of what they call 'aggressive-type problem behaviors'.

According to Breen and Altepeter (1990), externalizing behavior problems (which they refer to as antisocial behavior) can be distinguished along two dimensions, that is, socialized versus unsocialized behaviors, and aggressive versus nonaggressive behaviors. The dimension of socialized versus unsocialized behaviors refers to whether or not the child is group-oriented and has good social relationships. The dimension of aggressive versus nonaggressive behaviors refers to whether or not the behavior reflects violation of the rights of others and/or violent confrontations with another person (e.g. vandalism, firesetting, theft, breaking and entering versus truancy, lying, running away, substance use etc.).

Coie and Dodge (1998) also describe a classification of externalizing behavior problems (referred to as antisocial behavior) along two dimensions. The first dimension runs from overt to covert behaviors and the second dimension consists of more destructive to less destructive behaviors. Thus, four categories of antisocial behavior can be distinguished. They are: aggression (destructive and overt behaviors such as assault, cruelty, and fighting), oppositional behavior (nondestructive and overt behaviors such as temper tantrums, stubbornness, and arguing), status violations (nondestructive and covert

behaviors such as substance use and truancy), and property violations (destructive and covert behaviors such as stealing and vandalism).

Most authors agree that externalizing behavior is relatively stable over time (Breen & Altepeter, 1990; Coie & Dodge, 1998; Forehand & Long, 1991; Gardner, 1992; Kazdin, 1987) but also over generations (Kazdin, 1987). Although many externalizing behaviors decline with age, externalizing behavior problems are relatively stable: Children who are relatively aggressive at a younger age, are still relatively aggressive at a later age. Risk factors that predict long-term externalizing behavior problems are early (childhood-)onset of the behavior, frequency and intensity of the behaviors, a variety of many antisocial behaviors (overt as well as covert) and antisocial behavior across various settings (e.g. home and school) (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Kazdin, 1987; Loeber, 1982; Lytton, 1990).

Delinquency can be defined as a special form of externalizing behavior, in that it refers to a failure to adhere to societal norms and laws, and usually is based on official contact with the courts (Breen & Altepeter, 1990; Kazdin, 1987). Delinquent behavior is not in the focus of this study.

In this study we concentrate on mild forms of externalizing behaviors, that is, on disruptive behaviors such as noncompliance, temper tantrums, and angry, irritable, and argumentative behavior towards parents. In the recent classification of Coie and Dodge (1998) these behaviors fall into the category of oppositional behaviors (overt and nondestructive) and to some degree in the category of aggression (overt and destructive behaviors).

In the literature, much attention has been devoted to finding explanations for the origin of child behavior problems, because insight in factors causing child behavior problems may create possibilities for intervention and prevention. It is generally assumed that family functioning is somehow related to child development and to child behavior problems. In our search for family factors related to child behavior problems, we will discuss several theories that attempt to explain the origin and maintenance of child behavior problems. They are: the parenting approach, the intergenerational family systems approach, the structural family systems approach, and the communication approach.

1.2 Aspects of family functioning related to child behavior problems

In the literature, child behavior problems are frequently related to family functioning. According to Petzold (1998), the concept of family functioning is very important in studying children's behavior, as the family is responsible for supporting,

protecting and guiding the children. According to L'Abate (1998), it is generally assumed that there are strong and influential links between family functioning and individual behavior, and that dysfunctional individuals generally grow up in dysfunctional families. Typically, in theories on family functioning, it is emphasized that changes in one part of the family system bring about changes in other parts (or subsystems) of the family as well (Lange, 1994). Family functioning can be described from several viewpoints, for example focusing on parenting styles (Cusinato, 1998), intergenerational relationships (Cicirelli, 1998), family composition and structure (Petzold, 1998), and familial interaction patterns (Brunner, 1998).

Furthermore, it has to be said, that child behavior problems are supposed to be related not only to family functioning, but to other factors as well. Coie and Dodge (1998) review the literature on the development and persistence of behavior problems and come up with a number of factors. First, they point at factors within the child him/herself, such as heritable characteristics, dispositional factors like a difficult temperament, psychobiological influences like the level of sex hormones, neuropsychological deficits, and autonomic nervous system activity, and mental processes, like intelligence, moral development, or social information processing. Although these factors seem to influence the development of antisocial behavior, the authors emphasize that these factors always operate in interaction with the environment. Parenting practices may exacerbate or inhibit the child's tendencies for developing antisocial behavior. Second, they focus at ecological factors and social stressors, such as poverty, large family size, family loss and illness, and inadequate housing. Children born into disadvantaged environments are at relatively great risk for developing behavior problems later in life. Furthermore, the authors emphasize that the effects of these factors are cumulative: Children who experience multiple family stressors are at greater risk for behavior problems than are children who experience any single stressor. There may also be interactive effects of different factors operating at the same time. Third, they point at peer contexts, such as being rejected by peers or being part of a deviant peer group. Deviant peergroups may serve the modeling and reinforcement of antisocial behaviors.

This study, however, is restricted to the role of family functioning in the development of child behavior problems. In this section we focus on some of the most important approaches to the concept of family functioning, that is, the parenting, the intergenerational, the structural, and the communication approach. Without claiming to be exhaustive, we believe this overview to cover a broad range of viewpoints on family functioning. With this overview of perspectives on family functioning, we try to clarify the concept of family functioning, and the possible relations between family functioning and child behavior problems.

The parenting approach

Many articles have emerged in the literature that relate child behavior problems to parental child rearing strategies (e.g., Baumrind, 1996; Cusinato, 1998; Coie & Dodge, 1998; Dadds, 1987; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Rothbaum & Weisz, 1994; Shucksmith, Hendry, & Glendinning, 1995). The literature on child rearing generally focuses on two dimensions, that is, support and control. Support can be defined as parental behavior that induces the child to feel accepted, comfortable, and approved of, and refers to warmth and responsiveness. Warmth refers to parents' emotional expression of love and empathy, and their creation of a warm and accepting atmosphere. Responsiveness can be defined as parents being sensitive to the needs and feelings of their child and reacting adequately in this respect. Responsiveness refers to parents being attuned to children's needs and demands and to synchrony in parent-child interaction (Baumrind, 1996; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Parental control is defined by Rollins and Thomas (1979, p. 321) as 'behavior of the parent toward the child with the intent of directing the behavior of the child in a manner desirable to the parents'. Concerning control, two qualitatively distinct dimensions can be distinguished, that is coercive control and demanding control. Coercive control refers to parents using external pressure on their child to behave according to their desires and refers to the use of physical punishment, deprivation of privileges, and threatening (Rollins & Thomas, 1979). Demanding control refers to parents' maturity demands, supervision and monitoring. Parents set clear rules and standards, but at the same time they encourage children's independence and individuality. Parents attempt to obtain children's compliance by using inductive discipline, which refers to parents' giving suggestions and explanations, reasoning, and pointing to the consequences of the child's behavior for self and others (Baumrind, 1996; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Rollins & Thomas, 1979).

Studies on parental behavior consistently indicate that parental support, demanding control, and consistency in child rearing are related to positive developmental outcomes in children, whereas coercive control is related to children's social incompetence and behavior problems (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Rollins & Thomas, 1979; Shucksmith et al., 1995). It appears that harsh disciplinary practices (and severe punishment), as well as lax, erratic, inconsistent discipline are associated with children's externalizing behavior problems (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Kazdin, 1987).

Based on the dimensions of support and control, a number of parenting styles can be identified, namely authoritarian parenting (high control, low support), authoritative parenting (high control, high support), permissive parenting (low control, high support), and neglectful parenting (low control, low support). Research clearly showed that authoritative parenting is the most effective parenting style, as it is associated with

positive social and cognitive development, and independence in children (Baumrind, 1996; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Shucksmith et al., 1995).

The question that arises, is how can parents exert control in an effective way within the context of an authoritative parenting style? First, parents can exert control in a demanding, rather than a coercive way. Furthermore, concerning the dimension of parental control, it has been recently emphasized that relations between parental discipline (firm control or strictness) and positive child outcomes, are dependent on the context of the parent-child relationship; positive outcomes are more likely 'when firm control is accompanied by verbal give and take, if the child perceives the parents' rules as legitimate and if parents have respect for the individuality of the child' (Holmbeck, Paikoff, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995, p.101). Baumrind (1996) stated that within a warm, responsive, parent-child relationship, firm control, with occasionally the use of external pressure, or punishment, is positively related to child development. 'The notion that children can or should be raised without using aversive discipline is utopian' (Baumrind, 1996, p. 409). According to Baumrind, it is not aversive discipline per se, but its arbitrary use that can be harmful for children (for example, parents punish undesired behavior at times, but at other times they ignore or reinforce the same behavior). In this respect, the contingent, consistent use of discipline is emphasized (Baumrind, 1996; Cusinato, 1998; Patterson et al., 1992). This means that positive or negative reinforcers should consistently and immediately follow desired or undesired child behavior, respectively. Another aspect of parental control currently receiving much attention is parental supervision or monitoring (Baumrind, 1996; Coie & Dodge, 1998; Holmbeck et al., 1995; Kazdin, 1987; Patterson et al., 1992). Parental monitoring or supervision means that parents keep involved with their children, and consistently know their whereabouts: where and with whom they are, what they are doing, and when they will be home. Monitoring may also refer to a household organization with clear and consistent rules and responsibilities. The concept of monitoring becomes increasingly important when children enter middle childhood and adolescence. Children spend more time with peers and adults outside the family, and they develop increasing capacity for self-regulation and self-control. Parents expect more autonomy and responsibility from their children, and supervise and guide their children's activities at a distance. This shift in parental control is described as a three phase developmental process: from parental regulation, to co-regulation, and finally to self-regulation of the child (Collins, Harris, & Susman, 1995; Holmbeck et al., 1995).

Summarizing, the development of aggressive, externalizing child behavior seems to be related to parenting practices. First, a lack of parental support, resulting in cold, rejecting parental behavior, is related to child externalizing behavior. Second, concerning parental control, frequent coercive control techniques used in an inconsistent way are

related to child behavior problems. Furthermore, a lack of supervision, monitoring, and demanding control appear to be related to child behavior problems. Finally, socially incompetent, aggressive child behavior is associated with authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved parenting styles (Rubin, Stewart, & Chen, 1995).

Direction of effects

Although it is generally accepted that parental functioning is related to child behavior, most studies present correlational results, which leaves open the question of whether negative parental behavior causes child behavior problems or whether child behavior problems cause parents to behave in a certain way. In the literature there has been much debate on this topic. Ge, Conger, Cadoret, and Neiderhiser (1996), for example, studied parents and their adopted children to find out whether heritable characteristics of these children evoke parent responses and thus influence the type of parenting they receive (the evocative model), whether parent behavior evokes child behavior (the parent effect model) or whether there are mutual influences between (possibly genetically linked) child characteristics and parent behavior (the mutual influence model). The results were in favor of the mutual influence model. Although strong genetic influences were found (children's antisocial/hostile behavior was related to biological parents' psychiatric disorders), mutual influences were found between children's antisocial/hostile behavior and mothers' parenting practices.

Pike, McGuire, Hetherington, Reiss, and Plomin (1996) studied whether differential family environments are related to differences between children when genetic differences between children in the same family are controlled for. Pike et al. state that often in the literature relations (that is, correlations) between family functioning, parenting practices and children's antisocial behavior are interpreted causally: ineffective parenting practices are supposed to cause child antisocial behavior. The possibility that the same genetic characteristics in a child may elicit parent behavior and may result in the child behaving in a certain manner, is often ignored. Pike et al. (1996) found a substantial contribution of children's genetic differences to the correlation between family environment (including parental behavior) and child outcome, but also a significant, although modest, contribution of family environment. This means that adolescents who received more parental negativity than their siblings, were more likely to experience adjustment difficulties. The authors conclude that the relation between parental negativity and adolescent adjustment can mainly be explained by the child's genes that are reflected in the parents' behavior as well as in the child's adjustment, although there is some contribution from the parents' behavior. However, the authors state that these findings do not mean that parent behavior is unimportant. After all, the results 'do not preclude the

potential usefulness of parenting interventions; this is a statement of 'what is', rather than 'what can be'.' (Pike et al., 1996, p.600).

Bates, Bayles, Bennett, Ridge, and Brown (1991) studied the origins of externalizing behavior problems of eight year old children. They view the development of child externalizing behavior from a systems model, in which the influence of parental behavior on child behavior is viewed within a context of biological, psychological, and sociological factors mutually influencing each other. They studied 168 families with a child of six months, followed until the age of eight. The results revealed that boys' externalizing behavior at eight years of age was predicted to a modest degree by early difficult temperament, resistance to control, mother's restrictive and punitive control, and mother personality (negative self-descriptions), and to a stronger degree by acting out problems from age three to six. For girls, externalizing problems at eight years were predicted to a modest degree by early difficult temperament and resistance to control, by the absence of mother's positive involvement, by mother personality, and to a moderate degree by discordant problem solving interactions with mother and acting out behaviors from age three to six. Bates et al. conclude that some aspects of early mother-child interactions are predictive of later externalizing problem behavior of boys as well as girls. It appears that less positive involvement and more negative control are related to later externalizing behavior problems (as perceived by mother).

Eron, Huesmann, and Zelli (1991) studied parents' child-rearing practices and children's aggressive and antisocial behavior, to determine what contribution parents make to the development of aggression of children. Concerning parenting, they focused on parental rejection of the child, punishment for child aggression, and children's identification with the parent. The results of their studies showed relationships (correlations) between parental child rearing and contemporaneous child behavior. However, longitudinal data of a cross-lagged panel design showed that parent behavior was more likely a consequence than an antecedent of child aggression. The best predictor of adolescent aggression was the extent of child aggression, regardless of parental behavior. Early parental rejection or punishment did not predict later child aggression when initial aggression was partialled out. Early child aggression did predict later parental rejection or punishment with the effects of early parental behavior partialled out. Only for girls, low identification with mother was found to predict aggression. For boys, early aggression was found to predict later low identification. According to Eron et al. (1991) aggressive behavior of children may emerge early in life and may remain relatively stable over time. To a certain degree aggressive behavior may be genetically determined. However, they also emphasize that, although aggressive behavior may be in part genetically determined, 'aggression as a way of interacting with other persons is learned' (p. 169), and in this learning process, parents may play an important role. Furthermore,

the children in the studies were at least six years old. Perhaps, this learning process takes place before the age of six. Therefore, the influence of parental behavior on younger children's behavior should be studied, as it seemed that differences in parental behavior had little effect on the development of aggression after the age of six. Furthermore, Eron et al. (1991) hypothesize that maybe not all children react with externalizing aggressive behavior to ineffective parenting practices. Some children might for instance show internalizing behavior, which may obscure the effects of parental functioning on aggression. Thus, there may be individual differences.

Henry, Caspi, Moffitt, and Silva (1996) also comment on the early onset of externalizing behavior. They distinguished between men who were serious (violent) offenders and who were nonserious (nonviolent) offenders. Their study revealed that family factors were related to both types of offenses, but that childhood temperament was related primarily to later violent offenses. Thus, it appears that there is a subgroup with early onset of antisocial behavior and relatively violent offending, and a subgroup with a later start and less frequent and less violent offending. There may be different 'developmental pathways' leading to each type of antisocial behavior, with different contributions of temperamental (or genetic) and family (environmental) factors.

Patterson, Capaldi, and Bank (1991) also hypothesized that there is a difference between early starters and late starters of delinquency. Their early starter model is based on the idea that young preschool children (boys) are trained for antisocial behaviors (fighting, temper tantrums, non compliance) in interaction with family members, as a result of poor family management skills and poor monitoring by the parents. The late starter model refers to children (boys) that were not identified as problem children until early adolescence. Parents' ineffective family-management skills and their lack of super-vision and monitoring may lead children to become involved in deviant peer groups, which eventually may result in delinquency. Late starters do not offend until age 15 or later, according to the authors. Patterson et al. (1991, p. 140) assume that late starters are at less risk for a 'career as antisocial adult' because they have a higher level of social skills and are 'more likely to drop out of the antisocial process'. In their study they examined the early-starter model. The results showed that parental monitoring was related to concurrent child antisocial behavior in grade four, but not predictive of antisocial behavior of the child in grade seven. The only variable predictive of antisocial behavior in grade seven was antisocial behavior in grade four. These results are in agreement with the results of the study of Eron et al. (1991).

Coie and Dodge (1998) reviewed the literature on the development of externalizing child behavior and also paid attention to the role of genetic and dispositional factors in the child. However, they state that these factors always interact with environmental factors in the development of behavior problems. As they say, aggressive behavior is not inherited

directly. However, children can inherit a liability for aggressive behavior, and thus may be relatively susceptible to developing behavior problems. Genes (that is, codes for proteins and enzymes) constitute biological genotypes that influence physiological characteristics such as hormone levels and central nervous system reactivity. These physiological characteristics may predispose one toward certain behavioral characteristics and cognitive styles such as impulse control, activity level, or frustration tolerance level. Depending on environmental context (parenting practices, for example) these behavioral and cognitive characteristics might lead to the development of aggressive behavior. Thus, individual genetic differences will play a role in physiological characteristics that, through interaction with environmental characteristics, may lead to individual differences in aggressive and antisocial behavior. The importance of this analysis of Coie and Dodge (1998) is that it shows the complexity of the interaction between genes and environment in the development of child behavior problems. Thus, it also focuses on the importance of environmental influences and of parenting as an aspect of that environment. Parents do not passively react to the child's characteristics, they actively shape the child's development, that is in part genetically influenced.

Summarizing, it can be said that there are indeed relationships between the development of aggressive, externalizing child behavior and parenting practices. A lack of parental support, frequent use of coercive control, and a lack of demanding control all appear to be related to child behavior problems. Furthermore, the literature on the direction of effects in the association between parent and child behavior, indicates that there is evidence for parent effects as well as for child effects. In conclusion, it can be said that a mutual influence model of parent-child interaction best meets the complexity of the social reality. There is evidence of the influence of (partly genetically determined) child characteristics on parenting behavior, and evidence of parenting behavior influencing child behavior. Furthermore, it seems that children's disruptive behavior is relatively persistent over time, as children's early disruptive behavior was often found to be the most predictive variable for children's later disruptive behavior. As mentioned before, it might well be, that the influence of parenting practices and style is greatest when children are still very young (preschool), and when patterns of aggressive or disruptive behavior are not yet well established. Nevertheless, Pike et al. (1996) emphasize that although parental behavior seems to be determined in part by the child's behavior, changes in parental behavior (for example brought about in prevention or intervention programs) can lead to changes in child behavior, which demonstrates the potential influence of parental behavior on child behavior. Furthermore, as Coie and Dodge (1998) emphasize, child behavior always develops in interaction with environmen-

tal influences, such as parenting practices. Thus, parental behavior can be considered an important factor influencing child behavior.

The intergenerational approach

The intergenerational theory on family functioning, also called the contextual approach, tries to explain child behavior problems from the quality of the relationship between child and parents. It is assumed that there are four dimensions underlying human behavior and human relationships, that is, facts, individual psychology, behavioral transactions, and relational ethics (Boszormenyi-Nagy, Grunebaum, & Ulrich, 1991; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Ulrich 1981). Facts are considered part of destiny or reality, such as ethnic identity, gender, the social context, and culture or point in history. Psychology refers to mental functions, such as cognitive and emotional development, and drives. Transactions refer to communication sequences; observable transactions between family members. The dimension of transactions is the dimension that most theories on family functioning focus at, according to the intergenerational theory. However, underlying these dimensions, there is a fundamental fourth dimension of relational ethics, that is considered the cornerstone of the intergenerational theory, and that refers to a balance of fairness among people. Fairness in family relationships means that the interests of all family members are considered (by each family member). A good relationship is characterized by the fulfillment of one's needs, but also by showing concern and considering the other's needs. Thus, intergenerational theory emphasizes the importance of the quality of the relationship between parents and child.

The key concept concerning interpersonal relationships is loyalty, which is considered crucial for the parent-child relationship (Boszormenyi-Nagy et al., 1991; Boszormenyi-Nagy, & Ulrich 1981; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Seaburn, Landau-Stanton, & Horwitz, 1995). Loyalty can refer to vertical loyalty and horizontal loyalty. Vertical loyalty, or filial loyalty, refers to the relationship between parents and their children. Because a child is born to his/her parents and because the child is taken care of by the parents, the child owes loyalty to the parents, just as the parents owe the child care and affection. This means that the child, by nature, has to conform to the expectations of the parents and to adopt and internalize their norms and values; he/she is loyal to his/her roots. The parents, by nature, are responsible for parenting, and caring for their children. Thus, a balance of giving and taking may emerge between parents and child (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Boszormenyi-Nagy et al., 1991). Whether parents and child are satisfied with their mutual relationship, depends on whether they are able to fulfill their own needs, but also on whether they are able to consider the other's needs, and to give concern and gratitude. Thus, children are inherently loyal to their parents; they are not only obliged to give, but also have a right to give. However, the

parent-child relationship is thought to be asymmetrical for some time, as parents (because of age and development) are more capable of giving, than are their young children.

According to Boszormenyi-Nagy et al. (1991, p.205) this balance of giving and receiving between parents and children consists of 'an implicit accounting of what has been given and what is owed in return'. The desire for fairness in the parent-child relationship (and other relationships as well) is thought to be basic and universal.

Horizontal loyalty refers to someone's relationships with peers, partners, siblings and friends. These relationships are also characterized by the balance of giving and taking mentioned above. However, the difference between filial loyalty (the relationship between parents and children) and horizontal loyalty, is that horizontal relationships, in contrast to vertical relationships, can be easily broken up, whereas the bond between parents and children is existentially given and can not be broken up (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Onderwaater, 1986).

When problems arise in a family, the loyalty bonds of family members should be looked at to explain these problems. Loyalty problems may result in children showing problem behavior; internalizing behavior problems (e.g. anorexia, psychosis, phobia) as well as externalizing behavior problems (acting out behavior, delinquency, avoidance, coldness, indifference). These problems may arise if there is imbalance of giving and taking between parents and children (Boszormenyi-Nagy et al., 1991; Boszormenyi-Nagy, & Ulrich 1981; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Seaburn et al., 1995).

First, problems may occur when parents receive a lot of support and concern from their children, but do not give enough support and concern in return, or if they do not acknowledge their children's efforts. If parents are not able to take on their parental responsibilities, children may take over these responsibilities, which is called parentification (meaning that children take over parents' roles). When this happens, the child's own needs and interests are not paid enough attention and the child may be overburdened.

Second, the balance of giving and taking between parents and child may cause problems when parents are nonreceiving and thus deny the child's need and 'right' to give. These parents act overprotecting. They give a lot to the child, but do not ask anything in return.

Third, children may be caught in a split loyalty situation. This happens when parents do not trust each other or make different demands on the child (they set up conflicting claims), so the child can only be loyal to one parent at the cost of his or her loyalty to the other parent. The child is torn between the two parents, which may result in the child showing misbehavior (for example delinquency) to avoid a choice between the parents, and eventually to unite the parents in their approach of the difficult child. A related problem occurs when one parent expects the child to align with him/her against the other parent. Again, the child is drawn into a split loyalty situation.

As intergenerational theory is characterized by a multigenerational perspective, these patterns of loyalty problems are supposed to evolve and be passed on across several generations. If parents received little care and support from their parents, they may tend to give their own children little care and support, expecting their children to give them the care and support they were lacking when they were young. In the same way, parents who did not have the opportunity to give concern and support to their parents when they were young, may tend to give to their children what they were not able to give to their parents. Again, the children lack the opportunity to give support to their parents. This is called an 'intergenerational linkage of substitutive balancing' (Boszormenyi-Nagy et al., 1991, p.212).

Fourth, problems in family functioning may be caused by loyalty conflicts. Loyalty conflicts refer to a conflict between filial loyalty (the loyalty between child and parents) and loyalty to peers. This may happen when norms, values and expectations of parents and peers do not match, and the child is not able to be loyal to parents and peers as well. Sometimes, these loyalty conflicts result in invisible loyalty, with the child denying or ignoring the relationship, or the importance of the relationship, with his or her parents. The child acts as if he or she does not care about parents' needs, interests and expectations. Sometimes, however, children may entirely choose their parents' side, and fail to build up relationships with peers and agemates. As a consequence, social and autonomy development may be hampered.

According to the intergenerational theory, family problems are most likely to emerge during developmental transitions in family life (e.g. adolescence, separation, marriage, death, leaving home). Such transitions bring new demands and necessitate negotiations and change (new needs and interests of family members, growing autonomy of children within intimacy and connectedness with parents etc.). These transitions require a redefinition of loyalty commitments, of the balance of needs and rights to give and receive, and thus provide opportunity for growth and enrichment, but also for problems to arise (Boszormenyi-Nagy et al., 1991; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Ulrich 1981; Seaburn et al., 1995).

Summarizing, if there is balance of giving and taking between parents and children and if there is acknowledgment for each person's efforts, the parent-child relationship is characterized by fairness (justice), appreciation, and mutual trust (and trustworthiness). The climate of trust in the family is expressed in the ability of listening and hearing one another, making statements about one's needs, desires, and rights, making requests of others, expressing gratitude, being available for other family members, and sharing (positive experiences as well as problems) (Boszormenyi-Nagy et al., 1991). Child behavior problems are supposed to emerge when giving and taking are

out of balance, which is expressed in the perception of the parent-child relationship as being unjust, mistrustful, and lacking appreciation.

Although in the literature the intergenerational theory is described in great detail, there is scarce empirical evidence for the hypothesized associations between child behavior problems and the loyalty bonds between parents and children, as expressed in the degree of justice, trust and appreciation in the parent-child relationship. In this study, these hypothesized relationships between child behavior problems and the quality of the parent-child relationship will be examined.

The structural approach

Theories on family structure not only take into account the parent-child relationship, but also stress the structure and organization of the whole family system in trying to explain child behavior problems. According to Colapinto (1991), building on the work of Minuchin (Minuchin, 1974; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981), the function of the family is to support, regulate, nurture, and socialize its members. Family members always have to find some balance between dependency and relatedness on the one hand, and autonomy and individuation on the other hand. To function adequately, families need structure and hierarchy. Family structure has to do with the organization of the family, and is described with the concepts of family subsystems and boundaries. Subsystems refer to various subgroupings within the family. Each subsystem serves specific functions in the family. The subsystem of the spouses (parents), for example, serves the function of marital intimacy and support, but also the function of parental tasks and responsibilities, such as supporting, guiding, and disciplining the children. The sub-system of the siblings, for example, may serve as the children's first peer group in which they learn about social rules. The concept of boundaries refers to the rules that define who participates in which subsystems. For example, rules about who is in charge of the children, who makes decisions in child rearing issues (generally this will be the parents in Western culture) etc. The boundaries within a family need to be strong and clear, but also permeable; when boundaries are extremely rigid and impermeable, there may be a lack of contact and communication between members of various subsystems; when boundaries are unclear however, the members of a subsystem are not able to carry out their tasks and functions adequately (and without interference of other family members). The hierarchy within a family has to do with the concepts of boundaries and subsystems, and refers to the rules concerning the degree to which each family member or family subsystem has decision-making power. Generally, in Western societies, parents are the ones who are 'in charge' of their children (in terms of leadership and protection) (Colapinto, 1991).

However, although families need a clear structure, they also need to adapt this structure as the family goes through its developmental stages (e.g. family with young

children, children entering adolescence, children leaving home). Healthy families are constantly adapting and rearranging their subsystems and boundaries (or rules) in respond to developmental changes. For example, when children grow older, they can handle an increasing degree of autonomy, and need less, or more distant parental discipline and guidance (Colapinto, 1991).

Summarizing, family functioning depends on family structure and family adaptability (Colapinto, 1991). Structure and adaptability are considered complementary, as functional families need stable structure as well as ability to change this structure.

Family dysfunction and individual problems of family members are assumed to be related to these concepts of family structure, hierarchy, and adaptability.

Concerning family structure, problems may arise when the boundaries between family subsystems are overly rigid or overly weak. When the boundaries are overly rigid, there is emotional distance between family members, and a lack of mutual emotional support, nurturance, and protection. This lack of involvement with each other may result in high tolerance for deviation, such as children's problem behavior. The concept of disengagement is used to describe this situation of rigid boundaries. When the boundaries are overly weak, there is overinvolvement and extreme proximity between family members, which is called enmeshment. This may result in a lack of individual differentiation and autonomy. Children may develop problem behavior as the child's social development and development of autonomy is hindered. According to Colapinto (1991), enmeshment appears to be related to psychosomatic as well as antisocial child behavior, whereas disengagement appears to be related primarily to antisocial behavior.

Concerning hierarchy in a family, problems may arise when the hierarchy is weak and ineffective, or when the hierarchy is extremely rigid. In the first case, rules and responsibilities are unclear, and children experience a lack of guidance and protection. In case of a rigid hierarchy, children lack autonomy, and power struggles may characterize parent-child interaction. Furthermore, hierarchy problems may be caused by a dysfunctional parental subsystem, for example when parents are in conflict. This may result in crossgenerational coalitions, if one parent tries to align with the child against the other parent. It is also possible that children develop behavior problems to distract attention from marital conflict and to unite the parents in their approach of his/her problems, and thus protect the family system. This is called a family triad. In what is called a detouring-attacking triad, the child may develop externalizing behavior problems and function as a scapegoat at which parents can direct their anger. In what is called a detouring-protecting triad, the child develops internalizing of psychosomatic problems that unite the parents in their concern for the child (Colapinto, 1991).

Concerning family adaptability, family problems can be explained by a failure to adapt the family structure to internal or external stressors and challenges (e.g.

adolescence, divorce, diseases, financial stressors etc.). In general, this is expressed in conflict avoidance. In the case of enmeshed families, conflict avoidance may take the form of denying differences and disagreements; in the case of disengaged families a lack of interpersonal contact may lead to conflict avoidance. Even 'constant bickering' between family members may be a form of conflict avoidance, as they may express their hostility and anger toward each other, without negotiating the actual conflicts (Colapinto, 1991, p.428).

According to Colapinto (1991) disengaged families tend to be disorganized and unstable, whereas enmeshed families can be characterized as overorganized, overprotecting, overly stable, rigid, overly controlling, and lacking flexibility in transactions and conflict negotiation.

Olson and colleagues (Gorall & Olson, 1995; Olson, 1994; Olson, Sprenkle, & Russell, 1979) elaborated on the idea of family structure as they studied several family systems theories and concluded that two dimensions appear to underlie most family system theories, that is, cohesion and flexibility. The different degrees of cohesion and flexibility in a family are supposed to be related to the functioning of the family. These dimensions of cohesion and flexibility (the latter was conceptualized as adaptability until 1992) resemble Colapinto's concepts of family structure and adaptability described above. Cohesion is defined as the emotional bonding or closeness of family members with each other, and family flexibility as the amount of change in its leadership, role relationships, and relationship rules (Gorall & Olson, 1995; Olson, 1994; Olson et al., 1979). Olson et al. (1979) have distinguished four types of families for each of the dimensions of cohesion and flexibility. Concerning cohesion, families can be characterized as enmeshed, connected, separated, or disengaged (on a dimension ranging from very high cohesion to very low cohesion). It is hypothesized that problems arise in extreme family types: Enmeshed families are characterized by an overidentification with the family, resulting in extreme bonding and involvement, whereas disengaged families are characterized by low emotional bonding and lack of involvement. Concerning flexibility, families can be characterized as chaotic, flexible, structured, or rigid (on a dimension ranging from very high flexibility to very low flexibility). Again it is assumed that poor family functioning is related to extreme family types: Chaotic families are characterized by a lack of leadership and by unclear roles and rules that often change, whereas rigid families are characterized by authoritarian leadership and rigid, strictly enforced rules and roles. Sixteen family types can be distinguished, based on the dimensions of cohesion and flexibility. Family types that are in the moderate range of both the cohesion and the flexibility dimension, are called balanced family types. Families who score extreme on one dimension, but in the moderate range on the other dimension,

are called midrange families. Finally, families who are in the extreme range on both dimensions are called unbalanced family types, and are considered least functional.

Thus, curvilinear relationships are assumed between family cohesion and flexibility on the one hand and family functioning on the other hand. That is, a very low degree and a very high degree of cohesion and flexibility are considered dysfunctional, whereas a moderate degree of cohesion and flexibility is considered most functional. However, there has been much debate in the literature on whether the results of empirical studies indicate curvilinear or otherwise linear relationships between the constructs (Cluff, Hicks, & Madsen, 1994; Green, Harris, Forte, & Robinson, 1991; Olson, 1991; Olson, 1994). According to Olson (1991, 1994) and Gorall and Olson (1995) the problem is not due to false theoretical assumptions of associations between extreme family types and family dysfunction, but to limitations of the measurement instrument. The instrument used to assess cohesion and flexibility, the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES) is hypothesized to work in a linear manner, as it is unable to asses the extremes of high cohesion (enmeshment) and high flexibility (chaos). A new version of the measurement instrument, FACES IV, is being developed, which should be able to measure curvilinear relationships between family cohesion and flexibility, and family functioning (Gorall & Olson, 1995).

Using the Dutch questionnaire to measure family cohesion and flexibility, the Family Dimension Scales (Buurmeijer & Hermans, 1988), it is assumed that again only linear relationships can be measured. According to Janssens and Oud (1990), the questionnaire is, due to formulation of the items, unable to assess the extremes of high cohesion and low flexibility. High cohesion and low flexibility as measured with the Dutch questionnaire do not indicate extreme, but balanced family types, and thus indicate positive family functioning. High scores on the cohesion scale might indicate positive involvement, while low scores on the flexibility scale might indicate a clear (though not rigid) family structure.

As said before, in the literature on the structural approach, not only family cohesion and adaptability are considered relevant aspects of family functioning, but also family hierarchy. A clear family hierarchy is promoted by a healthy functioning parental subsystem (Colapinto, 1991). As the functioning of the parental subsystem is also considered in the present study, it will be described here in more detail. An important aspect of the functioning of the parental subsystem is the parents' marital relationship (Colapinto, 1991). The parents' marital relationship is supposed to influence children's functioning. In the literature, child behavior problems and adjustment problems have been associated with poor marital relationships (Bond & McMahon, 1984; Emery, 1982; Fainsilber Katz & Gottman, 1993; Wierson & Forehand, 1992). Fincham and Osborne

(1993) report after reviewing several studies on the association between marital functioning and child adjustment that empirical data show that the magnitude of this association is often rather low and varies considerably across studies. They hypothesize that this is due to a lack of specification of the construct of marital functioning and suggest that marital conflict (and particularly children's perceptions of marital conflicts), rather than marital discord or marital satisfaction, appears to be related more consistently and strongly to child adjustment.

Fainsilber Katz and Gottman (1993) studied marital interaction and found that particularly a mutually hostile interaction pattern between parents, a pattern characterized by a great deal of hostile marital interaction and mutually contemptuous remarks, better predicted children's externalizing behaviors than a more global measure of marital satisfaction. These findings are consistent with the assumptions of Fincham and Osborne (1993).

Erel and Burman (1995) conducted a meta-analysis on data relating marital quality to the quality of the parent-child relationship. They found support for a positive relationship between the quality of the marital and parent-child relationship. Although the association was of only moderate magnitude, the association appeared relatively robust and stable, as no effects of potential moderators of the relationship were found. Thus, they conclude that positive parent-child relationships are less likely, when the relationship between parents is troubled.

The influence of marital interaction and marital quality on children's behavior and adjustment might be explained by a modeling process (children acquire negative negotiation and interaction patterns by observational learning), by a process in which parenting practices and parent-child interactions serve as mediators between marital interaction and child adjustment, or by the stress that marital hostile interactions impose on children. However, more research is needed to explain the links between marital interactions and child behavior (Fainsilber Katz & Gottman, 1993). Finally, it might also be possible that children's behavior problems impose strain on parents' marriages, resulting in marital conflicts and dissatisfaction. However, the best explanation of the association between marital functioning and child behavior seems to be reciprocal influence, with marital and child behavior influencing each other to a certain extent (Emery, 1982; Fainsilber Katz & Gottman, 1993; Fincham & Osborne, 1993).

The communication approach

In the literature, child externalizing behavior problems are often related to the communication and interactions between parents and children. The quality of the relationship between family members is supposed to be expressed in these interactions and child behavior problems are assumed to be related to dysfunctional interactions

between parents and children. Dysfunctional interaction patterns are characterized by power struggle, misunderstanding, criticizing, and attacking each other. Parents and child accuse each other of having caused the trouble, without being aware that it is an interactional problem and that most of the time it is difficult or even impossible to find out who initiated the problem (Bodin, 1981; Lange, 1994; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). This may lead either to endless escalating conflicts or to avoidance of conflicts. According to Olson et al. (1983) and Clark and Shields (1997) families with a child with behavior problems differ from families with a child without behavior problems, in that the communication between family members is less open and problems and feelings cannot easily be discussed.

In Olson's theory on family systems, it is assumed that there are three basic dimensions characterizing family functioning, that is, the structural dimensions of cohesion and flexibility described above, and family communication. Communication is defined as the family skill level in listening and speaking with one another (Gorall & Olson, 1995, p.218). Communication is viewed by Gorall and Olson (1995) as the key to family system change; positive communication skills allow family members to change their levels of cohesion and flexibility, when necessary.

Family communication processes are considered crucial for healthy family functioning and organization (Walsh, 1995). Especially clarity of communication is viewed as important: Verbal as well as nonverbal messages need to be consistent and congruent. According to Walsh, functional families are characterized by a climate of mutual trust. Free expression of emotions, opinions and responses in a caring, empathic way, and with tolerance of differences, is encouraged. Dysfunctional families, however, are characterized by a climate of mistrust, criticism, blaming, and scapegoating. Sometimes family members block communication and avoid sharing vulnerable, painful, or threatening feelings, which is destructive since communicating is necessary for resolving problems. Otherwise, highly emotional expression of feelings can also be destructive since they evoke emotional conflicts and feelings of despair.

Thus, well functioning families are not characterized by an absence of problems, but by their problem solving abilities. Functional problem solving processes should consist of several steps, that, is, identifying the problem, communicating about it with the persons involved, developing possible solutions, deciding on the best alternative, monitoring whether the solution is carried out well, and finally evaluating the effectiveness of the problem solving process (Walsh, 1995). Summarizing, dysfunctional families are characterized either by avoidance of communication on problems and feelings, or by highly emotional, escalating interactions.

Patterson et al. (1992) developed a more detailed view on the influence of family interactions on child behavior, described in their social interactional stage model of children's antisocial behavior. They focused on boys, since patterns of antisocial behavior and its development might be different for girls. In family interactions, most antisocial behaviors consist of mildly aversive (or coercive) behaviors such as, whining, yelling, teasing, threatening, having temper tantrums, or hitting. The social interactional model is based on the idea that parent-child interactions are important determinants of children's antisocial behavior. Children are thought to develop antisocial behavior in four stages, that is, stage 1, basic training; stage 2, reaction of the social environment; stage 3, deviant peers and polishing antisocial skills; and stage 4, the career antisocial adult. The first stage of basic training usually starts with decreased parental effectiveness in family management and child rearing skills. The child learns to show aversive behavior to turn down aversive behavior of other family members and to get what he or she wants. When this happens more frequently, these aversive exchanges may escalate; the aversive behavior exchanges increase in duration and become more intense. According to Patterson et al. (1992) the most important determinants of this process are first, parents' ineffective parenting skills (that is, poor discipline, poor problem solving skills, no contingent use of positive reinforcement, and a lack of monitoring), and second, the child's temperament. Furthermore, there may be risk factors that have a disruptive effect on parenting skills, such as, environmental stress (because of financial problems, bad housing), divorce, parents' personal problems (e.g. substance abuse), and low socio-economic class. During stage 2, the child enters school and has to cope with two developmental tasks: relating to peers and developing academic skills. Because the child was trained in the family to use aversive behaviors to refuse parental requests, he (as Patterson et al.'s model was developed for boys) may tend to use these same behaviors to manipulate teachers and peers. Thus, the child may fail in academic skills, and may be rejected by his normal peers, which may lead to stage 3, at which the child relates to deviant peers, who were also rejected by normal peers. Thus, a deviant peer group may develop, with a negative view on adult authority. Such deviant peer groups appear to be related to adolescent delinquency and substance abuse. The lack of parental monitoring and discipline further increases the risk of joining deviant peer groups. Finally, stage 4, the career antisocial adult, is based on research findings that indicate that antisocial children often experience problems in (young) adulthood, such as unemployment, substance abuse, high risk of divorce, and having antisocial children themselves.

This model is based on the idea that children who are at a certain stage of the model, are at risk for entering the next step of the model. However, not all children who are trained in antisocial behavior at home, fail in school. And not all children failing in school enter a deviant peer group. However, children who are at an advanced stage of the

model presumably moved through the earlier stages as well. Intervention programs, directed at teaching parents family management skills, should prevent children from moving from one stage to the next.

As a final remark, it must be kept in mind, that the model described above applies to the development of boys' antisocial behavior; whether girls go through the same sequence of stages has yet to be studied.

To return to family interaction and communication, we have to focus on the stage of 'basic training': how can parent-child interaction in problem families be characterized? According to Patterson et al. (1992) antisocial behavior is usually part of so called escape contingencies, which is a form of coercion. Escape contingencies refer to a sequence of one person acting aversively toward another person, with the second person reacting in such an aversive way that the first person stops with the aversive behavior. The second person has learned that his or her aversive behavior had effect, and may again use it in the future. For example: mother scolds the child to clean up his room, the child yells and argues, mother stops scolding, and the child stops yelling and arguing. Thus, the child has learned to yell and argue to escape from mother's requests, and mother has learned not to scold anymore (as the child reinforced mother, by stopping his aversive behavior as soon as she stopped scolding). Patterson et al. (1992, p. 42) call this the 'reinforcement trap', which means that in the short term family members are satisfied with the results of their actions (in the example mentioned above, the child stops yelling and arguing, and mother stops scolding), whereas in the long term the consequences are not that positive (as the child has learned to yell and argue to escape from requests, and mother has learned to give in to the child's aversive behavior). Thus, coercion training refers to interactions between family members, consisting of frequent initiations of aversive interactions, and a tendency to withdraw once the other family member 'counterattacks' (Patterson et al., 1992, p.42).

Patterson et al. hypothesize the frequency (or proportion) and duration of aversive behaviors to be higher in problem families than in normal families. Furthermore, the structure of social exchanges in problem families might be different from the structure of the interactions in normal families. This structure refers to the sequencing of the family members' behaviors and to the question of whether behaviors are contingent on one another. For example, when the child whines, the likelihood that mother yells at the child is increased. Thus, family members' reactions appear to be functionally related to each other. According to Patterson et al. (1992), the structure of coercive interactions between parents and child can be defined by the concepts of negative synchronicity, and negative continuance. Negative synchronicity refers to one family member reacting aversively immediately following the aversive behavior of the other family member. Continuance refers to the likelihood that a family member reacts aversively, and continues to be

aversive, regardless of the reaction of the other family member (Patterson et al., 1992). It is expected that negative synchronicity and negative continuance occur at higher rates in problem families than in normal families. In normal families aversive behavior of a family member is often ignored, or it is stopped by a prosocial or neutral reaction. In problem families aversive behavior of a family member may often lead to a sequence of aversive exchanges; family interaction is more defensive.

Although coercive exchanges occur at a significantly higher rate in problem families than in normal families, they form only a small portion (about ten percent) of parent-child interactions. Furthermore, family members are often hardly aware of these coercive exchanges, as if it is some kind of thoughtless routine (Patterson et al., 1992).

Furthermore, in studying the process of interaction patterns between family members, a lot of attention has been paid to interactions between husbands and wives. It was found that satisfied and dissatisfied married couples differ consistently in what is called negative affect reciprocity (Coan, Gottman, Babcock, & Jacobson, 1997; Cordova, Jacobson, Gottman, Rushe, & Cox, 1993; Wilson & Gottman, 1995). Negative affect reciprocity refers to cycles of negative behaviors, in which distressed couples become caught up. Husband and wife reciprocally attack each other and defend themselves. Wilson and Gottman (1995, p.38) refer to three-chain sequences of negative interchanges, that can be characterized by 'fighting on' or 'fighting back'. In these negative sequences, an aversive behavior of one person is followed by an aversive behavior of the other person, which is in turn followed by another aversive behavior of the first person. Furthermore, they suppose that these negative sequences may not only be characteristic of dissatisfied married couples, but may be characteristic of the interactions between parents and child in problem families as well. They state that 'just as in the marital relationship, negativity in families can become an absorbing state' (Wilson & Gottman, 1995, p. 46). They base their assumption on Patterson's ideas about cycles of coercion between parents and children (Patterson, 1982). It is assumed that parents and children use aversive behaviors to gain compliance from each other. However, more and more aversive events become necessary as the coercive cycle continues and as family members do not want to give in to each other. Thus, parent-child interactions in problem families may also be characterized by negative sequences, in which an aversive behavior of one family member is followed by an aversive behavior of another family member, which is in turn followed by another aversive behavior of the first family member.

These analyses of parent child interaction exchanges try to explain the origin of child behavior problems at a microsocial level. At a macrosocial level, parenting practices are thought to control these microsocial exchanges. For example, it is hypothesized that coercive exchanges occur more often in families in which rules and roles tend to be unclear, and where parents and child tend to have equal power (Patterson et al., 1992).

1.3 Relationships among aspects of family functioning

In the above paragraphs, child behavior problems were tried to be explained from various theoretical approaches, that is, the parenting approach, the intergenerational family systems approach, the structural family systems approach, and finally the communication approach. Each approach uses its own concepts to explain relationships between child behavior problems and family factors. It could be argued that there are relationships between certain concepts, and that certain concepts might even focus at the same aspects of the reality of family life, while using different concepts. Although family problems may be labeled differently by the different theoretical approaches, the differences may be not as large as they seem to be at first sight.

<u>Relationships between the theoretical approaches</u>

The parenting approach emphasizes parenting practices as correlates of child behavior problems. From the literature it is clear that first, a lack of parental support and responsiveness, resulting in cold, rejecting parental behavior, is related to child external-izing behavior. Second, concerning parental control, frequent coercive control tech-niques, used in an inconsistent way, are related to child behavior problems. Furthermore, a lack of supervision, monitoring, and demanding control appear to be related to child behavior problems. Finally, socially incompetent, aggressive child behavior is associated with authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved parenting styles. Although there has been much debate in the literature on the direction of effects (whether parent behavior influences child behavior, or whether the reverse is true), we adopted a mutual influence model, which is based on the idea that parents and children mutually influence each other.

According to the intergenerational family systems approach, child behavior problems may arise if there is imbalance of giving and taking between parents and children, which is expressed in the perception of the parent-child relationship as lacking justice, trust, and appreciation. The climate of trust in the family is supposed to be expressed in the ability of listening to one another, of expressing one's needs, and of sharing feelings.

More specifically, problems may occur when parents receive a lot of support and concern from their children, but don't give enough support and concern in return, which may result in parentification when children take over parental tasks and responsibilities. In terms of the parenting approach, these parents are not very sensitive to the child's needs and feelings, they show little support and responsiveness, and there is little synchrony in parent-child interaction, as it is conceptualized by Baumrind (1996).

Furthermore, problems may arise when parents are nonreceiving and thus deny the child's need and 'right' to give (these parents act overprotecting). In terms of the parenting approach, it seems clear that, as the parents act overprotecting, the child lacks the opportunity for showing mature behavior. The parents don't expect increasing autonomy and responsibility from the child as he/she grows older. Since stimulating the child's autonomy and responsibility are characteristic of demanding control, these parents are presumably low in demanding control.

Problems may also arise when children are caught in a split loyalty situation, with both parents making different demands on the child. First, it can be argued that these parents are not sensitive to their child's need to be loyal to both parents, and thus they lack responsiveness, according to the parenting approach. Second, it can be argued that parenting practices are ineffective in this situation, because of inconsistent parental control; the parents disagree on the rules or on what they demand from their child.

Finally, according to the intergenerational approach problems may be caused by a conflict between filial loyalty (the loyalty between child and parents) and loyalty to peers. Sometimes, these loyalty conflicts result in invisible loyalty. Sometimes, however, children may entirely choose their parents' side, and fail to build up relationships with peers and agemates. In the case of invisible loyalty, the child refuses to live up to the parents' rules and expectations. Thus, it can be argued from the parenting approach that these parents fail to control the child's behavior. It seems likely that the parents lack appropriate control techniques (such as using effective sanctions, or monitoring the child's whereabouts) to influence their child. In the case of the child acting overly loyal to the parents and failing to build up relationships with peers, it might be that parents fail to encourage the child's independence and own responsibility. They don't allow the child more autonomy and thus they might be low in demanding control. Furthermore, it may be possible that they force the child to conform to their rules and standards, and that they use coercion to prevent the child from building up a life of its own. The use of force and coercion are characteristic of coercive control, and thus, these parents may be high on coercive control.

The structural approach on family systems emphasizes the importance of a clear structure and hierarchy in families. First, problems may be related to the degree of cohesion in the family, and arise when the boundaries between family members are either very weak, resulting in enmeshment, or very rigid, resulting in disengagement. The situation of very high cohesion, called enmeshment, might be related to the situation of children being overly loyal to their parents and family, as was described in the intergenerational approach. The children fail to develop autonomy and independence (and their parents will be low on demanding control, as was argued above). The situation of

disengagement, however, might be related to the intergenerational construct of invisible loyalty: there is very little involvement with other family members and the family. Since there is little involvement between family members, presumably the parents are low on support and responsiveness toward the child. Furthermore, since there is little involvement in the family and the child does not seem to care about the parents' rules and expectations, it is plausible/likely that the parents fail to exert any control at all. Thus, the parents may be low on coercive control as well as on demanding control.

However, we described that the Dutch questionnaire, the Family Dimension Scales, seems to be unable to assess the extreme of high cohesion, called enmeshment. High scores on this instrument seem to indicate high, but not extremely high, cohesion, and be related to healthy family functioning. High cohesion refers to high closeness and involvement between family members (Gorall & Olson, 1995). It is to be expected that within a close, involved family climate, the parents will be affectionate and warm, and that they are willing to consider the child's needs and feelings. Thus, using this measurement instrument to assess family cohesion, high scores on cohesion might be related to a warm, responsive parenting style. Furthermore, it might be argued that high cohesion, indicating high involvement and closeness, might be related to a balanced parent-child relationship, in which family members care about each other and consider each other's needs and feelings.

Second, according to the structural approach, problems may be related to the level of flexibility in the family. Families need to change their structure, rules, and responsibilities in reaction to transitions in family life (for example, when children grow older and enter adolescence). According to Olson et al. (1979) problems may arise when families are too high on flexibility, or when they are too low on flexibility. The extreme of high flexibility, the so called chaotic family, is characterized by a lack of leadership and unclear, often changing rules. It seems likely that parenting in these families is characterized by a lack of parental control. The extreme of low flexibility, called rigidity, is characterized by authoritarian leadership and strictly enforced rules. Thus, it seems likely that parenting in these families is characterized by firm, coercive control, as the parents expect their children to conform to their rules without discussion. Furthermore, parenting in these rigid families will be characterized by a lack of demanding control, as the parents do not encourage their children to participate in family decisions, or to take the responsibility of making their own decisions. However, the Dutch questionnaire for assessing family flexibility, the Family Dimension Scales, is not able to measure the extreme of low flexibility, that is, rigid families. Low scores on flexibility seem to indicate families with a clear, but not rigid structure, and seem to indicate healthy family functioning. In those families with a clear structure, parents set clear rules and standards, while at the same time they allow negotiations about the rules and they encourage

children's independence. Thus, when the Family Dimension Scales are used for assessing family flexibility, low scores on flexibility (indicating a clear family structure) will be related to a high degree of demanding control.

Furthermore, in the structural family systems approach, the importance of a clear hierarchy in the family is emphasized. In the case of a rigid hierarchy, there is authoritarian leadership, the children lack autonomy, and parent-child interaction may be characterized by power struggles. It seems likely that parenting in these families is characterized by an emphasis on coercive control and a lack of demanding control and supervision. In the case of a weak hierarchy, it can be assumed that parents fail to exert control over the child's behavior. The child experiences a lack of guidance and protection (Colapinto, 1991). Hierarchy problems might also be caused by a dysfunctional parental subsystem, for example when parents are in conflict. This situation will correspond to the split loyalty situation as is described in the intergenerational family therapy approach; parents disagree about what they expect from the child. To escape from these conflicting claims, the child may develop behavior problems and function as a scape-goat, at which the parents direct their anger and concern. This situation is also acknowledged in the intergenerational family systems approach, as a child suffering from a split loyalty situation may develop behavior problems to escape from a choice between the parents and to unite the parents in their mutual concern for the child.

In the structural family systems approach, it is emphasized that an appropriate hierarchy in the family needs (at least in Western society) a well-functioning parental subsystem for carrying out parental responsibilities and tasks. If parents are not able to carry out their parental and household tasks, children may take over. This hierarchy reversal is also recognized in the intergenerational approach, in the situation of parents who take a lot from their children and do not give very much in return, which may result in parentification. Furthermore, the structural approach emphasizes the importance of the parental subsystem, not only for parental tasks and responsibilities, but also for spousal support and intimacy. For example, Erel and Burman (1995) found very consistent relationships between marital quality and the quality of the parent-child relationship. Positive parent-child relationships are less likely when marital quality is low. Thus, it might be expected that there are relationships between marital quality and the quality of the parent-child relationship, as is conceptualized in the intergenerational approach. The lower the marital quality (that is, the more marital conflict and the lower marital satisfaction), the less the parent-child relationship will be characterized by trust, justice and fairness.

Finally, in the communication approach, child behavior problems are related to family interaction patterns. First, it is hypothesized that the communication between

parents and child in problem families is more negative than the communication in families with a child without behavior problems (Olson et al., 1983). Furthermore, it is assumed that dysfunctional families are characterized either by avoidance of communication on conflicts and disagreements, or by highly emotional, escalating discussions.

Reasoning from the parenting approach, it might be expected that a high quality of parent-child interaction (that is, open and problem free discussion of feelings and needs) is correlated with warm, responsive parenting. Warmth, for example, refers to parents' expressions of love and empathy, and acceptance, which can be viewed as examples of positive communication messages. Responsiveness refers, among other things, to synchrony in parent-child interaction, according to Baumrind (1996). Thus, a parenting style that is characterized by many supportive and responsive expressions of the parents will be related to open, positive communication between parents and child. Vuchinich, Wood, and Vuchinich (1994) studied families with child behavior problems and families without these problems. They observed parent-child interaction (during a conflict discussion) and concluded that parental warmth toward the child was positively associated with the quality of family problem solving (the latter can be viewed as an important aspect of communication). According to the authors, parental warmth provides a context for open communication in which each person's needs and feelings are taken into consideration, and in which compromises can be reached. Furthermore, it is to be expected that open and positive communication patterns between parents and child will be related to a high degree of demanding control and a low degree of coercive control. Demanding control refers to parental use of induction, suggestions, explanations and reasoning, which can be viewed as examples of positive, problem solving communication. Coercive control, on the other hand, refers to the use of physical punishment, deprivation of privileges, and threatening to force the child to comply with parental requests (Rollins & Thomas, 1979). Parents use strict rules and request compliance to these rules without discussion. Thus, the use of coercive control will probably be related to negative and coercive parent-child interactions, and a lack of openness in the communication.

Furthermore, Walsh (1995) considers family communication processes crucial for healthy family functioning, and states that functional families are characterized by a climate of mutual trust, with free expression of emotions and opinions in a caring, empathic way, whereas dysfunctional families are characterized by a climate of mistrust, criticism, blaming and scape-goating. This description can be linked to the intergenerational approach, in which mutual trust in parent-child relationships is emphasized. Furthermore, according to Boszormenyi-Nagy et al. (1991) the climate of trust in parent-child relationships is expressed in for example listening and hearing one another, making statements about one's needs and desires, expressing gratitude and concern, and sharing

needs and feelings. Thus, this climate of trust is clearly expressed in expressions of open and positive communication between family members.

In the structural family systems approach, the emphasis is on the dimensions of cohesion and flexibility. According to Gorall and Olson (1995) communication is an important skill which makes changes in the family structure possible. They hypothesize that balanced families (which fall in the moderate range of both the cohesion and the flexibility dimension) tend to have more positive communication skills than unbalanced families (which are in the extreme range of both the dimensions of cohesion and flexibility). Concerning cohesion, Olson et al. (1979) assume that in disengaged families (with extremely low cohesion) family members are highly independent of each other, they spend a lot of time apart from the family, there is low involvement, and there is primarily individual decision-making. Thus, it can be argued that there is little open communication, as family members do not spend much time together and are hardly involved in each others' lives. Enmeshed families on the other hand, which are characterized by extremely high cohesion, are characterized by many shared activities and high involvement, and decisions must be made by the whole family. As family members spend much time together, there has to be much interaction and communication. According to Gorall and Olson (1995) however, communication skills in enmeshed families are less positive than in families with a moderate level of cohesion (the so called separated or connected families). As the questionnaire to assess family cohesion (the Family Dimension Scales) is unable to assess the extreme of high cohesion, however, it may be assumed that high scores on this cohesion scale (that indicate high cohesion and involvement, but not enmeshment) are related to positive communication skills, that is, to open and positive communication between family members. Concerning family flexibility, Olson et al. (1979) describe chaotic families (with very high flexibility) as families characterized by a lack of leadership, poor problem solving and endless negotiation, whereas rigid families are characterized by authoritarian leadership, poor problem solving and very limited (or hardly any) negotiation. Families with a moderate level of flexibility (the so called flexible and structured families) are characterized by structured negotiation and good problem solving. However, as the Dutch instrument for assessing family flexibility (the Family Dimension Scales) is unable to assess the extreme of very low flexibility (rigid families), low scores on this scale (which do not indicate a rigid, but structured family) would be expected to correlate with open and positive communication between family members.

1.4 Research questions

In this study we examined aspects of family functioning in two groups of families, that is, families with a child showing behavior problems and families with a child not showing behavior problems. From now on, we will speak of problem families and normal families, respectively. A family was defined as a problem family if the parents reported that they experienced difficulties in child rearing and if they judged their child's behavior as difficult. A family was defined as a normal family if the parents reported no special difficulties in child rearing and in their child's behavior. Thus, we used the parents' subjective evaluation as the basis for assigning families to the problem or normal group of families. As said before, we focused on children with mild forms of externalizing behavior problems (see Chapter Four for more information on the participants of the study). Although we do not prefer the terms 'problem' and 'normal' families, since they mean an oversimplification, we will still use them for the sake of clarity and to avoid extensive descriptions of the two types of families. In this study, we compared family functioning between these two groups of families.

In the literature, the relationships between family functioning and child behavior problems, as described in the former paragraphs, are mainly based on empirical studies on families with moderate to severe child rearing difficulties (e.g., Cusinato, 1998; Kazdin, 1987; Patterson et al. 1992), and on clinical experiences with families that were referred for treatment (for example in the family system approaches of Boszormenyi-Nagy et al., 1991; Gorall & Olson, 1995; Minuchin, 1974; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981). In this study, we concentrated on families with children with mild forms of externalizing behavior problems; families that had not earlier been referred for treatment and had not received help for child rearing difficulties. There may be differences between the problem families in our study and the problem families with more severe child rearing difficulties that were described in the literature. According to Kousemaker and Timmers-Huigens (1985), problem families differ greatly in the extent to which they experience child rearing difficulties and in the type of problems. They distinguish between four types of families on a continuum from normal families to problem families. The normal families, placed at the one end of the continuum, are characterized by no special child rearing difficulties. The parents of these families feel able to handle difficult situations in child rearing satisfactorily. The problem families, placed at the other end of the continuum, experience severe and enduring difficulties in child rearing or in handling the child's problem behavior. They need specialized help and treatment to overcome the difficulties. Between these two poles of the continuum, Kousemaker and Timmers-Huigens distinguish between families experiencing stress in parenting and families experiencing a crisis in parenting. Families experiencing parenting stresses, feel they do not succeed in child

rearing very well. Although they do not experience severe difficulties, the parents of these families often seek help, in the form of advice (from friends, relatives, or professionals), books, or parent programs, to be better able to handle the daily hassles of parenting. Families in crisis suffer from sudden difficulties in child rearing that are difficult to handle just based on prior parenting experience. The parents feel they cannot overcome the crisis without professional help. Often these crises are caused by stressful life events such as financial problems, illness, or death, that may disturb an already unsteady balance in the family. Furthermore, the persistence of parenting stresses over time may exceed family strength, thus causing a family crisis. Thus, Kousemaker and Timmers-Huigens (1985) recommend differentiating between those families experiencing more severe problems in parenting that need specialized help and treatment, and those families experiencing mild problems in parenting that can be helped by less specialized types of help such as parenting advice, support, and guidance. The problem families in our study can be situated on the continuum of Kousemaker and Timmers-Huigens in the category of families experiencing parenting stresses. Thus, it will be interesting to examine whether the relationships between child behavior problems and aspects of family functioning, that were found in the literature, will be reproduced in our study. We compared mildly disturbed problem families with normal families to examine whether these groups differed concerning parenting characteristics, the quality of the parent-child relationship, family structure, and the communication between family members. Thus, we examined whether the differences between problem families and normal families that were found in the literature can be replicated for the comparison of mildly disturbed problem families (experiencing mild parenting stresses) and normal families.

Furthermore, we examined whether parental and family functioning could be enhanced by offering the parents of the problem families a parent program. For this purpose, the parents of half of the problem families were offered a parent program that was directed at improving parent-child communication and parents' problem solving skills. The parent program is described in more detail in chapter Three of this thesis. Since the parent program is directed at parents' communication skills, we expected to demonstrate effects of the program mainly on the communication between parents and children. However, we also examined whether (generalization) effects of the program could be found on parenting practices, the quality of parent-child relationships, and family structure.

Which research questions can be inferred from the theoretical analysis described in the former paragraphs? In the second paragraph of this chapter, child behavior problems were related to parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, family structure, and parent-child communication. In the third paragraph of this chapter, we

discussed possible relationships among the various aspects of family functioning. In the following, we will subsequently describe our research questions concerning differences between problem and normal families, concerning relationships among aspects of family functioning, and concerning the effects of the parent program.

<u>Research questions concerning differences between problem families and normal families</u>

Concerning <u>parenting practices,</u> the development of child behavior problems appears to be related to a lack of parental support resulting in cold, rejecting parental behavior, to frequent coercive control techniques, and to a lack of supervision, monitoring, and demanding control.

We examined whether parents offer less support and tend to use more coercive control and less demanding control in problem than in normal families.

Concerning the <u>quality of the parent-child relationship</u>, as is conceptualized in the intergenerational approach, we summarized that child behavior problems are likely to emerge when giving and taking in the parent-child relationship are out of balance, which is expressed in the perception of the parent-child relationship as being injust, mistrustful, and lacking appreciation.

In this study we examined whether the parent-child relationship in the problem families was characterized by less justice, trust and appreciation than the relationship in the normal families.

Concerning <u>family structure</u>, we concluded that child behavior problems appear to be related to a lower degree of cohesion and a less clear family structure, and to the quality of the relationship between the parents.

In this study we expected a lower degree of cohesion and a less clear structure in problem families than in normal families. We also expected a lower level of marital satisfaction in problem families than in normal families.

Concerning the <u>communication between family members</u>, we concluded that child behavior problems are related to the degree in which parent-child interaction is characterized by openness and conflicts. When parent-child interaction is viewed in more detail, child behavior problems are assumed to be related to the proportion of aversive expressions, and the rates of negative synchronicity, negative continuance, and negative sequences.

In this study we examined whether the communication between parents and between parents and children would be more negative and less open in problem than in

33

normal families. At a more detailed, microsocial level, we determined whether negative interactions were more frequent in problem families, and whether problem families were characterized by higher rates of negative synchronicity, continuance, and sequences than were normal families.

<u>Research questions concerning the relationships among aspects of family functioning</u>

In the third paragraph of this chapter, we first compared the <u>parenting approach</u> and the <u>intergenerational approach</u>. We assumed that imbalance of giving and taking within the parent-child relationship, characterized by a lack of trust, justice, and appreciation, will be related to a lack of parental support (warmth and responsiveness). Furthermore, we assumed that imbalance of giving and taking will be related to either very low demandingness on the part of parents (the parents may lack appropriate control techniques), or a high degree of coercive control.

In this study we examined whether the degree to which the parent-child relationship is characterized by trust, justice and appreciation is positively related to the degree of parental warmth and responsiveness. Furthermore, we examined whether the degree of trust, justice and appreciation in the parent-child relationship is positively related to the degree of demanding control, and negatively related to the degree of coercive control.

Second, we compared the structural approach on family functioning with the parenting approach and the intergenerational approach, respectively.

Concerning the comparison of the <u>structural</u> and the <u>parenting approach</u>, we hypothesized that a high degree of cohesion will be related to a warm and responsive parenting style. Furthermore, we assumed that a high level of flexibility (that is, a lack of clear structure) will be associated with a lack of parental control (whether demanding or coercive control). A low level of flexibility, called rigidity, will be associated with high levels of coercive control (and presumably low levels of demanding control). However, when the Family Dimension Scales are used for assessing family flexibility, we assume that low scores on the flexibility scale indicate clear family structure. Thus, we expect low scores on flexibility (indicating a clear family structure) to be related to appropriate levels of parental control, that is, high demanding control, but low coercive control. We expect high scores on flexibility (indicating a lack of structure) to be related to a lack of both demanding and coercive control.

Concerning family hierarchy, we hypothesized that either a rigid or a weak hierarchy will be related to family problems. A rigid hierarchy will be associated to high coercive, and low demanding control (autonomy granting) on the part of the parents,

whereas a weak hierarchy will be related to a lack of both coercive and demanding control.

Furthermore, we hypothesized that hierarchy problems might be related to the functioning of the parental subsystem. Thus, low marital quality might possibly be related to high coercive, or low demanding control. Furthermore, the parent-child relationship might suffer from problems in the parental relationship. Thus, low marital quality might be related to low levels of warmth and responsiveness.

In this study we examined whether family cohesion is positively related to parental warmth and responsiveness, and whether a clear family structure (that is, a low level of flexibility) is negatively related to parental coercive control, and positively related to parental demanding control.

In this study we did not examine family hierarchy. However, we did examine the quality of the marital relationship. We investigated whether marital quality is positively related to parental warmth and responsiveness, and to parental demanding control, and negatively related to parental coercive control.

Concerning the comparison of the <u>structural</u> and the <u>intergenerational approach</u>, we hypothesized that high levels of cohesion will be related to a balanced parent-child relationship that is characterized by mutual trust, justice and appreciation.

Concerning flexibility, we did not have clear hypotheses about possible associations between family flexibility and the quality of the parent-child relationship. Since low levels of flexibility as measured with the Family Dimension Scales are assumed to indicate a clear family structure and healthy family functioning, low levels of flexibility may also be associated with healthy parent-child relationships, that is, with a balanced relationship that is characterized by trust, justice and appreciation.

Furthermore, we stressed the importance of the parental subsystem for the functioning of the family and for maintaining a clear (neither rigid nor weak) hierarchy in the family. We assumed that marital quality will be related to the quality of the parent-child relationship. That is, high marital quality will be related to balanced parent-child relationships that are characterized by trust, justice, and appreciation.

In this study we examined whether the degree of mutual trust, justice and appreciation in the parent-child relationship is positively related to the level of family cohesion, to a clear family structure, and to the quality of the marital relationship.

Finally, we compared the communication approach to the parenting, intergenerational, and structural approach, respectively.

Concerning the comparison between the <u>communication approach</u> and the <u>parenting approach</u>, we hypothesized that a high quality of parent-child communication

will be associated with a warm, responsive family climate. Furthermore, we expected that a high quality of communication (that is, open, positive communication) will be related to a high level of demanding and a low level of coercive control.

In this study we examined whether the quality of parent-child communication is positively related to parental warmth and responsiveness, and to demanding control, and negatively related to parental coercive control.

Concerning the <u>communication approach</u> and the <u>intergenerational approach</u>, we hypothesized that open and positive communication between family members will be related to a balanced parent-child relationship, that is characterized by trust, justice and appreciation.

In our study we examined whether the quality of parent-child communication is positively related to the degree of mutual trust, justice and appreciation in the parent-child relationship.

Comparing the <u>communication approach</u> and the <u>structural approach</u>, we hypothesized that, using the Family Dimension Scales for measuring family cohesion and flexibility, high scores on cohesion (indicating positive involvement and family functioning) and low scores on flexibility (indicating a clear, but not rigid, family structure) will be related to positive communication skills.

In this study we examined whether the quality of parent-child communication is positively related to family cohesion and to a clear family structure.

<u>Research questions concerning the effects of the parent program</u>

For examining effects of the parent program, the program was offered to the parents of the problem families. A pretest posttest control group design was used with approximately half of the problem families attending the parent program between the pretest and the posttest (the experimental group) and approximately half of the problem families attending the program after both the pretest and the posttest had been conducted (the control group). Thus, we were able to compare the families of which the parents had already attended the parent program with the families of which the parents had not yet attended the program. More information on the design of this study is presented in chapter Four.

Concerning <u>parenting practices</u>, we examined whether parents of the experimental group (who had attended the parent program) improved their parenting skills when compared against parents of the control group (who had not yet attended the parent

program). We examined whether parents who had followed the parent program offered more support, and used less coercive control and more demanding control than parents who had not yet followed the parent program.

Concerning the quality of the parent-child relationship as is conceptualized in the intergenerational approach, we examined whether the parent-child relationship in the families of the experimental group improved concerning the level of appreciation, justice, and trust, as compared to the parent-child relationship in the families of the control group.

Concerning family structure, we examined whether the families of the experimental group were characterized by a higher level of cohesion, a more clear structure, and a higher level of marital satisfaction than the families of the control group.

Concerning parent-child communication, we examined whether the quality of the communication between parents and child improved in the experimental families when compared against the communication between parents and child in the control families. That is, we first examined whether the communication in the experimental families was characterized by more openness and less conflicts than in the control families. Furthermore, we examined whether the communication in the experimental families was characterized by a lower rate of negative communication, and by less negative synchronicity, negative continuance, and negative sequences, than in the control families.

2. Parent Education[1]

As we explained in the first chapter, in this study the relationship between family functioning and child behavior problems is explored. In the last paragraph of the first chapter, the research questions were presented. First, we examined differences in family functioning between problem families and normal families. Second, we analyzed relationships among aspects of family functioning. Third, we explored the possibility of improving family functioning by evaluating the effects of our newly developed parent program. In this second chapter, we will present an overview of the different types of parent education programs that have been developed in recent years. We discuss the most important types of parent education programs and their theoretical backgrounds. In the third chapter we present our newly developed parent program, 'Parents and children talking together', and compare it with the types of programs that we will discuss shortly.

Parent education can be defined as 'a systematic and conceptually based program, intended to impart information, awareness, or skills to the participants on aspects of parenting' (Fine, 1980, p.5). Parent education programs are designed for use with relatively small groups of parents (about eight to fifteen parents) (Alvy, 1994).

Generally parent education programs are directed at several goals, that is, providing information on child development and child rearing strategies, developing self awareness, teaching effective methods of discipline and problem solving, improving parent-child communication, and making family life more enjoyable (Dembo, Sweitzer, & Lauritzen, 1985; Fine, 1980; Fine & Henry, 1989). All types of parent education programs are based on the idea that parental and familial functioning are somehow related to children's functioning and aim at increasing the level of parental and familial functioning (Lamb & Lamb, 1978). Parent education may serve the goals of early intervention and prevention of child behavior problems. Parent education is distinguished from parent or family therapy, in that therapists have a more personal, in-depth relationship with the family members, while parent educators often limit their involvement in a parent's or family's personal problems. Parent education deals primarily with common child rearing problems faced by many parents. Furthermore, parent education programs are limited to a fixed number of weekly sessions, whereas therapy usually has no predetermined number of sessions (Dembo et al., 1985; Fine, 1980).

In this chapter we will further distinguish between parent programs based on 1. the individual psychology of Adler, 2. humanistic psychology (client-centered therapy), 3. social learning theory (behavior modification approaches), 4. rational emotive theory,

---

[1] The text of this chapter is also part of a chapter on parent education in a handbook on family psychopathology: Gerris, J.R.M., Van As, N.M.C., Wels, P.M.A., & Janssens, J.M.A.M. (1998). From parent education to family empowerment programs. In L. L'Abate, Family Psychopathology: The relational roots of dysfunctional behavior (pp. 401-426). New York: Guilford Press.

and 5. combinations of these theoretical perspectives. In the following, we will first give a brief description of the theoretical assumptions of each type of program. Second, we consider which aspects of family functioning are addressed by each type of program. Third, we consider whether each type of program aims at changes in parental cognitions and beliefs, or at changes in parental behavior. Finally, the effectiveness of these types of parent education programs is discussed.

2.1 Theoretical assumptions underlying parent education programs

The first question to be answered is on what theoretical assumptions the various parent education programs are based. In the following we give a brief description of each parent education program's underlying theory.

Parent education programs based on the individual psychology of Adler

Adlerian parent programs are based on the idea that Western society is based on the principles of democracy and social equality. It is assumed that the family should reflect these values. Parent-child interaction should be characterized by equality (which does not mean that parents and children are the same, but rather that they are equal in terms of value or worth) (Christensen & Thomas, 1980). Furthermore, family life should reflect individual rights and responsibilities, promote cooperation in the family, and self-confidence and independence in children (Alvy, 1994; Christensen & Thomas, 1980). There are four main Adlerian parent education techniques: 1. teaching parents the goals of children's misbehavior, 2. encouragement, 3. the use of natural and logical consequences, and, 4. family meetings.

The first Adlerian parent education technique is teaching parents what is called the goals of children's misbehavior. An important assumption herein is that a child's behavior (whether positive or negative) always reflects a need 'to belong', to develop a sense of social acceptance and usefulness (Alvy, 1994; Christensen & Thomas, 1980; Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1976a, 1976b). If children cannot meet their goals (to belong) through constructive behavior, they may show destructive behavior in order to meet their goals (Alvy, 1994). Four types of misbehavior (or goals of misbehavior) are distinguished, that is, attention, power, revenge, and display of inadequacy. It is assumed that children go through these four goals of misbehavior in a fixed order. First, children who do not feel accepted, may try to acquire a place of belonging by getting attention. Second, they may switch to the goal of power. Third, they may aim at the goal of revenge (hurting others as they feel hurt by others). Finally, they may give up in discouragement and no longer take responsibility (Christensen & Thomas, 1980; Dreikurs & Blumenthal, 1976).

Parents can help their children to show cooperative and desirable behavior by using the following techniques of encouragement, the use of consequences, and family meetings.

Encouragement, the second Adlerian technique, refers to showing acceptance and appreciation of the child and his or her behavior. Encouragement is distinguished from praise, approval, or rewards, in that it is assumed to be used in a non-contingent way. It is not meant to reinforce the behavior the parent likes to see, but it is meant to develop self-confidence and self-worth in children (Alvy, 1994; Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1976a, 1976b).

The third basic Adlerian technique is the use of natural and logical consequences, which refers to allowing children to learn from the consequences of their behavior (Alvy, 1994). The use of natural consequences refers to allowing children to learn from the 'natural order of events' (no gloves in winter means cold hands), whereas the use of logical consequences refers to allowing the child to learn from what is called the reality of the social order (not being dressed in time means being late for school). The purpose of the use of natural and logical consequences is not to force children's compliance, but to encourage them to be responsible for their choices and decisions (Alvy, 1994; Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1976a, 1976b). Natural and logical consequences are preferred to punishment, because punishing the child implies inequality and the power of an authority (the parent) and is not based on mutual respect (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1976a, 1976b).

The fourth Adlerian technique is conducting Family Meetings, regular meetings with all family members present, to plan for family chores and family fun, to resolve conflicts, and to make decisions.

Parent education programs based on humanistic psychology and client-centered therapy of Rogers

Parent education programs based on humanistic psychology and Carl Rogers' client-centered therapy aim at building warm, close and democratic parent-child relationships.

Human relationships should be characterized by acceptance (being non-judgmental toward each other), and genuineness (being honest in expressing one's feelings) (Alvy, 1994). It is assumed that people are able to find their own solutions to problems once they recognize, express and accept their feelings. Each person is responsible for his/her own problems and for finding his/her own solutions (Lamb & Lamb, 1978). Parent education programs based on this philosophy emphasize the expression of feelings between parents and children (Lamb & Lamb, 1978). Gordon (1970, 1980) developed a well-known parent education program called Parent Effectiveness Training. The PET program aims at building a warm relationship between parents and children based on mutual positive feelings and respect, by using (Rogerian,

client-centered) communication skills: Parents learn to *communicate* respect and acceptance of their children's feelings as well as their own feelings (Lamb & Lamb, 1978). The parent program begins by teaching parents they can feel accepting or unaccepting toward their children's behavior. Subsequently it teaches parents about problem ownership. If the child owns the problem (the child experiences a problem, and his or her behavior is acceptable to the parent), the parent can use the 'language of acceptance' called Active Listening, which means the parent reflects back the feelings of the child, thus stimulating the child to find his or her own solutions to the problem. When the parent owns the problem, because the child's behavior is unacceptable to the parent as it interferes with the parent's needs and wishes, the parent can use (confrontive) I-messages. Using I-messages, the parent non-blamefully describes the child's unacceptable behavior, the parent's feelings about the child's behavior, and the effect that the child's behavior is having on him or her. Thus, the child is stimulated to consider the parent's needs without being forced to change behavior. The child is held responsible for his or her own behavior. When parent and child share a problem, parents first learn to determine whether it is a conflict of needs or a conflict of values. In the case of conflicting needs, parents and children are taught to reach agreement using a six step problem solving method: (1) identifying the conflicting needs, (2) generating possible alternative solutions, (3) evaluating the solutions, (4) deciding on the best acceptable solution, (5) working out ways of implementing the solution, and (6) evaluating the solution (Alvy, 1994). Concerning conflicts of values, parents feel unaccepting toward the child's behavior, but the child's behavior does not interfere with the parent's needs and wishes. In this case, parents learn not to be persuasive, but to model the behavior they would like to see in the child ('practice what you preach'), or to consult (offering information or opinions without persuasion). Children have the right to hold and express their own values and beliefs (Alvy, 1994; Lamb & Lamb, 1978).

In general, the use of parental power (including the use of rewards and punishment) is rejected, as it is incompatible with a democratic parent-child relationship in which everyone is responsible for his or her own behavior.

Behavior modification approaches based on social learning theory

There are many different kinds of behavioral parent education programs that include basic behavioral concepts, for example, 'Parents are teachers' (Becker, 1971), 'Parents and adolescents living together' (Patterson & Forgatch, 1987), and 'Confident parenting' (Eimers & Aitchison, 1977). In these parent education programs it is assumed that human behavior is learned in social interaction. Thus, children's problem behaviors represent inadequate or incorrect learning and parents can be instructed to weaken undesirable and strengthen desirable child behavior. Since behavior is assumed to be

primarily a function of observable antecedent and consequent events that precede and follow the behavior, a lot of attention is given to these antecedent and consequent events. Parents are able to manipulate these factors in order to change children's behavior (Alvy, 1994; Dembo et al., 1985; Lamb & Lamb, 1978; Patterson et al., 1992; Simpson, 1980).

In behavioral parent education programs parents are taught how to set up a behavior modification program consisting of four steps (Abidin, 1976a, 1976b; Alvy, 1994; Fine, 1980; Lamb & Lamb, 1978; Patterson & Forgatch, 1987; Simpson, 1980):

1. Selection of the target behavior that parents want to change. First, parents must decide whether they want to focus on behavior the child exhibits too much of (e.g. fighting with siblings) or on behavior that the child is lacking (e.g. eating correctly, completing school tasks). Second, the target behavior that parents want to increase or decrease must be observable, and specifically defined in such a way that there is no confusion about whether or not the behavior is occurring.

2. Observing and recording. When a target behavior has been selected, parents measure the frequency, rate, duration, or intensity of the behavior. Parents learn to observe and measure, to determine how serious the problem really is (and to be able to determine whether any changes in the behavior occur, after altering the consequences of the behavior).

3. Setting the consequences. Parents are taught to either increase or decrease the frequency of occurrence of the selected behavior through systematic manipulation of the consequences of the behavior (Simpson, 1980). A positive consequence or reinforcer is an event that strengthens a behavior it follows. Concerning reinforcers, one can distinguish between social reinforcers (e.g. praise, compliments) and nonsocial reinforcers (material reinforcers, such as a present, or activity reinforcers, such as playing a game). An aversive consequence, on the other hand, is an event that weakens the behavior it follows. Examples of aversive or negative consequences are punishment, and taking away reinforcers or privileges (e.g. time-out, ignoring).

The importance of the contingent use of positive and negative consequences is emphasized (Alvy, 1994; Patterson & Forgatch, 1987). Contingency refers to a when/ then connection between what children do and how their parents react (*when* children come home on time, *then* they are allowed to go out again).

4. Evaluating the results. After parents have set the consequences, they continue to measure the frequency, rate, duration, or intensity of the behavior to evaluate whether the target behavior has indeed been weakened or strengthened.

Common to all behavioral programs is the emphasis on positive reinforcement, since parents, especially those having problems with their children, are often involved in a negative response pattern with their children (Fine, 1980).

Rational emotive parent education

Rational emotive parent education is based on the writings of Ellis (1962, 1973). According to the rational-emotive theory emotional or psychological disturbances are largely a result of thinking illogically or irrationally. Ellis (1962, 1973) developed the A-B-C method to teach people to maximize rational and minimize irrational thinking. 'A' represents the Activating event or situation, 'B' stands for the individual's Beliefs or Belief system (the way in which someone thinks about situation A), while 'C' stands for the Consequences, that is, someone's reactions and feelings in that situation. According to rational emotive theory negative feelings (C) are not caused by the situation or event (A), but by people's beliefs about the situation or event (B). These beliefs can be rational or irrational. Rational beliefs assist people to achieve their goals, and relate to observable events that can be empirically validated (Ellis, 1973; Ellis & Harper, 1977). Irrational, illogical beliefs prevent people from meeting their goals, and relate to hypotheses that cannot be empirically verified (Ellis, 1973). An example of a common irrational belief is: 'It is a necessity for a human being to be loved by every significant other person in his life' (rational alternative: 'Being constantly loved by everyone is not possible and not necessary') (Abidin, 1976a, 1976b; Ellis, 1973). There are also common irrational beliefs of child management, for example, 'A child and his or her behavior are the same' (rational alternative: 'Separate doer from deed; children are human beings and humans are not perfect'), or 'Children can upset their parents' (rational alternative: 'Parents upset themselves by what they say to themselves about their children') (Lamb & Lamb, 1978). Many irrational beliefs and thoughts contain absolutes, such as 'must', 'should (not)', 'ought (not)'. They are based on absolutistic and exaggerated thinking (Ellis & Harper, 1977). Parents can be challenged to dispute their irrational beliefs and to train themselves to think and behave more efficiently. Irrational thinking about child behavior may lead to intense negative emotions, and eventually parents may do things they later wish they had not done (e.g. spanking). Rational emotive theory of behavior can teach parents to manage and control their feelings and their reactions to their child (Abidin, 1976a, 1976b; Lamb & Lamb, 1978).

Rational emotive theory is mostly part of parent education programs that combine several theoretical perspectives. Combined parent education programs are described in the following.

Parent education programs that combine theoretical approaches

Many parent education programs combine aspects of several of the earlier mentioned theoretical approaches. Abidin (1976a, 1976b), for example, developed a parent program 'Parenting skills', teaching parents communication skills, behavior

modification techniques and rational emotive techniques. Dinkmeyer and McKay developed STEP (Systematic Training for Effective Parenting), an Adlerian parent program that also includes communication skills of the client-centered approach (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1976a, 1976b). Patterson and Forgatch developed a parent education program for parents of adolescents that consist of two parts: one based on behavior modification principles and one based on conflict resolution techniques and communication skills (Forgatch & Patterson, 1989; Patterson & Forgatch, 1987).

According to Popkin (1989), many parent education books and programs have been developed that are based on one or more of the theoretical perspectives mentioned before. For this reason, he proposed to shift attention from the content of parenting programs to the process (*how* can parents effectively and efficiently be instructed?), by developing the program 'Active Parenting' in which video is introduced to teach parents the skills of effective communication and behavior modification.

2.2 Aspects of family functioning addressed by parent education programs

As said before, parent education programs are based on the idea that family functioning is somehow related to children's functioning. In the first chapter we presented a summary of some of the most important approaches in trying to explain child behavior problems, that is, the parenting approach, the intergenerational approach, the structural approach, and the communication approach on family functioning. Parent education programs intend to educate and train parents in order to prevent child behavior problems or to deal with identified child behavior problems. Therefore, they may be based on the prior mentioned theories on family functioning. The second question to be answered in this chapter, is on which aspects of family functioning the different types of parent education are based.

In Adlerian parent education much attention is paid to building positive relationships between parents and child, with mutual respect and appreciation. Parents are taught that supporting their children may contribute to building a positive relationship. Aspects of support in Adlerian parent education are for example taking time for fun, communicating love through verbal expressions, pats, hugs and kisses, and encouragement (which means emphasizing children's strengths and showing confidence in, and appreciation of children's efforts). Encouragement may also stimulate children's sense of self-confidence and self-worth. Furthermore, parents are taught to show respect for children's feelings, thoughts and beliefs, which can be interpreted as parents being responsive to their children's needs and wishes.

Concerning parental control, in Adlerian parent education, democracy and cooperation in the family are aimed at. Individual independence and responsibility are

promoted, which can be viewed as an expression of demanding control. Natural and logical consequences are used to give children a choice between behaving appropriately or experiencing the consequences of their inappropriate behavior, and to encourage them to make responsible decisions, without forcing their submission.

In Adlerian parent education, family relationships are considered important, as all children seek ways to be part of the family and all (mis)behavior is supposed to serve this purpose. Parents learn to view their children's misbehavior as attempts to belong and be significant and accepted. Thus, child behavior problems are placed into a relational perspective.

In client-centered parent education, the aim is at building a warm, close parent-child relationship, that is characterized by acceptance and in which each is free to express feelings. Parents are taught to be supportive by listening reflectively and showing respect and acceptance of children's feelings. This may help children to express their feelings, to solve their own problems, and to become independent and responsible for their own feelings and behavior. Parents learn to develop democratic relationships with their children. When parents think their children's behavior is unacceptable, they don't force the child to change behavior, but send I-messages and express their own feelings to stimulate the child to consider the parents' needs. The child is held responsible for his or her own behavior. This can be interpreted as a form of demanding control, in that parents expect mature behavior of the child, without forcing the child to comply.

Thus, in client-centered parent education a positive parent-child relationship is promoted, in which parents consider their children's needs and feelings, and in which children consider their parents' needs and feelings as well. In this respect some accordance with the intergenerational emphasis on balance of giving and taking between parent and child can be recognized.

A major emphasis in client-centered parent education is on communication skills. Parents are taught to communicate respect and acceptance of their own feelings (I-messages) and of their children's feelings (reflective listening). Better communication skills should improve the parent-child relationship.

In parent education programs based on social learning theory the emphasis is on teaching parents to influence and control children's behavior by manipulating the consequences of that behavior. Compared to the former parent education programs, in behavior modification programs, parental control and family hierarchy are emphasized more strongly. Although building positive parent-child relationships and supporting children are less explicitly emphasized, it is also worked on, as a lot of attention is given to positively reinforcing children's desirable behavior. Parents learn to use social reinforcers like hugs, praise, and compliments. Although (social) reinforcement is meant to increase desirable behavior, it also contributes to building a warm parent-child

relationship and can be viewed as parental support. In behavioral parent education programs, parents learn to set limits on their children's behaviors and to enforce those limits by using positive and negative consequences (Alvy, 1994). Parents are also taught to be consistent in the use of positive and negative consequences. It seems clear that in behavioral parent education the importance of parental control is more strongly emphasized than in Adlerian and client-centered parent education programs. There is somewhat more reliance on techniques of punishment and the use of aversive consequences. It can also be said that in behavioral parent education parents are taught how to use demanding control instead of coercive control, in that the limits they set must be fair and reasonable, the emphasis is on using positive consequences, and if using negative consequences, parents are taught to use mild forms of punishment. The use of severe punishment and verbal aggression is discouraged (Alvy, 1994). Furthermore, parents are taught to inform their children about the behavior they expect and about the positive or negative consequences they will apply. Eventually parents and child negotiate about which consequences will follow which behavior. In this respect some attention is given to communication skills.

In rational emotive parent education, the emphasis is not as much on parents' behavior towards their children, but on parents' thoughts and beliefs ('B' in the A-B-C chain). Parents are taught that often it is not their children's behavior, but their own thoughts that determine their feelings and reactions. This approach suggests that sometimes the child's behavior may not be the problem, but the parents' way of interpreting that behavior is (at least part of) the problem. Some child behavior problems may simply disappear when parents stop judging the behavior as problematic (e.g., some of children's undesirable behaviors are just a developmental stage the children go through). Some other child behavior problems are more easy to handle when parents view them more rationally (e.g., undesirable child behavior does not mean that the child is all bad, but that the parent can love the child as a person and still reject some of the child's behavior and try to change that behavior). The focus in rational emotive parent education is on parents' perceptions of child behavior and child rearing situations, and on teaching parents to think rationally. This may lead to parents reacting more adequately to children's behavior. Rational emotive theory is mostly part of a combined parent education program in which parents' behavior towards their children is also at focus.

At this point we do not go into a full consideration of the combined parent education programs because these programs do not consist of new elements, but merely of elements of the parent programs just discussed.

In conclusion, it can be said that all parent education programs emphasize the importance of parental warmth, acceptance and respect for children, and teach specific

skills that demonstrate this positive concern. They all provide parents with strategies and skills for assuming authoritative family leadership, helping them set and enforce reasonable and fair limits on their children's behaviors and encouraging problem solving and considering the viewpoints and interests of children (Alvy, 1994). Thus, in all parent education programs much attention is paid to parenting practices (parental support and control). The communication approach on family functioning is also well represented in especially client-centered parent education programs. However, the intergenerational and structural approaches on family functioning are not as well represented in parent education programs. This may be due to the fact that in all parent education programs parents are at focus. Although a bidirectional interpretation of relations between child behavior problems and parenting and family functioning will be closest to the complexity of social reality, parent programs seem to emphasize the unidirectional point of view. The parent programs are all based on the idea that changes in parental attitudes and behavior will result in changes in children's behavior. Parents are chosen as change agents for their children (Reisinger, Ora, & Frangia, 1976). Parents are the medium through which child behavior and family functioning are influenced. This might explain why parents, their thoughts, feelings, behavior, and communication toward their children, get the most attention. To influence the family structure, or to pay attention to the importance of reciprocity and bidirectional intergenerational relationships, it may be more appropriate to involve not only parents, but also their children in parent education programs (as is the case in family therapy, for example (Lange, 1994)). However, it might at least be possible to inform parents on family structure and reciprocal intergenerational relationships. This in addition to information being given in parent education programs on, for example, child development, the importance of expressing feelings, the 'goals of children's misbehavior', or the importance of thinking rationally.

2.3 Reflective and behavioral counseling

The third question to be answered in this chapter is about the mechanism of change that is emphasized in parent education programs. Concerning parent education, two approaches can be distinguished; reflective counseling and behavioral counseling (Tavormina, 1974). Reflective counseling emphasizes parental awareness, understanding, and acceptance of the child's feelings. Behavioral counseling emphasizes behavior and teaches parents to control their responses to the child in order to influence the child's subsequent behavior. So, programs based on reflective counseling primarily aim at changes in parents' cognitions, feelings and attitudes, while programs based on behavioral counseling aim at changes in parents' behavior. What model of counseling underlies the parent education programs described before?

Adlerian parent education programs are based on reflective as well as behavioral counseling. These programs start with informing parents about the goals of children's misbehavior. Parents learn to understand children's behavior and to be aware of its goals. They also learn to be aware of their own feelings concerning child misbehavior. Those feelings are supposed to indicate the goal of the child's misbehavior (for example, when parents feel angry and provoked, the goal of the child's misbehavior is probably power (Alvy, 1994)). All this is clearly based on reflective counseling, in that parents cognitions and feelings are addressed. Parents are also stimulated to change their responses to the child's behavior, which represents behavioral counseling. When children misbehave, parents learn to use alternative reactions (e.g., ignoring the child instead of starting a power struggle, and to use encouragement and natural and logical consequences). Thus, parents not only learn to understand why children misbehave (reflective counseling), but also learn to change their reactions toward their child's behavior (behavioral counseling).

In client-centered parent education programs, the emphasis is on the free expression and acceptance of feelings, which may lead to self-awareness and understanding. Parents are taught to stimulate their children to express their feelings (active listening), but also to express and accept their own feelings (I-messages). Thus, client-centered parent education is mainly based on reflective counseling. However, parents are also trained in communication techniques, like active listening and I-messages. This can be viewed as influencing and changing parents' behavior toward their children. Thus, it can be said that although the major emphasis in client-centered parent education programs is on reflective counseling, behavioral counseling is also used.

Parent education programs based on social learning theory are clearly based on behavioral counseling, as is expressed by the term 'behavior modification approaches'. These programs hardly pay attention to parents' cognitions and feelings. The emphasis is on changing parents' behavior and responses toward their children in order to change their children's undesirable behavior. Nevertheless, some use is made of reflective counseling, in that parents are taught how children's behavior is shaped by its antecedents and consequences. Thus, parents' understanding and awareness of how they have shaped and can shape their children's behavior is very important and is a prerequisite for behavior modification.

Rational emotive parent education is clearly based on reflective counseling, in that the emphasis is on parents' cognitions and beliefs. The way in which parents think about children's misbehavior and child rearing is discussed and parents are trained to manage and control their feelings by thinking more rationally. Although rational emotive parent education is a clear example of reflective counseling, it is expected that parents' thinking more rationally will have its effects on parents' behavior, which in turn will have its effects on children's behavior.

49

Because parent education programs that combine several theoretical perspectives are all based on the types of parent education programs mentioned before, we will not discuss the model of counseling underlying combined parent education programs separately.

In conclusion, it can be said that Adlerian and client-centered parent education programs are mainly based on reflective counseling, but also contain elements of behavioral counseling. Parent education programs based on social learning theory, on the other hand, are primarily based on the model of behavioral counseling. However, some attention is paid to parents' understanding and awareness, which can be viewed as based upon reflective counseling. Finally, rational emotive parent education is mainly based on reflective counseling. However, it is acknowledged and discussed that changes in parents' cognitions and beliefs may lead to behavior change. Although this may be insufficient to speak of behavioral counseling, some reference to parents' behavior and behavior change is made. Probably, parental cognitions, beliefs and feelings, and parental behavior are hardly separable, like two sides of a coin. Parent education programs may accentuate one or the other, but it seems reasonable to conclude that cognitions, beliefs and feelings, and behavior are interrelated, and that in most parent education programs both aspects receive (at least some) attention.

2.4 Evaluation of parent education programs

The fourth question to be answered in this chapter is whether parent education programs are effective. We discuss the effectiveness of Adlerian, client-centered, behavioral, rational emotive, and combination parent education approaches. We also compare the results of the different parent education approaches. Are these programs equally effective?

Concerning Adlerian parent education programs, Dembo et al. (1985) evaluated 10 studies on the effects of Adlerian parent education. According to Dembo et al. Adlerian parent education resulted in positive changes in parents' attitudes on child rearing, although there was little evidence of resulting changes in children's behavior. Dembo et al. reported some methodological and measurement problems of the studies, such as the lack of random assignment of subjects to groups, the lack of control groups, and the lack of follow-up data.

According to Roberts (1994), considerable research has been conducted on the Adlerian parent education approach, indicating that generally there is support for the Adlerian approach. Positive effects are reported on children's behavior and their self-concepts, and on parental attitudes (Burnett as cited in Roberts, 1994).

Concerning <u>client-centered parent education programs</u>, Dembo et al. (1985) reviewed 18 evaluation studies on PET, Parent Effectiveness Training. Most studies measured parental attitudes. Some positive changes were found in parental attitudes on child rearing. In some studies children reported positive changes in parents' acceptance. However, Dembo et al. concluded that there was little evidence of changes in children's behavior. Children's or parents' behavior was hardly studied. Furthermore, some methodological problems in studies on effects of client-centered parent education programs are reported, such as, the lack of random assignment of subjects to groups, the absence of control groups, the use of inappropriate statistical procedures, and the lack of long-term follow up (Dembo et al., 1985).

However, the results of a meta-analysis on 26 studies on the results of client-centered parent education (PET) indicated that these programs brought about changes in parental attitudes and behavior, and also in child behavior (Cedar & Levant as cited in Alvy, 1994). Meta-analysis is described as 'a procedure that allows one to compute the degree of change that parents and children show after participating in group education programs compared to control groups of parents who did not participate' (Medway, 1989, p.239). The results of the meta-analysis showed that client-centered parent education programs primarily influenced parental attitudes (e.g. more understanding of children). Regarding child outcomes, the results indicated that children improved on self-esteem. According to Alvy (1994) these results are based on sound statistical analysis and show that client-centered parent education may be a good prevention and intervention strategy, despite many criticisms of other reviewers on methodological aspects of studies on client-centered parent education.

Regarding <u>behavioral parent education</u>, Dembo et al. (1985) evaluated 15 studies and Alvy (1994) evaluated 10 studies on the effects of the behavioral approach. They both conclude that the majority of studies demonstrate some positive outcomes of behavioral parent training (e.g. positive changes in child behavior), although also a few studies failed to demonstrate significant positive changes. Of the studies examining follow-up data, about three-fourths mentioned positive results (Dembo et al., 1985).

Socio-economic status appeared to be an important characteristic influencing the results, with less favorable outcomes with lower class parents (Dembo et al., 1985).

Furthermore, Alvy (1994) reports on the studies of Patterson and colleagues. These studies indicated that the type of measurement instrument used to assess parent education effects may influence the results. It appeared that parental reports, or parents' perceptions of change (especially measures of a more global nature) tended to overestimate the behavior change that is recorded by objective observers. This is something that should be accounted for in future studies.

Regarding studies on <u>combination parent education programs</u>, Alvy (1994) evaluated studies on Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP), a parent education program based on a combination of client-centered and Adlerian principles. Alvy reports on the results of 31 studies, of which only 20 used an adequate design with an experimental and control group. In 26 studies, children without severe disabilities participated. According to Alvy (1994) the STEP program resulted in changes in parental attitudes, but there was less evidence of changes in child attitudes and behavior, or parent-child interactions. Most studies were conducted with middle-class parents and again there is some indication that results might be less positive with lower class parents (Weaver as cited in Alvy, 1994).

Regarding combination parent education programs, Alvy also reported on some studies on Active Parenting, a video-based approach in which client-centered, Adlerian, and behavioral principles are integrated. Most studies suffered from methodological problems, such as the lack of control groups. Some studies that did use a control group showed some improvement on parental attitudes measures and on self-report measures of parental behavior (Alvy, 1994).

Summarizing, combination parent education programs like Active Parenting, appear to have positive effects on parental attitudes and behaviors. However, more well designed studies are needed to support and confirm these results.

Concerning the comparison of the effectiveness of different educational approaches, Dembo et al. (1985) reviewed five comparison studies, that is, four comparing Adlerian with behavioral parent education, and one comparing client-centered with Adlerian parent education. These studies failed to find differences in effectiveness between the educational programs. However, comparing different parent education programs is difficult because different programs have different goals. Comparison studies should therefore use attitude measures as well as measures to assess behavior change. Concerning client-centered and Adlerian approaches, results of evaluation studies yielded more positive outcomes on parent attitude measures than on measures assessing parents' and children's behavior, whereas concerning behavioral approaches, measures on parents' or children's behavior yielded more positive outcomes than parent attitude measures. According to Dembo et al. (1985) these findings are consistent with the goals of the different parent education approaches. Each program has different goals and its effectiveness may depend on the specific needs of parents. Maybe the question 'Which parent education program works best?' should be replaced by the question of 'which parent education program works best for which parents and which children?'.

Medway (1989) used meta-analysis to review the results of 27 empirical studies on the effectiveness of parent education, that is, 12 on behavioral, 7 on Adlerian, 5 on client-centered parent education programs, and 3 studies that compared behavioral parent education with other forms of parent education. Concerning the results of behavioral parent education programs, there were data on parents' attitudes, and parents' and children's behavior. Concerning client-centered parent education, there were data on parents' attitudes and some data on parents' behavior and on children's attitudes, but not on children's behavior. Concerning Adlerian parent education, there were data on parents' attitudes and behavior, and on children's behavior. However, studies on behavioral parent education programs were most consistent in producing data on children's behavior. Results of the meta-analysis showed that on the whole, the studies showed positive effects (62% greater improvement in treatment groups than in control groups), with about equally strong effects on parents and on children, and with about equally strong effects on attitudes and on behavior. According to Medway, the question of whether one type of parent education is any better than any other, could not be answered, because the studies differed in the outcome measures used. The three studies reviewed that compared results of the behavioral parent education approach with the results of the other approaches, yielded stronger effects of the behavioral model on child behavior measures, than the client-centered or Adlerian model. However, these findings are tentative, because they are based on only three studies (Medway, 1989). Analysis of the studies with follow-up assessment (three studies of behavioral parent education) indicate that there are long term results of parent education. Summarizing, all three models have empirical support. Parents' choice for a parent education program can be based on the effectiveness of the program in relationship to the parents' own goals. However, the results of meta-analysis can be biased in a positive direction, since several studies did not provide statistics on measures that were reported to be nonsignificant. Therefore, these nonsignificant measures could not be included in the analysis (Medway, 1989).

In this chapter we subsequently discussed the most important types of parent education programs and their theoretical backgrounds, the aspects of family functioning that are addressed by these parent programs, the question of whether the parent education programs are mainly based on reflective or behavioral counseling principles, and the effectiveness of each type of parent education program. In the next chapter we present our newly developed parent program, 'Parents and children talking together'. We will discuss our reasons for developing the new parent program and compare it with the programs that we discussed in this chapter.

3. Parents and children talking together
A parent program for parents and young adolescents

In this third chapter we describe the development of the parent program, 'Parents and children talking together'. In this study we evaluated the effectiveness of this parent program (the third major research question, as was described in the first chapter). In the first paragraph of this chapter, we describe why we decided to develop a new parent program. We also discuss some research findings that guided us in developing this new parent program. In the second paragraph we give a brief description of the program. Finally, in the third paragraph, we compare the program with the types of parent programs that were described in the second chapter and we examine which aspects of family functioning are addressed by the new program.

3.1 Why developing a new parent program?

In the literature on parent programs the importance of matching the type of parent program and the parents that will attend it, is emphasized (Dembo et al., 1985; Fine, 1980, 1989). That is, the parents' existing parenting skills and style should be taken into account so that the parent program can have the optimum effect. For this reason, we decided to base the parent program on the results of a former study in which we compared families with a child with behavior problems with families with a child without these problems. Just like in the present study, we concentrated on children with mild forms of externalizing behavior problems. Families with a child with behavior problems were compared to families with a child without behavior problems on a number of aspects of parental and family functioning. For the sake of clarity, we will again use the terms problem families and normal families to describe these groups of families. Those aspects that appeared to differentiate the problem families from the normal families, would be paid attention to in the parent program. When the parents of the children with behavior problems appear to function less adequately, or when they are less skilled in certain aspects, it seems appropriate to enhance parental and family functioning in these aspects.

To track relevant aspects of parental and family functioning we compared a group of 28 problem families with a group of 28 normal families. The children in this study were pre-adolescents, ranging in age from 12 to 15 years. Each group consisted of 17 families with a boy, and 11 families with a girl. We compared the two groups on measures of parental child rearing, parent-child relationships, family structure, and parent-child communication. In the following, we briefly review the most salient results. For more detailed information on subjects, measurement instruments, and research results, we refer to some earlier publications on the results of the study (Janssens & Van

As, 1993; Janssens & Van As, 1994a; Janssens & Van As, 1994b; Janssens & Van As, 1994c; Van As & Janssens, 1994).

Concerning parental child rearing practices, we compared the two groups of families on parental support (warmth and responsiveness) and parental control (coercive and demanding control). We used several questionnaire subscales, derived from a survey study of Gerris et al. (1993). Concerning parental support, we used two questionnaire scales filled out by the child, measuring the degree of parental warmth and responsiveness, and found significant differences; parents of problem families appeared to be less warm and responsive toward their child than parents of normal families. Concerning parental coercive control we used two questionnaire scales filled out by both parents, measuring the degree to which parents make use of punishment to control the child, and the degree to which parents emphasize the importance of the child's conformity to the parents' rules and standards. The results showed only one significant difference; mothers of problem families reported to make more use of punishment than mothers of normal families. Concerning parental demanding control, both parents and the child filled out a questionnaire scale measuring the degree to which the parents grant autonomy to the child. No significant differences between problem and normal families were found. However, we had some doubts about the validity of this autonomy scale, and the results of this scale must be interpreted with caution.

Considering the results on parental child rearing practices, it can be concluded that parental support seems to be more relevant in explaining differences between problem and normal families, than parental control. Problem families differed significantly from normal families concerning parental warmth and responsiveness, but they hardly differed concerning parental control. Probably, how parents set rules and enforce them (that is, whether or not within a warm, supportive family climate) may be more important than which rules they set.

Concerning the quality of the parent-child relationship, we used three question-naire scales filled out by the child, measuring the degree of trust, justice, and appreciation in the child's relationship with each parent. These scales were derived from the Family Relations Test, developed by Oud and Welzen (1989). Trust refers to the degree to which the child feels he or she can count on each parent and the degree of shared experiences and togetherness. Justice refers to the degree to which the child experiences a balance of rights and responsibilities in the relationship with each parent; whether parent and child are willing to 'do something for each other'. Appreciation refers to the degree to which the child feels accepted and valued in the relationship with each parent. The results showed differences in the child's relationship with both fathers and mothers between problem and normal families, in that the parent-child relationship in the problem families was characterized by less trust, justice and appreciation.

Concerning <u>family structure</u>, we used the Family Dimension Scales (Buurmeijer & Hermans, 1988) to assess family cohesion and flexibility, filled out by both parents and the child. The results showed that problem families were less cohesive than normal families, but only according to the mothers, and that problem families had a less clear structure than normal families, but only according to the children. Concerning the relationship between the parents (the functioning of the parental subsystem), we asked both parents to fill out two questionnaire scales derived from a survey study of Gerris et al. (1993), assessing the degree of marital satisfaction and the degree of marital destructive interactions, and a questionnaire developed by Lange (1983), assessing the extent of problem solving interaction between the parents. The results showed that fathers as well as mothers experienced their marital relationship as less satisfying in problem families than in normal families. We found no differences concerning destructive and problem solving interactions between the parents of the two groups of families.

Finally, concerning <u>parent-child communication,</u> we used questionnaires and observations to compare problem families and normal families. Both parents and the child were asked to fill out the Parent Adolescent Communication Scale (Olson et al., 1983), that assessed the quality of parent-child interaction. The results showed that the communication between mother and child, as well as between father and child, was characterized by less openness and more problems and conflicts in problem families than in normal families. Furthermore, family interaction was observed during several structured family tasks, consisting of discussions about disagreements about house rules, things they did not like about each other, and actual conflicts. Parent-child interaction was tape-recorded, transcribed, and coded. Each utterance (consisting of no more than one message) was coded. Eight categories were coded, that is, neutral remarks, questions, supportive remarks, problem solving remarks, expressions of negative withdrawal, disagreements, aversive and negative remarks, and commands and prohibitions. The results showed significantly more negative interactions between parents and child in problem families than in normal families. This held for reactions from both parents toward the child, but also for reactions from the child directed at the parents. Parent-child interaction in normal families was more neutral than in problem families. Furthermore, the interaction between mother and child was more supportive (in both directions) in normal families than in problem families.

Summarizing the results, problem families and normal families appear to differ most clearly concerning the climate of warmth and supportiveness in the family, the quality of the parent-child relationship, and parent-child communication. Concerning parental control and family structure, the differences were somewhat less convincing.

Based on the results described above, we decided to develop a parent program that would be based primarily on parent-child interaction and communication. When parent-child communication is improved, it is to be expected that this will also positively influence the climate of warmth and supportiveness in the family, and the quality of the parent-child relationship. After all, as was argued in the third paragraph of the first chapter, parents' supportive (warm, accepting, responsive) remarks can be interpreted as examples of positive communication. Furthermore, a balanced parent-child relationship, characterized by trust, justice and appreciation, is stimulated by clear communication skills, the ability to listen to one another, the willingness to take into account one another's needs and wishes, and problem solving processes in which parents as well as the child take part. Thus, improving family members' communication skills may contribute not only to the quality of parent-child interaction and problem solving, but also to the quality of the parent-child relationship and the climate of warmth and support in the family.

Although communication and problem solving skills are paid attention to in various existing parent education programs (especially Parent Effectiveness Training by Gordon (1970)), most parent education programs aim at parents of children up to twelve years of age. Our goal was to develop a Dutch parent program, designed for parents of pre-adolescents and adolescents. Although we made use of principles, examples and exercises from several existing parent programs, the result was a new parent program, designed for use with parents of (pre-)adolescent children. In the next paragraph we will briefly describe the parent program 'Parents and children talking together'.

3.2 Parents and children talking together

In developing the parent education program 'Parents and children talking together' we were inspired by the principles and exercises of the parent education programs of Abidin (1976a, 1976b), Bakker and Husmann (1994a, 1994b), Forgatch and Patterson (1989), Gordon (1970), Lamb and Lamb (1978), Patterson and Forgatch (1987), and Van Londen, Biloen-Beijen, Cladder, and Van Londen-Barentsen (1990a, 1990b). While elaborating on their ideas, we developed a parent program that is new in that its focus is on communication, primarily, and in that it is written for parents with (pre-)adolescent children.

In the following, we give a brief description of the planning and the content of each session of the parent program. For a complete description we refer to Van As and Janssens (1995, 1997).

The parent program 'Parents and children talking together' consists of seven weekly sessions of about two hours. It is designed for use with a group of eight to fifteen parents. The parent program can be used for parents who are interested in the subject and for parents who experience difficulties in child rearing because of mild forms of behavior problems in their children. The parent program is described in two books; one for parents and one for parent trainers. The parent program is organized around the book 'Parents and children talking together' that is written for parents (Van As & Janssens, 1995). The book shows how parents and child can negotiate conflicts and disagreements, aiming at a solution that is acceptable to both parties. The book 'Parents and children talking together, Handbook for the parent trainer' shows how seven sessions can be organized around this theme (Van As & Janssens, 1997).

Parents and children talking together is based on a model of problem solving, consisting of four steps: 1. discussing the problem, 2. alternating possible solutions, 3. deciding on the best solution and on how it will be carried out, and 4. evaluating the solution. In the seven sessions these four steps are worked out and parents are given many rules and guidelines to see that the discussion will not escalate and the problem can be discussed in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. The first four sessions are devoted to the first step, discussing the problem. This step is given a lot of attention because it is very important that each family member's viewpoints are clear, and because only then is finding a solution possible. The first step consists of two aspects, that is, listening skills, and skills in bringing up a subject in a constructive way. The fifth session aims at brainstorming solutions for the problem, the sixth session is devoted to deciding on the best solution and making arrangements on how to carry it out, and the seventh session, finally, is devoted to summarizing and practicing all that has been taught in the former sessions. At the end of each session, the parents are given homework assignments, to think about, and practice what has been taught in the latest session. Each session consists of a discussion of the homework assignments of the past week, a discussion of the new theory of the present week, and exercises (for example, role playing, or group discussions). We will now turn to a description of each session separately.

The first session: The problem-solving model

In the first session of the parent program, the problem solving model is introduced. However, before introducing the model, parents are explained how conflicts and disagreements can be solved in different ways. First, parents can solve a conflict by deciding on a solution. This can be seen as a rather authoritarian way of solving problems. Although this may be an effective and adequate strategy in some cases (e.g. when the child is too young to decide, or when parents are not willing to discuss certain rules with the child), problems may arise when parents always take decisions without

negotiating with the child. In that case, the child fails to learn how to negotiate, to take decisions, and may be hampered in its autonomy development. Second, parents can solve a conflict by letting the child decide on a solution. This can be interpreted as a rather permissive way of solving conflicts, and can also be very adequate in some cases (e.g. when the parents consider the subject not important enough to negotiate, or when they feel the child should take his or her own decisions on this matter). However, when parents let the child decide too often, the child fails to take responsibility for taking others' feelings and wishes into account and is at risk for developing in a rather selfish way. Thus, the best way for solving problems in general is negotiating, and aiming at finding a solution that is acceptable to both parents and child. That is the third way of solving conflicts, and that is what the parent program is all about. Next, the four steps of the problem solving process are introduced to the parents. Before discussing these steps in detail, parents are told about conflicts of needs and conflicts of values. Conflicts of needs refer to conflicting needs of parents and child that cannot be fulfilled at the same time (e.g. the child likes to watch its favorite soap series on television, whereas the parents like to watch the daily news). Conflicts of values refer to differing opinions, values, or norms. Parents and child disagree on how things 'ought to be' (e.g. the child likes to smoke because he or she values being part of his or her peer group, whereas the parents disapprove of smoking as they value a good health). Concerning conflicts of values the parents often disapprove of the child's behavior or attitude, 'because of the child's own good'. The distinction between the two types of conflicts may be of importance because conflicts of needs are much more easy to solve than conflicts of values. That's why parents may start practicing the new problem solving skills with conflicts of needs. Concerning conflicts of values, parents should realize that it may not be possible to reach agreement on each person's viewpoint or values. However, negotiating and discussing viewpoints and values may bring more clarity, and may create more understanding for each other. Furthermore, concerning conflicts of values, parents can concentrate on negotiating for reaching agreement on each family member's behavior, although the differences of opinion remain (e.g. although the parents do not approve of the child's smoking, they allow him or her to smoke, as long as he or she does not smoke at home). When parents are aware of these differences, the problem solving process may be facilitated.

<u>The second session: The first step of the problem solving process, Discussing the problem. Part 1: Listening</u>

The first step of the problem-solving process consists of discussing the conflict. Parents and child must each get the opportunity to give their opinion on the problem, to make clear what each family member's needs, wishes and viewpoints are. The aim of the

first step is not to decide who is right and wrong, but only to make the problem concrete and specific. For a good problem discussion there are two important aspects, that is, listening to one another, and bringing up your own opinion, needs and wishes. In the second session, parents are taught how to listen and how to let the child know that they listen. The parents are taught five aspects of listening, that is, showing a listening attitude, asking for more information, showing empathy, refraining from impulsive reactions, and active listening. A listening attitude refers to looking at the other person, nodding, not interrupting, and short listening expressions such as 'hm', 'yes', 'oh', 'I see'. Thus, parents show attentiveness to the child's story. Asking for more information means that parents ask questions to create a better understanding of what the child thinks, wants, or needs. The parents learn to ask their questions in a neutral tone of voice. The questions must not serve to criticize or advise the child (as the parent will get an opportunity to give his or her own viewpoint later in the discussion). Showing empathy refers to responding to the child's feelings, for example by reacting enthusiastically to an enthusiastic story, and seriously when the child seems to be worried. This will make the child feel accepted and understood. Refraining from impulsive reactions means that parents let the child finish his or her sentences and story, without immediately showing anger, concern, mistrust, disapproval, giving advice etc. The parents must listen to what the child tries to tell, and wait for their turn to give their opinion on the subject. Active listening, finally, refers to summarizing in your own words what the other person said, what he or she meant or felt. The parent feeds back the child's message in a friendly way, without adding his or her own opinion, criticism, or advice. Thus, the parent tries to communicate to the child that he or she is understood and accepted. Furthermore, the parent gives the child the opportunity to correct the parent if he or she did not correctly understand the child.

When parents and child really listen to each other, an open, trustful atmosphere may develop, in which it is easier to discuss and solve problems.

The third session: The first step of the problem solving process, Discussing the problem. Part 2: Bringing up the subject

The third session is dedicated to the second aspect of discussing the problem: bringing up a subject and giving your opinion about the problem. The way in which a subject is brought up may be very important for how the negotiation proceeds and for creating an atmosphere of openness and trust. When parents are criticizing the child in a very negative way, the child will probably react very negatively, and things will easily get out of hand. In the third session, parents are taught a number of rules to create a friendly, open atmosphere, in which everyone can give his or her opinion and express his or her needs, without feeling attacked by other family members. These rules and guidelines are

as follows: describe the problem as specific and concrete as possible; judge the behavior, not the person; use constructive instead of destructive criticism; aim at the future; refrain from useless 'why-questions'; refrain from 'lecturing' and keep it short; be pleasant; try to show understanding for the child, refrain from blaming each other; and discuss one problem at a time. Describing the problem as specific and concretely as possible means that everyone, even a stranger, should be able to understand what is meant. Furthermore, parents often use nonspecific terms to describe the problem. For example, they blame the child for being lazy, or aggressive. Instead of using these terms, they could describe the behavior more specifically. With 'being lazy' they possibly mean that the child does not clean up his or her room, after being there with friends. With being aggressive, the parents may probably mean that the child shouts at them when they ask him or her to do the dishes, or that the child fights with his or her younger brother etc. Judging the behavior, but not the person is related to the rule of being specific and concrete. Parents sometimes judge the child as a person ('I can never trust you, nasty boy') instead of describing the behavior that they do not wish to see. It would be better to judge the child's behavior ('I do not approve of you walking into the house without taking your dirty shoes off. When you do that, I have to sweep the floor again'). The use of constructive instead of destructive criticism means that parents not only describe the behavior of the child that they do not approve of, but also describe the alternative, desirable behavior ('I would appreciate it, if, from now on, you would take your shoes off when you enter the house'). This immediately leads to the next point: aim at the future, which refers to the rule that parents should work at solving the problem. It may make no sense to keep arguing about what went wrong in the past, and why. When the conflict and viewpoints are clear, parents and child have to find a solution for the future to prevent the problem from occurring again. When parents keep focused on what went wrong in the past, they often stick to unnecessary why-questions ('why were you late?', 'why didn't you call us?', 'why can't I trust you?', 'why do you always do that to me?', 'why don't you care about MY wishes?' etc.). Of course, some why-questions may be very useful, primarily when parents are really asking for information. However, many why-questions are not meant for asking information, but imply criticism, disapproval, and blame. A likely reaction of children to these blaming why-questions is to defend themselves, or to counterattack the parent. Thus, the discussion may escalate without finding a solution. Instead of why-questions, parents can describe the behavior they disapprove of, and give the child an alternative. When parents bring up a subject or give their point of view on the problem, it is essential to keep it short. When the parents start a long lecture, the child will easily become irritated and annoyed, which is not a good starting point for problem solving. Parents must try to create an atmosphere in which children are likely to cooperate. For the same reason, parents should be pleasant, and talk

in a friendly, or at least neutral, tone of voice. They may also try to show some understanding for the child's point of view ('I understand that you don't like it that you have to be home at twelve, I used to hate that when I was your age. But I get very concerned and anxious when you come home late. That's why I would like you to call me, if you can't make it.'). When parents show some understanding, the child will be more willing to try to understand the parents' point of view, and to cooperate. The point, refrain from blaming each other, has to do with the fact that parents and child often accuse each other of having caused the trouble. They often fail to see that the problem is interactional in nature, and that both parties are part of the problem. (For example, the parent blames the child for not cleaning up his or her room until the parents become nagging and scolding. The child blames the parent for nagging and scolding all of the time. If the parents would not nag about the room, there would be no problem at all! It would be better if both parties would think about how to solve this problem, than about who caused it.) Blaming the other party often leads to defensive reactions, to a counterattack, and to an escalating discussion about who is at fault. Finally, parents are taught to discuss one problem at a time. Often when parents and child discuss a conflict, other subjects and disagreements are brought up, which makes it very difficult to solve the conflict. (For example, when mother blames the child for being messy, the child blames mother for always leaving her books lying around on the dinner table, which leads mother to defending herself: She only leaves her books on the table when she is taking a break from her work etc. Thus, the original problem of the child's behavior is forgotten, and not solved.)

If parents want to <u>solve</u> a problem, instead of just talking or arguing about it, it is important to prevent negative emotions from interrupting the problem solving process (Forgatch & Patterson, 1989). By keeping the rules (mentioned above) in mind, parents can try to create an open, relaxed atmosphere in which children are willing to cooperate in solving the problem.

<u>The fourth session: Once again: The first step of the problem solving process</u>
In the fourth session the first step of the problem solving process, consisting of listening and bringing up the subject, is repeated. In exercises and role-plays parents practice the skills that are taught in the second and third session.

<u>The fifth session: The second step of the problem solving process, Brainstorming solutions</u>
The second step in the problem solving process is finding possible solutions to the problem. It won't always be possible to find a satisfying solution immediately, so it will be useful to think of as many solutions as possible. Each solution must be considered

seriously, for even crazy, funny, or impossible ideas may carry some useful elements, or may lead to new ideas that are indeed useful. Thus, parents and child must refrain from immediately judging or rejecting the suggested solutions. When solutions are criticized or rejected immediately, family members may be discouraged in thinking about possible solutions. Furthermore, it is important that both parents and child contribute to the list of possible solutions. Each family member who is involved in the conflict must get a chance to give his or her opinion about possible solutions.

To be able to list solutions in a friendly atmosphere and to prevent negative emotions from disturbing the process, parents are taught some rules or guidelines. First, it is important that everyone involved gets a chance to list his or her suggestions for solutions. Second, parents and child should try to think of as many solutions as possible. This rule aims at stimulating the brainstorming process. Third, parents and child are encouraged to use their fantasy and imagination. Thinking of strange and funny solutions too, may be relaxing, and may lead to finding new, creative solutions. Fourth, parents and child are taught not to judge or criticize the suggestions. The purpose of the second step is creating a list of all possible solutions. Weighing the pros and cons of each solution against each other is the aim of the third step in the problem solving process. Immediately considering the usefulness of the solutions may inhibit the creative process of thinking of possible solutions. Fifth, parents and child are taught not to criticize each other, or to put each other down. Aversive expressions, directed at other family members, will create a tense, unpleasant atmosphere, and will inhibit brainstorming. Sixth, parents learn they can use encouragement and punishment to stimulate family members to keep their promises and agreements. Thus, parents can reward their child if he or she sticks to the agreements, or they can use punishment (not allow him or her to go out in the weekend, no pocket money for a week etc.) if the child does not. In the second step of the problem solving process, parents and child can negotiate possible encouragements and punishments. Finally, parents are taught to write down all suggestions for solutions and consequences. Thus, it is possible to overview all that is suggested.

In the session on brainstorming solutions, parents mention conflicts they experience at home, and practice with the other group members, to list as many solutions as possible.

The sixth session: The third and fourth step of the problem solving process, Selecting a solution, making agreements, and evaluating

The sixth session is devoted mainly to the third step of the problem solving process, that is, selecting the best possible solution and deciding on how the solution should be carried out. In selecting a solution, parents must consider whether the solution is practically workable and whether both parents and child are satisfied with this particular

solution. Parents are taught to select a solution in the following way. First, they should read aloud the list of possible solutions, in order to present an overview of all suggestions. Second, they can drop those solutions not workable, those solutions that satisfy the needs of only one, but not both parties, or the solutions on which everyone agrees that they will not work out well. Third, the pros and cons of the remaining solutions can be listed. It is emphasized that every family member involved, should get a chance to give his or her view on each solution. However, criticisms must be directed at the list of solutions, not at each other. Fourth, when each solution has been discussed, parents and child must decide on the solution that will be tried out. They are stimulated to try out a solution, even though it does not seem perfect. After all, they can change the solution or select a new solution, if the solution proves not workable or satisfying. Fifth, it is emphasized that parents and child must describe precisely how the solution will be carried out. It must be clear what each family member has to do, when it should be done, and how it should be done. Thus, it must be easy to determine whether each family member sticks to the agreements. For example, the parents promise to stop nagging, if the child promises to clean up his or her room once a week. Furthermore, parents and child agree on what is meant by 'cleaning up' (that is, clothes in the closet, no books on the floor, the bed made, toys in the toy-box), on when the room should be cleaned up (that is, on Friday afternoon, before dinner), and on how the agreement will be monitored (that is, the parents check every Friday night, after dinner, whether the room has been cleaned properly). If it has not been cleaned, the parents withhold the child's allowance (pocket money) until the room has indeed been cleaned. However, if the parents nag during the week about the child's messy room, they promise to pay the child a small extra allowance for each time they nag about the room. Finally, the parents are taught to write down the selected solution and the agreements. Thus, it is clear what is expected from each family member. Furthermore, no one will get away with the agreement by saying that he or she had forgotten or misunderstood the agreement.

Finally, the parents are taught about the fourth step of the problem solving process, that is, evaluating the selected solution. When a selected solution has been tried out for some time, parents and child may evaluate how it worked out. Has the problem really been solved? Is everyone satisfied with the solution? If parents and child are dissatisfied with the solution, it may be necessary to select another solution from the list, or to return to the second step of the problem solving process and think of new solutions. It may even be necessary to return to the first step and discuss the problem again, to get viewpoints and needs more clear. If parents and child consider the selected solution not the right one, there may be several reasons for the failing of the agreement. First, it might be that the solution was not practically performable, or not achievable, for example as family members have too high, or unrealistic expectations. Second, agreements may not

work out because some family members do not really stand behind the solution or the agreements. Third, a solution may not work out because the agreements were not concrete and specific enough. In that case, parents and child may elaborate further on how exactly the solution has to be implemented.

Thus, when a solution did not work out, parents and child are stimulated to find out why the solution failed. With this knowledge they may select a new solution and make new agreements.

<u>The seventh session: The problem solving process once again</u>

In the seventh session no new theory is discussed. Once again the problem solving model, consisting of the four steps, is repeated. Furthermore, this session is used for practice and exercise. For example, parents bring in conflicts they experienced at home. These examples are subsequently used for group discussion and for exercises in subgroups, in which three or four parents role-play the problem solving process. While playing the role of father, mother, and child, they try to solve the problem, following the four steps and the accompanying rules and guidelines.

3.3 Aspects of family functioning addressed by 'Parents and children talking together'

Compared with the types of parent programs that were described in the second chapter, the program 'Parents and children talking together' is a clear example of a communication program. Although the program is not based on client centered theory, it comes closest to Parent Effectiveness Training (PET), the client centered parent program of Gordon (1970, 1980). 'Parents and children talking together' resembles the PET-program in its emphasis on a structured model of problem solving, consisting of a number of subsequent steps, and its emphasis on communication skills. The communication skills of Gordon, active listening and the use of I-messages, are part of 'Parents and children talking together' too. Active listening is paid attention to in the second session when listening skills are at focus. I-messages refer to the parent specifically describing the child's unacceptable behavior, the parent's feelings about the child's behavior, and the effect that the child's behavior is having on the parent. These skills are paid attention to in the third session on bringing up a subject. However, whereas the PET-program is centered around these two communication skills, our program intends to offer parents more rules and guidelines that can help them in listening to their children and in bringing up subjects. These rules and guidelines are described above. Thus, 'Parents and children talking together' consists of a greater variety of listening and communication skills. Furthermore, the theoretical assumptions underlying PET and 'Parents and children

talking together' differ. In PET, the use of parental power is disapproved of. Democratic parent-child relationships are promoted, in which children are responsible for their own behavior and parents do not force their children to change behavior (Alvy, 1994; Lamb & Lamb, 1978). 'Parents and children talking together' is based on the ideas of Patterson and Forgatch (1987) and Forgatch and Patterson (1989) about a hierarchical relationship between parents and children, in which parents are placed higher in hierarchy than their children, as they are responsible for guiding and disciplining their children. In 'Parents and children talking together' it is emphasized that negotiating conflicts and finding solutions that everyone is satisfied with, is the best strategy, although occasionally parents can decide on a solution (the authoritarian way) or let the child decide on a solution (the permissive way). Thus, the use of parental power is not rejected. Furthermore, in 'Parents and children talking together', parents are taught how to use rewards and punishments to stimulate family members to stick to the agreements (see the fifth session, described above). In PET the use of punishments and rewards is rejected as it is regarded as the use of power. Finally, PET is primarily designed for parents with younger children, while 'Parents and children talking together' aims at parents with (pre-) adolescent children.

   In the second chapter, we described several types of parent programs and examined which aspects of family functioning they addressed. What aspects of family functioning are addressed by 'Parents and children talking together'? This parent program is primarily focused at improving the quality of the communication between parents and children. The quality of parent-child communication is emphasized in the communication approach on family functioning. Furthermore, the parents are also taught to be supportive by listening reflectively and thus showing respect and acceptance of the child's thoughts and feelings. Also, some attention is paid to parental control. In the first session of the program, parents are taught about authoritarian and permissive ways of problem solving. They are taught that it is best to negotiate to find solutions that are satisfactory for all parties in the conflict. This can be interpreted as a kind of demanding control: Parents allow their children some freedom and decisiveness in problem solving, but at the same time they demand their children to be responsible and to keep agreements. Furthermore, they learn how to use rewards and punishments in an effective way. The importance of supportive parenting and demanding control is emphasized in the parenting approach. Furthermore, by improving the family members' communication skills, a positive parent-child relationship is promoted, in which parents consider their child's needs and wishes and the child considers the parents' needs and wishes as well. In this respect, some attention is paid to the balance of giving and taking between parents and child, that is emphasized in the intergenerational approach on family functioning. Although family

structure is not directly paid attention to in the program, good problem solving and communication skills may contribute to a family's cohesiveness and clear structure.

According to Gorall and Olson (1995), communication is the key to family system change: Positive communication skills allow family members to optimize their level of cohesion and flexibility, when necessary. Thus, the family structure might also benefit from improving family members' communication skills.

In the second chapter, we also commented on the mechanisms of change that are emphasized in the various types of parent programs, that is, reflective and behavioral counseling. Concerning the program 'Parents and children talking together', both models of counseling can be recognized. On the one hand, parents gain insight in the interaction process between them and their children, and its influence on the child's behavior. They are taught how family members influence each other and how they shape each other's reactions in the communication process. Thus, parents' cognitions and attitudes are directed. This can be regarded as reflective counseling. On the other hand, parents are also trained in communication techniques. They practice their communication skills during the sessions and by way of homework assignments. This can be viewed as influencing and changing parents' behavior toward their children, which is based on the model of behavioral counseling.

In the present study we evaluated the effectiveness of the parent program 'Parents and children talking together' in a group of parents who experienced child rearing difficulties because of mild externalizing behavior problems of their child. Since the parent program primarily focuses on the communication between parents and children, we expected to demonstrate results of the program mainly on parent-child communication. Thus, we expected the program to result in improved communication and problem solving skills of the parents. Furthermore, we examined whether there were generalization effects on parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, and family structure.

In the next chapter a description of the subjects and measurement instruments of the study is presented.

4. Method

4.1 Participants

In this paragraph we present information on the participants of the present study. As was described in the first chapter, there were three major research questions.

First, problem families and normal families were compared on aspects of family functioning. For this part of the study, the sample consisted of 54 families with a child between 10 and 14 years: 28 families with a child showing mild externalizing behavior problems and 26 families with a child without these problems. The two groups of families were compared on their pretest scores. (The normal families were administered a pretest only. The problem families were administered a pretest and a posttest. We will come back to this later.) As said before, we will use the terms problem families and normal families, respectively. Although the use of these terms is an oversimplification, we will use them for the sake of clarity. The sample was selected in two stages. First, we published articles about child behavior problems in the local press and asked parents to participate if they had such problems with their child; 28 families called and agreed to participate. Second, parents of children from the two highest grades of several elementary schools and the two lowest grades of several general secondary schools were asked by letter to participate in a study on child rearing. No reference was made to behavior problems. Furthermore, we published articles in the local press in which we asked parents who felt they had no special problems with parenting, to participate in a study on child rearing. Seventy families agreed to participate. Out of these 70 families, 26 were selected that could be matched with the problem families on the following variables: sex and age of the child, family composition (one-parent or two-parent family), and socio-economic class. All families lived in and around Nijmegen or Arnhem. The group of 28 problem families consisted of 19 boys and 9 girls, with a mean age of 11 years and 9 months, while the group of 26 normal families consisted of 16 boys and 10 girls, with a mean age of 11 years and 10 months. Concerning family composition, the group of problem families consisted of 18 two-parent, and 10 one-parent families, while the group of normal families consisted of 20 two-parent and 6 one-parent families. There were no significant differences between the groups concerning age and sex of the child, family composition, educational level of the child, and educational and vocational level of the fathers. For mothers we found differences in educational ($\underline{t}(51) = 2.40$; $\underline{p} < 0.05$) and vocational level ($\underline{t}(52) = 2.27$; $\underline{p} < 0.05$). The mean scores for mothers in the group of problem families were 4.96 ($\underline{SD} = 1.43$) (on a scale ranging from 1 to 7) for educational level and 4.07 ($\underline{SD} = 1.18$) (on a scale ranging from 1 to 6) for vocational level. The mean scores for mothers in the group of normal families were 4.04 ($\underline{SD} = 1.37$) for

educational level and 3.35 (<u>SD</u> = 1.16) for vocational level. Thus, the mothers of the problem families scored higher on educational and vocational level than the mothers of the normal families.

Second, relationships among aspects of family functioning were examined. For answering this second research question, relationships among aspects of family functioning were examined within the group of 54 families (that is, the 28 problem families plus the 26 normal families). The pretest scores were used for these analyses.

Third, the effectiveness of the parent program 'Parents and children talking together' was examined in the group of 28 problem families. To be able to evaluate the effects of the parent program, a pretest posttest control group design was used. Therefore, the group of 28 problem families was split in two: an experimental group of 13 families and a control group of 15 families. Both groups were administered a pretest. Subsequently, the parents of the experimental group of 13 families attended the parent program, whereas the parents of the control group of 15 families did not. After the end of the parent program, about two months later, both the experimental group and the control group were administered a posttest. The parents of the control group attended the parent program after the posttest had been administered. Strictly speaking, there were four groups of parents. In October and November 1994 we ran an experimental group of five families in Nijmegen and a control group of nine families in Arnhem. In April and May 1995 we ran an experimental group of eight families and a control group of six families in Nijmegen. Since there were four groups of parents, the parent program was also organized four times. As we were dependent on the number of parents who presented themselves for the first two parent programs and the second two parent programs, and as we took into account parents' preferences for joining the parent program in Nijmegen or Arnhem, it was not possible to form equally large experimental and control groups. Thus, we did not exactly fulfill the condition of random assignment of subjects to the experimental and the control group, as is required in a true pretest posttest control group design. However, we believe our design approximates the demands of a pretest posttest control group design very closely, as we randomly assigned the four groups of parents (two in Nijmegen and two in Arnhem) to the experimental or the control group.

The group of 13 experimental families consisted of 8 families with a boy and 5 families with a girl. Furthermore, the group consisted of 8 two-parent families and 5 one-parent families. However, of 1 two-parent family (with a girl) only the mother participated in the tests and the parent course. The group of 15 control families consisted of 11 families with a boy and 4 families with a girl. Furthermore, the group consisted of 10 two-parent families and 5 one-parent families.

There were no significant differences between the group of experimental families and the group of control families concerning age and sex of the child, family composi-

tion, educational level of the child, vocational level of mothers and fathers, and educational level of the fathers. For mothers we found a difference in educational level ($t(25) = -2.56$; $p < 0.05$). The mean scores were 4.25 ($SD = 1.36$) (on a scale ranging from 1 to 7) for mothers in the experimental group of families, and 5.53 ($SD = 1.25$) for mothers in the control group of families. Thus, the mothers of the experimental group scored lower on educational level than the mothers of the control group.

Finally, every problem family was given 120 Dutch guilders for participation (pretest and posttest), while every normal family was given 75 Dutch guilders for participation (pretest only).

An overview of the design of the present study is presented in the following scheme.

Group of participants:

54 Families	28 Problem Families				
		13 Experimental Families	Pretest	Program	Posttest
		15 Control Families	Pretest	-	Posttest Program
	26 Normal Families		Pretest		

4.2 Measures

Child problem behavior

To assess the degree of child externalizing behavior problems, parents were asked to fill out the Dutch version of the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1979; Verhulst, Koot, Akkerhuis, & Veerman, 1990). The scale 'externalizing problems' consists of 40 items for boys and 42 items for girls on a three-point scale, indicating the degree to which children show various forms of problem behavior. Sum scores were computed over the items of the scale, which subsequently were transformed into T-scores according to the norms of the handbook of the CBCL (Verhulst et al., 1990).

Furthermore, to check whether the parents of the problem families experienced more trouble in parenting, and felt less well than parents of the normal families, parents were asked to fill out two scales from a survey study on parenting in The Netherlands of

Gerris et al. (1993), that is, depression and child rearing stress. Although these scales were originally designed by Gerris et al. using 7-point items, we decided to use 6-point scales to prevent family members from scoring in the middle too often, and to force them to choose between both 'sides' of the scale. For this reason, we decided to use 6-point scales for most of our questionnaire-scales. Thus, the scores range from 1 (disagree) to 6 (agree). The scale 'depression' consisted of 9 items and referred to the extent to which parents felt depressed. Cronbach's alpha at pretest was 0.88 for fathers and 0.85 for mothers. We also checked on Cronbach's alphas at posttest, and as these were comparable with the alphas at pretest for this scale and the following scales, we decided to report only the Cronbach's alphas at pretest. The scale 'child rearing stress' consisted of 9 items (Cronbach's alpha at pretest was 0.87 for fathers and 0.95 for mothers) and referred to the extent to which parents experienced child rearing as a burden and as problematic. For each parent, measures of depression and child rearing stress were assessed by computing mean scores over the items.

Parenting behavior

Support

To asses parental support we asked children to fill out three scales with 6-point items for each parent separately. Two scales were derived from the survey study of Gerris et al. (1993). The first scale, 'affection', consisted of 10 items and assessed the degree to which a child experienced his/her parents as showing positive affection and warmth. Cronbach's alpha at pretest was 0.90 for fathers and 0.87 for mothers. The second scale, 'responsiveness' (8 items, Cronbach's alpha at pretest was 0.95 for fathers and 0.93 for mothers), assessed the degree to which a child experienced his/her parents as reacting adequately to his/her needs, signals, and mood. For each parent a measure of affection and responsiveness was determined by computing mean scores over the items. The third scale, 'care', was derived from the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) (Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979). Although the PBI was designed for use in a retrospective way, by asking adolescents how their parents used to behave, we decided to formulate the items in the present tense to ask children about the relationship with their parents today. The 'care' subscale consisted of 12 items (Cronbach's alpha at pretest was 0.93 for fathers and 0.90 for mothers) and assessed the degree to which each parent cared for the child, showed love and affection, and tried to understand the child's needs and feelings. For each parent a measure of care was determined by computing mean scores over the items of the scale.

<u>Coercive control</u>

To assess coercive control we asked parents to fill out a scale 'power assertion' (five 6-point items, Cronbach's alpha at pretest was 0.70 for fathers and 0.74 for mothers) to assess the extent to which parents used several forms of punishment in their child rearing (Gerris et al., 1993). For each parent a measure of coercive control was determined by computing mean scores over the items of the scale.

<u>Demanding control</u>

To assess demanding control we asked children to fill out the scale 'protection', derived from the Parental Bonding Instrument (Parker et al., 1979). The scale consisted of 13 six-point items. The 'protection' subscale consisted of seven items assessing the degree to which parents overprotected the child without allowing the child the freedom to make its own decisions, and six items assessing the degree to which parents granted autonomy to the child. As we used the scale for measuring demanding control, the seven items measuring the degree to which parents overprotected the child were reversed in scoring. Subsequently mean scores over the items were to be computed for each parent, indicating the degree to which each parent granted autonomy and allowed the child to make its own decisions. However, this autonomy subscale proved not reliable (Cronbach's alpha at pretest was 0.49 for fathers and 0.51 for mothers). For this reason we decided to drop the scale from the analyses.

The quality of the parent-child relationship

We asked children to fill out three scales from the Family Relations Test (Oud & Welzen, 1989) with 6-point items, for each parent separately. The first scale, 'justice' (10 items, Cronbach's alpha at pretest was 0.79 for fathers, and 0.78 for mothers), assessed how the child experienced the reciprocity of giving and taking between parents and child. High scores referred to a child feeling fairly treated by his/her parents. The scale 'appreciation' (13 items, Cronbach's alpha at pretest was 0.94 for fathers, and 0.88 for mothers) assessed the extent to which a child felt appreciated by his/her parents. The third scale, 'trust' (12 items, Cronbach's alpha at pretest was 0.91 for fathers, and 0.89 for mothers), indicated the extent to which a child trusted his/her parents. Measures of justice, appreciation, and trust were assessed by computing mean scores over the items of a scale.

To assess whether fathers and mothers were satisfied about their relationship with their child we asked them to fill out a scale called 'attachment' (Gerris et al., 1993), consisting of nine 6-point items (Cronbach's alpha at pretest was 0.87 for fathers and 0.93 for mothers). Scores on this scale indicated the degree to which parents experienced

a warm, personal relationship with their child. Measures of attachment were also determined by computing mean scores over the items of the scale.

Family structure

Cohesion and flexibility

To assess cohesion and flexibility, parents and children were asked to fill out the Family Dimension Scales (Buurmeijer & Hermans, 1988) with the 'cohesion' scale consisting of twenty-three 4-point items (Cronbach's alpha at pretest was 0.70 for fathers, 0.84 for mothers, and 0.82 for children) and the 'flexibility' scale consisting of thirteen 4-point items (Cronbach's alpha at pretest was 0.75 for fathers, 0.84 for mothers, and 0.68 for children). Mean scores were calculated over the items of both scales for each family member. As discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation study, we followed the interpretation of the cohesion and flexibility scales of Janssens and Oud (1990), assuming linear relationships between cohesion and flexibility, and family functioning. According to this interpretation, cohesion referred to the extent to which a family member experienced the cohesion in his/her family positively, while flexibility referred to the extent to which the family is characterized by a lack of structure and organization. To prevent confusion about the content of the flexibility scale (as the concept of flexibility seems to suggest positive family functioning, while high scores on the scale refer to negative aspects of family functioning), from now on we use the name 'lack of structure' for this scale.

Marital relationship

To assess the quality of the parental relationship, both parents were asked to fill out a scale, 'marital satisfaction', derived from the survey study of Gerris et al. (1993). This scale (seven 6-point items, Cronbach's alpha at pretest was 0.84 for fathers and 0.94 for mothers), assessed the degree to which parents were satisfied with the relationship with their partner. Mean scores were computed over the items, with high scores referring to high marital satisfaction.

Communication between family members

Quality of communication between parents and child

Quality of communication between parents and children was assessed with the Parent Adolescent Communication Scale (Olson et al., 1983), filled out by both parents and children. This questionnaire assessed the degree to which there was openness of communication between parent and child and the degree to which the interaction was characterized by conflicts. The questionnaire consisted of twenty 6-point items. Children were asked to fill out this questionnaire for fathers and mothers separately (Cronbach's

alpha at pretest was 0.92 for fathers, and 0.87 for mothers). Both fathers and mothers were asked to fill out the questionnaire with regard to the communication with their child (Cronbach's alpha at pretest was 0.87 for fathers, and 0.89 for mothers). Next, mean scores were calculated. High scores referred to a family member positively evaluating his/her communication with the other family member.

Furthermore, observations were used to assess communication between parents and children. Parents and child were observed during interaction tasks and during a meal. First, a decision-making task was used. Parents and child were instructed to plan a vacation together, on the basis of a form with eight questions on destination, accommodation, means of transport, preferred activities etc. Each question was accompanied by several alternatives, from which parents and child had to choose. They had to reach agreement on each choice, and were allowed to discuss these issues over a period of 10 minutes. Second, a tangram puzzle was used. Tangram consists of seven different pieces that can be put together to form many different figures. The child was given a form with 32 tangram-figures, and was instructed to complete as many figures as possible in 10 minutes. The parents were allowed to assist the child by giving instructions, information and explanations, but they were not allowed to touch the pieces of the puzzle, or to solve the puzzle themselves. Third, the child was presented a series of eight puzzles, containing brainteasers, tasks of logical thinking, and number work. Again the child was instructed to solve the puzzles himself of herself. Parents were allowed to give information, explanation or instruction, without solving the puzzles themselves, and without giving immediate solutions. Parents and child were given five minutes for each puzzle. If a puzzle had not been solved after five minutes, they had to turn to the next puzzle. Thus, this third interaction task lasted for 40 minutes at most. Fourth, parents and child were observed during dinner. They were instructed to have dinner as usual. Because the dinner observations varied in length, only the first 15 minutes of each mealtime were used for observation. Fifth, parents and child were observed during a conflict-resolution task. Parents and child were each asked to write down an issue they disagreed about. After that they were invited to explain their ideas about these issues and to try to agree on solutions. They were allowed to discuss these issues over a period of 20 minutes.

Because the parents and children of the problem families were administered both a pretest and a posttest, we used two different, but comparable versions of the decision-making task, the tangram puzzle, and the eight puzzles task (an A and B version). The order in which the A and B versions were used was counterbalanced; Half of the experimental families and half of the control families were given version A at pretest and version B at posttest, while the other half of the experimental and control families were given version B at pretest and version A at posttest. In this way, any influence of the

75

order of the task versions was controlled for. Concerning the conflict-resolution task, parents and child were asked at posttest to discuss issues that they had not yet discussed at pretest.

All interactions were recorded on video. After that, all interactions during the decision-making task, the tangram puzzle, the series of eight puzzles, and the mealtime situation were rated by two coders (one of which was uninformed about which families were problem families and normal families, or experimental and control families). The average scores of the two raters were used for analysis. The ratings were made on seven-point Likert scales. Four dimensions of parental communication were rated, that is, intrusiveness, quality of explanation and assistance, positive communication, and negative communication. These dimensions were rated for the decision-making task, the tangram puzzle, and each of the eight puzzles separately. For the interaction during dinner, only positive and negative communication were rated. Ratings were coded for fathers and mothers separately. Intrusiveness ratings were based on the parent's style of responding to the child. High scores indicate that parents were interrupting, making demands, ordering, commanding, and rushing the child without giving him or her room for exploring (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wolfson, Mumme, & Guskin, 1995). Interrater reliability was determined by calculating Pearson correlations between the two coders' scores after observing 15 families (6 one-parent families and 9 two-parent families). For intrusiveness, the Pearson correlation was 0.77. Ratings of quality of assistance and explanation were based on clarity and appropriateness of parents' information and suggestions. High scores on this scale indicate that parents gave adequate information on what is meant or how to handle the puzzle, asked questions to stimulate the child to think about the solution, and provided the child with strategies and suggestions that may lead to a solution. They helped the child to solve the puzzles by him- or herself. Interrater reliability, assessed with the Pearson correlation between the two raters' codes, was 0.78. Ratings of positive communication focused on parents' verbal expressions of enthusiasm, praising and rewarding the child's ideas and attempts to solve the puzzles, supportive remarks, and nonverbal expressions of warmth, like touching and hugging the child, and smiling warmly. The Pearson correlation between the two coders' ratings was only 0.53. This low correlation is probably due to the low variance in scores on positive communication (the mean score on positive communication over all interaction tasks for fathers was 4.0 with a standard deviation of 0.42; the mean score on positive communication for mothers was 4.1 with a standard deviation of 0.43). Furthermore, the mean difference between the two coders' scores (over the 15 families used for determining interrater reliability) was only 0.55 on a seven-point scale. Thus, the low Pearson correlation coefficient should not be interpreted as indicating that interrater agreement was

lacking. Finally, ratings on <u>negative communication</u> were based on parents' verbal expressions of negative affect, criticism, put downs, disapproval, sarcasm, threats, indifferent or evasive remarks, and nonverbal aversive expressions, like frowning and angry looks. The Pearson correlation between the two coders' ratings of negative communication was 0.70.

The interaction between parents and child at the conflict-resolution task was recorded on video and coded, using a micro coding system, which means that each statement of father, mother, and child was coded. A new code was recorded each time the type of statement displayed by the speaker changed, or each time a new speaker began talking. Thus, one speaking turn may consist of several messages, which were coded separately. Furthermore, we coded who spoke, what the content of the message was, and to whom the message was directed. Concerning content, a coding system was developed, based on the four steps of the problem solving process as is taught in 'Parents and children talking together'; that is, step one: discussing the conflict, step two: brainstorming solutions, step three: choosing a solution and working it out, and step four: evaluating the solution. Within each step of the problem solving process, codes of constructive, negative, and neutral communication are distinguished. In the following, we consider the codes within each step in more detail.

<u>1. Discussing the conflict.</u>

Seven codes within this category refer to a constructive discussion of the problem, that is, explaining one's point of view; asking questions for more information; paraphrasing (active listening); showing understanding and empathy; supportiveness (expressions of agreement with other family members, showing approval and acceptance (compliments, praise), and relaxing remarks such as laughs and jokes); seeing to the fact that only one problem at a time is discussed; and expressions of attentive listening.

Five codes refer to a more negative way of discussing the conflict, that is: aversive expressions (criticisms, put downs, irritable expressions); disagreements (expressions of disagreement, or agreeing in a hesitating, unwilling way indicating no real agreement, such as 'yes but...'); expressions of withdrawal from discussion (such as 'I don't like this task', 'can't we discuss this later?'); commands and prohibitions; and bringing up other subjects (problems that are not at focus now and that are meant to criticize the other person).

Two codes refer to neutral conversation, that is, neutral remarks and neutral questions. Neutral conversation refers to remarks that have nothing to do with the interaction tasks (such as 'would you like some more coffee?', 'what time is it?').

2. Brainstorming solutions.

Eleven codes within this category refer to constructive expressions in brainstorming solutions, that is, suggesting solutions; clarifying suggested solutions; making jokes about solutions (in a positive way); suggesting punishments, and suggesting rewards that can be used in working out the solutions; asking for suggestions for solutions; asking someone to clarify solutions; writing down suggestions; supportiveness (expressions of agreement, approval, and laughs or jokes); seeing to the fact that the discussion is focused on solutions for the problem and not on other subjects; and expressions of attentive listening.

Nine codes refer to rather negative ways of brainstorming solutions, that is: rejecting solutions immediately; suggesting solutions that imply criticism; setting rules without discussion (refusing to consider solutions); aversive expressions (criticisms, put downs, irritable expressions); suggesting solutions in a very cynical way, not meant seriously; disagreements (expressions of disagreement, or agreeing in a hesitating, unwilling way indicating no real agreement); expressions of withdrawal from discussion; commands and prohibitions (including forcing someone to pay attention); and bringing up other subjects.

Once again, two codes refer to neutral communication: neutral remarks and neutral questions.

3. Selecting a solution and making agreements.

Nine codes refer to a constructive way of selecting a solution, that is, summarizing and presenting an overview of all suggested solutions; crossing off the list solutions that are not practicable; deciding on which solution will be selected and making agreements about working it out; asking for clarification concerning solution or agreements; clarifying solution or agreements; writing down the selected solution or agreements; supportiveness (expressions of agreement, approval, and jokes or laughs); seeing to the fact that no other subjects are brought up that may distract from the real subject; and expressions of attentive listening.

Seven codes refer to less constructive ways of selecting a solution, that is: immediately rejecting solutions or agreements; forcing a solution without discussion; aversive expressions (criticisms, put downs, irritable expressions); disagreements (expressions of disagreement, or agreeing in a hesitating, unwilling way indicating no real agreement); expressions of withdrawal from discussion; commands and prohibitions; and bringing up other subjects that are not at focus.

Neutral conversation consists of neutral remarks and neutral questions.

4. Evaluating.

Two constructive code categories were used, that is: agreements about when and how to evaluate the selected solution; and supportiveness (expressions of agreement, approval, and relaxing remarks).

Four codes refer to a more negative interaction: aversive expressions (criticisms, put downs, irritable expressions); disagreements (expressions of disagreement, or agreeing in a hesitating, unwilling way indicating no real agreement); expressions of withdrawal from discussion; and commands and prohibitions.

Again two codes refer to neutral conversation, that is: neutral remarks and neutral questions.

Summed over the four steps of the problem solving process, we used 29 codes referring to constructive communication, 25 codes referring to negative communication, and 8 codes referring to neutral communication between parents and child.

Thus, concerning the content of the interactions between parents and child, for each message we coded the phase of the problem solving process (that is: the four steps of discussing the problem; brainstorming solutions; choosing a solution; and evaluating) as well as the type of the message (that is: whether a message was constructive; negative; or neutral). For comparing the effectiveness of the parent program (the third major research question), coding the phase of the problem solving process (the four steps) was relevant, since the parents were taught in the program to solve problems according to these four steps. For comparing the problem families with the normal families on aspects of family functioning (the first major research question), however, the four phases of the problem solving process were less relevant (as the parents of the group of normal families did not follow the parent program in which these four steps of problem solving were taught). Thus, these two groups were compared on aspects of constructive, negative, and neutral communication, regardless of the phase of the problem solving process the codes fell into. The two groups were compared on seven types of constructive communication, that is: attentive listening; questioning; expressing one's point of view; suggesting solutions; writing down solutions and agreements; making agreements; and supportiveness. Attentive listening consisted of the sum of the attentive listening codes over the four steps of the problems solving process, and of the code for active listening/paraphrasing (step one). Questioning consisted of the codes asking questions for more information (step one), asking for solutions and asking for clarification of proposed solutions (step two), and asking for clarification of the solution that is chosen or of agreements (step three). Expressing one's point of view consisted of the codes explaining one's point of view on the problem (step one), clarifying suggested solutions (step two), clarifying the chosen solution or the agreements (step three), and the codes for seeing to the fact that

79

only one problem at a time is discussed and no other subjects are brought up (summed over step one, two, and three). <u>Suggesting solutions</u> consisted of suggesting solutions, making jokes about possible solutions (that is, proposing funny solutions), and suggesting punishments and rewards that can be used in working out the suggested solutions (step two). <u>Writing down solutions and agreements</u> consisted of the codes writing down all solutions that are suggested (step two) and writing down the solution chosen and agreements about how the solution should be worked out (step three). <u>Making agreements</u> consisted of the codes for summarizing all suggested solutions, crossing off the list impracticable solutions, selecting a solution and making agreements about working it out (step three), and making agreements about evaluating the selected solution (step four). <u>Supportiveness</u> consisted of the codes supportiveness (expressions of agreement, showing approval and acceptance, and laughs and jokes) summed over all four steps of the problem solving process, and the code for showing understanding and empathy (step one).

Furthermore, the two groups were compared on three aspects of negative communication, that is, aversive expressions and commands, disagreements, and forcing rules or solutions. <u>Aversive expressions and commands</u> consisted of the codes aversive expressions (criticisms, put downs, and irritable expressions) (summed over all four steps of the problem solving process), commands and prohibitions (also summed over all four steps of the problem solving process), suggesting solutions in a very cynical way, or solutions that imply criticism (step two), expressions of withdrawal from discussion (summed over all four steps of the problem solving process), and bringing up other subjects and problems meant to criticize one another (summed over step one, two, and three). <u>Disagreements</u> consisted of the codes of disagreement, summed over the four steps of the problem solving process, and the codes for immediately rejecting suggested solutions (step two) or selected solutions and agreements (step three). <u>Forcing rules or solutions</u> consisted of the codes setting rules without discussion (step two) and forcing a solution without discussion (step three).

Finally, the two groups were compared on neutral communication. <u>Neutral communication</u> consisted of the codes neutral remarks and neutral questions, summed over all four steps of the problem solving process.

Interrater reliability was assessed, based on the seven categories of constructive communication, the three categories of negative communication, and the category of neutral communication, described above.

Interrater reliability was assessed after coding the interactions of three families (consisting of 1333 coded utterances). Subsequently interrater reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa (kappa's are in parentheses), on the following 11 code categories of

attentive listening (0.67), questioning (0.78), expressing one's point of view and clarifying suggestions and agreements in a neutral or friendly way (0.66), aversive expressions and commands (0.62), suggesting solutions (0.80), writing down solutions and agreements (0.53), disagreements, and rejecting solutions and agreements (0.68), setting rules or forcing a solution without allowing discussion (0.92), making agreements on the selected solution (0.68), supportiveness (0.67), and finally neutral remarks (0.60). The overall Cohen's kappa was 0.62. Two types of disagreements between the two raters occurred, that is, disagreement on the code that should be assigned to a particular utterance, and disagreement because one of the coders missed an utterance that the other coder noticed and coded. This second type of disagreement occurred fairly often (206 times, that is, 15 percent of the total number of utterances), because we coded directly from videotape, without written protocols, and the audibility of some tapes was not very good. Furthermore, family members may speak at the same time, and they may speak in a low or soft voice, making the interaction hardly understandable. When we leave this second type of disagreement out of consideration, and calculate Cohen's kappa's over only those utterances that both coders noticed and coded, kappa's are as follows: attentive listening (0.83), questioning (0.84), expressing one's point of view and clarifying suggestions and agreements in a neutral or friendly way (0.73), aversive expressions and commands (0.66), suggesting solutions (0.84), writing down solutions and agreements (1.00), disagreements, and rejecting solutions and agreements (0.78), setting rules or forcing a solution without allowing discussion (0.92), making agreements on the selected solution (0.71), supportiveness (0.76), and finally neutral remarks (0.65). The overall Cohen's kappa was 0.76. According to Vuchinich, Bank, and Patterson (1992), who coded parent-child interaction in the home and reported an average Cohen's kappa of 0.52, this indicates agreement far beyond chance levels.

After interrater reliability had been established, one of the coders coded all videotapes.

After coding all interaction, several measures were computed.

For comparing the problem families with the normal families on aspects of family functioning (the first major research question), we computed proportions of attentive listening, questioning, expressing one's point of view, suggesting solutions, writing down solutions and agreements, making agreements, supportiveness, aversive expressions and commands, disagreements, forcing rules or solutions, and finally neutral communication, for each parent-child dyad. For example, the proportion of mothers' attentive listening reactions to the child was computed by dividing the total number of attentive listening reactions from mother to the child by the total number of utterances from mother directed to the child. In the same way the proportions of attentive listening

reactions directed from father to the child, and from the child to mother and to father were computed. This procedure was applied to all code categories.

Furthermore, we constructed the measures of negative synchronicity, negative continuance, and negative sequences to differentiate between problem families and normal families (Patterson et al., 1992; Wilson & Gottman, 1995). For computing these measures, all negative code categories (that is, 25 code categories), summed over the four steps of the problem solving process, were used. For the sake of completeness, the same measures were computed, using only those negative code categories that did not refer to disagreements between family members (that is, 21 code categories). This was done because there may be a difference between disagreements and other types of negative remarks such as aversive expressions and put downs. Disagreements may be part of constructive, well functioning problem solving processes as well, and should not necessarily be interpreted negatively.

First, we computed for each parent-child dyad the measures of <u>negative synchronicity</u>. Negative synchronicity refers to one family member reacting aversively immediately following the aversive behavior of the other family member. For the mother-child dyad, the proportion of negative synchronicity was computed by dividing the number of interaction sequences in which a negative utterance of the mother was directly followed by a negative utterance of the child, by the number of interaction sequences in which a negative utterance of the mother was followed by an arbitrary (whether negative or not) utterance of the child. Negative synchronicity consisting of negative utterances of the child followed by a negative utterance of the mother, was computed in the same way. For the father-child dyad, comparable measures of negative synchronicity were computed.

Measures of <u>negative continuance</u> refer to the likelihood that a family member communicates aversively and continues to be aversive, regardless of the reaction of the other family member. Measures of negative continuance were also computed for each parent-child dyad. The proportion of negative continuance from mother to child was computed by the number of sequences in which mother made a negative remark to the child, followed by an arbitrary remark of the child, followed by a negative remark from mother to child again, divided by the number of sequences in which mother made a negative remark to the child, followed by a arbitrary remark from the child to mother, which in turn was followed by an arbitrary remark from mother to child. In the same way measures of negative continuance were computed for the communication from father to the child, and for the communication from the child to mother and father, respectively.

Measures of <u>negative sequences</u> refer to the tendency of family members to react negatively to each other's negative statements. Negative sequences in the mother-child

dyad consist of sequences in which a negative remark from mother to child is followed by a negative remark from child to mother, which in turn is followed by a negative remark from mother to child, or of sequences in which a negative remark from child to mother is followed by a negative remark from mother to child, which in turn is followed by a negative remark from child to mother. Since large amounts of data are required for analyzing sequences of three or more utterances, it was not possible, with the amount of interaction data of this study, to analyze sequences consisting of more than three negative utterances. Proportions of negative sequences are computed by dividing, for example, the number of sequences of a negative maternal utterance, followed by a negative child utterance, followed by a negative maternal utterance, by the number of sequences that start with a negative maternal utterance and are followed by an arbitrary utterance of the child and the mother, respectively. Thus, negative parent-child interaction sequences are computed starting with a negative maternal remark, a negative paternal remark, a negative remark of the child directed to mother, or a negative remark of the child directed to father.

For comparing the parent-child interaction in the experimental families and the control families (that is, for evaluating the effects of the parent program, the third major research question) proportions of negative and constructive communication were computed for each parent-child dyad. Thus, we computed the proportion of negative and constructive communication from mother and father directed to the child, and from the child directed to mother and father, respectively. First, we computed these measures regardless of the four steps or phases of the problem solving process. For the proportion of constructive communication, all code categories referring to constructive interaction in the four steps of the problem solving process were used for analyses (that is, 29 code categories). For the proportion of negative communication, all negative code categories (that is, 25 code categories), summed over the four steps of the problem solving process, were used. Once more, for the sake of completeness, the proportion of negative communication was also computed, using only those negative code categories not referring to disagreements between family members (that is, 21 code categories). The proportion of negative communication from mother directed to the child during the problem solving process, for example, was computed by dividing the number of negative remarks from mother to the child by the total number of remarks that mother made to the child. In the same way, the proportions of negative interactions from father to the child, and from the child to father and mother, respectively, were computed. We computed the proportions of constructive communication in the same way for each parent-child dyad.

Second, the measures of constructive and negative communication were computed while distinguishing between the first step of problem solving and the second, third, and fourth step. The first step referred to discussing the problem and the opinions and needs

83

of each family member. The second step (brainstorming solutions), third step (selecting the best acceptable solution), and fourth step (evaluating the effectiveness of the selected solution) were taken together, as they all referred to finding and working out a solution to the problem. Furthermore, the codes within the third and fourth step of the problem solving process did not occur very frequently. Therefore, we decided to group them together with the codes of the second step of the problem solving process. Thus, we subsequently computed the proportion of constructive and negative communication during the first step of the problem solving process, that is, discussing the conflict. For the proportion of constructive communication during the first step, the seven code categories referring to constructive communication during the first step of problem solving were used for analyses. For the proportion of negative communication, the five code categories referring to negative interactions during the first step of problem solving were used for analyses. The proportion of negative communication during the first step of problem solving was also computed using only the four negative code categories not referring to disagreements between family members. The proportion of negative communication from mother directed to the child during the first step of the problem solving process, for example, was computed by dividing the number of negative remarks from mother to the child during the first step by the total number of remarks that mother made to the child during the first step of the problem solving process. In the same way, the proportions of negative communication from father to the child, and from the child to father and mother, respectively, were computed. We computed the proportions of constructive communication in the same way for each parent-child dyad. Subsequently, proportions of constructive and negative communication were computed for the discussion during the second, third, and fourth step of the problem solving process. For the proportion of constructive communication during the second, third, and fourth step of problem solving, the code categories referring to constructive communication summed over these three steps of problem solving were used for analyses (that is, 22 code categories). For the proportion of negative communication, the code categories referring to negative interactions during the second, third, and fourth step of problem solving were used for analyses (that is, 20 code categories). The proportion of negative communication during these steps of problem solving was also computed using only the negative code categories not referring to disagreements between family members (that is, 17 code categories summed over step two, three, and four). The proportion of negative communication from mother directed to the child during the second, third and fourth step of the problem solving process, for example, was computed by dividing the number of negative remarks from mother to the child during these steps by the total number of remarks that mother made to the child during these steps of the problem solving process. In this way proportions of constructive and negative communication were computed for the

interaction between mother and child, and between father and child, during the second, third, and fourth step of the problem solving process.

Furthermore, the experimental and control families were compared using the measures of negative synchronicity, negative continuance, and negative sequences for each parent-child dyad. As was described before, these measures were computed using all codes of constructive communication, all codes of negative communication (including remarks of disagreement), and those codes of negative communication not referring to disagreements between family members, respectively. For computing these measures, we did not distinguish between the four steps of the problem solving process.

Quality of communication between parents

To assess the quality of the communication between parents, parents were asked to fill out a scale 'destructive communication' (Gerris et al., 1993), consisting of six 6-point items (Cronbach's alpha at pretest was 0.78 for fathers and 0.85 for mothers). For each parent a mean score was calculated, with high scores indicating negative spousal interaction.

4.3 Procedure

Each pretest and posttest consisted of two visits at home with the families. Each visit lasted for about one hour. During the first visit, parents and child were observed at the decision-making task (planning a vacation), the tangram puzzle, and the eight puzzles task. At the end of the first visit, parents and child were given the questionnaires. They were each asked to fill out their questionnaires (with father, mother, or son/daughter written on it to indicate who had to fill out which questionnaire) before the second visit. The second visit was planned about one week later, and consisted of video observation of the mealtime situation and the conflict-resolution task. At the second visit, the observer collected the questionnaires again.

Each problem family received an allowance of 120 Dutch guilders for participation (they were administered a pretest and a posttest). Each normal family received an allowance of 75 Dutch guilders (they were administered a pretest only).

5. Results

In this chapter, the research questions as they were described in the fourth paragraph of the first chapter, are answered. First; results are presented concerning differences in family functioning between problem families and normal families. Second; results concerning relationships among aspects of family functioning are presented. Third; results on the effects of the parent program 'Parents and children talking together' are described.

5.1 Differences between problem families and normal families.

To test for significant differences between the problem families and the normal families, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests. The analyses were done for fathers and mothers separately, with the analyses for fathers on groups of 17 and 20, and the analyses for mothers on groups of 28 and 26 families, respectively. The analyses were done on the pretest scores of both groups of families. In this paragraph, the results are presented for child behavior, parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, family structure, and the communication between family members, respectively.

<u>Externalizing behavior of the child</u>

First, we checked whether the parents in the problem families indeed experienced more child rearing problems than the parents in the normal families.

In Table 1 mean pretest T-scores on child externalizing behavior, and mean pretest scores on parental depression and child rearing stress are presented for the problem and normal families. The analyses on parental depression and child rearing stress were done for mothers and fathers separately. The analyses on child externalizing behavior were done for boys and girls separately, to validate that there were differences between the two groups of families in problem behavior of boys as well as girls.

From Table 1, it is clear that in the problem families the CBCL reported more externalizing behavior problems with boys and girls than in the normal families.

Concerning parental depression, significant differences were found between the mothers of the problem families and the mothers of the normal families, with the mothers of the first group being somewhat more depressed than the mothers of the second group (although the mean scores on depression were still rather low for both groups). For fathers, no significant differences were found between the two groups of families. Concerning childrearing stress, differences were found between the two groups of families,

for both fathers and mothers, with the parents of the problem families experiencing more childrearing stress than the parents of the normal families.

Table 1
Mean Scores on Children's Externalizing Behavior, and on Parental Depression and Child Rearing Stress in Problem and Normal Families

	Problem families	Normal families	F	p
Girls	(n=9)	(n=10)		
Externalizing behavior	57.4	48.2	4.96	.04
Boys	(n=19)	(n=16)		
Externalizing behavior	64.1	52.0	26.03	.00
Father				
Depression	2.64	2.42	.56	.46
Childrearing stress	3.46	2.31	21.30	.00
Mother				
Depression	2.77	2.11	10.17	.00
Childrearing stress	3.85	2.09	57.49	.00

Parenting practices

In Table 2 mean pretest scores on affection, responsiveness and care as aspects of parental support, and on coercive control, are presented for the groups of problem and normal families.

Table 2
Mean Scores on Parental Affection, Responsiveness, Care, and Coercive Control in Problem and Normal Families

	Problem families	Normal families	F	p
Fathers				
Affection	4.09	4.65	3.97	.05
Responsiveness	3.74	4.74	9.77	.00
Care	4.32	5.09	7.81	.01
Coercive control	2.88	2.60	1.11	.30
Mothers				
Affection	4.39	4.82	4.26	.04
Responsiveness	4.60	5.16	6.76	.01
Care	4.89	5.34	6.93	.01
Coercive Control	2.93	2.72	.69	.41

From Table 2, it is clear that differences between the parents of the problem families and the parents of the normal families were found only for parental support; the parents of the problem families offered their child less affection and were less responsive

and caring toward their child than the parents of the normal families. This held for fathers and mothers as well. No significant differences between the two groups of parents were found concerning the use of coercive control.

The quality of the parent-child relationship

In Table 3 mean scores on justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment, indicating the quality of the parent-child relationship, are presented for both groups of families.

Table 3
Mean Scores on Justice, Appreciation, Trust, and Attachment in the Parent-Child Relationship in Problem and Normal Families

	Problem families	Normal families	F	p
Father-child relationship				
Justice	3.95	4.79	24.68	.00
Appreciation	3.99	4.66	6.28	.02
Trust	4.10	4.68	6.16	.02
Attachment	4.41	5.03	7.69	.01
Mother-child relationship				
Justice	4.24	4.75	11.43	.00
Appreciation	4.36	4.79	4.97	.03
Trust	4.35	4.80	5.90	.02
Attachment	4.49	5.28	10.68	.00

Table 3 shows that there were significant differences between the problem and normal families on all these measures. The parent-child relationships in the problem families were characterized by less justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment, than the parent-child relationships in the normal families. This held for the father-child and the mother-child relationship as well.

Family structure

In Table 4 mean pretest scores on family cohesion, lack of family structure, and marital satisfaction are presented for both groups of families.

Table 4 indicates some significant differences in family structure between the problem and normal families. First, both mothers and children in the problem families evaluated their families as less cohesive than mothers and children in the normal families. There was no significant difference between the two groups in the fathers' evaluation of cohesion in their families. Second, the mothers and children of the problem families experienced more lack of structure in their families than the mothers and children of the normal families. For the fathers' view on lack of family structure, no significant difference between the two groups of families was found. Furthermore, no significant differ-

ences between the two groups were found concerning marital satisfaction; neither for the fathers', nor for the mothers' judgements.

Table 4
Mean Scores on Cohesion, Lack of Family Structure, and Marital Satisfaction in Problem and Normal Families

	Problem families	Normal families	F	p
Cohesion				
According to father	2.97	2.98	.02	.89
According to mother	2.92	3.12	7.39	.01
According to child	2.91	3.09	4.79	.03
Lack of family structure				
According to father	1.76	1.69	.43	.52
According to mother	1.85	1.58	7.92	.01
According to child	1.94	1.71	6.88	.01
Marital satisfaction				
According to father	4.84	4.63	.58	.45
According to mother	4.16	4.64	1.39	.25

The communication between family members

For assessing the communication between family members, questionnaires and observations were used.

In Table 5 the results of the questionnaires are shown. Mean scores on the quality of the parent-child communication, and on destructive communication between the parents are presented for both groups of families.

Table 5
Mean scores on the Quality of Parent-Child Communication, and Destructive Communication between Parents in Problem and Normal Families

	Problem families	Normal families	F	p
Quality of Father-child Comm				
According to father	4.05	4.50	5.41	.03
According to child	3.83	4.54	8.41	.01
Quality of Mother-child Comm				
According to mother	3.98	4.67	16.35	.00
According to child	4.15	4.67	8.95	.00
Destructive Communication				
According to father	3.08	3.27	.48	.49
According to mother	3.31	2.78	3.00	.09

Table 5 shows that the parent-child communication was experienced more positively in the normal families than in the problem families, by both parents and children. This held for the communication between father and child, as well as between mother and child. Concerning destructive communication between the parents as partners, no statistically significant differences were found between the two groups of families.

In Table 6 and 7, the results of the observations during the decision-making task, the tangram puzzle, the eight puzzles, and the mealtime situation are presented. For each group of families, mean rating scores on intrusiveness, quality of explanation, positive communication, and negative communication are presented.

We analyzed whether there were differences between the two groups of families for each observation task separately. Concerning the eight cognitive puzzles, an average rating score was computed over the eight puzzles, and used for analysis. The analyses were conducted for fathers (Table 6) and mothers (Table 7) separately.

Table 6
Mean Rating Scores for Fathers on Intrusiveness, Quality of Explanation, and Positive and Negative Communication in Problem and Normal Families

	Problem families	Normal families	F	p
Fathers				
Decision-making task				
Intrusiveness	2.00	1.89	.22	.65
Quality of explanation	3.22	3.31	.08	.78
Positive communication	4.41	4.58	.76	.39
Negative communication	1.13	1.08	.64	.43
Tangram				
Intrusiveness	2.81	2.14	5.98	.02
Quality of explanation	4.03	3.89	.23	.63
Positive communication	4.38	4.71	2.50	.12
Negative communication	1.22	1.25	.10	.76
Eight puzzles				
Intrusiveness	1.91	1.80	.33	.57
Quality of explanation	2.67	2.67	.00	.97
Positive communication	3.97	4.23	3.67	.06
Negative communication	1.16	1.10	.65	.43
Mealtime				
Positive communication	4.25	4.44	.95	.34
Negative communication	1.43	1.15	5.93	.02

Table 6 shows that there were few differences between the fathers of the problem families and the fathers of the normal families. The only two statistically significant find-

ings indicated that the fathers of the problem families were more intrusive during the tangram task, and communicated more negatively to their child during mealtime, than the fathers of the normal families. However, it should be noted that the mean ratings on intrusiveness and especially on negative communication were rather low for both groups of fathers, indicating that there was little intrusiveness and negative communication on the part of both groups of fathers.

Table 7
Mean Rating Scores for Mothers on Intrusiveness, Quality of Explanation, and Positive and Negative Communication in Problem and Normal Families

	Problem families	Normal families	F	p
Mothers				
Decision-making task				
Intrusiveness	2.22	1.95	2.70	.11
Quality of explanation	3.46	3.52	.04	.85
Positive communication	4.55	4.79	1.90	.17
Negative communication	1.41	1.09	3.73	.06
Tangram				
Intrusiveness	2.15	1.88	2.17	.15
Quality of explanation	3.44	3.67	.70	.41
Positive communication	4.38	4.78	4.90	.03
Negative communication	1.31	1.13	2.65	.11
Eight puzzles				
Intrusiveness	1.71	1.65	.25	.62
Quality of explanation	2.41	2.50	.40	.53
Positive communication	4.07	4.24	1.84	.18
Negative communication	1.13	1.07	2.32	.13
Mealtime				
Positive communication	4.59	4.61	.02	.89
Negative communication	1.38	1.22	2.22	.14

Table 7 shows that only one significant difference between the two groups of mothers was found, indicating that the mothers of the problem families communicated less positively to their child during the tangram task, than the mothers of the normal families. However, the absolute difference in the rating scores on positive communication is rather small (about half a point), indicating that the mothers of the two groups did not differ much on positive communication.

In Table 8 and 9, the results of the observations during the conflict-resolution task are presented. For the parent-child communication in both groups of families, mean proportions of attentive listening, questioning, expressing one's point of view, suggest-

ing solutions, writing down solutions and agreements, making agreements, supportiveness, aversive expressions, disagreements, forcing rules and agreements, and neutral communication are presented. The analyses were done for the communication between father and child (Table 8) and between mother and child (Table 9) separately.

Table 8
Mean Proportions of Constructive, Negative, and Neutral Father-Child Communication during the Conflict-Resolution Task in Problem and Normal Families

	Problem families	Normal families	F	p
Constructive Communication				
From father to child				
Attentive listening	.06	.11	7.12	.01
Questioning	.18	.18	.03	.86
Expressing point of view	.45	.44	.05	.83
Suggesting solutions	.06	.07	.19	.67
Making agreements	.04	.03	.40	.53
Writing down solutions				
and agreements	.00	.01	1.24	.27
Supportiveness	.07	.08	.65	.43
From child to father				
Attentive listening	.09	.13	1.18	.28
Questioning	.04	.06	.64	.43
Expressing point of view	.51	.50	.02	.90
Suggesting solutions	.04	.04	.43	.52
Making agreements	.01	.01	.91	.38
Writing down solutions				
and agreements	.00	.00	.61	.44
Supportiveness	.08	.11	.82	.37
Negative Communication				
From father to child				
Negative expressions				
and commands	.07	.01	10.60	.00
Disagreements	.04	.03	1.51	.23
Forcing rules and solutions	.01	.00	.97	.33
From child to father				
Negative expressions				
and commands	.10	.03	7.36	.01
Disagreements	.09	.09	.00	1.0
Forcing rules and solutions	.00	.00	-	
Neutral Communication				
From father to child	.02	.04	1.21	.28
From child to father	.03	.03	.02	.88

Table 9

Mean Proportions of Constructive, Negative, and Neutral Mother-Child Communication
during the Conflict-Resolution Task in Problem and Normal Families

	Problem families	Normal families	F	p
Constructive Communication				
From mother to child				
Attentive listening	.08	.09	1.01	.32
Questioning	.16	.17	.06	.80
Expressing point of view	.47	.45	.11	.74
Suggesting solutions	.06	.07	.17	.68
Making agreements	.04	.03	.09	.77
Writing down solutions				
and agreements	.01	.01	.49	.49
Supportiveness	.06	.09	6.85	.01
From child to mother				
Attentive listening	.10	.13	.95	.34
Questioning	.04	.06	2.90	.10
Expressing point of view	.47	.53	2.97	.09
Suggesting solutions	.05	.06	.05	.83
Making agreements	.02	.01	1.04	.31
Writing down solutions				
and agreements	.01	.01	.11	.75
Supportiveness	.06	.09	4.85	.03
Negative Communication				
From mother to child				
Negative expressions				
and commands	.05	.01	7.61	.01
Disagreements	.05	.03	2.70	.11
Forcing rules and solutions	.00	.00	.49	.49
From child to mother				
Negative expressions				
and commands	.14	.03	17.70	.00
Disagreements	.09	.07	.83	.37
Forcing rules and solutions	.00	.00	-	
Neutral Communication				
From mother to child	.03	.04	.90	.35
From child to mother	.03	.03	.02	.88

Table 8 shows, that there were few significant differences in father-child communication between the problem and normal families. Concerning constructive communication between father and child, the only significant finding indicated that the proportion of attentive listening was higher for the fathers in the group of normal families than for the fathers in the group of problem families. This held only for the proportion of attentive listening from father to child.

Concerning negative communication between father and child, there were significant differences between the two groups of families, with higher proportions of negative expressions and commands in the problem families than in the normal families. Both fathers and children of the problem families communicated more negatively toward each other than the fathers and children of the normal families. (For the degree to which children force rules and solutions upon their fathers, no $\underline{F}$-value could be computed, as there was zero variance in the groups.)

For the proportions of neutral communication between father and child, no significant differences between the two groups of families were found.

Table 9 indicates that there were few statistically significant differences in mother-child communication between the two groups of families. Concerning constructive communication, the groups differed significantly on both mothers' and children's supportiveness toward each other, with the mothers and children of the problem families being less supportive in their interactions than the mothers and children of the normal families.

Concerning negative communication, it is clear that both the mothers and children of the problem families made more negative expressions and commands toward one another than the mothers and children of the normal families.

No significant differences between the two groups were found concerning neutral communication between mother and child.

Finally, we used the measures of negative synchronicity, negative continuance, and negative sequences to analyze differences between problem families and normal families. For computing these measures, all observed negative code categories during the conflict-resolution task were used. For the sake of completeness, we also computed these measures, excluding the code categories referring to disagreements with the other person's point of view. The analyses were done for the father-child dyad and the mother-child dyad separately, and are presented in Table 10 and 11, respectively.

Table 10 shows that when expressions of disagreement were included in the analyses, no significant differences in father-child communication between problem and normal families emerged.

When expressions of disagreement were left out of the analyses, however, some differences between the two groups of families were found. The fathers of the problem families were found to continue directing negative remarks to the child more often, once they made a negative remark, and to be part of more negative sequences in which they made the first negative remark. For the communication from the child to father, we found

a higher proportion of negative synchronicity (with the child reacting negatively to a negative remark of father), and of negative continuance (with the child tending to continue communicating negatively once a negative remark was made) in problem families than in control families.

Table 10
Mean Proportions of Negative Synchronicity, Negative Continuance, and Negative Sequences in Father-Child Communication during the Conflict-Resolution Task in Problem and Normal Families

	Problem families	Normal families	F	p
Negative Communication Including disagreements				
From father to child				
Negative synchronicity	.35	.31	.08	.78
Negative continuance	.26	.10	2.33	.14
Negative sequences	.16	.03	3.12	.09
From child to father				
Negative synchronicity	.21	.08	3.76	.06
Negative continuance	.42	.28	1.24	.27
Negative sequences	.09	.07	.16	.69
Negative Communication Excluding disagreements				
From father to child				
Negative synchronicity	.22	.13	.68	.42
Negative continuance	.25	.05	4.39	.04
Negative sequences	.15	.00	4.14	.05
From child to father				
Negative synchronicity	.16	.00	6.56	.02
Negative continuance	.29	.09	4.15	.05
Negative sequences	.10	.00	2.79	.10

Table 11 shows that, when expressions of disagreement were included in the analyses, some significant differences in mother-child communication were found between the problem and normal families. For the communication from the mother directed to the child, we found that the mothers of the problem families tended to react negatively to a negative remark of the child more often, and to continue directing negative remarks to the child more often, once they had made a negative remark, than the mothers of the normal families. Concerning the communication from the child to mother, we found that the children of the problem families tended to continue making negative remarks more often than the children of the normal families. No significant difference

between the two groups was found concerning negative sequences, neither when mother, nor when the child initiated the sequence of negative expressions.

When expressions of disagreements were left out of the analyses, the pattern of differences between the problem and normal families stayed roughly the same. Concerning the communication from mother directed to the child, significant differences between the two groups of families were found for all three measures. The mothers of the problem families were more often inclined to react negatively to a negative remark of their children, tended to continue making negative remarks more often, and initiated more negative sequences, as compared to the mothers of the normal families. Concerning the communication from the child directed to mother, we found that the children of the problem families tended to continue making negative remarks more often, once they had made a negative remark, than the children of the normal families.

Table 11
Mean Proportions of Negative Synchronicity, Negative Continuance, and Negative Sequences in Mother-Child Communication during the Conflict-Resolution Task in Problem and Normal Families

	Problem families	Normal families	F	p
Negative Communication Including disagreements				
From mother to child				
Negative synchronicity	.36	.19	4.21	.05
Negative continuance	.22	.08	5.01	.03
Negative sequences	.07	.03	1.95	.17
From child to mother				
Negative synchronicity	.18	.10	3.09	.09
Negative continuance	.34	.15	6.50	.01
Negative sequences	.07	.04	.66	.42
Negative Communication Excluding disagreements				
From mother to child				
Negative synchronicity	.22	.04	9.18	.00
Negative continuance	.15	.03	5.64	.02
Negative sequences	.06	.00	6.54	.01
From child to mother				
Negative synchronicity	.13	.05	2.06	.16
Negative continuance	.27	.11	5.15	.03
Negative sequences	.03	.00	2.05	.16

5.2 Relationships among aspects of family functioning

In the first chapter of this study, it was hypothesized that a relationship exists among parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, family structure, and the communication between family members. In this paragraph the results of these hypotheses will be presented. Pearson correlation coefficients (two-tailed) were used with an alpha level of .05. In the analyses the pretest scores were used for all 54 families (that is, 28 problem families and 26 normal families). The analyses were done for fathers and mothers separately.

The quality of the parent-child relationship and parenting practices
In Table 12, relations are presented between the quality of the parent-child relationship and parenting practices.

Table 12
Correlations between the Quality of the Parent-Child Relationship and Parenting Practices

| | Quality of the Father-Child Relationship | | | |
	Justice	Appreciation	Trust	Attachment
Fathers' Parenting				
Affection	.68**	.89**	.78**	.57**
Responsiveness	.82**	.85**	.88**	.46**
Care	.77**	.90**	.84**	.62**
Coercive control	.01	.16	.10	.02
	Quality of the Mother-Child Relationship			
	Justice	Appreciation	Trust	Attachment
Mothers' Parenting				
Affection	.43**	.82**	.79**	.40**
Responsiveness	.43**	.87**	.81**	.48**
Care	.54**	.86**	.77**	.50**
Coercive control	-.12	-.12	-.07	-.25

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 12 shows that the more parents were affective, responsive, and caring for their child, the more the parent-child relationship was characterized by justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment. This held for fathers and mothers as well. No significant correlations were found between coercive control and the indicators of the quality of the parent-child relationship.

Family structure compared with parenting practices and the quality of the parent-child relationship

In Table 13 and 14 correlations are presented between family structure on the one hand, and parenting practices and the quality of the parent-child relationship on the other hand. The results are presented for fathers (Table 13) and mothers (Table 14) separately.

Table 13
Correlations between Family Structure and the Quality of the Parent-Child Relationship and Parenting Practices for Fathers

	Family Structure				
	Cohesion According to		Lack of structure According to		Marital Satisfaction
	Father	Child	Father	Child	Acc. to father
Parenting Practices					
Affection	.38*	.74**	.05	-.38*	.24
Responsiveness	.22	.73**	.00	-.47**	.17
Care	.31	.78**	.04	-.38*	.22
Coercive control	-.07	.27	.41*	-.25	.04
Father-Child Relationship					
Justice	.15	.62**	-.03	-.53**	.12
Appreciation	.35*	.69**	-.01	-.47**	.24
Trust	.39*	.67**	-.07	-.46**	.44**
Attachment	.52**	.46**	-.21	-.33	.36*

* p < .05   ** p < .01

From Table 13 it is clear that the degree of family cohesion, according to fathers, was positively related to fathers' affection, and to appreciation, trust, and attachment in the father-child relationships. Cohesion, according to the child, was positively correlated with the fathers' affection, responsiveness, and care, and with justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment in the father-child relationship. Thus, the more cohesive the family was, the more supporting fathers were, and the better the quality of the father-child relationship was. No correlations were found between cohesion and coercive control.

Concerning lack of structure in the family, it appeared that the more the family lacked structure, according to the fathers, the more the fathers tended to use coercive ways of controlling the child. The more the family lacked structure, according to the child, the less supportive fathers were toward the child, and the lower the perceived quality of the father-child relationship was.

Concerning marital satisfaction, it appeared that the more fathers were satisfied with their marital relationship, the more the father-child relationship was characterized by trust and attachment.

Table 14
Correlations between Family Structure and the Quality of the Parent-Child Relationship
and Parenting Practices for Mothers

| | Family Structure | | | | |
| | Cohesion According to | | Lack of structure According to | | Marital Satisfaction |
	Mother	Child	Mother	Child	Acc. to mother
Parenting Practices					
Affection	.41**	.67**	-.01	-.27	.17
Responsiveness	.39**	.74**	-.06	-.31*	.16
Care	.48**	.72**	-.04	-.26	.17
Coercive control	-.14	-.19	.26	.06	-.10
Mother-Child Relationship					
Justice	.39**	.59**	-.32*	-.49**	-.10
Appreciation	.43**	.68**	-.08	-.38**	.28
Trust	.42**	.70**	-.14	-.36**	.17
Attachment	.66**	.57**	-.37**	-.29*	.38*

* p < .05   ** p < .01

From Table 14, it is clear that the more cohesive the family was, the more affective, responsive, and caring the mothers were, and the more the mother-child relationship was characterized by justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment. This held for both mothers' and children's perception of the degree of cohesion in the family. No relationship was found between cohesion and mothers' use of coercive control.

For the degree to which the family lacked structure, it appeared that the more the mothers judged their families as lacking structure, the less the mother-child relationship was characterized by feelings of justice and attachment. The more the family lacked structure, according to the children, the less responsive their mothers were, and the less the mother-child relationship was characterized by justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment.

Concerning marital satisfaction, it appeared that the more satisfied mothers were with their marital relationship, the more the mother-child relationship was characterized by feelings of attachment.

The communication between family members compared with parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, and family structure

The quality of the communication between family members was measured with questionnaires and observations. In Tables 15 and 16 correlations are presented between the quality of communication between family members as measured with the question-naires on the one hand, and parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relation-

ship, and family structure on the other hand. The results are presented for fathers (Table 15) and mothers (Table 16) separately.

Table 15
Correlations between Communication between Family Members and Parenting Practices, the Quality of the Parent-Child Relationship, and Family Structure for Fathers

	Communication between Family Members		
	Quality of communication		
	According to		Destructive marital
	Child	Father	interaction
Parenting Practices			
Affection	.73**	.42*	.00
Responsiveness	.94**	.34*	-.10
Care	.83**	.45**	-.13
Coercive control	.15	-.12	.30
Father-Child Relationship			
Justice	.84**	.45**	-.04
Appreciation	.82**	.45**	-.12
Trust	.87**	.39*	-.17
Attachment	.42**	.81**	-.36*
Family Structure			
Cohesion			
According to child	.70**	.26	-.09
According to father	.26	.46**	-.44**
Lack of structure			
According to child	-.42*	-.32	.16
According to father	.08	-.29	.51**
Marital Satisfaction	.14	.39*	-.59**

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Concerning the comparison between the communication between family members and parenting practices, Table 15 shows that the more fathers were affective, responsive, and caring, the more positively fathers and children evaluated their mutual communication. It should be noted that these correlations were especially high for the children's evaluation of the communication with their fathers. No correlations were found between fathers' use of coercive control and the quality of father-child communication. Furthermore, no significant relationships were found between the fathers' judgement of the degree of destructive communication in their marital relationships and their parenting behaviors.

Concerning the comparison between the communication between family members and the quality of the father-child relationship, it appeared that the more positively the fathers and children judged their mutual communication, the more the father-child relationship was characterized by justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment. For the

fathers' evaluation of the rate of destructive communication in the marital relationship, only one significant relationship was found: The more the parents interacted in a destructive way with each other, the less the father-child relationship was characterized by feelings of attachment.

Concerning the comparison of the communication between family members with family structure, it appeared that the children's evaluation of the communication with their fathers was positively related to their evaluation of the degree of cohesion in the family, while the fathers' evaluation of the father-child communication was positively related to the fathers' evaluation of the degree of family cohesion. The more cohesive the family was, the more positively did fathers and children evaluate their mutual communication. Furthermore, lack of family structure was negatively related to the quality of father-child communication, but only for the children's evaluations. The more the family lacked structure, according to the child, the more negatively the child evaluated the communication with father. Concerning marital satisfaction, it appeared that the more the fathers were satisfied with their marital relationships, the more positively they evaluated the communication with their children.

Concerning destructive marital communication, according to the fathers, it appeared that the more destructive the marital interaction, the less cohesive and the less structured the family functioned, in the fathers' viewpoint. However, there was no relation between destructive marital interaction and the children's evaluations of cohesion and lack of structure in the family. Finally, it appeared that the more destructive marital interaction the fathers reported, the less satisfied they were in their marriages.

Concerning links between the communication between family members and parenting practices, Table 16 shows that the more affectionate, responsive, and caring the mothers were, the more positively the mother-child communication was judged by both mothers and children. No relationship was found between the mothers' use of coercive control and the quality of mother-child communication. Furthermore, no relationships were found between destructive marital interaction and mothers' parenting behaviors.

Comparing the communication between family members with the quality of the mother-child relationship, it was clear that the more both mothers and children evaluated their mutual communication positively, the more the mother-child relationship was characterized by justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment. For the mothers' judgement of destructive marital interaction, it was only found that the more destructive the marital interaction was, the less attachment the mothers experienced in the mother-child relationship.

Concerning the comparison of the communication between family members with family structure, it appeared that the more positively both mothers and children evaluated

102

their mutual communication, the more cohesive they judged their families, and the less they judged their families to be lacking structure. Furthermore, the more positively the mothers evaluated the communication with their children, the more satisfied they were with their marital relationship.

For the degree of destructive marital interaction, it was found that the more the mothers experienced destructive communication in their marital relationship, the less they judged their families to be cohesive and the more the family was experienced to be lacking structure, by both mothers and children. Furthermore, the more destructive the mothers experienced the marital interaction, the less satisfied they were with their marital relationships.

Table 16
Correlations between the Communication between Family Members and Parenting Practices, the Quality of the Parent-Child Relationship, and Family Structure for Mothers

	Communication between Family Members		
	Quality of communication		Destructive marital interaction
	According to		
	Child	Mother	
Parenting Practices			
Affection	.70**	.33*	-.10
Responsiveness	.79**	.39**	-.13
Care	.78**	.41**	-.09
Coercive control	-.23	-.22	.25
Mother-Child Relationship			
Justice	.74**	.49**	-.01
Appreciation	.79**	.37**	-.13
Trust	.74**	.44**	-.09
Attachment	.55**	.88**	-.46**
Family Structure			
Cohesion			
According to child	.76**	.57**	-.29
According to mother	.51**	.67**	-.60**
Lack of structure			
According to child	-.48**	-.38**	.38*
According to mother	-.33*	-.50**	.58**
Marital Satisfaction	.17	.49**	-.74**

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

In Table 17 and 18, correlations are presented between the quality of parent-child communication, as measured with the observations on the one hand, and parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, and family structure on the other hand. Indicators of the quality of parent-child communication are the rating scores on intrusiveness, quality of explanation, and positive and negative communication. For this

analysis, we used mean rating scores on intrusiveness, quality of explanation, positive, and negative communication over all tasks. Concerning the eight cognitive puzzles, an average rating score was computed over the eight puzzles. Subsequently, average scores were computed over the decision-making task, the tangram task, the puzzle task, and the meal. The analyses were done for fathers (Table 17) and mothers (Table 18) separately.

From Tables 17 and 18 it is clear that there were hardly any significant relationships between parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, and family structure on the one hand, and the ratings of parents' communication toward their children on the other hand. For the fathers, only one significant correlation was found, indicating that the more positively the fathers communicated to their children, the more the father-child relationship was characterized by feelings of attachment. For the mothers, two statistically significant correlations were found. The more the mothers used coercive control, the lower the quality of their explanations was. And the more the mother-child relationship was characterized by justice, the less intrusive the mothers were toward their child.

Table 17
Correlations between Parents' Communication as Measured with the Observation Ratings, and Parenting Practices, the Quality of the Parent-Child Relationship, and Family Structure for Fathers

| | Fathers' Communication | | | |
	Intrusiveness	Quality of Explanation	Positive Comm	Negative Comm
Parenting Practices				
Affection	-.00	.04	.19	-.07
Responsiveness	-.17	-.09	.06	-.12
Care	-.07	.04	.16	-.06
Coercive control	.18	-.05	-.00	-.11
Father-Child Relationship				
Justice	-.06	-.01	.14	-.01
Appreciation	-.11	-.01	.08	-.10
Trust	-.25	-.12	.06	-.20
Attachment	.04	.36	.39*	.25
Family Structure				
Cohesion				
According to child	.06	.14	.24	-.09
According to father	.17	.29	.26	.05
Lack of structure				
According to child	-.03	.03	.04	.19
According to father	.19	-.20	-.04	-.02
Marital Satisfaction	-.06	.15	.22	.10

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 18
Correlations between Mothers' Communication as Measured with the Observation Ratings, and Parenting Practices, the Quality of the Parent-Child Relationship, and Family Structure for Mothers

| | Mothers' Communication | | | |
	Intrusiveness	Quality of Explanation	Positive Comm	Negative Comm
Parenting Practices				
Affection	-.03	-.07	.03	-.16
Responsiveness	-.03	.06	.09	-.17
Care	-.13	.06	.15	-.11
Coercive control	-.18	-.43**	-.23	-.03
Mother-Child Relationship				
Justice	-.38**	-.21	-.00	-.16
Appreciation	-.26	-.07	.12	-.23
Trust	-.04	-.09	.05	.00
Attachment	.01	.03	.10	.09
Family Structure				
Cohesion				
According to child	.00	-.10	.01	-.07
According to mother	-.05	-.10	.02	.11
Lack of structure				
According to child	.11	.12	.02	-.03
According to mother	.22	.12	-.01	.01
Marital Satisfaction	-.11	.03	-.03	.12

* p < .05   ** p < .01

In Table 19 and 20 correlations are presented between the proportions of constructive and negative communication during the conflict-resolution task as indicators of the quality of parent-child communication on the one hand, and parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship and family structure on the other hand. For the proportions of negative communication the analyses were done using all negative code categories (including disagreements) as well as only those negative code categories not referring to disagreements. The analyses were done for fathers (Table 19) and mothers (Table 20) separately.

Table 19

Correlations between Parent-Child Communication as Measured with the Proportions of Constructive and Negative Communication and Parenting Practices, the Quality of the Parent-Child Relationship, and Family Structure for Fathers

	From Father to Child:		
	Constructive Communication	Negative Communication incl. disagreement	Negative Communication excl. disagreement
Parenting Practices			
Affection	.41*	-.35*	-.51**
Responsiveness	.39*	-.31	-.34*
Care	.45**	-.43*	-.50**
Coercive control	-.08	.20	.14
Father-Child Relationship			
Justice	.34*	-.32	-.40*
Appreciation	.41*	-.35*	-.42*
Trust	.31	-.31	-.32
Attachment	.35*	-.46**	-.49**
Family Structure			
Cohesion			
According to Father	.08	-.17	-.19
According to Child	.35*	-.32	-.38*
Lack of family structure			
According to Father	.05	.03	-.09
According to Child	-.17	.19	.23
Marital satisfaction	.02	-.03	.00
	From Child to Father:		
	Constructive Communication	Negative Communication incl. disagreement	Negative Communication excl. disagreement
Parenting Practices			
Affection	.34*	-.36*	-.34*
Responsiveness	.48**	-.40*	-.33
Care	.37*	-.38*	-.34*
Coercive control	.06	.00	.09
Father-Child Relationship			
Justice	.40*	-.37*	-.39*
Appreciation	.41*	-.39*	-.37*
Trust	.34*	-.33*	-.26
Attachment	.12	-.19	-.21
Family Structure			
Cohesion			
According to Father	-.13	.06	.01
According to Child	.17	-.18	-.16
Lack of family structure			
According to Father	-.02	.06	-.07
According to Child	-.18	.24	.17
Marital Satisfaction	-.12	.09	.11

* p < .05   ** p < .01

Table 20

Correlations between Parent-Child Communication as Measured with the Proportions of Negative and Constructive Communication and Parenting Practices, the Quality of the Parent-Child Relationship, and Family Structure for Mothers

	From Mother to Child: Constructive Communication	Negative Communication incl. disagreement	Negative Communication excl. disagreement
Parenting Practices			
Affection	.32*	-.36**	-.30*
Responsiveness	.30*	-.36**	-.29*
Care	.36*	-.40**	-.37**
Coercive control	-.26	.38**	.42**
Mother-Child Relationship			
Justice	.29*	-.35*	-.32*
Appreciation	.28*	-.32*	-.23
Trust	.16	-.22	-.16
Attachment	.16	-.21	-.24
Family Structure			
Cohesion			
According to Mother	.17	-.21	-.21
According to Child	.22	-.32*	-.27
Lack of family structure			
According to Mother	-.11	.21	.18
According to Child	-.13	.17	.09
Marital satisfaction	-.14	.03	.05

	From Child to Mother: Constructive Communication	Negative Communication incl. disagreement	Negative Communication excl. disagreement
Parenting Practices			
Affection	.34*	-.35*	-.36**
Responsiveness	.41**	-.43**	-.43**
Care	.38**	-.39**	-.46**
Coercive control	-.28*	.34*	.37**
Mother-Child Relationship			
Justice	.28*	-.28*	-.36**
Appreciation	.44**	-.47**	-.50**
Trust	.34*	-.37**	-.32*
Attachment	.26	-.29*	-.28*
Family Structure			
Cohesion			
According to Mother	.12	-.16	-.30*
According to Child	.31*	-.34*	-.37**
Lack of family structure			
According to Mother	-.09	.13	.23
According to Child	-.28*	.27	.38**
Marital Satisfaction	.05	-.12	-.15

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

From Table 19, it is clear that the proportion of constructive communication from father to child as well as from child to father appeared to be positively related to father's affection, responsiveness, and care as indicators of parenting practices. The more constructively the fathers and children communicated with one another, the more the children experienced their fathers to be affectionate, responsive and caring. No relationship was found between the proportions of constructive father-child communication and the degree to which fathers exerted coercive control. Furthermore, the proportion of constructive communication was positively related to justice and appreciation (this held for the proportion of constructive communication from father to child as well as from child to father), to trust (this held for the proportion of constructive communication from child to father), and attachment (this held for the proportion of constructive communication from father to child) as indicators of the quality of the father-child relationship. Concerning family structure, it appeared that the more the fathers interacted constructively toward their children, the more the children viewed their families to be cohesive. No other relationships were found between the proportion of constructive communication and the indicators of family structure.

Concerning relationships between the proportion of negative communication and parenting practices, overall significant correlations were found for the indicators of parental support, but not for parental coercive control. The more fathers and children interacted in a negative way with each other, the less the fathers were experienced by their children to be affectionate, responsive, and caring.

Furthermore, some significant correlations were found between the proportions of negative father-child communication and the quality of the father-child relationship. The more the fathers communicated negatively to their children (including remarks of disagreement), the less the father-child relationship was experienced by appreciation and attachment. When the proportion of negative communication from father to child without remarks of disagreement is considered, the relationships did not change, but appeared somewhat stronger. Furthermore, the nonsignificant negative correlation between the fathers' negative communication to the child and justice turned significant; the more negative the communication from father to child, the less the father-child relationship was characterized by justice. For the proportion of negative communication from child to father, significant negative relationships were found with the degree of justice and appreciation in the father-child relationship. This held both when remarks of disagreement were included in, and excluded from the analyses. Only when remarks of disagreement were included in the analyses, a significant correlation with trust was found: the more negatively the children communicated toward their fathers, the less they experienced trust in the father-child relationship.

Again hardly any relationships were found between the proportions of negative communication between fathers and children and family structure. The more the fathers interacted in a negative way (with disagreements left out of the analysis), the less the children experienced their families to be cohesive.

Table 20 shows that the proportion of constructive communication between mother and child appeared to be positively related to the mothers' affection, responsiveness and care. This held for the communication from mother to child, as well as from child to mother. A negative correlation was found between the proportion of constructive communication from child to mother, and the mothers' coercive control.

Concerning the quality of the mother-child relationship, the proportion of constructive communication between mother and child was positively related to justice and appreciation (for both the communication from mother to child and from child to mother) and trust (only for the communication from child to mother) in the mother-child relationship.

Concerning relationships between constructive communication and family structure, significant correlations were found only for the proportion of constructive communication from child to mother. The more the children interacted in a constructive way, the more they viewed their families as cohesive, and the less their families lacked structure according to the children.

Concerning relationships between negative communication and parenting practices, all correlations appeared significant. The more the mothers and children communicated in a negative way to one another, the less the mothers were affectionate, responsive, and caring, and the more they exerted coercive control. This held for the communication from mother to child as well as from child to mother, and whether remarks of disagreement were included in the analyses or not.

Concerning negative communication from mother to child and the quality of the mother-child relationship, some significant correlations were found. The more the mothers communicated negatively to their child, the less the mother-child relationship was characterized by justice (whether or not remarks of disagreement were included in the analyses) and appreciation (only when remarks of disagreement were included in the analysis). For the proportion of negative communication from child to mother, all relationships with the indicators of the quality of the mother-child relationship were significant. This held, regardless of inclusion or exclusion of remarks of disagreement. The more the children communicated in a negative way, the less the mother-child relationship was characterized by feelings of justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment.

Concerning relationships between negative communication and family structure, some significant correlations were found. Negative communication from mother to child

appeared to be negatively related to the degree of family cohesion according to the child. However, this relationship turned nonsignificant, when remarks of disagreement were excluded from the analysis. Negative communication from child to mother appeared to be negatively related to family cohesion in the child's view, when remarks of disagreement were included in the analysis. When remarks of disagreement were excluded from the analysis, negative child communication appeared to be negatively related to both the children's and the mothers' views on the degree of family cohesion, and positively related to the children's view of lack of family structure. Thus, the more the children communicated negatively to their mothers, the less the family was cohesive (according to mother and child) and the more the family lacked structure (according to the child).

In Table 21 and 22 correlations are presented between the measures of negative synchronicity, negative continuance, and negative sequences as indicators of the quality of parent-child communication on the one hand, and parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, and family structure on the other hand. For computing the measures of negative synchronicity, negative continuance, and negative sequences, all negative code categories were used, including codes indicating disagreements between family members. For the sake of completeness, the same measures of parent-child communication were computed, using all negative code categories except of the codes indicating disagreement. The results of the latter are presented in parentheses. The analyses were done for fathers (Table 21) and mothers (Table 22) separately.

From Table 21, it is clear, that there were hardly any significant relationships between the father-child communication on the one hand and parenting practices, the quality of the father-child relationship, and family structure on the other hand. The only significant correlations were between lack of family structure on the one hand and negative synchronicity from father to child and negative sequences started by the father on the other hand. The more the fathers reacted negatively to a negative remark of the child, the more the family lacked structure according to the child. When remarks of disagreement were excluded from the analysis, the relationship turned nonsignificant. And the more often the fathers started a negative sequence, the more the family lacked structure according to the child. This held both when remarks of disagreement were included in, and excluded from the analyses.

Table 21

Correlations between the Interaction Process Measures (Negative Synchronicity, Negative Continuance, and Negative Sequences) and Parenting Practices, the Quality of the Parent-Child Relationship, and Family Structure for Fathers

| | From Father to Child | | | | | |
	Negative Synchronicity		Negative Continuance		Negative sequences	
Parenting Practices						
Affection	.08	(-.11)[a]	-.03	(-.10)	.01	(.06)
Responsiveness	-.19	(-.23)	-.05	(-.10)	-.15	(-.11)
Care	.01	(-.03)	-.10	(-.13)	-.04	(.02)
Coercive control	.04	(-.24)	-.04	(-.08)	-.13	(.22)
Father-Child Relationship						
Justice	-.01	(-.15)	-.06	(-.16)	-.09	(-.10)
Appreciation	-.06	(-.14)	-.08	(-.12)	-.09	(-.00)
Trust	-.13	(-.19)	-.13	(-.17)	-.10	(-.04)
Attachment	.09	(.10)	.05	(-.04)	.16	(.13)
Family Structure						
Cohesion						
According to child	.05	(.03)	.04	(.01)	.11	(.14)
According to father	.11	(.19)	.01	(-.02)	.31	(.31)
Lack of structure						
According to child	.35*	(.29)	.21	(.31)	.36*	(.36*)
According to father	-.06	(-.23)	-.12	(-.18)	-.13	(-.27)
Marital Satisfaction	-.12	(.01)	-.22	(-.20)	.03	(.10)
	From Child to Father					
	Negative Synchronicity		Negative Continuance		Negative sequences	
Parenting Practices						
Affection	-.08	(-.06)	-.13	(-.16)	.12	(.13)
Responsiveness	-.15	(-.17)	-.21	(-.12)	-.04	(-.03)
Care	-.14	(-.07)	-.11	(-.08)	-.01	(.12)
Coercive control	-.08	(-.21)	-.18	(.03)	-.13	(-.28)
Father-Child Relationship						
Justice	-.13	(-.15)	-.15	(-.18)	.05	(.03)
Appreciation	-.21	(-.11)	-.13	(-.20)	.01	(.04)
Trust	-.12	(-.10)	-.08	(-.08)	.01	(-.03)
Attachment	-.14	(.02)	-.03	(.01)	.08	(.19)
Family Structure						
Cohesion						
According to child	.05	(-.18)	-.02	(-.01)	.04	(.18)
According to father	.23	(.25)	.21	(.07)	.29	(.21)
Lack of structure						
According to child	.27	(.34)	.24	(.20)	.31	(.29)
According to father	-.08	(-.24)	-.06	(-.18)	-.32	(-.27)
Marital satisfaction	.06	(.07)	-.01	(.12)	.04	(.06)

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

[a] Results based on the process measures, with the codes indicating disagreement excluded, are in parentheses

Table 22

Correlations between the Interaction Process Measures (Negative Synchronicity, Negative Continuance, and Negative Sequences) and Parenting Practices, the Quality of the Parent-Child Relationship, and Family Structure for Mothers

	From Mother to Child					
	Negative Synchronicity		Negative Continuance		Negative sequences	
Parenting Practices						
Affection	-.27	(-.48**)[a]	-.13	(-.24)	-.21	(-.24)
Responsiveness	-.25	(-.46**)	-.12	(-.26)	-.14	(-.23)
Care	-.26	(-.50**)	-.23	(-.36*)	-.22	(-.37**)
Coercive control	.08	(.46**)	.21	(.29*)	.21	(.35*)
Mother-Child Relationship						
Justice	-.39**	(-.38**)	-.15	(-.37**)	-.39**	(-.37**)
Appreciation	-.32*	(-.52**)	-.10	(-.23)	-.28*	(-.22)
Trust	-.24	(-.33*)	-.03	(-.15)	-.09	(-.16)
Attachment	-.23	(-.34*)	-.27*	(-.23)	-.18	(-.31*)
Family Structure						
Cohesion						
According to child	-.33*	(-.50**)	-.17	(-.28*)	-.20	(-.21)
According to mother	-.37**	(-.39**)	-.21	(-.18)	-.18	(-.29*)
Lack of structure						
According to child	.42**	(.29*)	.18	(.10)	.30*	(.13)
According to mother	.24*	(.20)	.09	(.09)	.03	(.06)
Marital Satisfaction	-.43*	(-.29)	.01	(.18)	.03	(.10)

	From Child to Mother					
	Negative Synchronicity		Negative Continuance		Negative Sequences	
Parenting Practices						
Affection	-.16	(.06)	-.44**	(-.47**)	-.10	(-.16)
Responsiveness	-.11	(-.00)	-.40**	(-.42**)	-.10	(-.15)
Care	-.15	(-.09)	-.42**	(-.47**)	-.13	(-.27)
Coercive control	-.01	(.12)	.20	(.25)	.06	(.30*)
Mother-Child Relationship						
Justice	-.19	(-.04)	-.42**	(-.32*)	-.31*	(-.31*)
Appreciation	-.15	(.06)	-.53**	(-.54**)	-.11	(-.15)
Trust	-.09	(.07)	-.43**	(-.41**)	-.01	(-.07)
Attachment	-.06	(-.09)	-.27*	(-.22)	-.15	(-.28*)
Family Structure						
Cohesion						
According to child	-.15	(-.09)	-.39**	(-.36*)	-.22	(-.16)
According to mother	-.18	(-.16)	-.31*	(-.29*)	-.20	(-.33*)
Lack of structure						
According to child	.02	(-.07)	.38**	(.26)	.17	(.05)
According to mother	.02	(.01)	.18	(.09)	.07	(.02)
Marital Satisfaction	-.12	(-.01)	-.21	(-.14)	-.11	(.05)

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

[a] Results based on the process measures, with the codes indicating disagreement excluded, are in parentheses

From Table 22 it is clear that when the communication from mother directed to the child is considered, some significant correlations with parenting practices were found, but only when remarks of disagreement were excluded from the analyses. Negative synchronicity from mother to child was correlated negatively to the mothers' affection, responsiveness, and care, and positively to their use of coercive control. Thus, the more the mothers reacted negatively to negative child remarks, the less they were viewed by their children as affectionate, responsive, and caring, and the more they said to use coercive control. Negative continuance and negative sequences started by the mother were negatively related to care, and positively related to the use of coercive control. Thus, the more the mothers tended to continue directing negative remarks to the child, and the more they started sequences of negative interaction, the less their children perceived them to be caring, and the more the mothers said to use coercive control.

Concerning correlations between the communication from mother to child and the quality of the mother-child relationship, it was found that maternal negative synchronicity was negatively related to justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment in the mother-child relationship (although the relationships between negative synchronicity and trust and attachment turned into nonsignificant tendencies when disagreements were included in the analyses). Maternal negative continuance correlated negatively with justice (when disagreements were excluded from the analyses) and with attachment (when disagreements were included in the analyses). Negative sequences started by the mother were negatively correlated with justice (with disagreements both included in and excluded from the analyses), appreciation (with disagreements included in the analyses) and attachment (with disagreements excluded from the analyses).

Concerning correlations between the communication from mother to child and family structure, most significant relationships were found for maternal negative synchronicity with remarks of disagreement included in the analyses. The more the mothers reacted negatively to a negative child remark, the less the family was characterized by cohesion according to mother and child, the more the family lacked structure according to mother and child, and the less the mothers experienced marital satisfaction. When remarks of disagreement were excluded from the analyses, maternal negative synchronicity was negatively related to family cohesion according to mother and child, and positively related to lack of family structure according to the child. Furthermore, maternal negative continuance was negatively related to family cohesion according to the child, but only when remarks of disagreement were left out of the analyses. Negative sequences started by the mother were negatively related to family cohesion as evaluated by the mother (but only when disagreements were excluded from the analyses) and were

positively related to a lack of family structure as evaluated by the child (but only when disagreements were included in the analyses).

Concerning the communication directed from the child to mother, most significant correlations emerged in relationship with negative continuance. Concerning parenting practices, negative continuance appeared to be negatively related to the mothers' affection, responsiveness, and care. The more the children tended to continue making negative remarks, the less they viewed their mothers as being affectionate, responsive, and caring. This held whether or not remarks of disagreement were included in the analyses. Furthermore, negative sequences started by the child appeared to be positively related to the mothers' use of coercive control. This finding held only when remarks of disagreement were left out of the analyses.

Concerning the quality of the mother-child relationship, negative continuance by the child was negatively correlated with the degree of justice, appreciation, and trust (whether disagreements were included in the analyses or not), and to the degree of attachment in the mother-child relationship (only when disagreements were included in the analyses). Negative sequences started by the child were negatively related to the degree of justice in the mother-child relationship (both when disagreements were included in, and excluded from the analyses) and to feelings of attachment in the mother-child relationship (but only when disagreements were left out of the analyses).

Concerning family structure, negative continuance from child to mother appeared to be negatively related to family cohesion as evaluated by both mother and child, and positively related to lack of family structure as evaluated by the child. When disagreements were excluded from the analyses, the relationship between negative continuance and the child's view of a lack of family structure turned nonsignificant. Finally, negative sequences started by the child were negatively related to family cohesion as evaluated by the mothers, but only when disagreements were excluded from the analyses.

5.3 Effects of the parent program 'Parents and children talking together'.

In this paragraph, the results of the effects of the parent program 'Parents and children talking together' are presented. We tested for differences between the parents who had attended the parent program (the experimental group) and the parents who had not yet attended the parent program (the control group). To test for significant differences between the experimental group and the control group, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used, with the indicators of parental and family functioning as dependent variables, and group assignment (experimental versus control group) as independent variable. A design with a within-subjects factor (that is, repeated measurements (pretest and posttest) on the dependent variable), in combination with a between-subjects factor (assignment to the experimental or control group) was used. This analysis yielded main effects of time and group and an interaction effect. The main effect of time indicated whether there was a difference between pretest and posttest for the whole group of families, without distinguishing between assignment of the families to the experimental or the control group. This indicated whether there was any change over time, whether or not this change was due to the parent program. Theoretically it is possible, for example, that the parent program has no effect at all, but that there is indeed an effect of time in that there is an improvement or a deterioration in family functioning over time in the whole group of families. The main effect of group indicated whether there was a difference between the families of the experimental and the control group in the sum of pretest and posttest scores. The interaction effect was important for demonstrating possible effects of the parent program. For computing the interaction effect, the mean difference between pretest and posttest on the dependent variable for the experimental group was compared to the mean difference between pretest and posttest for the control group. Any change in the scores on a variable from pretest to posttest for the experimental group (after the parents of this group had attended the parent program), was compared to any change in the scores on that variable from pretest to posttest for the control group (of which the parents had not followed the parent program). Thus, we tested whether there was more improvement on these variables in the experimental group than in the control group. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests. The analyses were done for fathers and mothers separately.

As we found hardly any main effects of time in the whole group of families we decided not to report on these results. We found only eight significant effects of time on a total of 118 separate analyses. This is hardly more than could be expected on the basis of chance. The same held for main effects of group: We found only four significant effects of group on a total of 118 separate analyses, less than could be expected on the basis of chance. Furthermore, we judged the main effects of time and group to be not particularly

interesting for answering our research question. We judged the interaction effects to be more interesting for answering our question of whether the parent program proved effective, since changes in scores in the experimental group were compared to changes in scores in the control group of families. For this reason, we decided to report only on the interaction effects.

Initially, there were 13 experimental families (with 13 mothers and 7 fathers) and 15 control families (with 15 mothers and 10 fathers). However, the analyses on the questionnaire variables were done on an experimental group consisting of 12 families (with 12 mothers and 7 fathers), and a control group consisting of 15 families (with 15 mothers and 10 fathers). For one family, data on the posttest (that is, the questionnaires to be filled in by the mother and her daughter) were lacking, due to serious illness in the family. The analyses on the interaction tasks (the decision-making task, the tangram puzzle, the eight puzzles, and the meal) were done on the complete groups of 13 experimental families (with 13 mothers and 7 fathers) and 15 control families (with 15 mothers and 10 fathers). The analyses on the conflict-resolution task, finally, were done on an experimental group of 12 families (with 12 mothers and 6 fathers) and a control group of 15 families (with 15 mothers and 9 fathers). In one two-parent family the target-child was not at home at the time the observation of the conflict-resolution task was planned and making a new appointment failed due to the pressure of daily activities. In another two-parent family the father had to leave for work during conflict-resolution and let mother and child discuss the conflict.

As described earlier, the parent program is directed at teaching parents problem solving skills in order to help them to be able to negotiate conflicts with their children and find solutions that are acceptable to both parents and children. Thus, the program is based on communication skills. For this reason we expected to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of the program mainly on parents' communication with their children. Furthermore, we tested for generalization effects on parents' child rearing practices, the quality of parent-child relationships, and on family structure. Although the analyses on the communication variables are the most important, we will present the results in the same order as we did in the former chapters. Thus, for reasons of clarity and consistency, we will subsequently present results on parenting practices, the quality of parent-child relationships, family structure, and communication between family members.

Parenting practices

In Table 23 mean scores for the parents of the experimental group and the control group at pretest and posttest are presented on affection, responsiveness, care, and coercive control.

Table 23

Mean Scores on Parental Affection, Responsiveness, Care, and Coercive Control for the
Experimental and Control Families at Pretest and Posttest

	Experimental Group		Control Group		F	p
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest		
Fathers						
Affection	4.62	4.28	3.99	4.20	2.68	.12
Responsiveness	4.08	4.38	3.73	4.05	.01	.94
Care	4.83	4.68	4.22	4.42	1.31	.27
Coercive control	3.06	3.26	2.76	2.82	.26	.62
Mothers						
Affection	4.77	4.73	4.21	4.52	4.62	.04
Responsiveness	4.92	4.90	4.52	4.69	1.05	.32
Care	5.19	4.99	4.76	4.78	1.35	.26
Coercive control	3.02	3.08	2.81	2.80	.13	.72

Table 23 indicates that for fathers, no significant differences on support and control between the two groups were found. That is, the difference between pretest and posttest scores for the fathers of the experimental group did not significantly differ from the difference between pretest and posttest scores for the fathers of the control group. The fathers of the experimental group did not improve concerning the degree to which they showed affection, responsiveness and care to their child or the degree to which they exerted coercive control, as compared to the fathers of the control group.

For mothers, Table 23 shows that one significant difference between the mothers of the experimental and control group was found. For the mothers who had not attended the parent program, the scores on affection increased by about three tenth of a point, whereas for the mothers who had attended the program, the scores on affection hardly changed. However, as the differences in scores from pretest to posttest are rather small, the importance of this finding should be doubted. Concerning maternal responsiveness, care, and coercive control, no significant differences between the mothers of the experimental group and the mothers of the control group were found. That is, the mothers who had attended the parent program did not improve on these variables as compared to the mothers who had not yet attended the parent program.

The quality of the parent-child relationship

In Table 24, mean scores on justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment as indicators of the quality of the parent-child relationship at pretest and posttest are presented for the experimental and the control families.

Table 24
Mean Scores on Justice, Appreciation, Trust, and Attachment for the Experimental and Control Families at Pretest and Posttest.

	Experimental Group		Control Group			
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	F	p
Father-child relationship						
Justice	4.08	3.98	3.90	4.01	.59	.45
Appreciation	4.19	4.19	4.08	4.18	.08	.79
Trust	4.29	4.22	4.15	4.26	.44	.52
Attachment	4.35	4.25	4.44	4.50	.43	.52
Mother-child relationship						
Justice	4.21	4.01	4.24	4.34	3.08	.09
Appreciation	4.47	4.66	4.40	4.60	.00	.97
Trust	4.42	4.52	4.37	4.55	.19	.67
Attachment	4.65	5.00	4.44	4.70	.23	.64

Table 24 shows that we failed to find any statistically significant differences between the experimental families and the control families. For both groups of families, there are no large differences between the scores at pretest and posttest. The children in the experimental families did not experience more improvement in justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment in the relationship with their parents, than the children in the control families. This held for both the father-child and the mother-child relationship.

Family structure

In Table 25 the mean scores at pretest and at posttest for the experimental and the control families on cohesion, lack of family structure, and marital satisfaction are presented.

Table 25 indicates no statistically significant differences in family structure between the experimental families and the control families. Concerning family cohesion and lack of family structure, there were only very small differences between the scores at pretest and the scores at posttest for both the experimental and the control families. The analyses showed that the differences between the experimental families and the control families concerning the difference between pretest and posttest scores on cohesion and lack of structure were not significant. This held for both fathers', mothers', and children's evaluations of the degree of cohesion and lack of structure in the family.

Concerning marital satisfaction, no statistically significant differences between the parents of the experimental group and the parents of the control group were found. That is, the small increase in the scores on marital satisfaction after the parents of the experimental group had attended the parent program, did not differ significantly from the

change in scores from pretest to posttest for the parents of the control group. This held for both fathers' and mothers' judgements of their marital relationship.

Table 25
Mean Scores on Family Cohesion and Lack of Structure, and on Marital Satisfaction for the Experimental and Control Families at Pretest and Posttest

	Experimental Group		Control Group			
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	F	p
Cohesion According to						
Father	2.98	2.96	2.96	2.90	.48	.50
Mother	3.04	3.07	2.84	2.89	.02	.88
Child	3.05	3.04	2.85	2.84	.01	.91
Lack of structure According to						
Father	2.02	1.96	1.58	1.70	2.10	.17
Mother	1.96	1.81	1.76	1.78	2.19	.15
Child	1.98	2.02	1.88	1.86	.34	.56
Marital satisfaction According to						
Father	4.82	4.92	4.86	4.41	3.62	.08
Mother	4.45	4.51	4.52	4.36	.42	.53

The communication between family members

The quality of the communication between family members was measured with questionnaires and observations. In Table 26, the mean scores at pretest and posttest on the quality of the communication between parents and child and on the degree of marital destructive communication, as measured with the questionnaires, are presented for both the experimental and control group.

From Table 26, it is clear that no statistically significant differences in the communication between family members were found between the experimental families and the control families. Parents who had attended the parent program did not improve concerning the quality of the communication with their child as compared to the parents who had not attended the program. This held for both the fathers' and mothers' evaluation. The same held for the children's evaluation of the communication with their parents. In the same way, the parents of the experimental group did not experience significantly less destructive marital communication after they had attended the parent program, as compared to the parents of the control group. This held for both fathers' and mothers' judgement of the degree of destructive marital communication.

Table 26

Mean Scores on the Quality of Parent-Child Communication and on Destructive Marital Communication for the Experimental and Control Families at Pretest and Posttest

	Experimental Group		Control Group			
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	F	p
Quality of Father-child communication According to						
Father	3.79	3.89	4.24	4.07	3.09	.10
Child	4.09	4.03	3.80	3.90	.45	.51
Quality of Mother-child communication According to						
Mother	4.06	4.23	3.97	4.14	.00	.98
Child	4.19	4.18	4.22	4.25	.06	.81
Marital destructive communication According to						
Father	3.41	3.29	2.85	3.27	3.80	.07
Mother	3.12	3.10	3.31	3.25	.01	.93

Furthermore, the ratings of the quality of parent-child communication were used for analyzing whether the parents who had attended the parent program differed from the parents who had not yet attended the program. In Table 27, ratings on intrusiveness, quality of explanation, and positive and negative communication are presented for the fathers of the experimental group and the fathers of the control group. These four rating scores are presented for the decision-making task, the tangram task, and the eight puzzles. (Concerning the eight puzzles, mean rating scores over the eight puzzles were used.) For the mealtime situation, only ratings on positive and negative communication are presented. In Table 28, the same analyses were done for mothers.

Table 27 shows that for fathers, no statistically significant effects of the parent program were found. We failed to find any difference between the fathers of the experimental group and the fathers of the control group concerning differences between pretest and posttest scores on intrusiveness, quality of explanation, and positive and negative communication. That is, the fathers of the experimental group did not improve on these measures after they had attended the program as compared to the fathers of the control group.

Table 28 indicates that there were no significant differences between the mothers who had attended the parent program and the mothers who had not. Thus, we were unable to find effects of the parent program on mothers' intrusiveness, quality of explanation, and positive and negative communication.

Table 27
Mean Rating Scores on Intrusiveness, Quality of Explanation, Positive, and Negative
Communication for Fathers of the Experimental and the Control Group

| | Experimental | | Control group | | F | p |
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest		
Decision-making task						
Intrusiveness	2.00	2.25	2.00	2.30	.02	.90
Quality of explanation	3.11	3.11	3.30	3.23	.02	.90
Positive communication	4.46	4.29	4.37	4.23	.01	.92
Negative communication	1.07	1.68	1.18	1.35	3.19	.09
Tangram task						
Intrusiveness	3.07	2.54	2.63	2.83	4.10	.06
Quality of explanation	3.93	3.46	4.11	3.70	.02	.90
Positive communication	4.36	4.21	4.40	4.05	.48	.50
Negative communication	1.18	1.50	1.25	1.65	.08	.78
Puzzle task						
Intrusiveness	1.85	2.03	1.95	1.96	.52	.48
Quality of explanation	2.48	2.49	2.81	2.71	.18	.68
Positive communication	3.97	3.94	3.98	3.80	.44	.52
Negative communication	1.12	1.20	1.19	1.39	1.12	.31
Mealtime						
Positive communication	4.21	4.46	4.25	4.35	.41	.53
Negative communication	1.54	1.42	1.40	1.70	1.30	.27

Table 28
Mean Rating Scores on Intrusiveness, Quality of Explanation, Positive, and Negative
Communication for Mothers of the Experimental and the Control Group

| | Experimental | | Control group | | F | p |
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest		
Decision-making task						
Intrusiveness	2.25	2.37	2.20	2.23	.08	.77
Quality of explanation	3.58	3.85	3.36	3.45	.40	.54
Positive communication	4.50	4.54	4.59	4.48	.40	.53
Negative communication	1.60	1.48	1.23	1.20	.06	.80
Tangram task						
Intrusiveness	2.19	2.52	2.11	2.05	1.32	.26
Quality of explanation	3.29	3.40	3.59	3.45	.65	.43
Positive communication	4.13	4.29	4.61	4.36	3.76	.06
Negative communication	1.42	1.40	1.20	1.36	.65	.43
Puzzle task						
Intrusiveness	1.74	1.93	1.69	1.56	2.75	.11
Quality of explanation	2.31	2.32	2.51	2.33	1.77	.20
Positive communication	3.97	3.77	4.17	3.98	.00	.98
Negative communication	1.20	1.28	1.07	1.14	.01	.93
Mealtime						
Positive communication	4.63	4.33	4.60	4.37	.08	.77
Negative communication	1.50	1.55	1.32	1.65	.98	.33

Finally, the observations of the conflict-resolution task were used for analyzing whether the parent-child communication in the experimental group differed from the communication in the control group. Proportions of constructive and negative communication in each family dyad were used for these analyses. First, it was analyzed whether parents and children of the experimental families communicated more constructively and less negatively toward each other than parents and children of the control families, without distinguishing into the four steps or phases of the problem solving process. In Table 29 mean proportions of constructive and negative communication for each parent-child dyad during problem solving are presented. As parents and children hardly made neutral remarks (that had little or nothing to do with the interaction task), the proportions of constructive and negative communication are almost complementary. However, for the sake of completeness, the analyses for both constructive and negative communication are presented. Furthermore, the analyses for negative communication were done twice, once using all negative code categories, and once excluding those negative code categories referring to disagreements between family members.

Table 29
Mean Proportions of Constructive and Negative Parent-Child Communication in the Experimental and the Control Group

	Experimental Group		Control Group		F	p
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest		
Constructive communication						
From mother to child	.87	.91	.88	.84	5.32	.03
From child to mother	.65	.77	.81	.74	7.66	.01
From father to child	.86	.90	.87	.89	.11	.74
From child to father	.73	.83	.81	.74	2.51	.14
Negative communication						
From mother to child	.10	.07	.10	.13	5.58	.03
From child to mother	.32	.20	.17	.23	7.94	.01
From father to child	.11	.07	.12	.07	.02	.88
From child to father	.23	.14	.18	.22	1.56	.23
Negative communication excluding disagreements						
From mother to child	.06	.05	.07	.10	3.49	.07
From child to mother	.24	.16	.12	.17	5.43	.03
From father to child	.07	.05	.11	.05	.36	.56
From child to father	.15	.07	.13	.17	2.27	.16

Table 29 shows that only for the mother-child dyad, differences in the proportions of constructive and negative communication between the two groups of families were found. Whereas mothers who had followed the parent program made more constructive remarks and less negative remarks at posttest than at pretest, mothers who had not followed the program communicated less constructively and more negatively toward their children at posttest than at pretest. Thus, for the mothers of the experimental group a small improvement in the communication toward their children could be noticed, whereas for the mothers of the control group a small deterioration was shown. The same pattern of change emerged for the communication of the children toward their mothers. For the children whose mothers had attended the parent program the proportion of constructive communication increased while the proportion of negative communication decreased. For children whose mothers had not attended the parent program, a reverse pattern was shown: the proportion of constructive communication toward their mothers decreased, while the proportion of negative communication increased. These differences between the two groups were statistically significant for the proportions of constructive communication and negative communication including remarks of disagreement, both from the mothers to the children, and from the children to the mothers. Concerning negative communication without remarks of disagreement, only for the communication from the children to their mothers a significant difference between the two groups of families was found.

Concerning the communication between fathers and children, no statistically significant differences between the experimental and control families were shown. Thus, the fathers who had attended the parent program did not significantly increase the proportion of constructive, or decrease the proportion of negative communication toward their children, as compared to the fathers who had not attended the program. The same held for the children's communication toward their fathers.

Furthermore, we distinguished between the first step of the problem solving process (discussing the problem) and the second, third, and fourth step (working on solutions) to see whether the effects of the parent program that we found for the mother-child communication, emerged during the first step of the problem solving process, and the steps two, three, and four as well.

In Table 30 the mean proportions of constructive and negative communication during the first step and during the second, third, and fourth step are presented for the father-child dyad in both groups of families. Again, proportions of both constructive and negative communication are shown, although these proportions are almost complementary. In Table 31, the same proportions are presented for the mother-child dyad in the experimental and control families.

From Table 30, it is clear that no statistically significant differences between the experimental families and the control families were found for the communication between fathers and their children. This held for the first step, as well as for the second, third, and fourth step of the problem solving process. Thus, the fathers who had attended the parent program did not communicate more constructively and less negatively toward their children, than the fathers who had not attended the program. In the same way, the children whose fathers had followed the parent program, did not differ from the children whose fathers had not followed the program concerning the communication to their fathers. Differentiating between negative codes referring to disagreements and other negative codes made no difference in the results.

Table 30
Mean Proportions of Constructive and Negative Father-Child Communication in the Experimental and the Control Group at Step 1 and at Steps 2, 3 and 4 of Problem Solving

| | Experimental Group | | Control Group | | | |
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest	F	p
Step 1: Discussing conflict						
Constructive communication						
From father to child	.87	.90	.86	.87	.17	.69
From child to father	.82	.84	.81	.76	.39	.54
Negative communication						
From father to child	.08	.10	.13	.10	1.37	.26
From child to father	.16	.15	.18	.21	.13	.72
Negative communication excluding disagreements						
From father to child	.06	.05	.12	.07	.63	.44
From child to father	.08	.08	.12	.16	.23	.64
Step 2, 3 and 4: Working out solutions						
Constructive communication						
From father to child	.89	.88	.87	.92	.49	.49
From child to father	.71	.81	.82	.76	1.42	.26
Negative communication						
From father to child	.09	.08	.12	.06	.31	.59
From child to father	.25	.16	.16	.21	1.00	.34
Negative communication excluding disagreements						
From father to child	.06	.06	.11	.04	1.07	.32
From child to father	.18	.10	.14	.14	.62	.45

From Table 31, it is clear that for the communication from mother to child, only in the first step of the problem solving process, differences between the mothers of the experimental families and the mothers of the control families were found. Whereas the proportions of constructive communication increased from pretest to posttest for the mothers of the experimental group, these proportions declined from pretest to posttest for the mothers of the control group. As the proportions of negative communication were almost complementary to the proportions of constructive communication, a comparable development emerged for the proportions of negative communication from mother to child, but only when remarks of disagreement are included in the analyses. Whereas the mean proportion of negative communication decreased from pretest to posttest for the mothers of the experimental group, this mean proportion increased for the mothers of the control group. When remarks of disagreement were excluded from the analyses, no significant difference between the two groups of mothers was found.

Table 31
Mean Proportions of Constructive and Negative Mother-Child Communication in the Experimental and the Control Group at Step 1 and at Steps 2, 3 and 4 of Problem Solving

	Experimental Group		Control Group			
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	posttest	F	p
Step 1: Discussing conflict						
Constructive communication						
From mother to child	.86	.91	.89	.85	8.11	.01
From child to mother	.69	.78	.83	.78	5.16	.03
Negative communication						
From mother to child	.10	.07	.10	.13	4.94	.04
From child to mother	.28	.21	.15	.21	3.86	.06
Negative communication excluding disagreements						
From mother to child	.05	.03	.05	.09	2.99	.10
From child to mother	.18	.17	.11	.13	.38	.54
Step 2, 3 and 4: Working out solutions						
Constructive communication						
From mother to child	.90	.91	.87	.84	.72	.41
From child to mother	.61	.77	.80	.68	8.15	.01
Negative communication						
From mother to child	.08	.07	.10	.13	1.40	.25
From child to mother	.36	.20	.17	.27	8.90	.01
Negative communication excluding disagreements						
From mother to child	.06	.05	.09	.10	.46	.50
From child to mother	.30	.16	.13	.23	9.36	.01

Concerning the communication from mother to child at steps two, three, and four of the problem solving process, no statistically significant differences between the two groups of families emerged.

For the communication from the children to their mothers, statistically significant differences between the experimental families and the control families were found for both the first step, and steps two, three, and four of the problem solving process. For the children in the experimental families the mean proportion of constructive communication to their mothers increased from pretest to posttest, whereas for the children in the control families, the proportion of constructive communication decreased. This held for the first step of the problem solving process, as well as for the second, third, and fourth step of the process.

In the same way, for children in the experimental families, the mean proportion of negative communication to their mothers decreased from pretest to posttest, whereas for children in the control families, the proportion of negative communication increased. At the first step of the problem solving process, this difference was not significant. At step two, three, and four of the problem solving process, the difference between the two groups of children was significant, both when remarks of disagreement were included in, and excluded from the analyses.

Finally, the observations of the conflict-resolution task were used for analyzing effects of the parent program on the measures of negative synchronicity, negative continuance, and negative sequences. For computing these measures, subsequently all negative code categories (whether or not referring to disagreements), and those negative code categories not referring to disagreements were used. The analyses were done for fathers (Table 32) and mothers (Table 33) separately.

From Table 32, it is clear that there were no significant differences in negative synchronicity, continuance, and sequences in father-child communication between the experimental and the control families. The father-child communication in the experimental families did not improve as compared to the father-child communication in the control families.

Table 32

Mean Proportions of Negative Synchronicity, Negative Continuance, and Negative Sequences in Father-Child Communication during Problem Solving

	Experimental Group		Control Group			
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	posttest	F	p
Including disagreements:						
Negative Synchronicity						
From father to child	.20	.39	.45	.18	3.40	.09
From child to father	.31	.21	.19	.10	.00	.96
Negative Continuance						
From father to child	.07	.12	.44	.18	3.24	.10
From child to father	.49	.24	.41	.34	.34	.57
Negative Sequences						
From father to child	.03	.08	.29	.06	1.55	.24
From child to father	.04	.00	.15	.04	.34	.57
Excluding disagreements:						
Negative Synchronicity						
From father to child	.05	.03	.35	.10	1.13	.31
From child to father	.11	.19	.23	.04	1.56	.23
Negative Continuance						
From father to child	.07	.10	.43	.11	3.50	.08
From child to father	.34	.12	.33	.34	.72	.41
Negative Sequences						
From father to child	.02	.00	.28	.04	1.32	.27
From child to father	.02	.00	.18	.02	.81	.39

From Table 33 it is clear that for the mother-child communication, the only significant effect of the parent program was on negative continuance from the child directed to the mother, with remarks of disagreements included in the analyses. Whereas the children whose mothers had attended the parent program decreased the degree of negative continuance from pretest to posttest, the children whose mothers had not attended the parent program increased the degree of negative continuance from pretest to posttest. Thus, the children of the experimental group became less inclined to continue directing negative remarks to their mothers (regardless of how their mothers reacted), whereas the children of the control group became more inclined to do so. No other significant differences in negative synchronicity, negative continuance, and negative sequences in mother-child communication were found between the experimental and the control families.

Table 33

Mean Proportions of Negative Synchronicity, Negative Continuance, and Negative Sequences in Mother-Child Communication during Problem Solving

	Experimental Group		Control Group			
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	posttest	F	p
Including disagreements:						
Negative Synchronicity						
From mother to child	.40	.30	.34	.33	.35	.56
From child to mother	.19	.13	.18	.15	.18	.67
Negative Continuance						
From mother to child	.15	.08	.27	.24	.11	.75
From child to mother	.50	.30	.23	.32	5.64	.03
Negative Sequences						
From mother to child	.08	.03	.08	.09	1.14	.30
From child to mother	.06	.04	.08	.08	.08	.77
Excluding disagreements:						
Negative Synchronicity						
From mother to child	.26	.25	.18	.23	.20	.66
From child to mother	.10	.05	.16	.07	.34	.57
Negative Continuance						
From mother to child	.09	.06	.17	.23	.80	.38
From child to mother	.37	.28	.21	.25	1.63	.21
Negative Sequences						
From mother to child	.05	.02	.07	.05	.05	.82
From child to mother	.02	.02	.04	.02	.06	.80

6. Discussion

In this chapter, the results of the present study are summarized and discussed. In the first paragraph, the results of the first research question will be considered. What can be concluded about differences in family functioning between problem and normal families? In the second paragraph, the results of the second research question are summarized and discussed. Are there any relationships between parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, family structure, and the communication between family members? In the third paragraph, the results of the third research question are summarized. What are the effects of the parent program 'Parents and children talking together' on family functioning? Finally, some limitations of the present study, directions for future research, and practical implications for methods of intervention and prevention will be considered.

6.1 Differences between problem and normal families

In the fifth chapter, 26 families with a child with behavior problems were compared to 28 families with a child without behavior problems (for the sake of convenience called problem families and normal families, respectively) on child externalizing behavior, parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, family structure, and the communication between family members.

Externalizing behavior of the child

To validate whether there were really differences between the two groups of families, concerning child problem behavior, we checked on externalizing behavior of the child, and concluded that the children in the problem families indeed showed more externalizing behavior than the children in the normal families (boys and girls as well). The parents of the children with behavior problems reported more childrearing stress than the parents of the normal families (fathers as well as mothers) and the mothers of the problem families were also more depressed than the mothers of the normal families. Thus, we can conclude that the problem families actually differed from the normal families, in that they were characterized by more child behavior problems and child rearing difficulties. However, the mean scores on externalizing behavior of the children (boys as well as girls) of the normal group as well as the problem group stayed below the T-score of 70, which is considered the cut-off point that separates nonclinical from clinical scores (Verhulst et al., 1990). This means that the group of problem families cannot be considered a clinical group. This was to be expected, since we recruited the problem families through advertisements in the local papers, and not by way of mental

health institutions. Furthermore, the families in our study had not earlier sought help for their problems. Thus, in the typology of Kousemaker and Timmers-Huigens (1985) consisting of normal families, families experiencing parenting stress, families in crisis, and problem families, the so called problem families in our study can be placed in the category of families experiencing parenting stress. Furthermore, it must be noticed that all these measures were questionnaires filled out by the parents. Thus, our conclusions considering differences between the two groups of families concerning child behavior are restricted to the parents' subjective judgement, since we had no objective measures on child behavior (and no measures on child behavior that were filled out by the child itself, or by others, like teachers or independent observers). It may be plausible that parents who experience difficulty in child rearing will describe the child's behavior as relatively difficult as well (regardless of how difficult the child's behavior really is). However, as the parents are important informants on family life and are part of family life themselves, their subjective evaluations of the child's behavior might be even more related to aspects of family functioning (and thus be more important), than more objective measures of child behavior are.

Parenting practices

Concerning parenting practices, the problem families and normal families differed concerning parental support, with the fathers and mothers of the normal families being more affectionate, responsive, and caring. However, the scores of the parents of the problem families were not very low (ranging from 3.74 to 4.89 on a six-pointscale). Thus, the children of these families did not rate their parents very low on affection, responsiveness, and care, but they rated their parents lower than did the children of the normal families. No difference between the two groups of families were found concerning coercive control. In the first chapter we hypothesized that parents of problem families would use more coercive control than parents of normal families. The failure to demonstrate differences in coercive control might be explained by the possibility that parental coercive control probably plays a less prominent role in childrearing when children grow older. As ordering, commanding, and the use of pressure and punishment may work when the child is still young, older children will ask their parents to explain their rules and commands, and they will demand some involvement in decision-making. Explaining rules, allowing children a role in decision-making and thus stimulating the child's independence and responsibility, can be considered aspects of demanding control. Thus, for the age group in this study (children aged 10 to 14), demanding control may be of great importance. Unfortunately, the scale that was intended to measure demanding control proved unreliable (see the second paragraph of the fourth chapter). In addition, Patterson et al. (1992) emphasized that, when children enter middle childhood and

adolescence, problems may arise, when parents fail to monitor their children's where-abouts. Probably, parents of problem families differ from parents of normal families in their failure to monitor their children and in their failure to exert any control at all. Thus, although the results of this study did not support the hypothesis that parents of problem families and normal families differ in the degree to which they exert control, or the way in which they exert control, valid and reliable measurement instruments, particularly for measuring demanding control and monitoring, are needed to draw more definitive conclusions about the role of parental control in parenting (pre-)adolescents.

Quality of the parent-child relationship

Concerning the quality of the parent-child relationship, we found that the parent-child relationship in the problem families was characterized by less justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment than the parent-child relationship in the normal families. This held for the father-child relationship and the mother-child relationship as well. Since the measures of justice, appreciation, and trust were filled out by the child, and the measure of attachment was filled out by the parents, it can be concluded that both parents and children in the problem families judged the quality of their relationship less positively than the parents and children of the normal families. Here again, it should be noted that the scores of the problem families on justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment in the parent-child relationship were not very low (ranging from 3.95 to 4.49 on a six-point scale). Thus, the conclusion is not that there was no balance at all in the parent-child relationship in the problem families, but rather that the balance was less good than in the normal families. From these results, we can conclude that in the problem families there was indeed less balance of giving and taking between parents and child than in the normal families, just as we hypothesized from the literature on the intergenerational approach on family functioning (Boszormenyi-Nagy et al., 1991). In the first chapter we mentioned that although the intergenerational theory is thoroughly described in the literature, the hypothesized relationships between imbalance in the parent-child relationship and child behavior problems have hardly been studied and empirical evidence is still lacking. However, the results of this study lend strong support to the intergenerational theory, since we found significant differences between the problem and normal families on all the indicators of the quality of the parent-child relationship.

Family structure

With regard to family structure, we found that the mothers and children of the problem families experienced their families to be less cohesive and more lacking structure than the mothers and children of the normal families. Although the differences between the two groups of families were statistically significant, the absolute differences between

the scores of the problem families and the normal families were not large (about 0.3 on a four-point scale at most). Concerning lack of family structure, the scores for both groups of families were below two (on a four-point scale). Thus, although the problem families lacked more structure than the normal families, according to the mothers and children of these families, all the families scored rather low on lack of family structure. In the first chapter, we hypothesized that with the Dutch questionnaire to measure cohesion and flexibility, no curvilinear, but linear relationships with family functioning would be measured. High scores on the cohesion subscale were assumed to indicate healthy family functioning. Low scores on the flexibility subscale were assumed to indicate a clear family structure and healthy family functioning (Janssens & Oud, 1990). To prevent misunderstandings, we decided to rename the flexibility scale into the scale 'lack of family structure'. Thus, high scores on this scale were supposed to indicate a lack of a clear family structure. The results of our study supported our hypotheses on the interpretation of the scores on these scales. The normal families scored higher on cohesion and lower on lack of structure than the problem families (at least according to the mothers and the children). This finding supports our hypotheses that high scores on cohesion and low scores on lack of structure indicate healthy family functioning. No difference was found between the fathers of the problem and normal families. This might be explained by the fact that traditionally, fathers work more outside the home than mothers, and mothers spend more time with childrearing and the household (Hosley & Montemayor, 1997; Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 1997), as was also the case in our sample of families. Thus, fathers may be somewhat less sensitive for the degree of family cohesion and lack of structure.

Furthermore, no differences between the two groups of families were found for marital satisfaction. Thus, these results do not support the idea that child problem behavior is somehow related to the quality of the parental subsystem. According to Fincham and Osborne (1993), however, marital satisfaction is only one aspect of marital functioning. They hypothesize that marital conflict may be a better indicator of marital functioning than marital satisfaction, and may be more consistently and strongly related to child adjustment. Fainsilber Katz and Gottman (1993) also found that a mutually hostile interaction pattern between parents better predicted children's externalizing behaviors than a more global measure of marital satisfaction. Thus, for discriminating between the group of problem and normal families, it would be better to measure marital conflict, rather than marital satisfaction. This may have to do with the fact that marital conflict is more visible, and may have a more direct influence on the functioning of the parental subsystem, the family system, and the child. Furthermore, we measured the degree of destructive communication between the parents as partners. No difference between the two groups of families was found regarding destructive communication between the parents as partners.

This is in line with the fact that no differences between the two groups of families were found for marital satisfaction. However, as destructive marital interaction comes close to the concept of marital conflict, this finding does not support our hypothesis that marital conflict would be related more strongly to child behavior problems than marital satisfaction (Fainsilber Katz & Gottman, 1993; Fincham & Osborne, 1993). Neither marital satisfaction, nor destructive marital interaction discriminated between the groups of problem and normal families. Apparently, the marital relationship was neither affected by the child behavior problems in the problem families, nor did it seem to influence the child's behavior problems. Maybe this can be explained by the fact that the child behavior problems were not very serious yet, and none of the problem families had sought help for their problems before. As we described in the first chapter, Kousemaker and Timmers-Huigens (1985) distinguished between four types of families; that is, normal families, families experiencing parenting stress, families in crisis, and problem families experiencing lasting trouble in parenting. They hypothesized that in families with more serious difficulties in parenting, there may be an accumulation of problems and stresses. Probably, in the problem families in our study (falling into the category of families experiencing parenting stress), the difficulties had not yet become that serious, that marital difficulties caused child behavior problems, or that child behavior problems affected marital functioning. Maybe, if a more clinical group of problem families had been selected next to the normal families, more differences would have been found between the two groups concerning the parents' marital relationship.

The communication between parents and children

For measuring the quality of the communication between parents and child, questionnaires and observations were used. The results of the questionnaires showed that the parents and children of the problem families judged the quality of their mutual communication less positively than the parents and children of the normal families. That is, the communication between parents and children in the problem families was characterized by less openness and more conflicts than the communication in the normal families.

Furthermore, the quality of parental communication toward the child was measured with the ratings of intrusiveness, quality of explanation, and positive and negative communication during the decision-making task, the tangram puzzle, the eight puzzles task, and the mealtime situation. Hardly any differences between the parents of the problem families and the normal families were found. The only significant differences indicated that the fathers of the problem families communicated more intrusively during the tangram puzzle, and more negatively during the mealtime situation than the fathers of the normal families. The mothers of the problem families communicated less positively to

133

their children during the tangram puzzle than the mothers of the normal families. Although these differences were significant, the absolute differences in scores between the two groups of families were small. Furthermore, the ratings for the fathers' negative communication were low for both groups: below two on a seven-point ratingscale. Thus, negative communication hardly occurred during the interaction tasks. Since most differences in rating scores between the two groups of families were not significant, neither for the mothers, nor for the fathers, the observation tasks that were used, might not be very appropriate for demonstrating differences between problem and normal families. Maybe, differences in parent-child communication between problem families and normal families do not easily show up when the family members are engaged in a very structured puzzle task, or during dinner when an observer with a video-camera is present. From the literature, there are indications that the type of interaction task that is used, influences the type of interaction between parents and child that is observed (Ten Haaf & Janssens, 1994). Maybe, the observed interaction during the puzzle tasks is driven more by the structure, guidelines and instructions of the task, than by the interaction patterns that characterize the family relationships.

Furthermore, the conflict-resolution task was used for observing the communication between parents and child. The parent-child interaction in the problem families was compared with the parent-child interaction in the normal families concerning forms of <u>constructive, negative, or neutral communication</u>. Only a few significant differences between the two groups of families were found. The fathers of the normal families listened more attentively to their children than the fathers of the problem families. Both the fathers and children of the problem families made more negative expressions and commands toward each other, than the fathers and children of the normal families. The mothers and children of the problem families were less supportive toward one another than the mothers and children of the normal families. Finally, the mothers and children of the problem families made more negative expressions and commands than the mothers and children of the normal families. Thus, it seems that differences in interaction patterns between problem families and normal families are primarily manifested in negative interaction, that is, in negative expressions and commands. This is in line with findings of studies on interactions between family members described in the literature, that indicate that negative behaviors are more important in distinguishing between problem families and normal families, than positive behaviors (Gottman, 1979; Jacob & Krahn, 1987). Since the purpose of the conflict-resolution task is to discuss conflicts that exist between family members, this task may easily evoke negative interactions. Therefore, this task may be more suitable for demonstrating differences between problem families and normal families than the decision-making task, the puzzle tasks, and the mealtime situation. However, the results of the conflict-resolution task show, that even in the problem

families, negative communication made up only a small portion of the communication (ranging from 5 to 14 percent of negative expressions and commands in the communication). The communication between parents and child appeared to consist mainly of family members expressing their points of view. Almost 50 percent of the communication consisted of this type of conversation. This held for the problem families and normal families as well.

Finally, measures of <u>negative synchronicity</u>, <u>negative continuance</u>, and <u>negative sequences</u> were computed to analyze differences between problem and normal families in the process of interaction. These measures were computed, using the coded interaction during the conflict-resolution task. The results showed a few significant differences between the two groups of families. When remarks of disagreements were included in the analyses, no significant differences between the two groups were found for the father-child communication. For the communication between mother and child, we found a higher proportion of negative synchronicity and negative continuance for the mothers of the problem families, and a higher proportion of negative continuance for the children of the problem families. Thus, both the mothers and children of the problem families were more inclined to continue directing negative remarks toward each other, once they had made a negative remark, than the mothers and children of the normal families. Furthermore, the mothers of the problem families tended to react negatively to a negative child remark more often than the mothers of the normal families. Thus, it seems that in problem families negative remarks in the mother-child communication may lead to chains of negative remarks. Negative remarks trigger further negative remarks, and it may be difficult to break through these negative interaction patterns. Furthermore, it is likely that discussions escalate when negative remarks lead to further, probably even harder, negative remarks (Coan et al., 1997; Patterson et al., 1992; Wilson & Gottman, 1995). No differences between the two groups concerning negative sequences were found. This may be partly due to the fact that negative sequences (consisting of three successive negative remarks) did not occur very often. This corresponds to the findings of Patterson and colleagues, who stated that negative interaction made up only ten percent of the interaction in problem families (Patterson et al., 1992). Although there is more negative interaction in problem families than in normal families, negative interactions are only a small part of the total interaction. That implies that lengthy observations of parent-child interaction will be needed to be able to observe enough negative sequences to demonstrate possible differences in the proportion of these sequences between problem families and normal families. Furthermore, to observe negative sequences, observation tasks should be used that evoke negative interactions. Thus, the proportion of negative remarks and negative sequences can be raised. However, we already tried to do that by instructing the family members to discuss some actual family conflicts. No significant differences

135

between the two groups of families were found for the father-child communication. Maybe this can be explained by the possibility that the mothers were more used to arguing and discussing conflicts with their children than the fathers. As the fathers worked more hours than the mothers, and the mothers spent more time at home with the children, discussing conflicts might be part of the mothers', rather than the fathers' daily routine. Maybe, during the conflict-resolution task, the mothers fell into their habitual interaction practices more easily than the fathers. Steinberg (1987b) reviewed some recent research on sex differences in families with adolescent children, and concluded that adolescents spend more time in play activity with their fathers than with their mothers, and that mothers are more involved with the adolescents via household matters. As these household issues are likely sources of parent-adolescent conflict according to Steinberg (1987a, 1987b), this might explain why mothers' role and involvement in conflict negotiation may differ from fathers' role.

When remarks of disagreement were excluded from the analyses, we found a higher proportion of negative continuance and negative sequences from father to child and a higher proportion of negative synchronicity and negative continuance from child to father in the problem families. For the mother-child interaction, we found higher proportions of negative synchronicity, continuance, and sequences from mother to child, and a higher proportion of negative continuance from child to mother in the problem families. It appears that, comparing problem and normal families, more differences were found when remarks of disagreement were excluded from the analyses. Maybe excluding remarks of disagreement produced a more pure measure of negative interactions, as disagreeing needs not always be negative, and as disagreements occur in healthy, loving families as well. Thus when negative remarks consisted of aversive expressions and remarks, expressions of withdrawal from discussion, commands and prohibitions, and bringing up other subjects, but not disagreements, the differences between the normal and control families were more pronounced. This supports our hypothesis that there is a difference between remarks of disagreement and other negative remarks, and that differences between problem and normal families may be demonstrated more easily when disagreements are not considered necessarily negative. Although we found statistically significant differences between the groups on some, but not all interaction process measures, the significant differences were all in the same direction, indicating that there was more negative interaction, and more continuation of negative interaction in the problem families than in the normal families.

<u>Conclusion</u>

In conclusion, it can be said that the problem families differed from the normal families on quite a number of variables of family functioning. In the first chapter, we explained that the relationships between family functioning and child behavior problems that are described in the literature are mostly based on empirical studies and clinical experience with families experiencing moderate to severe child rearing difficulties. In this study, we compared problem families, experiencing only mild child rearing difficulties, with normal families. The results of our study demonstrate that we were able to replicate most of the differences between problem and normal families that are described in the literature. In the problem families, the parents were less supporting, the parent-child relationship was characterized by less appreciation, justice, trust, and attachment, the family was judged less cohesive and less structured (at least according to the mothers and children), and the quality of the communication between parents and child was judged less good by both parents and children, than in the normal families. Although the differences in scores between the problem and normal families were often small, they proved statistically significant. Thus, although family functioning in the problem families could not be considered very bad, it was actually less good than in the normal families. This may indicate that there is a continuum indeed, from normal family functioning to severe family dysfunctioning, as Kousemaker and Timmers-Huigens (1985) suggested. The difference between the mildly disturbed problem families in our study and the clinical problem families that are described in the literature is probably not a qualitative difference, but a difference of degree. In our view, this underscores the importance of prevention and early intervention programs, such as parent education programs. These early intervention programs may prevent family functioning from worsening and may help parents improve their parenting practices, the relationship with their children, the family structure, and the communication with their children. Thus, these programs may prevent families from moving from the stage of parenting stresses to the stages of parenting crisis and enduring family dysfunctioning (Kousemaker & Timmers-Huigens, 1985; Patterson et al., 1992).

In our study we only compared two groups of families, that is, mildly disturbed families falling into the category of families experiencing parenting stresses in the typology of Kousemaker and Timmers-Huigens (1985), and normal families. However, we did not study the other two family types that Kousemaker and Timmers-Huigens distinguished, that is, families in crisis and severely disturbed problem families. In our study, we managed to find several statistically significant differences between the mildly disturbed problem families and the normal families, as summarized above. We failed to find differences between the two groups of families concerning parental coercive control and the quality of the marital relationship. Probably, as families move from the stage of normal family functioning to the stage of parenting stresses, those aspects of family

functioning that are most likely to be negatively affected, are parental support, the quality of the parent-child relationship, family structure, and the communication between family members. Probably, in this stage, there is not yet any deterioration in parental control and the marital relationship. However, it is also possible, that our measurement instruments for parental control and the quality of the marital relationship were too restricted to reveal differences between normal families and families experiencing parenting stress. Especially for measuring parental control, our measurement instruments were rather limited, as we argued before. Future studies may try to answer the question of whether some aspects of family functioning are more likely to deteriorate, than other aspects, when families move from normal functioning to mildly disturbed functioning. Furthermore, future studies may address the question of whether it is possible to demonstrate differences in family functioning between families experiencing parenting stress, families in crisis, and severely disturbed problem families, since in our study we only compared normal families to families experiencing parenting stress. Future studies might thus complete the picture by examining the different aspects of family functioning for each of the four family types on the continuum of Kousemaker and Timmers-Huigens.

The results on differences between the problem and normal families show that family functioning is clearly linked to child behavior problems. However, no conclusion can be drawn about the direction of effects. A less supporting parenting style, a lack of trust, justice, appreciation, and attachment in the parent-child relationship, a less cohesive and less clear family structure, and negative parent-child communication may, each, or in combination, cause child behavior problems. But the reverse may also be true. The most plausible explanation is one of transactional family processes, in which child behavior, parental functioning, and family functioning influence each other and are influenced by each other at the same time in rather complex processes.

To investigate the direction of effects, longitudinal studies on family processes are needed, which enable us to study relationships between child, parental, and family characteristics over time (Lytton, 1990). Furthermore, the effects of intervention studies can tell us something about the direction of influence in family processes. If, for example, a parent program, that is directed at changing the parents' cognitions and behavior, results in child behavior changes as well, this supports our hypothesis that parental behavior indeed influences child behavior. Of course, these findings do not deny the possible role of child effects on parental behavior, which may operate at the same time! The results on the effectiveness of our parent program 'Parents and children talking together' are summarized and discussed in the third paragraph of this chapter.

6.2 Relationships among aspects of family functioning

In the second paragraph of the fifth chapter, relationships between parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, family structure, and the communication between family members were described.

<u>The quality of the parent-child relationship and parenting practices</u>

Concerning relationships between the quality of the parent-child relationship and parenting practices, strong positive correlations were found between justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment in the parent-child relationship on the one hand, and the parents' affection, responsiveness, and care on the other hand. This held for fathers and mothers as well. These findings suggest that parental support is very important for the quality of the parent-child relationship, and the other way around. As we hypothesized in the first chapter, parental support and the quality of the parent-child relationship seem to have a lot in common, although the concepts stem from different theoretical approaches.

No relationships were found between the quality of the parent-child relationship and parental coercive control. The quality of the parent-child relationship, as measured with the variables justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment, clearly has more to do with parental support than with the use of coercive control. Parental support and the quality of the parent-child relationship both refer to positive, warm feelings between parents and child. The use of coercive control is apparently rather independent of these feelings of warmth and affection. Furthermore, it should be noted that the measurement instrument to measure coercive control was rather restricted, since it consisted of only five items on the extent to which parents used several forms of punishment in child rearing. Maybe the use of punishment is more relevant with younger children, and looses some of its importance when children reach pre-adolescence. Coercive control might then not only refer to the use of punishment, but also, for example, to the strictness with which parents stick to houserules, or to parents' readiness (or refusal) to negotiate and discuss rules and restrictions. Maybe the scale measuring coercive control could be improved by adding some items that refer to other means of restrictive control.

<u>Family structure compared with parenting practices and the quality of the parent-child relationship</u>

Subsequently, relationships between family structure on the one hand, and parenting practices and the quality of the parent-child relationship on the other hand were considered. In the fourth paragraph of the first chapter we hypothesized family cohesion to be positively related to parental support, and to the quality of the parent-child relationship. We expected lack of family structure to be negatively related to coercive control, and

possibly to be negatively related to the quality of the parent-child relationship. The quality of the marital relationship was supposed to be positively related to parental support and the quality of the parent-child relationship, and negatively related to parental coercive control.

As we expected, family cohesion was positively correlated to the fathers' affection, responsiveness, and care, but mainly for the children's evaluation of family cohesion (the degree of cohesion according to the fathers' was positively related to the fathers' affection only). Family cohesion was also related to the mothers' affection, responsiveness, and care, for both the mothers' and children's evaluations of family cohesion. However, stronger correlations appeared between the child's view of family cohesion and the indicators for parental support, than for the mother's view of family cohesion. This may have to do with the fact that both the parents and children judged family cohesion, but only the children judged the parents' affection, responsiveness, and care. Thus, the strongest correlations that were found, were between variables that were assessed by the same respondent.

As we expected, family cohesion was also positively related to the quality of the parent-child relationship. The more cohesive the family, the more justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment in the parent-child relationship. Again, the most and strongest correlations were between measures that were obtained by the same respondent, that is, between the child's evaluation of family cohesion, and the child's judgement of justice, appreciation, and trust in the relationship with their parents, and between the parents' evaluation of family cohesion and the parents' evaluation of attachment in the relationship with their children.

Lack of family structure was not negatively related to the fathers' coercive control, as was hypothesized in the first chapter, but positively. This held only for the fathers' judgement of lack of family structure. Although this may seem contradictory at first, it is rather plausible that fathers who experience a lack of structure in the family, feel a need to exert more coercive control to keep things under control. They may feel the need to exert coercive control to a certain extent, <u>because</u> they feel the family lacks structure. Furthermore, it may be possible that fathers who use coercive control to a large extent, are less able to create a clear family structure, since they lack appropriate control techniques, such as the use of demanding control. For mothers, no relationship was found between lack of family structure and the use of coercive control. This may have to do with the fact that we used only one rather restricted indicator for measuring parental control. The measure of coercive control consisted of only five items referring to the use of punishment. Furthermore, we failed to measure demanding control. Maybe, lack of family structure is in fact related to the degree to which parents exert control over the child, in general. Thus, the less the family lacks structure, the more parents may exert control. However, these

control attempts may also consist of demanding control and setting clear rules and restrictions. The measure of coercive control (focusing on the use of punishment) may be too restricted to detect this hypothesized relationship.

Although we had no expectations concerning relationships between lack of family structure and parental support, we found that the more the family lacked structure according to the children, the less their fathers showed affection, responsiveness, and care, and the less their mothers showed responsiveness. Thus, it seems that lack of family structure is not only related to the organization and the balance of power between parents and children, but also to feelings of warmth and affection. Maybe, the aspects of structure in family life and cohesion (mutual connectedness and involvement) are not as independent of each other as is often thought, and influence each other and the family members' sense of well-being. How the family is organized (more or less structured) will also affect the family members' feelings of involvement with each other, and the other way around. It is not quite clear why a lack of family structure is related more strongly to the fathers' than the mothers' child rearing. Maybe, this is because a lack of family structure has to do with, for example, setting rules in the family, making decisions, family hierarchy, and who is in charge (and whether someone is in charge at all). These aspects may traditionally be the father's role, rather than the mother's role. Thus, this might explain why the relationship between a lack of family structure and child rearing is stronger for fathers than for mothers. However, Dekovi and Rispens (1998) state that nowadays, differences between fathers and mothers in parenting behaviors are not large, and there is no 'true, unique, specialization' (p. 66).

In line with our hypothesis, we found that a lack of family structure was negatively related with the quality of the father-child relationship, but only in the child's view. The more the family lacked structure according to the child, the less the father-child relationship was characterized by justice, appreciation, and trust. Here again the relationships that were found were between questionnaires that were filled out by the same respondent. For the mother-child relationship, we found that the more the family lacked structure according to the children, the less the relationship was characterized by justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment. The mother's evaluation of lack of family structure was negatively related to justice and attachment in the mother-child relationship. Thus, it can be concluded that the degree to which the family is structured and clearly organized, is clearly related to the quality of the parent-child relationship. A clear family structure may thus be a prerequisite for a balanced, understanding parent-child relationship. However, within a balanced parent-child relationship, it may also be more easy to keep the family organized and structured. When children experience justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment in the relationship with their parents, they will be more willing to live according to the rules and to comply with requests.

Marital satisfaction was not related to any child rearing variable, that is, neither to the parents' support, nor to coercive control. This might have to do with the fact that the parents evaluated their marital quality and the children evaluated most of their parents' child rearing behavior (affection, responsiveness, and care). Maybe, correlations would have been found between the children's impression of the relationship between their parents and the children's impression of the childrearing behavior of their parents, or between the parents' impression of their marital relationship and the parents' impression of their own child rearing behavior. However, coercive control was judged by the parents themselves and was also not correlated with marital satisfaction. The fathers' marital satisfaction correlated with two variables of the quality of the parent-child relationship: The more fathers were satisfied with their partners, the more the father-child relationship was characterized by trust and attachment. The mothers' judgement of marital satisfaction was only related to attachment: The more mothers were satisfied with their marital relationships, the more they experienced attachment in the relationships with their children. Maybe marital satisfaction is not so much related to how the parents act in their child-rearing, but more to how parents and children feel in the parent-child relationship. However, marital satisfaction was only related to some, but not all indicators of the quality of the parent-child relationship, so we must be careful in drawing this conclusion.

The communication between family members compared with parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, and family structure

Finally, relationships between the communication between family members on the one hand, and parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, and family structure on the other hand were considered. The communication between family members was measured by using questionnaires and observations. The questionnaires measured the quality of the communication between parents and child, and between the parents as partners. The observations consisted of the ratings of intrusiveness, quality of explanation, and positive and negative communication, the proportions of constructive and negative communication, and the process measures of negative synchronicity, negative continuance, and negative sequences.

Concerning relations between the communication between family members and parenting practices, the *questionnaire measures* on the communication between parents and child correlated with parental support, but not with coercive control. The more both the parents and the children evaluated their mutual communication positively, the more the children evaluated their parents to be affectionate, responsive, and caring. Again, the highest correlations were found between the measures that were filled out by the same respondent, that is, the children. No relationship was found between destructive marital

142

interaction and parental child rearing behaviors. This corresponds with the fact that no relationships were found between marital satisfaction and parental child rearing. Apparently, no influence of the quality of the relationship between the parents on the parents' child rearing was found. This may have to do with the fact that our sample did not consist of families with very serious child rearing problems and the group of problem families could not be considered a clinical group. The parents of the problem families did not score very low on marital satisfaction, nor did they score very high on destructive marital interaction. Furthermore, the groups of normal and problem families did not significantly differ on these two variables. Thus, there may be too little variance in the quality of the parents' marriage to demonstrate relationships with the parents' child rearing quality. Concerning correlations between parenting practices and the *ratings* of intrusiveness, quality of explanation, and positive and negative communication, only one significant relationship was found: The better the quality of the mothers' explanations, the less they used coercive control. Apparently, mothers who make often use of coercive control, do not explain very much to their children. Understandably, the use of coercive control (punishment) and the use of explanations do not go together. When the *proportions of constructive and negative communication* during the conflict-resolution task were used as indicators for the quality of parent-child communication, some more correlations with parenting practices were found. The proportions of constructive and negative communication in parent-child interaction were related to the parents' affection, responsiveness, and care. The higher the proportion of constructive communication and the lower the proportion of negative communication, the more affectionate, responsive, and caring the parents. This held for the communication from father and mother to the child, as well as for the communication from the child to father and mother. There were no striking differences in the correlations when remarks of disagreement were included in, or excluded from the proportion of negative communication in the analyses. Although the correlations between negative communication from father to child, and affection, responsiveness, and care appeared to be somewhat stronger when remarks of disagreement were excluded from the analyses. Thus, at least for the communication from father to child, this supports our hypothesis that remarks of disagreement might be different from other negative remarks, in that remarks of disagreement may not necessarily be considered negative. Aversive expressions, expressions of withdrawal from discussion, and commands and prohibitions can almost certainly be considered negative, whereas disagreements can be negative (especially when the other person's arguments are constantly denied) but can also be part of functional problem solving discussions. Only for the mothers, correlations between the proportion of constructive and negative communication and the use of coercive control were found. The lower the proportion of constructive communication from child to mother, and the higher the proportions of negative

communication (from child to mother as well as from mother to child), the more the mothers made use of coercive control. It is not clear why this relationship was found for mothers, but not for fathers. Finally, correlations were computed between parenting practices and the *process measures* of negative synchronicity, negative continuance, and negative sequences. No relationships were found between these measures and the fathers' affection, responsiveness, care, and coercive control. This held both for the interaction from father to child and the interaction from child to father. For the process measures on the interaction between mother and child, some significant relationships with the mothers' child rearing behavior were found. For the interaction from mother to child, significant relationships were found, but only when remarks of disagreement were excluded from the measures of negative synchronicity, continuance, and sequences. The more negative synchronicity, that is, the more the mothers reacted negatively to a negative remark of the child, the less the mothers were affectionate, responsive, and caring, and the more they used coercive control. And the higher the proportions of negative continuance from mother to child, and of negative sequences that were started by the mother, the less caring and the more coercively controlling the mother was. Again, distinguishing remarks of disagreements from other types of negative remarks proved relevant. Interestingly, for the interaction from child to mother the difference between remarks of disagreement and other negative remarks seemed less important. The more the children tended to continue making negative remarks directed at their mothers, the less they perceived their mothers to be affectionate, responsive, and caring. This held both when remarks of disagreement were excluded from, or included in the analyses. When remarks of disagreement were excluded from the analyses, a positive relationship between negative sequences and coercive control was found; The more the children started sequences of negative interactions, the more their mothers said to use coercive control. In general, for the interaction from the children directed at their mothers, the process measure of negative continuance seemed the most important one. The children's tendency to continue directing negative remarks (regardless of the reaction of their parents to the first negative remark) seems an important variable, that is correlated with parental functioning.

Subsequently, relationships between the indicators of the communication between family members and the quality of the parent-child relationship were considered. When the *questionnaires* were used to measure the quality of the communication between parents and child, positive relationships were found with the quality of the parent-child relationship. The higher both parents and children rated the quality of the communication with each other, the more the parent-child relationship was characterized by justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment. This held for both the parents' and the children's view on their mutual communication, and for fathers as well as mothers. It was clear that

the highest correlations were found between measures that were filled out by the same respondent (that is, between the parents' view on the quality of parent-child communication and attachment, and between the children's view on parent-child communication and justice, appreciation, and trust). These correlations ranged from 0.74 through 0.88 and can be considered rather strong. (The correlations between measures that were filled out by two different respondents ranged from 0.37 through 0.55.) The questionnaire measure of destructive marital interaction correlated only with attachment (again, these are measures that were filled out by the same respondent, that is, the parent). The more destructive marital interaction both fathers and mothers reported, the less they considered the parent-child relationship to be characterized by attachment. The degree of destructive marital interaction was not related to the child's perception of the quality of the parent-child relationship.

When the *ratings* of intrusiveness, quality of explanation, and positive and negative communication were used as indicators for the quality of parent-child communication, hardly any significant relationship with the quality of the parent-child relationship was found. The more the fathers communicated positively (according to the independent raters), the more the parent-child relationship was characterized by attachment, according to the fathers. And the more intrusive the mothers behaved (according to the raters), the less the children judged the relationship with their mothers to be just. Again, the ratings of parental communication during the decision-making task, the tangram puzzle, the eight puzzles, and the mealtime situation, proved not very suitable for demonstrating relationships with other variables of family functioning. Maybe, these tasks are too specific, and evoke some kind of task-related or task-driven behavior, that does not tell us much about parental functioning.

When the *proportions of constructive and negative communication* were used as indicators for the quality of parent-child communication, a number of significant correlations with the quality of the parent-child relationship emerged. Although not all correlations were statistically significant, in general it can be concluded that the more parents and children communicated constructively and the less they communicated negatively toward one another, the better the quality of the parent-child relationship was, that is, the more the parent-child relationship was characterized by justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment. Concerning the communication between father and child and the father-child relationship, these correlations were again the strongest and highest between measures that concerned the same respondent, that is, between the communication from father to child, and the father's judgement on the degree of attachment in the father-child relationship, and between the communication from child to father, and the child's judgement on the degree of justice, appreciation, and trust in the father-child relationship. Whether or not expressions of disagreement were included in the proportions of negative father-child

145

communication, did not seem to make real difference; the more negative remarks the fathers and children made toward one another (with or without remarks of disagreement), the lower they rated the quality of their mutual relationship. Concerning the communication between mother and child and the mother-child relationship, clearly the most significant correlations appeared between the communication from the child directed to the mother and the quality of the mother-child relationship. The more the children interacted constructively to their mothers, the more they experienced their mutual relationship to be characterized by justice, appreciation, and trust. The more the children interacted negatively to their mother, the less the mother-child relationship was characterized by justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment. The more the mothers interacted constructively, and the less they interacted negatively toward their children, the more their children experienced their mutual relationship to be characterized by justice and appreciation. Thus, the way in which both mother and child experience the quality and degree of positive feelings in their relationship, seems to be influenced somewhat more strongly by the way in which the child approaches the mother. Or, the perceived quality of the mother-child relationship more strongly influences the child's behavior to the mother, than the mother's behavior to her child. Probably, the mothers were in more control of their behavior and way of communicating than the children were, in observation situations with a camera present. The mothers might be trying harder to keep up appearances, whereas the children might just say what comes to their mind. However, these are just speculations that need further study. Whether or not remarks of disagreement were included in, or excluded from the analyses of the proportions of negative remarks, did not really seem to matter; the general tendency indicated that the more the mothers and children made negative remarks, the lower the quality of the mother-child relationship was rated.

When the *process measures* of negative synchronicity, continuance, and sequences were used as indicators of the quality of communication, no correlations were found between the communication between father and child and the quality of the father-child relationship. For the communication between mother and child and the quality of the mother-child relationship, more significant correlations were found. Although not all indicators of the communication between mother and child were significantly related to the indicators of the quality of the mother-child relationship, all significant results pointed in the same direction, indicating that the better the quality of the relationship between mother and child was, the less their communication was characterized by negative synchronicity, negative continuance, and negative sequences. Thus, there seems to be a clear link between the process of negative communication between mother and child and the quality of their relationship. For the communication from mother to child, most significant correlations with the quality of the mother-child relationship were found for

the measure of negative synchronicity (especially when remarks of disagreement were excluded from the analyses). The more the mothers tended to react negatively to a negative remark of the child, the less the mother-child relationship was experienced to be characterized by justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment. For the communication from child to mother, most significant correlations with the quality of the mother-child relationship were found for the measure of negative continuance (whether or not remarks of disagreement were included in the analyses). The more the children tended to continue making negative remarks, once they made a negative remark, the less the mother-child relationship was characterized by feelings of justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment. Thus, for the communication from the children to their mothers, negative continuance seems to be an important variable. The children's tendency to continue making negative remarks, once they are 'on the negative track', clearly appears to influence (or to be influenced by) the quality of the mother-child relationship. This may be an important finding, which can only be found when the process of the interaction between family members is taken into account, not when only proportions or rates of negative remarks are considered (Patterson et al., 1992; Wilson & Gottman, 1995). This supports our hypothesis that it is relevant to analyze the processes of interaction in studies on the communication between family members, and to add the use of observations of family interaction to the use of questionnaires. The fact that we failed to find many significant relationships between the measure of negative sequences and the indicators of the quality of the mother-child relationship, may be explained by the fact that there was a low occurrence of negative sequences. As was said before, negative remarks make up only a small portion of family interaction, and sequences consisting of three subsequent negative remarks are rare in a twenty-minute observation period. This makes it difficult to link the occurrence of negative sequences to the quality of the mother-child relationship. However, some significant correlations were indeed found, indicating that the more negative sequences occurred, the less the mother-child relationship was characterized by justice (both when mother and child started the sequences and both when remarks of disagreement were included in or excluded from the analyses), appreciation (only when the negative sequences were started by the mother and disagreements were included in the analyses), and attachment (only when disagreements were excluded from the analyses).

It is not clear, why we failed to find any relationship between the process measures for the father-child interaction and the quality of the father-child relationship. The explanation might have something to do with the fact that traditionally, fathers spend more time outside the home, and spend less time in child-rearing, than mothers (Hosley & Montemayor, 1997; Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 1997). Furthermore, conflicts are more likely to surface between mothers and children, than between fathers and children (Steinberg, 1987a, 1987b). According to Steinberg (1987a), most conflicts in the family

revolve around issues of daily living, and mothers are more active in talking to the children about these subjects than are fathers. Therefore, the quality of the mother-child relationship may be more easily affected by the quality of the mother-child communication, than the father-child relationship is affected by the father-child communication. Mothers and children may have more of a history of problem solving and negotiating than fathers and children. That might explain why the mother-child relationship is more clearly related to the quality of their mutual communication.

Finally, relationships between the quality of communication and family structure were considered. When the *questionnaires* were used to measure the quality of the communication between father and child, some relationships were found with family structure. The more positively children judged the communication with their fathers, the more they judged their families to be cohesive, and the less they judged their families to be lacking structure. The more positively fathers judged the communication with their children, the more they judged their families to be cohesive, and the more satisfied they were with their marital relationships. Furthermore, the fathers' evaluations of destructive marital interaction was negatively correlated with the fathers' judgement of family cohesion, positively correlated with the fathers' judgement of a lack of family structure, and negatively correlated to their marital satisfaction. Not surprisingly, all these correlations are again between measures that were filled out by the same person. Concerning relationships between the communication between mother and child and family structure, strong correlations were found between almost all indicators. The more positively both the mothers and children evaluated their communication, the more cohesive and the more structured they judged their families. The mothers' judgement of the quality of the communication with their children was also positively related to their marital satisfaction. The mothers' judgement of destructive marital interaction was negatively related to their judgement of the degree of family cohesion, positively related to both the mothers' and children's judgement of lack of family structure, and negatively related to the mothers' judgement of marital satisfaction. Clearly, as we hypothesized, the better the communication between parents and child, the more the family is cohesive, and the less it is lacking in structure. Probably, in a cohesive and reasonably structured family climate, open and nonconflictual communication between parents and child is facilitated. Or, reversely, parent-child communication that is open and not characterized by conflicts, brings about a cohesive and structured family life. With a high quality of parent-child communication, parents and child are aware of each other's needs and feelings, are involved with each other (the characteristics of family cohesion), and are able to discuss and negotiate family rules and leadership (leading to a clear family structure). Interestingly, the degree to which fathers and mothers are satisfied with their marital

relationships, also correlated positively with their evaluations of the quality of the communication with their children. Maybe, parents who have happy marriages, have more energy to invest time and effort in the quality of the communication with their children. Or, this finding may just indicate that the individual's functioning in one family subsystem influences, and is influenced by, his or her functioning in other family subsystems as well. Thus, it might not be realistic to view the several family subsystems, or dyads within the family, as relatively independent from one another (Lange, 1994). The degree of destructive interaction in the parents' marriages was also related to (especially the parents' views of) family cohesion and structure. When parents interact in a destructive way with one another, there will be less warm feelings of involvement (the characteristics of family cohesion), and it may be harder to set or maintain a clear family structure, since the parents may not be able to negotiate on family rules, or since they may also disagree on important child-rearing issues. This again shows that the functioning of the whole family and the family subsystems mutually influence each other.

When the *ratings* of intrusiveness, quality of explanation, and of positive and negative communication were used to measure the quality of the communication between parent and child, no relationships were found with family structure. This held for the communication between father and child and between mother and child as well. The most plausible explanation for this finding, may lie in the nature of the observation tasks. The rating scores were assigned during the decision-making task, tangram puzzle, the eight puzzles task, and the mealtime situation. As we suggested before, these task situations may not be suitable for observing parenting behaviors or family functioning. The behavior of parents and child during these tasks may be highly influenced by the structure and instructions of the task, and there is little variance in parental behavior. Thus, the rating scores probably do not say much about family functioning; however they may reveal how parents and children function during cognitive tasks. The way in which parents and children solve cognitive problems, may not have much to do with the way in which the family functions, in terms of family cohesion, lack of family structure, and marital satisfaction. Furthermore, concerning the mealtime situation, it is our conviction that the parents and children were highly aware of the presence of the observer and the video-camera (although the observer tried not to sit very close to the dinner table and was instructed to read a book and to pay no attention to the family members). Probably, the family members did not behave as they usually did during dinner, and performed some sort of socially desirable behavior. If that was indeed the case, relationships of the rating scores with the indicators of family functioning may be difficult to detect.

When the *proportions of constructive and negative communication* during the conflict-resolution task were used as indicators for the quality of the communication between parents and child, some significant correlations with family structure were

149

found. Concerning the communication between father and child, and the fathers' and children's evaluation of family cohesion and lack of family structure, few significant relationships were found. The more the fathers interacted constructively toward their children, and the less they interacted negatively toward their children (with remarks of disagreement excluded from the analyses), the more the children judged their families to be cohesive. No relationships were found between the communication from the child directed to father, and family structure. In the first chapter, we hypothesized that high scores on cohesion and low scores on lack of structure would be related to positive communication skills between the family members. It is not quite clear why we failed to find most of these relationships for the fathers and children (although the relationships that were found were in the expected direction). Probably, as we suggested before, fathers and children do not talk about conflicts very often, and are less used to this type of situation than are mothers and children. That might explain why there were so few relationships between the communication between father and child, and their views on the degree of family cohesion and structure.

For the communication from mother to child, it was found that the more the mothers communicated negatively toward their children (including remarks of disagreement), the less the children judged their families to be cohesive. For the communication from the child directed to mother, more significant correlations with family structure were found, indicating that the more the children communicated constructively, the more cohesive they judged their families and the less they judged their families to be lacking structure. Furthermore, the more they communicated negatively toward their mothers (with remarks of disagreement left out of the analyses), the less both the children and their mothers judged their families to be cohesive and the more the children judged their families to be lacking structure. It is striking that especially the communication from the child directed to the mother seemed to be related to the degree of family cohesion and structure. Maybe, the mothers were in more control of their feelings and reactions, whereas the children reacted more impulsively. Probably, the mothers managed to 'hide' any relationships between their way of communicating toward their children and the degree of cohesion and structure in the family. The children might have been more 'honest' in their reactions (or, in other words, they might have been reacting in a less socially desirable way). However, these are just speculations and we must be very careful in interpreting these findings.

Finally, the *process measures* of negative synchronicity, negative continuance, and negative sequences were used as indicators of the quality of parent-child communication. When the communication between father and child is considered, only few significant relationships of these process measures with family structure were found. The more the fathers reacted negatively to a negative remark of the child (with remarks of disagree-

ment included in the analyses), and the more the fathers started negative sequences (with disagreements included in, or excluded from the analyses), the more the family lacked structure, according to the children. Interestingly, the communication from the father directed to the child appeared to be related to how the child viewed the family. Apparently, a negative influence of the father on the interaction process (by reacting negatively to the child, and by starting and maintaining negative sequences) is associated by the child with a lack of family structure. That is interesting, since family structure may indeed have something to do with the process (or, structure) of the interactions. When the interaction processes go smoothly, and family members are not overruled by negative emotions or caught in chains of negative expressions that trigger further negative expressions, the family structure may be maintained more easily, since it is easier to negotiate on house rules and on conflicts, and it is possible to make decisions and since it is clear who is responsible. Negative discussions will undermine the family's structure. No statistically significant relationships were found between the communication from the child directed to father and family structure. The reasons for the failure to demonstrate these relationships are not quite clear, but may again have to do with the probability that fathers and children are less accustomed to negotiating on conflicts and with the fact that negative expressions made up only a small portion of the interaction process.

When the communication between mother and the child was considered, more correlations with family structure were found. Concerning the communication from mother directed to the child, especially negative synchronicity, that is the mother reacting negatively to a negative remark of the child, seemed important. The more the mothers tended to react negatively to a negative remark of their children, the less the family was judged to be cohesive according to both mothers and children, the more family lacked structure according to both mothers and children, and the less the mothers reported to be satisfied in their marriages (with remarks of disagreement included in the analyses; when remarks of disagreement were excluded from the analyses, some of these relationships turned nonsignificant). When the communication from the children directed to their mothers was concerned, the measure of negative continuance proved most relevant. The more the children tended to continue making negative remarks, once they had made a negative remark to their mothers, the less both mothers and children judged their families to be cohesive, and the more the children judged their families to be lacking structure (with somewhat stronger correlations when remarks of disagreement were included in the analyses). Interestingly, for the children's communication to their mothers, it was their tendency to keep making negative remarks that appeared to be related to the family's functioning, whereas for the mothers, the measure of negative synchronicity seemed the most important. Apparently, mothers and children play a different role in family problem solving. Probably, the children are more sensitive to 'negative moods' in which they keep

151

making negative remarks, than the mothers, who may be more in control of their feelings and reactions.

A salient detail in the results is the relationship between the mother's tendency to react negatively to negative remarks of the child, and her own marital satisfaction. This finding again shows how the different subsystems in the family appear to be related and to influence each other's functioning (Lange, 1994). Probably, mothers who experience low marital satisfaction, feel less well, and subsequently are more inclined to react negatively and with less patience to their children. An alternative explanation would be that the negative interactions with their children influence these mothers' feelings in their marriages.

Although not all expected relationships proved to be statistically significant, the relationships that we did find were all in the expected direction. Thus, the conclusion that the structure of the interaction process between parents and children, has indeed to do with the degree of cohesion and structure in the family, seems justified. In general, good commmunication skills appear to promote, or to be promoted by, healthy family function-ing characterized by feelings of cohesion and involvement and a clear family structure.

In comparing the different measures that were used as indicators for the quality of the communication between parents and children, it is striking that the questionnaire measures were most suitable for demonstrating relationships with family structure. Although one might be inclined to conclude that it is most efficient to use questionnaires to measure family communication, some remarks can be made opposed to this viewpoint. The fact that the questionnaire measures yielded the best results, may have to do with the fact that the indicators of family structure, that is, family cohesion, lack of family structure, and marital satisfaction, were also measured by questionnaires. Furthermore, the strongest correlations were found between those questionnaire measures that were filled out by the same person. Thus, method variance may play a role. Furthermore, the fact that we managed to demonstrate relationships between the observation measures on parent-child communication and the questionnaire measures on family structure, lends even stronger evidence of the existence of relationships between parent-child communica-tion and family structure. The fact that the same respondent gives his or her view on both communication and family structure does not play a role here. Furthermore, adding observations of family communication to the questionnaires on family communication is worthwhile, since not all aspects of communication between family members can be measured with questionnaires. For example, the process of the interaction (which was measured with negative synchronicity, continuance, and sequences) is hard, or impossi-ble to measure by questionnaire. Family members will be hardly aware of their tendencies to react negatively to one another, their tendency to keep making negative remarks once they made the first negative remark, or their tendency to get caught in chains of negative

exchanges (Patterson, 1982; Patterson et al., 1992). These processes probably go by unnoticed, and even unintentionally. Family members' descriptions of these processes may therefore be inaccurate accounts of the interaction.

In the relationships between the communication process measures and family structure, inclusion in or exclusion of remarks of disagreement from the process measures did not lead to marked differences in the results, although on the whole, the relationships seemed to be somewhat stronger when remarks of disagreement were included. This does not support our hypothesis, that remarks of disagreement are qualitatively different from really aversive expressions (like criticisms, put downs, and the such) and are not necessarily negative, and therefore probably should be excluded from the analyses. The problem in interpreting remarks of disagreement might be that disagreements can be part of healthy problem solving (when family members just disagree, but do not mean to harm or attack one another), but can also be part of dysfunctional problem solving, when family members constantly disagree to undermine the other person's position. If the latter is the case, family members are not engaged in the content of the discussion, but in some power struggle (Lange, 1994). Thus, disagreements may have a different meaning, in different situations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that, as we hypothesized in the first chapter, there are many relationships between the concepts of the parenting approach, the intergenerational approach, the structural approach, and the communication approach on family functioning. Although within each approach different aspects of the complex reality of family life are emphasized, and different terms are used to refer to family phenomenons, these aspects of family life are not unrelated. When the correlations between all aspects of family functioning are examined more closely, it appeared that the most substantial positive relationships showed up between the questionnaire measures of parental support, the quality of the parent-child relationship, family cohesion, and the quality of the communication between family members. Apparently, these aspects of family functioning have a lot in common, since they all refer to the emotional involvement between family members and their mutual relations and understanding. Apparently, supportive parents, balanced parent-child relationships with mutual trust and understanding, a cohesive and involved family climate, and open, problem free communication between parents and child, tend to go together. Furthermore, in general, a lack of family structure was negatively correlated with parental support, the quality of the parent-child relationship, and the quality of parent-child communication. The observation measures on the communication between parents and child were mainly related to parental support and the quality of the parent-child relationship. By and large, constructive communication was positively related, and

negative communication was negatively related to parental support and the quality of the parent-child relationship. Furthermore, the results on the structure of the interaction process showed that in general, continuation of negative exchanges between parent and child was negatively related to parental support and the quality of the parent-child relationship.

Summarizing, the concept of family functioning refers to the interrelated aspects of parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, family structure, and the communication between family members. According to Lange (1994), in helping families experiencing child rearing difficulties, it would be best to pay attention to all these aspects of family functioning. Thus, all factors of family functioning that might be related to the behavior problems of the child are subsequently examined to build a complete picture of the family's functioning. Interventions can subsequently address those aspects of family functioning that need improvement most urgently. By examining all aspects of family functioning, we can prevent situations in which problem families are helped by improving one aspect of family functioning, whereas other aspects of family functioning that need improvement too and that preserve the problematic situation, are kind of ignored. The better the influences on child behavior problems are examined, the better the relevant influences can be addressed in intervention programs.

6.3 Effects of the parent-program 'Parents and children talking together'.

In this paragraph, the results on the effectiveness of the parent program 'Parents and children talking together' are summarized and discussed. For evaluating the effects, the experimental families with the parents who had attended the parent program, were compared to the control families, with the parents who had not attended the program.

The questionnaire measures
First, the experimental group and the control group were compared on the questionnaire measures that were used as indicators of parenting practices (affection, responsiveness, care, and coercive control), the quality of the parent-child relationship (justice, appreciation, trust, and attachment), family structure (cohesion, lack of structure, and marital satisfaction), and the communication between family members (quality of communication between parent and child and marital destructive communication). Only one significant difference between the two groups of families was found, indicating that the mean score on affection for the mothers who had attended the parent program hardly changed, whereas the mean affection score for the mothers who had not attended the program, increased. Although this finding is contrary to our hypothesis, its importance should be doubted. The decrease in scores for the mothers of the experimental group was in fact negligible (0.04 point), while the increase in scores for the mothers of the control

group was small (0.31 point). Furthermore, we accepted an alpha level of 0.05 for each comparison, which means that we accepted a chance of five percent to conclude that a difference is significant, while in fact it does not really exist. When many comparisons are made at the same time, this chance of five percent to draw a wrong conclusion is accepted repeatedly, which increases the chance of finding a significant, but not relevant difference. Thus, while keeping this in mind, significant differences that were found between the two groups of families must always be considered carefully, and be judged on their relevance.

Thus, it can be concluded that we failed to demonstrate any effects of the parent program on the way in which both the parents and children filled out the questionnaires. One explanation for this finding might be that the parent program was not really that effective. Maybe it is hard to change family functioning with a parent program that only consists of seven sessions with the parents. Perhaps, we aimed too high in expecting to change parenting practices, the parent-child relationship, the family's structure, and the communication between family members. Especially, since we worked only with the parents, it will be difficult, and take more time to alter the whole family's functioning, of which parents only play a part. Maybe, it is more easy to change these aspects of family functioning if the parent program is lengthened and consists of more sessions, and if all family members participate in the program. Furthermore, the parent program focused on negotiating conflicts between parents and children and problem solving interpersonal conflicts. Perhaps, if we want to demonstrate effects of this parent program, the first step is to use measurement instruments that measure those skills or behaviors that are taught in the parent program. Some aspects of family functioning, like, for example, family cohesion, or parental control techniques, may be too far off the original goals of the parent program. Perhaps a positive side effect of the parent program is that the family becomes more cohesive, or parents start to use more authoritative and less restrictive control techniques. It may however be difficult to detect these generalizations of effects. However, the observation measures on the communication between the family members showed positive results of the parent program, which indicated that it is nevertheless possible to change something in the family members' interaction patterns. We will come back to these findings later and turn now to another explanation for the failure to demonstrate effects of the parent program on the questionnaire measures. This explanation may lie in the questionnaires themselves. The questionnaires tap more global aspects of family functioning. For example, the questionnaire on the communication between parents and child is designed for parents and child to report their evaluation of the quality of their mutual communication in general, that is, the degree to which the communication is characterized by openness and lack of conflicts. If, as a consequence of the parents attending the parent program, they are better able to negotiate conflicts with the child,

resulting in one or two more incidences of problem solving in which they manage to reach a solution that is acceptable for both parents and children, this may be considered an important effect of the program. However, it should be doubted whether this reveals itself immediately in the parents' or child's evaluation of the general quality of their mutual communication. Perhaps the questionnaires might have shown some effects of the parent program, if they would have been filled out later, with additional time between the end of the parent program and the measurement. After a while, the small changes in, for example, the communication between parents and child, might have resulted in a change in the parents' and child's evaluation of their communication in general. The same argumentation applies to the other questionnaire measures. Another suggestion might be to try to develop questionnaires that tap more molecular aspects of the different aspects of family functioning. In the case of the communication between parents and child, such a questionnaire might ask parents and child, for example, to register how often they made negative remarks toward one another on a number of subsequent days. Such a questionnaire might take the form of some sort of self-observation by parents and child. With measures like these, effects of the parent program might be revealed more easily. Finally, a possible explanation for the failure to demonstrate effects of the parent program on the questionnaire measures may be the fact that the problem families were not clinical families and the parents of these families only experienced mild child rearing difficulties. It is possible that there was a ceiling-effect on the questionnaire measures: The parents of the problem families were already rather supportive and did not use coercive control to a large extent; the quality of the parent-child relationships in these families was rather good; these families were rather cohesive and did not lack structure to a large extent; and the quality of the communication between the family members was rather good. Although there were differences between the problem families and the normal families on many of these measures, the situation in the problem families could not be considered very bad. Thus, the question is whether large improvements in the problem families could be expected at all, following the parent program.

The observations

Furthermore, the observation tasks were used to evaluate effects of the parent program. First, we looked at the ratings of intrusiveness, quality of explanation, and positive and negative communication during the decision-making task, the tangram puzzle, the eight puzzles task, and the meal. Again, we failed to find any significant effects of the parent program. Thus, the parents who had attended the parent program did not become less intrusive, nor did they improve the quality of their explanations, or communicate more positively and less negatively, as compared to the parents who had not attended the program. The most likely explanation for the failure to demonstrate effects of

the parent program can be found in the type of interaction tasks that were used. The parent program focuses on communication rules, and on negotiating conflicts and disagreements between parents and children. The interaction tasks that were used to collect the rating scores do not resemble the processes of problem solving and conflict-resolution that were taught in the parent program. The decision-making task comes closest to a conflict-resolution situation. However, as the parents and children had to plan an imaginary vacation, for which there was plenty of money, the parents and children could make their dreams come true, and conflict or disagreement did not occur. The tangram puzzle and the eight puzzles task consisted of cognitive challenges for the children in which the parents were asked to guide, advise, and help their children. Although the difficulty of some of the puzzles induced some stress on the parents and children, conflicts did not occur. Furthermore, the behavior of the parents and children was directed very much on the content of the puzzles, not on how parents and child communicated or cooperated. Thus, some sort of task-driven behavior was observed, that probably tells us more about how family members solve cognitive puzzles, than about their habitual interactions and their way of solving interpersonal problems. The mealtime situation, finally, had the potential of observing characteristic interaction patterns between family members. However, they were very much aware of the presence of the observer and the video-camera, and disagreements at the dinner table hardly occurred. The interaction during dinner was restricted mainly to questions (for example about the child's experiences at school during the day) and answers; to information exchange between parents and child. Conflicts and problem solving hardly occurred. To demonstrate effects of the parent program, it will be best to use observation tasks that are as close as possible to the situations of problem solving and negotiating conflicts, as they are taught and practiced in the program itself. Therefore, the <u>conflict-resolution task</u> offered the best opportunities, since the parents and children were instructed to discuss some actual conflicts that they came up with themselves. As these conflicts and disagreements had meaning and significance for the family members, they managed more easily to concentrate on the task, and to forget the observer and the video camera. To demonstrate effects of the parent program on the interactions during the conflict-resolution task, <u>proportions of constructive and negative communication</u> were computed for each parent-child dyad. Analyzing differences between the experimental and the control families in constructive and negative communication, significant effects of the parent program were found for the communication between mother and child, but not father and child. We found that both the mothers and the children of the experimental group communicated more constructively and less negatively toward one another at posttest than at pretest, whereas the mothers and children of the control families communicated more negatively and less constructively at posttest than at pretest. Furthermore, we distinguished between the first step, and the

157

second, third, and fourth steps of the problem solving process. For the communication during the first step, discussing the problem, the same pattern was found, indicating that the mothers and children of the experimental group communicated more constructively and less negatively, whereas the mothers and children of the control families communicated more negatively and less constructively to one another at posttest than at pretest. During the subsequent steps of the problem solving process, however, this pattern of differences was repeated only for the communication from the child directed to the mother. For the children of the experimental group, the proportion of constructive communication increased and the proportion of negative communication decreased from pretest to posttest, whereas for the children of the control group the reverse pattern was found: the proportion of constructive communication decreased and the proportion of negative communication increased from pretest to posttest. Interestingly, distinguishing between the first step and the second, third, and fourth step of the problem solving process revealed a difference between the mothers and their children. Apparently, when the mothers interacted in a more constructive and less negative way to their children during the beginning of the conflict-resolution task, while discussing the problem, this seemed to have a lasting effect on the children. The children not only interacted more constructively and less negatively during the discussion of the problem, but also during the brainstorming and selection of solutions. This might suggest, that the way in which mothers set the stage for problem solving is very important for the cooperation of the children during the further steps of the process. In discussing these results we must keep in mind, as was earlier mentioned in the fifth chapter, that neutral remarks hardly occurred, and that the proportions of constructive and negative communication were almost complementary. However, for the sake of completeness, we reported on both constructive and negative communication. Concerning the proportions of negative communication, we included, as well as excluded remarks as disagreements, to see whether this made any difference. We expected that it would be better to exclude remarks of disagreement from the proportion of negative remarks, as these remarks need not necessarily be negative. However, removing remarks of disagreement from the analyses failed to improve the results. Some significant differences between the mothers and children of the experimental group and the mothers and children of the control group even disappeared, when remarks of disagreement were excluded from the analyses. This suggests that remarks of disagreement may be considered negative indeed, as they play an important role in distinguishing the interactions in experimental families from control families. Although remarks of disagreement are not necessarily negative, and occur in healthy family problem solving processes as well, they may be considered negative in disturbed family problem solving processes. In the latter case, remarks of disagreement may be used to constantly undermine and deny the other person's views. In that case remarks of

disagreement may not be directed at the content of the interaction, but serve some implicit power struggle in the relationship (Lange, 1994). Summarizing the results, it can be said that we managed to demonstrate effects of the parent program on the way in which the mothers and children interacted with each other. Thus, we can conclude that the parent program had effect on those skills and behaviors that were actually taught in the program, while it had no effect on those skills or aspects of family functioning that were not taught in the program. As we already hypothesized, it may be important to use observation tasks and measurement instruments, that resemble as closely as possible the contents of the parent program. The results show us that the mothers who had attended the parent program indeed improved their way of communicating to the child when discussing conflicts, just as they were taught in the program. Interestingly, the parent program also resulted in improvement in the children's communication toward their mothers, although the children did not attend the parent program themselves! This can be considered an important finding, that indicates that choosing the parent as a 'change agent' may result in changes in the children as well. Trying to influence family interaction patterns, by influencing the parents in a parent program proves to be effective (at least when the interactions between mothers and children is concerned, a finding that we will come back to soon). The fact that the parents are chosen as change agents, does however not mean that the parents are considered causing the problems in the family. The family is viewed as a complex system of individual characters, who have relationships with one another, and engage in various subsystems in the family. However, the results show us that changes in one family member, may indeed result in changes in other family members or in the functioning of family subsystems as well.

Unfortunately, we failed to find any effects of the parent program on the interaction between the fathers and children. Maybe this can be explained by the fact that the fathers traditionally spent less time with the family and in child rearing, and maybe they were less used to discussing conflicts with their children (as we hypothesized before). And although the fathers attended the sessions of the parent program as frequently as the mothers did, they probably spent less time practicing the new communication skills at home. Furthermore, we compared only small groups of fathers (6 experimental versus 9 control group fathers), which makes it difficult to demonstrate significant differences between the two groups of fathers. That is, the differences in scores between the two groups must be rather large to reach significance. Finally, and this is perhaps the most interesting explanation, the fathers might play a different role in problem solving, than do the mothers. Probably, the mothers discuss more with their children and exchange most arguments, while the fathers listen carefully. The fathers' role might be to summarize the viewpoints, to add some arguments if necessary, to monitor the process and structure of the discussion, and eventually to force a solution or

'to cut the knot'. However, to uncover such possible differences in roles between fathers and mothers, the interactions should be viewed and coded in a different way, with an emphasis on the structure, and not on the content of the discussion. From the literature, there are indications that fathers and mothers play a different role in problem solving with their children. Kahen, Fainsilber Katz, and Gottman (1994) observed the interaction between mother, father, and child during a structured interaction task and found mothers to be significantly more engaged during parent-child interaction than fathers, and fathers to issue significantly more commands than mothers. Hauser et al. (1987) studied the interaction between father, mother and child, during a discussion of differences of opinion on moral dilemmas. They found that fathers were more likely to be cognitively enabling (explaining, focusing, and problem solving) in family discussions, while mothers were more likely to be cognitively constraining (interrupting, distracting, and interfering). However, Hauser et al. (1987) emphasize that the importance of the context must be taken into account, that is, the nature of the task in which the adolescent and the parents were engaged. They hypothesize that the demands of the task, solving a complex moral dilemma, encouraged these cognitive responses by fathers. The task may have evoked behaviors such as problem solving or explaining by the fathers. Although Hauser et al. had expected mothers to be more supportive and empathic, the type of task probably did not evoke these behaviors. Thus, possible differences between fathers and mothers may also depend on the type of interaction task that is used. Furthermore, as we described before, Steinberg (1987a, 1987b) stated that mothers are more involved with adolescents in household matters, than are fathers. Since these household issues are likely sources of parent-adolescent conflict, this might explain why mothers play a different role in discussing conflicts with their children than fathers. Finally, Jory, Rainbolt, Thibo Karns, Freeborn, and Greer (1996) observed father-mother-child triads in a structured negotiation task and concluded that patterns of communication during family problem solving appeared to be influenced by the gender of both parents and children. They found differences between the four dyadic relationships of mother-son, mother-daughter, father-son and father-daughter in the degree to which alliances were formed. Whether there are also interaction effects of gender of parent and adolescent during conflict-resolution tasks like the one that we used in the present study, may be examined in future studies.

Furthermore, it may be highly useful to study the mother-father-child triad, instead of the mother-child and the father-child dyad separately. Studying family triads, instead of dyads, may be more close to reality, as both the fathers and mothers were present and interacting with the child at the same time. It may be considered artificial and unrealistic to separate the mother-child dyad and the father-child dyad from a three-person interaction process. We acted as if the mother and child interacted together, and independent on that, father and child interacted together. However, the father's reactions to the child may be

influenced by the mother's reactions to the child, or by the child's reactions to the mother, and so on. Thus, the interactions in a family triad may be far more complex than we suggested in our parent-child dyad analyses. Future studies might well try to address these topics, and to unravel the complex sequences of behavior in the interactions of three persons. This does not mean that studying the father-child dyad and the mother-child dyad separately, as we did, is useless. Studying these dyads is just the beginning, and we should work on ways to analyze the interactions in family triads as the next step on the road to understanding the complexity of family interactions.

Finally, we analyzed the <u>process of the interaction</u> during the conflict-resolution task using the measures of negative synchronicity, negative continuance, and negative sequences. Again, the analyses were done for the father-child dyad and the mother-child dyad separately. For the interaction between father and child, no differences in the interaction process measures were found between the experimental families and the control families. For the interaction between mother and child, only one significant difference between the two groups of families was found. The degree of negative continuance from the child directed to the mother decreased in the experimental group, whereas the degree of negative continuance from child to mother increased in the control group. Thus, the children whose mothers had attended the parent program decreased their tendency to make negative remarks, once they had made one, whereas the children whose mothers had not attended the program increased their tendency to continue making negative remarks. However, when remarks of disagreement were excluded from the analysis, the difference was less clear and turned nonsignificant. Although this significant difference between the two groups of families was in the expected direction, we must be cautious in interpreting it, since we found only one significant difference. We can't be sure whether the difference really exists or is based on chance. It is not clear why the interaction process measures yielded so little result in demonstrating effects of the parent program (especially as these measures proved reasonably effective in distinguishing between problem families and normal families, as was discussed in the first paragraph).

<u>What can we expect from parent programs?</u>

Summarizing, it can be said that the parent program 'Parents and children talking together' proved to have a little overall effect. The only effects found were on the proportions of constructive and negative communication between mother and child, during the conflict-resolution task. However, that is exactly what the parent program aimed at: teaching parents better communication and problem solving skills. We failed to find any evidence for a generalization of this effect to other aspects of family functioning. The question of whether the improved communication between parents and children would positively affect parenting skills, parent-child relationships, and family structure, could

thus not be answered affirmatively. The question is, however, whether parent programs can be expected to be very influential after all. According to Alvy (1994), it is not realistic to expect parent education programs to have large effects on the behavior of parents because there are so many other factors influencing parental functioning. Parental behavior is also influenced by the personality and health characteristics of the parent, by personality characteristics and developmental stage of the child, by a parent's marital relationship, by environmental aspects (like neighborhood, financial stresses), and by norms and values of the parent's cultural background. All these factors may play a role and may influence each other, which makes parental functioning a very complex matter. Parent education can be viewed as a short-term intervention that attempts to influence the 'long-term and multi-determined' parenting process and parent-child interactions (Alvy, 1994, p.232). During the parent education program, parents are stimulated to focus attention on parenting and family functioning. When the program has ended, it may be difficult for parents to keep focused on their style of parenting.

Furthermore, just like parental behavior, child behavior is multi-determined. Although family functioning is a major influence on the development of children, other factors influence child development as well, such as internal, biological factors (personality, temperament, health characteristics), and external factors (siblings, peers, school, television).

In general, parent programs are based on a unidirectional model of influence. The parent is viewed as the change agent and the child is viewed as the target of change. Probably the reality is more complex, and parent-child interaction is rather bidirectional than unidirectional (Patterson et al., 1992). Children are also supposed to influence the relationship with their parents. In our parent program, we attempted to influence parent-child interaction by teaching the parents how to interact with their children. Since parent-child interaction involves two participants, parent and child, it might also be possible to include parents as well as children in the parent program. This would fit the plea of some authors in favor of applying an interactive or systemic perspective in parent education approaches (Roberts, 1994). Although it might not be easy to involve both parents and their (probably unwilling) children in the parent program, it may be more easy to change family interaction patterns (as all participants are influenced at the same time) and to avoid the question of who is to blame for the family problems.

Furthermore, it is emphasized in the literature, that many other factors may influence parent program effectiveness. How can we be sure that the observed changes (or the lack of it) in parents' or children's behavior can be ascribed to the parent education program? Since other factors are influencing program outcomes, these factors should be taken into account in future evaluation studies. In the following we will mention some of these factors.

First, not only the parent education approach used, but also the personality, quality and competencies of the group leader affect program effectiveness (Alvy, 1994; Dembo et al., 1985; Medway, 1989). Personality characteristics, such as warmth, flexibility, empathy, but also aspects such as sex, marital status, or being a parent him- or herself, may be of influence. Furthermore, it may be important whether a group leader is well prepared for leading a parent education group and has had a proper training. Relevant group leader skills are for example leading group discussions, giving feedback, asking eliciting questions, giving examples to illustrate principles etc. Furthermore, there may be interaction effects between leader characteristics and type of parent education program.

Second, the parents who participate in parent education programs may also influence program effectiveness (Alvy, 1994; Dembo et al., 1985; Medway, 1989). Parent education programs intend to teach parents how to parent effectively. However, what 'effective parenting' means, may depend on the personal characteristics, the goals and values of the parents, and the practices and values of the culture a family lives in (Dembo et al., 1985). Socio-economic class may be of influence, since middle and lower class parents may interact differently with their children and may have different needs. Furthermore, more attention should be paid to different (developmental) stages of parenting. Parents of adolescent children, for example, may have other needs and problems than parents of preschool children. However, we tried to take this into account by developing a parent program for parents of (pre-)adolescent children. It is also possible that there is an interaction between parents' child rearing style and the different parent education approaches. Dembo et al. (1985) report that there is some evidence that parents with an authoritarian child rearing style respond less successfully to parent education.

It is for these reasons that parents' needs assessment is recommended (Alvy, 1994; Dembo et al., 1985; Medway, 1989; Roberts, 1994). What do parents know, what do they want to know, and what do they need to know about child rearing and child development? More educated parents for example, may already know and practice the principles taught in the parent education program; It may be unrealistic to expect them to change their attitudes and behavior (Dembo et al., 1985). According to Dembo et al. (1985) there needs to be more attention to parents' individual goals for participating in a parent education program. Program evaluation could be based on these individual goals, instead of on the program's goals in general.

Third, the process of parent education may be of influence (Alvy, 1994; Dembo et al., 1985; Medway, 1989). Factors such as the number of parents in the group and the amount of verbal discussion by parents may influence the results. Furthermore, little research has been done on the influence of methods of parent education, that is, for example, the use of lectures, discussion, manuals, audio-visual equipment like tape recordings, or video-instruction, and the combination of several methods.

Fourth, the results of parent education programs may differ depending on the type of measurement used. Therefore, the use of multiple assessment procedures is recommended. Evaluation measures can assess internal states (attitudes, values, and knowledge), or overt behavior. Source of information can be the parents or independent observers. It would be best to use self-report, as well as observational measures, and to focus on parents as well as children (Dembo et al., 1985; Medway, 1989). In this study, we tried to take this into account by using questionnaires filled out by the parents as well as the children, and observations. We would like to add to this point, the importance of choosing or developing measurement instruments (questionnaires or observations) that try to measure exactly what is taught in the parent program. Thus, the measurement instruments must fit the goals and contents of the program.

Furthermore, attention must be given to generalization of changes in behavior across settings (e.g. from home to school) and over time (maintenance) (Dembo et al., 1985; Medway, 1989). In this study however, the posttest was conducted shortly after the last session of the parent program. Although we found effects of the program on the degree of constructive and negative communication between mothers and children, it would be interesting to examine whether these effects are lasting, or whether they vanish after some time. Future studies should address this question.

Finally, adequate research designs are important, with adequate sample sizes, use of control groups of parents, random assignment of subjects to treatment and control groups, controlling for key demographic characteristics, use of multiple assessment instruments, that assess parent, child and family characteristics, and look for generalization of effects over time (Alvy, 1994; Dembo et al., 1985; Medway, 1989). In this study, we tried to meet most of these criteria. We used a pretest posttest control group design and controlled key demographic characteristics by matching the experimental and the control group on variables like age and sex of the child and family type (one or two parent family). We also tried to assess parent, child, as well as family characteristics. However, we used rather small groups, that is, 13 experimental families and 15 control families. Furthermore, these groups consisted of only 7 and 10 fathers, respectively. Thus, we must be careful in drawing conclusions from our results. It would be recommended to replicate the present study on larger groups of parents to see whether the same results can be found, and whether effects can be found for fathers as well.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the parent program 'Parents and children talking together' resulted in more constructive and less negative communication between mother and child during the conflict-resolution task. These results indicate that with this parent program it seems possible to improve parent-child communication and to influence the

way in which parents and children negotiate conflicts. When conflicts can be discussed in an atmosphere of openness and trust, and parents and child succeed in finding solutions that are acceptable for both parties, this will hopefully lead to better parent-child relationships and a more relaxed, pleasant family climate. It is our conviction that the program 'Parents and children talking together' can thus contribute to the improvement of family functioning. However, we failed to find evidence for a generalization of effects on other aspects of family functioning, that is, on parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, and family structure. For this reason, more research is needed, examining whether bringing about a generalization of effects is possible. For demonstrating generalizations of effects, it may be relevant to use observations as well as questionnaires. Since we were able to demonstrate effects of the program on the communication between mother and child with the observations, but not with the questionnaires, these findings might indicate that questionnaires are less sensitive for demonstrating changes in family functioning as soon as they occur, than observations. Furthermore, it is possible, that for realizing a generalization of effects, it will be necessary to address other aspects of family functioning in the parent program as well, and to link communication and problem solving skills explicitly to those other aspects of family functioning. In the parent program as we developed it, only communication skills were addressed, without reference to other aspects of family functioning. Furthermore, since we failed to demonstrate effects of the program on the communication between fathers and children, future studies should address the question of the possible effectiveness of the program on fathers. To give a decisive answer to this question, a larger sample of fathers than participating in our study, will be needed.

References

Abidin, R. R. (1976a). <u>Parenting skills. Trainer's manual.</u> New York: Human Sciences Press.

Abidin, R. R. (1976b). <u>Parenting skills. Workbook.</u> New York: Human Sciences Press.

Achenbach, T. M. & Edelbrock, C. S. (1979). The child behavior profile: II. Boys aged 12-16 and girls aged 6-11 and 12-16. <u>Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 47,</u> 223-233.

Achenbach, T. M. (1966). The classification of children's psychiatric symptoms: a factor-analytic study. <u>Psychological Monographs, 80</u>, 1-37.

Achenbach, T. M. (1978). The child behavior profile: I. Boys aged 6-11. <u>Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 46,</u> 478-488.

Alvy, K. T. (1994). <u>Parent training today: A social necessity.</u> Studio City, Cal.: Center for the improvement of child caring.

Bakker, I. & Husmann, M. (1994a). <u>Positief omgaan met kinderen. Praktijkboek voor ouders en andere opvoeders</u> [Interacting with children in a positive way. A practical book for parents]. Nijmegen: Dekker & Van de Vegt.

Bakker, I. & Husmann, M. (1994b). <u>Positief omgaan met kinderen. Handleiding oudercursus</u> [Interacting with children in a positive way. Handbook parent program]. Nijmegen: Dekker & Van de Vegt.

Bates, J. E., Bayles, K., Bennett, D. S., Ridge, B., & Brown, M. (1991). Origins of externalizing behavior problems at eight years of age. In D. J. Pepler & K. H. Rubin, <u>The development and treatment of childhood aggression</u> (pp. 93-120). Hillsdale, Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Baumrind, D. (1996). The discipline controversy revisited. <u>Family Relations, 45</u>, 405-414.

Becker, W. C. (1971). <u>Parents are teachers. A child management program.</u> Champaign, Illinois: Research Press.

Bodin, A. M. (1981). The interactional view: family therapy approaches of the mental research institute. In A. S. Gurman, & D. P. Kniskern (Eds.), <u>Handbook of family therapy. Vol II</u> (pp. 267-309). New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Bond, C. R. & McMahon, R. J. (1984). Relationships between marital distress and child behavior problems, maternal personal adjustment, maternal personality, and maternal parenting behavior. <u>Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 93</u>, 348-351.

Boszormenyi-Nagy, I. & Ulrich, D. N. (1981). Contextual family therapy. In A. S. Gurman & D. P. Kniskern, <u>Handbook of family therapy</u> (pp. 159-186). New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Boszormenyi-Nagy, I., & Spark, G. M. (1973). <u>Invisible loyalties. Reciprocity in intergenerational family therapy.</u> Maryland: Harper & Row Publishers.

Boszormenyi-Nagy, I., Grunebaum, J., & Ulrich, D. (1991). In A. S. Gurman, & D. P. Kniskern (Eds.), <u>Handbook of family therapy. Vol. 2</u> (pp. 200-238). New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Breen, M. J. & Altepeter, T. S. (1990). <u>Disruptive behavior disorders in children. Treatment-focused assessment.</u> New York / London: The Guilford Press.

Brunner, E. J. (1998). Family interaction and family psychopathology, in L. L'Abate (ed.), <u>Family psychopathology. The relational roots of dysfunctional behavior</u> (pp. 75-93). New York: The Guilford Press.

Buurmeijer, F. A. & Hermans, P. C. (1988). <u>Gezinsfunctioneren en indivi-duele stoornissen</u> [Family functioning and individual disorders]. Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger.

Christensen, O. C. & Thomas, C. R. (1980). Dreikurs and the search for equality. In M. J. Fine (Ed.), <u>Handbook on parent education</u> (pp. 53-74). New York: Academic Press.

Cicirelli, V. G. (1998). Intergenerational relationships in modern families, in L. L'Abate (ed.), <u>Family psychopathology. The relational roots of dysfunctional behavior</u> (pp. 185-206). New York: The Guilford Press.

Clark, R. D. & Shields, G. (1997). Family communication and delinquency. <u>Adolescence, 32</u>, 81-92.

Cluff, R. B., Hicks, M. W., & Madsen, C. H. (1994). Beyond the circumplex model: I. A moratorium on curvilinearity. <u>Family Process, 33</u>, 455-470.

Coan, J., Gottman, J. M., Babcock, J., & Jacobson, N. (1997). Battering and the male rejection of influence from women. <u>Aggressive Behavior, 23</u>, 375-388.

Coie, J. D. & Dodge, K. A. (1998). Aggression and antisocial behavior. In W. Damon (Series Ed.) & N. Eisenberg (Vol. Ed.), <u>Handbook of Child Psychology. Vol. 3. Social, emotional and personality development</u> (pp. 779-862). New York: Wiley.

Colapinto, J. (1991). Structural family therapy. In A. S. Gurman, & D. P. Kniskern (Eds.), <u>Handbook of family therapy. Vol. 2</u> (pp. 417-443). New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Collins, W. A., Harris, M. L., & Susman, A. (1995). Parenting during middle childhood. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), <u>Handbook of parenting. Vol I.</u>

Children and parenting (pp. 65-89). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Cordova, J. V., Jacobson, N. S., Gottman, J. M., Rushe, R., & Cox, G. (1993). Negative reciprocity and communication in couples with a violent husband. Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 102, 559-564.

Cusinato, M. (1998). Parenting styles and psychopathology, in L. L'Abate (ed.), Family psychopathology. The relational roots of dysfunctional behavior (pp. 158-184). New York: The Guilford Press.

Dadds, M. R. (1987). Families and the origins of child behavior problems. Family Process, 26, 341-357.

Dekoviç, M. & Rispens, J. (1998). Vaders en de opvoeding en ontwikkeling van kinderen. Een inleiding. [Fathers and the upbringing and development of children. An Introduction]. Kind en Adolescent, 19, 65-67.

Dembo, M. H., Sweitzer, M., & Lauritzen, P. (1985). An evaluation of group parent education: Behavioral, PET, and Adlerian programs. Review of Educational Research, 55, 155-200.

Dinkmeyer, D. & McKay, G. D. (1976a). Systematic Training for Effective Parenting. Leader's Manual. Circle Pines, Minnesota: American Guidance Service.

Dinkmeyer, D. & McKay, G. D. (1976b). Systematic Training for Effective Parenting. Parents' Handbook. Circle Pines, Minnesota: American Guidance Service.

Dreikurs, R. & Blumenthal, E. (1976). Ouders en kinderen, vrienden of vijanden? [Parents and children, friends or enemies?]. Amsterdam: uitgeverij Contact.

Eimers, R. & Aitchison, R. (1977). Effective parents - responsible children: A guide to confident parenting. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Ellis, A. & Harper, R. A. (1977). A new guide to rational living. North Hollywood, California: Wilshire Book Company.

Ellis, A. (1962). Reason and emotion in psychotherapy. Secaucus, New Jersey: Lyle Stuart.

Ellis, A. (1973). Humanistic psychotherapy. The Rational-Emotive Approach. New York: The Julian Press.

Emery, R. E. (1982). Interparental conflict and the children of discord and divorce. Psychological Bulletin, 92, 310-330.

Erel, O. & Burman, B. (1995). Interrelatedness of marital relations and parent-child relations: a meta-analytic review. Psychological Bulletin, 118, 108-132.

Eron, L. D., Huesmann, L. R., & Zelli, A. (1991). The role of parental variables in the learning of aggression. In D. J. Pepler & K. H. Rubin, <u>The development and treatment of childhood aggression</u> (pp. 169-188). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Fainsilber Katz, L. & Gottman, J. M. (1993). Patterns of marital conflict predict children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors. <u>Developmental Psychology, 29</u>, 940-950.

Fincham, F. D. & Osborne, L. N. (1993). Marital conflict and children: retrospect and prospect. <u>Clinical Psychology Review, 13</u>, 75-88.

Fine, M. J. & Henry, S. A. (1989). Professional issues in parent education. In M. J. Fine (Ed.) (1989), <u>The second handbook on parent education. Contemporary perspectives</u> (pp. 3-20). New York: Academic Press.

Fine, M. J. (Ed.) (1980). <u>Handbook of parent education.</u> New York: Academic Press.

Fine, M. J. (Ed.) (1989). <u>The second handbook on parent education. Contemporary perspectives.</u> New York: Academic Press.

Forehand, R. & Long, N. (1991). Prevention of aggression and other behavior problems in the early adolescent years. In D. J. Pepler & K. H. Rubin, <u>The development and treatment of childhood aggression</u> (pp. 317-330). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Forgatch, M. & Patterson, G. (1989). <u>Parents and adolescents living together. Part 2: Family problem solving.</u> Eugene: Castalia Publishing Company.

Gardner, F. E. M. (1992). Parent-child interaction and conduct-disorder. <u>Educational Psychology Review, 4</u>, 135-163.

Ge, X., Conger, R. D., Cadoret, R. J., & Neiderhiser, J. M. (1996). The developmental interface between nature and nurture: A mutual influence model of child antisocial behavior and parent behaviors. <u>Developmental Psychology, 32</u>, 574-589.

Gerris, J. R. M., Vermulst, A. A., Van Boxtel, D. A. A. M., Janssens, J. M. A. M., Van Zutphen, R. A. H., & Felling, A. J. A. (1993). <u>Parenting in Dutch families.</u> Nijmegen: ITS.

Gorall, D. M. & Olson, D. H. (1995). Circumplex model of family systems: integrating ethnic diversity and other social systems. In R. H. Mikesell, D. D. Lusterman, & S. H. McDaniel (Eds.), <u>Integrating family therapy. Handbook of family psychology and systems theory</u> (pp. 217-233). Washington: American Psychological Association.

Gordon, T. (1970). Parent effectiveness training. New York: Wyden.

Gordon, T. (1980). Parent Effectiveness Training: A preventive program and its effects on families. In M. J. Fine (Ed.), Handbook on parent education (pp. 101-121). New York: Academic Press.

Green, R. G., Harris, R. N., Forte, J. A., & Robinson, M. (1991). The wives data and FACES IV: Making things appear simple. Family Process, 30, 79-83.

Gottman, J. (1979). Marital interaction: Experimental investigations. New York: Academic Press.

Hauser, S. T., Book, B. K., Houlihan, J., Powers, S., Weiss-Perry, B., Follansbee, D., Jacobson, A. M., & Noam, G. G. (1987). Sex differences within the family: Studies of adolescent and parent family interactions. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 16, 199-220.

Henry, B., Caspi, A., Moffitt, T. E., & Silva, P. A. (1996). Temperamental and familial predictors of violent and non-violent criminal convictions: age 3 to age 18. Developmental Psychology, 32, 614-623.

Holmbeck, G. N., Paikoff, R. L., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (1995). Parenting adolescents. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), Handbook of parenting. Vol I. Children and parenting (pp. 91-118). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Hosley, C. A, & Montemayor, R. (1997). Fathers and adolescents. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), The role of the father in child development (pp. 162-179). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Jacob, T. & Krahn, G. (1987). The classification of behavioral observation codes in studies of family interaction. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 49, 677-687.

Janssens, J. M. A. M., & Oud, J. H. L. (1990). Boekbespreking van F. A. Buurmeijer & P. C. Hermans. Gezinsfunctioneren en individuele stoornissen [Commentary on F. A. Buurmeijer and P. C. Hermans: Family functioning and individual disorders]. Gezin, 2, 52-56.

Janssens, J. M. A. M., & Van As, N. M. C. (1993). Gezin, opvoeding en gedragsproblemen [Family functioning, parental child rearing, and child behavior problems]. Nijmegen: University Press.

Janssens, J. M. A. M., & Van As, N. M. C. (1994a). Kwaliteit van de ouder-kind relatie en gedragsproblemen [Quality of the parent-child relationship and child behavior problems]. Tijdschrift voor Orthopedagogiek, 33, 165-183.

Janssens, J. M. A. M., & Van As, N. M. C. (1994b). Negatieve communicatie in gezinnen [Negative communication in families]. Tijdschrift voor Orthopedagogiek, 33, 432-442.

Janssens, J. & Van As, N. (1994c). Externaliserend gedrag van kinderen [Children's externalizing behavior problems]. In J. R. M. Gerris (Ed.), <u>Pedagogische ondersteuning van gezinnen en hulpverleners</u> [Supporting families and family caretakers] (pp. 3-18). Assen: Van Gorcum.

Jory, B., Rainbolt, E., Thibo Karns, J., Freeborn, A., & Greer, C. V. (1996). Communication patterns and alliances between parents and adolescents during a structured problem-solving task. <u>Journal of Adolescence, 19</u>, 339-346.

Kahen, V., Fainsilber Katz L., & Gottman, J. M. (1994). Linkages between parent-child interaction and conversations of friends. <u>Social Development, 3</u>, 238-254.

Kazdin, A. E. (1987). <u>Conduct disorders in childhood and adolescence.</u> California: Sage Publications.

Kousemaker, N. P. J. & Timmers-Huigens, D. (1985). Pedagogische hulpverlening in de eerste lijn [Parenting support]. <u>Tijdschrift voor Orthopedagogiek, 24</u>, 549-565.

L'Abate, L. (Ed.) (1998). <u>Family psychopathology. The relational roots of dysfunctional behavior</u>. New York: The Guilford Press.

Lahey, B. & Loeber, R. (1994). Framework for a developmental model of oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder. In D. K. Routh (Ed.), <u>Disruptive behavior disorders in childhood</u> (pp. 139-180). New York / London: Plenum Press.

Lamb, J. & Lamb, W. A. (1978). <u>Parent education and elementary counseling.</u> New York / London: Human Sciences Press.

Lange, A. (1983). <u>Interactionele Probleem Oplossings Vragenlijst. IPOV</u> [Interactional Problem Solving Questionnaire. IPOV]. Deventer: Van Loghum Slaterus.

Lange, A. (1994). <u>Gedragsverandering in gezinnen</u> [Behavior change in families]. Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff.

Loeber, R. (1982). The stability of antisocial and delinquent child behavior: A review. <u>Child Development, 53</u>, 1431-1446.

Lytton, H. (1990). Child and parent effects in boys' conduct disorder: A reinterpretation. <u>Developmental Psychology, 26</u>, 683-697.

Maccoby, E. E., & Martin, J. A. (1983). Socialization in the context of the family: parent-child interaction. In P. H. Mussen (Series Ed.) & E. M. Hetherington (Vol. Ed.), <u>Handbook of Child Psychology. Vol. 4. Socialization, personality and social development</u> (pp. 1-101). New York: Wiley.

Medway, F. J. (1989). Measuring the effectiveness of parent education. In M. J. Fine (Ed.) (1989), <u>The second handbook on parent education. Contemporary perspectives</u> (pp. 237-255). New York: Academic Press.

Minuchin, S. & Fishman, H. C. (1981). <u>Family therapy techniques.</u> Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Minuchin, S. (1974). <u>Families and family therapy.</u> Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Nolen-Hoeksema, S., Wolfson, A., Mumme, D., & Guskin, K. (1995). Helplessness in children of depressed and nondepressed mothers. Special section: Parental depression and distress: Implications for development in infancy, childhood, and adolescence. <u>Developmental Psychology, 31,</u> 377-387.

Olson, D. H. (1991). Commentary: Three dimensional (3-D) circumplex model and revised scoring of FACES III. <u>Family Process, 30,</u> 74-79.

Olson, D. H. (1994). Commentary. Curvilinearity survives: the world is not flat. <u>Family Process, 33,</u> 471-478.

Olson, D. H., McCubbin, H. I., Barnes, H. L., Larsen, A. S., Muxen, M. J., & Wilson, M. A. (1983). <u>Families. What makes them work.</u> Beverly Hills/London/New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Olson, D. H., Sprenkle, D. H., & Russell, C. S. (1979). Circumplex model of marital and family systems: I. Cohesion and adaptability dimensions, family types, and clinical applications. <u>Family Process, 18,</u> 3-28.

Onderwaater, A. (1986). <u>De onverbrekelijke band tussen ouders en kinderen. Over de denkbeelden van Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy en Helm Stierlin</u> [The indissoluble bond between parents and children. The conceptions of Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy en Helm Stierlin]. Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger.

Oud, H. & Welzen, K. (1989). <u>Nijmeegse Gezinsrelatie Test, Kinderversie. Handleiding</u> [Family Relations Test, children's version. Handbook]. Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger.

Parker, G., Tupling, H., & Brown, L. B. (1979). A parental bonding instrument. <u>British Journal of Medical Psychology, 52(1),</u> 1-10.

Patterson, G. R. (1982). <u>A social learning approach. Vol. 3. Coercive family process</u>. Eugene: Castalia Publishing Company.

Patterson, G. & Forgatch, M. (1987). <u>Parents and adolescents living together. Part 1: The basics</u>. Eugene: Castalia Publishing Company.

Patterson, G. R., Capaldi, D., & Bank, L. (1991). An early starter model for predicting delinquency. In D. J. Pepler & K. H. Rubin (Eds.), <u>The development and treatment of childhood aggression</u> (pp. 139-168). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Patterson, G. R., Reid, J. B., & Dishion, T. J. (1992). <u>A social interactional approach. Vol 4. Antisocial boys</u>. Eugene: Castalia Publishing Company.

Petzold, M. (1998). The concept of 'the family' in family psychopathology, in L. L'Abate (ed.), <u>Family psychopathology. The relational roots of dysfunctional behavior</u> (pp. 60-74). New York: The Guilford Press.

Pike, A., McGuire, S., Hetherington, E. M., Reiss, D., & Plomin, R. (1996). Family environment and adolescent depressive symptoms and antisocial behavior: a multivariate genetic analysis. <u>Developmental Psychology, 32</u>, 590-603.

Popkin, M. H. (1989). Active parenting: A video-based approach. In M. J. Fine (Ed.), <u>The second handbook on parent education. Contemporary perspectives</u> (pp. 77-98). New York: Academic Press.

Reisinger, J. J., Ora, J. P., & Frangia, G. W. (1976). Parents as change agents for their children: A review. <u>Journal of Community Psychology, 4</u>, 103-123.

Roberts, T. W. (1994). <u>A systems perspective of parenting. The individual, the family, and the social network.</u> Pacific Grove, California: Brooks / Cole Publishing Company.

Rollins, B. C., & Thomas, D. L. (1979). Parental support, power and control techniques in the socialization of children. In W. R. Burr, R. Hill, F. I. Nye, & I. L. Reiss (Eds.), <u>Contemporary theories about the family. Vol. 1</u> (pp. 317-364). London: Free Press.

Rothbaum, F., & Weisz, J. R. (1994). Parental caregiving and child externalizing behavior in nonclinical samples: A meta-analysis. <u>Psychological Bulletin, 116</u>, 55-74.

Rubin, K. H., Stewart, S. L., & Chen, X. (1995). Parents of aggressive and withdrawn children. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), <u>Handbook of parenting. Vol I. Children and parenting</u> (pp. 255-284). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Seaburn, D., Landau-Stanton, J., & Horwitz, S. (1995). Core techniques in family therapy. In R. H. Mikesell, D. D. Lusterman, & S. H. McDaniel (Eds.), <u>Integrating family therapy. Handbook of family psychology and systems theory</u> (pp. 5-26). Washington: American Psychological Association.

Serbin, L. A., Schwartzman, A. E., Moskowitz, D. S., & Ledingham, J. E. (1991). Aggressive, withdrawn, and aggressive / withdrawn children in adolescence: into the next generation. In D. J. Pepler & K. H. Rubin (Eds.), <u>The development and treatment of childhood aggression</u> (pp. 55-70). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Shucksmith, J., Hendry, L. B., & Glendinning, A. (1995). Models of parenting: implications for adolescent well-being within different types of family contexts. <u>Journal of Adolescence, 18</u>, 253-270.

Simpson, R. L. (1980). Behavior modification and child management. In M. J. Fine (Ed.), <u>Handbook on parent education</u> (pp. 153-178). New York: Academic Press.

Smets, A. C. (1985). <u>Systems and symptoms. Family cohesion and adaptability as correlates of childhood psychopathology.</u> Nijmegen: University Press.

Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau (1997). Sociale atlas van de vrouw. Deel 4 [Women's social atlas. Part 4]. Rijswijk: Staatsuitgeverij.

Steinberg, L. (1987a). Impact of puberty on family relations: Effects of pubertal status and pubertal timing. <u>Developmental Psychology, 23,</u> 451-460.

Steinberg, L. (1987b). Recent research on the family at adolescence: The extent and nature of sex differences. <u>Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 16,</u> 191-197.

Tavormina, J. B. (1974). Basic models of parent counseling: A critical review. <u>Psychological Bulletin, 81,</u> 827-835.

Ten Haaf, P. G. J. & Janssens, J. M. A. M. (1994). Indelingscriteria voor opvoedingsgedrag [Criteria for the classification of parenting behavior]. <u>Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Opvoeding, Vorming en Onderwijs, 10,</u> 317-327.

Van As, N. M. C. & Janssens, J. M. A. M. (1994). Kwaliteit ouder-kind relatie: Samenhang tussen indicatoren [Quality of the parent-child relationship: relationships among indicators]. <u>Tijdschrift voor Orthopedagogiek, 33,</u> 206-224.

Van As, N., & Janssens, J. (1995). <u>Praten met kinderen</u> [Parents and children talking together]. Leuven/Apeldoorn: Garant.

Van As, N., & Janssens, J. (1997). <u>Praten met kinderen. Handboek voor de begeleider</u> [Parents and children talking together. Trainer's manual]. Leuven/Apeldoorn: Garant.

Van Londen, A., Biloen-Beijen, A. H. M., Cladder, J. M., Van Londen-Barentsen, W. M. (1990a). <u>Vaardigheden voor ouders</u> [Parenting skills]. Amsterdam / Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger.

Van Londen, A., Biloen-Beijen, A. H. M., Cladder, J. M., Van Londen-Barentsen, W. M. (1990b). <u>Trainershandleiding. Behorende bij de zevende druk van het werkboek vaardigheden voor ouders</u> [Trainer's manual. Belonging to the seventh edition of the workbook parenting skills]. Amsterdam / Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger.

Verhulst, F. C., Koot, H. M., Akkerhuis, G. W., & Veerman, J. W. (1990). <u>Praktische handleiding voor de CBCL (Child Behavior Checklist)</u> [Practical Handbook of the CBCL (Child Behavior Checklist)]. Assen: Van Gorcum.

Vuchinich, S., Bank, L., & Patterson, G. R. (1992). Parenting, peers, and the stability of antisocial behavior in preadolescent boys. <u>Developmental Psychology, 28,</u> 510-521.

Vuchinich, S., Wood, B., & Vuchinich, R. (1994). Coalitions and family problem solving with preadolescents in referred, at-risk, and comparison families. <u>Family Process, 33,</u> 409-424.

Walsh, F. (1995). From family damage to family challenge. In R. H. Mikesell, D. D. Lusterman, & S. H. McDaniel (Eds.), Integrating family therapy. Handbook of family psychology and systems theory (pp. 587-606). Washington: American Psychological Association.

Watzlawick, P., Beavin, J. H., & Jackson, D. D. (1967). Pragmatics of human communications. New York: Borton.

Wierson, M. & Forehand, R. (1992). Family stressors and adolescent functioning: A consideration of models for early and middle adolescents. Behavior therapy, 23, 671-688.

Wilson, B. J. & Gottman, J. M. (1995). Marital interaction and parenting. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), Handbook of parenting. Vol. 4. Applied and practical parenting (pp. 33-55). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Summary

In this study, the relationship between family functioning and child behavior problems is explored. In the literature, the development of child behavior problems within the context of the family is studied extensively. However, there are various theoretical approaches that emphasize different aspects of family functioning. In this thesis we try to present an overview of the most important aspects of family functioning that appear to be related to the development of child behavior problems. We also examine the relationships that can be expected among those aspects of family functioning. Although many different aspects of family functioning can be distinguished, we suppose that these aspects are related. As was explained in the first chapter, the literature on the relationship between aspects of family functioning and child behavior problems is mainly based on studies comparing families experiencing severe child rearing difficulties with families experiencing no child rearing difficulties, and on clinical experiences with families referred for treatment. In our study, we compared families with mild forms of child rearing difficulties with families experiencing no child rearing difficulties to examine whether the relationships between family functioning and child behavior problems that are described in the literature can be replicated for mildly disturbed families as well. Furthermore, we explored the possibilities of improving family functioning by means of a newly developed parent program, focusing at family members' communication and problem solving skills. When family functioning in mildly disturbed problem families can be enhanced by offering the parents the parent program, this may have important implications for family intervention and prevention. Hopefully, the use of the parent program may help to prevent families from moving from the stage of mild child rearing difficulties to the stage of more severe difficulties.

Three major research questions are addressed in this study. First, we examined whether mildly disturbed problem families differed from normal families on aspects of family functioning. For answering this question, we compared a group of 28 problem families with a group of 26 normal families on aspects of family functioning. A family was defined as a problem family if the parents experienced child rearing difficulties because of mild forms of externalizing behavior problems of their 10 to 14 year old child. A family was defined as a normal family if the parents did not experience child rearing difficulties. Second, we examined relationships among different aspects of family functioning. For answering this question, we examined correlations among aspects of family functioning in the group of 54 families (that is, 28 problem families plus 26 normal families). Third, we evaluated the effectiveness of a newly developed parent program, 'Parents and children talking together', directed at improving parents' com-

munication and problem solving skills. For evaluating the effects of the program, it was offered to the parents of the 28 problem families.

In the <u>first chapter</u> of this thesis, the concepts of family functioning and child behavior problems are clarified. Concerning family functioning, four of the most influential approaches to family functioning are described, that is, the parenting, the intergenerational, the structural, and the communication approach. Each approach focuses on certain aspects of family functioning that are assumed to be linked to child behavior problems. In the parenting approach, the concepts of parental support and control are emphasized. The intergenerational approach focuses on the quality of the relationship between parents and child, and the degree to which this relationship is characterized by justice, appreciation, and trust. In the structural approach, the family's structure and organization, as expressed in the concepts of cohesion, flexibility, and the quality of the marital relationship are stressed. The communication approach, finally, focuses on the content and process of the interactions between family members. Concerning child behavior problems, we focused on mild forms of externalizing behavior of the child. Furthermore, we theoretically analyzed which relationships were to be expected among the different aspects of family functioning, mentioned above. Finally, in the first chapter, the research questions are summarized.

In the <u>second chapter</u>, the literature on parent education programs is reviewed. The most influential types of parent education programs are described, that is, Adlerian, client centered, behavior modification, rational emotive, and combination parent programs. First, the theoretical assumptions that underlie each type of program are summarized. Furthermore, for each type of program we examined which aspects of family functioning are addressed, whether the program aims at changes in parental cognitions, attitudes, and knowledge (reflective counseling) or in parental behavior (behavioral counseling), and what is known about the effectiveness of the program. Thus, an overview of the theoretical approaches to parent programs is presented, against which the newly developed parent program can be compared.

In the <u>third chapter</u>, the new parent program, 'Parents and children talking together' is presented. First, we explain how we decided to develop a new parent program, based on the results of a former study that pointed at the quality of the communication between parents and child as an important variable differentiating problem families from normal families. Furthermore, most existing parent programs aim at parents of children up to twelve years of age. We intended to develop a communication parent program that was specifically designed for use with parents of (pre)adolescent children. Second, a summary of the contents of the seven sessions of the program is presented. 'Parents and children talking together' is based on a model of problem solving consisting of four steps, that is; 1. discussing the problem, 2. brainstorming possible solutions, 3.

deciding on the best solution and making agreements on how it will be carried out, and 4. evaluating the solution. In seven sessions, these four steps are worked out and parents are given many rules and guidelines to prevent family discussions from escalating and to make sure that problems can be discussed in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere. Third, the parent program is compared with the parent programs that were described in the second chapter. Subsequently, we examined the aspects of family functioning that are addressed by 'Parents and children talking together', and whether the program aims at changes in parental cognitions, attitudes, and knowledge, or changes in parental behavior. We concluded that our program can be considered a communication program. It is different from existing communication programs (such as Gordon's (1970, 1980) Parent Effectiveness Training) in its emphasis on negotiating conflicts in a democratic way within the context of a hierarchical parent-child relationship. Herein parents keep the final responsibility for problem solving. Furthermore, offering parents a wide range of rules and guidelines in problem solving is emphasized in 'Parents and children talking together'.

In the <u>fourth chapter</u> the participants and measurement instruments of this study are presented. We used questionnaires to assess child behavior problems, parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, family structure, and family communication. In addition, we used observations to examine the communication between family members. Parents and child were observed during a decision-making task (planning a vacation), some puzzle tasks, a meal, and a conflict-resolution task (discussing conflicts and disagreements).

In the <u>fifth chapter,</u> the results relating to the three major research questions described above, are presented. The first research question concerned differences between the problem families and the normal families in aspects of family functioning. The results on the questionnaire measures revealed that in the problem families, the parents were less supportive, the parent-child relationship was less good, the family was judged less cohesive and less structured (at least according to the mothers and the children), and the quality of the communication between parents and child was less good than in the normal families. Although the differences in scores between the problem and normal families were often small, they proved statistically significant. Thus, although family functioning could not be considered very bad, it was actually less good than in the normal families. No differences between the two groups of families were found concerning parental coercive control and the quality of the marital relationship. Furthermore, observations were used to examine the communication between family members. Hardly any differences in communication between the problem and normal families were found during the decision-making task, the puzzle tasks, and the meal. Concerning the communication during the conflict-resolution task, we found that both the

parents and children of the problem families made more negative expressions and commands toward each other than the parents and children of the normal families. Furthermore, the fathers of the problem families listened less attentively to their children than the fathers of the normal families, and the mothers and children of the problem families were less supportive toward one another than the mothers and children of the normal families. Finally, we examined the structure of the communication process and found some indications that there was more continuation of negative exchanges between parents and child in problem families than in normal families.

The second research question concerned relationships among the different aspects of family functioning. When the questionnaire measures were used, we found substantial positive correlations between parental support, the quality of the parent-child relationship, family cohesion, and the quality of the communication between parents and child. Furthermore, in general a lack of family structure was negatively correlated with parental support, the quality of the parent-child relationship, and the quality of parent-child communication. The observation measures on the communication between parents and child were mainly related to parental support and the quality of the parent-child relationship. By and large, constructive communication was positively related, and negative communication was negatively related to parental support and the quality of the parent-child relationship. Furthermore, we examined the structure of the interaction process, by studying sequences of negative communication exchanges. We found that, in general, continuation of negative exchanges between parent and child was negatively related to parental support and the quality of the parent-child relationship.

The third major research question concerned the effectiveness of the parent program 'Parents and children talking together' on family functioning. As the program explicitly addressed family members' communication and problem solving skills, we expected to demonstrate its effects mainly on the quality of the communication between family members. Furthermore, we checked for generalization effects on other aspects of family functioning, that is, on parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, and family structure. A pretest posttest control group design was used for answering this research question, with approximately half of the problem families attending the parent program between the pretest and the posttest (the experimental group), and approximately half of the problem families attending the program after both the pretest and the posttest had been conducted (the control group). When using the questionnaire measures, we failed to find any effects of the program on the quality of the communication between parents and child, or on parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, and family structure. When the observations were used, we only managed to demonstrate the program's effectiveness with the coded interaction during the conflict-resolution task. This task consisted of discussing conflicts that actually

showed up between parents and child, and thus was closest to the focus and content of the parent program. We found positive effects of the program for the communication between the mothers and children, but not for the communication between fathers and children. We found that both the mothers and the children of the experimental group communicated more constructively and less negatively toward one another at posttest than at pretest, whereas the mothers and children of the control group communicated more negatively and less constructively toward one another at posttest than at pretest. Thus, mothers who had attended the program improved the communication with their children, whereas for mothers who had not yet attended the program, the communication with their children became worse.

In the sixth chapter the results of this study are summarized and discussed. Concerning the first major research question, we concluded that we were able to replicate most of the differences between problem families and normal families that are described in the literature. Although family functioning in the mildly disturbed problem families in our study could not be considered very bad, it was still less good than in the normal families. This led us to conclude that the difference between the mildly disturbed problem families in our study and the clinical, severely disturbed problem families that are described in the literature is probably not a qualitative difference, but a difference of degree. Families can be placed on a continuum of family functioning ranging from healthy functioning in normal families, through mildly disturbed family functioning in families experiencing parenting stresses and parenting crisis, through severely disturbed functioning in clinical problem families. In our opinion this conclusion underscores the importance of prevention and early intervention programs, such as our parent program. These early intervention programs may prevent family functioning from worsening and may prevent families from moving on the continuum from mildly disturbed functioning to more severe problems in family functioning.

Concerning the second major research question, we concluded that, as we expected, we found many relationships between the concepts of the parenting approach, the intergenerational approach, the structural approach, and the communication approach on family functioning. The most substantial relationships were found between parental support, the quality of the parent-child relationship, family cohesion, and the quality of the communication between parents and child. These aspects of family functioning seem to have a lot in common, as they all refer to the emotional involvement and mutual relationship and understanding between parents and children. Summarizing, the concept of family functioning refers to the interrelated aspects of parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, family structure, and the communication between family members. In family intervention and prevention, it would be best to pay attention to all

these aspects of family functioning to build a complete picture of child behavior problems in the context of the family.

Concerning the third research question, we concluded that the results on the effectiveness of the parent program are promising, as we managed to demonstrate improvement in the communication between mothers and children after these mothers had attended the parent program. It is not quite clear why we failed to demonstrate the parent program's effectiveness on the communication between father and child; future studies might well address this topic. Concerning the use of measurement instruments, we concluded that it will be best to use instruments that fit the goals of the parent program, and measure exactly that what is taught in the program. As our parent program focused on communication skills and negotiating conflicts, the observation task that asked parents to discuss and solve conflicts with their children, resembled most closely the goals of the parent program and offered the best possibilities for demonstrating program effectiveness. Furthermore, we failed to demonstrate generalization effects of the parent program on other aspects of family functioning, that is, on parenting practices, the quality of the parent-child relationship, and family structure. We concluded that it is perhaps not realistic to expect a parent program that addresses the communication between parents and children, to influence many other aspects of family functioning as well. The program was intended to improve parents' communication and problem solving skills, and the results showed that, at least for mothers, we reached that goal. Our conclusion is that the program 'Parents and children talking together' can thus contribute to enhancing family functioning by improving the communication between parents and children.

Samenvatting

In deze studie is de relatie tussen gezinsfunctioneren en probleemgedrag van kinderen onderzocht. Er is veelvuldig onderzoek gedaan naar het ontstaan van probleemgedrag van kinderen in de context van het gezin. Het blijkt dat er verschillende theoretische benaderingen onderscheiden kunnen worden, die elk verschillende aspecten van het gezinsfunctioneren benadrukken. In dit onderzoek proberen we een overzicht te geven van de meest belangrijke aspecten van gezinsfunctioneren waarvan verondersteld wordt dat ze gerelateerd zijn aan het ontstaan van gedragsproblemen van kinderen. Zoals in het eerste hoofdstuk uitgelegd wordt, is de literatuur over relaties tussen aspecten van gezinsfunctioneren en gedragsproblemen van kinderen voornamelijk gebaseerd op onderzoek waarin gezinnen met ernstige opvoedingsproblemen vergeleken worden met gezinnen zonder opvoedingsproblemen, en op klinische ervaringen met gezinnen die zich reeds in het hulpverleningscircuit bevinden. In ons onderzoek hebben we daarentegen gezinnen met lichte opvoedingsmoeilijkheden vergeleken met normale gezinnen. Op deze manier wilden we nagaan of de samenhangen tussen gezinsfunctioneren en probleemgedrag van kinderen die in de literatuur vermeld worden, ook blijken te gelden voor gezinnen met lichte opvoedingsmoeilijkheden. Verder wordt in dit onderzoek nagegaan welke relaties verwacht kunnen worden tussen de verschillende aspecten van gezinsfunctioneren. Hoewel er veel verschillende aspecten van gezinsfunctioneren onderscheiden kunnen worden, veronderstellen we dat deze aspecten met elkaar zullen samenhangen. Tot slot zijn we nagegaan of het mogelijk is om het gezinsfunctioneren in gezinnen met lichte opvoedingsproblemen te verbeteren door middel van een nieuw ontwikkelde oudercursus die gericht is op communicatie- en probleemoplossingsvaardigheden van ouders. Als het gezinsfunctioneren in gezinnen met lichte opvoedingsproblemen verbeterd kan worden door de ouders de oudercursus aan te bieden, kan dit belangrijke implicaties hebben voor de hulpverlening aan deze gezinnen. Hopelijk kan de oudercursus helpen voorkomen dat gezinnen met lichte opvoedingsproblemen meer en ernstiger problemen gaan ontwikkelen.

In dit onderzoek komen drie onderzoeksvragen aan bod. Ten eerste zijn we nagegaan of gezinnen met lichte opvoedingsproblemen verschillen van gezinnen zonder opvoedingsproblemen wat betreft het gezinsfunctioneren. Om deze vraag te kunnen beantwoorden hebben we een groep van 28 probleemgezinnen met een groep van 26 normale gezinnen vergeleken wat betreft aspecten van gezinsfunctioneren. De groep zogeheten probleemgezinnen bestond uit gezinnen waarvan de ouders opvoedingsproblemen ervoeren vanwege lichte vormen van externaliserend probleemgedrag van hun 10 tot 14 jaar oude zoon of dochter. De groep normale gezinnen bestond uit gezinnen waarvan de ouders geen opvoedingsproblemen ervoeren. Ten tweede zijn samenhangen

onderzocht tussen de verschillende aspecten van gezinsfunctioneren. Voor het beantwoorden van deze vraag zijn relaties bestudeerd tussen aspecten van gezinsfunctioneren in de groep van 54 gezinnen als geheel (28 probleemgezinnen en 26 normale gezinnen). Ten derde is de effectiviteit van de oudercursus 'Praten met kinderen' geëvalueerd. Deze cursus is gericht op het verbeteren van de communicatie- en probleemoplossende vaardigheden van ouders. Voor het evalueren van het resultaat van de cursus, is de cursus aangeboden aan de ouders van de 28 probleemgezinnen.

In het <u>eerste hoofdstuk</u> worden de begrippen gezinsfunctioneren en probleemgedrag van kinderen nader uitgewerkt. Wat betreft gezinsfunctioneren, worden vier invloedrijke theoretische benaderingen beschreven, te weten de opvoedkundige benadering, de intergenerationele benadering, de gezinsstructuurbenadering en de communicatiebenadering. In elke theoretische benadering worden bepaalde aspecten van het gezinsfunctioneren benadrukt, die verondersteld worden samen te hangen met gedragsproblemen van het kind. In de opvoedkundige benadering gaat het om de begrippen ouderlijke ondersteuning en controle. Binnen de intergenerationele benadering wordt de nadruk gelegd op de kwaliteit van de relatie tussen ouders en kind en de mate waarin deze relatie gekenmerkt wordt door rechtvaardigheid, erkenning en vertrouwen. In de gezinsstructuurbenadering staat de structuur en organisatie van het gezin centraal. Deze structuur en organisatie komen tot uitdrukking in de begrippen cohesie en flexibiliteit van het gezin en de kwaliteit van de huwelijksrelatie van de ouders. In de communicatiebenadering tenslotte, worden de inhoud en structuur van de interacties tussen gezinsleden benadrukt. Wat betreft gedragsproblemen van kinderen, hebben we ons beperkt tot lichte vormen van externaliseringsgedrag. Verder wordt in het eerste hoofdstuk een theoretische analyse gemaakt van de samenhangen die verwacht kunnen worden tussen de verschillende aspecten van gezinsfunctioneren. Tot slot worden in dit hoofdstuk de onderzoeksvragen gepresenteerd.

In het <u>tweede hoofdstuk</u> wordt een overzicht gegeven van de literatuur op het gebied van oudercursussen. De meest bekende typen oudercursussen worden beschreven: Adleriaanse, client centered, gedragsveranderings-, rationeel emotieve en gecombineerde oudercursussen. Ten eerste worden de theoretische uitgangspunten die aan de verschillende typen cursussen ten grondslag liggen samengevat. Verder wordt voor elk type cursus nagegaan aan welke aspecten van gezinsfunctioneren aandacht wordt besteed, of de cursus gericht is op veranderingen in cognities, attitudes en kennis van ouders ('reflective counseling') of op veranderingen in het gedrag van ouders ('behavioral counseling') en wat er bekend is over de effectiviteit van het programma. Op deze wijze wordt een overzicht gegeven van de bestaande oudercursussen, waarmee de nieuwe cursus 'Praten met kinderen' vergeleken kan worden.

In het <u>derde hoofdstuk</u> wordt de nieuwe oudercursus 'Praten met kinderen' gepresenteerd. Allereerst wordt uitgelegd dat besloten is tot het ontwikkelen van een nieuwe oudercursus op grond van de resultaten van een eerder onderzoek, waaruit duidelijk de kwaliteit van de communicatie tussen ouders en kind naar voren kwam als een belangrijke variabele waarop probleemgezinnen en normale gezinnen verschilden. Daarnaast zijn de meeste bestaande oudercursussen ontwikkeld voor ouders met kinderen tot ongeveer 12 jaar. De cursus 'Praten met kinderen' daarentegen is ontwikkeld voor ouders met kinderen vanaf een jaar of tien. Ten tweede wordt in hoofdstuk drie een samenvatting gegeven van de inhoud van de zeven bijeenkomsten van de cursus. 'Praten met kinderen' is gebaseerd op een overlegmodel dat uit vier stappen bestaat: 1. Het bespreken van het probleem; 2. Het bedenken van mogelijke oplossingen; 3. Het kiezen van een oplossing en maken van afspraken over de uitvoering ervan; en 4. Het evalueren van de oplossing. In zeven bijeenkomsten worden deze vier stappen uitgewerkt en krijgen de ouders een groot aantal tips en regels om te voorkomen dat discussies in een gezin escaleren en om ervoor te zorgen dat problemen in een rustige, ontspannen sfeer besproken kunnen worden. Ten derde wordt in het derde hoofdstuk de cursus 'Praten met kinderen' vergeleken met de reeds bestaande oudercursussen die in hoofdstuk twee beschreven zijn. Ook wordt nagegaan welke aspecten van gezinsfunctioneren in 'Praten met kinderen' aan bod komen, en of de cursus veranderingen in ouderlijke cognities, attitudes en kennis, of in ouderlijk gedrag beoogt. Geconcludeerd wordt dat de nieuwe cursus beschouwd kan worden als een communicatiecursus die echter afwijkt van bestaande communicatiecursussen (zoals Gordons (1970, 1980) Parent Effectiveness Training) in de nadruk die gelegd wordt op het overleggen over conflicten binnen een hiërarchische ouder-kind relatie waarbij ouders de eindverantwoordelijken blijven voor het probleem-oplossingsproces, en in de nadruk die gelegd wordt op het bieden van een grote hoeveelheid tips en regels voor het overleggen over zich voordoende problemen.

In het <u>vierde hoofdstuk</u> worden de deelnemers aan het onderzoek en de meetinstrumenten besproken. Ten eerste zijn vragenlijsten gebruikt om probleemgedrag van het kind, opvoedingsgedrag, de kwaliteit van de relatie tussen ouders en kind, de gezinsstructuur en de kwaliteit van de communicatie tussen ouders en kind te meten. Ten tweede zijn observaties gebruikt om de communicatie tussen ouders en kind te onderzoeken. Ouders en kind werden daartoe geobserveerd tijdens een beslissingstaak (het plannen van een vakantie), het oplossen van een aantal puzzels, een maaltijdsituatie en een conflictoplossingstaak (het bespreken en proberen op te lossen van onderlinge conflicten).

In <u>hoofdstuk vijf</u> worden de resultaten voor elk van de drie onderzoeksvragen gepresenteerd. De eerste onderzoeksvraag betrof verschillen tussen de probleemgezinnen en normale gezinnen wat betreft aspecten van gezinsfunctioneren. De resultaten met

betrekking tot de vragenlijsten lieten zien dat in de probleemgezinnen de ouders hun kinderen minder ondersteuning boden, de kwaliteit van de ouder-kind relatie minder goed was, het gezin als minder cohesief en minder gestructureerd beoordeeld werd (althans, volgens de moeders en de kinderen), en de kwaliteit van de communicatie tussen ouders en kind minder goed was dan in de normale gezinnen. Hoewel de verschillen in scores tussen de probleem- en normale gezinnen over het algemeen klein waren, waren ze statistisch significant. Dat betekent, dat hoewel het gezinsfunctioneren in de probleem-gezinnen niet als zeer negatief bestempeld kan worden, het wel degelijk minder positief was dan in de normale gezinnen. Er zijn geen verschillen gevonden tussen de twee groepen gezinnen wat betreft de mate waarin ouders restrictieve controle uitoefenden en wat betreft de kwaliteit van de huwelijksrelatie van de ouders. Verder zijn er observaties gebruikt om een beeld te krijgen van de communicatie tussen ouders en kind. Er zijn nauwelijks verschillen tussen de probleem- en normale gezinnen gevonden wat betreft de communicatie tijdens de beslissingstaak, de puzzeltaken en de maaltijdsituatie. Wat betreft de communicatie tussen ouders en kind tijdens de conflictoplossingstaak bleek, dat de ouders en kinderen uit de probleemgezinnen meer negatieve opmerkingen tegen elkaar maakten dan de ouders en kinderen uit de normale gezinnen. Verder luisterden de vaders uit de probleemgezinnen minder aandachtig naar hun kinderen dan de vaders uit de normale gezinnen, en waren de moeders en kinderen uit de probleemgezinnen minder ondersteunend ten opzichte van elkaar dan de moeders en kinderen uit de normale gezinnen. Tot slot is de structuur van het interactieproces tijdens de conflictoplossingstaak geanalyseerd. Hierbij werd een aantal significante verschillen tussen de probleem- en normale gezinnen gevonden, die erop duidden dat er in de probleemgezinnen meer sprake was van een bij voortduring negatief op elkaar reageren dan in de normale gezinnen.

De tweede onderzoeksvraag had betrekking op relaties tussen de verschillende aspecten van gezinsfunctioneren. De resultaten met betrekking tot de vragenlijsten lieten een sterke, positieve samenhang zien tussen ouderlijke ondersteuning, de kwaliteit van de ouder-kind relatie, de mate van cohesie in het gezin en de kwaliteit van de communicatie tussen ouders en kind. Verder bleek over het algemeen dat een gebrek aan een duidelijke structuur in het gezin negatief samenhing met ouderlijke ondersteuning, de kwaliteit van de ouder-kind relatie en de kwaliteit van de communicatie tussen ouders en kind. De observatiematen die gebruikt werden om de communicatie tussen ouders en kind te onderzoeken, bleken met name gerelateerd te zijn aan ouderlijke ondersteuning en de kwaliteit van de ouder-kind relatie. Over het algemeen bleek dat de mate van constructieve communicatie tijdens de observatie positief samenhing en de mate van negatieve communicatie tijdens de observatie negatief samenhing met ouderlijke ondersteuning en de kwaliteit van de ouder-kind relatie. Tot slot hebben we de structuur van het interactie-proces onderzocht, door sequenties van negatieve uitingen te bestuderen. Over het

algemeen bleek dat een opeenvolging van negatieve uitingen tussen ouders en kind negatief gerelateerd was aan ouderlijke ondersteuning en de kwaliteit van de ouder-kind relatie.

De derde onderzoeksvraag betrof de effectiviteit van de oudercursus 'Praten met kinderen' op het gezinsfunctioneren. Aangezien de cursus expliciet gericht is op de communicatieve en probleem-oplossende vaardigheden van ouders, verwachtten we vooral effect van de cursus aan te kunnen tonen op de kwaliteit van de communicatie tussen ouders en kind. Verder wilden we nagaan of er generalisatie-effecten waren op andere aspecten van gezinsfunctioneren: op opvoedingsgedrag van ouders, de kwaliteit van de ouder-kind relatie en de gezinsstructuur. Een 'pretest posttest control group design' werd gebruikt voor het beantwoorden van de derde onderzoeksvraag. De ouders van ongeveer de helft van de probleemgezinnen volgden de oudercursus na afloop van de voormeting en voor de nameting (de experimentele groep). De ouders van de andere helft van de probleemgezinnen volgden de oudercursus pas na afloop van voor- én nameting (de controle groep). Met behulp van de vragenlijsten om het gezinsfunctioneren te meten, slaagden we er niet in om enig resultaat van de oudercursus aan te tonen wat betreft de kwaliteit van de communicatie tussen ouders en kind of wat betreft ouderlijk opvoedings-gedrag, de kwaliteit van de ouder-kind relatie en de gezinsstructuur. Met behulp van de observaties om de communicatie tussen ouders en kind in kaart te brengen, slaagden we er alleen met de gecodeerde interactie tijdens de conflictoplossingstaak in om effecten van de oudercursus aan te tonen. Deze taak bestond eruit dat ouders en kind conflicten die ze zelf aandroegen moesten bespreken en proberen op te lossen. Daarmee lag deze taak het dichtst bij het doel en de inhoud van de oudercursus, die immers gericht is op het overleggen over conflicten en meningsverschillen tussen ouders en kinderen. We vonden positieve effecten van de cursus voor de communicatie tussen de moeders en kinderen, maar niet voor de communicatie tussen de vaders en kinderen. We vonden dat zowel de moeders als de kinderen van de experimentele groep meer op een constructieve en minder op een negatieve manier met elkaar communiceerden tijdens de nameting dan tijdens de voormeting, terwijl de moeders en kinderen uit de controlegroep minder op een constructieve en meer op een negatieve manier met elkaar omgingen tijdens de nameting dan tijdens de voormeting. Het bleek, met andere woorden, dat de communicatie tussen de moeders die de cursus gevolgd hadden en hun kinderen verbeterde, terwijl de communicatie tussen de moeders die de cursus nog niet gevolgd hadden en hun kinderen verslechterde.

In het zesde hoofdstuk worden de resultaten van het huidige onderzoek nog eens samengevat en becommentarieerd. Wat betreft de eerste onderzoeksvraag kunnen we concluderen dat we erin geslaagd zijn om de meeste verschillen in gezinsfunctioneren tussen probleemgezinnen en normale gezinnen, zoals die in de literatuur beschreven

worden, te repliceren. Hoewel het gezinsfunctioneren in de probleemgezinnen in dit onderzoek, gezinnen met lichte opvoedingsmoeilijkheden, niet bijzonder slecht genoemd kon worden, was het wel degelijk minder goed dan in de normale gezinnen. Hieruit kunnen we concluderen dat het verschil tussen de gezinnen met lichte opvoedings-problemen in dit onderzoek en de klinische probleemgezinnen met ernstige opvoedings-problemen die in de literatuur beschreven worden, waarschijnlijk geen kwalitatief verschil is. De gezinnen verschillen slechts in de mate waarin het gezinsfunctioneren verstoord is geraakt. Gezinnen kunnen geplaatst worden op een continuüm van gezinsfunctioneren, dat loopt van adequaat functioneren in normale gezinnen, via licht verstoord functioneren in gezinnen met lichte opvoedingsproblemen en gezinnen in een opvoedingscrisis, tot ernstig verstoord functioneren in klinische probleemgezinnen. Naar onze mening toont deze conclusie het belang aan van preventie- en vroege interventieprogramma's zoals onze oudercursus. Deze vroege interventieprogramma's kunnen helpen voorkomen dat het gezinsfunctioneren verder verslechtert en dat gezinnen zich op het continuüm bewegen van een licht verstoord functioneren ten gevolge van lichte opvoedingsproblemen in de richting van ernstig verstoord functioneren.

Wat betreft de tweede onderzoeksvraag kunnen we concluderen dat, zoals verwacht, veel relaties gevonden werden tussen de concepten van de opvoedings-benadering, de intergenerationele benadering, de structurele benadering en de commu-nicatiebenadering van het begrip gezinsfunctioneren. De sterkste samenhangen werden gevonden tussen ouderlijke ondersteuning, de kwaliteit van de ouder-kind relatie, gezinscohesie en de kwaliteit van de communicatie tussen ouders en kind. Deze aspecten van gezinsfunctioneren lijken veel gemeenschappelijk te hebben en allemaal te verwijzen naar de emotionele betrokkenheid en wederzijdse verstandhouding tussen de gezinsleden. Samengevat, blijkt het concept gezinsfunctioneren te verwijzen naar een aantal onderling afhankelijke aspecten: ouderlijk opvoedingsgedrag, de kwaliteit van de relatie tussen ouders en kind, de gezinsstructuur en de communicatie tussen de gezinsleden. In interventie- en preventieprogramma's zou dan ook aandacht besteed kunnen worden aan al deze aspecten van gezinsfunctioneren om een compleet beeld te krijgen van gedrags-problemen van kinderen in de context van het gezin.

Wat betreft de derde onderzoeksvraag kan geconcludeerd worden dat de resultaten van de cursus 'Praten met kinderen' veelbelovend zijn, aangezien we erin geslaagd zijn verbetering aan te tonen in de communicatie tussen moeders en kinderen, nadat de moeders de cursus gevolgd hadden. Het is niet duidelijk waarom we er niet in geslaagd zijn effecten van de cursus aan te tonen op de manier waarop vaders en kinderen communiceerden. Toekomstig onderzoek zou hier mogelijk een antwoord op kunnen geven. Wat betreft het gebruik van meetinstrumenten, kunnen we conluderen dat het aanbeveling verdient meetinstrumenten te gebruiken, die passen bij het doel en de inhoud

van de oudercursus en die precies meten wat in de cursus aan ouders geleerd wordt. Aangezien de cursus 'Praten met kinderen' gericht is op communicatieve en conflict-oplossende vaardigheden, sloot de observatietaak waarbij ouders en kind gevraagd werd om onderlinge conflicten te bespreken en op te lossen, het best aan bij de inhoud en het doel van de cursus. Deze conflictoplossingstaak bood dan ook de beste mogelijkheden om de effectiviteit van de cursus aan te tonen. Verder zijn we er niet in geslaagd om generalisatie-effecten van de cursus aan te tonen op andere aspecten van het gezins-functioneren, zoals ouderlijk opvoedingsgedrag, de kwaliteit van de relatie tussen ouders en kind, en de gezinsstructuur. We kunnen concluderen dat het misschien niet realistisch is om te verwachten dat een oudercursus die zich richt op de communicatie tussen ouders en kinderen, ook vele andere aspecten van het gezinfunctioneren positief beïnvloedt. De cursus was bedoeld om de communicatieve en conflictoplossende vaardigheden van ouders te verbeteren en de resultaten van het onderzoek hebben aangetoond dat we, tenminste voor de omgang van de moeders met hun kinderen, in die opzet geslaagd zijn. Onze conclusie is dan ook dat de cursus 'Praten met kinderen' door het verbeteren van de communicatie tussen ouders en hun kinderen een positieve bijdrage kan leveren aan het gezinsfunctioneren in gezinnen met lichte opvoedingsmoeilijkheden.

Curriculum Vitae

Nicole van As werd op 16 februari 1968 in Nijmegen geboren. Ze behaalde in 1986 het Atheneum diploma aan het Canisius College te Nijmegen. In 1986 begon ze aan haar studie Gezinspedagogiek aan de Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen. In 1991 studeerde ze cum laude af. Van 1991 tot 1993 was ze werkzaam als junior onderzoeker bij de vakgroep Algemene Pedagogiek. Van 1993 tot 1997 was ze als Onderzoeker in Opleiding aan dezelfde vakgroep verbonden. Haar promotie onderzoek richtte zich op verschillen in gezinsfunctioneren tussen gezinnen met, en gezinnen zonder opvoedingsproblemen en op de effectiviteit van de oudercursus 'Praten met kinderen'. Sinds 1997 is ze als docent verbonden aan de vakgroep Orthopedagogiek van de Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen.