

# **EXPLORING CHILDREN'S COPING WITH DIVORCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

**Lynette Mary Roux**

M.A. (Clinical Psychology)

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree  
of

**PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR  
(Child Psychology)**

in the

**Faculty of Humanities**

Department of Psychology

at the

University of the Free State

**Bloemfontein**

**November 2007**

**Promoter: Prof. E. Van Rensburg**

**Co-Promoter: Prof. A. Louw**

## **STATEMENT**

I, Lynette Mary Roux declare that the thesis hereby submitted by me for the Philosophiae Doctor (Child Psychology) degree at the University of the Orange Free State is my own independent work and has not previously been submitted by me at another university/faculty. I furthermore cede copyright of the thesis in favour of the University of the Free State.

---

L.M. Roux

---

Date

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The kind assistance and valuable contributions of the following people towards this research is gratefully acknowledged:

- To God who has lead me throughout my life and career. Without Him I am nothing.
- My husband Allen, for all his love and support.
- My children Samantha, Cassie, Tammy and Peter who have all had a hand in this research in some manner.
- Professor Esme Van Rensburg, who so patiently and wisely guided me through this research, and has become a true friend.
- Professor Anet Louw for her guidance and support.
- My parents who have always believed in me and encouraged me to pursue my dreams.
- To my friend and assistant Liane Veliotas, who has kept my life and practice on track throughout my studies.
- All those who assisted in the editing, and proof reading including Hester van der Walt, Rika Oosthuizen and Lillian Venters.

Most importantly, to all the children who participated in this research. Without them this study would not have been possible.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page No
STATEMENT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
 <b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b>	 <b>1</b>
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 MOTIVATION FOR THE PRESENT STUDY	5
1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT STUDY	6
1.4 OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENT STUDY	7
 <b>CHAPTER 2: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH</b>	 <b>9</b>
2.1 A DEFINITION OF PHENOMENOLOGY	9
2.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF PHENOMENOLOGY	13
2.2.1 Edmund Husserl	13
2.2.2 Martin Heidegger	15
2.2.3 Gabriel Marcel	16
2.2.4 Jean-Paul Sartre	17
2.2.5 Maurice Merleau-Ponty	17
2.2.6 Conclusions	18
2.3 PHENOMENOLOGY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON EXISTENTIALISM AND PSYCHOLOGY	19
2.4 PHENOMENOLOGICAL CONCEPTS	21
2.4.1 Being in the world	22
2.4.2 Lebenswelt	23
2.4.3 Consciousness and intentionality	24
2.4.4 Ontological anxiety and guilt	25
2.4.5 Conclusions	26
2.5 THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF PHENOMENOLOGY AS A RESEARCH METHOD	26
2.5.1 Methodological assumptions of phenomenology	27
2.5.1.1 Objectivity vs subjectivity	28
2.5.1.2 The collection of data	28

2.5.1.3 The qualitative nature of phenomenological research	29
2.5.1.3.1 Linguistic results	30
2.5.1.3.2 Hermeneutics and narrative discourse	30
2.5.1.3.3 The empathic nature of qualitative research	31
2.5.1.3.4 Contextual interpretation	31
2.5.1.3.5 Polydimensionality of experience	32
2.5.1.3.6 Nonlinear causality	32
2.5.1.3.7 Empowerment as a research tool	32
2.5.1.3.8 Tentative interpretations	33
2.5.1.3.9 The use of self in research	33
2.5.1.3.10 Convergent explication of data	34
2.5.1.4 The “what” vs the “why” of phenomenological research	34
2.5.2 Validity and reliability in phenomenological research	35
2.5.2.1 The objectivity/ confirmability of qualitative research	36
2.5.2.2 Reliability/ dependability/ auditability	36
2.5.2.3 Internal validity/credibility/authenticity	36
2.5.2.4 External validity/ transferability/fitness	37
2.5.2.5 Utilization/application/action orientation	38
2.6 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN	38
2.7 CONCLUSIONS	39
<b>CHAPTER 3: GROUNDED THEORY</b>	<b>41</b>
3.1 INTRODUCTION	41
3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH	42
3.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF GROUNDED THEORY	43
3.4 PHENOMENOLOGY AND GROUNDED THEORY	46
3.5 THE RESEARCH PROCEDURE	49
3.5.1 Maintaining an objective position	50
3.5.2 Theoretical sensitivity	52
3.5.2.1 Literature	52
3.5.2.2 Professional experience	53
3.5.2.3 Personal experience	53
3.5.2.4 The process of analysis	53

3.5.3 The use of literature	54
3.6 THE RESEARCH QUESTION IN GROUNDED THEORY	55
3.7 DATA COLLECTION IN GROUNDED THEORY	55
3.7.1 Interviews	56
3.7.2 Sampling	58
3.7.2.1 Theoretical sampling	58
3.7.2.2 Sampling during open coding	60
3.7.2.3 Sampling during axial coding	61
3.7.2.4 Sampling during selective coding/discriminate sampling	62
3.7.3 Theoretical saturation	63
3.8 DATA ANALYSIS IN GROUNDED THEORY	63
3.8.1 Data analysis procedures	63
3.8.1.1 The use of questions	64
3.8.1.2 The making of comparisons	65
3.8.2 Analysis techniques	65
3.8.2.1 The use of questioning	66
3.8.2.2 Analysis of words, phrases and sentences	66
3.8.2.3 Theoretical analysis through comparisons	67
3.8.2.4 The red flag	68
3.8.3 Coding procedures	69
3.8.3.1 Open coding	70
3.8.3.1.1 Steps involved in open coding	70
(A) Conceptualisation	71
(B) Identifying categories	71
(a) Naming of categories and subcategories	72
(b) Development of categories in terms of properties and dimensions	73
3.8.3.1.3 Variations on conducting open coding	74
3.8.3.1.4 Coding notes	74
3.8.3.1.5 Conclusions	75
3.8.3.2 Axial coding	75
3.8.3.2.1 The paradigm model	77
3.8.3.2.2 Drawing connections and developing categories	79

(a) The drawing of connections between sub-categories and categories	80
(b) Verification of hypotheses	80
(c) Further development of categories and sub-categories	80
(d) Exploration of variation of a phenomenon	81
3.8.3.2.3 Conclusions	82
3.8.3.3 Selective coding	82
3.8.3.3.1 Integration	83
3.8.3.3.2 Discovering the central category	84
3.8.3.3.3 Techniques to assist in integration	85
3.8.3.3.4 Refining the theory	86
(a) Reviewing the scheme for internal consistency and logic	86
(b) Filling in poorly developed categories	87
(c) Trimming excess categories	87
(d) Validating the theoretical scheme	88
(e) Building in variation	88
3.8.3.3.5 Conclusions	88
3.8.3.4 Process coding	88
3.8.4 The use of notes and diagrams	90
3.8.4.1 General and specific features of notes and diagrams	91
3.8.4.1.1 General features	91
3.8.4.1.2 Specific features	92
3.8.4.2 Notes and diagrams in the three types of coding	93
3.8.4.2.1 Open coding notes and diagrams	93
3.8.4.2.2 Axial coding notes and diagrams	93
3.8.4.2.3 Selective coding notes and diagrams	93
3.9 CONCLUSIONS	94

<b>CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDREN'S COPING AND A CONTEXTUALISING OF THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN</b>	<b>97</b>
4.1 INTRODUCTION	97
4.2 THE CONCEPT OF COPING	98
4.2.1 Theoretical views of coping	98
4.2.1.1 The contextual/ transactional/ cognitive-contextual perspective	98
4.2.1.2 The motivational perspective	99
4.2.1.3 The cognitive social perspective	100
4.2.2 A conceptualisation of coping	101
4.2.3 Coping strategies employed by children	103
4.2.3.1 The problem-focused/emotional-focused coping model	103
4.2.3.2 The primary/secondary control model	104
4.2.3.3 The approach/avoidance model	104
4.2.3.4 Factor analytic models	105
4.2.3.5 Convergence of models	105
4.2.3.6 The coping-competence model	107
4.2.4 Conclusions	108
4.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN'S COPING WITH DIVORCE AND CHARACTERISTICS WITHIN THE CHILD	108
4.3.1 Age of the child	109
4.3.1.1 Theoretical considerations	109
4.3.1.1.1 The psychodynamic paradigm	110
4.3.1.1.2 The developmental paradigm	110
(a) Attachment theory	110
(b) Cognitive development	112
4.3.1.2 Conclusion	115
4.3.2 The gender of the child	116
4.3.3 The child's temperament	118
4.3.4 The child's self concept	121
4.3.5 The child's coping skills	122



4.3.6 The child's locus of control	123
4.3.7 The child's intelligence	124
4.3.8 Conclusion	125
4.4 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN'S COPING WITH DIVORCE AND THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILIAL AND OTHER RELATIONSHIPS	126
4.4.1 Parental conflict	126
4.4.1.1 Defining parental conflict	127
4.4.1.2 The child's age and parental conflict	127
4.4.1.3 The child's gender and parental conflict	129
4.4.1.4 The impact of parental conflict on the child's adjustment	130
4.4.1.4.1 Children's responses to parental conflict	130
4.4.1.4.2 Negative effects of parental conflict on children	131
4.4.1.4.3 Positive effects of parental conflict on children	132
4.4.1.4.4 Variables influencing the impact of parental conflict on children	133
4.4.1.5 Conclusions	134
4.4.2 Parenting skills	135
4.4.3 Parents' temperament and psychopathology	137
4.4.3.1 The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual and ICD-10 Codes	137
4.4.3.2 Divorce related syndromes	138
4.4.4 The child's relationship with the parents	140
4.4.4.1 Pre-divorce relationships with the parents	141
4.4.4.2 Post-divorce relationships with the parents	141
4.4.5 The child's relationship with the non-custodial parent	143
4.4.6 The influence of the step-parent relationship	145
4.4.7 The influence of sibling relationships	147
4.4.8 The influence of relationships with grandparents and the extended family	148

4.4.9 The influence of relationships with peers and other significant people	149
4.4.10 Conclusions	150
4.5 THE ROLE OF CHANGES IN THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN COPING WITH DIVORCE	151
4.5.1 Moving house	151
4.5.2 Changing schools and changes in after-school care and extra- mural activities	152
4.5.3 Changes in economic resources	154
4.5.4 Cumulative stress	154
4.5.5 Conclusion	155
4.6 THE EFFECT OF THE CHILD'S RACE	156
4.7 THE EFFECT OF THE PASSING OF TIME	157
4.8 THE EFFECT OF THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS	158
4.9 CONCLUSIONS	159
<b>CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH PROCEDURE</b>	<b>161</b>
5.1 THE AIM OF THE STUDY	161
5.2 RESEARCH QUESTION	162
5.3 RESEARCH PROCEDURE	163
5.3.1 Selection of participants	164
5.3.1.1 Selection of participants in phenomenological methodologies	164
5.3.1.2 Selection of participants in grounded theory research	165
5.3.1.3 Prerequisites of the participants	166
5.4 DATA COLLECTION	166
5.4.1 The interview and schedule	168
5.4.2 Recording of data	170
5.5 METHOD OF ANALYSIS	171
5.5.1 Open coding	171
5.5.2 Axial coding	171
5.5.3 Selective coding	172
5.5.4 The development of the concepts and categories	172
5.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	174

5.7 CONCLUSIONS	176
<b>CHAPTER 6: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION</b>	<b>177</b>
6.1 INTRODUCTION	177
6.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION	177
6.2.1 Sample size	177
6.2.2 Age	178
6.2.3 Gender	179
6.2.4 Residency	179
6.2.5 Passage of time since divorce	179
6.2.6 Age of the child when the parents' divorced	179
6.2.7 Socioeconomic status	179
6.2.8 Home language	179
6.3 CATEGORIES CREATED RELATING TO CHILDREN COPING WITH DIVORCE	180
6.3.1 First Category: Coping strategies pertaining to children personally	181
6.3.1.1 First Subcategory: The need for a cognitive understanding of divorce	182
6.3.1.1.1 First concept: The importance of being told by both the parents about the impending divorce	183
6.3.1.1.2 Second concept: Understanding the process of divorce	184
6.3.1.1.3 Third concept: Honesty from the parents assists in the understanding and adaptation	185
6.3.1.1.4 Fourth concept: Therapy can assist with an understanding of that which is occurring	185
6.3.1.1.5 Fifth concept: Being absolved of guilt	187
6.3.1.2 Second Subcategory: The development and maintenance of positive relationships with family members	188
6.3.1.2.1 First Concept: Parental relationships	188
A. First property: A perceived improvement in relationship/s with parent/s post-divorce	189

B. Second property: The importance of telephonic contact	190
C. Third property: Parent's recognition of the other family members	191
D. Fourth property: Active involvement by the non-custodial parent in the child's life	192
6.3.1.2.2 Second concept: The perceived need for "equal time" with each parent	193
6.3.1.2.3 Third concept: Sibling relationships	195
A. First property: Close sibling relationships	195
B. Second property: Siblings providing distractions to assist with coping with parental conflict	196
C. Third property: Companionship offered by step-siblings	198
6.3.1.3 Third Subcategory: A sense of control over that which is happening	199
6.3.1.3.1 First concept: Having a voice in court regarding custody arrangements	199
6.3.1.3.2 Second concept: Respecting confidentiality	200
6.3.1.3.3 Third concept: Flexibility in contact with non-custodial parent	201
A. First property: Flexibility in relation to the children's social lives	202
B. Second property: The role of geographical proximity	203
6.3.1.4 Fourth Subcategory: Normalisation is important	203
6.3.1.4.1 First concept: The "normalisation" of divorce is beneficial	204
6.3.1.4.2 Second concept: Normalisation of parents' emotions	205
A. First property: Experiencing parent/s being happier after the divorce	205
B. Second property: Reassurance that a	

parent has company is comforting	206
6.3.1.4.3 Third concept: A sense of fairness and peace when both parents move	207
6.3.2 Second category: Support from others assists in coping with divorce	
2010	
6.3.2.1 First subcategory: Step-parents	209
6.3.2.1.1 First concept: A sensitive introduction to step-parents	211
6.3.2.1.2 Second concept: A good relationship with a step-parent	212
6.3.2.1.3 Third concept: Step-parent's involvement in extra-mural activities	213
6.3.2.2 Second subcategory: Support from grandparents is important	214
6.3.2.2.1 First concept: Emotional support from grandparents	214
6.3.2.2.2 Second concept: Practical support from grandparents	215
6.3.2.3 Third subcategory: Support from relatives	216
6.3.2.3.1 First concept: Support from other significant people	217
6.3.2.4 Fourth subcategory: Friends can prove to be a source of support	218
6.3.2.4.1 First concept: Companionship assisting in adjusting to changes in after school care arrangements	218
6.3.2.4.2 Second concept: Talking to friends is a source of support	219
6.3.2.5 Fifth subcategory: Teachers are a source of support	220
6.3.2.5.1 First concept: Teachers can be a source of support and understanding	220
6.3.2.6 Sixth subcategory: The church can offer meaningful support	221

6.3.2.6.1	First concept: Church based counselling services are beneficial	221
6.3.2.7	Seventh subcategory: Knowledge of parents receiving support is helpful	223
6.3.2.7.1	Concept: Knowledge of others being of assistance to a parent is comforting	223
6.3.3	Third category: Spiritual Support	224
6.3.3.1	Concept: Spiritual support is helpful	225
6.3.4	Fourth category: Therapeutic Interventions are helpful	226
6.3.4.1	First subcategory: Therapeutic interventions assists children	226
6.3.4.1.1	First concept: Psychotherapy for children	227
6.3.4.1.2	Second concept: Therapy provides a helpful distraction	228
6.3.4.2	Second subcategory: Benefit of parental counselling	228
6.3.4.2.1	Concept: Children experience parent's receiving therapy as being beneficial	229
6.3.5	Fifth category: A stable environment and belongingness	230
6.3.5.1	First subcategory: Changing School	231
6.3.5.1.1	First concept: Staying in the same school post-divorce	231
6.3.5.1.2	Second concept: An explanation regarding changing school that acts as a buffer	232
6.3.5.2	Second subcategory: Moving house	233
6.3.5.2.1	First concept: Moving house perceived as assisting with coping with divorce	233
	A. First property: Perceived resultant improvement when moving house	234
	B. Second property: The opportunity to escape greater stressors	235
6.3.5.2.2	Second Concept: Remaining in the family home creates stability	236
6.3.5.3	Third subcategory: General continuity and	

belongingness	237
6.3.5.3.1 Concept: A sense of continuity assists in coping with divorce	237
6.3.6 Sixth category: The role of extra-mural activities	239
6.3.6.1 Concept: Extra-mural activities help in coping with divorce	239
6.3.7 Seventh category: The role of conflict	240
6.3.7.1 First subcategory: The role of pre-divorce conflict	241
6.3.7.1.1 First concept: The need to distance themselves from the conflict in order to cope	242
6.3.7.1.2 Second concept: Getting involved in the parental conflict in an attempt to cope with the conflict	243
6.3.7.2 Second subcategory: The role of post-divorce conflict	244
6.3.7.2.1 Concept: Parent's ability to buffer negative impact of conflict assists the child	244
6.3.7.3 Third subcategory: Pre-divorce parental conflict facilitates an understanding of divorce	245
6.3.7.3.1 Concept: Pre-divorce parental conflict assists children in understanding the event of divorce	245
6.3.8 Eighth category: The development of resiliency	247
6.3.8.1 First subcategory: The development of resiliency pre-divorce	247
6.3.8.1.1 First concept: Previous experience with difficult situations is helpful in developing coping skills to deal with divorce	248
6.3.8.1.2 Second concept: Resiliency to the stress of moving house assists with coping with the change	249
6.3.8.2 Second subcategory: The development of resiliency post-divorce	250
6.3.8.2.1 First concept: Divorce perceived positively due to improvement in school performance	250

6.3.8.2.2 Second concept: Being reassured is helpful	251
6.3.8.2.3 Third concept: Keeping a journal can be helpful in coping with divorce	252
6.4 CONCLUSIONS	253

<b>CHAPTER 7: INTEGRATION AND CONCEPTUALISATION OF CHILDREN'S COPING WITH DIVORCE</b>	<b>254</b>
7.1 INTRODUCTION	254
7.2 DEVELOPING AN UNDERSTANDING OF CHILDREN'S COPING WITH DIVORCE	255
7.2.1 Coping strategies employed by children in relation to their own personal emotions and perceptions	255
7.2.1.1 The importance of developing a cognitive understanding of divorce	255
7.2.1.2 The role of positive relationships with family members	259
7.2.1.3 The need for a sense of control	264
7.2.1.4 A sense of normalisation of divorce and the emotions linked to it	266
7.2.2 Coping strategies relevant to the support received from other people	268
7.2.2.1 Step-parents' involvement	268
7.2.2.2 The importance of support from grandparents	269
7.2.2.3 Relatives assist in giving support	270
7.2.2.4 Friends are a source of support	271
7.2.2.5 Teachers play a role in supporting children in divorce	271
7.2.2.6 The role of the church in offering support	272
7.2.2.7 Parents receiving support assists children in coping	273
7.2.3 Coping assisted by spiritual support	273
7.2.4 Therapeutic interventions facilitate coping	274
7.2.4.1 Therapeutic interventions for children	274
7.2.4.2 Therapeutic interventions for parents	275
7.2.5 The benefit of a stable environment and belongingness	276



7.2.5.1	Aspects pertaining to changing school that enhance coping	276
7.2.5.2	Aspects pertaining to moving house that enhance coping	277
7.2.5.3	A sense of continuity assists coping	278
7.2.6	The ability of extra-murals to assist in coping	279
7.2.7	Pre- and post-divorce conflict and aspects that facilitate coping	279
7.2.7.1	Coping strategies that assist in coping with pre-divorce conflict	279
7.2.7.2	Parental role in assisting with coping with post-divorce conflict	280
7.2.7.3	The role of pre-divorce conflict in facilitating an understanding	281
7.2.8	The role of resiliency	282
7.2.8.1	Resiliency pre-divorce	282
7.2.8.2	Resiliency post-divorce	283
7.2.9.	Conclusion	284
7.2.10	The development of a central concept	285
7.3	A MODEL OF CHILDREN'S COPING STRATEGIES	286
7.3.1	The need for a new model of coping strategies relevant to children coping with divorce	287
7.3.2	A new conceptualisation of children's coping strategies	290
7.3.3	Conclusions	292
<b>CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS</b>		<b>293</b>
8.1	INTRODUCTION	293
8.2	INTEGRATION WITH THEORY	293
8.2.1	Integration with phenomenology and grounded theory	293
8.2.2	Integration with theory on coping	295
8.3	INTEGRATION OF FINDINGS WITH LITERATURE	296
8.3.1	Literature on factors influencing children's coping with divorce	297
8.3.2	Limitations of existing models of coping strategies.	300
8.4	INTEGRATION OF A NEW CONCEPTUALISATION OF	

CHILDREN'S COPING	301
8.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RESEARCH	302
8.6 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH	303
8.6.1 Age of the children	304
8.6.2 Race and Culture	304
8.6.3 Control over the age of the children when the parent's divorced	305
8.6.4 Socioeconomic group	305
8.6.5 The effect of the passage of time	305
8.6.6 Type of custody	306
8.6.7 Generalisability of results	306
8.6.8 Coping strategies in other stressful situations	306
8.6.7 Conclusions	306
REFERENCES	307
APPENDIX "A" Interview Schedule	344
SUMMARY	352
OPSOMMING	354

## List of Tables

	Page No
Table 6.1: The ages, genders and residency of the children	179
Table 6.2: Summary of the descriptions of the eight categories	181
Table 6. 3: Summary of the descriptions of the subcategories, concepts and properties of the First Category: Coping strategies pertaining to children personally	182
Table 6.4: Summary of the descriptions of the sub-categories and concepts of the Second Category: Support from others	210
Table 6.5: Summary of the description of the Third Category: Spiritual Support	225
Table 6.6: Summary of the descriptions of the sub-categories and concepts of the Fourth Category: Therapeutic interventions are helpful	227
Table 6.7: Summary of the descriptions of the sub-categories, concepts and properties of the Firth Category: A stable environment and belongingness	231
Table 6.8: Summary of the descriptions of the concept of the Sixth Category: The role of extra-mural activities	240
Table 6.9: Summary of the descriptions of the sub-categories and concepts of the Seventh Category: The role of conflict	242
Table 6.10: Summary of the descriptions of the sub-categories and concepts of the Eighth Category: The development of resiliency	248

## List of Figures

	Page No
Figure 3.1 Paradigm Model	78
Figure 3.2 Relationship between structure and process	90
Figure 5.1 A diagrammatic representation of the development of a central category from raw data	174
Figure 5.2 A diagrammatic representation of the process of data collected and coding of data occurring simultaneously	175

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The effect of divorce on children, and factors that influence how children cope with divorce, have been well researched since the 1970s when divorce became more prevalent in Western countries. There is a wealth of information in the literature on this topic from different aspects, including the effects that divorce has on adults' and children's functioning and coping. In South Africa, the statistics from the Department of Home Affairs indicate that the number of children that have been involved in divorce has increased from 11098 in 1970, to 45331 in 1999, and dropped to 32394 in 2005 (Statssa report, P0307, 1999; Statssa report, P0307, 2005). The reported drop in the number of children involved in divorces could be as a result of a worldwide trend within the Western culture, for people to co-habit rather than get married. It can be expected however, that the children of these relationships, would still experience the same, or at least similar, consequences when their parents separate, as those children whose parents experience divorce. A further factor that needs to be recognised within the South African context is that children from customary marriages would not be taken into account in these statistics, as customary marriages were not included in the statistics. It is reasonable to assume that the children born of these relationships would also be affected in the same way when their parents separate as those children whose parents are married under common law and then divorce.

Dreman (2000) maintained that within Western countries 50% of children born in the 1980s would experience the divorce of their parents before reaching the age of 18 years. These children would currently be in their late teens to early adulthood. Considering that the divorce of a child's parents has been taken to be one of the most stressful events that a child may have to cope with (Drapeau, Samson & Saint-Jacques, 1999; Jansen van Rensburg, 2004; Kail & Cavanaugh, 2007; Kelly & Emery, 2003) and that research has consistently found that

children are largely affected negatively by the divorce of their parents (Amato & Keith, 1991a, 1991b; Emery, 1989; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1995, 1997; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989; Wenar & Kerig, 2005) the implications of these statistics are far reaching. Divorce has been found to influence children emotionally, academically and socially, and even physically (Kelly, 2000). An increase in the occurrence of depression, anxiety, anger and suicide has been found to be higher in children who come from divorced families (Jansen van Rensburg, 2004; Thompson & Henderson, 2007; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1996). Wallerstein and Kelly (1996) report that children from divorced households typically obtain significantly lower scores on standardised measures of intellectual capacity and academic achievement. Amato (2001) and Kurtz (1996) also found that children from divorced families are at a greater risk of underachieving academically. Van Rensburg (2001) and Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1979, 1985) discuss how children from divorced families experience greater frustrations in relation to socialising with their peers. As a result of the financial consequences of divorce the lifestyle of the divorced family is often negatively affected. This can result in a decrease in the standard of nutrition and medical care, with a negatively effect on the children's physical well-being (Lamb, Sternberg & Thompson, 1997).

Historically, studies on divorce have focused on the negative effects of divorce on children. However, these studies all approach the topic of children and divorce from the premise that children are negatively affected by divorce (Frisco, Muller & Frank, 2007; Schwartz, 1992; Shaw, 1991; Thiesen, 1993). Amato (2003) maintains, however, that the estimated negative effects of divorce are not as strong as has previously been reported. With the recent resurgence internationally in the interest in the effects of divorce on children it has been suggested that some children do not show any ill effects in response to their parents' divorce (Amato, 2000, 2003; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Lamb et al. (1997) state that although divorce is a painful experience that may increase children's psychological vulnerability, the long-term effects of divorce should not be over-exaggerated. They are alluding to the possibility that divorce does not always impact negatively on children. Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999) concur with this view. Cohen and Ronen (1999) go further in stating that

just as there are differing opinions on the strength of the effects of divorce on children, so too is there controversy on the process of adaptation of children. In fact, the majority of children that have to cope with their parents' divorce appear in the long term to develop within the normal range, without identifiable psychological scars or other negative effects (Lamb et al., 1997). Such findings have led to a debate regarding the extent to which divorce actually impacts negatively on the children of divorced families.

There is also much research on the factors that are considered to influence the adaptation of children of divorced families (Allison & Furstenberg, 1989; Amato, 2000; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Taylor, Peplau & Sears, 2003; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1996). Different factors that may influence children's coping with divorce have also been examined. These factors include characteristics within the child such as developmental age, temperament, self-concept, coping skills, locus of control and intelligence as well as factors involving other aspects such as parental conflict, the sex of custodial parent, the nature of the relationship the child has with each of the parents and significant other people, the parent's coping with the divorce and aspects such as the possible necessity to move house and change schools. Factors such as prior experience of stressful events and the development of coping strategies and resilience in children are aspects that have received much attention in the literature recently (Leon, 2003; Sandler, Kim-Bae & MacKinnon, 2000; Tein, Sandler & Zautra, 2000). The possibility that children may actually benefit in some ways from the divorce of their parents has also been investigated and found to be the case in certain circumstances, such as an improvement in a relationship with a parent (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999).

Considering then that divorce may not always result in all of the negative effects on children that has been considered to be the case, the possibility exists that children may employ and/or develop coping strategies to help them cope. Children's coping is seen as being attempts made by children to cope with events that they experience as being taxing and demanding of their resources. This coping involves developing and employing coping strategies. It is commonly held that these coping strategies are intentionally employed and are not

concerned with the efficacy of the strategies, as with the perceived experience of a sense of control over the stressful event (Sandler, Tein, Mehta, Wolchik & Ayers, 2000; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007; Wolchik & Sandler, 1997).

Duncan (1996) has explored children's coping with violence and Richter and her colleagues have researched children's coping with HIV/AIDS (Barbarin, Richter & de Wet, 2001; Manegold, Pather & Richter, 2004; Richter, Manegold, Pather, 2004). These researchers have explored and elucidated factors influencing children coping within the specific contexts of violence and HIV/AIDS. However, it is not clear whether these factors are specific to the context within which they have been explored or whether they can be extrapolated to other contexts. It is possible that the coping strategies employed by children coping with divorce are specific to the context of divorce as are, at least some of the factors influencing children's coping with other stressful events, such as violence and illness.

With regard to children's coping with their parents' divorce specifically, this event demands that the children have to continue to employ coping strategies as the ongoing effects of the divorce situation continues to affect them at different stages of their own and the family's development. Krantz, Clark, Pruyn and Usher (1985) maintain that children do employ coping strategies with regard to their parent's divorce; however, what these coping strategies are is not revealed.

Furthermore, Fields and Prinz (1997) state that the majority of the taxonomies of coping strategies derived from identified strategies that children are purported to employ, have been derived from the literature and research on adult coping strategies. Whether these dichotomies are relevant to children in their life stage is, however, debatable. Furthermore, when these coping strategies are contextualised within the event of the parent's divorce, it is possible that coping strategies particular to the context exist.



## 1.2 MOTIVATION FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

The research question is born from the experience of the researcher in private practice that some children *appear* to cope better than others with their parents' divorce and discuss their experiences more positively. This led the researcher to question what factors from the children's personal perspectives enable some children to cope better with divorce than others. Furthermore, the strategies that children employ in order to facilitate their adjustment and coping were also seen to be important aspects that need to be explored, to develop an understanding of children's coping with divorce.

Although the research has indicated that children do not always experience negative effects as a result of their parents' divorce it was found that the existing studies were either conducted from the perspectives of the parents, or else certain constructs were pre-selected and then studied comparing children from divorced families with children from intact families (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Leon, 2003). Studies on resiliency factors in children from divorce have therefore been conducted employing a quantitative methodology. Most of the existing studies have thus imposed a theoretical paradigm onto the data collected, approached the collection of data from a specific paradigm, or interpreted their findings according to a preconceived theory (Barnes, 1999; Schwartz, 1992; Shaw, 1991). An example of this would be when the researcher employs a developmental psychopathological framework in order to develop an understanding of the effect that divorce has on early childhood, as seen in the article by Leon (2003).

This researcher was not able to find any studies where children's perspectives had been explored employing a qualitative, phenomenological approach allowing factors that enable children to cope with their parents' divorce to reveal themselves. Heyink and Tymstra (1993) maintain that qualitative research is preferable when the subject's own perceptions and interpretations are being studied and furthermore, that interviews are the only method of data collection when no theoretical preconceptions are held and descriptions are the most

important source of data. To adequately study children's well-being, children need to be involved in all stages of research (Fattore, Mason & Watson, 2007). The need to allow children to 'talk for themselves' and to allow the data to reveal the strategies employed by the children rather than imposing theoretical constructs upon the data was seen as being imperative in order to develop a conceptualisation of 'what' children find assists their coping with divorce. According to Leedy (1997), phenomenological studies are a form of qualitative research. Phenomenology focuses on the question of 'what?' rather than 'why?' (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1999). A phenomenological study of children's experiences reveals children's life-worlds (Danaher & Briod, 2005).

In order to achieve a situation whereby the children's own perspectives are gathered and a deeper, richer understanding of children's coping with divorce can be developed, while not holding any pre-conceived ideas or theoretical frameworks during the process, a phenomenological paradigm will be adopted and a grounded theory approach will be used in the analysis of the data.

### **1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT STUDY**

This research aims primarily to provide an in-depth description of children's coping with divorce from children's perspectives. In keeping with the phenomenological framework adopted children from divorced families, between the ages of 6- to- 13 years, will be interviewed giving the children the opportunity to voice their perspectives on their coping with their parents' divorces. The interviews will be transcribed and analysed using a grounded theory methodology in an attempt to gain a deeper insight into the lived-in experiences of the children.

On a broader level, this study aims to develop a new conceptualisation of children's coping strategies employed in coping with divorce. This includes developing a more comprehensive understanding of children's coping strategies relevant to the context in which children operate. As previously stated the research that has been conducted on children's coping has explored children

coping within the contexts of for example hospitalisation, violence and within South Africa within the context of violence and HIV/AIDS (Barbarin, et al., 2001; Miller & Green, 1985; Richter, et al., 2004). Fields and Prinz (1997) state that the existing conceptualisations of children's coping have largely been based on research that has been conducted on adult coping strategies and the taxonomies that have been developed from these coping strategies. However, children are generally limited in their coping skills by cognitive, affective, expressive, and social developmental skills as well as a general lack of life experience. A child's world differs from that of the adult world, particularly because children have less control over circumstances. Children are limited by realistic constraints, such as restricted freedom to actively avoid stressors, being able to source or refuse resources, and being in a state of personal and financial dependence on parents. Aspects of development and environment may, therefore, limit the coping responses that children are capable of making, and the coping strategies promoting adjustment in children may differ from those promoting adjustment in adults. This study aims to explore the 'fit' of existing taxonomies of coping strategies with those revealed by the children who participated in this study.

The approach adopted by this study has, therefore, been chosen to enable the researcher to build a new conceptualisation of children's coping with divorce and the coping strategies employed by children within this context. From the findings it is expected that a meaningful guide will be provided for the development of divorce programmes or therapeutic interventions for children to assist them with their coping; and furthermore, that it will provide for advocacy of policies to promote children's coping with their parents' divorce.

## **1.4 AN OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENT STUDY**

Chapter 1 begins with an introduction to the phenomenon of children's coping with divorce and outlines the aims and objectives of this study. Chapter 2 presents an overview of a phenomenological approach to research, including a discussion on phenomenology and its concepts before discussing phenomenology as research framework. The grounded theory methodology is

explained and discussed in Chapter 3 in order to outline the methodology used in the collection and analysis of this data and in the development of new conceptualisations of children's coping with divorce. In Chapter 4 existing theoretical perspectives relevant to children coping with divorce, research and findings as reported in the literature, as well as the factors and aspects that influence this coping are discussed. A definition of coping is developed in this chapter, as well as a discussion on models on coping strategies that have been developed by other theorists. Chapter 5 explains the research procedure that was followed in this study. In Chapter 6 the concepts revealed by the data collected from the children's perspectives are developed together with the coping strategies identified that the children have reported using. Chapter 7 offers an integration with the literature and a conceptualisation of children's coping with divorce as well as a discussion of the development of a new model on children's coping strategies used. The final chapter, Chapter 8, provides an overview of the phenomenon of children's coping with divorce and an evaluation of the study providing recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH**

This study is placed within the phenomenological tradition and Chapter 2 outlines the development of phenomenology. A discussion on the relationship between phenomenology, existentialism and psychology is followed by a brief overview of the concepts held within phenomenology. Phenomenology as a research method is then discussed including covering the methodological assumptions and the validity and reliability of phenomenological research.

All research is explicitly and implicitly placed within a particular paradigm. It cannot take place in a void or find meaning outside of methodology and theory. There should always be a dynamic interplay between research, stretching the boundaries of existing knowledge, and current thinking. In addition research should question the manner in which experience influences that which research explores and which therefore impacts on theory. Paradigms are the frame of reference and the magnifying glass through which phenomena are explored, explained and understood. By definition paradigms are based on specific theories and are placed within certain methods which will influence the manner in which the findings are interpreted and the meaning that is made from these findings (Creswell, 1994).

#### **2.1 A DEFINITION OF PHENOMENOLOGY**

According to Richardson (1980) the term phenomenology embraces a wide range of terms and he suggests that a narrower definition is necessary. Chaplin (1975, p.384) defines phenomenology as *“the study of phenomena or events as they occur immediately in experience without interpretation”*.

Merleau-Ponty (1945) suggests that phenomenology can be viewed as the study of “essence”. He postulated that phenomenology is a philosophy that recognizes that the world is always already there before any reflection on it begins. Phenomenology concentrates all its efforts on re-achieving a direct and unadulterated contact with the world. For Merleau-Ponty (1945) phenomenology should give a direct description of an experience as it is. The psychological origin and causal explanations are not given any credit.

In essence, the phenomenologist attempts to simply describe the *meaning* of a person’s experience and behaviour without referring to systematic explanations of behaviour, ready-made formulations about what causes behaviour, or the effects of such causes.

This transcendental philosophy as referred to by Merleau-Ponty (1945) is based on a style of thinking that focuses on discarding traditional or pre-conceived ways of viewing man’s behaviour or understanding man. This implies that direct, naïve or “uncontaminated” contact is made with the world being experienced at that time. This can only occur if all prior knowledge and ideas are suspended. The phenomenologist is primarily interested in the lived experience of the real rather than the abstracted real of “objective consciousness” (Knowles, 1986). Describing the meaning of one’s immediate experience of concrete reality is of paramount importance. This description yields *what* is meant when talking about a phenomenon and not the *why*.

In an attempt to be as rigorous and disciplined as possible, the phenomenologist, before beginning a description of reality, tries to put aside or “bracket”, as referred to by Husserl, as many preconceptions as possible in order to let the phenomena of the world speak on their own terms (Hammond, Howart & Keat, 1991). However, it is impossible to become aware of *all* of one’s preconceptions and totally transcend one’s perceived limitations. In fact, one’s preconceptions

and perspectives give us access to phenomena in the beginning. An event has to be identified as a phenomenon to be a phenomenon.

Notwithstanding this dilemma, the phenomenologist attempts to describe a phenomenon with the intention of understanding its meaning, while simultaneously engaging in interpreting *how* events of meaning are structured in such a manner that we experience a given phenomenon as *what* it is. While phenomenologists recognise the value of explanation, an explanation of a phenomenon alone does not lead one to an understanding of what that phenomenon primordially is. Van den Berg (1972) describes phenomenology as being a method or an attitude. The phenomenologist wants to observe in the way one usually observes. He believes implicitly in the everyday observations of objects, the body, people around him, and of time. All the answers to stated questions are based on the results of this type of observation. On the other hand, he distrusts theoretical and objective observations, the kind of observations made by scientists.

Furthermore, when things in the world present themselves they always occur in relation to, and are situated within, a concrete *context*. A never-ending web of meaningful relations to other things and people is the world within which things take on their significance. While some aspects of a phenomenon make themselves evident perceptually, just as much remains hidden or is latent in the worldly backdrop of our experience. Therefore, in order to be truly concrete as well as existential, the phenomenologist must acknowledge that things both reveal and hide themselves at the same time. Opening up that which is hidden is therefore just as important to the meaning of the phenomenon, as that which is not hidden (De Roberts, 1996).

Since things are primordially tied to other things, people and situations, the phenomenologist endeavours to interpret the meanings of the things as they appear within the context of the human being's entire being-in-the-world-with-

others-alongside-things. Phenomena can only be truly understood as always within the life-world context of our being-in-the-world (De Roberts, 1996). Nothing happens in isolation to the context - incorporating physical context, social context, historical context, political context, chronological context and the personal context.

It needs to be pointed out, however, that the phenomenological perspective removes the need to look outside for the cause of, or source that causes an experience. It rather focuses on that which is present or concrete in awareness (Polkinghorne, 1989). Osborn (1995) points out that phenomenological research should elicit an unadulterated description of experiences rather than accounts of what the participant thinks the researcher wants to hear.

For the purposes of this research then, phenomenology can be seen to be the study of the essence of consciousness. It is the study of the observation made by the observer of an event or phenomenon. The meaning of this observation is based, as far as is humanly possible, on the meaning given by the “players” being observed. The fact that the phenomenon is being observed, however, must influence the phenomenon and the meaning that springs from it. Each phenomenon is, therefore, unique unlike any previous experience or any experience to come. Moreover, each phenomenon is situated in a specific time, culture and context.

To try and gain an understanding of the issues that phenomenology has tried to address, a brief overview of the development of phenomenology and its theory will be outlined. This assists in placing the research within its context which is in itself a requirement of phenomenology.



## **2.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF PHENOMENOLOGY**

An understanding of the development of phenomenological thinking is necessary in order to understand the concepts held within phenomenology. Historically the term phenomenology was coined in the mid-eighteenth century referring to a homogeneous and systematically developed philosophical position. More recently, however, phenomenology has referred to a philosophical position that transcends the thinking of the researcher or observer and is only concerned with the core or essence of that which is being observed.

According to Van den Berg (1972), the development of phenomenological psychology began in 1894. Dilthey had analysed the methods of psychology and concluded that they had been derived from the physical sciences; he further concluded that this was not sufficient for psychology (De Roberts, 1996). The objects that psychologists study cannot be dissected and the elementary factors then isolated and used to reconstruct a theoretical understanding in the way scientists study their objects. Both William James and the Gestalt theorists maintain that the human being's consciousness cannot be broken down into meaningful components (Lahey, 1989). In order to develop a holistic understanding of a person's conscious awareness of the world being experienced, more than just putting together the components of the previously abstracted elementary parts, is necessary.

The principles and philosophies of some of the strongest proponents of phenomenology will be briefly discussed in order to outline the development of phenomenological thinking.

### **2.2.1 EDMUND HUSSERL**

Edmund Husserl (1859 -1938) rejected the behaviouristic thinking that perception and the meaning attached thereto, is the result of external stimuli observed.

Husserl's phenomenological thinking was fundamentally opposed to the realism foundations held in behaviourism (Hammond et al., 1991). He proposed that realism was a naïve misinterpretation of "natural attitude", the generally held assumption that there is an independent existence to that which is being perceived.

According to Husserl, in order to avoid this misinterpretation one had to suspend or "put in abeyance" this assumption, and then research the experience free of these preconceived views (Hammond et al., 1991). This bracketing of assumptions attempts to set aside assumptions in order to start again in describing what appears to the pure psyche. According to Husserl, the individual is consciously aware of the world and will therefore make a personal meaning of that world (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 1989). From Husserl's perspective phenomenology was an exploration of the essence of man's consciousness and his experiences, and he attempted to develop a rigorous and unbiased approach to study these experiences (Valle, King & Halling, 1989).

Husserl further ascribed to a Transcendental phenomenology. This philosophy is basically characterized by attempting to reduce all experiences to the life of the transcendental ego. According to Husserl the transcendental ego holds a

*"... constitutive role with respect to the 'real world': the sense or meaning of the latter is provided by the former, the transcendental ego which is not itself a part of the world, but rather presupposed to it"* (Hammond et al., 1991, p.5).

While not being a part of the phenomenon the transcendental ego assumes a meta-position in order to gain perspective and make meaning.

Meaning is not derived only from that which is seen but also from that which is hidden or not revealed. Husserl utilized systematic reflection as a research method as well as giving recognition to the horizontal nature of consciousness. He suggested that one's experience or field of awareness is not limited to that

which is given in the factual account of the phenomenon but rather includes that which is also unseen; that which is implied, remembered, anticipated, generalised and affected through being processed (Von Eckartsberg, 1998). He also explored the aspect of “inner and outer consciousness” as placed within time. He suggested that:

*“... people experience their embeddedness in the stream of time: past, present and future. He explored how these horizons co-operate in creating the temporal meaning of the here and now. Such horizons contextualise experience in terms of consensually available cognitive frameworks of perceived meaning”* (Von Eckartsberg, 1998, p.9).

Lastly, Husserl later explored the concepts of a ‘life-world’, the world of-taken-for-granted and common-sense meanings (Von Eckartsberg, 1998).

It can therefore be said, that Husserlian phenomenology is primarily concerned with the analysis of the consciousness rather than giving an account of its causal origins. The existential philosophies of Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and Nietzsche’s (1844-1900) influenced and enriched Husserl’s work.

### **2.2.2 MARTIN HEIDEGGER**

One of the first philosophers to merge existential concerns and phenomenological methodology was Martin Heidegger (1889-1976).

Heidegger (1889-1976) saw phenomenology as complementing existentialism. He attempted to explore the experiences of humans free from the presuppositions of “...cultural heritage, philosophical dualism and technologism...” (Valle et al., 1989, p.6). Existential-phenomenology developed into a discipline that is concerned with the essence, structure and the form of human experience and behaviour revealed through descriptive techniques as well as reflection (Valle et al., 1989). Heidegger brought together the thinking of

Husserl, Marcel and Sartre. Von Eckartsberg (1998) maintains that Heidegger's approach used the idea of intentionality. Heidegger developed a hermeneutic phenomenology as an approach to studying and understanding the ontological meaning of "being-in-the-world" (Spielberg, 1975).

Rather than the accepted notion of a subject-object divide, Heidegger introduced the concept of a subjective consciousness versus objective matter (Von Eckartsberg, 1998). He explained that one conceives of existence as in relation to nature, where a dynamic relationship plays out between the world and things within it (*Dasein* as being-in-the-world). Heidegger followed by stating that the world comes into existence only through participation. He called this philosophy the hermeneutics of existence (Von Eckartsberg, 1998).

Heidegger saw phenomenology as complementing existentialism. These philosophies were also extended into the field of psychology. The relationship between phenomenology, existentialism and psychology will be explored in section 2.3.

### **2.2.3 GABRIEL MARCEL**

Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), a philosopher concerned with exploring the metaphysical meditations of human existence, employed phenomenological principles in order to explore concrete situations and experiences that had previously been ignored by scientific psychology (Goldstein, 2003). Marcel was concerned with the idea that people are limited in their freedom or openness to possibilities, because these are in effect the essence of being. People are bound to engage in dialogue with others or things occurring in-the-world. This is a limited freedom, people cannot be free of the world and they are always in the process of becoming. We are the worlds we constitute for ourselves (De Roberts, 1996).

#### **2.2.4 JEAN-PAUL SARTRE**

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) employed Husserl's phenomenological philosophy as an approach to exploring imagination and emotions (Thévenaz, 1962). He built on Marcel's concept of limited freedom and he rejected Husserl's transcendental idealisms and developed the notion of reflexive and pre-reflexive consciousness. Sartre argued that because consciousness can be seen to be reflective in nature, it can in turn become aware of itself. A crucial step in Sartre's chain of argument was the move from self-consciousness to self-determination (Grossmann, 1984). According to Sartre, because consciousness can be seen as an action, individuals therefore become aware of their experiences through reflecting, or pondering on their consciousness. He called this *reflective consciousness* (Thévenaz, 1962). According to Sartre then, existence precedes essence. As a result of this each person can then be held responsible for his or her life choices as all consciousness is reflected upon (Von Eckartsberg, 1998).

Existential phenomenology can therefore be seen as having followed Husserl's method of describing, exploring and making meaning of phenomena, but rejected his notion of transcendental idealism (Hammond et al., 1991).

#### **2.2.5 MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY**

Expanding on this approach, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, (1908 -1961) employed a phenomenological approach to the study of perception. He proposed that people do not perceive their world, but rather that their world is what they perceive (Thévenaz, 1962). Merleau-Ponty also introduced the concept that the subject is always placed within a particular time frame. This would then imply that there are always aspects of the subject that are not available to a reflecting subject, which is in itself, also placed within a particular time frame. Phenomenology then, for Merleau-Ponty always had a historical dimension to it, any phenomenon

observed is placed within a specific (and maybe limiting) time period (Hammond et al., 1991). Merleau-Ponty perceived phenomenology to be

*“...both a philosophy of essences and a philosophy of existence, both a transcendental and an ontological philosophy, both a “rigorous science” and a hermeneutics”* (Macann, 1993, p.202).

## **2.2.6 CONCLUSIONS**

Husserl could be seen to be the father of phenomenology having given recognition to the meaning that man makes of an experience, or of his world, rather than the imposing of an objective explanation of the meaning of an experience. Heidegger, who was greatly influenced by Husserl's thinking, but differed from Husserl - instead of accepting the subject-object divide, he introduced the concept of a subjective consciousness vs. objective matter. Heidegger brought together the thinking of Husserl, Marcel and Sartre with his marrying of phenomenology and existentialism. Marcel brought to light the limitedness of people's freedom; and Sartre did not accept Husserl's notion of the transcendental ego existing irrespective of the phenomenon. Sartre proposed that the process of reflection on one's consciousness is in itself a conscious action employed to make meaning. This makes the reflection part of the world. Merleau-Ponty took the concept of being part of the world a step further and highlighted that all experiences, and therefore the meaning thereof, are bound to the context they find themselves in. He introduced a historical context.

While each of the philosophers discussed above introduced their own concepts to phenomenology and phenomenological existentialism, differing from Husserl on some issues they all hold true to Husserl's basic philosophy that all meaning is bound to, or held within, the person. How these philosophies have influenced existentialism and psychology needs to be explored in order to understand the development of phenomenology within the field of psychology.

## 2.3 PHENOMENOLOGY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON EXISTENTIALISM AND PSYCHOLOGY

Von Eckartsberg (1998) states that phenomenology is primarily an approach that can be used to explore the phenomena of human consciousness. Existentialism can be seen as the study of essences and themes in human existence. He describes existential phenomenology as the utilization of the phenomenological approach to explore issues of human existence (Von Eckartsberg, 1998). Von Eckartsberg (1998, p.8) maintains that existential phenomenology:

*“...broadens the base of understanding of our discipline beyond acts of thematic consciousness by recognizing the importance of pre-reflective bodily components in the constitution of meaning (Merleau-Ponty), by emphasizing the existential choices a person makes about his or her life situation, the “existential project” (Sartre); or by focusing on the totality of personal existence as being-in-the-world (Dasein [Heidegger]), including our dwelling in social relations and historical circumstances. There is still another opinion...that sees the unfolding of the phenomenological movement and the foundation of contemporary European philosophy as resting on the threefold foundation of phenomenology (Husserl), philosophical anthropology (Scheler) and the ontology of Dasein (Heidegger)”.*

Existentialism can be seen to be concerned about overcoming the philosophical dualism between the subject and the object, as is phenomenology. Valle et al. (1989) see existentialism as achieving this, by suggesting that the person and the world are not divided into a separate subject and object but that they are rather unitary, structural and whole. The existential philosopher employs human subjectivity itself in order to attempt to understand human nature. The dualism is evident in that it is through the world that the very meaning of the person's existence emerges both for him and others and it is through the individual's

existence that the world is given meaning. By implication then existence implies that “being” is actually “being-in-the-world” (Valle et al., 1989). Existentialism is also concerned with exploring how human values are derived from totally human situations and not theoretical assumptions. The human will to meaning, freedom, responsibility, self-actualization and social relatedness are all philosophical underpinnings and assumptions associated with existentialism. However, they are also closely related to the phenomenological philosophy. Together, phenomenology and existentialism form the school of thought known as existential phenomenology. When this philosophical approach is applied to human psychological phenomena, existential phenomenology becomes known as existential-phenomenological psychology. This is a psychological discipline that is concerned with explaining the essence, structure or form of human experience through the use of descriptive research techniques (Valle et al., 1989).

This study is placed firmly within this approach as it attempts to explore the child’s perspective of the phenomenon of divorce between parents and that which, in the child’s perception, assists in coping with this phenomenon that they are living in.

Interestingly, Husserl was uncomfortable with the relationship between psychology and phenomenology (Spinelli, 1989). He did recognise that the two fields could contribute greatly to each other, however; but he nevertheless remained sceptical of contemporary psychology. After having revisited his views on this a number of times, his solution was to develop an alternative school of psychology. He initially called this “rational psychology”, or “eidetic psychology” but he eventually settled on the term “phenomenological psychology” (Spinelli, 1989). Husserl defined phenomenological psychology as being the implementation of the phenomenological approach to psychological enquiry (Spinelli, 1989). Phenomenological psychology is concerned with systematically observing and describing the conscious experience of the world and can be



distinguished from phenomenology by the fact that it is concerned with the issue of personal, subjective experience (Spinelli, 1989).

Phenomenological psychology tries to explain the experience of human life “*by re-conceiving psychology on properly human grounds*” (Von Eckartsberg, 1998, p.4). One of the most important distinguishing factors of phenomenological psychology is that while it explores the conscious experience of the world, it does not employ implicit or explicit reductionistic assumptions. Spinelli (1989, p.31) maintains that

*“...phenomenological psychology attempts an unbiased examination of conscious experience, via the application of the phenomenological method, in order to present a description of phenomena which is as free from experientially based, variational biases as possible.”*

Pure phenomenology, which is not limited to psychological phenomena, is the study of the essential structures of consciousness focusing on its ego-subject, its act and its contents. Phenomenological psychology is the study of psychological phenomena specifically, in their subjective aspects only. This is irrespective of the fact that they are founded in the objective context of a psychological organism. Phenomenological psychology is one approach to exploration, which can be used as a research method in exploring the essence, the core, of things. This approach rests itself on some core concepts, which define the “being” of phenomenological psychology.

## **2.4 PHENOMENOLOGICAL CONCEPTS**

In order to understand the methodology of phenomenological research some of its basic concepts need to be understood. The concepts of “being-in-the-world”, including facticity; lebenswelt; consciousness; intentionality; and ontological guilt and anxiety will be discussed.

### **2.4.1 BEING IN THE WORLD**

Phenomenology holds that people have no existence outside of their relationship to other people and the world. It is therefore, only through the world and other people that the meaning of existence is revealed both for the individual and those in the relationship. Likewise the world derives its sense of meaning only in relation to the person without which it would not exist as it does (Valle et al., 1989). There is a dynamic relationship between the two, forever giving definition to each other but at the same time re-defining each other. Each is therefore totally dependent on the other for its existence.

For Heidegger the question of being-in-the-world was fundamental to philosophy. He felt that people's freedom is limited by being in the world, which he called "facticity". Any person is found within a specific situation, always in a mood, in a time in history, culture, embodied, and so on. Individuals are "thrown" into an already interpreted world. Subsequently, the core of the human nature is always a consequence of prior existence, of "being-in-the-world" (Carr, 1995). This "throwness" into society results in a coming-to-existence, which is reliant on communal beliefs (Carr, 1995). While humans are able to construct their own world, they are thrust or "thrown" into an already interpreted world where limitations are imposed and interaction is inherent (Maddi, 1972). As a result, man can be seen to be having situated freedom; the freedom to make choices albeit at times within limited circumstances (Valle et al., 1989).

'Being-in-the-world' can be broken down into three broad categories namely Umwelt, Mitwelt and Eigenwelt.

- Maddi (1972) describes Umwelt as referring to the individual's perception of his/her physical world.
- Mitwelt refers to the individual's perception of others and his/her interaction with others (Maddi, 1972).

Both Umwelt and Mitwelt are therefore not objective but are rather the subjective perception of the individual.

- Eigenwelt refers to the individual's own world focusing on internal processes and dialogues, more specifically the relationship that the individual has with him/herself.

Maddi (1972) states that these modes of 'being-in-the-world' provide a frame of reference for the individual from which the physical, social and personal worlds can be perceived and experienced.

An interdependency exists between these different modes of being and it is based on dialogue. As mentioned before the individual, people and the world are in constant dialogue. Valle et al. (1989) describe this relationship as being dialogical in nature. The individual is viewed as being both partly active in the world, as acting in the world in a purposeful manner, as well as partly passive, as the world is viewed as always acting on individuals. Part of "being-in-the-world" is bound up with Lebenswelt.

#### **2.4.2 LEBENSWELT**

As discussed previously, Husserl was mainly concerned with exploring the world of everyday experience as described in everyday language. He focused on the world as reported in direct and naïve experience, pure phenomena prior to any reflective interpretation (Valle et al., 1989). This is the Lebenswelt, the life-world, the direct experiences of the individual's daily life world. It is in this pre-reflective life-world that scientific knowledge can be founded (Thévenaz, 1962).

The life-world, the Lebenswelt, is the corner stone of existential-phenomenology. It is the beginning of everything as it is the naïve experience and is not based on anything. Causal thinking, theories and hypotheses have no place as they do not compose the life-world. Rather they are higher order derivatives of the life-world (Valle et al., 1989).

Consciousness and intentionality are two aspects that are closely linked to being-in-the-world, of one's life-world and one's experiences.

### **2.4.3 CONSCIOUSNESS AND INTENTIONALITY**

The nature of consciousness is an important notion within phenomenological psychology.

Valle et al. (1989) suggest that objects are held and sustained by the constituting power of consciousness. They note "There is no world without a consciousness to perceive it and, similarly, no consciousness without a world to be conscious of" (p.11). Consciousness can be seen as a "making present" where phenomena are exposed (Goldstein, 2003).

However, existential-phenomenological psychologists see consciousness as not merely existing but rather that one is always conscious of something, that it always has an object. Consciousness therefore, is seen as being intentional in nature; it is not passive (Valle et al.,1989).

Intentionality refers basically to the ongoing work of consciousness. Husserl proposed that consciousness is an intentional act through which the individual allows the world to be revealed. Therefore, it is through consciousness that man is able to know, or stated slightly differently, consciousness allows the "identified" object to make itself "known" (Goldstein, 2003).

Segal (1999) states that:

*"Because it is the nature of man to be able to reveal the world to himself by experiencing it directly, his consciousness can itself be regarded as an act of revealing, a process by which the viewer and the thing viewed*

*obtain their meaning rather than that consciousness is an encapsulated distinct entity apart from the world” (p.31).*

Heidegger, in keeping with Husserl's thinking, proposed that the meaning of being was held within intentionality. The notion of intentionality explores man's experience of the world in that every situation demands a decision. In turn the relationship between the individual and his/her decision and the world, suggests that every moment and the situation in the individual's life exhibits intentionality (Maddi, 1972).

Heidegger expanded on the notion of intentionality in an attempt to overcome the subject-object-divide. He suggested that rather than perceiving man as an object in the world of things, that man is an intentional being relating to his world (Goldstein, 2003). Existentialism sees intentionality as reflecting the interdependence between the person and the world. Hammond et al. (1991) state that to exist as a subject involves interacting with the world, but it also involves being able to stand back, to wonder and to question (in other words to reflect on), the world.

Intentionality, then suggests that all perceptions have meaning. Intentionality is the essence of perception, awareness, experience, and attention (Goldstein, 2003). It refers to the content of consciousness as well as the manner and direction in which consciousness deciphers that which it perceives (Owen, 1994a). Consciousness and the ability to act intentionally are linked to one's ontological guilt and anxiety.

#### **2.4.4 ONTOLOGICAL ANXIETY AND GUILT**

Ontological anxiety is viewed as being one of the major premises of existential thought and was posited by Heidegger. Heidegger was greatly influenced by Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), who defined existential anxiety as "being" anxiety, which is a reaction to the perception of choice and freedom (Owen,

1994b). Kierkegaard suggested that existential anxiety was the product of one's consciousness of one's responsibility for one's intentions, choices and actions (Owen, 1994b).

Heidegger separated anxiety and guilt in that he saw a *sense of guilt* as being associated with misdeeds, and *anxiety* as being in the presence of real danger, neurotic guilt and anxiety (Owen, 1994b). Existential guilt is linked to inauthenticity as it is linked to the manner in which people choose to deny their capacity to make authentic choices (Owen, 1994b). According to Owen (1994b) existential guilt can be recognised but not overcome.

#### **2.4.5 CONCLUSIONS**

From the above discussion it can be seen that phenomenology is a way of thinking, a philosophy about the meaning of being. It is underpinned by assumptions and understandings and, therefore, its usage as a research method is bound by these assumptions. Its application as a research method, methodological assumptions, validity and reliability as well as the reasons why it was chosen for this study will be discussed below.

### **2.5 THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF PHENOMENOLOGY AS A RESEARCH METHOD**

A research method is only a way of investigating certain kinds of questions. The questions and the manner in which the questions are understood is what is important and not the method. There is however, dialectic interplay between the question and method as the way that the questions are articulated is influenced by the research method (Van Manen, 1990).

It is important to distinguish between research method and research methodology. Methodology refers to the theoretical underpinnings, the

philosophical framework including the fundamental assumptions and characteristics of a human science perspective. Van Manen (1990) states that “method” is charged with methodological considerations as well as implications.

Phenomenology as seen by Leedy (1997) refers to the individual’s personal construction of the meaning of a phenomenon, as opposed to the phenomenon as it exists out there, external to the individual. Pintrich and Schunk (1996) describe the importance of understanding the individual’s phenomenological perspective stating: *“Individuals’ personal and subjective self-perceptions are important...regardless of the “accuracy” of the perceptions ...”* (p.86). Part of what makes phenomenology so powerful is that it is methodologically free to accommodate the phenomenon or phenomena under investigation, so long as the final outcome remains in the concrete experience. The methodology of phenomenology tries to prevent constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts (Van Manen, 1990). Heidegger talked about phenomenological reflection as following certain “wood paths” towards a “clearing” (Gadamer, 1975; Rorty, 1975). The “paths” however, are not fixed signposts; they are discovered or invented as the path is walked.

This study aims to explore children’s experiences of their parents’ divorce employing a phenomenological perspective in order to develop an understanding of this phenomenon. It is, therefore, important to consider the theoretical assumptions of phenomenological methodology.

### **2.5.1 METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF PHENOMENOLOGY**

There are a number of methodological assumptions pertinent to phenomenological research. Issues such as objectivity versus subjectivity, the collection of data, the qualitative nature of phenomenological research as well as the “what” versus the “why” of phenomenological research will be discussed below in order to elucidate their relevance to research of this nature.

### **2.5.1.1 Objectivity vs. subjectivity**

An important underlying principle in phenomenological research is that it explores human experiences as reported from the individual's perspective as it attempts to understand the experienced world prior to metaphysical categorisations (Morley, 2001). As a result phenomenology is neither objective nor subjective. If perception is understood to be intentional and conscious, then the objective and subjective exist alongside each other (Valle et al., 1989). They require one another for their existence. The description of the phenomenon, through disciplined reflection, can be seen to substitute the method, while structure is the cause-effect of the content of phenomenological inquiry (Valle et al., 1989).

### **2.5.1.2 The collection of data**

The collection of data by using phenomenological methods of research facilitates the direct exploration of conscious experience. The sampling is usually the specific selection of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon that is being investigated, while the data is usually collected as spoken or written descriptions of personal experience (Osborn, 1995). Creswell (1994) states that phenomenological research involves intensive specific interaction with specific individuals in an attempt to establish patterns, themes and relationships of meaning. The task facing the existential-phenomenological psychologist is one of revealing the nature of structure in the form of meaning. It is in the describing of the phenomenon that the pre-reflective life-world is brought to the level of reflective awareness where its psychological meaning is then seen (Valle et al., 1989).



### 2.5.1.3 The qualitative nature of phenomenological research

Mouton (1986) states that the term “qualitative research” indicates that this approach concentrates on qualities of human behaviour, i.e. on the qualitative aspects as against the quantitative measurable aspects of human behaviour. This places the current research within the definition of a qualitative approach to research. Although phenomenological research is, however, usually delineated into descriptive and qualitative categories of methodology, it cannot be exclusively relegated to these classifications as it additionally focuses on the structures that create meaning in consciousness (Valle et al., 1989). Phenomenology distinguishes between that which presents itself as part of a person’s awareness and that which might exist as a reality “outside” of our existence (Valle et al., 1989). Phenomenological research is not interested however, in simply taking an inventory of facts or compiling a chronology. That which is most essential to the meaning of the experience as lived, is what is sought after.

Much phenomenological research stops at the moment of generalisation and makes little attempt to connect to sets of constructs or covering laws (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Some phenomenological methods, such as the *hermeneutical circle* used for the interpretation of texts, centre more on interpretation than on gaining firm empirical knowledge of social or natural facts. Still the aim is to construct a coherent, internally consistent argument, one with theoretical referents from a series of *empirical facts* in the form of texts, perceptions, and social acts. This process often involves multiple readings and condensations in the search for *themes* and *essences*. As a result of the empathy and familiarity (further dialogue with the participants is at times necessary), farther-ranging interpretations, often based on additional social facts, can be made.

The analytic challenge for all qualitative researchers is finding coherent descriptions and explanations that still include all the gaps, inconsistencies, and

contradictions inherent in personal and social life (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The risk is forcing the logic, the order, and the plausibility that constitute theory-making on the uneven, sometimes random, nature of social life. Yet, without theory we can be left with banal, bland descriptions that do not do justice to the complexities of human interaction, emotions and experiences.

The qualities and characteristics of qualitative research such as linguistic results, hermeneutics and narrative discourse, empathy, contextual interpretation, polydimensionality, nonlinear causality, empowerment, tentativeness of interpretation, the use of self and the convergent explication of data lend themselves to the phenomenological methodology.

#### **2.5.1.3.1 Linguistic results**

In qualitative research, the results are normally expressed and interpreted in words rather than in a numerical or statistical format. The results are typically reported in terms of describing the data or themes, based on relationships found to exist in the data. This does not, according to Stiles (1993) mean that numerical data cannot be used in qualitative research. The use of numerical data however, must always reflect the person's personal experience in the world. Another aspect of the linguistic nature of qualitative research is that it should always refer to specific, and not general events.

#### **2.5.1.3.2 Hermeneutics and narrative discourse**

According to Stiles (1993) qualitative research is characterized by hermeneutical discourses. Each interpretation is seen not as a final account or interpretation but rather as a step in a continuing cycle of reframing. Muller (1999) maintains that together with the tentative nature of hermeneutic and narrative discourse, it is important to recognise that people recount their life stories in a manner that is personally meaningful to them. That which is meaningful for children coping with

divorce is that which children will talk about. The difference between phenomenology and hermeneutics is however, that phenomenology is concerned with human experience while hermeneutics refers to the interpretation of events (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991).

#### **2.5.1.3.3 The empathic nature of qualitative research**

Empathy is an important construct of qualitative research, however it is also an observation strategy (Stiles, 1993). Stiles (1993) states that “*empathic understanding draws on the investigator’s own experience and self-knowledge and on intersubjective meanings shared within a society, as well as on a participant’s speech and behaviour*” (p.585). Empathy is, according to Stiles, a tool whereby information can be gathered, and it is this empathy that differentiates qualitative research from experimental research (Stiles, 1993). In the interpretation of qualitative data, the focus is on the empathic understanding of the subject, in comparison to the unempathic, clinical explanation and extrapolation of the results in quantitative research. It appears then that the focus of qualitative research lies in the understanding of the individual - in - context, compared to the obtained data in quantitative research (Addison, 1999; Muller, 1999).

#### **2.5.1.3.4 Contextual interpretation**

Contextual interpretation refers to the researcher and the participant’s personal and cultural history, as well as the immediate environment which is taken into account in the interpretation (Muller, 1999). This would include the setting where the participant is observed and behavioural information being recorded in the data. There is therefore a broader context, a macro-context, as well as an immediate, micro-context, that needs to be taken into account (Van Rensburg, 2001).

#### **2.5.1.3.5 Polydimensionality of experience**

The term polydimensionality refers not only to experiences including various dimensions but also that there is a dynamic interaction between these dimensions. Stiles (1993) refers to the term *polydimensional* rather than multidimensional as the latter does not recognise the interactional nature of the different dimensions. Leedy (1997) emphasizes the polydimensionality of qualitative research. Each person's behaviour, ideas, language and experiences vary not only on an inter-level but also on an intra-level and involve different dimensions.

#### **2.5.1.3.6 Nonlinear causality**

Qualitative research accommodates nonlinear causality. Nonlinear systems, in which elements feed back to influence their own subsequent behaviour, often behave in unpredictable or even chaotic ways. Stiles (1993) maintains that most systems involving human experience or behaviour are nonlinear and potentially chaotic. This chaotic system refers to what Leedy (1997) explained as a chain-reaction or cybernetic-feedback process. There is also a chain-reaction of choices that the individual goes through and results in the cybernetic feedback. These chain-reactions are often only retrospectively identifiable by the researcher and participants (Van Rensburg, 2001).

#### **2.5.1.3.7 Empowerment as a research tool**

Empowerment or enhancement of participants has been advocated by many qualitative commentators as a legitimate or even central purpose of research (Stiles, 1993). The imposition of an interpretation on participants' experiences can be seen to influence the participants personally as well as being a scientific act. It is therefore, considered to be important that construction of interpretations

should further the participants' interests rather than maintaining vested interests, and participants should be involved in the construction of the interpretations.

#### **2.5.1.3.8 Tentative interpretations**

Qualitative research's aim is to understand rather than to predict and therefore hypotheses are tentative. Researchers do try to develop general theories, interpretations and hypotheses but recognize the contextual nature of the findings (Addison, 1999). Should the context change the theory, interpretation and hypotheses would also change. Lawlike generalisations, as found in experimental research are therefore, not important. The focus is on attaining a "fit" for the context rather than generalisability (Muller, 1999).

#### **2.5.1.3.9 The use of self in research**

Rew, Bechtel and Sapp (1993) emphasize that in qualitative research the self plays an important role as an instrument in the research process. Barnes (1992) states that the participants should see the researcher's role as being one of an "observer as participant". It is, therefore, important that the role of the self needs to be clearly described and defined. The researcher needs to make sure that the participants understand that the interview is *not of a therapeutic nature*; the researcher should *remain authentic* by being cognisant of personal theoretical perspectives, values etc. held, that may influence collection and interpretation of data; the researcher needs to ensure the *reliability* of the data collected by using scientifically acceptable methods to collect; be *intuitively attuned* to the participants; being *sensitive* to the experiences of the participants as well as using this sensitivity to assist in the data collection and lastly, the researcher should be open and *receptive* to the participants' experiences.

#### **2.5.1.3.10 Convergent explication of data**

Addison (1999) states that an important characteristic of qualitative research is the convergent explication of the data. Eventually the different facts need to be integrated in order to arrive at a conclusion. This includes the integration of verbal and non-verbal data.

#### **2.5.1.4 The “what” vs the “why” of phenomenological research**

Phenomenological research focuses on the “*what?*” rather than on the “*why?*” of phenomena (Goldstein, 2003). Kvale (1996) suggests that phenomenology is a method of obtaining knowledge using the meanings given by the participants themselves rather than through outside manipulations.

It is important to note that the researcher assumes that the participant’s frame of reference is revealed through a process of interpretations, perceptions and decisions made by the participants in the past that continue in the present (Bogdan, 1975). The phenomenological method enables the researcher to move away from an active interaction or dialogue with the world and the object under investigation, to a reflection upon it (Owen, 1994a). The phenomenologist attempts to examine the phenomenon as it appears in the person’s consciousness. In collecting the data the process demands that the individual’s awareness is directed towards their own experience (Valle et al., 1989). Polkinghorne (1989) refers to this verbal data that the phenomenologist deals with as “*verbal portraits*” (p.45).

While a phenomenologically-based study is founded on phenomenological principles it is important that for each particular study the theoretical underpinnings suit the particular phenomenon or experience being studied. As a result the plan of the study is usually only determined during the research process rather than being determined before the study begins. In order to reach

an understanding valid for the participants, the process evolves as the process takes place.

## **2.5.2 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY IN PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH**

*“Phenomenology deals with structures and totalities of experience, not with discrete units of data”* (Walter, 2000, p.116). Validity and reliability are then interwoven into the process that unfolds as the meaning of the experience is revealed. The validity of phenomenological research depends greatly on the power of the descriptions and the meaningfulness of the psychological units developed to convince the reader of its accuracy (Goldstein, 2003; Polkinghorne, 1989). As the meaning expressed by the data is usually retrieved and selected by the researcher, it is inevitable that there is some subjectivity in transforming the raw data. It is, therefore, also possible that another researcher will interpret some of the raw data differently and the categories may differ slightly.

The aim of phenomenological research is to explore meaning rather than quantifiable facts and statistics. It stands to reason then that the criteria applicable for establishing the scientific rigour of quantitative research cannot be employed in qualitative research (Malterud, 2001). Malterud (2001) suggests the criteria such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are more applicable. Credibility corresponds with internal validity, confirmability with objectivity, and transferability with generalisability. Miles and Huberman (1994) also give recognition to the fact that qualitative research deals with real people in real situations. Holding to a rather “critical realist” position, as described by Miles and Huberman five main issues:

- the objectivity/confirmability of qualitative research;
- reliability/dependability/ auditability;
- internal validity/credibility/authenticity;
- external validity/transferability/fitness; and
- utilization/application/action orientation

will be discussed.

### **2.5.2.1 The objectivity/confirmability of qualitative research**

The basic issue here is one of relative neutrality and reasonable freedom from unacknowledged researcher biases. It is at least concerned with explicitness about the inevitable biases that exist. Guba and Lincoln (1981) ask the question whether the conclusions depend on the subjects and conditions of the inquiry, rather than on the inquirer as a means to ascertain whether the researcher has remained objective. As this term is linked to the term “external reliability” the emphasis is on the replicability of the study by others.

### **2.5.2.2 Reliability/dependability/auditability**

Whether the process of the research is consistent and whether it is reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods are the issues that reliability addresses. Kirk and Miller (1986) distinguish between three types of reliability:-

- *Diachronic* reliability - which has to do with stability of the observations over time,
- *Synchronic* reliability - is concerned with stability of the results within the same time frame, and
- *Quixotic* reliability - which points to the danger of multiple respondents who give a monolithic, party-line answer.

### **2.5.2.3 Internal validity/credibility/authenticity**

This is possibly the most crucial issue in that it refers to whether the results of the study are credible to the participants, are they a true reflection of that which they reported or experience. Is it true to their perception?



Maxwell (1992) differentiates between the types of understanding that may emerge from a qualitative study:-

- A *Descriptive Understanding* - an understanding of that which happened in specific situations,
- An *Interpretive Understanding* - an understanding of what it meant to the people involved,
- A *Theoretical Understanding* - an understanding of the concepts and their relationships, used to explain actions and meanings,
- An *Evaluative Understanding* - an understanding of the judgements of the worth or value of actions and meanings.

Miles and Huberman (1994) use Warner's concept of "*natural*" validity, which is the idea that the events and settings studied are uncontrived, unmodified by the researcher's presence and actions. This is however debatable as merely being present to observe an event changes the setting.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest the importance of such aspects as "*apparency*" and "*verisimilitude*" (Van Maanen, 1988) "*authenticity*", "*plausibility*" and "*adequacy*" among others. Kvale (1989) emphasises validity as being a process of checking, questioning and theorizing data as a strategy for establishing rule-based correspondence between the issue of choosing among competing explanations.

#### **2.5.2.4 External validity/transferability/fittingness**

It is important that the conclusions of a study are transferable to other contexts. Firestone (1993) suggests three levels of generalization:

- from sample to population, which is less helpful for qualitative studies,
- analytic, which is theory-connected,
- case-to-case transfer.

Maxwell (1992) also speaks of *theoretical* validity as a more abstract explanation of described actions and interpreted meanings. Such explanations could be

considered as *internal* validity, but they gain added power if they are connected to theoretical networks beyond the immediate study. Generalisability, he suggests, requires such connection-making, either to unstudied parts of the original case or to other cases.

Miles and Huberman (1994) stress however, that generalising is far from a mechanical process, as it is more like translating, refuting or synthesising two or more studies of similar phenomenon. It is careful interpretation, not just “adding up”.

#### **2.5.2.5 Utilization/application/action orientation**

Even if a study’s findings are valid and transferable, it is important to understand what the research has done for the participants, both the researchers and the researched. Miles and Huberman (1994) call this *pragmatic validity*. Both the researched and the researchers should gain from the study, i.e. they should be “better off” for having participated in the research.

## **2.6 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN**

Danaher and Briod (2005) state that the experiential threshold to a child – as – child can only be opened through exploring the child’s world as the child experiences, remembers and re-imagines it. To develop an understanding of a phenomenon experienced by children requires that a methodological framework be adopted that facilitates the collection of data that strengthens a sense of what it means to *be* a child, to live in the world *as* a child. Children’s “lived in” experiences can be approached phenomenologically by means of essentialist, existentialist, and hermeneutic inquiry (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Husserl's "rigorous discipline" as seen in the essentialist orientation, aims at understanding the essence of life experiences. Embodied in this essentialist thinking is the concept of intentionality. In Section 2.4.3 the notions of consciousness and intentionality are discussed. In developing an understanding of children's "lived in" experiences the personal meanings that they attach to their experiences, and their awareness of their world need to be explored. It is this intentionality that creates meaning and significance in the child's consciousness of the "lived in" world.

In research with children, hermeneutic phenomenology is the discovery of meanings that children attach to that which they communicate, both verbally and non-verbally. This development of meaning is derived from interplay between the narrative discourses obtained and the researcher's own memories (Danaher & Briod, 2005).

It is this interplay, a hermeneutic circle, that enables a new understanding of children's experiences of a phenomenon, such as divorce, to be developed. Furthermore, a phenomenological framework gives recognition to the children's intentionality in their making of meaning of their experiences.

## **2.7 CONCLUSIONS**

Notwithstanding all of the above,

*"the best measure of generalisability, reliability and validity in (phenomenological) research, however, is ultimately in the correspondence between the results obtained and the experiences you, the reader, yourself have had"* (Register & Henley, 1992, p.472).

In a truly phenomenological approach, the meaning created by the participants' own experience is all-important. The participants may be those being observed, those doing the observing or those observing the observer, and different meanings need to be expected and respected.

In conclusion then, phenomenology attempts to describe essential structures of experiences. It is a methodological framework that can be used to assist in the development of the theory of knowledge. This study is approached from a phenomenological philosophical paradigm. This framework facilitates the development of an understanding of the person's personal experience in the world that they find themselves in, and the meaning that they make of their perceptions. Exploring these meanings lends itself to the development of *new* understandings and theories. For the purposes of this study a qualitative research methodology is used in the form of grounded theory in order to develop a basic understanding of children coping with divorce from their personal perspectives. Grounded theory facilitates the development of new understandings, within the phenomenological framework of understanding the 'lived in' experience.

In Chapter 3, grounded theory as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and by Strauss and Corbin (1998) is discussed. In adopting a phenomenological perspective for this study the children's lived-in experiences are acknowledged and obtained. By using a grounded theory methodology the data (the children's perspectives) is allowed to "speak out" and reveal itself. From this a new understanding is then built regarding children's coping with divorce and the coping strategies that they employ.

## CHAPTER 3

### GROUNDED THEORY

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Although qualitative researchers strive to be anti-positivistic, holistic or inclusive and explanatory, it needs to be recognised that they often hold different perspectives on qualitative research dependent on their world-views or personal philosophies (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Qualitative research is particularly well suited to exploring subjective experiences, perspectives and meanings and is therefore particularly well suited to the present study's epistemological frame of reference, being that of a phenomenological paradigm as discussed in chapter 2 (Polkinghorne, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory bridges the gap between traditional positivistic and explanatory methods, especially in disciplines such as sociology and psychology where quantification is seen to be important (Charmaz, 1995). In comparison to the more traditional methods of verification, grounded theory offers a systematic approach to the understanding of meaningful aspects of human experiences. It investigates personal experiences and subjective meaning, but adheres to empirical principles and provides specific research procedures (Botha, 2004). These methods can, therefore, be used within the most explanatory to the most structured analyses depending on the researcher's epistemological framework (Charmaz, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) propose four reasons for conducting qualitative research. *The nature of the research problem* may necessitate a qualitative approach and *the researcher's preference or experience* often leads the researcher into choosing qualitative research. The need to *explore new "territory"* when little is known about the topic or a new understanding is sought, and lastly the *exploring of intricate processes* within a phenomenon are further reasons for which qualitative research is necessary. The qualitative approach is used to

obtain an understanding of the intricate details about phenomena that are difficult to extract or learn about, such as emotions and thought processes.

There are three important underlying assumptions to the use of grounded theory as a research methodology, namely that all the particular concepts relevant to a specific topic have not been identified, the relationship between the different concepts is not fully understood, and the concepts are conceptually undeveloped (Charmaz, 1995; Ertmer, 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The components and characteristics of qualitative research will be briefly discussed below. This will be followed by a brief outline of the development of grounded theory as a methodology together with a discussion on the relationship between phenomenology and grounded theory. Finally, the specific grounded theory research procedure adopted for this research will be discussed.

### **3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

The term qualitative research holds different meanings for different people. It is therefore somewhat problematic to develop a generally acceptable definition (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Schurink, 1998a). Qualitative research is defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.10) as: *“any research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification”*.

This is a very broad and accepting definition. The authors concede that some data can be quantified but state that the greater part of the analysis is interpretive. Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p.3) define qualitative research methods as attempting *“to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”*.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) there are three main components to qualitative research:

- The *data*, which is obtained from various sources such as interviews, observations, documents, records and films.
- The *procedures* that researchers use to interpret and organize the data. These usually consist of conceptualising and reducing data, creating categories, and relating the concepts through a series of prepositional statements. This is often referred to as coding.
- The *reports* both of a written and verbal nature are the third component.

Schurink and Schurink (1988) outline five characteristics of qualitative research. Qualitative research primarily uses *participant observation*, in-depth interviews or personal documentation, as methods of data collection. Secondly, it is not possible to conduct qualitative research in clearly demarcated phases, as a *continuous interplay* between the different steps of qualitative research occurs, resulting in the different phases evolving parallel to each other. Furthermore, qualitative research is *flexible*, as it does not have to follow refined or standardised rules. Qualitative research is *inductive* in nature as it constructs concepts, generalisations, models and theories from the understandings of the subjects themselves (Finch, 1986). Data is seldom collected to prove previously developed models, hypotheses or theories. Lastly, qualitative researchers see the person as a *holistic* being and they try to study phenomena in their entirety without reducing them to separate components.

For the purposes of this study qualitative research is described as a multifaceted perspective on social interaction employed to describe, give meaning to, interpret and reconstruct social interaction in terms of the meaning that the participants have attached to the phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Schurink, 1998a).

### **3.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF GROUNDED THEORY**

Grounded theory as a methodology was developed in the mid -1960s by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. It derives its philosophy from

that of George H. Mead's symbolic interactionism (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). Glaser and Strauss tried to bridge the growing divide between theory and empirical research (Charmaz, 1995; Ertmer, 1997). They sought an alternative approach to research through which adequate sociological theory could be developed. They felt that the existing theories, especially the structuralist and functionalist theories that predominated at the time, were either too abstract or too poorly developed to be tested (Well, 1995). They were particularly critical about (a) the arbitrary division between theory and research that existed; (b) the view that qualitative research was primarily a forerunner to more stringent and acceptable quantitative research methods; (c) the view that qualitative research was impressionistic and unsystematic; (d) the division that existed between the phases of data collection and analysis, and (e) the thinking that qualitative research was only capable of producing descriptive case studies rather than being able to developing theories (Charmaz, 1995).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) set out clear guidelines for conducting qualitative research. The methodology was presented as an alternative strategy to the traditional scientific approaches, where there was an emphasis on theory verification. However, it was not predicated, as has sometimes been assumed, on a rejection of the possibility of a science of human behaviour, or hypothesis testing, or of experimental designs or qualitative data (Babchuk, 1997; Wells, 1995). Grounded theory made it possible to conduct qualitative research in different disciplines such as education, nursing and organisational studies (Charmaz, 1995).

The continued development of grounded theory nevertheless did not continue without controversy. In later publications two different forms of grounded theory, each with its own underlying epistemology began to develop (Babchuk, 1997). Glaser and Strauss continued to publish articles and books in their own capacities and as co-authors (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998; Strauss 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). Glaser's (1992) critique on Strauss and Corbin's (1990)



work highlighted the differences between the two scholars' thinking. Glaser (1992) maintained that Strauss' version should rather be presented as a new methodology, which he called "*full conceptual description*". In essence, Glaser's (1992) criticism against Strauss revolved around his concern that Strauss' methods appear to test or verify hypotheses that are contrary to grounded theory's approach to discovering concepts. He felt that Strauss imposed excessive use of techniques and rules and ultimately that his approach did not allow for the generation of new theories by the data.

Although the differences between these two theorists may appear to be insignificant, Babchuk (1997) states that the differences have important implications for grounded theory. He explains that the differences between Glaser's and Strauss' versions of grounded theory are a result of epistemological and methodological differences. Glaser's approach falls into the qualitative paradigm. His is a more laissez-faire, flexible methodology that is primarily guided by the participants and their socially constructed realities. Although Strauss is committed to gaining insight into the participants' realities, he appears to be more concerned with producing a detailed description of the cultural setting. Strauss (1987) outlines definite guidelines and techniques for data analysis and he places emphasis on grounded theory retaining scientific principles such as replicability, generalisability, precision, significance, and verification. This tends to place Strauss' approach within the scientific doctrines.

For the purposes of this study the data collecting and data analysis methods of Glaser and Strauss (1967), and Strauss and Corbin's (1990) were combined. The grounded theory approach was selected as it "fits" with the epistemological framework adopted, because children's own perspectives on coping within the context/culture of divorce is under investigation, rather than children's coping *per se*. Babchuk (1997) notes that grounded theory has been used in varying and different forms although he expresses some concern about whether this may be a result of researchers not fully understanding the methodology or whether this is

a strength of the methodology. Possibly it is neither, or both. However, grounded theory allows for the emergence of new understandings, possibly the unexpected, to emerge as a phenomenon is researched. As the research questions, themes, new understandings and theories, all emerge while the data collection and analysis take place, they all influence each other. This can be seen as an ongoing, continually evolving process and therefore the methodology itself is influencing itself and evolving as it is employed and studied, allowing for new understandings to be developed.

### **3.4 PHENOMENOLOGY AND GROUNDED THEORY**

Phenomenology is a school of thought in which the study of phenomena, the appearance of things and the discovery of their essence, is explored (as discussed in Chapter 2). The theoretical assumptions of empirical phenomenological research flow from this, namely to describe the world as experienced by the participants in order to discover the common meanings underlying empirical variations of a given phenomenon (Baker, Wuest & Stern, 1992).

Glaser (1978) states that grounded theory allows the researcher to discover that which is “going on”. The researcher’s purpose in using a grounded theory methodology is therefore to explain a given social situation by identifying the core and subsidiary processes operating in it. The core process is the guiding principle underlying what is occurring in the situation and dominates the analysis because it links most of the other processes involved in an explanatory network. Consistent with grounded theory’s theoretical underpinnings, the grounded theory method generates inductively based theoretical explanations of social and psychosocial processes (Baker, Wuest & Stern, 1992).

Baker, Wuest and Stern (1992) however, discuss differences between phenomenology and grounded theory in terms of the role of literature and

previous knowledge, the sources of data, sampling procedures, data collection and analysis techniques and validity. As a result of these differences they conclude that the different qualitative research methodologies should be clearly explicated in terms of their data collection and analysis methods. Failure to do so results in method slurring, muddling or blurring. Baker et al. (1992) maintain that although both phenomenology and grounded theory methodologies focus on the richness of human experiences and seek to understand a situation from the subject's own perspective there are fundamental differences. They are based on different intellectual assumptions and as a result they have clear differences in purpose and methodological prescriptions. The researcher therefore needs to be clear as to the reasons for choosing a particular methodology to prevent method slurring. Method slurring occurs when researchers use one methodology together with another but fail to recognise this. When different methodologies are combined without recognising the combination of the elements or of the influence this exerts on the findings, method slurring occurs.

Furthermore, it is imperative that the chosen method is congruent with the research question (Baker et al., 1992; Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). This further assists in preventing method slurring. Although the research question should be congruent with the methodology, Wimpenny and Gass (2000) maintain that often the method of interviewing used to gather the data is discussed inappropriately within the methodological paradigm from which it should originate. The interviewing technique of gathering data fits within the phenomenological approach as it enables the researcher to gather information regarding a phenomenon from the participant's personal perspective and experience. Within grounded theory however, interviewing is only one of a number of techniques that are available to the researcher. However, that does not preclude it from being an acceptable method of data collection for the grounded theorist.

Annells (2006) suggests that two qualitative approaches can be used in a study when the researcher wishes to illuminate a topic of interest about which little is

known, as long as the integrity of the methodologies is recognised and maintained. Hermeneutic phenomenology and grounded theory can be used in the same study as long as it is determined that there is a good “fit” of the approaches not only with the research problem and question, but also with each other, while maintaining the integrity of each approach. Annells (2006) states that if the understanding that is produced is plausible and relevant to the participants it is possible that this debate is irrelevant.

Grounded theory allows for such an understanding to be developed within the paradigm of phenomenological research. Rennie (2000) found that the realism-relativism duality addressed by grounded theory in qualitative research is best accounted for when the method is understood to be an inductive approach to hermeneutics. A phenomenological paradigm facilitates the collection of data that is of a hermeneutical origin, being relevant to the participants. Grounded theory then provides a method for deriving a coherent logic for the participants’ experiences.

A deeper understanding of children’s experiences can be developed by using a phenomenological approach (Omizo & Omizo, 1990) as this approach facilitates the collection of data relating to phenomena relevant to children as experienced by children. This information can then be used to gain a richer, deeper and more thorough understanding of their experiences.

In conclusion, the lived-in-experiences of the children as described by them are the data that have been collected in order to investigate the research question of this study, namely that of children’s coping with divorce from the children’s perspectives. The discussion of the theoretical assumptions of phenomenology as a research method in section 2.5 indicates how a phenomenological framework enables the researcher to collect data of a qualitative and narrative nature within the context of children coping with divorce while not holding any preconceived notions. In order to develop a deeper, fuller understanding of their

coping and the strategies that they employ in coping with divorce, a grounded theory approach to the data analysis has been adopted. A grounded theory methodology enables the data to remain true to the children's personal perceptions of their coping but integrates this data into a storyline that creates a new understanding of their coping within the context of divorce. The researcher is of the opinion that by using these two methodological approaches in this manner the integrity of both approaches is maintained, while being able to address the research question competently.

### **3.5 THE RESEARCH PROCEDURE**

Grounded theory is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures and employs an inductive process in order to develop theories regarding phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A process of logical and consistent procedures is used to collect and analyse the data with a view to identifying and elucidating relationships between concepts, and in so doing developing theories pertinent to the phenomena being researched (Charmaz, 1995; Ertmer, 1997; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory allows the theory to emerge from the collected data rather than imposing preconceived understandings or hypotheses upon the data.

The research characteristics particular to grounded theory can be summarised as follows: The data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously, and analytical codes and categories are developed from the data itself, while simultaneously, theories are developed in an attempt to explain behavioural/interactional processes. Both Glaser (1992) and Strauss (1987) stress the importance of the writing of notes/memos whilst coding the data, to explain and develop categories, and in the process to facilitate the emergence of theories. Theoretical sampling is used when the required sample is not available to further develop the theories and to achieve saturation of the poorly developed

categories. The literature study is conducted later in the research process rather than in the beginning (Charmaz, 1995).

Data collection and analysis begin with the first interview and data collection possibly only ends when the research is reported on. There is a constant interplay between the researcher and the research act. As this interplay requires immersion in the data, the researcher is by the end of the inquiry shaped by the data, just as the data is shaped by the researcher. The challenge for the researcher is to remain objective while being part of and sensitive to, the process. Objectivity is necessary to arrive at an impartial and accurate interpretation of the events. Sensitivity is required to perceive nuances and meanings in data and to recognise the connections between meanings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The manner in which literature is used together with theoretical sensitivity, is an important aspect in grounded theory and differentiates it from other methods of research. Before exploring the concept of theoretical sensitivity, the need to maintain an objective position will be briefly discussed.

### **3.5.1 MAINTAINING AN OBJECTIVE POSITION**

It is generally accepted that it is impossible for researchers to remain completely objective whilst conducting both qualitative and quantitative research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is important to recognise however, that researchers need to take appropriate measures to ensure that they remain as objective as possible. In qualitative research objectivity does not mean controlling the variables, but rather recognising the participant's views and representing them as accurately as possible. Furthermore, the researcher needs to recognise that the participant's views may be different from any personal values, understandings, knowledge and experiences that the researcher may bring to the research process (Bresler, 1995; Cheek, 1996). Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe five techniques to assist in maintaining objectivity whilst using a grounded theory approach to research:

- *Thinking comparatively* - By comparing incidents/data with one another the researcher is helped to remain grounded in the data. Comparing the data with similar phenomena in the literature assists in stimulating the researcher's thinking.
- *Multiple viewpoint* - Either gaining information from a number of participants on an event or gathering information on an event in various different ways assists in obtaining varied meanings and interpretations of a phenomenon. These variations can then be built into the theory resulting in a rich theory that allows for differences in perceptions and meaning of the same phenomenon.
- *Stepping back* – Stepping back and asking the questions “what is happening here?” and “does what I think I see fit the reality of the data?” helps the researcher to remain focused on the participants' perceptions and meaning.
- *Scepticism* - Maintaining an attitude of scepticism and holding the view that all explanations, categories, hypotheses and questions about the data are provisional. These need to be validated against further collected data. This is especially important for concepts taken from literature in order to make certain that the concepts fit for that particular piece of research.
- *Following the correct procedure* - Whilst there are a variety of analytical techniques available in grounded theory, the process of making comparisons, asking questions, and sampling based on evolving theoretical concepts being applied in a skilful and fluid manner, is essential for maintaining objectivity.

Ultimately it is essential to maintain a workable balance between objectivity and sensitivity.

### **3.5.2 THEORETICAL SENSITIVITY**

This concept refers to a personal quality of the researcher and indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning in the data so that theory can be conceptualised and formulated as it emerges from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this manner theory is formulated that reflects the phenomenon that is being investigated. Theoretical sensitivity allows for the development of grounded, conceptually rich and well integrated theory (De Vos & Van Zyl, 1998). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990) there are two main sources of theoretical sensitivity, viz. a good knowledge of the technical literature as well as of the researcher's own professional and personal experiences, and the research process itself, whereby sustained interaction with the data enriches the researcher's knowledge.

According to De Vos and Van Zyl (1998), theoretical sensitivity refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand and the capacity to separate the pertinent from that which is not pertinent. This is all done in conceptual rather than concrete terms.

Depending on the researcher's previous experiences and theoretical knowledge of the particular aspect being researched, the study can be approached with varying degrees of sensitivity.

#### **3.5.2.1 Literature**

This includes reading widely about theories, research and documentation. By becoming well acquainted with the phenomenon being researched the researcher's confidence is increased; and enriched background knowledge sensitizes the researcher to the subtleties of the phenomenon being researched (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).



### **3.5.2.2 Professional experience**

Professional experience provides the researcher with implicit knowledge about how aspects in a particular field function, as well as why and under what particular circumstances certain aspects occur. This implicit knowledge of the researcher enriches the available knowledge and insight during the research process. The researcher needs to guard against allowing personal understanding to influence that which is observed. The participant's perception is being researched and is of importance. It does help, however, if the researcher has a comparative base in which a range of meanings by others can be compared, together with a beginning list of properties and dimensions of categories that assist in developing a greater understanding of the participant's explanations (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998).

### **3.5.2.3 Personal experience**

Personal experience can increase sensitivity if used correctly. Personal experience can assist in developing an understanding of that phenomenon. As with professional experience, it can assist in developing a comparative base for asking questions. A pitfall of having personal experience of that which is being researched however, is that the researcher may think that everyone experiences that phenomenon in a similar manner (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998).

### **3.5.2.4 The process of analysis**

The collection and questioning of data, making comparisons, developing hypotheses, developing a theoretical framework regarding concepts and their relationships and the thought processes that occur throughout, all act to increase the researcher's insight and understanding of the phenomenon that is being researched. The value of an increased sensitivity regarding concepts, meaning and relatedness emphasises the importance of data collection and analysis as an

integrated process. The dynamic interplay that occurs increases the insight and understanding of the parameters of the developing theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Theoretical sensitivity represents an important aspect of grounded theory. It refers to the ability of the researcher to use both professional and personal experiences as well as literature to develop theory that contributes to scientific practice (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To ensure that the researcher does not just think creatively or merely describe a phenomenon, Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that the researcher should periodically stand back and question whether that which has occurred has in fact been observed, whether it is the reality. A critical, sceptical approach should be maintained throughout and the research process should be followed correctly and not deviated from.

The use of literature plays an important role in the grounded theory approach to research, as is the case in other approaches. The use of literature is discussed below.

### **3.5.3 THE USE OF LITERATURE**

Technical (published) as well as non-technical material (other material that is not published and may be recorded in a written, auditory or visual manner) play an important role in grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that it is not necessary for the researcher to review all the relevant literature on a phenomenon prior to beginning the research process. It is impossible to know, prior to the investigation, what the salient problems will be, nor is it helpful to be so steeped in the literature that it stifles creative thinking. Once a concept is completely developed the literature can be consulted in order to ascertain whether the concept exists and what other researchers' opinions are (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In grounded theory the literature study is delayed until later in the

research process, once the conceptual analysis of the data has been completed (Charmaz, 1995).

### **3.6 THE RESEARCH QUESTION IN GROUNDED THEORY**

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) the main purpose of using the grounded theory method is to develop theory. Grounded theory differs from traditional deductive research and has a different set of assumptions from that of traditional qualitative research. The inductive nature of the methods requires an openness and flexibility in the researcher and of the study (Charmaz, 1995). Normally the researcher will begin with a broad research question that allows for flexibility and freedom, so that the topic can be researched in depth. Although the initial question starts out broadly, it becomes progressively narrower and more focused during the research process as concepts and their relationships are discovered to be relevant or irrelevant. The research question identifies the general focus of the study and is action-and process-oriented. It determines which aspects are focused on during data collection and analysis (Ertmer, 1997).

The researcher follows the clues, being personal understandings and interpretations, those that come from the data and not from a comprehensive and exhaustive literature review (Charmaz, 1995). The theory is seen as being grounded, as it has been developed from the collected data and not from predetermined concepts or hypotheses. The starting point is therefore to move from individual accounts to the general, being a theory (Ertmer, 1997; Huysamen, 1993).

### **3.7 DATA COLLECTION IN GROUNDED THEORY**

Data collection and analysis are the same process where earlier analysis directs the later data collection (Ertmer, 1997; Strauss, 1987). Techniques for data collection include: participant observation; interpretation of documents and

reports; individual interviews; focus groups; and audio-visual material (De Vos & Fouché, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Initial interview questions or areas of observation might be based on concepts derived from the literature and/or experience. Although these early concepts are not theoretically relevant to the development of the theory, they serve as a valuable starting point for the data collection. Once the data collection begins, the initial interview or observational guides give way to concepts that emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The use of interviews in data collection and the different methods of data sampling, including theoretical sampling, sampling during open coding, axial coding and selective coding will be briefly discussed followed by an explanation of theoretical saturation. All these process occur simultaneously.

### **3.7.1 INTERVIEWS**

Interviews are a popular form of data collection in grounded theory, especially as they are the most comprehensive and inclusive method to gain information (Charmaz, 1995). The purpose of conducting interviews is to generate theory from the participants. Kvale (1992b) suggests that qualitative interviews (being conversations between people), provide insight into the subjective world-view.

The types of interviews that can be used to collect data range on a continuum from structured to unstructured interviews. Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommend unstructured interviews because the use of rigid guidelines can seriously limit the amount and content of data collected. The qualitative nature of unstructured interviews offers room and freedom to explore the phenomenon being researched (Fontana & Frey, 1994). In essence, unstructured interviewing can be described as social interaction between two people in order to obtain research-relevant information. An attempt is made to try to determine how people experience their life world, “a closed world”, and how they make meaning out of

that which happens to them ( De Vos & Fouché, 1998; Huysamen, 1993; Kvale, 1996; Schurink, 1998c).

It is important that the researcher is equipped with certain interviewing and observational skills in order to conduct research of this nature successfully. These skills include knowing how to approach the participants, ask questions, make observations, obtain documents, and record videotapes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

To prevent the possibility of participants' feelings and beliefs being blocked, general questions about the topic under discussion are used such as: " What do you think about...?" " How do you feel...?" "How has ... been for you?" This type of questioning directs the interview without its being dictative (Huysamen, 1993; Smith, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Smith (1995) suggests neutral questions rather than judgmental or leading questions; that the questions be couched in a manner that is congruent with the participant's language usage to assist the participants to feel relaxed and understand the questions easily; and that open questions rather than closed questions be used, as this helps the participants to express their feelings and thoughts as guidelines when developing questions. According to Smith (1995) it is important to create a rapport with the participants, arrange or order the questions logically, investigate interesting comments, and to investigate the interests and concerns of the participants when conducting unstructured interviews.

The analysis of the data that is obtained from the unstructured interview rests on the record of the data that is taken (Huysamen, 1993). It is advisable to audiotape the interviews together with keeping a good record of facts such as time, date and place of the participants. Comprehensive notes about the interview should be kept, which can assist in highlighting the need for further data collection during further interviews and analysis (Huysamen, 1993; Strauss &

Corbin, 1998). The keeping of records will be discussed in more detail in Section 3.7.5.

### **3.7.2 SAMPLING**

In grounded theory it is advisable to select more than one case in order to increase the possibility of similarities and differences in the data collected being revealed (Ertmer, 1997). Participants are normally selected by a process of snowball/chain referral sampling, or by purposeful sample selection. *Snowball sampling* refers to a process whereby the researcher selects one participant out of the population to interview. The participant then refers the researcher to another possible participant and this continues until all group members have been included, or the sample is deemed to be large enough to offer diversity (Huysamen, 1993; Schurink, 1998b). *Purposeful sample* selection refers to the process whereby individual cases or experiences are selected. As the data is collected, analysed, and categories and themes identified, other cases are selected in order to gain further relevant information until information saturation occurs (Charmaz, 1995; Huysamen, 1993; Schurink, 1998b).

Both sampling processes result in a continual dynamic interplay between the data that is being collected, the concepts that are being revealed and the researcher's perception of that which still needs to be investigated further. In grounded theory, sampling occurs according to guidelines and theoretical sampling is used to guide the collection of data (Charmaz, 1995). Theoretical sampling occurring along with the sampling of data through open coding, axial coding and purposeful coding will be discussed below.

#### **3.7.2.1 Theoretical sampling**

In grounded theory the collection of data, using the snowball sampling method or the purposeful sampling method, is controlled by the developing theory.

Theoretical sampling is the process whereby the researcher jointly collects, records, codes and analyses data and constantly decides what data are to be collected next, and where the data should be collected in order to develop a theory as it emerges from the data (Schurink, 1998b; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Theoretical sampling permeates the whole sampling process, regardless of whether snowball sampling or purposeful sampling is used. Furthermore, concepts form the basis of the analysis in grounded theory and the goal of all procedures is to identify, develop and compare concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Theoretical sampling can be seen as data collection that is controlled by the concepts that emerge from the developing theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is based on concepts that are revealed during the analysis and that are theoretically relevant for the developing theory. The concepts are seen to be relevant if:

- they repeatedly appear, either visibly or by default, whenever basic incidents are compared,
- they are confirmed to be categories by the coding procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The aim of theoretical sampling is to maximise opportunities to compare events, incidents, or happenings in order to determine how a category varies in terms of its properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Theoretical sampling is cumulative, as each additional sampled event builds from and adds to previous data collection and analysis. This occurs on a general level during the beginning of the research process but becomes more specific as the research process and the theory emerges (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Usually sampling is aimed at a general theme or problem area rather than being based on a preconceived theoretical framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The focus is on the generating of as many categories as possible. As long as categories are being identified the focus remains on the development, improving and refining of categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Consistency is very important in theoretical sampling as systematic comparisons of categories ensure that every category is fully developed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is important that theoretical sampling should be thought through and planned carefully rather than letting it occur haphazardly although it also needs to be flexible as rigid adherence to procedures can hinder the analytic process and stifle creativity. Sampling and analysis should happen sequentially with analysis guiding data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The more sensitive a researcher is to the theoretical relevance of certain concepts, the more likely it is that he or she will recognise indicators of those concepts in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Sensitivity develops with time and therefore, the researcher can legitimately return to data and records and recode them and also use future data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Sampling and data collection are an integrated process and are guided by the logic and aim of the three basic types of coding procedures that are used during the data analysis. Strauss and Corbin (1998) outlined these processes, which are discussed below.

### **3.7.2.2 Sampling during open coding**

The aim of open coding is to discover, name, and categorise phenomena according to their properties and dimensions. It follows that the aim of data gathering at this stage is to keep the collection process open to all possibilities. Sampling of people, places, and situations should be conducted in a manner to provide the greatest opportunities for discovery (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

As no concepts have proven theoretical relevance at this stage, the researcher does not know where to look for variations along the lines of their properties and dimensions. Selection of interviewees or observational sites is relatively open. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) it is advantageous not to structure data gathering too tightly with regard to timing, participants or place as holding



theoretical conceptions in mind early in the research process can result in relevant concepts being missed in the analysis. Data collection should be followed immediately by analysis as this guides further data collection.

Open sampling can be carried out using different approaches. *Purposeful sampling* occurs where the researcher looks for people, sites, or events where data can be gathered that relate specifically to categories and their properties and dimensions. *Systematic sampling* is where the researcher systematically works through a list of people or places on a list. This is a practical method that allows for consistency in data collection. *Unexpected sampling* occurs when the researcher unexpectedly happens upon significant events, and is often a result of theoretical sensitivity. *Returning to the data sampling* refers to where the data is reorganised into theoretically relevant concepts.

In this study, *systematic sampling* was used primarily in the beginning although *purposeful sampling* occurred further into the research process when it became evident that some concepts needed to be further investigated and explored. *Unexpected sampling* occurred throughout the research process as unexpected concepts were revealed and therefore required further exploration. Throughout the analysis of the data a process of *returning to the data sampling* took place as the data was reorganised into concepts and categories including identifying where they were interrelated and overlapped.

### **3.7.2.3 Sampling during axial coding**

During axial coding, sampling continues on the basis of theoretically relevant concepts, but the focus changes. The aim is now to identify how categories and subcategories relate to one another and also to develop categories further in terms of their properties and dimensions. In data gathering and analysis the researcher looks for incidents and events that facilitate the identification of significant variations. The researcher tries to identify as many incidents that

demonstrate the dimensional range or variation of a concept and the relationships among concepts. The purposeful search for data that maximises the differences between concepts is a deductive process. This may not always prove to be practical as a researcher cannot always choose to have people or sites according to developing concepts available, and sampling may then have to occur according to that which is available (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

#### **3.7.2.4 Sampling during selective coding/discriminate sampling**

Highly selective sampling is important when performing selective coding. The purpose of selective coding is to integrate the categories along the dimensional level to form a theory, to validate the statements of relationship among concepts, and to fill in any categories in need of further refinement (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Purposeful sampling requires that the researcher selects those people, places and documents that are potentially able to maximise the comparative analysis. This may involve revisiting previous participants, places or documents or it may require including new ones in order to gather the data necessary to saturate categories and complete a study.

Throughout a study, validation of the products of analysis is a crucial part of building a theory. The researcher constantly compares the products of the analyses against actual data, making modifications or additions based on these comparisons when necessary. Modifications and additions are then further validated. Researchers are therefore constantly validating or negating their interpretations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Only those concepts and statements that survive this rigorous constant comparison process become part of the theory. Strauss and Corbin (1998) add that negative cases are important in that they may denote extreme examples of variation in a concept.

### **3.7.3 THEORETICAL SATURATION**

In grounded theory it is generally accepted that it is necessary to gather data until theoretical saturation occurs (Glaser & Strauss, 1976; Strauss, 1987). This refers to the gathering of data in terms of a category's properties (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Saturation is reached when no new or relevant data seems to emerge regarding a category, the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation, and the relationships between categories are well established and validated. Theoretical saturation is of great importance, because the theory will be unevenly developed and lacking density and precision (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

## **3.8 DATA ANALYSIS IN GROUNDED THEORY**

The main purpose of data analysis is to formulate accurate descriptions and to formulate themes and extract concepts in order to build theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This involves working through the data thoroughly and identifying key categories (a grouping of similar themes) and patterns (relationships between categories). The development of connections between two or more concepts generates theory (Ertmer, 1997).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) discuss different analytic tools used to analyse data that has been collected being analysis procedures, analysis techniques, coding procedures, and the use of notes and diagrams. These procedures will be briefly discussed.

### **3.8.1 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES**

Strauss and Corbin (1998) discuss two types of analysis procedures that are particularly useful in the development of grounded theory, viz. questions and comparisons. These two procedures form the basis of data analysis and are

used throughout the process. It is through this that concepts are able to be accurately and fully developed.

### **3.8.1.1 The use of questions**

Every type of investigation rests on the development of effective questioning. Questions are used in grounded theory to develop a better understanding of the theoretical results. Strauss and Corbin refer to sensitive questions, theoretical questions, practical and structural questions, and guiding questions.

*Sensitive questions* help the researcher to be in tune with what the data might be indicating. Examples of these questions include; “What is going on here (issues, problems, concerns)?”, “Who is involved here?”, “How do they define the situation?”, “What meaning do they make of it?”. Issues include whether their definitions and meanings are the same or different. How, when and with what consequences are they acting, and how are these the same or different for different people and situations? *Theoretical questions* help the researcher to see process, variation, etc. and to make the connections between the concepts. Examples of these questions are; “What is the relationship of one concept to another (i.e. how do they compare and relate at the property and dimensional levels?)”, “What would happen if...?”, “How do events and actions change over time?” and “What are the larger structural issues here, and how do these events play into or affect what I am seeing or hearing?”. *Practical and structural questions* provide direction for sampling and help with development of the structure of the evolving theory. Questions such as “Which concepts are well developed and which are not?”, “Where, when and how do I go next to gather the data for my evolving theory?”, “Do I need permission?”, “Is my developing theory logical?”, “Where are the breaks in the logic?” and “Have I reached saturation point?”. *Guiding questions* guide the interviews, observations, and analyses of these and other documents. These questions will change over time, are based on the evolving theory, and are specific to the particular research. They normally

begin as open-ended questions and become more specific and refined as the research develops.

### **3.8.1.2 The making of comparisons**

As with other research methodologies, grounded theory makes use of comparisons in the analysis of data. The nature and use of the comparisons are, however, somewhat different. In grounded theory the focus of making comparisons is on suggesting and generating theory. Grounded theory makes comparisons between events in order to classify them and to guide the researcher's thinking regarding categories (properties and dimensions) and to guide theoretical sampling to ensure variation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### **3.8.2 ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES**

Analytic tools can be described as being methods that assist in making the coding process easier (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). They are techniques that improve theoretical sensitivity and help the researcher to make comparisons and develop questions. They help the researcher to recognise the influence of personal experiences and enable the researcher to use these personal experiences in a beneficial way rather than seeing them as problematic (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) summarise the purpose of analytic tools to include broadening the researcher's thinking to beyond the confines of the technical literature and personal experiences and enabling the researcher to think differently about phenomena. The tools stimulate the inductive process and focus the researcher's attention on the data and prevent information from being taken for granted. This allows for the clarification or debunking of assumptions made by the participants. Analytical tools listen to what people are saying and doing and help to prevent important bits of information being missed in the rush to analyse

the data. They force the researcher to ask questions and to give provisional answers, and allow for the provisional labelling of concepts. Lastly, analytical tools discover properties and dimensions of categories.

Four analytical tools are identified by Strauss and Corbin (1998) that can assist the researcher during the coding process. These techniques are discussed briefly.

### **3.8.2.1 The use of questioning**

The purpose of questioning is to unlock the data and to reveal potential categories, their properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). *Basic questions*: Who? When? Where? What? How? How much? What were the results? These questions are particularly useful when it appears that nothing other than the standard explanations regarding a phenomenon are being revealed by the data. *Temporal questions*: These questions deal with aspects such as frequency, duration, rate and timing. *Spatial questions*: Space, where, whether circumscribed or not, and open or closed are included in this category of questions. *Technological questions*: These questions deal with issues regarding equipment and resources. *Informational questions*: “Who knows what happened?” is an example of these questions. Lastly, there are questions that deal with rules, cultural values or morals, and standards. All of these questions would stimulate the researcher’s thought processes and increase sensitivity regarding what to look for in the data, as well as in future data.

### **3.8.2.2 Analysis of words, phrases and sentences**

Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommend coding by “microanalysis” which consists of analysing data word by word and coding the meaning in words and phrases. The analysis of a single word, a sentence or phrase can help to open up the data. This technique is especially valuable because it enables the analyst to raise

questions about possible meanings, whether assumed or intended (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher cannot assume that the participants attach the same meaning to concepts as the researcher does (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The word “support” for example, may mean emotional support to one person coping with divorce, financial support to another and practical support such as taking care of the children to someone else. Strauss and Corbin (1998) outlined how word and sentence analysis should normally be conducted. Firstly, the document, or at least a few pages are read through quickly, after which the researcher returns to a word and/or phrase that is considered to be particularly meaningful and valuable. Secondly, a list of all the possible meanings of that word or phrase is generated. The document is then referred to again and incidents or words are identified that suggest further meanings. An analysis of this nature enables the circumstances, consequences, variations, etc. relating to the phenomena that are being studied to be revealed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### **3.8.2.3 Theoretical analysis through comparisons**

The developing of comparisons helps the researcher to identify and develop categories. Comparing categories, which are abstract concepts, to similar or different concepts brings out possible properties and dimensions that were not evident to the analyst. Strauss and Corbin (1998) differentiate between two types of comparison analyses, namely the flip-flop technique and the systematic comparison of two or more phenomena:

- *The flip-flop technique* implies that a concept is turned “inside out” or “upside down” in order to explore whether there is a different perspective on the event, object, or action/interaction to be gained. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that this technique assists the researcher to reflect on the data analytically rather than descriptively and to generate categories and their properties as well as reflect on future questions. The concept “equal time with both parents” might mean the child is able to spend equal amounts of time with each parent. By turning this concept “inside out” the

question is asked, “What would happen if the child were not able to spend time with each parent?”

- *Systematic comparison* involves the researcher’s comparing an incident in the data to personal experiences and/or the literature. However, this is the comparison of concepts and not individuals or cases. Systematic comparison helps the researcher to be sensitive to the properties and dimensions of concepts that previously may have been overlooked as the researcher did not know what to look for. The researcher codes personal knowledge of a theme gained from the literature and/or personal experiences in a systematic manner into concepts, categories and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The comparative concept might be “close in”, i.e. similar in nature, or “far out”, i.e. dissimilar, to the concept under exploration (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). An example of a close-in comparison is “alternate weekend access with the non-custodial parent from Friday evening until Sunday evening” compared to “alternate weekend access with the non-custodial parent from Friday noon until Monday morning”, and an example of a far-out comparison would be to compare “alternate weekend access with the non-custodial parent” to “an annual school camp for three days which also entails leaving the custodial parent’s care”.

#### **3.8.2.4 The red flag**

Strauss and Corbin (1998) discuss *waving the red flag* technique. This tool can be used to improve sensitivity and data analysis. Both researchers and participants bring their own biases, beliefs and assumptions to the research. Strauss and Corbin (1998) stress that it is impossible to be completely free of bias. It is therefore important to recognise when the researcher’s, or the participant’s biases, assumptions or beliefs are intruding into the analysis. One of the indicators that assumptions or beliefs are intruding into the analysis is when words or explanations given by participants are accepted at face value or



rejected without questioning what is being said. The following types of words and phrases act as “red flags” to the researcher when used by the respondent or researcher uses them, and indicate that the researcher should be wary: “never”, “always”, “it is impossible”, “everyone knows that...” etc.

### **3.8.3 CODING PROCEDURES**

Grounded theory coding is a form of content analysis for finding and conceptualising the issues underlying the “noise” of the data (Allan, 2003). In grounded theory, data analysis is done mainly through coding. Coding represents the operation by which data are broken down, conceptualised and then reassembled and reintegrated in new ways. This is a necessary process by which theory is built from the data (Charmaz, 1995; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The purpose of coding is to enable the researcher to build theory rather than to test it; promote accuracy in the research process; identify the assumptions and biases that are brought to, and develop during the research processes; and employ procedures that will assist in building a theory that reflect the phenomena being researched (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Different types of coding are used in the data analysis during the development of a grounded theory, viz. open coding; axial coding, and selective coding (DeVos & Van Zyl, 1998; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). The lines between each type of coding are artificial; the different types do not necessarily occur sequentially and it is possible to alternate between the different types of coding procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It is a dynamic and flexible process. Open and axial coding usually occur in the earlier phases of the research process, but it is also acceptable to return to them at the end especially when some of the concepts have been found to be poorly developed (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These three types of coding procedures will be discussed further below.

### **3.8.3.1 Open coding**

Strauss and Corbin (1998) indicate that science cannot exist without concepts. They form the basis of theory in the sense that phenomena are named and in the process are put in the spotlight. It is then possible to begin to examine them comparatively and to ask questions about them. These questions enable the researcher to systematically specify a hypothesis about how phenomena relate to one another. The data is analysed on two levels; the actual words of the participants and secondly the researcher's interpretation and conceptualisation of these words.

The purpose of open coding is to produce concepts that describe the data. These concepts are only preliminary and can change as the data collection and analysis continues (Strauss, 1987). To develop concepts it is necessary to open up the text and reveal the thought, ideas and meanings contained therein (Strauss & Corbin, (1998). Open coding is concerned specifically with the naming and categorising of the data so that they can be studied more closely (Strauss, 1990). Without this, further data analysis cannot take place (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During open coding the data is broken down into discrete parts, closely examined and compared for similarities and differences, and put into groups/categories based on similarities in nature or meaning. Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that there are two main steps involved in open coding namely conceptualisation, and identification of categories. These two steps are discussed below.

#### **3.8.3.1.1 Steps involved in open coding**

The processes of open coding and the identifying of categories when conducting open coding are discussed below.

## **(A) Conceptualisation**

The first step in theory building is conceptualisation. It is an abstract representation of an event, object, or action/interaction that a researcher identifies as being significant in the data and involves the opening up of an observation, sentence, paragraph, etc. as well as the naming of phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The purpose of conceptualisation is to enable the researcher to group similar events, happenings, and objects under a common heading or classification. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) there are three important tasks that have to be carried out when conceptualising. Similar incidents, objects, ideas or events need to be grouped within a certain category. Incidents, objects, ideas or events need to be classified according to the interpretation of their unique properties. Lastly, incidents, objects, ideas or events need to be named because the researcher has given the same abstract names to other similar incidents, objects, ideas or events. For example, the concept of “support” has the same connotation whether referring to support from parents, relatives, teachers or counsellors. They all support the child in coping with the effects of divorce.

## **(B) Identifying categories**

During analysis, many concepts might be derived. The researcher then needs to group these concepts into categories according to the phenomena that are being studied in order to reduce the number of units being worked with. Categories are thus groups of concepts developed from the data that identify a phenomenon and in particular are relevant to the research context. A phenomenon is a problem or matter that was meaningful or significant for the individual within the context being researched. Categories have analytic power because they have the potential to explain and predict (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To continue with the example of “support” from parents, teachers and counsellors, a different researcher may label them as “adult interferences” as they may all place

pressure of some kind on the child. The category that they would be placed into would depend on the research context.

A subcategory of a category also has properties and dimensions. However, subcategories do not directly describe the phenomenon. They rather further specify a category by providing information such as when, where, why, and how a specific phenomenon is likely to occur (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A subcategory of the above example of “adult interference” would be how teachers may expect children to perform according to a particular academic standard.

### **(a) Naming categories and subcategories**

The researcher often personally names the categories, or the names may come from the words and phrases that the participants have used (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). There should be a logical link between the categories named by the researcher and the data that is being represented. Some of the names can come from the concepts that have already been identified in the data, evident in the list of concepts. Another source of categories is the literature. Terms borrowed from the literature are usually strong concepts, come with established analytic meanings, and are well developed in their own right. It needs to be noted, however, that the danger exists that commonly held meanings and associations can also become attached when borrowing concepts or names that already exist for phenomena. These meanings might bias the interpretation of the data and differ from that which the researcher intended, leading to misinterpretation. They should thus be used with caution. Words and phrases that participants themselves used are called “in vivo” codes. These are catchy terms that immediately draw attention to themselves because they are suggestive, explanatory and striking in nature (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Concepts coined by the participants themselves usually refer to real processes and behaviour, whereas concepts identified by the researcher provide an explanation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

## **(b) Development of categories in terms of their properties and dimensions**

Once a category is identified, the researcher can begin to develop it in terms of specific properties and dimensions. With the example of “support”, developing the category in terms of properties would involve defining what is meant by “support” in terms of why, when, how, for what and how often. This would give specificity through definition of the category’s particular characteristics within the category of “support”. Properties are general or specific characteristics of a category, whereas dimensions represent the location of a property along a continuum or range (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For example, one of the properties that differentiates “flexibility in contact with the non-custodial parent” is whether the parents live in close proximity to one another geographically or whether they live far apart. The property “flexibility” is dimensionalised by saying that when parents live in close proximity to one another the child’s opportunity to enjoy a sense of freedom to exercise flexibility in contact with each parent is possible and can assist the child in coping with the divorce. The delineation of properties and dimensions differentiates a category from other categories and gives it precision.

This qualification of a category by specifying its particular properties and dimensions is important because patterns, along with their variations, can then be formulated. To continue with the “flexibility in contact” example, based on the frequency of moving between the two homes, this situation can be classified into the pattern of “reason for frequency of moves” between homes. A third pattern of “flexibility in relation to extra-mural activities” may emerge with further interviewing. Patterns along with variation are formulated (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Patterns are formed when groups of properties align themselves along various dimensions. It is important to note however, that when data are grouped into patterns according to certain defined characteristics, not every object, event, idea, happening or person will completely fit into a pattern.

Properties of a category can also be general in nature, and represent for the researcher the full spectrum of dimensions within that category. Each specific occurrence of the same property can therefore be placed in a different place on the dimension continuum. Categories have different general characteristics that also vary over a dimensional continuum. Each property also has sub-properties that can be dimensionalised if necessary (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

#### **3.8.3.1.2 Variations on conducting open coding**

There are different ways to do open coding outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998). *Line-by-line analysis* involves a close examination of data, phrase by phrase and sometimes word by word. While this is very time consuming it is probably the most productive in generating information to code. Doing line-by-line analysis is particularly important in the beginning of a study as it enables the researcher to generate categories and furthermore, to develop these categories along dimensions of a category's general properties. It helps the researcher with theoretical sampling, and to study the data critically and analytically (Charmaz, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). *Sentence or paragraph analysis* is a second way in which open coding can be conducted. The focus is on identifying the main idea that a sentence or paragraph contains. After naming it a more detailed analysis of the concept can then be conducted. This approach to coding can be used at any time but it is especially useful once several categories have been identified and coding is being done in relation to these categories. A third way to code is to *peruse the entire document*. This involves analysing the interviews, documents or observations as a whole, asking the questions "What is happening here?" or "what is similar or different in this from the others?" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

#### **3.8.3.1.3 Coding notes**

One way to begin coding is to make notes on concepts as they emerge during the analysis, either on separate cards or in the margin (Glaser & Strauss, 1967;

Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This is only complete once the phenomena are being named (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The writing of coding notes is discussed in more detail in this chapter in Section 3.8.5.

#### **3.8.3.1.4 Conclusions**

Open coding is a process of analysis during which concepts are identified and developed in terms of their properties and dimensions. Two basic procedures of analysis are used, being (a) *the posing of questions* and (b) *the drawing of comparisons*, in order to expose the similarities and differences between incidents and events of phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Similar occurrences and incidents are then placed and named into concepts and then grouped into categories. This then forms the basis for patterns to be developed which is the beginning structure for theory building (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

#### **3.8.3.2 Axial coding**

Axial coding is conducted once open coding has taken place. It is a set of procedures used to reassemble the data in a new way. The categories are related to their subcategories to form more precise and complete explanations about the phenomena (Strauss & Corbin 1998). The main purpose is to develop categories in terms of theoretical characteristics focusing on the various conditions, consequences and action/interactions associated with the phenomena (Glaser & Strauss, 1967: Strauss, 1987). Axial coding focuses on (a) the specifying of a category in terms of the conditions that result in the phenomenon; (b) the context within which the phenomenon occurs; (c) the action or interaction strategies that are employed to manage the problem; and (d) the results of using the strategies. Specific properties build accuracy into a category and are named as subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

During axial coding categories and subcategories are brought into relation with each other along the lines of their properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This involves a number of basic tasks:

- the identifying of the properties and dimensions of a category;
- the identifying of conditions, actions/interactions and consequences associated with a phenomenon;
- relating a category to its subcategories using statements that indicate the nature of the relatedness;
- looking for clues in the data that indicate how major categories are related to each other.

Answers to questions such as when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences are sought. The answers help to reveal the relationship between categories as well as between structure and process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The relationship between categories can be very subtle. An example of this is when discussing the support the children have experienced as helpful. Axial coding may reveal categories such as “distractions”, “being prayed for”, “assistance with transport” and “knowing their parents are supported”, which may all be developed in answer to the question “how”. The analysis indicates how the categories “emotional support” and “practical support” may be related.

Strauss (1987) developed a coding paradigm that can be used to code subcategories as well as assisting with organising the expected connections between the categories (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This plays a central role in the coding procedure (Strauss, 1987). Strauss and Corbin (1990) later developed this coding paradigm into a paradigm model. This paradigm model and the process involved in the drawing of connections and development of categories is outlined below.



### 3.8.3.2.1 The paradigm model

The basic component of the paradigm model involves causal conditions, the phenomenon, context, intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies, and consequences. Figure 3.1 is a graphic representation of the paradigm model.

(A) Causal conditions → (B) Phenomenon → (C) Context → (D) Intervening conditions → (E) Action/Interaction strategies → (F) Consequences

**Figure 3.1 The Paradigm model (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 99).**

*Phenomenon* (B) refers to the central event or incident that results in a set of actions/interactions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These repeated patterns of happenings, events, or actions/interactions that represent what people do or say, alone or as a group, in response to the problem and situations in which they find themselves are identified by the following questions; What is this data referring to?, What is happening here?, What is this action/interaction about?.

*Causal conditions* (A), *Context* (C) and *Intervening conditions* (D) are sets of events or happenings that create the situations, issues, and problems pertaining to a phenomenon and may explain why and how an individual or groups responds in certain ways. Conditions might arise out of time, place, culture, rules, regulations, beliefs, economics, power, or gender factors as well as the social worlds, organisations, and institutions. Although researchers should endeavour to discover and identify the full impact thereof, it is not possible to always identify all conditions relevant to a particular phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The influence that conditions have on actions/interactions can be direct or indirect, as well as being more or less linear. Conditions can be micro (closer to the source of action/interaction, such as a parent making the child feel guilty for

wanting more time with the other parent in the example of children wanting equal time with the non-custodial parent used previously) or macro (further away from the source of action/interaction, such as society's view on what is correct for children with regard to fathers access to their children) in nature (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) indicate that the naming of conditions, as causal, contextual or intervening assist in sorting out some of the complex relationship among conditions and their subsequent relation to actions/interactions. *Causal conditions* represent sets of events or happenings that influence phenomena, for example, a parent's infidelity causing the divorce. *Intervening conditions* are those that mitigate or otherwise alter the impact of causal conditions on phenomena such as a parent becoming involved in a new relationship post-divorce. This results in action/interaction strategies, for example the parent being prepared to become more flexible in the access arrangements because it suits her to have time alone with her new partner. *Contextual conditions* are the specific sets/patterns of conditions that intersect dimensionally at this time and place to create the set of circumstances or problems to which persons respond through actions/interactions.

Conditions according to Strauss and Corbin (1998) have specific dimensions that become evident within a context. Similar conditions can therefore be grouped according to their dimensions. This enables the researcher to identify patterns or sets of conditions that create a context. Although the researcher has to identify and list which conditions are causal, intervening, or contextual, it is also important that the complex interweaving of events (conditions) leading up a problem, an issue, or a happening to which persons are responding through some form of action/interaction, with some sort of consequences be focused on. The changes that might occur in the original situation, because of that action/interaction, also need to be identified (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

*Actions/interactions* (E) are strategic or routine strategies, that people use to handle situations, problems, and issues that they encounter under specific conditions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). Strategic actions are purposeful or deliberate acts that are taken to resolve a problem and in doing so shape the phenomenon in some way. Routines are actions/interactions that tend to be more habituated ways of responding to occurrences in everyday life. In organisations, these would take on the form of rules, regulations, policies and procedures. It is important to focus on the routines as they demonstrate the actions/interactions that maintain social order. Conflict may occur under certain circumstances when the person's actions/interactions are not aligned with those of the group (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

There are always *consequences* whether intended or not whenever there is action/interaction, or a lack thereof, in response to an issue. The description of actions and the clarification of how it changes a situation and a phenomenon provides a more complete explanation of the phenomenon. Like conditions, consequences have inherent properties being; whether they are singular or many, they may vary in duration, they may be visible or invisible, immediate or cumulative, reversible or not, and foreseen or unforeseen. Their impact may be far-reaching or narrow (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

#### **3.8.3.2.2 Drawing connections and developing categories**

The development of connections and sub-connections occurs because of the basic process of analysis such as with the posing of questions and drawing of comparisons. Strauss and Corbin (1990) differentiate between four steps in the analysis that occur simultaneously in axial coding.

### **(a) The drawing of connections between subcategories and categories**

From the beginning of the analysis the researcher is able to see that certain concepts relate to each other. In explicating these relationships, the researcher links categories with their subcategories and recognises the conditions, action/interaction and consequences within. The first attempts to draw these connections are seen as being preliminary as the what, where and how of the phenomenon are elucidated. In axial coding the nature of the questions that are asked are such that the connections within a phenomenon are revealed (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

### **(b) Verification of hypotheses**

Although hypotheses are derived from the data, because they are abstractions, it is important that these be validated and further elaborated through continued comparisons of data. The data, incidents and events must either validate or contradict the hypothesis. When a hypothesis is contradicted this does not necessarily mean that the hypothesis is wrong, as the contradiction may indicate that there is an extreme dimension or variation of the phenomenon under investigation. Discovering a contradiction leads the researcher to question the data further and in doing so to reach a better understanding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). An example of this may be when researching stress experienced by children from divorced families, and one child reports not having experienced any stress. This does not contradict all other reports of stress experienced by other children. The question then becomes what conditions operate to result in this particular variant of the situation.

### **(c) Further development of categories and subcategories**

Axial and open coding do not take place sequentially, but rather occur simultaneously, as discussed earlier. The researcher codes properties and

dimensions while concepts are being developed in relation to each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During axial coding new categories and subcategories, properties and dimensions are identified. Each incident is compared as specifically as possible and placed dimensionally (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A category is considered to be *saturated* when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences emerge during the coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). However, this is a matter of degree and it is the researcher's responsibility to obtain a balance between the normal and exaggerated development of density. A theory that is conceptually dense and specific must be developed while acceptable theoretical variation of the different incidents of the phenomenon must be evident in order to make it relevant (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

#### **(d) Exploration of variation of a phenomenon**

The identification and specification of differences and similarities between categories form the basis of grounded theory. During axial coding connections are made by patterns that are identified during the analysis that refer to the properties of a phenomenon in terms of the dimensional positioning of events, happenings, incidents, etc. This search for patterns forms the basis of *selective coding*. Specific properties regarding conditions, strategies and consequences to a phenomenon reveal further differences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

During coding there is a continual movement between inductive and deductive thinking (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Concepts, hypotheses and interpretations are formulated deductively and verified by comparing incidents. There is therefore a continual interplay between the interpretation and verification of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It is important that the researcher validate the interpretations by continually connecting and comparing incidents in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The final theory is determined by the categories' properties and

dimensions, and the relative hypotheses regarding how concepts relate to one another (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

While coding it is important to make notes about insights about how concepts relate (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommend two devices for this purpose. *Mini-frameworks* are small, diagrammatic theoretical structures that indicate how subcategories are related and how they relate to the main category. *Conceptual diagrams* indicate how concepts relate to each other.

### **3.8.3.2.3 Conclusions**

During axial coding subcategories are connected to categories. This is a complex process of inductive and deductive thinking involving a number of steps. Questions are posed and comparisons drawn. The procedures focus on the identification of categories and the relation between them is made with the use of the paradigm model (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Each category is developed in terms of (a) the causal conditions that lead to it; (b) the characteristics, contexts, actions/interactions and strategies that are used in reaction to the phenomenon; and (c) the consequences of any actions/interactions. The identification of additional characteristics for each category, and the placing of these according to their dimensional continuum is also very important (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

### **3.8.3.3 Selective coding**

During open coding categories and their properties are generated and how they vary dimensionally is determined. In axial coding, categories are systematically developed further and linked with subcategories. Selective coding focuses on integrating the major categories in order to form a larger theoretical scheme (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During selective coding the integrating and refining of categories occurs. A central category is selected and systematically connected to

other categories. The connection is confirmed and categorised so that further refining and development can occur (Strauss, 1987). This type of coding is not very different to axial coding but it occurs on a more abstract level of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). By integrating the different categories, a fundamental theory is developed (Strauss, 1987).

The process of integration and developing a central category are discussed below. Techniques that facilitate and assist these processes as well as the refining of the theory are also elaborated on.

#### **3.8.3.3.1 Integration**

Integration is a continual process that occurs over a period of time (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The integration of theory cannot be forced. It is an open process. Just as new categories and properties have to be connected so do theoretical schema (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Integrating is an interaction between the analyst and the data, which is influenced by the researcher's thinking and findings that are recorded during the process. Integration is a difficult task that occurs after months of collecting and analysing of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), the following are important points to remember when attempting integration:

- (a) Concepts that reach the status of a category are an abstraction; they represent the story of many people or groups reduced into, and represented by, several conceptual terms. Although categories are not the specific data of individuals, groups or organisations, categories are derived by comparing data from each case. They should therefore have relevance for and be applicable to all cases within a category.
- (b) If theory building is the goal of research, findings should then be presented as a set of interrelated concepts and not just of a list of themes. Like concepts, relational statements are abstracted from the data. They are constructed out of the data. Relational statements do not

usually contain the exact words of respondents; rather, they represent the voices of many.

- (c) Relational statements can be described as being hypotheses, propositions or stories, depending on the researcher's theoretical or epistemological framework. The use of explanatory statements can also be made, such as "under these circumstances" or "when this occurs".

#### **3.8.3.3.2 Discovering the central category**

Choosing a central category that represents the main theme of the research is an important step in integration. Theory building occurs around the central category and it consists of all the products of analysis condensed into a few words or phrases (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The other categories and the properties are held in relation to the central category (Strauss, 1987).

A central category has analytic power and it should be able to pull the other categories together to form an explanatory whole. It should also allow for considerable variation within the categories. A central category may evolve out of the list of existing categories, or the researcher may decide on a more abstract term or phrase. This would be a core conceptual idea under which all the other categories can be subsumed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss (1987) created a list of criteria to assist in selecting a central category. It must be *central* and all other categories must be related to it. It must *appear frequently in the data* and indicators must point to that concept. The explanation that evolves by relating the categories must be *logical and consistent*. The central category needs to be *sufficiently abstract* so that it has relevance for general theory and can be used to do research in other areas. When the central category is refined analytically through integration, the *theory grows* richly and quickly. The category should be able to explain variation when conditions change.



Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that it can occur that two or more central themes can be identified. They recommend that one idea be selected as the central category and the other/s can then be related to the central category to assist in the integration.

The researcher can experience difficulties identifying a central category, especially if they are flooded with the data or find it difficult to remain objective. This difficulty can be solved by consulting a colleague to brainstorm the data. That person can ask direct questions, forcing the researcher to reply with abstract yet direct comments (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

#### **3.8.3.3.3 Techniques to assist in integration**

A number of techniques are proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1998), to assist with the integration of the central category and the integration of concepts, including writing a story line, moving from description to conceptualisation, using diagrams, and reviewing and systemising of notes.

*Writing a storyline* is a descriptive story of the core phenomenon of the study which often helps to bring clarity during integration. Questions such as “what is going on here?” and “what continually come out of the data?” are asked to assist in writing a concise story line. Once the researcher has an understanding of the essence of the data, it is then possible to go ahead with the conceptualisation and naming of the central phenomenon *moving from description to conceptualisation*. The central category can then be developed and connected to other categories. If no category is found that captures the substance entirely, then another broader concept should be used. The story must then be written again using the existing categories. By using concepts, linkages are built between the categories. The *use of diagrams* is important. Diagrams are abstract representations of the data. They help to sort out the relationships among relationships. Diagrams enable the researcher to gain distance from the data, by

forcing the researcher to work with concepts rather than the detail of the data. Integrative diagrams demonstrate the logic behind the connectedness of concepts and therefore, promote integration. Diagrams should focus on the central category, should flow and not be too complicated (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). *Reviewing and systemising of notes* from the beginning of the data analysis is important. Notes represent a record of the analysis process and include, for example, coding, theoretical and operational notes. As the research proceeds the notes usually become more abstract. They also contain clues to integration, especially if the researcher has systematically identified the properties of concepts along with their dimensions. Integration occurs when notes are reviewed and sorted according to categories and cross-dimensional linkages (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

It can be difficult to find an abstract, unifying theoretical schema that fits the data. Having read and reread all the notes and not discovered a central idea, the researcher can turn to the literature to look for a unifying concept to fit the data. This system helps researchers to locate their findings in the larger body of professional knowledge and to contribute to further development and refinement of existing concepts in their field (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

#### **3.8.3.3.4 Refining the theory**

Once the overarching theoretical scheme has been outlined, the theory can be refined. This is achieved by (a) refining the scheme for internal consistency and gaps in logic, (b) filling in poorly developed categories, (c) trimming excess categories, and (d) validating the scheme.

##### **(a) Reviewing the scheme for internal consistency and logic**

The theoretical scheme should be logical and should not have any inconsistencies. If the story line notes and diagrams are clear, then consistency

and logic should follow. It may be necessary for the researcher to revisit the central theme and make sure that (as with any other category), (a) it is defined in terms of its properties and dimensions, and (b) that references to the idea are evident in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In order to check for consistency and logical development, the researcher should stand back and review how many of the properties are built into the scheme. Any gaps that then appear need to then be filled in. If there is still uncertainty, the researcher should try to view the data from a different perspective.

### **(b) Filling in poorly developed categories**

Researchers aim for density in theory building. This refers to all the salient properties and dimensions of a category being identified, and indicating variation. Poorly developed categories usually become evident when making diagrams and sorting notes. The filling in of these categories can be done through reviewing the raw data and notes or by selectively collecting new data about the category through theoretical sampling. A category should be sufficiently developed in terms of properties and dimensions to demonstrate a range of variability as a concept. However, the ultimate criteria for determining whether sufficient data has been gathered is when theoretical saturation occurs, namely when no other new properties and dimensions emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### **(c) Trimming excess categories**

Some ideas, usually extraneous concepts, may never really be developed and although interesting do not add to the theory. It is possible that they did not appear much in the data and should be trimmed off to prevent the theory from becoming cluttered (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

#### **(d) Validating the theoretical scheme**

Validity does not refer to testing in the quantitative sense of the word, but rather in terms of internal and external validity as discussed in Section 2.5.2.3 and 2.5.2.4. The theory, although it emerges from the data, should prove to be an abstract representation of the raw data. Validating also involves determining whether any salient points have been omitted from the theoretical scheme. In order to validate the theoretical scheme, the theoretical scheme can be compared with the raw data in order to check if it is able to explain most of the cases. Another way to validate the theoretical scheme is to tell it to the participants in order to ascertain if they perceive it to be a reasonable explanation of their experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

#### **(e) Building in variation**

Some theoretical schemes fail to account for variation. Hence the theory may appear artificial as though every person or organisation falls perfectly into the theoretical scheme. There are always variations of every process. This means that even within patterns and categories, there is variability with different people, organisations and groups falling at different dimensional points along some properties (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

#### **3.7.3.3.5 Conclusions**

During selective coding the theory is integrated and refined. Integration is the process of organising the categories around a *central explanatory concept*. Integration occurs over time, beginning when the analysis begins and only ending with the final writing of the theory. Once the theoretical scheme is outlined, the theory can be refined, trimmed and poorly developed categories developed further. The theory is validated by comparing it to raw data or by presenting it to respondents for their reactions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### 3.8.3.4 Process coding

This form of coding is an essential part of analysis in grounded theory (Charmaz, 1995; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1998) define “process” as: *“a series of evolving sequences of action/interaction that occur over time and space, changing or sometimes remaining the same in response to the situation or context.”*

Process coding forms part of axial coding and it is not a new form of analysis. As with axial coding, analysis of properties and dimensions as well as connections between concepts takes place. However, the focus is on the action/interaction and tracing it over time noting movements, sequence, and changes as well as how it evolves (variations) in response to changes in context or conditions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Figure 3.2 illustrates the complex relationship between structure and process.

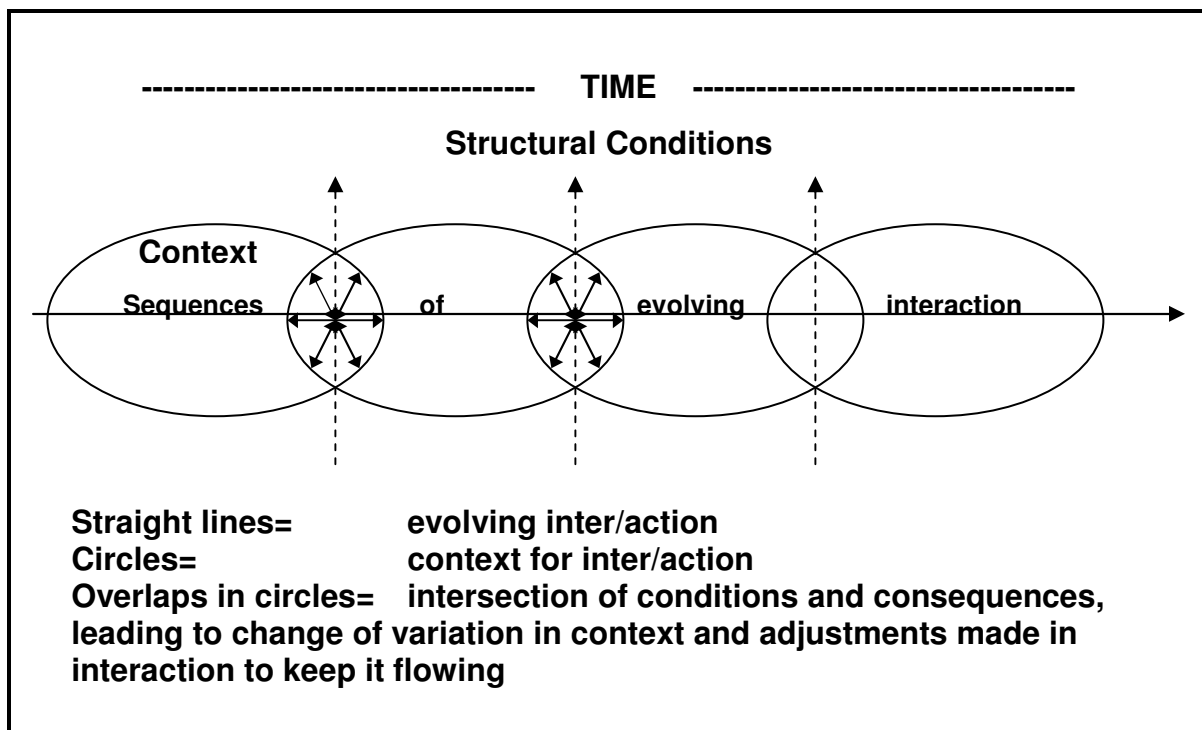


Figure 3.2 Relationship between structure and process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.167)

Action/interaction forms a process as it develops over time and changes over time. It can be planned, predictable or unexpected depending on the context. It can also be strategic, habitual, orderly, continuous and co-ordinated in nature. The complex relationship between structure and process needs to be revealed in order to understand the development of actions/interactions. Structure creates the context for the problems/events or actions/interactions that impact on the phenomenon. Process is the reactions of people, organizations and communities to these problems and events. It is the dynamic and continually evolving nature of action/interaction. The combination of structure and process helps the researcher to grasp the complexity of the phenomenon. If only structure is studied, then only the manner in which people behave is understood and the reasons for the manner in which they behave is lost (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). An example of this would be that children may need to feel free to exercise some flexibility in their contact with the non-custodial parent. This may also need to be guided by the parents according to the child's developmental age. The parents' reactions to this and ability to be flexible and their lifestyles and changes thereof would all influence this flexibility. This process would be a sequence of evolving interaction.

### **3.8.4 THE USE OF NOTES AND DIAGRAMS**

The use of notes and diagrams forms an important part of analysis in grounded theory (Charmaz, 1995; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Notes refer to written records of results from the researcher's analysis. They are analytical and conceptual rather than descriptive and represent the written form of the researcher's abstract views on the data. Diagrams are graphic representations of notes and depict the relationship between concepts (Charmaz, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) indicate that notes and diagrams grow in complexity, density, clarity and accuracy as the research process progresses. If notes and

diagrams are sparsely done, the final theory may lack density and integration, as it is difficult for the researcher to reconstruct the details of the research without notes. Notes and diagrams also help the researcher to remain objective and gain analytical distance. They force the researcher to develop abstract and conceptual ideas.

#### **3.8.4.1 General and specific features of notes and diagrams**

Strauss and Corbin (1998) differentiate between general and specific properties of notes and diagrams.

##### **3.8.4.1.1 General features**

- (a) Notes and diagrams differ in content, degree of conceptualisation and length.
- (b) Notes and diagrams may appear simplistic and awkward in the beginning.
- (c) It is impractical to write on the actual interview or field notes.
- (d) Researchers develop their own personal style for noting and diagramming information.
- (e) The researcher is assisted by notes and diagrams in developing the theory as concepts rather than working with raw data.
- (f) Notes and diagrams help the researcher to reflect, and think analytically, which promotes logic and coherence.
- (g) The researcher is assisted by being able to sort through, order and reorder and retrieve ideas from notes and diagrams.
- (h) It is necessary to code each analytic session or each new idea, in order to prevent the ideas from being lost.
- (i) Notes can be written from other notes and in so doing new insights are stimulated.

### **3.8.4.1.2 Specific features**

In addition to the general features of notes, there are also some technical ones.

- (a) Notes and diagrams should be dated and references to the documents from which ideas are derived should be included.
- (b) A heading of the concept or category should be made on each note.
- (c) Short quotes or phrases can be included in the memos.
- (d) A heading of the type of notes being written helps with quick referencing.
- (e) Theoretical or operational notes should be referenced by the code note that stimulated that note.
- (f) When an incident or event can be coded into two different categories, each incident should be coded separately.
- (g) The researcher should not be afraid to modify the content of notes as the analysis progresses and new insights are developed.
- (h) A list of emerging codes should be kept for referencing and to avoid duplication of categories.
- (i) When notes sound alike, concepts should be compared so that differences and similarities between concepts are not overlooked.
- (j) The researcher should keep multiple copies of the notes for later organizing and sorting.
- (k) The researcher should indicate in the notes when a category appears to be saturated.
- (l) When the researcher comes up with two or more interesting and new ideas at the same time these ideas should be jotted down immediately to prevent these ideas from being lost.
- (m) The researcher needs to be relaxed and flexible when doing notes and diagrams to facilitate creativity.
- (n) The researcher must be conceptual rather than descriptive when writing notes.



### **3.8.4.2 Notes and diagrams in the three types of coding**

Strauss and Corbin (1998) discuss the differences between notes and diagrams made during the different stages of analysis.

#### **3.8.4.2.1 Open coding notes and diagrams**

The researcher begins by writing the first impressions, thoughts and ideas down without concern for whether they are correct or not. Early notes contain impressions, thoughts and directions. By asking theoretically relevant questions and by making comparisons, the theory begins to emerge. Early notes include categories, the concepts that point to categories and some properties and dimensions. There are no restrictions on the type of notes made during open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

#### **3.8.4.2.2 Axial coding notes and diagrams**

During axial coding categories are brought into relation to each other and developed further in terms of their properties and dimensions; the notes written during this phase of the analysis should reflect this. During the early stages of axial coding, the notes reflect uncertainty, misconceptions and feeble attempts. They focus on conditions, action/interaction strategies and consequences and answer questions such as when, where, with who, how and with what consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)?

#### **3.8.3.2.1 Selective coding notes and diagrams**

In selective coding, notes reflect the complexity and depth of thought of the evolving theory. Theoretical and operational notes are specifically concerned with the refining of the theory. There is no further exploration, but rather validating of the integrated scheme takes place (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Diagrams reflect the density and complexity of the theory. A concise and precise graphic form of the theory helps to complete the final integration of the main concepts and their connections. It also helps the researcher to develop the final relationship between a major category and all its subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### **3.9 CONCLUSIONS**

Grounded theory was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in order to bridge the gap between theory and empirical research; outline the logic for, and specifications of, grounded theory; and legitimise qualitative research as a valuable research method. It has also proven to assist in the development of effective theory. Theory consists of the relationships between plausible concepts. Without concepts, no propositions or statements can be made and therefore, no cumulative scientific knowledge based on plausible but testable propositions would be possible. Grounded theory offers a set of systematic procedures that help the researcher to collect data and analyse the data, and then develop a theory regarding the phenomenon that was researched. Theory that is developed with the help of this methodology is able to specify consequences and conditions and is then able to be predictive to a certain extent (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Researchers who use grounded theory as a methodology are interested in the pattern of action/interaction between different social units. In grounded theory, processes do not refer as such to the identification of phases or stages, but rather to the search into the interplay between patterns of action/interaction and changes in circumstances. When phases or stages are differentiated for analysis purposes, they indicate conceptually what occurs under different conditions (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Strauss and Corbin (1994) state that all theories, whether or not they are grounded in data, are temporally limited. They are always provisional and never established forever. In fact, their very nature allows for endless elaboration and partial negation or qualification. As the researchers or theorists themselves are immersed in their times with all that that encompasses, their theories are limited in time. As conditions change at any level of the conditional matrix, this affects the validity of theories. Theories are constantly being outdated and need to be updated.

From this discussion on grounded theory together with the preceding discussion on phenomenological research it is evident that when investigating personal experiences, new understanding and theories can be developed from the meaning that people personally attach to experiences and their lived-in experiences.

This study was born out of the researcher's personal experience that some children appear to cope better with the divorce of their parents than others. No studies could be found where children's personal experiences and perceptions had been canvassed. Furthermore, the existing literature on children and divorce is based on adult perceptions of children's coping approached from particular theoretical frameworks. In order to develop an understanding of children's coping with divorce, data on children's own perspectives on their own experiences, and their own coping with their parents' divorce is necessary. Adopting an approach that allows the data to "speak for itself" enables a new understanding of children's coping with the phenomenon of their parents' divorce to be developed.

It is necessary, however, to contextualise the study. Literature on the effects of divorce on children needs to be considered in order to contextualise the constructs of coping reported by the children. While not approaching the investigation from a particular theoretical framework, or preconceived viewpoint,

knowledge on the effects of divorce on children guides the researcher towards possible aspects that are worth investigating without being restrictive.

In the Chapter 4 theoretical perspectives on children's coping with divorce are discussed. In order to contextualise this coping, the effects of divorce on children, as reported in the literature, is outlined.

## **CHAPTER 4**

# **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDREN'S COPING AND A CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The existing literature focuses overwhelmingly on the negative effects of divorce on children. The research has been based primarily on the perspectives of adults on children's coping with divorce, investigated from a particular theoretical perspective. It is assumed that parental divorce often follows after, and is followed by, a cascade of stressful events that threaten the psychological well-being of children. These children have to find ways within themselves to manage and cope with the situation they find themselves in, or they have to develop them. The coping processes employed by children during periods of stress have more recently been a topic of interest in the literature (Barbarin et al., 2001; Drapeau et al., 1999; Manegold et al., 2004; Richter et al., 2004). It is well documented that children find the divorce of their parents' stressful (Barnes, 1999; Jansen van Rensburg, 2004; Kail & Cavanaugh, 2007; Kelly & Emery, 2003) and therefore, research on the coping strategies employed by children coping with divorce adds to the growing body of information on coping strategies employed by children.

In Chapter 4 the different perspectives on coping are outlined and a conceptualisation of "coping" is developed. Different coping strategies employed by children are then explored. An overview of the factors that influence how children cope with their parents' divorce follows. The factors that moderate and mediate children's adjustment to divorce will influence the manifestations of the effects of divorce in children. The effects of divorce are therefore, almost by default, included in the discussion exploring the literature regarding factors that assist or hinder children's adaptation to divorce. This discussion covers the

relationship between children's coping with divorce and characteristics within the child, the relationship between children's coping with divorce and the influence of familial and other relationships, as well as the influence of changes in the social environment, race and therapeutic interventions, and the influence of the passage of time on children's coping with divorce.

## **4.2 THE CONCEPT OF COPING**

A definition of coping will be developed after different conceptual perspectives underlying the current thinking on coping have been explained. These will be briefly outlined. Following from this, different coping strategies employed by children, as reported in the literature, will be discussed.

### **4.2.1 THEORETICAL VIEWS OF COPING**

While theoretical views of coping efficacy differ slightly from each other in some respects, they are nonetheless complementary and emphasise different aspects.

#### **4.2.1.1 The contextual/ transactional/ cognitive-contextual perspective**

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) definition of coping as a continuous, ever changing cognitive and behavioural attempt to manage or deal with both external and/or internal demands that the individual sees as exceeding existing resources implies that a complex, dynamic, intentional process takes place, involving an interaction between the individual and the environment, involving episodes of evaluation and re-evaluation (Drapeau et al., 1999). The process is a conscious one, differentiating it from defence mechanisms and reflexes (Carpenter, 1992).

The emphasis of this viewpoint is that coping should be seen as encompassing all cognitive and behavioural strategies that are employed in response to specific internal and external demands, irrespective of the outcomes. The different

elements of the situation and the individual's evaluation of the perceived stressful situation are primary components in this model. Coping strategies are an attempt to control the affective arousal that occurs in threatening situations or to change the situation (Leeuwner, 2001).

Within this transactional model of adaptation to stress, perceived efficacy should increase the use of strategies that are expected to be effective, and if successful, use of these coping strategies should further increase perceptions of coping efficacy (Sandler et al., 2000).

#### **4.2.1.2 The motivational perspective**

Skinner and Wellborn (1994) conceptualise coping as an organisational construct that attempts to describe how people regulate their own behaviour, emotions and motivation during times of psychological stress. Stress is the result of pressure from the environment on the basic psychological needs for relatedness, autonomy and competence. Coping is influenced by the individual's commitment to these needs and *"encompasses people's struggles to maintain, restore, replenish and repair the fulfilment of these needs"* (Skinner & Wellborn, 1994, p.112).

From this perspective, one of the outcomes of coping is that coping efficacy beliefs are affected, and coping efficacy beliefs in turn affect future coping efforts. One of the functions of coping is to regulate behaviour, emotion and orientation to restore a sense of competence or efficacy. Coping efficacy beliefs also act as a resource that influences coping by affecting how people assess stressful events and by supporting coping attempts aimed at problem solving, planning and discovering new ways to change the threatening situation. Coping efficacy can therefore be seen as being one of the self-system processes that influence coping.

#### 4.2.1.3 The cognitive social perspective

Coping is conceptualised by Bandura (1997) as involving the belief that one can exercise control over potentially threatening events, including taking actions that reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes and controlling one's thoughts and feelings concerning the situation. He proposed that coping efficacy has multiple complementary effects, which make it more likely that people will engage in effective actions, think about the situation in ways that are less threatening, and effectively reduce negative arousal.

Within the cognitive social perspective, information that is conveyed inactively, vicariously, socially and physiologically is cognitively processed. The perception that one has greater efficacy in stressful situations affects "*cognitive, motivational, affective and decisional processes*" (Bandura, 1997, p.115). These processes are involved in the formulation and resultant behaviour of coping efforts.

The three theoretical models of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), Skinner and Wellborn (1994) and Bandura (1997) are each dynamic models of how people adapt to stress. They assume bi-directional causality between coping efficacy beliefs, coping efforts, and symptoms over time. Although these models may differ in many respects, they all hold to three propositions:

- The use of effective and ineffective coping efforts affects coping efficacy,
- coping efficacy affects the type of coping efforts used, and
- coping efficacy leads to lower psychological symptomatology following exposure to stress, in addition coping efficacy moderates the relations between coping efforts and psychological symptoms (Sandler, et al., 2000).



#### 4.2.2 A CONCEPTUALISATION OF COPING

Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p.141) define coping as: “...*constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person*”.

This definition emphasises the following:

- The dynamic process of coping and the need to evaluate it based on what people do in certain situations (Drapeau et al., 1999). It is a process that unfolds over time.
- The conscious nature of coping strategies and the coping process in general, differentiates them from defence mechanisms and reflexes (Carpenter, 1992).
- It understands strategies to be whatever the person may do in the situation, regardless of the efficacy of the strategy. Coping is then not seen to mean mastery over the environment.

Drapeau et al., (1999) maintain that the intentions underlying cognitions or behaviours help to differentiate between these two components.

Wolchik and Sandler (1997. p.12) define coping, and in particular coping strategies as: “...*cognitive and behavioural actions in a stressful situation which are intended to manage affective arousal or improve the problematic situation*”.

This definition emphasises the intentionality of the actions involved in the process of coping and the strategies employed in order to bring about some change.

Sandler, Tein, Mehta, Wolchik and Ayers (2000, p. 1009) define coping efficacy as :

“ ...*a global belief that one can deal both with the demands made and the emotions aroused by a situation*”. Coping efficacy includes the belief

*that one has dealt well with stressors in the past and can deal effectively with stressors one is likely to encounter in the future.”*

This definition incorporates the perception and belief that one has been and is still capable of, coping with internal or external factors that are stressful. This incorporates past and future experiences into the definition. Sandler et al., (2000) maintain that the experience of successfully coping with stressors in the past acts as a moderator. It is important to note that coping efficacy is a subjective evaluation rather than an objective measure of the effects of the coping strategy employed (Zautra, Reich & Newsom, 1995).

For the purposes of this study the following conceptualisation of coping has been developed:

**Coping refers to strategies, including cognitive, behavioural and beliefs that are intentionally employed in order to manage internal and/or external demands. These demands are experienced as being taxing and exceeding current resources and perceived to require intervention at some level. There is a dynamic interplay between past experiences, current perceptions and the experienced outcomes of the strategy employed, resulting in re-evaluation of the situation or a new experience. Coping strategies are not concerned with an objective evaluation of a successful outcome but rather with a subjective experience of an attempt to effect, or manage, a perceived stressful event.**

**Furthermore, coping with divorce is seen as being an ongoing process for children, demanding continued coping and employment of coping strategies as different aspects of the situation impact on them and at different stages of their lives.**

### **4.2.3 Coping strategies employed by children**

As has been seen, the perception of control over events is important in understanding the strategies that are used for dealing with them. Drapeau et al., (1999) state that little is known about children's perceptions of control over their parents' separation and the specific stressors that result from it. It has been found that children do use some coping strategies to cope with their parents' divorce (Krantz et al., 1985). However, Fields and Prinz (1997) state that little research has been done on the coping strategies used by children and adolescents in general. Many of the theoretical and conceptual models used have been derived from the literature on adult populations. A brief overview of the main conceptual models on coping will be discussed below.

#### **4.2.3.1 The problem-focused/emotion-focused coping model**

A widely used framework that classifies coping responses according to their function is the problem-focused/emotion-focused coping dichotomy proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). This model holds that a person's assessment of a given situation strongly affects the associated stress level. *Problem-focused strategies* aim to find a solution to the situation, either by changing aspects of the person, the environment or the relationship between the two. This category includes problem-solving strategies, direct action, and seeking out information on the situation. *Emotion-focused strategies* aim to deal with the emotions associated with the difficult situation. They include distraction, avoidance and a search for emotional support.

Moos and Billings (1983) independently developed a broader three-part typology that differentiates between practically, emotionally and cognitively oriented efforts. *Practically oriented efforts* are aimed at resolving or circumventing problems. *Emotionally oriented efforts* dampen, vent, or counteract negative

feelings and *cognitively oriented efforts* alter or minimize appraisal of threat or misfortune.

#### **4.2.3.2 The primary/secondary control model**

The control conceptualization of coping focuses on the goals that underlie coping activities. Rothbaum, Weisz and Snyder (1982) distinguished between three broad approaches to coping viz. primary, secondary and relinquished control. *Primary control* coping is aimed at influencing objective conditions or events, to bring the environment into line with expectations. These strategies would involve taking action of some sort. *Secondary control* is aimed at maximising one's goodness of fit with conditions or events as they are, or bringing oneself into line with environmental forces. These strategies can be seen to assist in psychological adaptation to unalterable circumstances, such as mourning someone who has died. This involves a number of subtle psychological means to reduce stress and are, therefore, covert and abstract in nature. This would then require a certain cognitive maturity. *Relinquished control* is the absence of goal-directed activity or coping and would include responses such as doing nothing and giving up.

#### **4.2.3.3 The approach/avoidance model**

A third conceptualisation of coping is the approach/avoidance model. This framework has been used frequently in the children's medical literature (Miller & Green, 1985). It is very similar to other dichotomies, such as monitoring/blunting (Miller, 1987), sensitisation/repression (Peterson, 1989), and active/passive coping (Ebata & Moos, 1991). *Approach* refers to active coping, monitoring and sensitisation. This implies a disposition to actively seek out information, exhibit concern, and make plans. Roth and Cohen (1986) describe approach-type coping strategies as behavioural, cognitive attempts to change ways of thinking about the problem or behavioural attempts to resolve a problem by focusing

directly on it. *Avoidance*, on the other hand, refers to blunting, passive coping and repression. This represents a disposition to avoid information, exhibit little concern, and distract oneself in the face of stressful situations (Fields & Prinz, 1997). Avoidance-type strategies have been described as behavioural, cognitive, emotional strategies oriented away from a stressor in order to avoid it.

#### **4.2.3.4 Factor analytic models**

A number of studies have used scales derived from factor analysing a compilation of coping responses generated by children (Fields & Prinz, 1997). These empirically derived taxonomies are helpful in that they provide information specific to children's coping and are unbiased by the imposition of adult theoretical models. Although methodological differences and variations in items compromise the factors, there is some consistency among these taxonomies and the conceptual models described above. Most of the factor analyses have revealed problem-focused or approach-oriented strategies, for example seeking support; as well as avoidant dimensions or emotion-focused strategies, for example venting feelings and seeking alternative sources of reward (Ebata & Moos, 1991).

#### **4.2.3.5 Convergence of models**

Despite the apparent diversity among the various theoretical and empirical approaches to conceptualizing children's coping, some convergence has emerged (Compas, Banez, Malcarne & Worsham, 1991). Compas et al., (1991) propose that there is a basic distinction between two overarching groups of coping strategies. The first overarching group comprises *problem-focused coping, primary control, approach coping, monitoring, sensitising, active coping and information-seeking*- all aimed at affecting the stressor more directly and involve efforts to change or master some aspect of the individual, their environment, or the relationship between them that is perceived as stressful. The

second broad group is *emotion-focused coping, secondary control coping, avoidance, blunting, repression, passive coping and information avoidance* – these all involve an attempt to manage the negative emotions associated with the stressor. They aim at avoiding the stressor and/or to control its emotional impact.

However, this overarching classification may be too broad, as it blurs some of the differences between approach/avoidance and problem-focused/emotion-focused taxonomies. Although there are similarities, there are also some differences. For example, emotion-focused strategies could potentially include both approach and avoidance strategies, as a child could try to modify their cognitions in an attempt to approach a problem, or they could manage emotions related to avoiding a stimulus.

Fields and Prinz (1997) propose that a more useful view, that incorporates all the information provided by each model, is to look at these as four overlapping groups representing two different dimensions of coping. The emotion-focused/problem-focused scheme encompasses primary/secondary strategies as well as Moos and Billing's (1983) practical, cognitive and emotional typology. The approach/avoidance conceptualization includes similar classification schemes of monitoring/blunting, active/passive and sensitization/repression. This results in the following dimensions of coping being differentiated:

- *Approach/emotion* focused coping, involving positive reappraisal, accepting responsibility and self-control,
- *Approach/problem* focused coping, involving seeking support, confrontation and problem solving,
- *Avoidance/emotion* focused coping results in distancing,
- *Avoidance/problem* focused coping is using escape as a strategy.

#### 4.2.3.6 The coping-competence model

With respect to predicting child and adolescent adjustment, the problem-focused/emotion-focused distinction does not prove to be particularly helpful, one reason being that it has been derived from work done with adults. Furthermore, these two-category, or even four-category distinctions fail to recognise adaptive functioning. This is problematic when trying to predict adjustment (Fields & Prinz, 1997).

A model more compatible with children, which also recognises the adaptive nature of coping strategies, is the coping-competence model (Blechman et al., 1995). This model suggests that children, and adults, are faced with a myriad of challenges that could be met with prosocial, antisocial or asocial coping responses. It is assumed that people use coping strategies from all three categories and that the specific behaviours within each category as well as the relative mix of the three categories evolve as a child develops. Behaviour such as crying to be fed may be seen at one developmental stage as asocial whereas that same behaviour at a different developmental stage would be seen as being antisocial (Fields & Prinz, 1997).

A key element of the coping-competence model is language development, both verbal and nonverbal, and the internal use of language in cognitions and self-instructions (Vygotsky, 1981). As defined within the coping-competence model, prosocial coping with affective, social and achievement challenges depends heavily on effective communication being information exchange, behaviour influence and problem solving (Blechman et al., 1995). Generally:

- *Prosocial coping* is a response to a challenge that can be thought of as approach behaviour reflecting respect for self and others;
- *Antisocial coping* is a response to a challenge that is an approach behaviour that fails to respect others; and
- *Asocial coping* is avoidance behaviour.

#### **4.2.4 CONCLUSIONS**

As can be seen from the above discussion a variety of coping strategies are employed by children. While these strategies are identifiable according to specific characteristics, they also overlap. Furthermore, the coping strategies employed by children differ according to the circumstances/stressors being faced by the children, such as the avoidance/approach strategies discussed primarily in research conducted with children in the medical field. Furthermore, Fields and Prinz (1997) maintain that children are protected, at least to some extent, from the effects of stressors by the family. In a divorce situation, however, this very protective factor is now the source of the stress. Santrock (1996) stated that children's perception of stress differs from that of adults. The literature indicates that children are more concerned about social isolation, the loss of a parent and rejection by friends. These are all aspects that can possibly affect a child coping with divorce. This study therefore explores how children cope with the effects of divorce; the coping strategies that they employ in order to cope with the effects of their parents' divorce that they experience, from their own perspective.

#### **4.3 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN'S COPING WITH DIVORCE AND CHARACTERISTICS WITHIN THE CHILD**

The vulnerability of some children contrasted with the ability of others to cope well when facing the changes and challenges during and after their parents' divorce, have led researchers to investigate the influence of children's own characteristics on their ability to manage the transitions that their parents' changing marital status demand of them. However, these current perspectives on children's coping with their parents' divorce with regard to characteristics within the child have been developed from the perspectives of the adults in the children's lives viz. the children's parents, teachers, therapists and the researchers themselves.



According to Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999), the most frequently studied characteristics are age, gender and personality. To explore the possible effects of divorce on children and develop an understanding of their coping, these characteristics as well as those of race, the child's coping skills, locus of control and intelligence will be explored.

#### **4.3.1 AGE OF THE CHILD**

The question of whether divorce is easier for children to cope with at different ages has received much attention because it has proven to be particularly relevant to parents when debating whether to stay together for at least a period of time in order to try to minimise the effects of divorce on the children. Most research on children and divorce has been cross-sectional in design and while this is practical it is limiting (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). The limitation of this type of research design is that it has led to theoretically relevant variables, all of which are related to the passage of time, being confounded in research on children and divorce. Emery (1988) maintains that there are three intertwined temporal variables being:

- the age of the child at the time of the separation or divorce,
- the child's current age at the time of the research,
- the length of time that has lapsed since the separation or divorce.

It is nevertheless of value to consider the different perspectives of child developmental theories in an attempt to gain some understanding of the possible influence of age on children's ability to cope with the divorce of their parents.

##### **4.3.1.1 Theoretical considerations**

Psychodynamic theorists have had much to say about the effects of divorce on children at different ages, and developmental theorists, in particular attachment and cognitive theorists, have also added their opinions. While the rationales may

differ, the consensus appears to be that divorce is most harmful when the child is under the age of six years.

#### **4.3.1.1.1 The psychodynamic paradigm**

The psychodynamic theorists have probably been the most outspoken on the effects of divorce at different ages during childhood (Emery, 1988). Meissner (1978) discusses the issue of the resolution of the Oedipal conflict and the child's subsequent identification with the same-sex parent. This is particularly relevant for younger boys because it is thought that identification with the same-sex parent is achieved by approximately 6 years of age and the father is usually the non-custodial parent, thus leaving younger boys without a male role-model. Another psychodynamic concept is that of object relations and the importance of having a single "psychological parent" (Goldstein, Freud & Solnit, 1973). It is held that the need for stability is particularly important for young children and therefore, disruptions in their relationship with the psychological parent, such as may occur through divorce, can have a marked effect on young children.

#### **4.3.1.1.2 The developmental paradigm**

Of the developmental theories, attachment theory and cognitive perspectives have been the most prominent regarding the influence of the child's age at the time of the parents' divorce, on the child's long-term adjustment and well-being.

##### **(a) Attachment theory**

Attachment theory has been very influential in the understanding of children's adjustment to divorce on at least two levels (Emery, 1999). Attachment theorists suggest that the formation of primary, secure attachment in the early years of life is imperative for healthy functioning later in life. The ability to build meaningful, close relationships with others after the infancy years is dependent on the

development of sound “working models” (Emery, 1988, p.73) that are developed in that initial primary secure attachment (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1973). As attachment to the primary caretaker, which is usually the mother, is considered to be of vital importance, separation from the primary attachment figure due to divorce would, according to attachment theory, prove to be most detrimental for young children. However, since the father is usually the non-custodial parent, and since divorce results in separation from the father, the effects of separation from the father, according to attachment theory, are unclear.

A further area in which attachment theory has proven to be very useful, is in explaining the processes that children pass through as part of their acute adaptation to separating from an attachment figure. These stages develop from the *protest stage*, when the child actively, and at times violently, protests to being separated from the primary attachment figure, into moving into the stage of *despair*. In the *despair stage* the child tends to withdraw, the protestations diminish, and it is often incorrectly assumed that the child has settled down and accepted the situation. Finally, should the duration of the separation continue for long enough, the child moves into the *detachment stage*, when the child accepts care from a succession of caregivers and appears to be happy. However, the child fails to develop a meaningful bond with any particular person (Berk, 2001). It is interesting to note that Rutter (1971) and Segilman and Rider (2003) state that when the separation was without emotional distress, the impact was far less damaging, and that when children separated from both parents the negative effects were far greater compared to when the child was separated from only one parent. Within the context of divorce the negative impact of separation is least when the child who is required to separate from the primary attachment figure has already developed a “sound working model” for the development of relationships. The child would therefore, be older than approximately six years of age for this to occur. Furthermore, the context within which the separation occurs would need to be a happy one and not fraught with negative undertones.

Although it has been assumed that children belong with the biological mother, as the person with whom the child has primarily bonded, it is important to recognise that the mother does not have to be the primary attachment figure. It can be that the child may primarily bond with the father, a substitute mother figure or even a nanny depending on the circumstances (Brandt, Swartz & Dawes, 2005).

The person to who that the child may be most closely bonded is not the only factor that may influence the child's coping with divorce at any particular age. The child's cognitive developmental age may also play a role.

### **(b) Cognitive development**

Although not specifically grounded in cognitive developmental theory, the studies on the explanations that children develop regarding their parents' divorce have been seen to be important predictors of later adjustment. Since children at different ages have different cognitive capacities, age at the time of divorce is thought to mediate adjustment. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), coming from a Piagetian approach, describe the differences in the intellectual conceptualisations that children develop at different ages in an attempt to cope with divorce.

According to Wallerstein and Kelly (1996) 3- to 5-year old children are commonly bewildered by divorce. They tend to develop unusual fantasies, fears of abandonment, emotional neediness, and display aggressive acting out behaviour, as they are not able to fully understand fully the meaning and implications of the changes due to their limited cognitive capacities. As these children are in a cognitive developmental stage characterized by egocentricity they tend to blame themselves for the divorce and any unhappiness any family member may feel, and they typically feel responsible for promoting reconciliation.

Children that are between the ages of 6- to 8-years display a greater acceptance of their parents' divorce probably due to their improved understanding of the situation (Emery, 1999). Wallerstein and Kelly (1996) found that grief tended to replace the denial, although these children still appeared to blame themselves to some extent. They still fantasised about their parents' reconciling and were desirous of this occurring.

Although cognitive theorists do not predict a shift in the cognitive development of children between the ages of 9- to 12-years from that of children between the ages of 6- to 8-years of age, it has been found that children whose parents divorce when they are between the ages of 9- to 12-years display a more successful adjustment than those children between the ages of 6- to 8-years of age display (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1996). According to these investigators however, 9- to 12-year olds also demonstrate a clear understanding of their parents' divorce and are equally clearly disapproving of it. They express and display a conscious anger towards their parents for divorcing. They also display an embarrassment because of their parents' divorce probably due to their increased social awareness.

Typically researchers have compared children who were younger than 5- to 6-years of age when their parents separated or divorced, to children whose parents' marriages broke up after that age. Some researchers have found greater adverse effects on younger children (Allison & Furstenberg, 1989; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999), but others have found no effect on children in this age group (Power, Ash, Schoenberg & Sorey, 1974). Still others have found more problems among children whose parents divorced after the age of six years (Amato & Keith, 1991a; Frost & Pakiz, 1990; Needle, Su & Doherty, 1990). Emery (1999) states that it is not surprising that there are such contradictory findings because confounding aspects, all play a role in the child's adjustment, with respect to the effect the child's age exerts on the child's adjustment to divorce, such as the child's age at time of separation, current age,

and the time that has lapsed between separation and divorce. It is of concern however, that these independent effects have yet to be untangled.

Furstenberg and Allison (1985) attempted to unravel the effects of the current age of the child and the effect of the age of the child at the time of the divorce by conducting a longitudinal study. In this study, it was found that initially those children whose parents separated when they were under the age of six years experienced greater difficulty in adjusting. Furthermore, it was found that more difficulties were found amongst those children whose parents had been separated for a longer period. In trying to untangle the effects of these temporal variables, Furstenberg and Allison (1985) found some interesting patterns contrary to the belief that younger children do not fare as well as older children in coping with divorce. They found that over the long term, younger children did not show any greater adjustment difficulties than their peers who came from two-parent families. They concluded that other confounding variables might well have influenced the outcome, in that conflict may have resulted in the poor adjustment found in the early separation groups as more conflictual marriages end sooner.

Finally, *adolescents* have been found to have the most complete and abstract conception of the reasons for their parents' divorce, which alludes to a greater adjustment to the event. According to Wallerstein and Kelly (1996) the most difficult cognitive task that adolescents are faced with is trying to integrate the divorce experience with their developing identity, particularly in relation to heterosexual relationships.

Adolescents from divorced families appear to experience less notable adjustment difficulties than do younger children (Kurdek, Blisk & Siesky, 1981; Skinner & Wellborn, 1994). It is however, possible that adolescents in general have fewer problems because it has been longer since their parents got divorced, they have learnt to rely on other support systems including siblings, extended family members and peers, they have a more sophisticated understanding of their

parents' relationship, or they have developed more involved intra-psychic defences in order to hide their insecurities and anxieties.

#### **4.3.1.2 Conclusion**

In general, while attachment and cognitive perspectives give more recognition to the process that the children go through at different ages when their parents divorce than the psychodynamic models do, they all focus on the event of divorce. By implication, an event perspective underlies the concern about the effects of age-at-separation (Emery, 1999). However, children's understanding of divorce is not fixed. Their ongoing experiences with their parents along with their continued cognitive development will influence their adjustment positively or negatively and could well prove to be more important to their adjustment than the initial cognitive construct they developed.

Furthermore, while theory is rich on the effects of *age-at-separation* on adjustment, theory and research is scant on the influence of the child's *current age* on the child's *current adjustment* to divorce. There is little in the way of theory that predicts the effect of the age of the child on current adjustment, when the child's age at the time of separation is controlled as well as the influence of the passage of time (Emery, 1989).

In conclusion then, definitive answers regarding age of the child as a buffer against parental divorce are difficult to find, because children's age at the time of the divorce, the time that has passed since the divorce and the child's current age are all theoretically important predictors of the children's adjustment, but these three temporal variables are perfectly confounded (Emery, 1999).

No matter what the age of the children, it appears however, that the advent of their parents' divorce influences the children in a manner that demands the need to employ coping strategies. These coping strategies may be more or less

necessary depending on the age of the child and their perception of the situation. Furthermore, the coping strategies may be determined by the developmental age of the child. Emery and Forehand (1994) maintain that children probably cope *differently* because of varying cognitive abilities, developmental tasks, access to extra-familial support and possibly their own temperament and pre-divorce adjustment.

#### **4.3.2 THE GENDER OF THE CHILD**

With respect to gender early research indicated that boys were more vulnerable to parental divorce than girls were. Researchers consistently found boys to be more overtly and immediately affected than girls (Atkeson, Forehand & Rickard, 1982; Emery, 1999; Hess & Camara, 1979; Hetherington et al., 1979; Porter & O'Leary, 1980; Rutter, 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1996). The same studies found little such association for girls. For example, although research with boys indicated an increased risk for antisocial and aggressive behaviour, no such relation has been reported for girls (Block, Block & Gjerde, 1986; Hetherington, et al., 1978; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1996). In their relationships with others, boys from divorced families also have been reported to be less popular (Guidubaldi et al., 1983; Levy-Schiff, 1982), and to interact more aggressively than children from married homes (Hetherington et al., 1979). Guidubaldi et al. (1983) also found that teachers reported that boys from divorced families, but not the girls, were more troublesome in class.

Reasons that have been given for these differences in adjustment to divorce according to gender, have included findings that boys are in general more exposed to domestic quarrels and the disputes continue for longer in the presence of sons than daughters (Hetherington et al., 1978; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1996). Divorced mothers have been found to attend less well to their sons' needs than those of their daughters' and tend to view their sons in a more negative light, comparing them to their ex-husbands (Emery, 1999; Hetherington et al.,



1978; Santrock, 1975; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). In the light of the fact that historically most mothers are the primary custodians of children, boys are more often placed to live with the other-sex<sup>1</sup> parent.

Children from divorced families whose fathers had been awarded custody have been compared with children whose mothers had been granted custody and with children from intact two-parent families (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Santrock & Warshak, 1979). It was found that children's adjustment in divorced homes was related to the interaction of the parent-child sex dyad. Children living with the other-sex parent were found to be less well adjusted than children living with the same-sex parent. This could be a possible explanation for the findings that boys are less well adjusted than girls.

The belief that boys are more vulnerable to parental divorce than girls has been questioned. Zaslow (1988) found that there were no gender differences and that girls fared worse than boys. Amato and Keith (1991a, 1991b) in their two meta-analyses found very few gender differences in children who had experienced parental divorce (Amato, 2001). As seen in the above discussion, confounding variables may be influencing the findings, as the sex of the parent appears to play a role in the children's adjustment. The age of the child may also influence the findings, as Hetherington (1993) found that there was a notable increase in behavioural problems in adolescence, with this increase being greater in girls than in boys. Children from divorced families have been found to be sexually precocious – girls more so than boys (Emery, 1999). In particular, the incidence of single-parenthood is higher in adolescents from divorced than from intact families and this has far more serious implications for girls than for boys in terms of their education and well-being (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). On the

---

<sup>1</sup> The author prefers to use the term "other-sex" rather than "opposite-sex" as sexes are not the opposite of one another, merely different. Opposite implies that they are the converse and this is not the case.

other hand, the diminishing of gender effects has also been attributed to the increase in the involvement of fathers following divorce reported in more recent studies (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

It is interesting to note that while both girls and boys appear to be equally vulnerable to the development of behaviour problems, depressive symptoms, low cognitive application and decreased social responsibility, a small number of girls, but not boys, have actually shown outstanding competence following divorce (Hetherington, 1989). They appear to have benefited from the increased responsibility, independence and challenges that have come their way owing to the divorce. Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999) suggest that this competency may come at a price manifested later on in early adulthood, as these women often present as people who set high standards for themselves, live with an underlying sense of inadequacy and failure, often become compulsive or inappropriate caregivers and get involved with emotionally needy partners.

The sex of the child therefore appears to play an important role in the predicted coping by the child with parental divorce. Furthermore, this coping seems to be further influenced by the sex of the custodial parent. However, it is possible that as the current trend is for the non-custodial parent to play a more significant and active role in the children's lives it is possible that this will help to provide a more normalised situation for those children coping with divorce.

#### **4.3.3 THE CHILD'S TEMPERAMENT**

As with the factors discussed above, the studies that have investigated the influence on the child's temperament on coping with divorce have proven to be difficult. Other factors have influenced the findings and often lead to more questions being asked than answers received.

Temperamentally difficult children have been found to be less adaptable to change and more sensitive to adversity than their counterparts who are considered to be temperamentally easy (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Hetherington et al., 1989; Rutter, 1980). It is not surprising then that stresses associated with their parents' divorce tends to exacerbate problems in already troubled and poorly adjusted children (Block et al., 1988; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

The more difficult child is more likely to elicit and be the target of negative responses by the parents and step-parents, whereas the temperamentally easy child not only is less likely to be the recipient of criticism, displaced anger, and anxiety but also is more able to cope with these responses. Other individual attributes such as intelligence, independence, internal locus of control, and self-esteem are also related to children's adaptability in the face of stressful life experiences (Hetherington, 1989; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Furthermore, Hetherington et al. (1989) suggest that, if temperamentally easy children have support systems available to them while going through moderate (but not high or low) levels of stress in a divorce or remarriage; this may actually enhance their ability to cope with later adaptive challenges. Block et al. (1981) found in their longitudinal study on parental agreement on child-rearing practices that when children have to cope with adversity they "grow up faster". Demo and Acock (1988) concluded that adolescents from divorced families acquired certain strengths, most importantly a sense of responsibility. If increased maturity and social competency are found among children whose parents divorce it needs to be asked however, whether this is in fact desirable or not.

For temperamentally difficult children, in contrast, increasing stress leads to a decrease in later coping skills and an increase in behavioural problems (Hetherington, 1989). Although already poorly adjusted children are most vulnerable to the effects of divorce, others develop problems as a result of experiences during and after the divorce. Chase-Lansdale, Chelin and Kiernan

(1995) found that the risk of adjustment problems in late adolescence and young adulthood remained high even when they controlled for problems evident prior to divorce. However, these controls did prove to reduce greatly the effects attributable to divorce.

When supports are not available, both temperamentally easy and difficult children are less adaptable, although difficult children have more problems (Emery & Forehand, 1994). These findings highlight the complexity of the situation in that a difficult temperament is a risk factor, and easy temperament is a protective factor, while at the same time the effects of these factors interact with the levels of stress and support that children encounter.

Tschann, Johnston, Kline and Wallerstein (1989) investigated children's temperament as a possible risk or protective factor in divorce. Interestingly, they found that not only did children with reportedly difficult temperaments develop more problems regarding their emotional adjustment following parental divorce, but that they developed a better relationship with their fathers. Tschann et al. (1989) suggest that such fathers may try to protect temperamentally difficult children, because they view them as vulnerable. If this is the case, then it is possible that a mediating process operates wherein a child's temperament elicits different responses from the environment.

In conclusion then, it appears that the results of studies investigating the influence temperament on a child's coping with divorce are unclear irrespective of whether the support received, and the effect of difficulties that existed pre-divorce exert an influence or not. Lastly, it is possible that parental personality may also influence the child's coping with the divorce. Lahey et al. (1988) found that antisocial parents might be more likely to divorce and to have temperamentally difficult children. Notwithstanding the above, there appears to be great diversity in the responses of children to divorce. Depending on the interaction of individual characteristics of the child and the pre- and post-divorce

experiences, new problems may emerge, old ones be exacerbated or attenuated, or children's adjustment enhanced by their parents' marital dissolution.

#### **4.3.4 THE CHILD'S SELF-CONCEPT**

Taylor, Peplau and Sears (2003) maintain that divorce impacts on a child's self-concept and that the manner in which the child copes with the divorce, including the methods that the child employs to cope with the divorce, either promotes a positive self-concept or adversely affects the child's self-concept.

Much research has been conducted investigating the impact of divorce on a child's self-concept. Many researchers have concluded that children from divorced families have a poorer self-concept than those from intact families (Amato, 1994; Amato, 2001; Bynum & Durm, 1996; Fischer, 1999; Pike, 2003).

It is interesting to note however, that Van Loggerenberg and Roets (1993) as well as Steyn (1989) state that a poor self-concept is not necessarily because of the divorce but rather because of the consequences of the divorce, such as a drop in living standards. Jansen van Rensburg (2004) found that there was no significant difference between the self-concept of children from divorced families and that of children from intact families. Hetherington (1989) suggests that the destructive process and occurrences that children experience prior to the divorce, may in fact result in children developing a poor self-concept.

Within the context of coping with divorce, the child's physical appearance can prove to become problematic as those features that prior to divorce were features that the child was proud of, now prove to be a source of discomfort, for example resembling the father who "deserted" the family. This then negatively impacts on the child's self-concept (Mc Kane, 1991; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976).

Pagani-Kurtz and Derevensky (1997) found that there was a correlation between children's self-esteem and the regularity with which they had contact with the non-custodial parent. Furthermore, the longer in duration the visits with the non-custodial parent are the more positive the children's self esteem.

The child's own coping skills also appear to play a role in children's coping with divorce and self-esteem. When children's coping is less flexible they struggle to develop a self-concept congruent with the changed family structure (Kurtz, 1996).

#### **4.3.5 THE CHILD'S COPING SKILLS**

Some research suggests that children's beliefs and feelings about divorce may moderate or mediate its effect on them. Children have been found to have more difficulties when they blame themselves for their parents' divorce, or when they fear being abandoned (Amato, 2000; Kurdeck & Berg, 1983, 1987; Walshak & Santrock, 1983). Healy, Stewart and Copeland (1993), however, suggest that children who are having more adjustment problems are more prone to self-blame.

Within the context of divorce, in which the children are helpless to resolve the marital dissolution, feeling responsible for something they cannot control may be particularly maladaptive. Armistead et al. (1990) found that poorer functioning among particularly girls from divorced families was associated with the use of an avoidant coping style (i.e. they avoided dealing with the divorce either cognitively or behaviourally).

The different conceptualisations of coping strategies have been discussed in detail in Section 4.2 of this chapter. The literature would suggest that the coping strategies that children employ in coping with their parents' divorce are influenced by their perception of the situation as well as the gender of the child. Furthermore, it is possible that the developmental age at which the child is

functioning as well as the temperament of the child, would influence their perception if not at least the coping strategies they would typically employ, including coping with divorce. It is important to recognise, however, that these findings have been made from the perspectives of the parents and other adults, together with having been researched from pre-selected constructs.

#### **4.3.6 THE CHILD'S LOCUS OF CONTROL**

Locus of control refers to the individual's perception of how the control of life events occur and who is responsible for such control (Jonassens & Grabowski, 1993). Locus of control describes the individual's belief with regard to the origin of events as well as the factors that define successes or failures. Rotter (1954, 1966) described *internal locus of control* as being when an individual perceives his behaviour and responses to events to be within his own control. An *external locus of control* refers to when an individual perceives himself to be exposed to changes in the environment that he is not in control of.

Kim, Sandler and Tein (1997) proposed that the concept of locus of control in earlier studies has been too dichotomous, viz. internal or external locus of control. They propose a more multidimensional approach. Multidimensionality appears to fit better for children's locus of control, since children's perceptions of their locus of control appear to have at least three different dimensions. There is an internal locus of control, an external locus of control and then there is an area where the child does not know what the outcome of the consequences to the event will be.

Research on children's locus of control in relation to coping with the divorce of their parents is lacking. Jansen van Rensburg (2004) states that locus of control is an important concept with regard to the functioning of the child, and therefore, to the functioning of children in coping with the divorce of their parents. As locus of control appears to be multidimensional and is influenced by different life

factors, it appears that different factors inherent to the divorce process impact upon and determine the child's experience of control, both internal and external.

Researchers have generally reported that children from divorced families tend to employ an external locus of control (Amato, 1993, 2001; Amato & Keith, 1991a; Hetherington et al., 1998; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Pryor & Rogers, 2001). However, while they state that there is a diminished locus of control, they do not explain this further. Baumeister's (1997) reference to the relationship between self-esteem and externalising behaviour (indicative of an external locus of control) is therefore particularly important. People who have a low self-esteem are more vulnerable to influence and failure and furthermore are less able to handle failure successfully and are more critical of others (Harter, 1983).

#### **4.3.7 THE CHILD'S INTELLIGENCE**

This aspect is closely linked to theories on children's cognitive development already discussed in Section 4.3.1.1.2 on the developmental paradigm. The cognitive development of the child will exert some influence on the child's ability to conceptualize the event of the divorce, and the meaning that they make of it for themselves.

There are many studies reported in the literature that indicate that divorce negatively impacts on a child's academic performance in comparison with that of children from two-parent families (Guidubaldi et al., 1983; Kinard & Reinherz, 1986; Shinn, 1978). Shaw (1991) reports that children from single-parent families show deficits in IQ scores ranging between 1- to- 7 points, and also exhibit lower school achievement scores. The long-term effects of divorce on children's intellectual functioning are not so clearly defined. Mulholland et al. (1991) found that the majority of the divorce adolescents in their study demonstrated relatively successful academic careers. They state that their results speak to the issue of resilience, and vulnerability. It is important to recognise that some children are



more resilient, i.e. they have a greater likelihood of successful adaptation despite exposure to stressful life events.

Another important aspect is the possibility that the child's intellectual functioning may play a role in the child's ability to adapt to divorce apart from the developmental stage of the child. Mulholland et al. (1991) state that academically sound students are likely to show high self-esteem, confident interpersonal skills and emotional resilience. This would suggest that they could then withstand the possible negative effects of divorce more easily than those children who are not as academically sound and do not feel as confident about themselves. It does need to be recognised that research into these dynamics is scarce and would be fraught with the difficulty of separating out the effects of confounding variables, such as the effect of the passage of time since separation, the child's personality type as well as the effect of the developmental age of the child and the influence of the parent's ongoing relationship, outside support and levels of conflict both before and after the divorce. All of these factors would influence the child and the meaning that the child may make of the divorce on an intellectual level, and therefore influence the child's adjustment on an ongoing basis.

#### **4.3.8 CONCLUSION**

From the above discussion it is evident that a child's coping with divorce is influenced, at least to some extent, by factors that are "within" the child. Some of these characteristics may also be influenced by the effects the divorce has on the child. A dynamic interplay appears to exist and continues to play out over time affecting the child's ongoing management of the situation, as the child moves through different developmental stages and the ongoing demands that the divorce scenario may place on the child. However, other powerful factors also influence a child's coping with divorce that are exerted by other significant people in the child's life.

### **4.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN'S COPING WITH DIVORCE AND THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILIAL AND OTHER RELATIONSHIPS**

Considerably more attention has been devoted to family than to individual child factors that lead to risk or resilience in children's coping with divorce (Emery & Forehand, 1994). As divorce demands a number of changes in family life, it is not surprising that the effect of these changes has received so much attention. Conflict between the parents, parenting styles and skills including the parents' temperament and pathology, relationships with the parents, the influence of the sex of the custodial parent as well as the child's relationships with siblings and grandparents as a source of support or otherwise, are all factors that may influence a child's coping with divorce.

#### **4.4.1 PARENTAL CONFLICT**

While there is considerable debate on the factors that influence children's coping with their parents' divorce and the effect that divorce has on children, the diverse opinions converge on one point: unresolved, enduring parental conflict can violate children's core developmental needs and threaten their psychological growth (Kelly, 2000).

##### **4.4.1.1 Defining parental conflict**

When defining entrenched conflict between parents it is important to recognise that the conflict can and in fact usually does begin prior to separation and divorce. By virtue of the fact that the circumstances are different prior to separation from those that exist after the separation, the definition needs to consider this.

McIntosh (2003) defines entrenched pre-separation conflict to include a high degree of anger and distrust, incidents of verbal abuse, intermittent physical aggression, ongoing difficulty in communication about the children, ongoing difficulty cooperating in the care of the children and the sabotaging of children's relationship with their other parent. She defines entrenched post-separation conflict to include all of the above factors together with high rates of litigation and re-litigation, pervasive mistrust of the other parent, and covert or overt hostility directed at the other parent, an ongoing negative attitude to the ex-spouse, avoidance of the other parent and unsubstantiated allegations about the ex-partner's behaviour and parenting practices. The ongoing entrenched conflict evident post-separation is linked to and may in some instances be born from the pre-separation conflict.

McIntosh (2003) goes further to state that parents at impasse are more likely to be emotionally distressed and/or possibly characterologically disturbed compared to parents who are able to settle disputes amicably. The extent to which their dysfunctions are attributes rather than reactions to the stress of divorce is unclear, but it is highly probable that a combination is likely.

#### **4.4.1.2 The child's age and parental conflict**

The meaning that children make of parental conflict is influenced by their developmental stage. Parents' conflictive behaviours are only part of the information that a child uses to construct the meaning of the conflict and its relevance for themselves (Medina, Margolin & Wilcox, 2000). Their ability to understand conflict differs in important ways at various stages of development.

Five-year-olds are less likely to understand that conflict is about divergent goals and are more likely to be self-blaming (Jenkins & Buccioni, 2000), which is in keeping with the cognitive theories. They do not understand that parents may have two or more social roles and they tend to focus on the parental role at all

times, as this is the role that interfaces with them on a personal level. This leads them to being more egocentric in their interpretation of disputes: this is about parenting and therefore, about them. McIntosh (2003) states that children are not able to analyse marital conflict in terms of the mental state of the parents until about the age of seven years. She believes that 4- to 5-year olds are particularly vulnerable because of their tendency to self-blame. Furthermore, at this stage the conflict and its resolution is understood in behavioural terms: the fight is over when the shouting stops. Children in this age group are also most likely to take sides in their parents' arguments in an attempt to understand the issue, rather than out of a desire to align themselves with one or the other parent.

Older children, from the age of 7- to 9-years, understand that conflict requires change in the goal of at least one parent. This age group has a more sophisticated understanding of triangulation (McIntosh, 2003), which is when the child tries to keep both parents happy and tries to keep a fair balance between the parents. These children are also more concerned as to whether some sort of resolution has been achieved or not. As these children have a lower threshold for perceived conflict, they identify a wider range of negative interactions as being conflictual (El-Sheikh & Harger, 2001).

Adamson and Thompson (1998) found that children between the ages of 5- to 8-years typically tried to distract their parents when they sensed conflict whereas children between the ages of 8- to 12-years were found to step into the argument in order to try and stop it. It was only older adolescent that were most likely to try to actively avoid the conflict.

Not surprisingly, Adamson and Thompson (1998) also report that children's emotional reactions to arguments between their parents, in which the children themselves are the topic under discussion, are predominantly responses of guilt rather than anger, sadness and distress. Kerig (1999, 2001) found that those children who stepped in most actively to intervene in parents' conflicts were the

most symptomatic, with marked patterns of anxiety and depression. McIntosh (2003) states that research indicates that children across a broad developmental range can and do distinguish between different forms of marital conflict. Threats to leave the marriage and parents' expressions of fear are the most distressing forms of non-physical conflict (Cummings & Davies, 2002). In these situations, children's distress is diminished as a direct function of whether conflicts are resolved, and the degree of resolution.

All children are sensitive to parental anger, but children with histories of spousal violence tend to respond with greater intensity (Adamson & Thompson, 1998). In general, children from violent homes are more likely to become personally involved, whereas children from non-violent homes are more likely to use a problem-solving approach. The forms of adult conflict most distressing to children are those that lack resolution and include high levels of hostility, physical violence, or threats to leave (McIntosh, 2003).

#### **4.4.1.3 The child's gender and parental conflict**

Research appears to be inconclusive with regard to specific gender differences associated with divorce (Kelly, 2000; Vandewater & Landsford, 1998). There are nevertheless noticeable differences in the effects that marital conflict has on boys and girls. In general, boys tend to experience a high level of threat whereas a higher level of self-blame is experienced by girls. This has an effect on the patterns of adjustment found (Cummings, Davies & Simpson, 1994; Kerig, 1998). A possible explanation for this is that the boys' externalising and anxiety-based responses are linked to their dominant experience of anger and threat in parental conflict whereas the girls' tendency toward internalising responses is more dependent on their appraisals of self-blame and perceived control (McIntosh, 2003). Those children who have experienced their parents' violence are likely to be the most disturbed, especially boys (Jaffe, Hurley & Wilson, 1990).

It is interesting to note that in the United States of America the gender-related responses to parent conflict were similar in ethnic minority children and ethnic majority children (McLoyd, Harper & Copeland, 2001).

#### **4.4.1.4 The impact of parental conflict on the child's adjustment**

Parental conflict has been the focus of considerable research on children's adjustment to divorce. The evidence overwhelmingly supports the thinking that high levels of conflict between parents, with all its ramifications, is linked with more psychological difficulties among children than any other factors associated with divorce (Emery, 1982, 1988; Grych & Fincham, 1990, 1992; Long & Forehand, 1987). Parental conflict may even be more strongly associated to children's adjustment than in divorce per se (Forehand, McCombs, Long, Brody & Fauber, 1988). The research literature indicates that the intensity of parental conflict, the style of conflict, its manner of resolution and the presence of buffers to ameliorate impacts of high conflict are the most important indicators of child adjustment (McIntosh, 2003).

##### **4.4.1.4.1 Children's responses to parental conflict**

If children find exposure to parental conflict distressing, then it would be reasonable to assume that they would be personally motivated to terminate the conflict (Emery, 1999). The manner in which children intervene in or withdraw from their parent's conflicts may be an important factor in developing an understanding of children's individual differences in respect of the adjustment to their parents' divorce.

Family-systems theorists have identified several possibilities, all with their own problems. Minuchin, Baker, Rosman, Liebman, Milman and Todd (1975) describe three alternatives:-

- Children can side with one parent against the other - resulting in a *parent-child coalition*,
- Children can attempt to maintain an equal and balanced relationship with each parent - resulting in a *triangulation*,
- Children can try to reunite their parents by serving as a scapegoat - resulting in *detouring*.

It is possible however, that children may attempt other alternatives (Emery, 1988). They may try to directly intervene in the conflict and mediate a solution. By emotionally withdrawing, the child may be able to relieve the distress they are experiencing due to the conflict at least temporarily (Emery, 1988). Other children may learn to exploit the division between their parents, playing them off against one another.

The response that any one child may have to parental conflict experienced is probably as a result of many confounding variables such as the child's temperament, developmental age, past experiences regarding conflict, existing relationships with each parent, other support available and the child's gender.

#### **4.4.1.4.2 Negative effects of parental conflict on children**

A number of negative effects of entrenched parental conflict on children coping with divorce have been established in the literature. Disturbed patterns of emotional arousal, in that the children become sensitized to further conflict, and affect regulation particularly in violent conflict, has been reported. The children develop a heightened sensitivity to conflict (Cummings, 1987; Jouriles, Bourg, & Farris, 1991). De Bellis (2001) and McLoyd, Harper and Copeland (2001) report an increase in physiological arousal in response to conflict. Heightened aggression, impulsivity, anxiety, poor social skills and emotional problems have been reported by Block et al. (1986) and Harrist and Ainslie (1998). Furthermore, the inappropriate models of interpersonal relationships that the

children are exposed to in entrenched parental conflict, is thought to play a major role in the development of these effects (Long & Forehand, 1987). Fauber, Forehand, Thomas and Wiersen (1990) propose that parental conflict disrupts parenting and thereby leads to children's behaviour problems. Children of highly conflictive divorcing parents at impasse are two to five times more likely to be clinically disturbed in emotions and behaviour compared with the average population (McIntosh, 2003). This is possibly because of the development of dysfunctional behaviour patterns developed because of the divorce. Unsuccessful conflict resolution processes lead to the development of non-normative family structures, especially a weakened parenting alliance and cross-generational alliances between children and parents (Emery, 1994, 1999).

#### **4.4.1.4.3 Positive effects of parental conflict on children**

The absence of parental conflict and/or the occurrence of parental attachment between the parents post divorce may also be problematic for children of divorce. Futterman (1980) found that children whose parents had undergone a "civilized divorce" later displayed a variety of symptoms. These included aggression, social problems, depression, anxiety, psychosomatic disorders and declines in academic performance. It was suggested that avoidance of conflict and overt hostility by parents in the pre-divorce period might prevent an opportunity to work through and understand the family conflicts and feelings. As a result, these children become confused, as they cannot understand why their "friendly" parents have divorced. Dreman (2000) states that the incidence of reunion fantasies in children from amicable divorces is higher, which supports this hypothesis.

Moderate conflict levels may be a contributing factor in helping divorcing couples to disengage and start a new life (Dreman, 2000). In support of this is research that shows that moderate conflict, accompanied by conflict resolution involving



negotiation and compromise, contributes positively to children's post-divorce adjustment (Camara & Resnick, 1989).

Camara and Resnick's studies (1988, 1989) indicate that when parents are able to engage in co-operative parenting on such issues as visitation, discipline and family routines, and can further constructively resolve their differences the children adjust to the divorce more successfully even when high levels of conflict exist on other issues.

#### **4.4.1.4.4 Variables influencing the impact of parental conflict on children**

Not only is it well accepted that entrenched parental conflict during divorce has a negative impact on children's adjustment to their parents' divorce but different factors pertaining to the nature of the conflict also result in particular outcomes. The *intensity of the conflict* has been found to be a more reliable predictor of the child's adjustment than the separation and divorce itself (Cummings & Davies, 1994). The *cumulative impact* of conflict pre- and post- separation, and historical context has been found to be extremely important in understanding the current impacts (Cummings & Davies, 2002). *Pre-separation issues* such as children's poor adjustment, parental conflict and unsupportive parenting processes have been found to predate the separation itself as far back as 11 years prior to separation (Grych & Fincham, 2001; Shaw, Emery & Tuer, 1993). The effect of *frequency of conflict* interacts inextricably with other factors such as, the intensity, severity, or destructiveness and the message or meaning of parents' arguments (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Jourilles et al., 1991). Beuhler, Betz, Ryan, Legg and Trotter (1998) found the *style of hostility* to be a significant factor when investigating the impact that parental divorce had on children. They found that for children in both intact and divorced families, overly hostile styles of conflict (both physical and verbal) are more strongly associated with symptomatology found in the children, than either covert styles or the frequency of the conflict. *Covert conflict* in the form of unspoken tension, resentment and

triangulation, is linked with internalising behaviours, more specifically, depression, anxiety and withdrawal (Buehler, et al., 1998; Bolger & Patterson, 2001). Cummings and Davies (2002) found that children's distress is reduced according to the degree to which the parents are able to resolve the conflict. However, children are generally less distressed by non-resolution of parental conflict when the parents themselves are optimistic about the ultimate outcomes of the conflict (McIntosh, 2003).

Ongoing conflict between parents appears to be the most important of these factors (McIntosh, 2003). Impact occurs through two processes namely, direct impact where the child observes, is party to, and becomes involved in the parental conflict, or alternatively, indirect impact where parental conflict influences the child through alternative mechanisms which affect family functioning, such as being taken into a parent's confidence inappropriately (Kritzmann, 2000).

Ayoub, Deutsch and Maragonore (1999), found that intensity and frequency were not necessarily the most salient factors in the witnessing of domestic violence between parents. A single exposure to parental violence resulted on some occasions in trauma of diagnostic proportions. They proposed that the strongest predictors of emotional distress in children were a combination of exposure to domestic violence and maltreatment by the parent/s.

#### **4.4.1.5 Conclusions**

Children's coping with divorce is therefore influenced by the parental conflict they experience pre- and post- divorce as well as the manner in which the parents perceive the conflict and the eventual outcome.

It must nevertheless also be recognised that some conflict is a normative part of post-divorce parenting - in fact, of parenting of any kind (King & Heard, 1999).

Persistent conflict between parents however, undermines the quality of their parenting, their affective responses to their children, and styles of discipline (McIntosh, 2003). Added to this scenario is the fact that negative parenting has been found to be associated with a myriad of child outcomes, specifically poorer social awareness, and social withdrawal. Conversely, parental warmth plays a vital role in buffering the negative impact of conflict, even high conflict, as does resolution of conflict (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Emery, 1999).

The influence of parental conflict on the child's adjustment to divorce is therefore closely linked to, and in itself influenced by parenting styles.

#### **4.4.2 PARENTING SKILLS**

Hetherington, et al. (1989) state that in single-parent families, the well-being of the custodial parent and the quality of the parent-child relationship become central to the adjustment of the child. Amato (1993) found that as is predicted in the parental adjustment perspective, the well-being of children of divorce was positively associated with the adjustment of the custodial parent and the quality of parenting after divorce.

Parents having a difficult time coping with their roles because of resource constraints may find that the quality of their parenting is affected (Hilton & Desrochers, 2002). Parenting may suffer directly if the parent is overworked and physically or psychologically absent much of the time. Indirectly, these conditions can affect parenting if parents feel that they are losing control, especially concerning their children's behaviour. Although parents may endeavour to maintain stability in their parenting and relationships with their children, they also experience their own psychological and life-related difficulties resulting in a "spill-over" onto the children. This is particularly pertinent to the first few years after the separation has occurred. Disruptions in child-rearing are so common, and often so marked, that a period of "diminished parenting" has been identified by

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980). It appears that the pressures inherent in raising a child alone, combined with too few resources for coping with a multitude of demands, are disruptive to both parenting and parental control. The children of single parents appear to respond to these deficits with problem behaviour (Hilton & Desrochers, 2002).

Hetherington's (1989) and Hetherington, et al. (1982) have provided convincing evidence that divorced mothers demonstrate poorer parenting skills than married mothers, including fewer maturity demands, less affection and less consistency. Their children also displayed more behavioural problems. Capaldi and Patterson (1991), Fauber, Forehand, Thomas and Wierson (1990) and Forehand, Thomas, Wierson, Brody and Fauber (1990) found that children from divorced homes functioned less well when poor parenting skills were manifest. The deficits examined in these studies included: poor communication, problem solving and monitoring, rejection, and little involvement with the children. Wolchik, Wilcox, Tien and Sandler (2000) found that parental acceptance and consistency of discipline, in particular, provided vital protective buffers against the stressors associated with divorce. Katz and Gottman (1997) found that parental warmth and praise, with low levels of derogatory comments about the other parent, completely buffered children from negative outcomes of academic difficulty, emotional regulation problems, negative peer relationships, and child physical illness. These parenting skills may prove to be very valuable in terms of identifying at risk children.

Over and above the possibility that poor parenting appears to be a risk factor for children in divorced families, it also seems that it may be a mediator between interparental conflict and children's behaviour problems. Fauber et al. (1990) found that conflict between parents was associated with a rejecting style of parenting, which was related to both internalising and externalising problems in children. It therefore, appears that poor parenting does not stand alone as a risk

factor for children. Rather, it is interrelated with other risk factors, and may qualify their influence.

The quality of parenting in divorced families improves as the parents' emotional state improves and as family roles and relationships stabilise in a new family equilibrium. Hetherington (1993) maintains, however, that the parenting of divorced parents remains less authoritative than that of non-divorced parents. For some families, divorce permanently alters parenting from a more to a less adaptive style. It appears that the long-term disruptions in parenting and their consequences for children depends on factors such as the parents' emotional well-being, the social and economic support available to the custodial parent, the number of children in the family and their ages, the sex of the children and the custodial parent and the personalities of the children.

#### **4.4.3 PARENTS' TEMPERAMENT AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY**

Amato (2001, 1994), Hetherington et al. (1998) as well as Amato and Keith (1991a) discuss the psychopathology specific to parents encountering divorce. Psychopathology in parents in relation to the divorce can impact on the child's psychological functioning and adaptation to the divorce. Interestingly, these high-risk parents have often played a significant role in the break down of the marital relationship. The disorders as outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR) (American Psychological Association, 2000) and divorce related syndromes are of relevance when the parents' psychological functioning and adaptation to the divorce is under consideration.

.

##### **4.4.3.1 The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual and ICD-10 Codes**

It needs to be recognised that it is not necessarily appropriate to relate the event of divorce to diagnosable disorders as outlined in the DSM-IV and International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10). It can be seen however, that some

disorders, depending on the premorbid psychological functioning of the person, are exacerbated by the divorce process. Furthermore, research has shown that some premorbid psychological functioning disorders do not necessarily clear during the divorce process (Emery, Waldron, Kitzmann & Aaron, 1999). The impact of stress on a number of DSM-IV diagnoses has been recognised to be detrimental to the functioning of the person. It is therefore understandable that a well-functioning parent may begin to experience problems managing or controlling previously well-managed disorders. Anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress and somatoform disorders are some of the most common disorders associated with divorce. When there is a pre-morbid potential for a personality disorder, the stress of divorce can precipitate the manifestation of the disorder.

#### **4.4.3.2 Divorce related syndromes**

Initially when divorce related syndromes were first recognised and identified, the term encompassed varying degrees of severity. Divorce related syndromes began receiving attention in the literature and became a recognisable condition as a result of the increase in divorces, custody disputes and complications thereof. The most distinguishing factor related to divorce related syndromes is that one of the parents will actively manipulate the situation in order to try to get sole custody of the children and have the other parent's access to the children removed. The children are to a lesser or greater extent also involved and manipulated in the attempt to attain the desired outcome (Wakeford, 2001). At the Fifth Annual Conference National Council for Children's Rights, Williams (1990) defined divorce syndrome as being the purposeful removal, withdrawal or severe limiting of a caring parent's involvement in a child's life, following divorce or separation. He maintained that divorce related syndromes are the cruellest infringement upon children's rights and went further to say that they have extremely serious psychological implications for the child and parent's well-being.

Wakeford (2001) discusses various syndromes have been differentiated within divorce related syndromes:

- Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) as outlined by Gardner (1992);
- The Sexual Allegations in Divorce Syndrome (SAID), (Gardner, 1987);
- The Medea Complex (Jacobs, 1988);
- Divorce- Related Malicious Mother Syndrome (Turket, 1999), and
- Munchausen by Proxy (MBP).

There is however, much criticism against the use of the word syndrome in relation to the alienation by one parent of the other parent in a divorce situation, (Bruch, 2002). The empirical evidence that these syndromes are based on is questionable and the use of the word “syndrome” in itself is problematic. It implies that there is a set of psychiatrically identifiable symptoms. Furthermore, Gardner (1987) failed to recognise the normal developmental sequence of emotional reactions by children to their parent’s divorce (Bruch, 2002). Notwithstanding these serious criticisms, the term “divorce syndrome” persists.

Kelly and Johnson (2001) have contributed a key reformulation of parental alienation in that they highlighted ongoing parental conflict as a chief protagonist in the creation of the alienated child, within a complex web of factors. Williams (1990) outlined some of the most important consequences of divorce related syndromes to include the situation when the parent who is the “victim” in the divorce chooses to withdraw from having contact with the child as a result of the allegations made in an attempt to protect the child from further emotional pain. While the victim can withdraw, however, the child remains in the emotional battleground with the parent who is making the suppositions. The child then experiences a loss of a parental figure because of a process that to the child is not understandable, and the child may well blame the parent who is actually the victim. Later, the child may experience difficulties building relationships with other adults that attempt to enter into a relationship with the child requiring mutual trust.

The impact of parents' psychopathology and divorce syndrome cannot be underestimated. According to Erikson (1965) the child in the middle years of childhood tends to identify with the parents; and children in this stage of development are more attached to their parents. It is then not surprising that pathology in the parent can have serious implications for the child. Although there have been some studies investigating divorce related syndromes in adults there have been no significant studies on the influence of this behaviour on the child in the middle years of childhood development. The incorrect feedback that the child receives regarding his relationship with the one parent from the other parent can result in the child developing incorrect perceptions of himself and he learns to distrust his own perceptions. Often the child in this situation receives much encouragement and attention because of having testified against the other parent, forcing the child to take sides irrespective of whether the child was a willing or otherwise participant. There is always the risk in such a situation that a symbiotic relationship develops between the child and the parent and the child often becomes a *parentified* child (Wakeford, 2001). As a result, these children often find it difficult to relate successfully with their peer group, leaving them socially isolated. The child develops an external locus of control because of being used as a pawn in the power struggle that develops when a parent manifests such psychopathology. The parent using the child to report false allegations against the other parent regarding sexual molestation can result in the child later developing behavioural problems (Jansen van Rensburg, 2004). However, these are all however speculative and need to be researched more thoroughly.

#### **4.4.4 THE CHILD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PARENTS**

Emery (1999) states that while the physical separation of the parents may be the most obvious and distressing aspect of divorce that children have to cope with, this is acute and short-lived. He maintains that the changes that occur in the



child's relationships with each of the parents appears to be more important factors influencing the child's psychological functioning and adjustment to divorce over time.

#### **4.4.4.1 Pre-divorce relationships with the parents**

The influence of a supportive relationship with at least one of their parents has received considerable attention as a predictor of children's adjustment to divorce. A trusting relationship between a child and an adult, not necessarily even a parent, has been found to be an extremely significant protective factor (Gelman, 1991). Similarly, a good parent-child relationship has been found to be an important factor for children experiencing parental divorce (Camara & Resnick, 1987, 1988; Forehand, Middleton & Long, 1987; Hess & Camara, 1979; Hetherington et al., 1982; Mc Intosh, 2003; Perterson & Zill, 1986). It is interesting to note that a good relationship with one parent appears to be an effective buffer for children from a bad relationship with the other parent. This suggests that a process of resilience operates. Poor relationships with both the parents' leaves the child feeling isolated and results in particularly poor child functioning (Forehand et al., 1987; Hess & Camara, 1979; Pererson & Zill, 1986).

Several hypotheses have been put forward as to why a warm, supportive relationship with one parent may mediate a child's coping more effectively with divorce. Wierson and Forehand (1992) suggest that it helps children feel secure and that it facilitates parents' appropriate discipline. This is however, speculative.

#### **4.4.4.2 Post-divorce relationships with the parents**

Parenting problems are not uniform, including across divorced households, across mothers and fathers, or even for one parent across time. Furthermore, mothers and fathers face very different issues, and this is magnified when one parent is trying to fulfil the role traditionally played by the other sex parent

(Emery, 1999). Another factor that needs to be recognised is that the challenges that the custodial parent encounters can differ vastly from the challenges that the non-custodial parent faces. The one parent may be feeling overwhelmed by the tasks of single-parenting whilst the other parent feels excluded and cut off from the children. The child's relationship with both the custodial and the non-custodial parent plays a significant role in the child's adjustment to divorce.

McIntosh (2003) re-iterates that an ongoing good relationship post-divorce with one and preferably two parents can buffer the impacts of separation and divorce for children. Buchanan et al. (1996) conducted a longitudinal study investigating the conditions of post-divorce family life associated with the adjustment in adolescents. They found that a strong predictor of child well-being was an environment that reduced daily stress for the child, through consistency of rules, routines, and expectations within the household, and quality of parental monitoring. These factors are no different to those that would be considered to constitute good parenting in any family whether the parents are divorced or not. Grych and Fincham (2001) state that there is a direct correlation between high marital conflict and child outcomes based on the type of parenting that the child receives post-separation and the quality of the parent-child relationship.

Divorcing parents are characterised by euphoria and optimism, alternating with anxiety, loneliness and depression (Hetherington et al., 1989). Divorce therefore places these parents under stress and this may well affect their parenting and relationships with their children. The children may be faced with anger, instability and vulnerability when they themselves need stability and parental strength in their changing and often chaotic lives. This process is circular since a vulnerable parent with a distressed, demanding, noncompliant child may experience difficulty giving support or comfort (Hetherington et al., 1989) and in the process, they exacerbate each other's feelings. Emery and Forehand (1994) state that not only does poor parenting appear to be a risk factor for children in divorced families, but it also may be a mediator between inter-parental conflict and

children's behaviour problems. Fauber et al. (1990) found that conflict between parents was associated with a rejecting style of parenting, which was related to both internalising and externalising problems in children. Poor parenting does not stand alone as a risk factor for children; rather it is interrelated with other risk factors, and may qualify their influence.

Family cohesiveness, viz. a sense of togetherness and adaptability, and flexibility may also be related to children's divorce adjustment (Dreman 2000). Divorced mothers reported fewer behavioural problems when they perceived family cohesion and flexibility as being high and the most behavioural problems when they perceived these levels as low.

On the other hand, Emery (1988) mentions that in fact the possibility exists that parents and children may be drawn closer together in certain circumstances and their relationship can benefit in a divorce situation. Children's coping with divorce can be assisted by positive relationships with their parents both pre- and post-divorce.

#### **4.4.5 The child's relationship with the non-custodial parent**

Although it is believed that involvement of the non-custodial parent in child-rearing benefits children, it is interesting to note that this topic has only recently received attention in the literature (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). The research that has been conducted has focused primarily on non-custodial fathers which, amongst other things, is a reflection of the trend for mothers to retain custody. Drapeau, Samson and Saint-Jaques (1999) maintain that the reason that children find the news that their parents are to separate so difficult to accept is that it is usually associated with a loss or lack of contact with one of the parents. Research indicates that in general, contact with the non-custodial parent decreases over time, especially with non-custodial fathers (Amato, 1994; Amato

& Booth, 1996; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001; Shaw, 1991).

Non-custodial mothers differ greatly from non-custodial fathers in their level of involvement, in their child-rearing as well as in the types of relationships they have with their children (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). In comparison to fathers, non-custodial mothers are more likely to adjust their living arrangements to facilitate visits from their children and they are more likely to establish and maintain contact with their children even when circumstances such as employment and remarriage commitments and relocations make this difficult (Furstenberg, 1990). Non-custodial mothers are, according to Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999) more likely to assume a traditional role of supporter, disciplinarian, teacher, advisor and confidant. They are more sensitive to their children's emotional needs and better at communicating with and supporting their children in times of stress in comparison to non-custodial fathers (Furstenberg, 1990). Children report feeling closer to non-custodial mothers than to non-custodial fathers (Arditti, 1992; Johnston, Kline & Tschann, 1989).

The role of the non-custodial father and the relationship between frequency of contact and the quality of the relationship that children have with their father has been widely researched. Amato and Gilbreth (1999) state that many researchers have assumed that frequency of contact serves as an indicator of the general quality of the father-child relationship. However, the results from a study conducted by Young, Miller, Norton and Hill (1995) suggest that it is not the presence of fathers that is critical for children's well-being, but the extent to which fathers engage in authoritative parenting. An authoritative father can buffer the child against the adverse effects of a rejecting or incompetent mother, although these protective effects are more difficult for nonresidential fathers than for non-divorced residential fathers or under conditions of conflict (Hetherington, 1993). Contact with a supportive, authoritative, reasonably well-adjusted non-custodial parent under conditions of low interparental conflict can enhance the adjustment

of children and these effects are greatest for non-custodial parents and children of the same sex (Hetherington, 1989; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). When non-custodial fathers feel they have control over decisions about their children and when conflict is low, fathers more often sustain both contact and child support (Braver et al., 1993; Seltzer, 1990). Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999) maintain that the quality of the contact differs from that of non-custodial mothers. Non-custodial fathers tend to try to establish a friendly companionable role with their children, and focus on recreational activities and maintain pleasant visits.

The non-custodial parent can play a significant role in children's coping with divorce, either in a positive or negative manner. As the current trend is for non-custodial parents, usually the father, to be more involved, the role that these parents can play becomes a more pertinent factor in exploring children's coping with the divorce.

Another factor that appears to influence relationships with non-custodial parents is the introduction and influence of step-parents. Remarriage can result in a decrease of visitation with the nonresidential parent (Furstenburg, Peterson, Nord & Zill, 1983) as well as an increase in parental conflict. The role of the step-parent therefore needs to be taken into account.

#### **4.4.6 THE INFLUENCE OF THE STEP-PARENT RELATIONSHIP**

There is a concerning lack of research in this area and what there is has been highly criticised for serious methodological flaws. This is especially serious when it is kept in mind that statistics indicate that most people who divorce tend to remarry.

Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) state that at least 50% of children from divorced families experience a second divorce later in their childhoods. The

incidence of divorce is statistically higher for those people that have already been divorced once, than for those that have never been divorced (Jansen van Rensburg, 2004). The implication for the children of these families is that they repeatedly have to reconstruct a family unit only to have the family unit disintegrate again (Pagani, Boulerice, Tremblay & Vitaro, 1997). When a third party is implicated in the divorce the children are confronted with a further issue; not only do they have to deal with the impact of the divorce of their parents, but they have to assimilate a third authority figure in their lives (Jansen van Rensburg, 2004). The child's perception of the step-parent and the manner in which all the members of the family approach the tasks involved in achieving acceptance and harmony influence the success of this assimilation (Everett, 1998).

There is some preliminary evidence to suggest that boys from divorced families experience benefits from remarriage (Chapman, 1977; Oshman & Manosevitz, 1976), whereas girls respond unfavourably (Clingempeel, Brand & Ievoli, 1984; Santock, Warshak, Lindbergh & Meadows, 1982). Sex differences may play a role in these findings as children typically are placed in the mother's custody and the introduction of a stepfather is not unusual. Hetherington (1986) maintains that the addition of a same-sex parent may serve to buffer the strained mother-son relationship that typically follows divorce. Girls, however, tend to draw closer to their mothers following divorce, and the stepfather may be seen as a threat or an intruder (Peterson & Zill, 1986).

These factors would all influence how children cope with the ongoing effects of their parents' divorce. Step-parents can play a significant role in assisting children to cope with the divorce, or alternatively introduce an element that could result in the ongoing coping of the children being made more difficult.

#### 4.4.7 THE INFLUENCE OF SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

While research on this aspect is limited, there is some evidence to suggest that the presence of siblings may help to protect children from the stress of divorce.

Female siblings have been found to play a particularly effective role in filling the emotional voids that an unresponsive parent may leave (Hetherington, et al., 1989). Male siblings on the contrary tend to be more antagonistic than the siblings of non-divorced parents. Emery and Forehand (1994) state that children from divorced families who have no siblings demonstrate more externalising problems than children from divorced families with siblings or from families where the parents are married irrespective of whether they have siblings or not. The possibility that siblings provide support to one another as they cope with similar struggles is supported by evidence that perceived sibling support is related to more positive attitudes and perceptions about the outcome of divorce (Cowen, Pedro-Carroll & Alpert-Gillis, 1990). In particular, these investigators found that sibling support was related to realistic views about the children's role in the divorce and their ability to reunite their parents.

Good sibling relationships appear to be a good buffer to parental conflict (Barnes, 1999; McIntosh, 2003). Caya and Liem (1998) found that sibling support ameliorates the negative impact of parental conflict on self-esteem, competence, social skill and general self-worth. Furthermore, the quality of the interaction, rather than residential proximity, was found to be important in the provision of meaningful support by siblings, of a type not rendered by peers.

It has also been reported that changes occur within the sibling subsystem because of the divorce, which the children have to assimilate. Children can be drawn into *choosing sides*, or feel that they have to take on the role of the parent that is not present, becoming a *parenting child*. These factors can affect the relationships between the siblings. Furthermore, when one child displays

behavioural problems prior to the divorce, that child may be seen by the other siblings as having been the cause of the divorce (Jansen van Rensburg, 2004).

Rivalrous, aggressive, coercive sibling and step-sibling relationships are more common in stepfamilies than positive relationships, and these negative relationships may act as additional stressors, at least in the first two years following remarriage (Hetherington et al., 1989). Sibling relationships in stepfamilies improve somewhat over time, but they are still more troubled than those of siblings with non-divorced parents (Hetherington, 1989).

It appears that changes in the sibling relationships can act as a mediating or moderating factor in children coping with divorce.

#### **4.4.8 THE INFLUENCE OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH GRANDPARENTS AND THE EXTENDED FAMILY**

The extended family serves as a source of psychological and economic support in divorce (Ahrons & Bowman, 1982). Pryor and Rogers (2001) suggest that grandparents can buffer the negative effects of divorce.

The involvement of grandparents generally in a child's life is seen as being beneficial to both the child and the adult. When grandparents are not available to have contact or their contact with the children is hindered, the negative effects of divorce have been found to be greater. This could possibly be due to the tendency for most children to perceive grandparents as part of their family unit (Pryor & Rogers, 2001).

The bond between children and grandparents often becomes stronger during divorce, especially with the maternal grandparents. Grandparents often assist financially, and they share in child-care and household responsibilities, together with providing their grown children and grandchildren with emotional support



(Hetherington, 1989). Weiss (1979) found that grandparents are likely to provide better support than aunts and uncles, because the latter often hold childhood grudges and may be preoccupied with their own families. Children have been found to display better adjustment in homes including the maternal grandmother than the mother alone (Kellam, Ensminger & Turner, 1977). Furthermore, sons in maternal custody have fewer behavioural problems when they have an involved supportive grandfather who serves as a father substitute (Hetherington, 1988).

Grandparents appear to play a significant role in being able to assist children in coping with divorce and prove to be a buffer against some of the negative impacts of the divorce. Alternatively, when the children's relationship with the grandparents becomes estranged due to parental conflict, or because grandparents involve the children in the parental issues the children are left with fewer resources to draw from to assist them in coping.

#### **4.4.9 THE INFLUENCE OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEERS AND OTHER SIGNIFICANT PEOPLE**

Pryor and Rogers (2001) found that during times of divorce children tend to talk more to their peers than their parents about their emotions and concerns. This is in keeping with developmental theories and views on socialisation, which emphasize the importance of friends for the child.

Friends not only provide a source of support for the child but also offer a forum for the verbalisations and release of frustrations and emotional difficulties being experienced as a result of the divorce. Dreman (2000) is of the opinion that the support of peers is more significant for adolescents than for primary school children as developmentally younger children may be unable to provide effective social support for each other, whereas peer support may effectively contribute to the adjustment of older adolescents.

Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999) found that adolescents in divorced families disengage to a greater extent from their families and interact less with family members than do adolescents from intact families. Although developmentally adolescents disengage to some extent from their parents (Shaffer & Kipp, 2007), it was found that conflict and a lack of parental monitoring and involvement tends to promote this disengagement. This disengagement, may in fact prove to be a positive solution to a difficult conflicted family situation and may have no adverse effects if there is a caring adult involved with the adolescent outside of the home, such as the parent of a friend, a grandparent, teacher, neighbour or even a sports coach (Cowen et al., 1990; Hetherington, 1993). Santrock and Warshack (1979) found that the amount of contact with adult caretakers outside of the family was positively related to a child's functioning following parental divorce. Attention and warmth shown by teachers has been associated with positive child adjustment following divorce (Barnes, 1999; Hetherington et al., 1979; Kelly & Wallerstein, 1977).

#### **4.4.10 Conclusions**

The relationships that children have with others, including the pre- and post-divorce relationships with their parents, as well as with their siblings, grandparents, friends and other significant people appear to play a significant role in the coping with divorce by children. This influence can be of a positive or negative nature. Furthermore, the relationship that the child may have with a step-parent can also prove to promote or hinder successful coping with the ongoing effects of divorce on the child.

Conflict between the parents, both pre- and post-divorce, appears to play a particularly significant role. It is interesting to note that while it is generally accepted that the effect of conflict on children is negative, some conflict pre-divorce does assist children in coping with the divorce.

Notwithstanding the important influences of characteristics within the child in relation to their coping with divorce, and the influence of familial and other significant relationships, other significant factors pertaining to the child's social environment have also been found to exert some influence on children coping with divorce.

#### **4.5 THE ROLE OF CHANGES IN THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN COPING WITH DIVORCE**

There are a number of changes that may take place in children's wider environment, owing to their parents' divorce that can affect the children in the family. These changes add to the different aspects that the children have to cope with and often require some adaptation on the part of the children. Divorce often results in moving house for the children and sometimes a change of school as well. Changes in the custodial parent's economic resources may also result in a change in the lifestyle that the children enjoy. These aspects and the effect of the resultant accumulative stress that may occur will be explored.

##### **4.5.1 MOVING HOUSE**

Moving house is generally accepted as being a stressful occurrence for anyone (Braver, Ellman & Fabricius, 2003). It is not uncommon for relocation to take place when divorce occurs. This results in the children experiencing not only the loss of daily contact with one parent but also the loss of familiar surroundings and often of friends and wider social relationships. Often, because of the divorce, the custodial parent's financial situation worsens and therefore moving house implies moving to a lower socio-economic neighbourhood. This may also result in the children then having to adapt to a neighbourhood with poorer schools and greater opportunities for deviant behaviour (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Pryor and Rogers (2001) found that these situations might lead to poorer school attendance and diminished parental supervision, and Dreman (2000)

reports that these children did less homework, watched more TV, had less organised home routines and engaged in fewer joint activities with their parents. Moving house then implies that many domains of the children's lives are affected and that it does not just involve a change in the building that they live in.

Furthermore, geographical relocation after divorce may also increase social isolation. Children suffer greatly since they need the continuity and familiar support systems to compensate for other issues (Dreman, 2000). This relocation may also result in vastly diminished contact with the non-custodial parent, which can be to the children's disadvantage (Braver et al., 2003).

The more recent tendency to award joint custody including joint physical custody requires that the children move regularly between their parents' houses, often every few days. Thiessen (1993) states that some children in joint custody of this nature may not show enough resilience cope with the continual moving. They cannot easily tolerate the move from one house to the other. The child staying one week with the maternal parent and the following week with the paternal parent develops a confused self-schema. This arrangement meets the parents' needs rather than the child's, displaying a disregard for the children's need for stability.

#### **4.5.2 CHANGING SCHOOLS AND CHANGES IN AFTER-SCHOOL CARE AND EXTRA-MURAL ACTIVITIES**

Within the context of divorce, any changes that occur usually imply a drop in socio-economic or social standards for the children involved. When the custodial parent has to move house this often requires a change in school for the children. Furthermore, this move is often into a lower socio-economic neighbourhood and can result in the children having to attend a poorer school with fewer facilities, and being exposed to more deviant behaviour (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). It is important to note that for the primary school child, home and school

are the symbols of security and stability. Teachers are viewed as trustworthy people and are often a source of emotional support (Jansen van Rensburg, 2004; Steyn, 1989). A change in school not only results in the child having to adapt to a change in environment and routine but it also can result in the loss of valuable sources of social support from friends as well as from teachers and other significant adults. Teachers often play a significant role in identifying children at risk by noting changes in behaviour and mood. When a child changes schools, the new teachers do not have prior knowledge of the child to assist in observing changes (Jansen van Rensburg, 2004).

Together with a change in financial circumstances, children also often have to adapt to attending an after-school care facility. This may or may not occur along with a change in school and moving house. Because of the change in the financial situation of the mother, who is usually the custodial parent, she has to obtain employment; as a consequence, the children have to attend an after-school care facility (Hilton & Desrochers, 2002). This at least demands that the children adapt to another change in their lives.

Moving house, a decrease in economic resources as well as the necessity for the mother to be employed can furthermore result in the children not being able to continue with the extra-mural activities that they had previously enjoyed. This includes extra lessons in school subjects, cultural activities, sports coaching and social activities that may have to be stopped or cut back to some extent. These activities all serve to develop a sense of self-worth and self-development and are a source of pleasure. With the loss of these activities the child experiences a loss of the value of these activities as well as the loss of the possibilities for these activities to assist in dealing with the difficulties associated with the divorce (Jansen van Rensburg, 2004).

#### **4.5.3 CHANGES IN ECONOMIC RESOURCES**

The economic conditions of the family have been postulated to play a role in children's adjustment to divorce. Several studies have found a correlation between economic resources and adjustment of children following their parents' divorce (Shaw & Emery, 1987). This has, however, been questioned and Amato (2000, 2003) and Amato and Keith (1991a) stress that in the studies conducted so far, economic disadvantage appears to account for only a small amount of variance in children's functioning after divorce.

As has already been discussed, income loss following divorce is not simply a matter of having fewer financial resources, but it can also lead to a number of changes in a child's life. These include moving house, changing schools, losing contact with friends, spending more time in childcare and diminished extra-mural activities. The potential influence of such changes together with that of total family income relative to the family needs to be researched (Emery & Forehand, 1994). A further implication for the children of divorced families is that when mothers start working owing to the divorce to increase their income, it may result in the children feeling abandoned by both parents (Hetherington et al., 1982).

Dreman (2000) criticises the research linking children's adjustment to divorce to the failure to control of income and socio-economic status. When socio-economic status is controlled, however, children in divorced families function as well as do those in two-parent families (Peterson & Zill, 1986).

#### **4.5.4 CUMULATIVE STRESS**

Hetherington et al. (1989) state that when children are exposed to multiple stressors, the adverse effects increase multiplicatively. When parents divorce, children are frequently exposed to parental conflict and must adjust not only to the non-custodial parent but also to depressed economic resources, changes in

the custodial parent's availability and overall parenting style, and more chaotic household routines. When the custodial parent remarries, the child again experiences changes in family structure and relationships. When the current statistics regarding the increased incidence of divorce that occurs in second marriages in comparison to the already high occurrence of first- marriage divorces is considered, the notion of cumulative stress has serious implications for the children in these families.

Furthermore, Cherlin (1981) found that when roles and relationships in stepfamilies become increasingly complex, the adjustment of family members becomes increasingly difficult. Hetherington et al. (1989) support this stating that children in stepfamilies experience more difficulties adjusting in stepfamilies with large numbers of children, in blended families in which there are children from the custodial parent and the step-parent's previous marriages, and in families in which a new child is born to the biological parent. Dunn, Deater-Deckard, Pickering and O'Connor (1998) found that the experience of one divorce or parental separation is not significantly related to children's adjustment, but the experience of repeated transitions constitute risk for adjustment problems. Multiple divorces, remarriage and a number of stressors in general are negatively associated with child well- being (Hilton & Desrochers, 2002).

It therefore appears that a series of stressful events can have a cumulative effect on the well-being of children.

#### **4.5.5 CONCLUSION**

Children's perceptions of minimal control over divorce-related changes like changes in income level, geographical relocation and moving house and changing schools, family functioning and household routines serve as stressors (Dreman, 2000; Guidubaldi et al., 1983; Hetherington et al., 1979). These stressors all affect children's adaptation to divorce. Conversely, children's ability

to cope with these stressors is also influenced by their own temperament and personality. It can therefore be seen that children's coping with divorce is affected by these factors and their coping with these changes also affects their temperament and possibly their coping strategies.

#### **4.6 THE EFFECT OF THE CHILD'S RACE**

Relatively few studies have been conducted in this area and while the findings have appeared to be clear-cut, other factors again appear to have clouded the results. It is important to note that there is a lack of studies on the effect of race in children's coping with divorce in South Africa.

Some racial differences have been found in the adjustment of children from divorced families. Amato and Keith (1991b) maintain that in comparison to adults that grew up in married families, whites from divorced families experienced divorce more often themselves, and had lower educational attainment than blacks had. Emery and Forehand (1994) proposes that if race does in fact moderate the risks of divorce, it is more likely due to socio-cultural and not individual characteristics.

Different socio-economic groups offer varying support to unmarried mothers and single parents through extended family relationships. Another confounding variable influencing the findings regarding the influence of race on children coping with divorce is that some socio-economic groups experience what is considered to be more risk and stress from other sources (Emery, 1994). It is then thought that the experience gained in dealing with stress facilitates the child's coping with the divorce as they have developed coping skills and strategies. Once again, then, confounding variables appear to influence the findings.



## **4.7 THE EFFECT OF THE PASSING OF TIME**

Based on the adage that “time heals” it has been proposed that as time passes, the difficulties that children experience as a result of their parents’ divorce tend to diminish (Amato, 2000). However, research on the influence of the passage of time is somewhat inconclusive.

Hetherington et al. (1982, 1985) conducted a longitudinal study regarding the effect of the passage of time on children’s adjustment to divorce. They found that with time, i.e. over a two-year period, the children from divorced families’ functioning improved although there were still some differences evident when compared with their counterparts from two-parent families. In a six-year follow-up it was found that there were still some differences, but these problems were different from those recorded earlier and were attributed to other significant life-events that had occurred.

Furstenberg and Allison (1985) also found that children’s and parents’ adjustments improved with time. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found the same trend, but they also found that more boys than girls continued to experience problems, as did Hetherington et al. (1985). Five years after the divorce, current life circumstances accounted for the children’s adjustment rather than events that had occurred at the time of the divorce (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). In a ten-year follow-up, Wallerstein (1986) found that the children from divorced families were functioning adequately although there was still a higher rate of behavioural problems. She further found that these children, especially those who were older at the time of their parents’ divorce, still reported a sense of sadness and feelings of anger associated with their parents’ divorce (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1996).

In conclusion, it is possible that children’s coping with their parents’ divorce improves with time although they may still exhibit some behavioural problems. It

appears that other factors may exert an influence such as continued difficulties experienced and possibly the coping skills available to the children.

#### **4.8 THE EFFECT OF THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS**

Children and adults from divorced families have been found to be two to three times more likely to receive psychological treatment when compared to those in non-divorced families (Howard, Cornille, Lyons, Vessey, Lueger & Saunders, 1996; Zill, Morrison & Coiro, 1993). As divorce has been widely accepted as representing a major crisis for children, these results are not surprising (Schlesinger, 1982). Buehler, et al.(1992) point out that the need for preventative mental health programmes for divorced families has increased. Emery et al. (1999) note that adequate, well-executed research on this topic is lacking.

The intervention programmes for children that have been developed and researched have been largely school-based interventions and are of short duration. They involve educational and therapeutic material and have dealt largely with the misconceptions about divorce. There has also been a focus on attempting to assist the children in developing effective skills to cope with the changes and stresses associated with divorce (Stohlberg & Mahler, 1994). Although intervention programmes have been found to be beneficial generally for children coping with their parents' divorce (Amato, 2000), it is of concern that the effect of these group intervention programmes do not appear to produce the same results as psychotherapy in general (Lee, Picard & Blain, 1994). The studies that did report improvements in the children's adjustment found that they were mediated by parenting competence and the quality of parent-child relationships (Wolchik et al., 1993).

Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999) state that the disappointing results reported in the literature regarding group-based therapeutic interventions for children suggest that either the problems children experience in response to

divorce are especially resistant to interventions, or that the types of interventions on which the systematic research is available are not very effective. Furthermore, it needs to be recognised that the studies that have been conducted have investigated short-term intervention programmes. It appears that it would be premature to dismiss interventions that are aimed at helping children adjust to their parents' marital transitions, but more systematic well-designed research needs to be undertaken including examining diverse interventions, before any conclusions can be reached.

## **4.9 CONCLUSIONS**

The effect of divorce on children has been a contentious debate that has continued for decades. The different factors that influence children coping with divorce, either mediating or moderating the effects, have been widely researched but have proven to be frustratingly complex and intertwined.

Possible clarity on the influence of the child's developmental age has been clouded by the possible effects of the child's age at the time of the research and the effect of the passage of time. The effect of the child's gender cannot be considered without considering the influence of the custodial parent's gender. The influence of the non-custodial parent cannot be ignored either and step-parents, siblings, peers, grandparents and the wider community may also play a significant role. All of these factors may well be influenced by the child's temperament, intelligence, the sense of control that the child has, and the parents' temperaments and psychopathology. Changes in economic resources also influence children coping with divorce and this may result in other factors coming into play, such as changes in schools and moving house and so the influence of these factors is often confounded. Conflict also appears to have a significant impact on children and again it has been found that this cannot be considered without taking into account the influence of the child's age and

gender as well. All these factors are influenced by, or influence, the child's coping strategies.

These factors cannot be considered in isolation from each other and there appears to be a dynamic interplay between the different factors that are influential in any one child's particular circumstances that makes it unique. Dreman (2000) mentions for example that researchers and practitioners have to consider the interaction of a child's gender and post-divorce family structure to better understand children's post-divorce adjustment. It is not surprising, then, that the results from different studies that have tried to tease out the factors that influence children in coping with divorce, have proven to be contradictory. One result of these contradictory findings is that there are those who see divorce as an important contributor to many social problems while on the other side there are others who see divorce as a largely benign force that provides adults with a second chance for happiness and rescues children from dysfunctional and aversive home environments. Amato (2000) concludes that continuing research on the factors that determine whether divorce has positive, neutral, or negative long-term consequences for both adults and children is a high priority.

Added to this is the necessity for research on children's perceptions on divorce and on the aspects that have helped them to cope with their parents' divorce. While many factors, as is seen above, have been highlighted as influencing children's coping with divorce and the different coping strategies that they employ, their own personal perceptions derived from their own experiences need to be explored in order to verify the hypotheses that literature suggests.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RESEARCH PROCEDURE**

Much research has been conducted on divorce and the negative effects of this modern-day, ever-increasing phenomenon on children. In Chapter 1 the lack of research on children's own perspectives on factors that enable or assist them to cope with this change in their lives, is mentioned. Chapter 2, places this study p within the phenomenological tradition as it attempts to explore children coping with their parents' divorce from the children's personal experiences and perspectives. Chaplin (1975) emphasises the importance of accepting the individual's personal experiences without interpreting them. This study will use the children's *own* accounts of their experiences and their perceptions as the data. Qualitative research methods, as defined by Denzin and Lincoln (1998), attempt to create an understanding of phenomena in terms of the meanings that people in those situations attach to them. As a qualitative study this study attempts to make meaning of children's coping with divorce by accepting the children's personal experiences and opinions regarding that which has assisted their coping. In Chapter 4 the Grounded Theory approach to research and theory building is outlined. This study will employ grounded theory methodologies as tools to assist in the analysis of the data with a view to developing a more comprehensive understanding of children's perceptions of factors that enable them to cope with their parents' divorce.

#### **5.1 THE AIM OF THE STUDY**

This study aims to develop a comprehensive and insightful understanding of the factors that assist children, as well as revealing the strategies employed by children in coping with their parents' divorce. It is envisioned that theory regarding strategies that assist children in coping with divorce will be developed.

## 5.2 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question has been born out of the experience of the researcher in private practice that some children *appear* to cope better than others with their parents' divorce and discuss their experiences more positively. This led the researcher to question what factors, from the children's personal perspectives, enable some children to cope better with divorce than others. These factors include amongst others characteristics from within the child, aspects relevant to relationships, as well as other support structures available to the child. In order to remain true to the phenomenological epistemology and to the grounded theory methodology, the researcher has adopted the stance of exploring children's opinions and outlook on divorce rather than assuming that children do or do not cope well with divorce. Husserl discussed the need for the phenomenologist to "bracket" any preconceived ideas so as not to allow them to influence the reality of the subject under study (Hammond, Howard & Keat, 1989). Charmaz (1995), when discussing grounded theory stated that the researcher needed to guard against allowing personal understandings to influence that which is observed. For this reason, a study of the literature was delayed in order to minimise the forming of preconceived ideas, as far as possible (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). De Vos and Van Zyl (1998) state that grounded theory questions tend to be oriented towards action and process; and the question posed by this research is one that explores the action and process involved in coping with divorce.

The research question can therefore, be said to be an "atheoretical", exploratory study of children coping with divorce, from the children's perspective. The research question is not formulated around a specific theoretical perspective nor is it asked in order to test a particular viewpoint, but a phenomenon is rather explored in order to allow children to talk for themselves.

The following research question is asked:

*What are children's own lived-in experiences of their own coping with their parents' divorce? Furthermore, what assists children in their coping with their parents' divorce?*

In order to investigate this over-arching research question, various aspects will be explored with the children. Guided interviews with the children will be used as the children are developmentally not able to participate in totally unstructured interviews, but require more directed interviews.

The data obtained from the interviews with the children will be classified into identifiable coping strategies according to established taxonomies of coping strategies as discussed in Section 4.2.3.

### **5.3 RESEARCH PROCEDURE**

Heyink and Tymstra (1993) state that qualitative research is preferable when the subject's own perceptions and interpretations are being explored. They go further to state that if there are no theoretical claims, and if descriptions are the most important source, then qualitative interviews are the only method for collecting data. In order to achieve a situation whereby the children's own perspectives are gathered and a deeper, richer understanding of children's coping with divorce can be developed, a phenomenological paradigm has been adopted. The children's own "lived-in" experiences of their parents' divorce and the phenomena that they have personally found to have assisted their coping are the data that are being sought. Baker, Wuest and Stern (1992) argue that phenomenological research attempts to describe the world-as-experienced by the participants in an attempt to discover common meanings while respecting empirical variations within a given phenomenon.

Grounded theory as a methodological approach to research emphasises the importance of allowing the data to reveal its own meaning. No preconceived

theoretical positions are held by the researcher. The researcher believes, as does Rennie (2000) that grounded theory allows for an understanding to be developed within the paradigm of phenomenological research. Grounded theory provides a method for deriving a coherent logic of the phenomena reported by the participants. In this study, using a grounded theory methodology within a phenomenological perspective, allows for the children's personal experiences of their parents' divorce to be investigated in an ordered manner allowing the data to reveal itself unencumbered by preconceived theoretical restrictions. This enables a new conceptualisation of children's coping with divorce to be developed; one that is grounded in the children's own perspectives.

Remaining true to a grounded theory approach as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1998), a grounded theory methodology has been employed. The research procedure in terms of the selection of participants, data collection and analysis will be discussed below.

### **5.3.1 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS**

The logic behind the selection of the participants in research within a phenomenological framework and according to grounded theory principles will be outlined, followed by a description of the prerequisites and criteria for the selection of the participants for this study.

#### **5.3.1.1 Selection of participants in phenomenological methodologies**

According to Polkinghorne (1989), the logic of selection of participants in phenomenological research differs from the logic of statistical sampling theory. In statistical sampling, the participants have to be randomly selected in order to make inferences to a population. The purpose of research within a phenomenological framework however, is to describe the structure of an experience rather than the characteristics of a group that has had the



experience. It is therefore important to select participants with whom it is possible to generate a full range of variation in the set of descriptions to be used in analysing the phenomenon. The participants also need to be able to give full and accurate descriptions of their experiences and therefore need to have lived through the phenomenon under study and be able to linguistically express this experience in full and with clarity (Polkinghorne, 1989). A phenomenological study of children requires, however, that the researcher not only clarifies, describes and interprets the children's "intentionality" that constitutes their way of attending to the world but also allows for the children's "sense of wonder" to be captured (Danaher & Briod, 2005). It is this "sense of wonder" that distinguishes some of children's most defining experiences.

#### **5.3.1.2 Selection of participants in grounded theory research**

Strauss and Corbin (1998) maintain that although the overriding consideration in quantitative research sampling is that the sample needs to be representative of the population, it is not possible to be certain that a sample is in fact completely representative. When building theory inductively, the concern is with representativeness of concepts and how the concepts vary dimensionally. The more interviews, observations, and documents obtained, the more incidents that will accumulate, which can be seen to be evidence of their validity as representative concepts, and the greater the likelihood of discovering significant variation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Participant sampling is completed when category/information saturation is achieved. It is possible that sampling continues even during the writing phase of the research when it may become evident that certain categories are not fully developed.

Purposeful sampling, as discussed in Section 3.7.2, will be used in this study in order to develop a broad perspective on children's lived-in experiences of their coping with their parents' divorce. The aim of using a purposeful sampling technique is that it will enable the researcher to source only children whose

parents are divorced and their personal experiences, rather than any children irrespective of whether or not their parents are divorced or not.

#### **5.3.1.3 Prerequisites of the participants**

For the purposes of this study, children between the ages of six to thirteen years of age, i.e. primary school children, whose parents had divorced, will be selected. This age group has been chosen as their linguistic and cognitive abilities are considered to be sufficiently well developed to be able to express themselves competently, and give full and accurate descriptions of their experiences and perceptions.

In total 41 children will be interviewed. This could be considered to be a relatively large sample group, but the researcher anticipates that it will be necessary to interview a sample of this size in order to gain information saturation.

Children were not selected according to gender in particular. Within the sample group of 41 participants, 17 children were boys and 24 were girls. No control was exercised over:

- the age of the children when their parents divorced;
- the duration of time between when their parents got divorced and when they were interviewed, or
- which parent had custody.

### **5.4 DATA COLLECTION**

For the purposes of this study, children whose parents had divorced will be selected for face-to-face interviews on a one-on-one basis. The method of data collection was to engage in an age-appropriate in-depth conversation with each child. The interviews will not be prescribed in terms of the length of time but will be allowed to continue until it is agreed by both the interviewer and interviewee

that no further discussion is necessary. Children will be interviewed more than once when necessary, for instance when it is found that categories and concepts are thin or incomplete. Strauss and Corbin (1998) stress the importance of information saturation. To achieve information saturation in this study, children were interviewed until no further concepts appear to be revealed. Furthermore, within each child's dialogue the concepts will be revealed and explored, until it appears, as far as possible, that all the perceptions relevant to the study and that child's lived-in experience has been developed. Subsequent interviews will be conducted as needed as data analysis and data collection occurs simultaneously.

Prior to the beginning of the interview, the rationale for the study will be explained to the parent/s. The rationale will also be explained to the child in an age appropriate manner, and the child will be put at ease regarding confidentiality. It will be explained to them that their personal opinions are most important to the researcher and that they cannot give any "wrong answers". This is to ensure that the child does not feel that the interview/s are in any way performance-based assessments.

A semi-structured, open-ended structure will be used for the interviews. Changes to opinions, feelings and suggestions relevant to their experiences and coping with divorce were explored in relation to the following broad themes:

- school and related aspects such as teachers, after-care, sport and extra-murals, changes in school and social life;
- relationships including with parents and siblings, step-parents and step-siblings, grandparents, relatives and friends;
- counsellors including church based counselling for children and parents;
- spirituality;
- parental conflict and parents coping;
- perceived self-image, functioning and coping;

- judicial aspects including visitation and the determination of custody and access, and the
- imparting of information including about the impending divorce.

The rationale behind the interview schedule and the method for recording of the data will be discussed.

#### **5.4.1 THE INTERVIEW AND SCHEDULE**

A semi-structured approach to the interviews will be adopted. The rationale behind this is to focus on specific situations and action sequences that are instances of the phenomenon under investigation rather than gathering general opinions. A schedule will be developed that contains questions and themes that are important to the research. A copy of this schedule can be found in Annexure A. Although the questions will not have to be asked in a particular sequence, they will ensure that all the relevant topics are covered during the interview. De Vos and Van Zyl (1998) suggest that semi-structured interviews provide for systematic collection of data whilst ensuring that important data are not forgotten. Westcott and Littleton (2005) emphasise that using interviews with children when researching children's experiences is a process of joint meaning-making, involving the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviews will be conducted in a manner to allow for such interplay while canvassing the children's experiences and opinions.

An examination of the schedule will reveal that the questions asked in the beginning of the interviews are somewhat biographical and "closed" in nature. This serves three purposes:

- to help put the child at ease and assist in developing rapport and trust between the interviewer and child being interviewed; and

- to provide some information such as whether there were siblings in the family. This influenced how some of the subsequent questions were couched or even presented at all.
- In a pilot study conducted it was found that if the child was faced with open-ended questions from the beginning of the interview, and at the beginning of each topic under discussion, the responses were vague and lacked content, such as “It’s fine”, “I don’t know”, etc. If the child however, was asked questions that directed, in essence “introduced”, the topic or eased the topic under discussion into the conversation, more insightful and content rich information was obtained. It was observed that in interviewing children in a phenomenological study could not be approached in exactly the same way as when interviewing adults. Greene and Hill (2005) emphasise the importance of using developmentally appropriate approaches to gather information on children’s experiences and their opinions.

The open-ended questions will be asked at the end of each “group” of questions pertaining to the topic under discussion in order to offer the child the opportunity to discuss anything they wished to, that might be of relevance to that topic. This was done in an attempt to prevent data from being lost and also in an attempt to remain “atheoretical”. Topics that were particularly pertinent to the research and that were an attempt to “tap into” the child’s inner feeling and perspectives and opinions were dealt with towards the end of the interview (if they had not previously come up in the conversation). This was an attempt to be as “child friendly” as possible, ensuring that the child felt relaxed when discussing potentially emotive and exposing topics. All the questions were asked in a way that attempted to guide the child towards a topic without guiding them to particular opinions about the topics (Kvale, 1983). It is interesting to note that, possibly because of this, the children at times may appear to interpret the questions in a slightly different manner from what was intended by the

researcher; this resulted in important, relevant information being obtained unexpectedly.

When some ambiguities or contradictions cropped up in comments by a child, the researcher will try to ascertain whether these ambiguities were because of the interview situation or because they were indicative of real inconsistencies, ambivalences and contradictions (Kvale, 1983). The researcher attempted to register and interpret what was said, as well as how it was said, observing vocalisations, facial expressions and other bodily gestures such as fidgeting, biting nails and jiggling feet. These notes were recorded on the interview schedule during the interview.

#### **5.4.2 RECORDING OF DATA**

The interviews will be recorded on audiotape. It will be explained to the child that the interview is being audio taped so that the interviewer does not have to write everything down. These tapes will be transcribed verbatim. Polkinghorne (1983) cautions that linguistic data is fragile and vulnerable to transformation. It is important to keep in mind that in the transcription phase, important aspects of expression can be lost especially intonations, gestures, facial expressions, pauses and silences. In an attempt to overcome this, the transcriptions will attempt to take note of non-verbal information where possible. The original audio tapes will be consulted when necessary. Once the interviews are transcribed, the analysis of the data will be conducted.

The original audio tapes and copies of the transcriptions of the interviews are available from the researcher.

## **5.5 METHOD OF ANALYSIS**

The aim of analysis is to establish and reveal the structures, logic and interrelationships that occur in the phenomena being researched (Polkinghorne, 1989). The basic goal of the grounded theory approach is to read (and reread) a textual database and to “discover” or label variables (called categories, concepts and properties) and their interrelationships. The ability to perceive variables and relationships is termed “theoretical sensitivity”. It is anticipated that the outcome will be that a new, more comprehensive theory regarding the phenomenon that is under investigation is developed. This new theory is grounded in the data itself. A grounded theory approach to the analysis of the data was adopted for the purposes of this study. This is outlined in detail in Chapter 3 and only a short overview of the most basic of these procedures will be given below.

### **5.5.1 OPEN CODING**

Open coding will be conducted, which refers to the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising the data collected (Ertmer, 1997). Essentially each line, sentence, paragraph, etc. is read whilst asking the question “what is this all about”. In so doing; as part of this analytic process, the more general categories are identified and comparisons made between them. An inventory of codes with their descriptions is created. Memos or code notes are also made that discuss the codes.

### **5.5.2 AXIAL CODING**

Axial coding refers to the process whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding by making connections between the categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Through a process of inductive and deductive thinking, the codes developed were connected or “related” to each other. The children’s own actions or strategies employed to assist them in coping, or their views on that

which they perceived to assist them in coping with their parents' divorce, were developed.

### **5.5.3 SELECTIVE CODING**

The core category was selected, systematically relating it to the other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that needed further refinement and development was concluded. From this, the theory was built out of the data collected, indicating that which facilitates children's coping with divorce.

### **5.5.4 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPTS AND CATEGORIES**

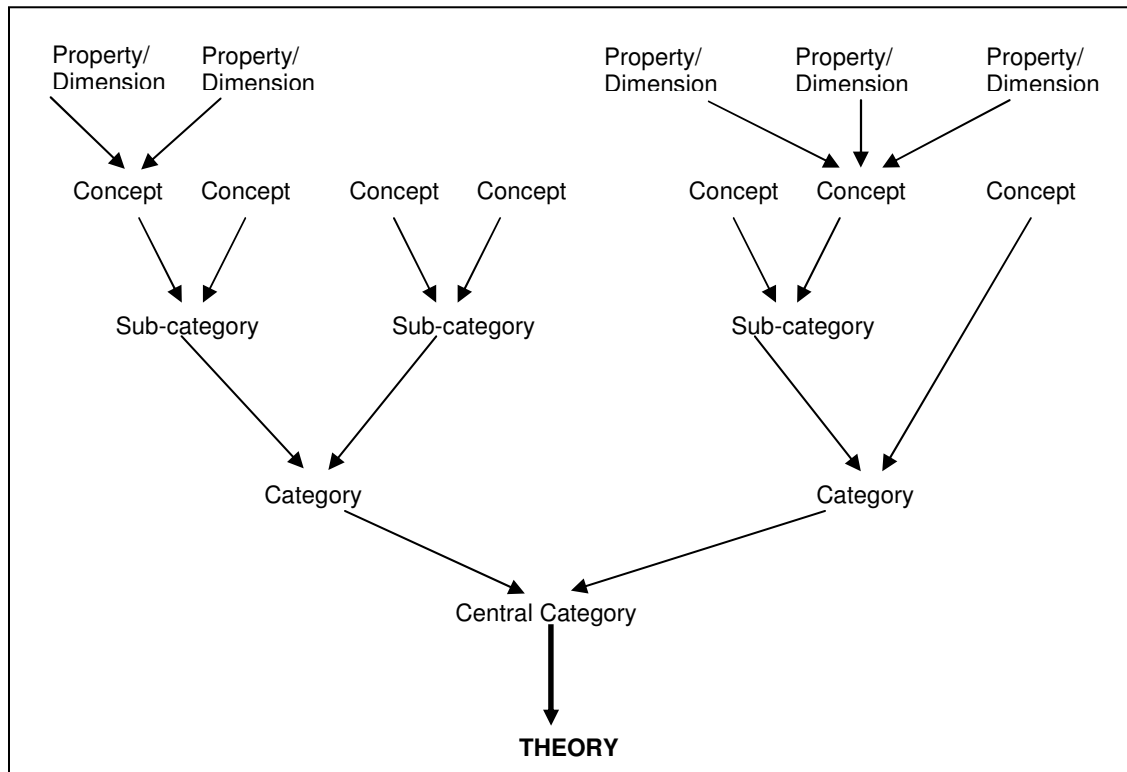
Strauss and Corbin (1998) discuss the development of *concepts* from the raw data as being the first step of theory building. This assists in beginning to group the data into similar bits of information as discussed in Section 3.8.3.1.1. Developing concepts involves naming the groups of similar information in a manner that identifies the information in the concept.

Once the concepts were created they were then grouped into *sub-categories and categories* as discussed in Section 3.8.3.1.2. Categories are groups of concepts developed from the data that identify a phenomenon and in particular are relevant to the research context. However, subcategories do not directly describe the phenomenon, they further specify a category by providing information about the category. The categories can be likened to themes that have emerged from the data. The categories are then integrated in such a way to develop the story line, or develop a central category as discussed by Strauss and Corbin (1998). By integrating the categories the *theory will then be built*.

In Figure 5.1 a diagrammatic representation of the process described above is offered. It can be seen that some concepts are enriched by properties and



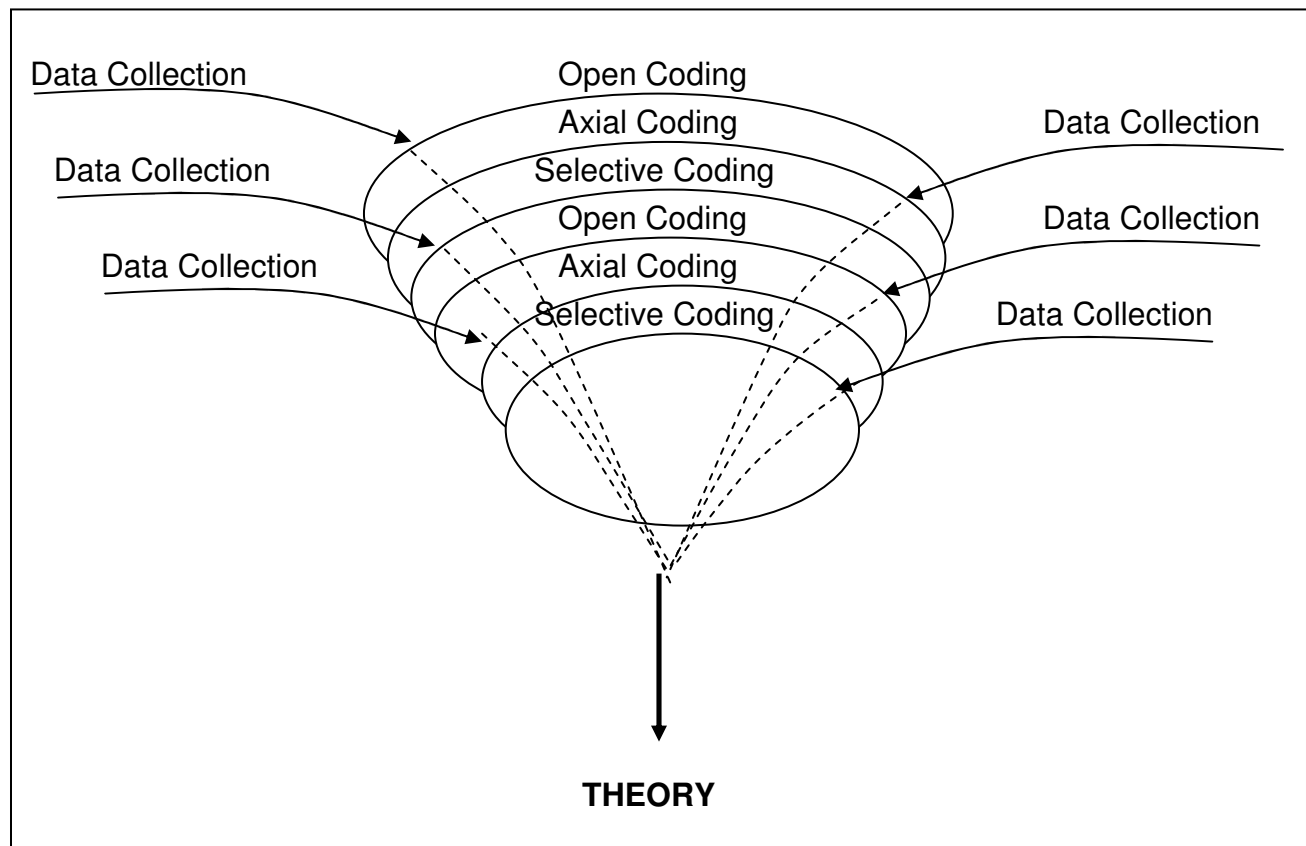
dimensions. Once the concepts are created they will then be grouped into sub-categories when applicable. The subcategories and “stand alone” concepts will then be grouped into categories and finally a central category will be identified. On this basis a new theory will be built.



**Figure 5.1: A diagrammatic representation of the development of a central category from raw data**

This process of data analysis will take place on different levels simultaneously through open coding, axial coding and selective coding as discussed in Section 3.8.3. Furthermore, these processes of data analysis will occur simultaneously with the data collection.

In Figure 5.2 it is seen how open coding, axial coding and selective coding all occur continually while data collection takes place continually at the same time.



**Figure 5.2: A diagrammatic representation of the process of data collection and coding of data occurring simultaneously**

By employing this methodology the children's personal perceptions and opinions will be collected and analysed in a manner that will enable a new conceptualisation of children's coping with divorce to be developed.

## **5.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The aim of phenomenological research, i.e. to access the individual's life world, is obtrusive in nature (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1996). Furthermore, as this study involves intruding into the child's feelings, perceptions and thoughts regarding a potentially highly emotive phenomenon, viz. the divorce of their parents, and the

dissolution of their family unit structure as they knew it, this obtrusiveness is exacerbated. The researcher was, therefore aware of the need to respect the children's rights, needs and feelings, and took pains to do so.

Hill (2005) discusses the importance of obtaining consent and giving the children that participate in research the opportunity to choose, the right to privacy and confidentiality as well as always being alert to the possibility that a child's participation in a study could possibly cause some harm or distress. The researcher therefore employed the following safeguards listed below as suggested by Creswell (1994):

- The research topic and objectives will be explained and discussed with the parent/s and children so that they understand the nature of the interaction;
- The parents' and children's verbal consent to participate in the study will be obtained;
- A copy of the findings, and or a verbal feedback session will be offered to the parent/s and children on completion of the study so that they will have some knowledge and understanding of that which they have contributed towards;
- The rights and need for protection of the children will be considered at all times throughout the process, and
- The researcher will honour confidentiality at all times. The children and parent/s will be reassured that names, and personally identifying information, will not be used or divulged.<sup>2</sup>

As mentioned divorce is potentially an emotionally laden topic of discussion for children, and when necessary the researcher will spend time reassuring and debriefing should a child need this intervention.

---

<sup>2</sup> To this effect the researcher has assigned each child with a number and shall refer to the child by the assigned number when citing quotes from the data. Siblings will be referred to as *brother* or *sister*, and other identifying information such as people's names and places will be referred to in a manner that maintains confidentiality.

## **5.7 CONCLUSIONS**

With the research question in mind, a grounded theory research procedure within a phenomenological framework was employed and refined in order to explore children's coping with their parents' divorce in a manner that enabled the children to speak for themselves, allowing the data to reveal concepts in a manner that would not be influenced by theory, perceptions or preconceived ideas held by the researcher or any other people involved with the children, such as parents and teachers. By using a grounded theory approach to the analysis of the data, the information gained from the data was obtained using a systematic methodology. While obtaining very personal and revealing information, confidentiality will be protected. In Chapter 6 the concepts that were achieved through a grounded theory analysis are discussed while referring back to theory and literature. The different concepts are then further reduced into categories and finally the theory is developed in the Chapter 7. The coping strategies that they children employed are identified according to, and discussed in relation to existing taxonomies. A new understanding of the coping strategies children employ in order to assist their coping with their parents' divorce is developed.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

The data collected from the interviews conducted on the children that participated in the study were analysed using a grounded theory methodology as discussed in Chapter 3 and very briefly mentioned in Section 5.5.

After an analysis of words, phrases and sentences had been conducted, thereby breaking down the data into discrete parts, concepts relevant in the exploration of children's coping with their parents' divorce were identified. The concepts were then connected, forming subcategories and then categories. These concepts and categories are discussed in relation to the literature and current thinking. The categories are named and explained, indicating and discussing the concepts that have been connected/grouped in that category.

#### **6.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

Briefly the biographical information regarding the participants in this study is as follows:

##### **6.2.1 SAMPLE SIZE**

A total of 41 children were interviewed for the purposes of this study. The researcher continued to interview children until information saturation, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998) was achieved. Interviews were approximately one hour in duration and 11 children were interviewed a second time in order to further explore their experiences. Information saturation was achieved on two levels, in that no further concepts were revealed, and that each

child interviewed did not offer any further new information. Table 6.1 sets out the ages and gender distribution of the children as well as residency.

**Table 6.1. The ages, genders and residency of the children**

Age		Gender		Residency		
	Total			Mother	Father	Shared
6 years	3	Boys	1	2	0	0
		Girls	2	1	0	0
7 years	6	Boys	2	1	0	1
		Girls	4	2	1	1
8 years	4	Boys	3	3	0	0
		Girls	1	1	0	0
9 years	7	Boys	1	1	0	0
		Girls	6	6	0	0
10 years	5	Boys	2	1	0	1
		Girls	3	3	0	0
11 years	4	Boys	3	3	0	0
		Girls	1	1	0	0
12 years	4	Boys	2	0	1	1
		Girls	2	2	0	0
13 years	8	Boys	3	3	0	0
		Girls	4	3	2	0
Total			41	33	4	4

### 6.2.2 AGE

As previously stated, all the children ranged between the ages of six to thirteen years of age.

### **6.2.3 GENDER**

Of the 41 children interviewed, 17 children were boys and 24 were girls.

### **6.2.4 RESIDENCY**

With regard to residency, 33 children lived with their mothers, 4 lived with their fathers and 4 children reported that they lived with both parents, in a shared residency arrangement.

### **6.2.5 PASSAGE OF TIME SINCE DIVORCE**

There was a wide variance with regard to the duration between the time of divorce/separation and the interview, with the longest duration being 12 years and the shortest duration being approximately six months.

### **6.2.6 AGE OF CHILD WHEN PARENTS' DIVORCED**

The age of the child when the parents divorced/separated also varied considerably, being between one week of age and thirteen years of age.

### **6.2.7 SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS**

All the children came from middle-class, white families.

### **6.2.8 HOME LANGUAGE**

The children were English- or Afrikaans- speaking children with the majority of being English. They were interviewed in their home language.

### 6.3 CATEGORIES CREATED RELATING TO CHILDREN COPING WITH DIVORCE

The concepts discussed below are the concepts born out of the data, identified by the researcher as being relevant to exploring children's coping with their parents' divorce. The concepts have been grouped into categories and subcategories, which have been named in order to identify them, and the concepts that are contained therein are discussed in detail. The identified concepts within the categories and subcategories are illustrated in Table 6.2. Pertinent vignettes from interviews will be offered to illustrate data that support the concept identified and categories created. These are however, just examples of the concepts as it is impractical to report all of the examples. Significant words and phrases that were identified during the microanalysis are in bold type.

The coping strategies that children appear to employ in coping with their parents' divorce, relevant to each concept identified, are discussed according to the dichotomies of coping strategies discussed previously in Section 4.2.3.

**Table 6.2. Summary of the descriptions of the eight categories**

CATEGORIES	DESCRIPTION
<b>1. FIRST CATEGORY</b>	Coping strategies pertaining to the child personally
<b>2. SECOND CATEGORY</b>	Support from others
<b>3. THIRD CATEGORY</b>	Spiritual support
<b>4. FOURTH CATEGORY</b>	Therapeutic interventions
<b>5. FIFTH CATEGORY</b>	A stable environment and belongingness
<b>6. SIXTH CATEGORY</b>	The role of extra-mural activities
<b>7. SEVENTH CATEGORY</b>	The role of conflict
<b>8. EIGHTH CATEGORY</b>	The development of resiliency



### 6.3.1 FIRST CATEGORY: COPING STRATEGIES PERTAINING TO THE CHILD PERSONALLY

The concepts and strategies identified within this category are all seen to be aspects that are personally related to the child in the sense that they are related to the child's own personal understanding of the occurrences, the child's relationships with others, the child's personally perceived sense of control over that which takes place that personally impacts on them, as well as the child's perception of the normalisation of life within this life-changing event. The subcategories, the need for a cognitive understanding of the divorce process; the development and maintenance of positive relationships within the immediate family; a sense of control over that which is occurring in their lives, and a perceived normalisation of life are discussed giving details about the relevant concepts within these subcategories comprising this category. Table 6.3 gives an overview of the concepts relevant to this category.

**Table 6.3. Summary of the descriptions of the subcategories, concepts and properties of the First Category: Coping strategies pertaining to children personally**

SUBCATEGORIES/ CONCEPTS/ PROPERTIES	DESCRIPTION
<b>1. FIRST SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>The need for a cognitive understanding of divorce</b>
1.1 First Concept	The importance of being told by both the parents about the impending divorce
1.2 Second Concept	Understanding the process of divorce
1.3 Third Concept	Honesty from the parents assists in the understanding and adaptation
1.4 Fourth Concept	Therapy can assist with an understanding of that which is occurring
1.5 Fifth Concept	Being absolved of guilt
<b>2. SECOND SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>The development and maintenance of positive relationships with family members</b>
2.1 First Concept	Parental relationships
2.1.A First Property	A perceived improvement in relationship/s with parent/s post-divorce
2.1.B Second Property	The importance of telephonic contact
2.1.C Third Property	Parent's recognition of the other family members

SUBCATEGORIES/ CONCEPTS/ PROPERTIES	DESCRIPTION
2.1.D Fourth Property	Active involvement by the non-custodial parent in the child's life
2.2 Second Concept	The perceived need for "equal time" with each parent
2.3 Third Concept	Sibling relationships
2.3.A First Property	Close sibling relationships
2.3.B Second Property	Siblings providing distractions to assist with coping with parental conflict
2.3.C Third Property	Companionship offered by step-siblings
3. THIRD SUBCATEGORY	A sense of control over that which is happening
3.1 First Concept	Having a voice in court regarding custody arrangements
3.2 Second Concept	Respecting confidentiality
3.3 Third Concept	Flexibility in contact with non-custodial parent
3.3.A First Property	Flexibility in relation to the children's social lives
3.3.B Second Property	The role of geographical proximity
4. FOURTH SUBCATEGORY	Normalisation is important
4.1 First Concept	The "normalisation" of divorce is beneficial
4.2 Second Concept	Normalisation of parents' emotions
4.2.A First Property	Experiencing parent/s being happier after the divorce
4.2.B Second Property	Reassurance that a parent has company is comforting
4.3 Third Concept	A sense of fairness when both parents move

#### **6.3.1.1. First subcategory: The need for a cognitive understanding of divorce**

Children's need for a cognitive understanding of the divorce process including the importance of being told about the impending divorce by both the parents and the need for honesty from the parents were concepts revealed by the data. Furthermore, the importance of being absolved from guilt feelings regarding the cause of the divorce as well as the role that therapists can play in assisting children to develop these understanding were further subcategories that were developed.

#### 6.3.1.1.1 First concept: The importance of being told by both the parents about the impending divorce

Children indicated that they felt that it was important that the parents themselves told the children that they were getting divorced. It is also interesting to note that the manner in which the children described this indicated that they felt that both parents should tell the children together. It is possibly that because children's locus of control is external; the children reported that they felt that both parents should tell them about the divorce and they would therefore need to see that their parents are in control in order to feel secure. Ferrer and McCrea (2005) recommend that if possible parents should tell their children about the divorce together. From an analysis of words and phrases, it was evident that the children were referring to both parents being present when telling the children of the impending divorce.

Child 6: *By their<sup>3</sup> **parents**,<sup>4</sup>.*

Child 24: *Like just by telling them in a nice way or something..... Um not like by fighting or anything in front of the children.* This implies that both parents are present.

Child 25: ***They** tell them that ... sorry.....* This child was describing how both parents should tell the children, and they should tell them that they are sorry about the divorce.

Child 32: *....., their **parents** should sit down and explain to them.*

---

<sup>3</sup> The quotes used to illustrate the concepts, being the actual statements that the children made, will be given in italics. All explanations and changes made to identifying information, in order to protect the child's right to confidentiality, will be in normal font.

<sup>4</sup> Words relevant for the micro-analysis are presented in bold.

This coping strategy could be seen as a *prosocial coping strategy* according to the classifications of coping strategies by Blechman, Prinz and Dumas (1995), as it incorporates the aspects of an active behaviour that is respectful towards themselves. Furthermore, it appears that it would be most effective if the children hear it from both parents, as this seems to enable them to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the situation. This could then also be considered to be a *cognitively-oriented coping strategy* using Moos and Billings' (1983) classifications of coping strategies.

#### **6.3.1.1.2 Second concept: Understanding the process of divorce**

Closely linked to the previous concept is the children's need to understand the process of divorce in order to be able to adjust and to cope more effectively. Children participating in this study stressed the importance of understanding the process of divorce, what divorce is, and what to expect, in order to assist them in coping with the divorce.

Child 11:      *And let them **know** about everything that's happening*

Child 23:      *..., I think that both parents should just sit them down and **explain** to them what's happening.*

Child 24:      *...a counsellor would make them **understand**.....*

Child 32:      *I think umm, their parents should sit down and **explain** to them.*

As this concept involves understanding the process of divorce, it is evident that a *cognitively-oriented coping strategy* (Moos & Billings, 1983) is employed by the children; at the same time it is a *prosocial coping strategy* (Blechman, Prinz & Dumas, 1995). Divorce proves to be an affective and social challenge for children and the latter theorists emphasise the importance of effective communication in

relation to coping with such challenges, which in turn assists the children in developing a cognitive understanding.

#### **6.3.1.1.3 Third concept: Honesty from the parents assists in the understanding and adaptation**

A further aspect closely linked to children's development of an understanding of the divorce is the importance of honesty. Because their developmental state, children of the ages that participated in this study are bound in their thinking to a strong sense of fairness, correctness and honesty (Nucci, 2002). The children in this study indicated that they felt that the parents needed to be honest when they told children about the divorce and that this helped in developing an understanding of the divorce.

Child 6:      *...well tell them just the **truth**....*

Child 12:    *...You have to be **honest** with your child.....*

Child 41:    *Well just tell them straight away, **don't lie**...*

In trying to understand their parents' divorce the children were employing a *cognitively-oriented coping strategy* (Moos & Billings, 1983). Honesty could be seen to assist the children to believe in, and trust, the understanding that they develop of the situation that they are trying to cope with.

#### **6.3.1.1.4 Fourth concept: Therapy can assist with an understanding of that which is occurring**

Apart from the children's reported need for their parent's to explain to them what was happening, another property applicable to this concept was the assistance that psychologists or counsellors could play in this regard. Children reported that

they felt that this was the role that psychologists could or even should play in assisting children to cope with the divorce.

Child 6: *.....maybe like convert it into a different language of child...She explained in detail how she felt it was important to explain things such as maintenance in a manner that was understandable to the child.*

Child 15: *Just **explain** to the child that their parents ... don't like each other...she then went on to say .... and **understand**... referring to helping the children to understand what was happening.*

Child 21: *Um, coz you like, if you're young you don't really know what's happening and then they can kinda point out all the problems....And tell you ok, this is **what you need to do**.... She was discussing how therapy can help children.*

Child 27: *It just makes me **understand** about things more and it also makes me feel better about it. He was discussing how therapy helps him.*

Child 30: *....because they get help there, in their lives because if something terrible happened and you can't do anything they could .....**explain**.....*

The children that participated in this study were all in cognitive developmental stages when they are typically able to develop more of an understanding of the situation than younger children, as discussed in Section 4.3.1.1.2 (B). Their expressed need to be assisted in the understanding of the divorce and the process involved, including the impact the divorce would have on their daily lives is therefore not surprising. This is a *cognitively-oriented strategy* (Moos & Billings, 1983) as well as being an *approach/problem focused coping strategy* that the

children are employing (Fields & Prinz, 1997) as they are developing an understanding as well as seeking and making use of support. Whether the children would be able to source this assistance is however, a further issue as they were not necessarily in a position to be able to always act on their desires and needs.

#### **6.3.1.1.5 Fifth Concept: Being absolved of guilt**

A number of children expressed strong ideas on the need to be told that they were not the cause of the divorce. This indicated that it is of extreme importance that it is explained to children that the divorce of their parents, and the ongoing animosity that may exist between their parents, is not the children's fault or of their own doing. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found that children between the ages of six to eight years of age experienced guilt in relation to their parents' divorce.

Child 9:        She mentioned that therapy helped her in understanding that... *if something bad happens it's not my **fault**.*

Child 19:        ...*assure the child that they haven't done anything wrong and it's purely the parent's relationship that is going wrong. It's got nothing to do with the child.....If they make that known then I really don't think there's any problem with it, but the child I reckon will always feel some **guilt** around their parents getting divorced.*

Child 19:        She stated later that ....*Again assure them that it's not their **fault**, it's such a big thing..... Children take it upon themselves.*

Child 21:        ...*because they should know that the divorce isn't their **fault**.....*

Child 35:        *They mustn't think it was because of them.*

It can be seen that the children expressed a need to be absolved of the responsibility of being the cause of the divorce. They did not, however, do this of their own accord. They required someone else, be it their parent/s or a therapist to explain this to them. Furthermore, it is most likely that they were not aware that they needed to distance themselves from the responsibility. It is upon reflection that the children were able to identify the need for this. While this can be seen to be an *avoidance/emotion focused coping* as described by Fields and Prinz (1997), identifying a coping strategy that fits this concept is problematic. Although the children recognised the benefit of being absolved of the guilt for the divorce upon reflection, the utilisation of the actual resource was up to the child at that moment in time. There does not appear to be a coping strategy identified in literature that adequately encompasses the subtlety of the concept.

#### **6.3.1.2 Second Subcategory: The development and maintenance of positive relationships with family members**

It was evident from the data collected that the development of, and an ongoing positive relationship with different family members played a significant role in children's coping with their parents' divorce. This includes perceived improvements in parent-child relationships, the importance of regular telephonic contact and positive recognition of other family members by a parent. It was interesting to note that children reported that they felt that "equal time" with each parent also assisted them in coping with their parents' divorce. Other relationships that emerged as being important in assisting children in coping with their parent's divorce were their relationships with their siblings and step-siblings.

##### **6.3.1.2.1 First Concept: Parental relationships**

Within this concept, three properties were identified that were considered particularly significant and therefore were listed and discussed separately.



Improved relationship's with either or both parents, regular, unrestricted telephonic contact with parents and parental recognition of other significant family members all emerged as properties of the children's relationships with their parents that assisted them in coping with divorce.

#### **A. First property: A perceived improvement in relationship/s with parent/s post-divorce**

A number a children reported that they felt that their relationship/s with either one or both their parents had improved because of the divorce. This improvement was seen as having occurred for various reasons, for instance that their parent/s were able to spend more time with them after the divorce, and the parents were more relaxed. Some children could not explain the improvement.

Child 6: *Well I do talk to him **more often** because I see him more often*

Child 10: *I think I've just got **a better relationship** with my dad now.....  
We're **better friends** now.*

Child 21: *I think since the divorce ok **we've gotten closer** a little bit. Referring to her father.*

Child 37: *Ja [yes]<sup>5</sup> we've become **closer**. He was talking about his mother.*

Child 40: *I don't know. In a way we've actually **become closer** because he's become... he's just not so grumpy.*

These children have been able to recognise the value of emotional support, improved emotional support, from a parent as being beneficial in the coping of their parents' divorce. This is an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy*

---

<sup>5</sup> Translations from Afrikaans into English will be placed in parentheses [ ] directly after the quote.

according to Fields and Prinz (1997). It is evident however, that the children did not necessarily actively pursue an improvement in their relationship with their parents but that this happened “by the way”. It could therefore be said that the improved parental relationship is a resource rather than a coping strategy. As discussed previously in Section 6.3.1.1.5 this is a somewhat problematic classification. Although the improved relationship can be seen as being a resource and the child did not actively seek to improve on the relationship, if the child did not co-operate with the parent and even only upon reflection, identify the improvement and benefit thereof, the assistance in coping with the divorce would not be recognised. This could also be classified as a *prosocial coping strategy* (Blechman et al., 1995) however, as the children did not actively pursue a coping strategy that was cognizant and respectful of his/her own emotional needs, or that of others. This classification again falls short of the subtleties of children’s coping and use of resources as discussed above.

## **B. Second property: The importance of telephonic contact**

When children are free to have unrestricted telephonic access to the non-custodial parent they appear to cope with the divorce more comfortably in that their relationship with the non-custodial parent remains close and they feel happier. There is a lack of research on the role of telephonic contact between parents and children in divorced families, which is concerning as difficulties around telephonic access being frustrated and/or not exercised are often reported in the divorce and family courts.

Child 5:       ...*my dad doesn’t want us to talk to my mom.* When asked how she felt about this she replied...*Upset but today **I phoned** my mom...He said I’m allowed to.* She was asked how she felt about that and she replied...***More happier..** that my dad’s allowing us to speak to my mom.*

Child 23: She was discussing her relationship with her father when she mentioned ... *And I think we didn't see him for like 6 months. ...But he like always used **to phone me**....Ja [yes] **so that was ok**.*

Child 24: ...*because I like **still speak to him**, and I'm still also **very close** to him when I do see him.*

As these children were receiving emotional support by enjoying telephonic contact with their parents, using Fields and Prinz's (1997) classification of coping strategies, this is an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy*. Furthermore, if the parent is maintaining the telephonic contact then the emotional support that the child experiences is as a result of the child's own doing specifically, although they may interpret it in a positive manner. Therefore, as previously indicated this can be seen more as an emotional resource and because the child is interpreting it as an emotional support it is an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy*. This is also a *prosocial coping strategy* as the child is aware of and acting on personal needs without being disrespectful of others (Blechman et al., 1995). If the child was however, to go against a parent's express wishes by making and maintaining telephonic contact with the other parent this could be said to be an *antisocial coping strategy* although not necessarily one that would best serve the child's personal emotional needs.

### **C. Third property: Parent's recognition of the other family members**

It appears that when parents are able to discuss the other parent's family members with the children in a positive manner, the children appreciate this and it assists in their coping with the divorce.

Child 19: *She does, she does.....referring to her mother talking to her about her father's family.... She was really close with his sister.*

Child 27:     ...um, I tell her something and she like gives her reply. So I don't know.... I don't feel you know like um I'm scared and well like as nervous and scared as I used to. He was talking about how his mother discusses his father's family with him and how he does not feel so tense anymore.

The reassurance that the children receive because of discussing family members with the other parent in a manner that is emotionally comfortable is a resource available to the child that can assist coping with the divorce. It is only when the child interprets this resource positively that this becomes an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy* as defined by Fields and Prinz (1997).

#### **D. Fourth property: Active involvement by the non-custodial parent in the child's life**

It is only recently that the benefits of involvement by the non-custodial parent have received attention in the literature, and mainly in terms of the involvement of fathers who are the non-custodians (Amato, 2001; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). They found that involvement by a well-adjusted non-custodial parent is beneficial. The results from the data obtained from the interviews with children in this study support this.

Child 11:     ...and sometimes we go **in the week** after school **we go out** for an ice-cream. He indicated that he enjoys this when his dad does this.

Child 34:     ...my **dad** picks me up and we **go for runs and stuff**. This was said very animatedly about her father, the non-custodial parent.

This resource enables the children to cope with the impact of the divorce on their lives. For various reasons however, children cannot always utilize this resource and therefore the children's active use of this resource enables it to be of benefit

to the children. For this reason it is also possible that this could be classified as an *approach/emotion focused coping* according to Field and Prinz's (1997) dichotomy of coping strategies, although some of the subtleties are lost. As both the parent's and child's feeling and emotional needs are taken into account this could also be considered a *prosocial coping strategy* (Blechman, Prinz & Dumas, 1995).

#### **6.3.1.2.2 Second concept: The perceived need for "equal time" with each parent**

A very strong concept that emerged from the data was that a number of children expressed either a need to have, or the importance of having, "equal time" with parents.

Child 3:      *...For a longer stay... like my mom gets to see me for **a week** and I get to see her for **a week**.* He then confirmed that this meant that he would have one week with his father and one week with his mother.

Child 5:      *...but I wish that um ...Yes it feels like **equal time**...*with regard to wanting to see her father more.

Child 19:      *Well if neither parents has like an imbalance or a mental illness of a sort um I think **sharing days evenly** works, like um... maybe having one house that they have all their stuff in and the other that they just pack a bag and go to like every second day, third day.*

Child 21:      *I think it's unfair ... I need to sometimes spend more time with my mom. The father is the custodial parent. I'd like **one week** with my dad and then **one week** with my mom.*

Child 34: *I'd tell them to share the custody of the children and let them **see their dad and their mom equally**.* She was discussing what she thinks judges need to know about children and divorce.

Child 35: *They should get to see each parent **equally**.* He was talking about what judges should do for the children.

Child 41: *Like say I'm living with my dad then I'll see my dad on a Monday, a Tuesday and then on a Wednesday, Thursday I'll see my mom and then on Friday whoever I go to... ja [Yes].* When he was asked if he meant that he would have equal time with both parents, he responded ... *ja [yes].*

It was interesting to note that the need for “equal time” was expressed irrespective of whether that particular child had regular contact with the non-custodial parent, no contact with the non-custodial parent, or whether they were made to see the non-custodial parent against their wishes. It appears that present personal experience regarding the contact with the parent is not a property of children's expressed desire to have “equal time”. It is possible that the parents' functioning could be a property of this concept. Should the child consider the non-custodial parent to be emotionally unstable, then the children may not wish to spend “equal time” with that parent. An *avoidance/problem focused coping strategy* is then employed (Fields & Prinz, 1997).

The children are calling for, or employing an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy*, as defined by Fields and Prinz (1997), as they are prepared to move between the two homes in order to spend time with the two parents. They are taking responsibility for their own happiness and better coping with the stresses and difficulties they may be experiencing as a result of the divorce. However, it could also be said that there is an element of the use of Fields and Prinz's (1997) definition of an *approach/problem focused coping strategy* as the children are

seeking support and taking responsibility for obtaining that support by moving regularly between the two homes. It appears that the taxonomy created by Field and Prinz (1997) as well as other models of coping strategies do not entirely fit this strategy.

#### **6.3.1.2.3 Third concept: Sibling relationships**

The concept of sibling relationships encompasses the properties identified as being the emotional support that children report receiving from both their siblings and step-siblings. A further property that emerged is the support that siblings offer each other, and experience in coping with parental conflict.

##### **A. First property: Close sibling relationships**

Children that participated in this study reported that they found close sibling relationships to be of assistance in coping with their parents' divorce. This was also differentiated from the support experienced in peer friendships. Furthermore, siblings were found to continue to provide support for each other as they continue to cope with the ongoing stressors in their lives that occurred owing to the divorce.

Child 6: *Um then she was **very kind**, and she **understood**, and she was **more social**.* She was describing her relationship with her sister since the divorce.

Child 17: *We **get along better**.* He was discussing his relationship with his brother since the divorce.

Child 24: *I think **we got closer**. She was referring to her older brother.... Coz we do a lot of **travelling together**. They travel together overseas, once a year to visit their father.*

Child 32: *...we also **shared more** stuff with each other. A perceived manifestation of the closeness that had developed.*

Primarily this can be seen to be a coping resource as the siblings are an emotional support resource for each other. Furthermore, these children appeared to interpret this resource as being helpful, i.e. they experienced receiving emotional support from their siblings and therefore it can be said that Children 6, 24 and 17 all appear to be employing an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy* (Fields & Prinz, 1997). Furthermore, this is a good example of a *prosocial coping strategy*, using the taxonomies of Blechman et al. (1995), as they are being respectful of each other's and their own needs.

## **B. Second property: Siblings providing distractions to assist with coping with parental conflict**

Barnes (1999) and McIntosh (2003) found that good sibling relationships appear to be a good buffer to parental conflict. This was also found to be the case in this study. It was also noted that some children reported fighting with their siblings as strategy to try to distract or distance themselves from the parental conflict. In grounded theory terms, this can be seen as a property of the subconcept of the concept of sibling relationships that assist in coping with divorce.

Child 5: *...**we** used to hide when they used to start fighting and arguing, sister used to **take me** and we used to **hide away**.*



Child 6: *And we did hear them fighting, one of us would go into **each others** rooms and we'd like try to **read a book together** and like **sleep in the same bed together**.....*

Child 32: *...Ummmm in a way me and my sister argue a bit more but we also **became closer**. ...Coz when my parents fought we sometimes **just fought** I don't know why. Following this she then explained how they are closer and she stated.....*I and um we also shared more stuff with each other.**

This is a particularly interesting coping strategy employed by these siblings, although admittedly not particularly unusual. Although they are employing an *emotion-focused coping strategy* (Fields & Prinz , 1997) by seeking and receiving emotional support from each other, there is also an attempt to distance themselves or distract themselves from the source of the stress (hearing their parents fighting) by reading a book together or hiding away together. This appears to be an *avoidance/emotion focused strategy* (Fields & Prinz, 1997). Child 6 and her sister also employ an *approach/emotion focused approach* by sleeping together (Fields & Prinz, 1997). This indicates that children will employ different coping strategies as an attempt to cope with the stressors of their parents' divorce, determined by the subtle changes to the circumstances. If it is considered that properties of concepts can be placed on a continuum of dimensions it appears that with an escalation of conflict to a level that involves violence and when the conflict is prolonged in time children will change the coping strategy that they employ from one of *approach/emotion* to include distraction.

### C. Third property: Companionship offered by step-siblings

A good relationship with step-siblings can help to foster positive feelings towards the reconstructed family. This study found this to be true and that this assisted the children in coping with the parents' divorce.

Child 1: ...*my stepsister and my stepbrother are also very nice*. Referring to her stepfather she stated ...*He's nice and stepbrother usually plays with his dad ..... and me and stepsister **play together***.

Child 19: ...*well they all make me feel like even though I have a different surname, **I am part of their family** and they never let me forget it* (said in a manner that indicated that she found this positive). She was referring to her stepfamily....*that also **makes me feel better** about, you know, who I am*.

Child 28: *Ek het drie boeties en een suster* [I have three brothers and one sister]. This child in fact has one sister and three stepbrothers, two of whom live with his father. He later discussed his relationship with the two stepbrothers that lived with his father. *Ek verlang na hulle, wil met hulle speel* [I miss them, want to play with them].

The act/s by the step-siblings that assist in making the children feel accepted can be seen to be resources available to the children. The children, however, must make use of this emotionally, interpreting these acts as being helpful. It can be said then that the coping strategy evident here is one of *secondary control* as defined by Rothman, Weisz and Snyder (1982) as the child is adjusting to the situation in a manner that enables the child to feel included and as being part of the family. This also meets the criteria of a *prosocial coping strategy* according to Blechman et al. (1995), as the feelings of everyone are taken into account.

### **6.3.1.3 The third subcategory: A sense of control over that which is happening**

This subcategory is primarily concerned with the aspect that children who participated in this study indicated that a sense of control over that which was happening in their lives assisted them in coping with their parents divorce. This included the concepts of being able to have a say about where they lived, as well as flexibility regarding contact that they have with the non-custodial parent. A further concept that emerged was that children needed to have some control over whether people know about the divorce and whether the divorce is spoken about or not.

#### **6.3.1.3.1 First concept: Having a voice in court regarding custody arrangements**

It is commonly held that children cannot make a decision, in fact they should not be asked to make a choice regarding which parent they should live with. Children in this study however, made it clear that they wished to have a say regarding where they were going to live when their parents get divorced.

These were all responses that the children gave when they were asked what they thought judges should know with regard to that which was best for children when their parents divorce:

Child 1:        *Well **you can ask them** which one do you want to stay with, your mom or dad.*

Child 9: *I think it's best for the judges to **let the children decide** who they want to live with....And not bring the adults into it.*

Child 11: *To live with the ones that love you the most.*

Child 15: *...let the children **make their own decisions***

Child 41: *Let them live with **who they want to live with** and if they make the wrong decision then just swap it around.*

In requesting that they determine where they live, or at least have a say where they want to live the children are employing an *approach/problem focused coping strategy* (Fields & Prinz (1997), *cognitively-oriented coping strategy* (Moos & Billings, 1983). This can also be seen as being an *antisocial coping strategy* as it is not necessarily taking into account how the parents feel, especially the parent with whom the child chooses not to live with.

#### **6.3.1.3.2 Second concept: Respecting confidentiality**

A number of children mentioned that they did not talk to their friends about their parents' divorce. They stated that they did not want people to know about the divorce and even felt that the divorce should be kept a secret. One of the reasons for this was that the children did not want to be pitied. While this may be seen as being denial, it appears that while the child is not comfortable with having others know about the divorce it is helpful to the child not having others talking to them about the divorce, or pitying them.

Child 18: *My ma sê ek mag nie vir niemand sê daaroor nie. [My Mom says I **must not tell** anyone]. ...Want ... laat al die kinders jammer vir ons wees [because all the children **will feel sorry for us**].*

Child 16: This child was explaining why he felt he did not want his teachers to know that his parents were divorced. *Because then they would ask my mom...My mom would talk, talk, talk until her mouth's broken.* . It appears that he was uncomfortable with his mother talking excessively about it as far as he was concerned.

Child 35: *I don't know **I just don't talk.** I don't want to tell everyone.....Yes, otherwise **they'd feel sorry** for you and everything.*

By not talking about their parents' divorce these children are employing an *avoidance/emotion focused coping strategy* (Fields & Prinz, 1997). They are using denial to cope. This is also an *asocial coping response* according to Blechman et al. (1995), taxonomies of coping strategies. It is interesting to note that both Child 18 and Child 16 responded in this manner as a result of their mother's reactions (although their mothers behaved in different ways). It can therefore, be said that their coping responses were a result of their mother's reactions or instructions and therefore the coping strategy needed to be modified to include this aspect.

#### **6.3.1.3.3 Third concept: Flexibility in contact with non-custodial parent**

Furthermore, and linked to the concept discussed in Section 6.3.1.2.2 in which children's need for "equal time" the children in this study expressed a need for flexibility in the contact that they enjoy with the non-custodial parent. Although children from divorced families have been reported in the literature to exercise an external locus of control (Amato, 1993, 2001; Amato & Keith, 1991a; Hetherington et al., 1998; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Pryor & Rogers, 2001), these children are displaying an internal locus of control by requesting that there be flexibility with regard to the contact with the non-custodial parent determined by themselves and their own needs.

Child 19: *For myself, but sometimes it got in the way of my weekend plans like I'd want to see my friends on the weekends that I was with my mother. And she'd say no because you're going to see your dad next weekend.* While discussing her time with her father she mentioned that it interfered with her social life.

Child 37: *Now I'm seeing him 4 weeks in a row.* He was discussing his contact with his father and he felt that it was very flexible. When he was asked how he felt about this he stated ....*Ja [yes] I like it.*

Two properties that emerged in relation to this concept were the following:

#### **A. First property: Flexibility in relation to the children's social lives**

Flexibility is especially important in order to allow children to continue with a normal social life. This appears to be particularly important to older children approaching their adolescence. Adolescents are in a life stage where peer acceptance is extremely important, and it appears that while they may desire contact with the non-custodial parent, contact with their peers takes precedence (Berk, 2001).

Child 24: *I don't know like... like **as often as possible** but not inconvenient.*

#### **B. Second property: The role of geographical proximity**

The geographical proximity of a child's two homes can play a role in the possible flexibility enjoyed by the child regarding contact with the non-custodial parent. It appeared that even in a situation of a high-conflict marriage and divorce the children took comfort that the non-custodial parent lived close by and they are able to visit as often as they wished.

Child 6: *So that's our house and it wasn't very far away, it's just like round about over here, it's called name of complex. When she was asked how she felt about this she replied....Well I was quite **happy that he was close by** but I wasn't too sure about my mom because she was like "oh he's so close".* Note that even though her mother expressed reservations about the close proximity, the child found it comforting to know that her father was within walking distance.

The children in this study appear to be employing an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy* as they were taking responsibility, or at least trying to take responsibility, for their time they spent with their parents as well as pursuing a social life (Fields & Prinz, 1997). From the child's perspective, it could be said that this is a *prosocial coping strategy*, as defined by Blechman et al. (1995), as they are respecting their own needs. From the parents perspective this might however, be seen as an *antisocial coping strategy*, as it might not meet the parent's needs as seen with Child 6 and Child 19 (Blechman et al., 1995).

#### **6.3.1.4 Fourth Subcategory: Normalisation is important**

Children reported that when they felt that divorce was a normal event in life this assisted them in coping with their parent's divorce as they did not feel different. This concept is closely linked to the concept discussed in Section 6.3.1.3.2 where the effect of children's feeling embarrassed was discussed. Furthermore, children also discussed how the normalisation of their parents' lives, including the properties of knowing that their parent/s were happier and had company, also assisted them. Finally, when it occurred that both parents moved house when the divorce took place, it appeared to bring a sense of fairness and normality to the situation for the children.

#### **6.3.1.4.1 First concept: The “normalisation” of divorce is beneficial**

An interesting concept that emerged throughout the interviews was the benefit that children experienced in coping with their parents' divorce when they recognised and felt that other children also experienced parental divorce, in fact that most of their friends parent's were divorced. This appeared to enable them to feel that they were normal and that the disruption that they were experiencing was not unusual. It seems that this normalised the situation for the children. Feeling that divorce is normal helps prevent children from feeling different and embarrassed.

Child 21: *And then they also tell me that I'm not the only person that this has all happened to coz sometimes some of my friends, their parents have also been divorced*

Child 27: *And my friend next door but she understands as well because her mom and dad also got divorced.*

Child 35: *Yes just like that nothings going to change.....No coz we've all forgotten about it and we've just carried on. The tone is one of feeling that life carries on normally and nothing has changed.*

Child 41: *...because he told me his parents got divorced ..... so no I don't have a problem.*

This coping strategy appears to incorporate a number of aspects of different coping strategies. The children were seeking support from others in that they are aligning themselves with others who had experienced the same changes in their lives. They were also choosing to reappraise the situation in a manner that enabled them to cope more successfully with the situation and finally they were also denying some of the aspects of their situation in that they were seeing the



situation as normal. It may be most correct to classify this coping strategy as an *avoidance/problem/active focused coping strategy* as the child is primarily denying the changes in the life circumstances although there is an element of actively problem solving and emotional coping.

#### **6.3.1.4.2 Second concept: Normalisation of parents' emotions**

Not only was it found that the normalisation of children's personal feelings had a positive influence on the children's coping with their parent's divorce, but that other factors also played a role in the concept of normalisation of the divorce experience proving to be beneficial for children's coping. Factors such as the children perceiving their parents as being happier post-divorce as well as knowing that parent/s have company were revealed by the data as being important for children.

#### **A. First property: Experiencing parent/s being happier after the divorce**

During the interviews it became evident that for children it was comforting, and assisted them with their coping with the divorce if they could see that at least one parent was happier as a result of the divorce. Experiencing their parents as being happier together with a reduction in the levels of conflict assists children in feeling happier and, therefore, cope better with the divorce. It goes so far as to make divorce more justifiable according to children

Child 6: *Um well she is certainly **much happier** that I know....Um well **I feel happy that she's happy**.* She was discussing how her mother had changed.

Child 11: *...Ja [yes] **he's also happier**.* He felt that his father was happier since the divorce.

Child 19: *I think **she's a lot happier** where she is now.....referring to her mother and then discussing her father she said....Um I think **he enjoys the single life.***

Child 32: *Well she **happier** ... Umm **less stressed** ... just living her life quietly.....I'm happy for her.*

This is primarily a *prosocial coping strategy*, using Blechman, Prinz and Dumas' (1995) taxonomies of coping strategies, as these children were being very respectful of their parent's as well as their own feelings. It is also an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy* as the children had reappraised the situation to be that of one that has a positive outcome, at least for their parents (Fields & Prinz, 1997).

## **B. Second property: Reassurance that a parent has company is comforting**

Considering that most of the children that participated in this study were in the concrete operational stage of cognitive development and for some they were beginning to move into the formal operational stage, concepts such as kindness, thoughtfulness and companionship were beginning to become important and possibly issues that they were grappling with. Fischer (1980) discusses the development of concepts such as kindness and respect for others' feelings beginning to develop at the age of 10 to 11 years of age during the single abstractions stage. It appears that, possibly because of this cognitive developmental stage, children find it reassuring if they know that, at least, their non-custodial parents have someone to care for them and provide companionship for them. This would be particularly relevant for the child who has become the *parentified child*. It is also possible that companionship for the parent/s could assist in preventing a child from becoming a *parentified child*.

Knowing that their parents have company and are happy appears to have assisted the children that participated in coping with their parents' divorce.

Child 12: *I feel... well him and I we're like pals, and **it's nice for my Mom**.* He was discussing how he felt about his mother's boyfriend and that his mother has company.

Child 15: *Coz, **she deserves someone to love**.*

Child 23: *I was **happy** for them because **I knew my dad was with somebody**.*

These children were all using an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy* (Fields & Prinz, 1997), as well as a *prosocial coping response* to the situation (Blechman et al., 1995). They had assessed the situation in a manner that was positive and assisted them to cope, as well as having taken into account the feelings of their parents.

#### **6.3.1.4.3 Third concept: A sense of fairness when both parents move**

Some children appeared to experience far less distress when both parents moved out of the matrimonial home when the parents separated. The children's developing a sense of fairness appears to have played a role in their ability to cope more effectively with having to move house when their parents separated and when both parents moved from the family home. It is possible that this situation prevents a "winner-loser" situation from developing in the children's perception of the divorce and therefore normalizes the situation by having both parents having to move.

Child 3: ***They both moved***.....and he then went on to say.....***I felt excited as well because I mean we were going somewhere else.***

Child 22: ***Mommy and daddy moved out.*** When she was asked how she felt about this she said..... ***I think good***,.....

Child16: ***My mom and my dad***....referring to who moved out of the house when they separated, and the reason for this was ....***Because we sold it***.....and then he replied... ***happy***....when he was asked how he felt about this.

With both parents moving out of the matrimonial house at the same time, these children were able to employ an *approach/emotion* enabling them to find a way to cope with their parent's separation/divorce more easily. This relocation was however, not of the children's making but because of the decisions that the parents have made; and the children had been able to make some positive meaning of this potentially distressing event. It can therefore be said that this classification of the coping strategy that the children have employed fails to recognise the subtlety of the dynamics of children's coping strategies. It also appears that this strategy also falls into a *prosocial coping strategy* definition of coping strategies according to Blechman et al. (1995), as these children reflected respect for everyone's feelings.

When the whole family has to move house at the time of separation/divorce, and assuming that the situation is such that the children do not feel a need to escape the situation due to conflict or abuse, it is possible that it assists children in that they feel that neither parent is being treated unfairly. When one parent does stay in the matrimonial home, with or without the children, it would therefore be important that the children be assisted in feeling that neither parent feels they have been treated unfairly. Under these circumstances, the children would be able to benefit from a sense of continuity as seen in the concept of a stable environment including involving the home environment in Section 6.3.5.

These concepts, being part of the category “coping strategies pertaining to the child personally” are grouped into subcategories. They all deal with what children perceive as being factors that were of a personal nature, often because of their own personal perceptions, personal relationships that they have, or their own personal experiences and feelings that assisted them with coping with their parents’ divorce. However, other relationships and support systems were revealed by the data obtained from the interviews with the children in this study that elucidated other important concepts with regard to support that assisted them in coping with divorce.

### **6.3.2 SECOND CATEGORY: SUPPORT FROM OTHERS ASSISTS IN COPING WITH DIVORCE**

This category encompasses concepts, grouped into subcategories, that reveal the importance of children receiving support from step-parents, grandparents, other relatives, friends, teachers and other people from the church in assisting them to cope with divorce as well as the comfort that children experience in knowing that their parents are receiving support. This is illustrated in Table 6.4.

**Table 6.4. Summary of the descriptions of the subcategories and concepts of the Second Category: Support from others**

SUBCATEGORIES/ CONCEPTS	DESCRIPTION
<b>1. FIRST SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>Step-parents</b>
1.1 First Concept	A sensitive introduction to step-parents
1.2 Second Concept	A good relationship with a step-parent
1.3 Third Concept	Step-parents’ involvement in extra-mural activities
<b>2. SECOND SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>Support from grandparents is important</b>
2.1 First Concept	Emotional support from grandparents

SUBCATEGORIES/ CONCEPTS	DESCRIPTION
2.2 Second Concept	Practical support from grandparents
<b>3. THIRD SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>Support from relatives is helpful</b>
3.1 First Concept	Support from other significant people
<b>4. FOURTH SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>Friends can prove to be a source of support</b>
4.1 First Concept	Companionship assists in adjusting to changes in after-school care arrangements
4.2 Second Concept	Talking to friends is a source of support
<b>5. FIFTH SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>Teachers are a source of support</b>
5.1 First Concept	Teachers can be a source of support and understanding
<b>6. SIXTH SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>The church can offer meaningful support</b>
6.1 First Concept	Church-based counselling services are beneficial
<b>7. SEVENTH SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>Knowledge of parents receiving support is helpful</b>
6.1 First Concept	Knowledge of others being of assistance to a parent is comforting

### 6.3.2.1 First subcategory: Step-parents

Children that participated in this study highlighted a number of concepts that appear to play a role in the positive impact that step-parents can have, including a sensitive introduction to the step-parent, having a good relationship with the step-parent and the positive effect step-parents can have by being actively involved in the children's lives. There appears to be a lack of research into the role that step-parents play in the ongoing success of children's coping with their parent's divorce.

### 6.3.2.1.1 First concept: A sensitive introduction to step-parents

Conversations with children that participated in this study indicated that the sensitive and possibly gradual introduction of step-parents, or potential step-parents, to children plays an important role in their coping with the divorce and the assimilation of new parent figures into their lives. The following vignette taken from the interview with Child 6, Child 7 and Child 14 illustrates the different feelings experienced when introduced to different potential step-parents. This highlights the importance of introducing the child to potential step-parents in a sensitive manner.

Child 6:     ...because um with mother's boyfriend **that's ok** because my mom **introduced him** and **I got to know him a little bit better**

Child 7:     Yes...I... saw her... I'm still getting to know her...When asked if he likes her he replied...Um I think so...I am **getting to like her...it takes time...**

Child 14:    ...He's **really nice** and he was first a **friend** and then my mom married him .....we **slowly** got to know him but he's a **friend** not our dad....

It could be said that when a step-parent is introduced in a manner that allows the child to adjust successfully and happily, the child would be employing a *secondary control coping strategy* (Rothbaum, Weisz & Snyder, 1982) as the child is adjusting to, coming into line with, a new and different family structure. This is however, not of the child's own doing but rather owing to the manner in which the adults have behaved in introducing the step-parent and that the child has been able to make use of this positively. This would also be a *prosocial coping strategy*, as by adjusting positively to the step-parent being a part of the

family this is an adjustment that is respectful towards the parent's feelings as well as the child's (Blechman et al., 1995).

#### **6.3.2.1.2 Second concept: A good relationship with a step-parent**

The integration of a step-parent into the reconstructed family, is an important element of the ongoing challenges that children are faced with when coping with divorce. Children in this study reported having a good relationship with a step-parent and furthermore, this appeared to have a beneficial effect for the child's coping with the divorce.

Child 6:     *...and then I ask my mom are you going to get married to step-father ...I said...it would be like really like **cool if you do** ...then I'd have, like ..., **two fathers sort of** .....Not like step-father would be like my permanent father. But I mean like he's like my foster father.*

Child 19:     *The one that I did know was very recent and she was amazing she was a really nice woman. God knows why she ended up with him but ja [Yes] and I enjoyed her company. She then went on to discuss her step-father.....He's a nice guy he's so funny, sometimes a little bit irritating with his humour, um but **he's a really nice guy** and he treats me... well, and he's been there since I was three, so he's kind of **become that father figure in my life**.*

Child 25:     *Very kind, loving, got a good job....Uh, **and I love him**.* She is talking about her step-father.

It appears that good step-parent relationships can assist children in coping with divorce. They can prove to be a source of support for the children.



It is quite evident that the children dealing with this situation, and being required to adapt to another change in their world, have used an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy* Fields & Prinz, (1997). It is evident, however, that the changes are not within the children's control as the situation is not of the children's own making, viz. firstly the divorce, and then secondly the introduction of a "third party", a step-parental figure. The fact that the step-parent relationship is beneficial to the child's coping with the divorce (which is the primary source of stress) is secondary; and therefore, it is the children's perception and use of the situation that makes it a resource that has a positive impact on the children's coping. This concept can also be classified as being a *prosocial coping strategy* as it is respectful of others emotions; but again, it was not a sought out coping strategy by the child.

#### **6.3.2.1.3 Third concept: Step-parents involvement in extra-mural activities**

While children were discussing extra-mural activities, the significance of the step-parent's support and involvement in extra-mural activities was brought to the fore. This is particularly important, as Hetherington et al. (1989) found there that the quality of parenting that children receive, for approximately two years post-divorce, is often poor. Should the child have a good relationship with the step-parent Furthermore, it is possible that step-parental involvement in their children's extra-mural activities assists in developing a sense of family cohesion.

Child 11: ***He's nice*** *he spoils us so much. He pays for my sports things and takes us to all race tracks and all.* He was discussing his step-father

Child 14: *No, he was like a dad to me coz... he was always there and stuff. He always came to my ballet concerts...*

Child 19: *...become that father figure in my life. He's at all my things. She was*

talking about her step-father.

As obtaining the step-parent's involvement is not something within the child's control this is a coping resource available to the child. Again, however, as the child makes positive use of this and finds benefit personally it can be said that the children are employing an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy* according to Fields and Prinz's (1997) classifications of coping strategies. The children enjoy the benefit of having these significant people's involvement but the involvement is not as a result of their own efforts. This highlights the lack of coping strategy taxonomies that recognize the subtleties of coping strategies employed by children.

#### **6.3.2.2 Second sub-category: Support from grandparents is important**

The children that participated in this study indicated clearly that grandparents could play a significant role in assisting them to cope with their parents' divorce. Concepts such as the emotional support as well as the practical support were revealed in the analysis of the data.

##### **6.3.2.2.1 First concept: Emotional support from grandparents**

Grandparents appear to be able to fulfill a vital role in emotionally supporting children coping with their parents' divorce.

Child 15:     *...but I do sometimes speak to my **gran**....Well sometimes **I feel relaxed when I talk to her.***

Child 19:     *My **grandmother**, I find I can always talk to her about whatever it is....and **she won't judge me** on what I say or I think, but **she gives me guidance**, which is very, very useful to me...*

Child 19: She stated that her grandmother helped her significantly while the divorce litigation was occurring. *She did especially when the divorce had just happened. Um I was at her house and I think having her there for me when my mom was busy with the lawyers and whatever, it really... **she helped me a lot.*** She explained that this support had helped her in the following manner...*Like for the confidence that I still had someone who loved me and who was **one person who was there only for me.***

Child 20: *I like it um because then **we can talk a lot** ...* She was discussing the significant emotionally supportive role that her grandmother played in her life linked to the practical assistance her grandmother provided.

The resource that there was someone, being the grandmother, there as a source of emotional support assisted these children in coping. Weiss (1979) maintained that grandparents were more likely to provide emotional support than were aunts and uncles, as the latter were often preoccupied with their own families or issues. An *approach/emotion focused coping strategy* as defined by Fields and Prinz (1997), is employed here as the children make use of, and may at times even elicit, emotional support from their grandparents in order to try to get help in coping with the situation.

#### **6.3.2.2.2 Second concept: Practical support from grandparents**

Children that participated in this study mentioned that their grandparents proved to be a significant source of support, on a practical level. This was experienced as being beneficial by these children.

Child 8: *Every afternoon, when there's school my **granny comes and does homework with us.***

Child 20: *I like it um because then we can talk a lot....And then **we don't need to waste petrol....Running up and down.*** This child derived benefit from the frequent contact as it gave her the opportunity to talk to her grandmother as well as her feeling that it assisted her mother financially as her mother did not have to spend money on petrol.

Child 26: *Every day I get home and swim by my Nana.....And **everyday my Nana picks me up from school.*** This child appeared to benefit from being collected from school and then being able to pursue activities that he would otherwise not have been able to do as his mother was at work.

These grandparents offer a coping resource to the children. Pryor and Rogers (2001) indicate that grandparents are able to help buffer the negative effects of divorce on children. Hetherington (1989) found that grandparents often assist with household and parenting responsibilities, which provides support to both their grandchildren and children. The children are using an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy*. They have reappraised the situation positively with regard to their mothers having to work, or that there is a need for them to be taken care of in the afternoons as a parent is not available and therefore, their grandmothers have to assist in care taking. It is, however, again a situation where the abovementioned categorisation of coping strategies falls short of fully describing the coping strategy as a situation whereby the assistance that the grandparents offer is not sought out by the children; however, the children actively choose to use this resource to their benefit without control over the situation.

### 6.3.2.3 Third subcategory: Support from relatives

This sub-category is characterized by the concept of the emotional and financial support that aunts and cousins offered.

#### 6.3.2.3.1 Concept: Support from other significant people

Other significant people in the child's family or social circle may prove to be a source of emotional support to the child in coping with divorce. Aunts, cousins and other significant people within the extended family were found in this study to be able to play a significant role in assisting children to cope with the divorce in a variety of ways. This assistance appears to have been significant in providing emotional support and financial support.

Child 14: *Ja [Yes], ...whenever I fight with my stepmother or my mom or something **she always like talks to me and stuff**. She was referring to a teenage cousin.*

Child 32: *Well my **aunt**...We've also become a little **bit closer**... coz um I **share my feelings with her**.*

Child 34: *Well she's also **given me a lot of advice and helped me with that**..... She was discussing how her aunt helped her.*

This is an example of Fields and Prinz's (1997) definition of *approach/emotion focused coping strategy* as the children appear to turn to their relatives for emotional support, which they found beneficial.

#### 6.3.2.4 Fourth sub-category: Friends can prove to be a source of support

Friends appear to assist children coping with divorce by offering companionship especially when changes in after-school care arrangements have to be assimilated Friends also seem to be of emotional support.

##### 6.3.2.4.1 First concept: Companionship assisting in adjusting to changes in after school care arrangements

It was found that some children had to attend an after-school care facility because of their parents' divorce, where the custodial parent had to work full-time. Being able to attend after-care with friends and/or siblings was found to play a significant role in assisting children in adjusting positively to this change in their lives.

Child 7: He did not attend after-care prior to his parents getting divorced. When he was asked how he felt about going to after-care he responded..... *Um, yes I like to see my brother working there.*

Child 30: This child also had to begin attending after-care after her parents divorced and said ..... *I feel a little bit happy because my friends go there.*

Child 39: ... *Nice coz all my friends were there.*

The findings of this study suggest that children can adapt to attending after-care successfully especially when friends are present. According to Fields and Prinz's (1997) taxonomies of coping strategies this would appear to be an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy*, as the children all seemed to have been able to reappraise the situation in a manner enabling them to find it positive in a stressful situation. It does appear, however, that this reappraisal occurred by

chance, rather than through any purposeful and conscious action that the child might have taken. This highlights an area that appears to have been neglected in the literature and previous research, viz. coping strategies that, children in particular display. They happen upon the strategy, and reframe or respond, but not through any conscious, purposeful action of their own. Furthermore, it is a *prosocial coping strategy* as it is respectful of the child's own needs (Blechman et al., 1995).

#### 6.3.2.4.2 Second concept: Talking to friends is a source of support

Pryor and Rogers (2001) found that children often talk to their peers more than they talked to their parents about their emotions and concerns. For many children, being able to talk to friends about their parents' divorce and their feelings surrounding the divorce proved to be a cathartic experience and an important source of support.

Child 5: *Because I was really upset and I started crying every time. She was discussing talking to her friends about the divorce and she went on to say....**They made me feel quite a lot better...***

Child 6: *Also um friend's name **I could talk...**She went on to say her friend would say.... *don't worry things are going to be ok..... She wouldn't really like give me advice..... but I could talk to her though.**

Child 12: *It **helped** a lot... It helps, **they calmed me down...** They were the only ones who could calm me down. She was discussing her friends helping her.*

Child 15: *It helps to be happy, makes you **feel happy**, makes you **feel special...** just to talk to someone about it. She was talking about her friends.*

Child 34: *Umm, **just to get it off your chest**. She was discussing the manner in which talking to her friends helped her and how she felt....Relieved.*

Child 40: *... they were just there...they were there for **support** ...He found his friends to be supportive.*

It is evident from these quotes that these children all found being able to talk to their friends to be very supportive, even if they did not receive any direct advice. They were all using an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy* by seeking emotional support from their friends (Fields & Prinz, 1997).

#### **6.3.2.5 Fifth subcategory: Teachers are a source of support**

The concept of teachers proving to be a source of support and showing understanding was evident from interviews given by children in this study.

##### **6.3.2.5.1 Concept: Teachers can be a source of support and understanding**

Children reported that they found the support that they received from teachers to be of assistance in coping with their parents' divorce. Teachers appear to be in a position to be able to provide some support to children coping with divorce, depending on how the child perceives the situation.

Child 5: *... and **they know why I'm crying** and they don't give me a demerit if I cry. She felt that her teacher's understanding of her behaviour was helpful.*

Child 12: *Yes my mom told them (teachers) and they began a little **club** for me. They asked who's experienced...this kind of thing. When he*



was asked if it had helped him he stated... *I did get a little bit of **advice**... Well, I **learnt** new things about divorce.*

Child 27: *I don't know I just **felt** a little bit **better** that she **knew** and if I was doing a little bit badly she knew why.*

Child 34: *Well she also **helped** me. She was referring to her teacher. She kind of gave me **advice**.*

These quotes indicate that teachers played a significant role in the lives of these children and that they were positioned to be able to provide significant support for children. The coping strategy that these children used was that of an *approach/problem focused coping strategy* (Fields & Prinz, 1997). It was not always evident whether the child approached the teacher for support, or whether the teacher's support was a resource offered to the child, or whether in her treatment of the child she indicated that she was sympathetic to and understanding of the situation. If the latter was the case then it was the children's personal interpretation and perception of the teacher's involvement being of assistance that resulted in the teacher's involvement being used positively.

#### **6.3.2.6 Sixth subcategory: The church can offer meaningful support**

According to the children that participated in this study the church, being people who are members of the church, could play a significant role in their coping with their parents' divorce.

##### **6.3.2.6.1 Concept: Church-based counselling services are beneficial**

A number of children mentioned that they felt that the church could help children and their parents to cope with divorce by providing counselling, including mediating between the parents. Children who participated in this study appeared

to hold a positive view of the outcomes of intervention programmes for children coping with divorce.

Child 19: *But it could **help** to tell the child that it's not their fault.* She was discussing the role that counsellors at the church could play.

Child 35: *Like just **speaking to them**....* He was discussing the possible involvement of the church.

Child 21: *I think they can **help** if the parents, like can't really afford to take the children to like counsellors and stuff like that, that they can also like help them at church.*

Child 23: *I think they can because, if the kids have like no body to talk to they can just **go** to the minister **with their problems**.*

Child 40: *They also just **supported** me.* He was discussing how people at the church had helped.

Using Fields and Prinz's (1997) taxonomies this coping strategy could be classified as an *approach/problem focused coping strategy* as the children would be involved in receiving direct support, possibly even having sought it out. As with previous concepts, however, if the children's parent/s had taken the children for counselling, by a person or people at the church, then this coping strategy would not be entirely applicable as the child is rather making use of a resource that is presented, even though they choose to derive positive benefit from this resource.

### 6.3.2.7 Seventh subcategory: Knowledge of parents receiving support is helpful

While it is evident that the children reported that people who played a wide variety of roles in their lives were able to provide assistance in various ways it was also evident that these same people could and at times did offer assistance to their parents and this also assisted the children in coping with the divorce.

#### 6.3.2.7.1 Concept: Knowledge of others being of assistance to a parent is comforting

Children from this study confirmed the positive effect that assistance their parent's received from others had on their coping. Pryor and Rogers (2001) report that not only do grandparents and, to a lesser extent, relatives play a significant role in assisting to buffer the negative effects of divorce on children, but they often assist the parent/s in various ways including financially, practically and emotionally.

Child 33: *She's always bringing me and my brother stuff.... He was discussing an aunt who he identified as having been particularly helpful and to whom he felt close to. He went on to say that she had helped them as a family ...Um, because my mom ran a bit short of money so **she gave** my mom some **money** for school fees and stuff and then paid her back.*

Child 34: *I think because my **gran** also helps my mom a lot and **helps my mom being stronger**.*

This could be considered to be a *practically-oriented coping strategy* as described by Moos and Billings (1983) as the children's perception of the assistance that their parents receive solves a problem for the children. The

problem is that the parents have a need, which is of concern for the children, and with the children experiencing the need being met, they derive personal benefit. It needs to be recognised however, that this assistance and the benefit derived for the children, was not something that the children personally sought out, but was rather owing to the adults' actions. The assistance that these children experience was of an indirect or vicarious nature as not only did the children not actively seek out the support but the support was not directly focused on them. The benefit that they experience could be considered to be "second order" assistance compared to assistance that they experience that is directed at them even when they did not seek it out.

It is evident that characteristics within the children, their immediate family members, the wider family and the broader community can, and do, play a significant role in assisting children in coping with their parents' divorce. It was also evident that spiritual support plays a role in supporting children from divorced families.

### **6.3.3 THIRD CATEGORY: SPIRITUAL SUPPORT**

This category deals with the concept of spiritual support as being seen by children as being beneficial when coping with divorce. This is illustrated in Table 6.5.

**Table 6.5. Summary of the descriptions of the concept of the Third Category: Spiritual support**

CONCEPT	DESCRIPTION
1. Concept	Spiritual support is helpful

### 6.3.3.1 Concept: Spiritual support is helpful

The role of “the church” or spiritual support was canvassed with the children who participated in this study. Whether they had obtained support from a religious body or not, children maintained that spiritual support was, or could be, helpful when coping with their parents’ divorce.

Child 5: *It feels that God’s always with me like **God and Jesus**...When she was asked how this helped, she stated it made her feel... **I think happy.***

Child15: *Coz then they **pray**, they actually pray for your parents to get **peace**.*  
She indicated that she felt this was beneficial.

Child 35: *Like um **praying**... He went on to say...**We like...I think we sat there for an hour and we just **prayed** and that....***He felt this was helpful.

Child 41: *They could **pray** for us.* He said this after he was asked if he felt the people at church could do anything.

It appears that children felt that by being prayed for assisted in coping with the stress of divorce as was supportive. This is an *approach/problem focused coping strategy* as support is requested (Fields & Prinz, 1997). If however, the parent/s were the ones who sought the prayer and the children were included as part of the family, then the coping strategy would not strictly be relevant as it fails to recognize the subtlety of the situation or intervention, although the children interpreted it positively.

#### **6.3.4 FOURTH CATEGORY: THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS ARE HELPFUL**

A category dealing with the role that therapy can play in assisting children in coping with divorce emerged from the data. This included the benefit that children experienced personally, as well as when their parents received therapeutic assistance. This is summarised in Table 6.6.

**Table 6.6: Summary of the descriptions of the subcategories and concepts of the Fourth Category: Therapeutic interventions are helpful**

SUBCATEGORIES/ CONCEPTS	DESCRIPTION
<b>1. FIRST SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>Therapeutic interventions assists children</b>
1.1 First Concept	Psychotherapy for children
1.2 Second Concept	Therapy provides a helpful distraction
<b>2. SECOND SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>Benefit of parental counselling</b>
2.1 Concept	Children experience parents' receiving therapy as being beneficial

##### **6.3.4.1 First subcategory: Therapeutic interventions assists children**

Apart from therapy being able to assist children in understanding the process of divorce and the therapist or counsellor being able to explain what is happening as discussed in Section 6.3.1.1.2, where the children's need to understand the process of divorce is dealt with, therapy and counselling appears to be able to assist children in other aspects as well. Children in this study indicated that on a personal level psychotherapy assisted them on an emotional level and also appeared to be a source of distraction.

#### 6.3.4.1.1 First concept: Psychotherapy for children

Although divorce is generally accepted as being a major crisis that many children face, the efficacy of intervention programmes for children has not been adequately researched. Children that participated in this study reported that they found psychotherapy to be beneficial in that it assisted them with their emotions.

Child 5:     *And I **felt a lot better** after that...Telling it to someone I know.....*  
She was talking about her experience of having received therapy.

Child 15:    *Well it **helps** when you're in a **bad mood**..... Its helps when you're not in a mood to talk.* She was discussing how she felt therapy was beneficial.

Child 17:    *So you **don't get too much in a state**.* His explanation of how therapy helps emphasises the supportive nature of therapy.

Child 19:    He replied... *It does, it does like you're **not keeping your feelings bottled inside** so... ja [yes] it does **help**...*

Child 40:    *I don't know just talking about it and I don't know.....**Just getting things off my mind** and that...*referring to how therapy had helped him.

As attending psychotherapy involves receiving support from others and problem solving it would be an *approach/problem focused coping strategy* according to Fields and Prinz's (1997) taxonomies of coping strategies. It is possible that some of the children they did not seek the assistance of a therapist, but rather that the therapist was more of a resource made available to the child through the school or by the parents. The child attended therapy without having requested such assistance; but the child was able to choose to make use of the resource in a constructive manner.

#### 6.3.4.1.2 Second concept: Therapy provides a helpful distraction

The use of denial as a defence mechanism is not generally taken to be a healthy coping strategy. Children in this study however, reported using denial and furthermore, that therapy assisted them in achieving this. They appeared to feel that trying to forget about their parents' divorce helped them to cope. It is possible that while they were using a coping strategy of denial they were able to feel that life is "normal".

Child 18: *Dat ons sal **vergeet**, Tannie* [That we will **forget**, auntie<sup>6</sup>] This was her reply to the question regarding whether she felt that therapy could help children when their parents divorced

Child 33: *They should help them like just take it **off their mind** and help them, just to **forget** about it.* He was discussing what role he felt therapists could play in helping children to cope with divorce.

It can be seen that these children were suggesting that the therapist could help the child to employ an *avoidance/emotion focused coping strategy* albeit with the assistance of another person (Fields & Prinz, 1997). The children were distancing themselves from their emotions related to the divorce.

#### 6.3.4.2 Second subcategory: Benefit of parental counselling

The concept discussed below indicated that children experience personal benefit when their parents receive psychotherapy.

---

<sup>6</sup> Tannie" or "Auntie" is an Afrikaans term of respect for an adult female, she is not referring to a relative.



#### 6.3.4.2.1 Children experience parents' receiving therapy as being beneficial

It has been found that the quality of the parenting that children receive post-divorce is often diminished due to the parent's personal emotional difficulties (Hilton & Desrochers, 2002; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). It is therefore, not surprising that an analysis of the data collected in this study indicated that the children found it beneficial to themselves when their parents received psychotherapy.

Child 20: *And maybe go to a **therapist**.* She was discussing what she felt parents should do in order to help their children with the divorce.

Child 21: *I think that they could like the **parents** could go to **counselling**.*

Child 29: *Get **other people to help** ...* She went on to explain how the parents need support including from counsellors.

This is an *approach/problem focused coping strategy* using Fields and Prinz's (1997) classifications of coping strategies. In this case, however, it would be the parent receiving the direct support and the child would benefit indirectly through receiving improved parenting. The parent receiving therapy could also be seen as being a coping resource from the children's perspective. This is a *prosocial coping strategy* as it is respectful of the parents and the child's emotions and needs (Blechman et al., 1995).

It appears that therapeutic interventions and counselling, for both themselves and their parents, is perceived by children as being helpful in assisting them to cope with the effects of their parents' divorce on themselves. The manner in which therapeutic intervention is of assistance may vary according to the children's ages and personal perceptions and needs, but it is nevertheless seen as a helpful coping strategy. A further category of concepts that was elucidated by

this study was that of children's need for their lives to remain as stable and unchanged as possible after the divorce.

### **6.3.5 FIFTH CATEGORY: A STABLE ENVIRONMENT AND BELONGING-NESS**

The need for stability incorporating the continuity of life post-divorce as it was pre-divorce as well as a continued sense of belongingness was voiced by the children who participated in this study. These concepts were grouped into three subcategories, encompassing the aspects of school, home and a sense of belongingness created by general continuity. This is illustrates in Table 6.7

**Table 6.7: Summary of the descriptions of the subcategories, concepts and properties of the Fifth Category: A stable environment and belongingness**

<b>SUBCATEGORIES/ CONCEPTS/ PROPERTIES</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
<b>1. FIRST SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>Changing School</b>
1.1 First Concept	Staying in the same school post-divorce
1.2 Second Concept	An explanation regarding changing school that acts as a buffer
<b>2. SECOND SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>Moving house</b>
2.1 First Concept	Moving house perceived as assisting with coping with divorce
2.1.A First Property	Perceived resultant improvement when moving house
2.1.B Second Property	The opportunity to escape greater stressors
2.2 Second Concept	Remaining in the family home creates stability
<b>3. THIRD SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>General continuity and belongingness</b>
3.1 Concept	A sense of continuity

### 6.3.5.1 First subcategory: Changing School

Two interesting concepts emerged from the data that are relevant to this subcategory. It appears that the opportunity to stay in the same school as pre-divorce is an important concept, as well as the concept of an explanation for the necessity to change school that is reasonable according to the children.

#### 6.3.5.1.1 First Concept: Staying in the same school post-divorce

Children often have to change schools when their parents divorce because of a result of a change in finances and due to moving house (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). This can prove to be stressful for the child added to all the other changes that occur because of the divorce, and can prove to make the child's adaptation more difficult. Children that participated in this study expressed their relief or appreciation at not having to change schools.

Child 6: **No** (she was replying to the question as to whether she had had to change schools owing to the divorce) *but my dad, because he's getting .... but he keeps on telling us "I'm going to have to take you to a government school". My mom says he's talking just rubbish.* When she was asked if she was worried about this she replied....**No** *because at first I was but my mom reassured me...*

Child 40: **No, I'm glad...** he replied to the question about whether he had changed schools after his parents divorce.

Child 41: **No, thank goodness...** he replied to the question about whether he had changed schools after his parents' divorce

By being able to remain at the same school these children were able to continue to remain in a familiar educational and social environment and hopefully therefore, receive support. This is, according to Rothbaum, Weisz and Snyder (1982) a *secondary control coping strategy*, as these children were using the existing situation to assist them in coping, while adapting themselves to the situation (the divorce). The children did not however, remain in the same school through any direct action of their own but rather merely because the parents did not change the school. Being able to remain at the same school was thus not, due to any action of their own. As has been previously discussed the existing coping strategy typologies fail to recognize this dynamic within children's lives and the coping strategies they employ.

#### **6.3.5.1.2 Second concept: An explanation regarding changing school that acts as a buffer**

The negative effects on children of changing schools when their parents divorce, is discussed in the literature, as well as the reasons for such a change, and the negative effects of these factors (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Jansen van Rensburg, 2004; Steyn, 1989). Some of the children in this study did indeed have to change schools and furthermore, some experienced this change positively. It appears that the positive experience was largely due to the positive reframe they were given regarding the change in school; it was explained to them in a manner that enabled them to experience the change positively

Child 10:     *Because my mom said that at "school A" **all they cared about is the money***. The explanation that his current school was asking for too much money helped this child feel that moving schools was a good idea and he did not find the change traumatic.

Child 39:     *...I was in..... school "A" then I went to "school B" but that was because a teacher swore at me and then after school" B" I had to*

*go to school” C” that was because my **mom and dad didn’t like school “B”**.*

It appears that the explanation given to children played a significant role in their being able to experience a potentially stressful event as a result of the divorce, in a manner that was not stressful. It could be said that the child is employing an *approach/emotion focused strategy* as defined by Fields and Prinz (1997) as it involves the acceptance of, even if it was provided by others, information that assists in coping with the situation. These children again chose to use the information in a manner that resulted in their feeling positive about the change of school/s, even though the change was as a result of the parents’ behaviour. These children also appeared to be using a *prosocial coping strategy* according to Blechman, Prinz and Dumas (1995) categorizations of coping strategies, as their acceptance of the change in school was also based on helping their parents, or at least being prepared to accept their parents’ interpretation of the situation.

#### **6.3.5.2 Second sub-category: Moving house**

Another aspect that has received attention in the literature and that children who participated in this study mentioned as influencing their coping with their parents’ divorce, was the event of having to move house when their parents divorced. Interestingly some children saw the necessity to move house positively, possibly because of other dynamics, or properties that added variance to these concepts.

##### **6.3.5.2.1 First concept: Moving house perceived as assisting with coping with divorce**

In general, Braver et al. (2003) state that moving house is seen as being one of the most stressful life events anyone can deal with. In studies on the impact of divorce on children Dreman (2000) and Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999)

describe the negative impact that moving house as a result of the divorce has on children. It is interesting to note however, that this does not always appear to always be the case and that some children appear to cope well with moving house and report no resultant negative effects or emotions. This appears to be especially relevant when the children perceive their living conditions as improving.

While the concept of moving house was perceived as being helpful, there were two properties that emerged that built complexity into this concept. These properties are the perceived resultant improvement when moving house and the need to escape more distressing factors in the home.

#### **A. First property: Perceived resultant improvement when moving house**

The analysis of the children's interviews on the aspect of moving house when their parents' divorce revealed that for some of them experienced the move as being beneficial as it resulted in a raised standard of living. These appeared to moderate the possible negative effects of the move for these children. It is possible that with the busyness of packing, moving and then unpacking that some children found moving house a source of distraction, which masks their emotions surrounding the divorce.

Child 1: She stated... ***It's cool***... when discussing having moved five times since her parents' divorce, and went on further to explain.....*Coz we move from one house to the next house and you get to see every **interesting** thing.*

Child 11: He discussed at length his feelings regarding moving three times since his parents' divorce and how he has been happy with this, especially when it has resulted in the family having more space. ... ***Very good, we had more space*** ...

An *approach/emotion focused coping strategy* has been employed as they have personally, actively and purposefully reframed a potentially stressful situation into a positive experience (Field & Prinz, 1997). These children were however, not in control of the situation as it was not their choice to move house, they were faced with the event and they chose to use it to their advantage.

## **B. Second Property: The opportunity to escape greater stressors**

Some children described how they were happy to move from the house they were in when their parents separated as it allowed them to get out of circumstances that were stressful for them. It appears that when there are other factors involved that the child finds stressful, then moving house is an escape, and brings about some peace in comparison to living in the house with both parents.

Child 15: ... and I actually feel **happy** in a way. She then explained why she felt happy about moving house.... **They don't fight anymore.**

Child 17: **I liked it** actually..... (referring to moving out of the family home with his mother)..... **My dad drank a lot** and we never got to see him and he used to come home late...

Child 20: **I liked it** because then, um, **we didn't have father around**.... And he couldn't shout at us.

This is an *avoidance/problem focused coping strategy* as the children viewed the move as an escape from a stressful situation. A change in the environment was brought about and the children experienced relief from a stressor created by parental conflict or unacceptable behaviour. However, this move was not brought about by the children but rather by the parents; and the children interpreted it in

an “escape” manner. They could have interpreted it in terms of loss, disruption, etc., but they chose to see it as a coping strategy.

#### **6.3.5.2.2 Second Concept: Remaining in the family home creates stability**

While some children expressed positive benefits from having moved house when their parents divorced others expressed appreciation for not having to move and being able to stay in their homes. Braver et al. (2003) state that moving house is generally accepted as being an extremely stressful occurrence. When parents divorce, changes in financial circumstances often occur, and owing to the financial settlement of the divorce the children have to move house with the custodial parent. It was evident that not having to move house was experienced being as beneficial by children that participated in this study.

These children were discussing whether they had moved house when their parents divorced.

Child 10:     ***Nope**, I stayed with all my animals.* Said in a manner that indicated that he was relieved and happy about this.

Child 19:     *Well sometimes I feel a little bit bored with my surroundings but I think it keeps me **stable and secure** about my environment.*

Child 29:     *We were **lucky** we could stay in our house.*

Using Fields and Prinz’s (1997) taxonomy of coping strategies, this concept can be classified as an *approach/problem focused coping strategy*. As the child does not have any control over whether the family moves or not, it cannot be said that the child directly or intentionally acted in a way to employ such a coping strategy. A resource, viz. being able to stay in the family home was available to the



children and they perceived this as being a positive factor and as assisting them in coping.

### 6.3.5.3 Third subcategory: General continuity and belongingness

A concept of general continuity intertwined with a creating a sense of belongingness emerged from the data.

#### 6.3.5.3.1 Concept: A sense of continuity assists in coping with divorce

It is interesting to note that for some children the ability to return to their old house when they visited the non-custodial parent was a source of comfort and it acted as a buffer to the negative impact of having to move house. It is therefore possible that for children coping with divorce the opportunity to be able to return to the familiar familial home, at least from time to time, is beneficial.

Child 27: *Well I **didn't have to move house** because my dad said **he would stay** in that place and um sometimes just for fun I sleep over at a friends house but that's like normal. But then I stay with my mom sometimes and stay with my dad sometimes.* He was explaining how his father had stayed in the matrimonial home and how this was helpful because he would be staying there when he was not staying with his mother.

Child 35: When he was asked who had moved house when his parents divorced he replied.... *Ja I went, **I moved with my mom** but I still saw my dad.....* When he was asked if he was sad about having moved house he replied.... *No because **my dad still lives there**.* He then confirmed that he was not sad having to move because he was able to return to the house when he visited his father.

From a slightly different angle, Child 23 mentioned that she enjoyed returning to the family home in which her father had remained as she felt that she experienced a sense of belongingness there.

Child 23: *The only place I can really **call my own home** was either with my gran or at **my dad's house**.* In discussing this further she indicated that this was the only thing that had remained stable. Her father had remained in the family home.

It appears that when there has not been pre-divorce factors that have impacted negatively on children resulting in their not wanting to return to their family home, or to visit the non-custodial parent. When that parent remains in the family home, children can benefit from the continuity that exists in their lives by being able to return to their “old” home regularly. These properties influence this concept.

It is possible that in finding it helpful to return to the familial home the children were employing a *secondary control coping* strategy according to Rothman, et al. (1982). They could not change the fact that their parents had divorced and that they had had to leave their familiar home; however, by returning there regularly they were able to psychologically adapt to the unalterable circumstances and derive some comfort from this.

While children appeared to benefit from a sense of continuity in their lives, especially with regard to schools and homes, it is also evident that due to different properties some children experienced changes in school and home as being beneficial. Aspects such as the children’s personalities, the role of distraction, positive reframes given by others and a sense of belonging being preserved all appear to have influenced these findings.

### 6.3.6 SIXTH CATEGORY: THE ROLE OF EXTRA-MURAL ACTIVITIES

The positive influence of being involved in extra-mural activities was discussed by children during their conversations with the researcher.

**Table 6.8: Summary of the descriptions of the concept of the Sixth Category: The role of extra-mural activities**

CONCEPT	DESCRIPTION
1. Concept	Extra-mural activities help in coping with divorce

#### 6.3.6.1 Concept: Extra-mural activities help in coping with divorce

A wide variety of extra-mural activities was reported by the children to be helpful in a variety of ways with coping with their parents' divorce. This is significant as in the literature it is reported that owing to restrictions on the custodial parent's time and finances children often have to stop pursuing their extra-mural activities. Sport can also prove to be an outlet for some of the emotions experienced by children coping with divorce.

Child 3: *Well it just **keeps them busy**.* He was referring to sport helping children cope with divorce.

Child 6: *...I'm just quite good at art and it just really **makes me feel cheerful** and that and when I do sport um it also like helps me like **take me mind off it**. (Then at a later stage), *Ja and then I'd say that it could help you to **take your mind off it**, but if you don't, but if you can get your mind off it, then maybe you read a book or something like that or um... maybe watch TV trying to get your mind off it and then if your parents um, will say to you "why are you watching TV" um, just**

*say” well it’s helping me take my mind off the divorce” or “ because I’m very, very sad about it lately”.*

Child 15: *Well it makes you **calm down** and it makes you feel **relaxed**.*

Child 21: *Well when we swim sometimes I feel like when I **swim fast**..... It helps me **relieve my anger** in a way.*

Child 41: *Well it does because I’d rather **concentrate on the game** and see what’s happening and then I **forget about it** and it doesn’t actually really matter to me anymore what they do coz I can’t tell them what to do- I’m not God.*

This is an *avoidance/emotion focused coping strategy* as well as being an *asocial coping strategy* (Fields & Prinz, 1997; Blechman, Prinz & Dumas, 1995). By being involved in activities, even watching T.V. these children found some relief in the stress they were experiencing because of the divorce.

Research on involvement in extra-mural activities and the possible positive benefit for children coping with divorce is generally lacking. However, in this study the children indicated that there were very real benefits from being involved in extra-mural activities.

A further category that emerged clearly in this study, as being significant for children and one that has been researched well is conflict and children’s coping with this.

### **6.3.7 SEVENTH CATEGORY: THE ROLE OF CONFLICT**

The negative effect of parental conflict on children has been well researched. Camara and Resnick (1988, 1989) state however, that moderate conflict,

followed by conflict resolution in fact contributed positively to children's post-divorce adjustment. A number of concepts relating to this category emerged from this study. These concepts have been divided into three subcategories dealing with factors relevant to the children's coping with pre-divorce parental coping, post-divorce conflict and thirdly how parental conflict has assisted them in developing an understanding of the need for divorce. Table 6.9 summarises the concepts.

**Table 6.9: Summary of the descriptions of the subcategories and concepts of the Seventh Category: The role of conflict**

SUBCATEGORIES/ CONCEPTS	DESCRIPTION
<b>1. FIRST SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>The role of pre-divorce conflict</b>
1.1 First Concept	The need to distance themselves from the conflict in order to cope
1.2 Second Concept	Getting involved in the parental conflict in an attempt to cope with the conflict
<b>2. SECOND SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>The role of post-divorce conflict</b>
2.1 Concept	Parent's ability to buffer negative impact of conflict assists the child
<b>3. THIRD SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>Pre-divorce parental conflict facilitates an understanding of divorce</b>
3.1 Concept	Pre-divorce parental conflict assists children in understanding the event of divorce

#### **6.3.7.1 First sub-category: The role of pre-divorce conflict**

A need to distance themselves from the parental conflict as a way to cope with it as well as an attempt to get involved in the conflict situations in order to cope with it are two concepts that became evident during the analysis of the data.

#### 6.3.7.1.1 First concept: The need to distance themselves from the conflict in order to cope

Many of the children that participated in this study became distressed when talking about the conflict that they had experienced during the divorce. They also discussed how they had tried to cope with this and how their reactions had helped to deal with the situation. The impact of parental conflict on children has been widely researched and it has been overwhelmingly concluded that this factor alone accounts for more psychological problems in children coping with divorce than any other (Emery, 1982, 1988; Grych & Fincham, 1990, 1992; Long & Forehand, 1987). Emery (1988) discussed how children may try to distance themselves from the parental conflict and in so doing temporarily relieve the distress they are experiencing. A number of children discussed employing tactics of this nature.

Child 8: *I **run into my room**.... I just rub my ears and **hear nothing**.*

Child 15: *I usually run to my bedroom and **put some socks in my ears**.*  
When she was asked if this helped she replied... Yes.

Child 29: *Um I **go in my room** and then I go and lie and I **fall asleep***

Child 33: *I just **go somewhere else**....I go to my room and listen to music or something.*

These children have all employed an *avoidance/emotion focused coping strategy*, as defined by Fields and Prinz (1997), as they have tried to distance themselves from the source of stress, being the argument or conflict taking place between their parents. This is also an *asocial coping strategy* as it involves the children trying to avoid an awareness of the content of the conflict being experienced (Blechman et al., 1995).

#### 6.3.7.1.2 Second concept: Getting involved in the parental conflict in an attempt to cope with the conflict

Children do appear at times to become involved in parental conflict, possibly in an attempt to mediate as can be seen from statements made by children who participated in this study. Emery (1988) discusses how children may try to intervene in parental conflict and possibly even try to mediate a solution or try to halt the conflict. It was evident however, that when the intensity of the conflict escalated to a certain point these children could not use an *avoidance/emotion focused coping strategy* any further and they then changed to an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy* and became involved in the conflict in order to stop it (Fields & Prinz, 1997) . This is a dimension of the coping strategies that children employ in coping with conflict between their parents.

Child 12: *I go to my room...When it gets worse I get out and I **stop them, I stop the fight.** I either keep my dad out .....at the door... or I just say you two just keep quiet....Or I just make an excuse "what about the neighbours" ... and make my dad go.*

Child 30: *then one day my mom and him were fighting on the phone and my mom was crying and **I went to sit with her and I hugged her** and I said don't worry and all that and then after that happened **everything was fine.***

Child 34: *get upset and sometimes I get terribly upset that I sometimes even **ask them to stop.***

In so doing, they were using an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy* (Field & Prinz, 1997) as they were actively involved in trying to alleviate their emotional distress. This strategy can also be classified as a *prosocial coping strategy* as by

intervening the child was taking into account the parents and their own emotions (Blechman et al., 1995).

### **6.3.7.2 Second subcategory: The role of post-divorce conflict**

Parental conflict often continues post-divorce and this may require the children to find further coping strategies. It appears that when one parent is able to buffer the possible negative effects of the other parent's negative or threatening statements this enables the child to cope better with the potentially stressful situation.

#### **6.3.7.2.1 Concept: Parent's ability to buffer negative impact of conflict assists the child**

Some children reported that the support and assistance that they received from one of their parent's was helpful in coping with the impact of the parental conflict.

Child 6: When discussing the possibility of having to change school Child 6 stated about her father ..... *but he keeps on telling us,... he says" because I have to pay you so much for the school fees I'm going to have to take you to a government school". My mom says he's talking just rubbish.* When she was asked if she was concerned about this she replied, *No, because at first I was but **my mom reassured me**.....*

Child 6: At a later stage the same child introduced the same concept again in relation to the contact she had with her father..... *And he's threatening us again, he's saying "next year you only going to see me 6 times because, every second month you can only see me because I'm going to go and travel the world".....So my mom says "that's the biggest load of rubbish under the sun, **he's just trying to***



*threaten you” and things like that. She went on to say..... But I don’t think of things bad of my dad I really, really love him.*

Child 30: *I used to cry a lot, and my mom would say don’t worry....*

The mother’s ability to respond to the conflict in a manner that reassured the children appeared to have a positive effect and enabled the children to cope more positively with the situation. This would appear to fit with an *approach/problem coping strategy* as the child seeks support and information that she finds reassuring (Fields & Prinz, 1997). As the child is seeking the reassurance she needs she appears to have an *internal locus of control* and takes some responsibility for her well-being.

#### **6.3.7.3 Third subcategory: Pre-divorce parental conflict facilitates an understanding of divorce**

The last subcategory with respect to conflict that was revealed was that of the concept of pre-divorce conflict between the parents assisting the children in developing an understanding of the occurrence of the divorce.

##### **6.3.7.3.1 Concept: Pre-divorce parental conflict assists children in understanding the event of divorce**

Children in this study made statements regarding their parents’ divorce that would support these findings. They stated that they felt it was better that their parents divorced and they felt their parents were happier. This assisted the children in accepting the divorce and adapting to it.

Child 6: ***Sad** but I know that it is for the **better**.* She was explaining how she felt about the divorce. There had been high levels of conflict pre-divorce.

Child 11: *I think **they should have** because they've got a **better life** for them right **now**.* He felt that it was better that his parents divorced as he could see they were happier and there was no more conflict.

Child 34: *My parents have **stopped fighting**.* She felt this was good and when she was asked if she felt that it was better that her parents had divorced she replied.....Yes.

Child 35: *The **not fighting** and arguing and that...They still friends that's all.* He enjoyed the fact that his parents don't fight anymore and that they now had an amicable relationship. This was for him a validating reason for the divorce.

These children have all employed an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy* according to Fields and Prinz (1997). However, the children did not directly effect the change, i.e. the divorce, that resulted in the reduction of conflict. They reappraised the situation, namely the divorce in relation to the conflict that occurred, and then developed a positive reframe of the divorce event.

Both pre- and post-divorce parental conflict plays a significant role in children's adaptation to and coping with divorce. This includes some positive effects such as pre-divorce parental conflict assisting children to develop a positive perspective of the necessity for divorce. All of the concepts discussed in this chapter on the results obtained from the conversations with children are influenced by and influence the last category of concepts. This category is concerned with resiliency and the development of resiliency both pre-and post-divorce.

### 6.3.8 EIGHTH CATEGORY: THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESILIENCY

Interviews with the children explored the development of resiliency and the possible assistance the resiliency developed prior to the divorce may have on the children's coping with the divorce. The concepts that were developed were categorised into two categories, namely the development of resiliency pre-divorce and post-divorce. These are summarised in Table 6.10.

**Table 6.10: Summary of the descriptions of the subcategories and concepts of the Eighth Category: The development of resiliency**

SUBCATEGORIES/ CONCEPTS	DESCRIPTION
<b>1. FIRST SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>The development of resiliency pre-divorce</b>
1.1 First Concept	Previous experience with difficult situations is helpful in developing coping skills to deal with divorce
1.2 Second Concept	Resiliency to the stress of moving house assists with coping with the change
<b>2. SECOND SUBCATEGORY</b>	<b>The development of resiliency post-divorce</b>
2.1 First Concept	Divorce perceived positively due to improvement in school performance
2.2 Second Concept	Being reassured is helpful
2.3 Third Concept	Keeping a journal

#### 6.3.8.1 First sub-category: The development of resiliency pre-divorce

Two concepts were found to be relevant to this subcategory, being the children's experiences of other general previous stressful events and the experience of having previously having coped with the stress of moving house. These were both reported by the children to have assisted them in developing a resiliency with regard to the stress of coping with divorce.

#### 6.3.8.1.1 First concept: Previous experience with difficult situations is helpful in developing coping skills to deal with divorce

The children that participated in this study were asked about whether they had had experiences in their lives that they had found difficult to deal with and if so whether having to learn to deal with these experiences had assisted in their coping with their parents' divorce.

Child 6: *Well in a way **it has helped** me like when there are some things **I know I can get over**, it's like a hurdle I know most things I can get over.* She was referring to coping with the death of her uncle.

Child 23: *Um ja [yes] there ja, [yes] **certain things just like helped me to get like through things....** When she was asked how dealing with these difficult things had helped her she replied....Ja, [yes] so **just understand** what was happening.*

Child 35: *Yes because **you're like more stronger** and you **know how to cope** with that and everything* He was explaining how he felt dealing with other difficulties in his life had helped with coping with the divorce.

Child 41: *Well I **don't need to worry** about it because I know my parents will take care of it.* He introduced a slightly different property in that he felt that in having experienced his parents helping with previous difficult experiences he felt that he could rely on them to help him through their divorce.

It does appear that previous experiences, that have required the development of coping skills, build resiliency. Aldwin, Sutton and Lachman (1996) found that

stressful episodes early in life form a context for the development of coping resources in life. This building of resiliency through previous life experiences appears to be an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy* (Fields & Prinz, 1997) as the child is reappraising the situation positively in a manner that enables the child to feel in control, at least to some extent, and feel more positive about the circumstances. Using Moos and Billings' (1983) typology of coping strategies this coping strategy is a *cognitively-oriented strategy* as the children's cognitive appraisal of themselves results in them feeling more positive about their own ability to cope.

#### **6.3.8.1.2 Second concept: Resiliency to the stress of moving house assists with coping with the change**

The possibility exists that some children due to their own personality types are more resilient to the negative impact of change. In the study it was found that some children reported not having trouble with repeated house moves and therefore when they had to move house when their parents got divorced the move was not distressful.

Child 1: She stated... ***It's cool...*** when discussing having moved five times since her parents' divorce, and went on further to explain.....***Coz we move from one house to the next house and you get to see every interesting thing.***

Child 34: ...When she was asked about how she felt about moving house she replied.... ***Oh well I'm used to it because we usually move a lot.***

It is possible that this resiliency observed within these children enabled them to, or resulted in their employing an *approach/emotion focused coping* (Fields & Prinz, 1997). The children were able to perceive the moving of house as a non-

event and their feelings about the fact that their parents were getting divorced were not further impacted upon by the fact that they had to move house as well.

### **6.3.8.2 Second subcategory: The development of resiliency post-divorce**

Three concepts were evident in the analysis of the data that are relevant to the development of resiliency in children post-divorce. This includes aspects that the children felt assisted them in developing resiliency. An improvement in school performance, the role of reassurance and journaling will be discussed.

#### **6.3.8.2.1 First concept: Divorce perceived positively due to improvement in school performance**

Most of the children that participated in this study reported that they felt that their parents' divorce had not had any effect on their schoolwork or performance in any way. It was interesting to note that some children reported a positive influence on their schoolwork because of their parents' divorce, more specifically after the divorce. Their verbalisations indicating that they felt good about their improved school performance and this helped them to feel positive about the divorce, i.e. they coped better with it.

Child 21: *Sometimes it makes me like angry to know that my parents are divorced, but then in a way **I feel happy** because it **doesn't affect my schoolwork that much now**.* (She had previously described how while her parents were still married she had not been able to concentrate at school, and had even not attended school on occasions due to her parents fighting at home).

Child 31: While discussing how her school work had improved this child mentioned the following ... **Nou kan ek my skoolwerk baie beter doen.....want my ouma en oupa help vir my nou...met my skoolwerk, as my ma by die werk is...**[Now I can do my schoolwork

a lot better....because my granny and grandpa help me now ...with my schoolwork, if my mom is at work].

Using Fields and Prinz's (1997) taxonomy of coping strategies it appears that these children used an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy* to cope with the possible negative effects of the divorce on their school performance, or at least their perception thereof. By positively reappraising the situation and being able to see the improvements in their schoolwork it enabled them to feel more positive about their parents' divorce. These children were able to make use of some of the resultant changes that occurred due to the divorce.

#### **6.3.8.2.2 Second concept: Being reassured is helpful**

Children in this study suggested that therapists could help children by reassuring them, especially with respect to the future being positive and happy. The development of a positive outlook and a sense of happiness appear to have assisted them in coping with their parents' divorce.

Child 5:        *They **mustn't worry** and it will be **ok**...* She was discussing how a therapist could help and what the children should be told by the therapist.

Child 6:        *... then she said oh **don't worry** because um I'm sure everything's going to be ok...* She was talking about her experience in therapy and how she found that supportive and then later on she went on to say that as a therapist she would do the following....*then I'll **reassure them** and say no **don't be scared**.*

Child 23:       *ja [yes] I think so because they've just always just **reassured me** and all of that.* She was confirming that she had found therapy beneficial.

These children are using an *approach/problem focused coping strategy* as they are seeking support from the therapist and confirmation that the future will be positive (Fields & Prinz, 1997). This is an important concept as often therapists will shy away from giving reassurance as there may be concern that the future may not prove to be positive or better and creating false hope is seen as being destructive. However, the children at that moment in time needed reassurance in order to go into the future.

#### **6.3.8.2.3 Third concept: Keeping a journal**

Some children mentioned that they had found it helpful to keep a journal of their feelings when their parents were divorcing. They found this cathartic and said that they would recommend to other children whose parents were divorcing to do likewise as a way to help themselves. It could be said that the writing of a journal would be the beginning of such a process and indeed could be used effectively therapeutically, with the child's permission.

Child 12:      *Well I'd say if you've got like **a diary**, book that that you can write in..... And write in there what your feelings are. **WRITE** . She said forcefully.*

Child 19:      *Um **keeping a diary is an amazing** thing to have.*

Journaling as a way of coping with parents' divorce can be seen as an *approach/emotion focused coping strategy* as the child is taking responsibility for his/her own emotions and employing a technique that implies some self-control as described by Fields and Prinz (1997). Using Moos and Billings (1983) classifications of coping strategies journaling could be seen as being an *emotionally-oriented strategy* as it allows children to give vent to their emotions.



The development of resiliency therefore assists children in coping with their parents' divorce, or at least aspects of the divorce that potentially affect them negatively. Furthermore, children are outspoken on concepts that they feel assist in developing resiliency such as improvements in their school work, reassurance and journaling.

## **6.4 CONCLUSIONS**

Using a grounded theory approach, as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as well as Strauss and Corbin (1994), eight categories of forty-nine concepts were developed, or revealed in the interviews conducted with forty-one children.

While these concepts have been grouped into the categories and subcategories, as discussed in this chapter, there are many concepts that apply to more than one category. An example of this is the concept of reassurance. This was seen to be an aspect that is fulfilled in a therapeutic role as well as being relevant to developing resiliency. This inter-relatedness helps to build complexity into the theory being developed as discussed in Section 3.7.3.3.1 and outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

The concepts were also discussed in relation to coping strategies identified by the researcher that the children appeared to be using. It became evident however, that often the coping strategies that have been identified in the literature failed to take cognizance of the subtleties that were at play in many of the strategies employed by the children. This was mainly because the children were often not in control over much that happened in their lives, including changes that occurred and resources that were made available to them. This will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **INTEGRATION AND CONCEPTUALISATION OF CHILDREN'S COPING WITH DIVORCE**

#### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

Children's views on their coping with their parents' divorce need to be explored as discussed in Chapter 4. As this involves developing an understanding of their coping with this phenomenon and the ongoing phenomena from their personal perspective, such a study is placed within the existential phenomenological tradition. In Chapter 3, an outline of the grounded theory methodology to research as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) is discussed and motivated as being a research methodology that tolerates a phenomenological approach. Following this methodology, the data from the interviews of the children were broken down into units that were then reconstructed into concepts. These concepts were grouped into categories, including subcategories and properties when necessary in order to develop a depth and richness to the categories. The central category subsequently needs to be identified. This central category should be able to pull all the categories together allowing for the variation that exists in the categories while forming an explanatory whole (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

For the purposes of this process, the researcher will divide this discussion into two parts. An understanding of children's coping with divorce according to the eight categories discussed in detail in chapter 6 will be developed before finally developing one central category. A new taxonomy of coping strategies relevant to children coping with divorce will then be developed according to the understanding and conceptualisation of children's coping with divorce.

## **7.2 DEVELOPING AN UNDERSTANDING OF CHILDREN'S COPING WITH DIVORCE**

Children appear to employ a variety of coping strategies in order to assist their coping with their parents' divorce. Coping strategies, as opposed to traits, styles, or resources are, according to Fields and Prinz (1997), the most widely studied aspects of children's coping. For the purposes of this research these strategies, that can be seen as being constantly changing behavioural and cognitive efforts employed to deal with demands, are furthermore not evaluated in relation to their efficacy. They are accepted as being of assistance to the children as the children's own experiences, perceptions and evaluations are accepted as being true for them. The strategies employed by the children are discussed below in keeping with the eight categories outlined in Chapter 6.

### **7.2.1 COPING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY CHILDREN IN RELATION TO THEIR OWN PERSONAL EMOTIONS AND PERCEPTIONS**

Children's coping with divorce has been found to be influenced by many factors and dynamics. Some of these factors can be seen as related to the children themselves, of a personal nature and not because of the intervention of other people or external factors.

#### **7.2.1.1 The importance of developing a cognitive understanding of divorce**

Children who participated in this study indicated that they had a real need to understand, on a cognitive level, what was taking place in their lives. This is a cognitively-oriented coping strategy (Moos & Billings, 1983).

It was found that children needed to be informed about the process of the divorce, and how it was going to affect them personally and influence their daily lives. This would include the practicalities in their lives such as which parent they

would be living with, transport to and from school, whether they would begin attending after-school care, facilitation of extra-murals, where the non-custodial parent would be living, frequency of contact with the non-custodial parent, etc. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), as discussed in Section 4.3.1.1.2.B, found that the intellectual conceptualisations that children developed in an attempt to cope with their parents', divorce influenced their coping.

It is possible that not only does being informed allow the children to develop a cognitive understanding of divorce, but it also brings a degree of predictability to their lives in a situation that brings instability and insecurity into their lives. Manderson (2005) argues that an individual's personal perception of their well-being is influenced by their social context. In this case, the children's perception of their well-being, or coping with their parent's divorce, is influenced by the context of their parent's divorce and that which happens to them on a personal level.

Another dynamic that plays a role in this aspect is that because of their parents' divorce children's lives change, often in significant ways. It appears that this leaves them with the experience of being affected without being able to effect any change themselves, or having a say in that which happens to them. Children coping with divorce have been found in the literature to exercise an external locus of control as discussed in Section 4.3.6. (Amato, 1993, 2001; Amato & Keith, 1991a; Hetherington, et al., 1998; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Pryor & Rogers, 2001). In order to allow children to develop a more internalised locus of control and experience a sense of well-being and coping successfully, they need to be informed about the changes that are going to take place and to have the opportunity to comment and possibly influence the decisions about issues that affects them. This is closely linked to, and is inter-related to the concept of 'A sense of control over that which is happening' as discussed in Section 6.3.1.3., and more specifically the expressed need to have a 'say' as seen in point 6.3.1.3.1.

It appears that it is most beneficial to children when these discussions occur with *both* parents present. This is also closely inter-related to the concept of the need for honesty from the parents with respect to the divorce and emphasises the importance of predictability for the children. When parents *together* tell the children about the divorce and all the ramifications that this has for the children it may be that while in many ways this destroys life as the children know it, and it immediately and simultaneously begins to build a new reality with a sense of security and predictability for the children. Ferrer and McCrea (2005) recommend that if possible parents should tell their children about the impending divorce together and Fattore, Mason and Watson (2007) highlight the importance of a sense of security for children's conceptualisations of well-being. Furthermore, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) in their contextual/transactional/cognitive-contextual perspective on coping consider that a sense of coping and well-being is influenced by personal perceptions and not necessarily the actual outcome. Following from this it is then particularly important that children of divorcing parents experience stability and predictability as soon as possible in order to reduce their stress.

Bandura (1997) in his cognitive social perspective on coping stresses the importance of a perceived sense of control over the stressful situation. He conceptualised coping as involving controlling one's response to stress by controlling one's thoughts amongst other things. When both parents tell the children *honestly* about the divorce, this not only assists in creating a sense of predictability and security but also helps in providing a trustworthy source, one that the children can believe. According to developmental theorists, and in particular Piaget, the cognitive development of children between the ages of seven to eleven years falls into the concrete operational stage and that of children between the age of twelve years to adulthood falls within the formal operational stage (Piaget, 1953). Based on this conceptualisation Kohlberg (1964) maintained that children only begin to develop a sense of morality towards the end of the concrete operational developmental phase. The children who

participated in this study were developmentally in the concrete operational phase of their cognitive development and therefore bound to a strong sense of fairness and correctness including honesty. They have to be able to trust the information they are given. It is therefore not surprising that this honesty from the parents is so important in assisting the children in their coping.

An important concept within the development of an understanding of the divorce was found to be that of being absolved of guilt. This study found that children felt guilty about their parent's divorce and they needed to be told that it was not their fault. They also indicated that this was an issue that needed to be dealt with on an ongoing basis (Section 6.3.1.1.5). In the literature, it is reported that children experienced feelings of guilt when their parents divorced. Studies have furthermore indicated that children experience more difficulties when they blame themselves for their parents' divorce (Kurdeck & Berg, 1983, 1987, Walshak & Santrock, 1983). Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) link the guilt that children experience to their cognitive development, since cognitively children of this age do not of their own accord understand that they are not to blame. Furthermore, this guilt may be exacerbated if the parents have argued about the children or child-rearing issues in front of the children.

An over-arching concept in the subcategory of developing an understanding of the divorce was the need to be assisted in developing such an understanding. This assistance may come from the parents as has been discussed; however, the children saw the intervention of a therapist or counsellor as being potentially beneficial in this regard. Amato (2000) emphasised the role of group programmes designed to assist children in coping with divorce. The findings of the present study would support this. Furthermore, the children saw the role of a therapist as being largely that of providing information and being able to clear up misconceptions. Stohlberg and Mahler (1994) maintain that intervention programmes are largely educational and deal mainly with information and misconceptions. There was also some recognition that therapists can assist with

dealing with emotions in relation to the divorce, as is seen in other concepts developed (Section 6.3.4.1.1 and 6.3.4.1.2).

As the whole of this subcategory involves the development of an understanding of divorce it can be seen that the coping strategy used by the children is one of a *cognitively-oriented coping strategy* (Moos & Billings, 1983). It is also in general a *prosocial coping strategy* as it recognises and tries to fulfil a personal need namely that of developing an understanding of the divorce according to Blechman, et al. (1995). There is also an emotional element to these coping strategies as the children are employing strategies in an attempt to relieve the emotional distress that they are experiencing. This is particularly evident in the recognition that therapists can help with developing an understanding of divorce. The need for an understanding that they are not the cause of the divorce and therefore the need to be freed from a sense of guilt is an emotionally laden coping strategy. Using the existing classifications dichotomies, the classification of *approach/problem coping strategy* would best fit the strategy of therapists assisting with the development of an understanding of divorce (Fields & Prinz, 1997). Likewise, when considering the children's need to understand that they are not the cause of the divorce and therefore do not have to feel guilty, it is also an emotionally laden coping strategy. The most relevant coping strategy classification would be that of *avoidance/emotion coping strategy* (Fields & Prinz, 1997).

#### **7.2.1.2 The role of positive relationships with family members**

Children in this study mentioned that a benefit they had experienced because of their parents' divorce which had assisted them in coping with the divorce was that they had enjoyed an improvement in their relationships with their non-custodial parents in comparison to the relationship prior to the divorce. There is evidence in research with regard to the influence of the child's post-divorce relationship with the parents on the child's adaptation to the divorce, as

discussed in Section 4.4.4.2. The literature emphasises that support, comfort and a sense of closeness with the parents helps children adapt to divorce. A sense of cohesiveness is also required for children's successful ongoing adaptation (Dreman, 2000; Hetherington et al., 1989). While developmentally children move from identifying most closely with their parents, to identifying more closely with their friends, as outlined by developmental theorists and in particular Erikson (1965), they still need the support and acceptance of their parents. Attachment theory would emphasise the importance of an ongoing close relationship after the initial primary attachment is developed. It is therefore not surprising that children coping with divorce would benefit from close relationships with both parents, and that this would assist their ongoing coping with their parents' divorce. Furthermore, Emery (1998) indicated that it is possible that a parent's relationship with a child might improve after divorce. This possibility is often observed by professionals that work in the area of family law and divorce although it is not often given recognition.

Children appear to have a need for regular telephonic contact with their parents when they are not in the care of that parent. There is, however, a lack of research on the role of telephonic contact between parents and children in divorced families. This is of concern as difficulties around telephonic access being frustrated and/or not exercised are often reported in the divorce and family courts. Emery (1988) discusses the role of the non-custodial parent and the importance of regular contact for the child with the non-custodial parent, which is usually the father. It can be taken that this contact could include telephonic contact. Children's participation in telephonic contact with a parent can be seen as a *prosocial coping strategy* (Blechman et al., 1995). However, when the child maintains this telephonic contact against the wishes of the parent in whose care he/she is in at that time, it could be said that the coping strategy is an *antisocial coping strategy* (Blechman et al., 1995). This emphasises the situation in which children find themselves; although their behaviour may have personal benefit it can be interpreted as being disrespectful by virtue of their age, and the fact that



they are of an age where their world is largely controlled by adults. It can then be classified as being an *antisocial coping strategy* although it has benefit for the child personally (Blechman et al., 1995).

It was found that when parents show an interest in the other parent and family members related to the other parent it assists in the children's coping. It is possible that this assists the child in developing a feeling of cohesion, belongingness and respect for those who are important to the child. Such behaviour on the parent's part could also assist in preventing the child from developing a sense of guilt surrounding the divorce; hence, there is an inter-relatedness between this concept and that of being absolved of a sense of guilt (Section 6.3.1.1.5). Dreman (2000) found that family cohesiveness and a sense of togetherness are positively related to children's divorce adjustment.

A further concept that assists in developing a sense of belongingness is the non-custodial parent's active involvement in the children's lives, for example by assisting with extra-murals and daily activities outside of the stipulated access periods. This requires flexibility with regard to the contact the children have with the non-custodial parent which Dreman (2000) emphasised as being important for the development of a sense of belongingness and cohesion. It is possible that children find the news that their parents are to separate difficult to accept as it is associated with a loss or lack of contact with one of the parents (Drapeau et al., 1999). Furthermore, research indicates that usually, contact with the non-custodial parent, especially non-custodial fathers, decreases over time, (Amato, 1994; Amato & Booth, 1996; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001; Shaw, 1991). While the sex of both the child and the parent appears to influence this concept, Hetherington (1989) and Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999), summed up their findings by stating that contact with a supportive, authoritative, reasonably well adjusted non-custodial parent under conditions of low interparental conflict can enhance the adjustment of children.

A particularly significant concept that emerged from the data was that of children's expressed desire to have what was termed 'equal time' with both parents. The concept is interrelated to many of the other concepts, such as those that deal with parental relationships, sibling relationships, having a say, flexibility in contact with the non-custodial parent, and non-custodial parents' involvement in children's lives. It was interesting to note that when the children were confronted with some of the practicalities of such an arrangement, they were not deterred by these obstacles. They quickly voiced solutions and even recognised that there might be some inconvenience involved for themselves. However, they felt that the benefits of such an arrangement would still outweigh the inconveniences. This was the case even for some children who did not have contact with their non-custodial parents because they had experienced abusive relationships. These children could still see the benefit of such an arrangement and felt that in general this would be beneficial for children's coping with their parent's divorce.

Historically, it has been the practice to award custody of the children to one parent, or more recently to award primary residency to one parent within a joint custody settlement, based primarily on the assumption that it is too disruptive and unsettling for the children to move between the two homes (Emery, 1989). Drapeau et al. (1999) found that children found it irritating to move between two homes. The present study found however, that the children felt that it would be beneficial to be able to have 'equal time' with both parents. Theoretically, children bond with a primary care-giver and experience distress when separated from this significant person (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1973). This seems to support placing the child with the mother in the event of divorce, assuming that the child has bonded with the mother as the primary attachment figure. There are two flaws however. The assumption is that the mother is the primary attachment figure; and this is generally, but not necessarily always the case although it is assumed that it is usually the case (Lamb, 1977). Secondly, and more importantly, infants construct attachment relationships with both parents between

the ages of eight and eighteen months (Lamb, 2002; Main & Weston, 1981). Based on this it is not surprising then that children in a divorce situation, may wish to have 'equal time', and in fact 'equal time' could assist them emotionally in coping with some of the effects of the divorce. While Emery (1988) states that joint custody in reality rarely occurs, Buchanan et al. (1996) state that children cope better with their parent's divorce under joint custody. The children in this study's voiced desire for 'equal time' supports Buchanan et al. (1996). The challenge is therefore for the parents to make such an arrangement work.

Sibling relationships also appear to play a significant role in assisting children in coping with divorce. It was evident that close sibling relationships can prove to be a source of comfort and provide support and that siblings can also provide a source of distraction especially in times of parental conflict. Close sibling relationships have been reported in the literature to ameliorate the negative impact of divorce on children (Caya & Liem, 1998; Cowen et al., 1990). According to Barnes (1999) and McIntosh (2003), close sibling relationships can prove to be a good buffer against the negative effects of divorce on children and in particular to parental conflict. Step-siblings were included in this concept as they also appeared to also be able to provide helpful companionship, and this was seen by the children as assisting in their coping with the divorce and in particular with the aspect of creating a sense of belongingness and in both homes. Cowen, et al. (1990) state that as step-siblings all have to adapt in a reconstructed family it is possible that they can offer support to each other, as do siblings.

These coping strategies can all be seen as being *prosocial coping strategies* (Blechman et al., 1995) and as *emotion-focused coping* (Moos & Billings, 1983). These coping strategies are predominantly *approach/emotion coping strategy* (Fields & Prinz, 1997) since the children are actively trying to seek out information, comfort and showing concern for themselves and other family members. The difficulty with the existing models is that they do not recognise the

fact that the children are for the most part vulnerable to intervention, or lack thereof, from their parents. There is also an example of an *avoidance/emotion focused coping strategy* (Fields & Prinz, 1997) when siblings prove to be a distraction for each other especially during parental conflict episodes. This will be discussed further in Section 7.3. Demanding 'equal time' is an exception to the situation if the children demand this, as with telephonic contact. The difficulty for the children is that they are then seen as being disobedient, and therefore it is *antisocial*.

#### **7.2.1.3 The need for a sense of control**

The third subcategory that was developed in relation to the category dealing with children's personal emotions and perceptions was that of a need for a sense of control.

The children who participated in this study expressed a need to have a say and some control over the events that directly affected them. This was evident in their expressed desire to have a say about where they should live and if necessary to be allowed to change their decision (Section 6.3.1.3.1). Furthermore, they indicated that this assisted in coping with divorce. The literature indicates that children of divorced families typically employ an external locus of control (Amato, 1993, 2001; Amato & Keith, 1991a; Hetherington et al., 1998; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Pryor & Rogers, 2001). This is not surprising, as so much in their life circumstances changes because of the divorce; and these changes are beyond their control. This fosters a perception that they are influenced and directed by factors beyond their control and external to themselves. This would suggest that although children are reported in the literature to exercise an external locus of control that would influence the coping strategies that they employ, they would prefer, at least at times, to exercise more of an internal locus of control. Jansen van Rensburg (2004) emphasises the importance of children's locus of control with regard to their functioning. This has implications for the

manner in which children are treated in divorce, as it is possible that at times children are at times forced into accepting an external locus of control. While this may be necessary in some situations, in others it may not necessarily be in their best interests. Given more of a voice, they may adjust to the changes and stress of divorce more readily. Until very recently children have not had a voice in court. However, with the implementation of the Children's Act 38 of 2005, children now have the right to be heard by the court with regard to, amongst other things, custody. This could assist children, whose parents' divorce, to have a sense of control over that which happens to them and also develop an internal locus of control.

Closely linked to this concept is that of being allowed to exercise flexibility with regard to contact with the non-custodial parent. The flexibility that the children referred to was in relation to being free to pursue their social lives without being restricted because the non-custodial parent was exercising access. Geographical proximity of the children's two homes also appeared to play a role in the ability to enjoy flexibility in their contact with the non-custodial parent.

A need for a sense of control was also evident in the concept that dealt with children's preference at times not to have to talk about their parent's divorce or to have people know about the divorce. This appeared to be born from a concern that they would be pitied or that they would feel embarrassed. The literature indicates that children feel embarrassment as a result of their parent's divorce and that these feelings of embarrassment include a fear of being pitied and a loss of respect (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Raab, 2006). It appears that although this is an *avoidance/emotional coping strategy* (Fields & Prinz, 1997) as well as an *asocial coping strategy* (Blechman et al., 1995) and could be seen to maladaptive, there appear to be occasions when it may, at least temporarily, be helpful for children to employ these coping strategies.

When children exercise or are given the opportunity to exercise, more of an internal locus of control it is interesting to note that they employ strategies that would be considered pro-active and indicate a high level of adaptation as in *approach/problem focused coping strategies* (Fields & Prinz, 1997), or maladaptive being *asocial or antisocial coping strategies* (Blechman et al., 1995). The existing dichotomies of coping strategies are such that they polarise the coping strategies and fail to recognise the subtleties that exist in children's coping.

#### **7.2.1.4 A sense of normalisation of divorce and the emotions linked to it**

It appears that when children are able to experience a sense of life and emotions being normalised they are able to cope more effectively with divorce. This includes developing a realisation that others have experienced and are experiencing the same difficulties and emotions. The children in this study also linked this aspect closely with the feelings of embarrassment that they sometimes experience when their parent's divorce as discussed by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) and Raab (2006). Santrock and Warshack (1979) found that the more contact children have outside the family, the better able the children are able to cope with the divorce.

This subcategory is also inter-related to the subcategory dealing with the need to develop an understanding of the divorce. When children can see that their parents are happier post-divorce in comparison to pre-divorce, this appears to assist them in developing an understanding of the necessity of the divorce, or provides a justification for the divorce and all the changes it has necessitated. Developmentally, the children who participated in this study were at a life stage when they were cognitively aware of the feelings of others and respected them. According to Kohlberg (1964) children of this age will want to please others and will take into account the feelings of others. Knowing, or experiencing their parents being happier then facilitates their adjustment and coping. Linked to the

perception that a parent is happier post-divorce is the knowledge that that parent has company. Children reported that it was comforting to know that their parent was not alone and was happy. This may act as a buffer to preventing children from becoming a parentified child.

Interestingly, children found it helpful when both parents moved out of the familial home when they divorced. Children develop a sense of fairness from the age of 7 years (Developmental Testing Services, LLC, retrieved 2006). According to Piaget, and more recently Kohlberg, children only begin to develop a sense of fairness and morality towards the end of the concrete operational developmental phase and are bound in their thinking to a strong sense of fairness, or the 'rules of the game' that exist (Nucci, 2002). The children who participated in this study fell into this stage of development and this strong sense of fairness was evident in this concept. There was an element of fairness and equity when both parents moved out of the family home when they separated.

These coping strategies are *prosocial* in nature as they deal very closely with the well-being of the children themselves but also their parents (Blechman, et al. 1995). It is possible to classify the children's need to normalise the event of divorce and the associated feelings as being a denial of their emotions and therefore, this strategy would then be classified as an *avoidance/emotion focused coping strategy* (Fields & Prinz, 1997).

In conclusion it was found that *developing an understanding of the process of divorce, with the assistance of their parents and counsellors, together with having a sense of control, and having a say with regard to that which impacts on them directly while being able to develop and rely on supportive relationships with their parents, siblings and stepfamily all assist children in coping with divorce.* Other relationships however, also appear to play a significant role in children's coping with divorce.

## **7.2.2 COPING STRATEGIES RELEVANT TO THE SUPPORT RECEIVED FROM OTHER PEOPLE**

The children that participated in this study indicated that step-parents, grandparents, other relatives such as aunts and cousins, friends, teachers, members of the church and counsellors all play a significant role in their coping with divorce.

### **7.2.2.1 Step-parents' involvement**

To begin with, it appears that a sensitive introduction to a new step-parent or potential step-parent plays a significant role in assisting children to accommodate and accept this new and possibly threatening person in their lives. It is possible that such an introduction facilitates a good relationship, as perceived by the child, with this person. To help children cope with their parents' divorce, parents need to be sensitive to their children's feelings and need to give them time to assimilate the changes that occur post-divorce, especially with regard to introducing new people, viz. potential step-parents. Previous studies have found that the successful assimilation of a step-parent into the reconstructed family is dependent on the manner in which that person is introduced, that it is important not to expose children to every casual date and that the introduction should be conducted slowly and sensitively (Bartell, 2000; Everett, 1998).

Children from this study indicated that step-parents can and do play a supportive role in their lives and can facilitate their ongoing coping with divorce. It is possible that this serves to create a greater sense of family cohesion and this is beneficial to the children as was discussed in Section 7.2.1.2 above. This concept is inter-related to the concept of non-custodial parents being actively involved in the children's lives. It appears that step-parents' involvement in and support of the children's extra-mural activities assist in the process of developing a good relationship and in assisting the child cope with the divorce. It is reported in the



literature that for approximately two years post-divorce the quality of parenting that children receive is often poor due to the parent's own psychological distress (Hetherington, 1986; Hetherington, et al., 1989). Perceived family cohesion and a sense of togetherness, amongst other factors, have been linked to be related to children's divorce adjustment (Dreman, 2000). It needs to be recognised, however, that it is the child's willingness or openness to receive the step-parent's involvement positively, coupled with the step-parent's actual involvement, that results in the child using this resource positively.

These coping strategies are *approach/emotion coping strategies* (Fields & Prinz, 1997) and also *prosocial* (Blechman et al., 1995). Once again however, the sensitive introduction to a step-parent and a step-parent's involvement in the child's life is not the child's personal doing but rather a resource offered or available to them. The children convert the coping resource into a coping strategy through their personal, purposeful and positive use of these resources.

#### **7.2.2.2 The importance of support from grandparents**

Grandparents appear to play a significant role in a variety of ways that enhance children's coping with divorce. Children reported gaining benefit from their grandparents and they perceived this involvement positively. Furthermore, when the parent's stress was relieved by the assistance of the grandparents, it indirectly assisted the children as they experienced better parenting owing to lowered stress levels in their parent.

Previous studies have found that children often talk more to others than to their parents about their emotions and concerns and that grandparents were the most likely family members to assist children in divorce (Pryor & Rogers, 2001; Weiss, 1979). Not only do grandparents offer emotional support to children but they also often prove to be a source of practical support to the children when they assist with childcare responsibilities and at times offer financial support directly or

indirectly (Hetherington, 1989). Pryor and Rogers (2001) indicate that grandparents are able to help buffer the negative effects of divorce on children. The children coping with divorce then derive some benefit from this as it lessens the stress in the family.

The children were employing an *approach/problem focused coping strategy* as they chose to interpret the situation positively (Fields & Prinz, 1997). This does not take into account that the children did not necessarily source this resource personally but that they were rather presented with it and they chose to use it positively.

#### **7.2.2.3 Relatives assist in giving support**

Just as children benefit from the involvement of grandparents, the support of other relatives assists children with coping with the ongoing impact of divorce on them and their lives. The children who participated in this study also indicated that cousins and aunts helped them to cope with their emotions. Another aspect that was revealed was that cousins could also prove to be a source of distraction, providing some emotional relief even if only temporary. The children found this distraction to be beneficial. This is in keeping with findings from other studies where it was found that children talk to others rather than their parents about their emotions in relation to divorce (Pryor & Rogers, 2001).

These coping strategies can be classified as *approach/problem focused coping strategies* as were the strategies employed in the concept above in Section 7.2.2.2. The coping strategy employed when cousins provide a source for distraction would be one of *avoidance/emotion focused coping* (Fields & Prinz, 1997).

#### **7.2.2.4 Friends are a source of support**

It was found that when it is necessary for the children to attend after-care facilities owing to the divorce and the custodial parent's working full-time, the fact that friends attend the after-care facility enables the children to adjust to this new and potentially stressful change, with little reported distress being experienced. They appear to be able to buffer the negative impact. The literature reports that the children often have to attend after-care in the afternoons after school and in the school holidays because of a change in the custodial parent's financial circumstances. The parent is usually the mother, who has had to secure employment, (Hilton & Desrochers, 2002). This is seen as requiring, at least, that the child adapt to another change at a time when many significant factors are changing in their life circumstances.

This study found that the support received from friends was in the form of emotional support and the opportunity to talk, and was a stabilising influence. Previous studies have proven to be contradictory in that it has been found that primary school children are developmentally not able to provide effective social support for their peers while others have found that both siblings and friends play a significant role in providing support, and acting as a buffer for children coping with divorce (Dreman, 2000; Wolchik & Sandler, 1997).

When children speak to their friends about their emotions as indicated in this study this can be classified as an *approach/problem coping strategy* and furthermore, it is true to the definition that Fields and Prinz (1997) provide as the children themselves source this support themselves.

#### **7.2.2.5 Teachers play a role in supporting children in divorce**

Teachers were found in this study to be a source of support to children coping with divorce. Children reported that knowing that their teachers understood what

was taking place in their lives with regard to the divorce was reassuring as they felt that their teachers would then be sympathetic towards them and that they also gave them advice which they experienced as helpful. Studies have found that attention and warmth shown by teachers can be associated with positive adjustment in children following divorce (Barnes, 1999; Hetherington, et al., 1979; Kelly & Wallerstein 1977).

This strategy is an *approach/problem coping strategy* (Fields & Prinz, 1997). This is again a situation where the children do not necessarily initially enlist the support of their teachers; however, as the teacher has been informed about the divorce, the children are able to derive benefit from this and choose to do so.

#### **7.2.2.6 The role of the church in offering support**

In this study, the children reported that the church could play a significant role in assisting their coping with their parents' divorce in a variety of ways. Children mentioned that counsellors at the church could assist by telling children who the divorce was not their fault. This is inter-related to the concept of children's need to know that the divorce is not their fault when developing an understanding of the divorce. They could also provide counselling and emotional support, which children felt was important. This is inter-related to the concept of therapeutic interventions being of assistance. However, intervention programmes and psychotherapy have been found in the literature however to be of varying success (Amato, 2000; Lee et al., 1994).

This is an *approach/problem focused coping strategy* although the children did not personally seek the support (Fields & Prinz, 1997). They did however choose to make use of it.

#### **7.2.2.7 Parents receiving support assists children in coping**

Children reported finding it to be personally beneficial when their parents received support from others. In Sections 7.2.2.2 and 7.2.2.3, the benefit of children receiving various forms of support was discussed but this was in relation to personal assistance that the children received. It has been reported in literature that children experience beneficial effects when their parents receive support and this support can be of a practical, financial or emotional nature (Ahrons & Bowman, 1982).

Although this could be seen as a coping resource from the children's perspective, it is also a *practically oriented coping strategy* as the children are able to experience a certain resolution of stressors through their parents' receiving assistance and this then lessens the children's stress (Moos & Billings, 1983).

About the coping strategies that children report employing in relation to the support that they receive from people other than their immediate family members and step-family it is therefore clear that *supportive relationships offered by the wider community for the children themselves as well as for their parents assist children in coping with divorce.*

#### **7.2.3 Coping assisted by spiritual support**

The children in this study reported that they found spiritual intervention, in the form of being prayed for, and a sense of God being with them in a supportive capacity, comforting and of assistance in coping with divorce. Studies that have investigated the relationship between religiosity and psychological distress have found a negative correlation between the two (Fabricatore & Handal, 2000; Moscher & Handal, 1997). Kasberger (2002) specifically found that there was a positive correlation between religious coping and divorce adjustment in teenagers and young adults. Fattore et al. (2007) reported that religion played a

significant role in assisting in developing a sense of safety and security for children.

These children were employing an *approach/problem focused coping strategy* especially if they personally requested such support. When the benefit is experienced because of their parent/s being prayed for or asking for prayer then the benefit the children experience is rather because of the children choosing to interpret this support as being beneficial.

It was found therefore that *religiosity is a further source of support for children who can assist them in creating a sense of security in coping with divorce.*

#### **7.2.4 THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS FACILITATE COPING**

Therapeutic interventions appear to be of benefit to children in coping with divorce. This involves both the benefit that children experience when they themselves receive counselling as well as when their parents receive counselling.

##### **7.2.4.1 Therapeutic interventions for children**

Therapeutic interventions were found to be of assistance as the children stated that it guided them in dealing with their emotions. They stated that in particular, the cathartic nature of the therapy was beneficial. While it is generally accepted that the divorce of parents constitutes a major crisis for children who they have to adapt to (Schlesinger, 1982), it is of concern that there has been very little adequate research conducted on this aspect (Emery et al., 1999). Previous studies that have been conducted report varied success of group and individual therapeutic programmes (Amato, 2000; Lee et al., 1994).

For some of the children who that participated in this study therapy proved to be a helpful distraction, which can be seen as a denial strategy. While the use of denial is generally seen as being unhealthy psychologically, these children found it to be beneficial, even if only temporarily. It is possible that these children found this denial helpful partly because of their age. Children between the ages of 8- to 10- years have been found to employed coping strategies that involved denial and avoidance behaviour to a greater extent and more than any other strategy than children younger or older than this group (Adamson & Thompson, 1998; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). It appears that while Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) state that it is due to increased intellectual capacity that older children use less denial, it is possible that emotional factors also influence the use of this strategy and that older children also use denial as a result. Levels of conflict, relationships with the parents, parental coping strategies and available support may all be factors that influence the child's coping strategies. This concept is inter-related to that of developing an understanding of divorce, as the benefit in receiving counselling was also reported to assist in developing an understanding as well as helping to absolve the child of any feelings of guilt.

Although these coping strategies have been classified as being *approach/problem* and *avoidance/problem focused coping strategies* they are again also coping resources as the children are not in a position to personally source and enlist the help of a therapist. They are taken to therapy by an adult. They do, however, choose to make use of this resource (Fields & Prinz, 1997).

#### **7.2.4.2 Therapeutic interventions for parents**

Children also found that when their parents received psychological intervention, they experienced a personal benefit. It is reported in the literature that the quality of parenting that children receive after divorce is diminished for at least two years post-divorce (Hilton & Desrochers, 2002; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Because of this diminished parenting the children are often negatively affected and respond

to these deficits with behavioural problems (Hilton & Desrochers, 2002). As the parents stabilise emotionally and a new family equilibrium is achieved the quality of parenting that the children receive improves. It is possible that when parents receive counselling the children experience better parenting resulting in an increased sense of well-being and adjustment to the divorce.

As the children are aware that they benefit from therapeutic interventions together with their parents, this could be seen as being a *prosocial coping strategy* (Blechman et al., 1995). Again, although the children do not source the support they do choose to perceive the resultant effect as beneficial.

*Psychological intervention, both on a personal level and for parents is found to assist children coping with divorce in developing an understanding and sense of well-being.*

## **7.2.5 THE BENEFIT OF A STABLE ENVIRONMENT AND BELONGINGNESS**

In the present study, the children indicated that staying in the same school as before the divorce assisted them in coping with their parents' divorce. Children also reported that moving house was not necessarily perceived to be stressful and in some instances was perceived to be beneficial.

### **7.2.5.1 Aspects pertaining to changing school that enhance coping**

Children who participated in this study reported that they experienced it as being beneficial when they were able to remain in the school that they attended pre-divorce. When children did have to change schools they did not report a negative impact if they were given an explanation that for them was understandable, and was not related to the divorce. The understandable explanation that they were given appeared to act as a buffer against the possible negative impact. It is reported that children often have to change schools when their parent's divorce



because of a change in finances and due to moving house (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). This results in the child's support system being narrowed, as they often lose the support of their friends and teachers. For the primary school child, home and school are the symbols of security and stability and teachers are viewed as trustworthy people who are often a source of emotional support (Jansen van Rensburg, 2004; Steyn, 1989). It is therefore believed that changing school is an added stressor that the children of divorcing parents should preferably be spared. Hence, the importance of being able to remain in the same school as pre-divorce is emphasised in the literature as being an important factor in assisting children's coping with divorce (Jansen van Rensburg, 2004).

#### **7.2.5.2 Aspects pertaining to moving house that enhance coping**

Some children expressed relief that they did not have to move house when their parents divorced. This is in keeping with Braver et al. (2003) state that moving house is stressful and that the stress is exacerbated when this occurs in conjunction with divorce. Coupled to this is the often resultant drop in the standard of living and quality of education that is associated with the move.

However, other concepts emerged that acted as buffers to this stress, so that the move in fact was seen positively. These factors included when the children perceived the move to be beneficial in that it enabled them to escape stressful circumstances, when their standard of living increased and also when the process of moving was experienced as being a distraction from other possible negative experiences relating to the divorce. Emery (1988) states that when children are exposed to parental conflict they often feel personally motivated to try to terminate the conflict. This would be a strategy to try to stop the cause of their distress. Furthermore, Carson and Bittner (1994) found that the child's temperament influenced the coping strategies employed and it is possible that these children's personalities enable them to find positive aspects in a potentially

stressful situation. Hence, children do not necessarily always experience these changes as being stressful and hindering their coping with the divorce. On the contrary they may experience these changes as them to cope.

These findings emphasise the importance of researching children's perspectives and viewpoints, as it appears that children at times view factors and events differently from that which adults expect or experience. The coping strategies that these children employed were all of a nature that the children chose to use the situation positively for themselves even though they were not in control of the events.

#### **7.2.5.3 A sense of continuity assists coping**

For some children the opportunity to return to the familial home when they visited the non-custodial parent assisted them in experiencing a sense of continuity. In the literature the importance of and the need for a sense of continuity is reported as being an important factor in the adjustment of children in divorce (Teyber, 2001). This could include the living arrangements.

This is a *secondary control strategy* as the children appear to be attempting to fit into the situation as it is and to find the positive aspects in it for themselves (Rothbaum et al., 1982).

It is evident that *the understanding that children develop regarding aspects relating to the effects of the divorce on their lives, such as changes in school and moving house, influences their perception of their sense of stability and belongingness.*

## **7.2.6 THE ABILITY OF EXTRA-MURALS TO ASSIST IN COPING**

Participation in extra-murals was reported by children in this study to be of assistance in coping with divorce. It is interesting to note that the children who participated in this study mentioned that extra-murals could prove to be a distraction for issues that were troubling them and helped to lift their mood and relax them. It has been reported in the literature that pursuing these activities as well as receiving extra lessons when necessary assists in the development of a sense of self-worth and self-development (Jansen van Rensburg, 2004). They are employing an *avoidance/emotion focused coping strategy* which is also *asocial* (Blechman et al., 1995; Fields & Prinz, 1997).

*In coping with divorce some distractions in the form of extra-mural activities is helpful.*

## **7.2.7 PRE- AND POST-DIVORCE CONFLICT AND ASPECTS THAT FACILITATE COPING**

Children report having tried to cope with both pre- and post-divorce conflict in various ways. The impact of conflict, both pre- and post-divorce, has received much attention in the literature and it has been overwhelmingly concluded that this factor alone accounts for more psychological problems in children coping with divorce than any other (Emery, 1982, 1988; Grych & Fincham, 1990, 1992; Long & Forehand, 1987).

### **7.2.7.1 Coping strategies that assist in coping with pre-divorce conflict**

Children in this study reported that they tried to distance themselves from the conflict. This strategy, of attempting to distance themselves from the conflict is in keeping with the findings of Emery (1988) who stated that children distance themselves in order to try to relieve the distress they experience. It was found,

however, that when the conflict escalated to a level, perceived by the children to be dangerous, they then tried to intervene and tried to stop the conflict. It appears that the level of intensity of the conflict acts as a dimension of this category.

It appears that children use various coping strategies in order to cope with pre-divorce conflict. They will generally use *avoidance/emotion focused coping strategies* unless the conflict escalates to a level that they feel they need to intervene and then they employ *approach/problem focused coping strategies* (Fields & Prinz, 1997).

#### **7.2.7.2 Parental role in assisting with coping with post-divorce conflict**

Children reported that a parent is able to effectively buffer the possible negative impact of post-divorce conflict, including when the conflict is directed at the child and that this is experienced as beneficial and of assistance in coping with the conflict. This concept can be seen to be similar to the concept that McIntosh (2003) identified when discussing the impact of conflict on children in divorce, when she stated that when parents are optimistic and positive about the outcomes of the conflict the distress experienced by the children is greatly reduced.

It also needs to be recognised that the children in the present study were older than six years of age and their primary attachment figure was their mothers. Therefore, in keeping with attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1973; Shaffer & Kipp, 2007) when children have a “sound working model” for the development of relationships they are more able to develop sound relationships with others. The threats from the fathers are less distressing when they can turn to their mothers for support and when they have developed an internal locus of control enabling them to cope with these stressful threats more successfully as found by Smith and Carlson (1997).

The children choose to interpret the supportive parent's efforts and possible explanations as being of assistance and therefore this coping strategy is identified as an *approach/problem focused coping strategy* (Fields & Prinz, 1997).

#### **7.2.7.3 The role of pre-divorce conflict in facilitating an understanding**

The children experienced some pre-divorce conflict as being beneficial as it assisted in their development of an understanding of the necessity for the divorce. Camara and Resnick (1988, 1989) found that pre-divorce conflict followed by co-operative parenting post-divorce facilitated children's adjustment to the divorce.

This concept is inter-related with the category of developing an understanding of the divorce. Futterman (1980) found that the children of parents who had gone through a "civilized" divorce and where there was no evidence of conflict prior to the divorce showed a variety of symptoms. It has, for example been found that greater reunification fantasies occur when there has been an amicable divorce (Dreman, 2000). On the other hand, when parents are able to engage in constructive co-operative parenting post-divorce even when there has been high levels of conflict pre-divorce, the children adjust more successfully (Camara & Resnick, 1988, 1989). It appears that when there is some pre-divorce parental conflict, children are able to adjust to the divorce more successfully.

According to Fields and Prinz's model (1997) this is an *approach/emotion coping strategy*. The children reappraise the situation and find a positive explanation for that which they found distressing.

It appears therefore that *some parental conflict assists in developing an understanding of the divorce. Children will try to distance themselves from the*

*conflict although when it reaches a level of intensity that becomes too threatening, children then try to intervene. Furthermore, parents can play a significant role in buffering the negative effects of post-divorce conflict.*

## **7.2.8 THE ROLE OF RESILIENCY**

Both pre-divorce and post-divorce resiliency was revealed as being important concepts.

### **7.2.8.1 Resiliency pre-divorce**

A number of children reported that they had experienced stressful situations pre-divorce and they perceived their coping with these and other stressors as having assisted them in their coping with the divorce. It appears that the children in this study developed a sense of an ability to cope, which enabled them to feel more positive about their, or their parents' ability to cope with the divorce. One particular concept that was directly relevant to the stressors associated with divorce was that of moving house. Children who had moved house a number of times prior to the divorce did not experience the necessity of moving house when their parents divorced as stressful. Early childhood experiences of stressful episodes have been reported to build coping skills in children; and children's temperaments can prove to play a risk or resiliency role in children's adaptation to divorce (Aldwin et al., 1996; Tschann et al., 1989). This was found to be the case in this study as previous experiences of coping with potentially stressful events appeared to build resiliency in these children.

*Approach/emotion coping strategies* were employed by these children (Fields & Prinz, 1997), as well as a *cognitively-oriented coping strategy* being used by those children who found that previous experiences helped them believe they could cope with this stress (Moos & Billings, 1983).

### **7.2.8.2 Resiliency post-divorce**

Some children reported having developed a certain resiliency post-divorce. This appeared to be as a result of positive personal experiences they perceived to be as a result of the divorce. This in turn assisted in their ongoing coping with the divorce. This was specifically in relation to an improvement in their schoolwork. It was found, that it could occur that the children experience no negative impact on their schoolwork or possibly even an improvement in their school performance. This is possibly evidence of a resiliency within the children. Much research has been conducted on the negative impact that divorce has on children's school performance for a wide variety of reasons (Guidubaldi et al., 1983; Kinard & Reinherz, 1986; Shaw, 1991; Shinn, 1978). The findings of Mulholland et al. (1991) seem to support these children's sentiments as they found that the successful academic careers of adolescents from divorced families suggested that divorce does not, negatively affect children's school performance on a long-term basis.

Other children reported that they had found generally helpful strategies that they had developed to assist in their coping with the divorce. These included seeking and receiving reassurance, as a way to developing a positive outlook. The children included within the role of the therapist the giving of some form of reassurance that the future would improve and in so doing creating hope for the future. Strümpfer (2001) suggests that hope is a fortigenic concept, and the presence of hope builds resiliency. Day (2003) reports that creating a sense of hope for children in crisis within a therapeutic setting is vital for sustained hope for their future lives. Whether it is within the therapeutic setting or with the assistance of other techniques and relationships, the development of hope in the children who participated in this study appeared to build a resiliency within them that assisted them in coping with their parent's divorce.

Children mentioned that they had found journaling to be helpful and this technique assisted them in coping with the divorce. It appears that they might have been about authoring their lives in a positive manner, thereby building a sense of hope and resiliency. Journaling has been reported in the literature to be therapeutic and having a cathartic effect (Ullrich & Lutgendorf, 2002). Narrative therapy as developed by Michael White and David Epston is based on the how people narrate their lives, the authoring of their experiences in life and the re-authoring in order to construct new meaning and coping (Epston & White, 1992; White, 1995).

As the children used techniques such as journaling they were using *approach/emotion coping strategies* (Fields & Prinz, 1997). They took control of their own emotions and efforts to cope with their stress.

In conclusion, the *coping with divorce is an ongoing process and resiliency previously developed and developed as a result of the divorce, assists in this coping and in the development of hope.*

## **7.2.9 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, it has been found that children report that they need to develop an understanding of the process of divorce to help them cope, with this phenomenon. Some amount of parental conflict appears to assist in developing an understanding and acceptance of the divorce. Children's parents and counsellors appear to be able to play a role in assisting the children to develop an understanding of the process of divorce by explaining aspects to them and dealing with some of the emotions they experience. Having a sense of control, and being able to have a say about aspects that affect on them directly are also important to their coping. Being able to rely on supportive relationships with their parents, siblings and stepfamily as well as other significant people such as



grandparents, relatives, teachers and friends, also plays an important role for children.

Support from members of the church and a sense of spiritual support was also found to play a significant role. Psychological intervention and support for both the children and their parents in assisting them to cope with the divorce were also found to be perceived by children to be important factors in that which helped them cope with their parent's divorce.

While the literature reports that changes such as moving house, changing schools and having to attend an after-care facility are stressful for children, it was found that these factors were not necessarily experienced negatively and that in fact under certain circumstances and with plausible explanations children can experience these potentially stressful events positively. A sense of continuity and fairness appears to play a role in this.

The use of distractions as coping strategies was found to play a significant role in children's coping with divorce. This was in the form of attending extra-mural activities as well as siblings providing distractions from each other as a means of coping with parental conflict. Attending therapy was also experienced as a distraction. It was found that children could develop a sense of hope and a resiliency post-divorce and that the development of previous coping strategies pre-divorce helped them to cope with the divorce.

The conclusions reached lead to the development of a central concept.

#### **7.2.10 THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CENTRAL CONCEPT**

A short story-line was written in the process of developing a central concept:

*The maintenance and development of supportive relationships within the family and the wider community, for themselves and their parents, as well as actively participating in the decision making processes on issues relevant to themselves, enable children to develop an understanding of divorce and also help them to cope with the potentially stressful effects of divorce. Children need to develop a sense of normality, consistency and belongingness in order to cope with the ongoing effects of the divorce context*

The following central concept is therefore developed as an understanding of children's coping with divorce:

***Children need to understand their parent's divorce and be given the opportunity to voice their opinions in order to develop a sense of consistency in their lives.***

While developing a conceptualisation of children's coping with divorce it became evident that the existing classifications of coping strategies do not always "fit" children's coping behaviour.

### **7.3 A MODEL OF CHILDREN'S COPING STRATEGIES**

Using a grounded theory approach to exploring children's coping with divorce a central concept, encompassing those aspects children themselves elucidated, was developed. In revealing the coping strategies that children employ, and attempting to integrate these with existing models of coping strategies, it was discovered that subtle dynamics evident in children's behaviour resulted in these models being found to be inadequate in explaining children's coping strategies in

a divorce context. For this reason a new model of coping strategies used by children in coping with divorce was developed.

### **7.3.1 THE NEED FOR A NEW MODEL OF COPING STRATEGIES RELEVANT TO CHILDREN COPING WITH DIVORCE**

Fields and Prinz (1997) state that conceptualisations of children's coping have been largely based on research that has been conducted on adult coping strategies. It is generally held that children are limited in their coping skills by cognitive, affective, expressive, and social developmental skills as well as a general lack of life experience. A child's world is quite different from that of the adult, particularly because children have less control over circumstances. Children are limited by realistic constraints, such as restricted freedom to actively avoid stressors, being able to source or refuse resources, and a state of personal and financial dependence on parents. Aspects of development and environment may therefore limit the coping responses that children are capable of making, and the coping strategies promoting adjustment in children may differ from those promoting adjustment in adults.

With respect to trying to predict adjustment in children the problem-focused/emotion-focused dimension does not fare well (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Moos & Billings, 1983) as these have been derived for research with adults. They assume an understanding of stressor controllability that is not typically found in children. These models fail to recognise the distinctions regarding adaptive functioning, which is problematic when trying to predict adjustment (Fields & Prinz, 1997). The approach/avoidance conceptualisation is considered more successful at predicting adjustment. However, it also combines adaptive and maladaptive strategies within the same categories (Miller & Green, 1985). Miller and Green's (1985) conceptualisation of coping strategies is based on children's coping, but in the context of research conducted within the medical field and is most relevant to children's coping within a hospital setting.

Fields and Prinz's (1997) taxonomy of a two-by-two framework (i.e. problem-focused/emotion-focused by approach/avoidance) represents an attempt to develop an approach that has greater "fit" for children as does Blechman et al. (1995) coping-competence model.

It became evident, however, that many of the coping strategies that the children who participated in this research utilised did not match any of the coping strategies described in the existing models. As discussed, children are restricted due to developmental limitations, not the least of which is that they have little control over most of that which takes place in their world. Not only do young children exercise an external locus of control, but with regard to coping and coping strategies, children are often unable to source the resources that they may require. Conversely, they might also be put in a position whereby they are expected to utilise certain coping resources, that are not necessarily what they need, nor can they *choose* not to avail themselves of the assistance available or offered. The element of *choice* is a dynamic that is ignored by the existing coping strategies. An example of this is the concept of the beneficial nature of a good relationship with a step-parent. The children did not go out and look for a step-parent and a helpful relationship with such a person, to assist in coping with the divorce. Rather being faced with the situation of adapting to the step-parent, the child then experiences benefit in coping with the parents' divorce itself.

When children *choose* to use a coping resource, such as the support offered by a therapist, they convert the coping resource into a coping strategy. This is a dynamic, purposeful action or cognitive manipulation of the resource. They can, may, and at times do choose not to make use of coping resources made available to them. It is the active *use* of the resource that becomes the coping strategy.

An example of such a coping resource being converted into a coping strategy is that of the role that a therapist can play in assisting children cope with divorce.

As seen in Section 6.3.1.1.5 and 6.3.4 therapists are seen by children as playing an important role in various ways that help them to cope with divorce. The therapist is seen as a coping resource when applying the existing models of coping strategies as the children have not sourced this assistance themselves since they are most of the time not in a position, to be able to do so. The current classifications and definitions of coping strategies do not take into account that children cannot be made to work with the therapist even when they are taken to therapy. The children *choose* to work with the process and therefore benefit from the support offered. If a child, independently of any adult assistance, sourced a therapist, for example a school counsellor, by approaching the counsellor and requesting a session in order to discuss the difficulties that are being experienced this could be seen as actively seeking the support, rather than the more passive scenario discussed above. The latter is a better “fit” with the definitions of the current coping strategies such as *approach/problem focused coping* (Fields & Prinz, 1997). This does not differentiate between the two coping strategies described above, and a subtle but important dynamic that is present in children’s coping strategies is ignored and lost.

Another scenario that is applicable for children coping with divorce is that of the role of the step-parent. This researcher found that children find a positive relationship with a step-parent to be beneficial and assists children in coping with divorce as discussed in Section 6.3.2. These children did not, however, go out and source a good relationship with potential step-parents with a view to this assisting them in coping with the divorce. Thus the step-parent’s being available and offering interaction that would facilitate a good relationship is a coping resource available to the children. The children’s part in this is ignored. While they cannot control the existence of a step-parent they are in a position to reciprocate the interaction in a manner that enables a positive relationship to be fostered. They should then be seen to have purposefully and intentionally acted with the coping resource in a manner that builds it into a coping strategy. The coping strategies employed in this scenario are that of a *prosocial coping*

*strategy* (Blechman, Prinz & Dumas, 1995) and an *approach/emotion coping strategy* (Fields & Prinz, 1997). The dynamic of the children's choosing to avail themselves of this resource is lost. They cannot be forced to build a good relationship, even if the other person is willing to do so. Ignoring the children's choices is disrespectful of the children's conscious and meaningful actions or cognitive manipulations in these strategies.

The same principle applies to coping strategies classified as *avoidance strategies* (Miller & Green, 1985). Children voiced the need to be absolved of any guilt in causing their parent's divorce as seen in Section 6.3.1.1.5. As discussed they are not able to necessarily source the necessary resources to obtain such absolution, and furthermore, if they are placed in the situation whereby it can be explained to them that it is not their fault, they have to actively accept this cognitive reframe. Again although the children may not have sourced the coping resource they have to bring their part to the interplay in order to change the resource into a coping strategy.

Because of these dynamics that are particularly relevant to children's coping, although not specific to children only, it can be seen that a new conceptualisation needs to be developed, or added to the existing conceptualisations of children's coping strategies.

### **7.3.2 A NEW CONCEPTUALISATION OF CHILDREN'S COPING STRATEGIES**

In order to give recognition to the fact that children choose to make use of coping resources made available to them, the researcher proposes that a classification of *Intentional/Unintentional strategies* be added to the existing taxonomies:

- *Intentional coping strategies* would be those strategies that the child intentionally, actively and purposefully employs. These would include

strategies such as demanding telephonic contact with the other parent or going and speaking to the school counsellor in order to source comfort and support.

- *Unintentional coping strategies* would be strategies that the child derives benefit from that result from a personal choice to co-operate with, use, or work with a coping resource made available to them that they did not initially seek, such as benefiting from a good relationship with a step-parent, or being able to remain in the familial home.

Thus using the example of children being taken to a therapist for counselling because the parents feel this is beneficial and the children choosing to make use of this resource and therefore benefit, this coping strategy would then be classified as an *approach/problem/unintentional focused coping strategy*. In contrast, when a child seeks a school counsellor and benefits from this support this would be an *approach/problem/intentional focused coping strategy*. With the example of the step-parent the best “fit” conceptualisation of the coping strategy being used would be that of an *approach/emotion/unintentional coping strategy*, and a *prosocial/unintentional coping strategy* as the children chose to benefit from a resource that was made available but was not requested by the children. Experiencing the benefit of being absolved of guilt in therapy regarding the divorce would be classified as an *avoidance/emotion/unintentional focused coping strategy*.

The implication of using such a conceptualisation for children’s coping strategies could be that children’s locus of control could be seen as moving along a continuum. It is possible that children do not stay fixed at any one stage of their development within either an internal or external locus of control, but rather that they may exercise more or less of either an internal or external locus of control depending on personality, the situation, the resources, and limitations that children experience in any given stage of their development. Locus of control could then be conceptualised as moving on a continuum dependent on a number

of factors and would be revealed by the type of coping strategies that children predominantly appear to employ.

### **7.3.3 CONCLUSIONS**

Conceptualising children's coping strategies involves dynamics that are specific to aspects of childhood that make the derivation of children's coping strategies from those of adults' coping strategies problematic. Subtleties and nuances that are as a result of the fact that children are limited by developmental constraints in their functioning are not recognised in the existing models of coping. For this reason, a new model that overlaps with existing models is proposed that gives recognition to the fact that although children may not always be able to choose coping resources that are or are not made available to them, they are able to choose whether to avail themselves to the benefit of these resources, thereby converting them into coping strategies.

This new conceptualisation has implications for the manner in which children's locus of control is perceived, as children's locus of control would then be seen as moving on a continuum. The position on the continuum would be dependent on a number of factors, including personality, the situation, the resources, and limitations experienced.



## **CHAPTER 8**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

#### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

In conclusion, this study was born from the experience of the researcher in private practice that some children appear to cope better than others with their parents' divorce. To develop a comprehensive understanding of the coping strategies that children employ to cope with this potentially traumatic event a phenomenological study was conducted. A grounded theory methodological approach was adopted and the researcher entered into the study as far as possible without any preconceived ideas, and allowed the data collected from interviews with forty-one children to "speak for the children" revealing the coping strategies that they employ. From this approach, a new conceptualisation was developed of the coping strategies that children use.

The findings also reveal further questions and indicate further research, which will be discussed.

#### **8.2 INTEGRATION WITH THEORY**

##### **8.2.1 INTEGRATION WITH PHENOMENOLOGY AND GROUNDED THEORY**

Children's personal experiences, perspectives and the meanings that they have made of their parents' divorce provided the data for this study, placing it within the phenomenological tradition. Chaplin (1975) emphasises the importance of accepting the individual's personal experiences without interpreting them. The children's *own* accounts of their experiences and their perceptions were used as the units of data for analysis using a grounded theory approach. Husserl (1859-1938) emphasised the importance of the phenomenologist "bracketing" all preconceived ideas and allowing the phenomena or experiences of the world to speak for themselves. Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that in grounded theory the researcher needs to enter the research field without pre-conceived ideas, to

ensure that the data (the reported experiences of phenomena) are free to talk for themselves. It is therefore, evident that a grounded theory methodology fits well with a phenomenological approach to research.

The lack of research on children coping with divorce from the children's personally reported perspectives is cause for concern, although much has been written about the negative impact that divorce has on children. A criticism against the existing research is that it has been conducted from the perspectives of parents, or that certain constructs were pre-selected and then "tested" by means of comparing children from divorced with children from non-divorced families. These studies have therefore, imposed a theoretical paradigm onto the data collected, approached the collection of the data from a specific paradigm, or interpreted their findings according to a preconceived theory (Barnes, 1999; Schwartz, 1992; Shaw, 1991). The present study explored children's perspectives of their coping with their parents' divorce in as broad a context as possible.

Adopting a phenomenological paradigm allowed the researcher to collect data that represented the children's own perspectives with their own meanings attached to their experiences. Furthermore, by using a grounded theory methodology, the data was allowed to reveal the coping strategies that children employ without being restricted or influenced by a specific theoretical framework and thereby possibly losing information. This proved to result in a new understanding of children's coping with the divorce and revealed some guidelines on aspects that could assist other children in coping with divorce.

Grounded theory offers a methodology whereby units of information can be reconstructed in order to develop a new understanding. Phenomenology indicates that to develop a holistic understanding of a person's conscious awareness of the world being experienced, more than just putting together the components of the previously abstracted elementary parts is necessary. In adopting a phenomenological approach using grounded theory, a new understanding of children's coping strategies relevant to their "lived in"

experience of divorce was developed, highlighting the need for a new model of coping strategies.

By virtue of the fact that the phenomenon is being observed, the children are being interviewed about their experiences and therefore being made aware of their feelings and impressions. This must influence the phenomenon and the meaning that springs from it - if not during the observation itself, then after the observation. For example, after Child 11 had been interviewed, he thanked the researcher for having spoken to him as he felt better after having talked about his parents divorce.

### **8.2.2 INTEGRATION WITH THEORY ON COPING**

The three theoretical models on coping, being:

- Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) contextual/transactional/cognitive-contextual perspective;
- Skinner and Wellborn's (1994) motivational perspective, and
- Bandura's (1997) cognitive social perspective,

are all dynamic models of how people adapt to stress. They all recognise the bi-directional causality between coping efficacy beliefs, coping efforts, and symptoms over time. Although these models may differ in many respects, they do all hold to some propositions as discussed in Section 4.2.1. Underlying these common propositions is the assumption that there is intentionality in the person's actions, whether behavioural, cognitive or emotional, when bringing into effect a coping strategy.

Fields and Prinz (1997) maintain that little is known about children's coping strategies. The research that has been conducted has been on coping strategies that adults employ and it has been assumed that children's coping can be viewed and classified similarly. In addition this research has been mainly in the field of medicine and the possible hospitalisation of children (Miller & Green, 1987). Research conducted in South Africa on children's coping has focused on children's coping with violence and with HIV/AIDS (Barbarin et al., 2001; Duncan,

1996; Manegold et al., 2004; Richter et al., 2004). Samson and Saint-Jacques (1999), state that little is known about children's perceptions of control over their parents' separation and the accompanying specific stressors. The aspect of control was found to be particularly significant for the children in this study, especially with regard to changes that were going to take place that directly affected the children. These included where they were going to live, the frequency of contact that they were to have with the non-custodial parent and other aspects such as telephonic contact, and whether others should be told about their parents' divorce. Children not only asked that they be given the opportunity to have a say in where they lived, but also that they could change the residency arrangements when necessary.

This current study found that children do intentionally employ a variety of coping strategies according to the existing classifications of coping strategies. This will be discussed in Section 8.3. It was also found, however, that children often do not intentionally and consciously seek support as a coping strategy, although they benefit from support that is offered or is merely available, and that because in their interpretation this support was seen as beneficial, it was a support. This is then a coping strategy employed by children that differs from the coping strategies used by adults. This has not been identified in the existing taxonomies of coping strategies that have been based on adults' coping. Therefore, this demands the development of a new model of coping strategies relevant for children coping with divorce. This will be discussed in Section 8.4

### **8.3 INTEGRATION OF FINDINGS WITH LITERATURE**

While much research has been conducted on the adverse effects of divorce on children, it has been suggested more recently that some children do not show any ill effects in response to their parents' divorce (Amato, 2000; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). This study confirmed that some children do experience some benefits because of their parents' divorce. Furthermore, in exploring children's coping strategies with reference to their parents' divorce, the existing models of coping strategies were used to classify the children's coping

strategies. However, these were found to be inadequate in some instances as they failed to recognise some of the subtle, but important dynamics applicable to the context, or world, in which children operate.

### **8.3.1 LITERATURE ON FACTORS INFLUENCING CHILDREN'S COPING WITH DIVORCE**

From the concepts revealed on children's coping with divorce, children were found to employ a number of strategies that assist in their coping with their parents divorce. A central concept was developed being:

*Developing a personal understanding of their parent's divorce and being given the opportunity to voice their opinions assists children in developing a sense of consistency in their lives.*

The strategies can be further understood when theory on childhood development as well as research into factors that influence children's coping in divorce is considered.

The children who participated in this study indicated clearly that developing an understanding of their parents' divorce was important for their coping with the divorce. Cognitive developmental theorists would support this as, although not specifically grounded in cognitive development theories, research has found that the explanation that children develop regarding their parents' divorce has played a significant role in the children's adjustment to the divorce. This study would suggest that included in the understanding of the divorce that is developed - or developing as it may be an ongoing process - an absolution from the possible guilt that the children may feel would be important for their adjustment. The need for an understanding that they are not to blame for the divorce could be understood according to developmental cognitive theory as young children (3-to- 8 years of age) are seen as egocentric and tend to blame themselves for the events in their lives. The process of understanding the divorce may be an ongoing process, as the children's cognitive development due to their chronological maturation would influence the understanding that they continue to develop as they live in their world of divorce (their context). Wallerstein and Kelly

(1980) outline how at different ages children respond differently to divorce owing to their cognitive developmental stage.

Attachment theory suggests that children need to experience sound “working models” of healthy relationships by experiencing primary, secure attachments in order to build other meaningful and close relationships (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1973). It was evident in the finding of this study that the children found that being able to continue sound relationships with both parents assisted their coping with the divorce. Furthermore, some children reported that their relationship with their non-custodial parent improved after the divorce, and this was reported as a personal benefit they enjoyed because of the divorce. Emery (1998) reported a similar finding, although in reality, the possibility of improvement of a parent’s relationship with the children, and improved parenting, after a divorce is rarely given any credibility.

For children to continue to benefit from a close and meaningful relationship with both parents, the freedom to spend time with both parents was found to be important. This took the form of “equal time” and the children who participated in this study expressed a real need for this. Emery (1988) stated that joint custody rarely occurs, as it is too disruptive for children to cope with. Conversely, Buchanan, et al. (1996) found that children fared better under joint custody arrangements. It appears that when children are consulted on the matter they experience joint custody as being beneficial and helpful for their adjustment. According to research, the physical separation from the parents may be the most distressing aspect that children have to face initially, together with the resultant changes in their relationships due to the divorce (Emery, 1988). It is therefore not surprising that the children in this study saw ‘equal time’ as being beneficial to their successful coping.

Along with close attachments to the parents’ close, supportive relationships with siblings, grandparents, and other relatives as well as with step-parents, step-siblings, friends and teachers were also found to assist children in their ongoing coping with their parents’ divorce. This is in keeping with findings reported in the

literature on children's adjustment to divorce (Barnes, 1999; Hetherington, 1986; McIntosh, 2003; Pryor & Rogers 2001).

The role of therapeutic interventions was also explored in this study with reference to whether children found therapy or counselling to be of assistance. Amato (2000) stated that therapeutic intervention was found to be of assistance to children coping with divorce. The children that participated in this study confirmed this. They also indicated that knowing that their parents were receiving therapeutic assistance was also beneficial to themselves. In Section 4.4.7, the emergence of the parenting child is discussed. It is possible that when parents receive therapeutic support the children receive better quality parenting, and the possibility of a parenting child developing is minimised.

The need for a sense of consistency and normality was highlighted by the children that participated in this study regarding their experiences with coping with their parents' divorce. Research and theorists on coping and coping strategies emphasise that coping strategies are born from a need to bring consistency and stability to a situation that has created stress and instability to the world as the person knows it. The children in this study indicated this in a variety of ways. Their demand for "equal time" is an example. Further indications of this are found in the concepts involving flexibility regarding contact with the non-custodial parent including telephonic contact and most importantly, the fact that children found it helpful that peers also experienced the same difficulties and that they were no different from the majority of their friends since these friends' parents were also divorced.

The concept of resiliency was also revealed as being important in children's coping with divorce. Aldwin et al. (1996) state that children develop a resiliency when they have to cope with stressful events in their early childhood. It was found that some of the children had developed coping strategies and therefore a certain resiliency through coping with other stressful events. They also reported that having had to cope with their parents' divorce, and develop coping strategies to deal with their parents' divorce had assisted them with other stressful events post-divorce.

It became evident, however, that the existing models of classifications of coping strategies failed to recognise some of the subtleties of the context within which children's coping takes place.

### **8.3.2 LIMITATIONS OF EXISTING MODELS OF COPING STRATEGIES**

Children are not able to control much of that which happens in their lives. As a result, they are not in a position to be able to control coping resources that are offered to them, to source coping resources or even in some instances to decline coping resources. Fields and Prinz (1997) state that little research has been conducted on children's coping except that which has been reported in children's medical literature (Miller & Green, 1985), and with violence and HIV/AIDS (Barbarin, Richter & de Wet, 2001; Duncan, 1996; Manegold, Pather & Richter, 2004a, 2004b; Richter, Manegold, Pather, 2004). The existing models of coping strategies by definition respect and rely on the person being able to control coping resources in the environment in which they find themselves. The coping strategies identified in the literature involve the intentional seeking out of information or support and directly attempting to influence the action of others. However, children are often not able to act in this manner due to developmental constraints. They are financially, physically and often emotionally dependent on adults and are, therefore, restricted in what they can influence directly or intentionally.

In this study, however, it was evident that children are often unable to intentionally source coping resources to assist them, or cannot refuse coping resources offered. They do in fact exercise some control by choosing to make use of coping resources in their environment. In this manner, they do exercise some control. They convert the coping resource into a coping strategy, by choosing to make use of it.

It is reported in the literature that children have been found to employ an external locus of control especially in the context of coping with divorce. However, when children's coping is conceptualised in this manner, it is seen that children are in effect exercising an internal locus of control. It may be more correct, therefore, to



see children's coping as sliding on a continuum between the two poles of external and internal loci of control.

A new conceptualisation of children's coping was therefore developed that is seen as giving recognition to the *intentionality* or *unintentionality* of children's coping. This conceptualisation is envisioned for use in conjunction with existing taxonomies of coping strategies in order to make them more applicable to the context within which children employ coping strategies. This gives recognition to the "lived in" context important to phenomenology.

## **8.4 INTEGRATION OF A NEW CONCEPTUALISATION OF CHILDREN'S COPING**

Phenomenology demands that the personal experiences, perceptions of the individual be recognised, respected and valued. This includes those of children. The world that children live in is different from that of adults. In order to develop an understanding of any events relevant to children it is necessary to source the perceptions and understandings of children.

The grounded theory approach used for conducting this research allowed for children's perceptions and understandings to be sourced in order to develop a conceptualisation of their coping with divorce. Hence, this allowed the researcher to remain true to the phenomenological perspective.

In the process a new conceptualisation of children's coping strategies could be developed. This is the result of using a grounded theory methodology, as grounded theory builds theory out of the data, rather than approaching data from a theoretical framework.

According to cognitive developmental theorists children are egocentric and with development move towards being less egocentric. Furthermore, children also move from employing an external locus of control to an internal locus of control. In the development of the *intentional/unintentional coping strategies* children's

developmental paths are given recognition as a child's coping can be recognised as being more or less egocentric and as indicating whether the child is employing more or less of an external or internal locus of control. This conceptualisation is therefore more descriptive and true to children's coping within a child's world.

## **8.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RESEARCH**

The significance of this research is in the understanding and knowledge that it provides for advocacy for policies to promote children's adjustment and well-being when their parents divorce. The challenge that it provides is that it requires that the adults' interests need to be separated out from those of the children when considering that which enables children to cope most effectively with their parents' divorce. This process is essential if policies and approaches are to be developed in ways which, because they respect children's understandings of their well-being in the world as they perceive it, truly promote children's well-being.

This research was begun prior to the ratification of the Children's Act, 2005 (Act No. 38 of 2005). This act came into effect in November 2007. It is interesting to note that sections of this new act call for, and legislates aspects that are in keeping with findings from this research although this study was not designed to investigate these aspects *per se*.

The children in this study stated that they wanted to have a say; a voice, with regard to what happens to them when their parents divorce. Section 10 of the Children's Act, 2005 (Act No. 38 of 2005), states that children have a right to participate in an appropriate manner in matters that concern them. Their opinions have to be taken into consideration.

It became evident in the results of this study that children need both their parents to be involved in their daily lives. They want "equal time" referring to contact with their parents and they report that involvement by the non-custodial parent in their lives is beneficial to their successful coping. In Sections 30 and 31 of the

Children's Act, 2005 (Act No. 38 of 2005), emphasis is placed on the aspect of co-parenting of children and the necessity of co-exercising of parental responsibilities and rights. This is particularly important as this underpins the necessity for both parents to be involved in their children's lives and that both parents are responsible for the well-being of their children.

Furthermore, it is evident from this study that step-parents, step-siblings, grandparents, and others play significant roles in children coping with divorce. These relationships need to be nurtured and facilitated when necessary. The Children's Act, 2005 (Act No. 38 of 2005), requires that parenting plans be drawn up and submitted to the court for ratification when parents divorce. In these parenting plans provision has to be made for the children's contact with relevant people other than the parents of the child. This therefore secures the contact and involvement of step-parents, step-siblings, grandparents and others in children's lives when their parents divorce.

It is evident, therefore, that although this study did not set out to explore these aspects of new legislation that has recently been implemented with regard to children and divorce, the findings of this study indicate that this new act is indeed in line with what children are calling for. Furthermore, as this study was retrospective it supports the Children's Act 2005 (Act No. 38 of 2005) without having been designed to study the philosophies of the act.

The challenge is for parents and adults, relevant professional people and the judicial system to facilitate this and uphold these principles as set out in the Children's Act, 2005 (Act No. 38 of 2005) as well as those which the children have indicated assists their coping with this potentially traumatic event.

## **8.6 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH**

During the research process a number of limitations became evident. These included limitations such as the age range of the children interviewed, the race of

the participant children, the lack of control over the ages of the children when their parents divorced and the effect of the passage of time on the coping strategies employed. Because of these limitations, recommendations for further research are made.

### **8.6.1 AGE OF THE CHILDREN**

Children between the ages of six to thirteen years were selected for the purposes of this study. It was decided to limit the study to this age range to enable the researcher to interview children that were verbally proficient and cognitively mature enough to be able to comment meaningfully on their perceptions of the coping with their parents' divorce. Adolescents were not included as the researcher was concerned to try to avoid other confounding variables such as developmental issues peculiar to adolescents. Accordingly, the understanding of children's coping with their parents' divorce and the new conceptualisation of children's coping strategies developed through this study is limited to this age group. It is therefore necessary that the perspectives of children younger than six years of age and of adolescents on their coping with their parents' divorce be researched in a similar fashion. This would enable the *intentional/unintentional coping strategy* conceptualisation to be tested for applicability for these age ranges as well. This is necessary to prevent the same error being committed as has occurred with the other research that has been conducted on coping strategies as those models had been incorrectly extrapolated to children.

### **8.6.2 RACE AND CULTURE**

The children that participated in this study were all white. Within the context of South Africa, there is a growing number of children from other race groups who are coping with divorce and it is important that their perspectives and coping strategies be explored. Furthermore, those children from other cultural groups, such as Indian children, whose parent's have divorced, are also growing up in communities that hold to a different culture and family structure. This needs to be researched to investigate whether coming from a different cultural background

influences children's perspectives and coping strategies pertaining to their coping with their parent's divorce.

### **8.6.3 CONTROL OVER THE AGE OF THE CHILDREN WHEN THE PARENTS DIVORCE**

No control was exercised over the children's age when their parents' divorced. Theorists including psychodynamic theorists (Meissner, 1978), Attachment theorists (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1973), and Cognitive Developmental theorists (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980) all argue that the age of the child at the time of the parents' divorce influences children's adjustment to their parents' divorce. For this reason, it would be important to conduct a similar study controlling for the ages of the children when their parents divorced. It would be of interest to study the coping strategies employed by children of different ages at the time of their parents' divorce.

### **8.6.4 SOCIOECONOMIC GROUP**

The children that participated in this study all came from upper-middle-class homes. This afforded them a certain life-style. Children from families of different socioeconomic sectors of the general population are afforded different resources and facilities. It is necessary that the perspectives of children from other socioeconomic groups needs to be explored.

### **8.6.5 THE EFFECT OF THE PASSAGE OF TIME**

Furstenberg and Allison (1985), Hetherington et al. (1982, 1985), and Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) all report that children's adjustment to their parents' divorce improved over time. This study did not control for the duration of time between when the children's parents divorced and when they were interviewed. It is possible that with the passage of time children's perceptions on their coping and their coping itself change. It is therefore necessary to research whether this influences the coping strategies that children employ in coping with divorce, as this coping is an ongoing process.

#### **8.6.6 TYPE OF CUSTODY**

No control was exercised over whether the children were in their mothers' or fathers' custody or whether it was a joint custody arrangement. This could influence some of the coping strategies that children employ as those children that are in a joint custody arrangement may have a different perception of the concept of "equal time" found in this study. This needs to be investigated.

#### **8.6.7 GENERALISABILITY OF RESULTS**

As this was an exploratory study of a qualitative nature the sample size was relatively small. In order to extrapolate the findings of this research to the general population research with a larger sample size needs to be conducted.

#### **8.6.8 COPING STRATEGIES IN OTHER STRESSFUL SITUATIONS**

This study was concerned with the coping strategies employed by children from divorced families. The resultant concepts identified are therefore limited to the context of divorce. Furthermore, the new conceptualisation of coping strategies developed is therefore also limited to this context. It is important that this new model be investigated as to whether it is applicable for other contexts, that is, applies to the coping strategies employed by children in other stressful contexts.

#### **8.6.9 CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion, this study was approached from an atheoretical position in an attempt to explore children's coping with their parents' divorce from the children's perspectives. This resulted in a number of concepts on children's coping being revealed. A new conceptualisation of children's coping was developed that is relevant to the world of the child. These findings need to be borne in mind when assisting children to cope with divorce including the manner in which the judicial system attempts to act in the child's best interests. This study has also highlighted a number of limitations and further research needs to be conducted.

## REFERENCES

- Adamson, J.L., & Thompson, R.A. (1998). Coping with inter-parental verbal conflict by children exposed to spouse abuse and children from non-violent homes. *Journal of Family Violence, 13* (3), 213-233.
- Addison, R.B. (1999). A grounded hermeneutic editing approach. In B.F. Crabtree & W.L. Miller (Eds), *Doing qualitative research* (p. 24-32). London: Sage.
- Ahrons, C.R., & Bowman, M. (1982). Changes in family life relationships following divorce of adult child: Grandmothers' perceptions. *Journal of Divorce, 5*, 55-69.
- Ainsworth, M.D.S. (1979). Infant-mother attachment. *American Psychologist, 34*, 932-937.
- Aldwin, C.M., Sutton, K.J., & Lachman, M. (1996). The development of coping resources in adulthood. *Journal of Personality, 64*, 837-871.
- Allan, G. (2003). A critique of using grounded theory as a research method. Retrieved March 23, 2006 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.ejbrm.com>
- Allison, P., & Furstenberg, F.F. (1989). How marital dissolution affects children: Variations by age and sex. *Developmental Psychology, 25*, 540-549.
- Amato, P.R. (1993). Children's adjustment to divorce: Theories, hypotheses, and empirical support. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 55* (22), 23-38.
- Amato, P.R. (1994). Life-span adjustment of children to their parents' divorce. *The Future of Children, 4* (1), 143-164.

- Amato, P.R. (2000). The consequences of divorce for adults and children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 1269-1287.
- Amato, P.R. (2001). Children of divorce in the 1990s: An update of the Amato and Keith (1991) meta-analysis. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15(3), 356-365.
- Amato, P.R. (2003). Reconciling divergent perspectives: Judith Wallerstein, qualitative family research, and children of divorce. *Family Relations* 52(4), 332-339.
- Amato, P.R., & Booth, A. (1996). A prospective study of divorce and parent-child relationships. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 58, 356-365.
- Amato, P.R., & Gilbreth, J.G. (1999). Non-resident fathers and children's well-being: a meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 61, 557-573.
- Amato, P.R., & Keith, B. (1991a). Parental divorce and the well-being of children: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 110, 26-46.
- Amato, P.R., & Keith, B. (1991b). Parental divorce and adult well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 53, 43-58.
- Amato, P. R., & Keith, B. (1993). Children's adjustment to divorce: Theories, hypotheses, and empirical support. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 55 (2), 23-38.
- Ambert, A. (1982). Differences in children's behaviour towards custodial mothers and custodial fathers. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 44, 73-86.
- American Psychiatric Association: *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition, Text revision. Washington, DC, American Psychiatric Association, 2000.



- Annells, M. (2006). Triangulation of qualitative approaches; hermeneutical phenomenology and grounded theory. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 56(1), 55-61.
- Armistead, L., McCombs, A., Forehand, R., Wierson, M., Long, N., & Fauber, R. (1990). Coping with divorce: A study of young adolescents. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 19, 79-84.
- Arditti, J.A. (1992). Differences between fathers with joint custody and noncustodial fathers. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 62, 186-195.
- Atkeson, B.M., Forehand, R.L., & Rickard, K.M. (1982). The effects of divorce on children. In B.B. Lahey & A.E. Kazdin (Eds), *Advances in clinical child psychology* (Vol. 5, pp.255-281). New York: Plenum.
- Ayoub, C.C., Deutsch, R.M., & Maraganore, A. (1999). Emotional distress in children of high-conflict divorce: The impact of marital conflict and violence. *Family and Conciliation Courts Review*, 37 (3), 297-314.
- Babchuk, W.A. (1997). Glaser or Strauss? Grounded theory and adult education. Retrieved September 25, 2005 from the World Wide Web:  
<http://www.anrecs.msu.edu/research/gradpr96.htm>
- Baker, C., Wuest, J., & Stern, P. (1992). Method slurring: the grounded theory/phenomenology example. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 17(11), 1355-1360.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: W.H. Freeman.
- Barbarin, O.A., Richter, L., & de Wet, T. (2001). Exposure to violence, coping resources, and psychological adjustment of South African children. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 71(1), 16-25.

- Barnes, C. (1992). Qualitative research; valuable or irrelevant? *Disability, Handicap and Society*, 7(2), 115-123.
- Barnes, G.G. (1999). Divorce transitions: Identifying risk and promoting resilience for children and their parental relationships. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*. 25(4), 425-441.
- Bartell, S.S. (2000). Help your teen adjust to a stepfamily. *Focus Adolescent Services*. Retrieved July 16, 2006 from <http://www.focusas.com/Adjust.html>
- Baumeister, R.F. (1997). Identity, self-concept, and self-esteem: The self lost and found . In K. Hogan, J. Johnson & S. Briggs (Eds), *Handbook of personality psychology*. New York: Psychology Academic Press.
- Berk, L.E. (2001). *Development through the life span*. Needham Heights: Allyn and Bacon.
- Blechman, E.A., Prinz, R.J., & Dumas, J.E. (1995) Coping, competence, and aggression prevention: Developmental model. *Applied and Preventive Psychology*, 4, 211-232.
- Block, J.H., Block, J., & Morrison, A. (1981). Parental agreement-disagreement on child-rearing orientations and gender-related personality correlates in children. *Child Development*, 52, 965-974.
- Block, J.H., Block, J., & Gjerde, P.F. (1986). The personality of children prior to divorce: A prospective and study. *Child Development*, 57, 827-840.
- Block, J.H., Block, J., & Gjerde, P.F. (1988). Parental functioning and the home environment in families of divorce: Prospective and concurrent analyses. *Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 27, 207-213.

- Bogdan, R. (1975). *Introduction to qualitative research methods' phenomenological approach to the social sciences*. New York: Wiley.
- Bolger, K.E., & Patterson, C.J. (2001). Pathways from child maltreatment to internalizing problems: Perceptions of control as mediators and moderators. *Development and Psychopathology*, 13, 913-940.
- Botha, A.C. (2004). *'n Gegronde studie oor seksuele molestering*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg.
- Bowlby, J. (1973) *Attachment and loss (vol.2): Separation*. New York: Basic.
- Brandt, R., Swartz, L., & Dawes, A. (2005). Assessing custody and placement of children. In C. Tredoux, D. Foster, A. Allan, A. Cohen & D. Wassenaar (Eds), *Psychology and law (p. 131-158)*. Lansdowne, Juta.
- Braver, S.L., Ellman, I.M., & Fabricius, W.V. (2003). Relocation of children after divorce and children's best interests: New evidence and legal considerations. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 17(2), 206-219.
- Braver, S.L., Wolchik, S.A., Sandler, I.N., Sheets, V.L., Fogas, B., & Bay, R.C. (1993). A longitudinal study of noncustodial parents: Parents without children. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 7, 1-16.
- Bresler, L. (1995). Ethical issues in qualitative research methodology. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 126, 29-41.
- Bruch, C.S. (2002). Parental alienation syndrome and alienated children – getting it wrong in child custody cases. *Child and Family Law Quarterly*, 14(4), 381-393.
- Buchanan, C. M., Maccoby, E. E., & Dornbush, S. M. (1992). Adolescents and their families after divorce: Three residential arrangements compared. *Journal of Research on Adolescents*, 2, 261-291.

- Buchanan, C.M., Maccoby, E.E., & Dornbush, S.M. (1996). *Adolescents after divorce*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Buehler, C., Betz, P., Ryan, C.M., Legg, B.H., & Trotter, B.B. (1992). Description and valuation of the orientation for divorcing parents: Implications for postdivorce prevention programs. *Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies*, 41(2), 154-162.
- Buehler, C., Keishnakumar, A., Stone, G., Anthony, C., Pemberton, S., Gerard, J., & Barber, B.K. (1998). Interparental conflict styles and youth problem behaviours: a two-sample replication study. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 119-132.
- Bynum, M.K., & Durm, M.W. (1996). Children of divorce and its effect on their self-esteem. *Psychological Reports*, 79, 447-450.
- Camara, K.A., & Resnick, G. (1987). Marital and parental subsystems in mother-custody, father-custody and two-parent households: Effects on children's social development. In J. Vincent (Ed.), *Advances in family assessment, intervention and research (Vol. 4, pp.165-196)*. Greenwich, CT: JAI.
- Camara, K.A., & Resnick, G. (1988). Interparental conflict and cooperation: Factors moderating children's post-divorce adjustment. In E.M. Hetherington & J. Arastech (Eds), *Divorced, single-parent, and stepparent families* (pp.169-195). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: LEA.
- Camara, K.A., & Resnick, G. (1989). Styles of conflict resolution and cooperation between divorced parents: Effects on child behaviour and adjustment. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 59, 560-575.
- Capaldi, D.M., & Patterson, G.R. (1991). Relation of parental transitions to boys' adjustment problems: I. A linear hypothesis. II. Mothers at risk for transitions and unskilled parenting. *Developmental Psychology*, 3, 489-504.

- Carpenter, B.N. (1992). *Personal coping, theory, research and application*. London: Praeger.
- Carr, T. (1995). *Only a God can save us*. Retrieved February 12, 2005 from [http:// www.firsttings.com/ftissues.ft9508/carr.html](http://www.firsttings.com/ftissues.ft9508/carr.html)
- Carson, D.K., & Bittner, M.T. (1994). Temperament and school-aged children's coping abilities and responses to stress. *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 155, 289-302.
- Caya, M.L., & Liem, J.H. (1998). The role of sibling support in high-conflict families. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 68(2), 327-333).
- Chaplin, J.P. (1975). *Dictionary of psychology*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc.
- Chapman, M. (1997). Father absence, stepfathers, and the cognitive performance of college students. *Child Development*, 28, 1155-1158.
- Charmaz, K. (1995). Grounded theory. In J. A. Smith, R. Harré & L. Langenhove (Eds), *Rethinking methods in psychology* (pp.27-49). London: Sage.
- Chase-Lansdale, P.L., Cherlin, A.J., & Kiernan, K.E. (1995). The long-term effects of parental divorce on the mental health of young adults: A developmental perspectives. *Child Development*, 66, 1614-1634.
- Cheek, J. (1996). Taking a view: Qualitative research as representation. *Qualitative Health Research*, 6, 429-505.
- Cherlin, A. (1981). *Marriage, divorce, remarriage: Changing patterns of postwar United States*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Children's Act 38 of 2005, (2006). Republic of South Africa. Government Gazette [B 70B-2003].

- Clarke-Stewart, K.A., & Haywood, C. (1996). Advantages of father-custody and contact for the psychological well-being of school-age children. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 17*, 239-270.
- Clingempeel, W.G., Brand, E., & Ievoli, R. (1984). Stepparent-stepchild relationships in stepmother and stepfather families: A multimethod study. *Family Relations, 33*, 464-473.
- Cohen, O., & Ronen, T. (1999). Young children's adjustment to their parents' divorce as reflected in their drawings. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 30* (1/2), 47-70.
- Compas, B.E., Banez, G.A., Malcarne, V., & Worsham, N. (1991). Perceived control and coping with stress: A developmental perspective. *Journal of Social Issues, 47*, 23-34.
- Connelly, F.M., & Clandinin, D.J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher, 19* (4), 2-14.
- Cowen, E.L., Pedro-Carroll, J.L., & Alpert-Gillis, L.J. (1990). Relationship between support and adjustment among children of divorce. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 31*, 727-735.
- Creswell, J.W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative & quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Cummings, E.M. (1987). Coping with background anger in early childhood. *Child Development, 58*, 976-984.
- Cummings, E.M., & Davies, P. (1994). *Children and Marital Conflict: The Impact of Family Dispute and Resolution*. New York: The Guilford Press.

- Cummings, E.M., & Davies, P. (2002). Effects of marital conflict on children: Recent advances and emerging themes in process-oriented research. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 43 (1), 31-63.
- Cummings, E.M., Davies, P., & Simpson, K. (1994). Marital conflict, gender, and children's appraisal and coping efficacy as mediators of child adjustment. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 8, 141-149.
- Day, L. (2003). Introduction: Public and private dimensions of therapeutic work with children and adolescents. In L. Day & D. Flynn (Eds), *The internal and external worlds of children and adolescents: Collaborative and therapeutic care*. London: Karmac.
- Danaher, T., & Briod, M. (2005). Phenomenological approaches to research with children. In S. Greene & D. Hogan (Eds), *Researching Children's Experience: Methods and Approaches*. London : Sage.
- De Bellis, M.D. (2001). Developmental traumatology: The psychobiological development of maltreated children and its implications for research, treatment, and policy. *Development and Psychopathology*, 13, 539-564.
- Demo, D.H., & Acock, A.C. (1988). The impact of divorce on children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 50 (30), 619-648.
- Denzin. N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin. N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1998). Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry*. California, Sage.
- De Roberts, E M. (1996). *Phenomenological Psychology: A Text for Beginners*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America.

Developmental Testing Services, LLC: Cognitive development (n.d.) Retrieved July15, 2006, from <http://www.devtestservice.com/cogdevel.html>

De Vos, A.S., & Fouché, C.B. (1998). General Introduction to research design, data collection methods and data analysis. In A.S. De Vos (Ed.), *Research at grass roots : A primer for the caring professions* (pp. 76-94). Pretoria: van Schaik.

De Vos, A.S., & Van Zyl, C.G. (1998). The grounded theory methodology. In A.S. De Vos (Ed.), *Research at grass roots: A primer for the caring professions* (pp. 265-76). Pretoria: van Schaik.

Downey, D.B., & Powell, B. (1993). Do children in single-parent households fare better living with same-sex parents? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 55 (1), 55-71.

Drapeau, S., Samson, C., & Saint-Jacques, M. (1999). The coping process among children of separated parents. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 31 (1/2), 15-37.

Dreman, S. (2000). The influence of divorce on children. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 32 (3/4), 41-71.

Duncan, D.F. (1996). Growing up under the gun: Children and adolescents coping with violent neighbourhoods. *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, 16(4), 343-356.

Dunn, J., Deater-Deckard, K., Pickering, K., & O'Connor, T.G. (1998). Children's adjustment and prosocial behaviour in step-, single-parent, and non-stepfamily settings: Findings from a community study. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 39(8), 1083-1095.



- Ebata, A.T., & Moos, R.H. (1991). Coping and adjustment in distressed and healthy adolescents. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 12, 33-54.
- El-Sheikh, M., & Harger, J. (2001). Appraisals of marital conflict and children's adjustment, health, and physiological reactivity. *Developmental Psychology*, 37 (6), 875-885.
- Emery, R.E. (1982). Interparental conflict and the children of discord and divorce. *Psychological Bulletin*, 92, 310-330.
- Emery, R.E. (1988). *Marriage, Divorce, and Children's Adjustment*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Emery, R.E. (1999). *Marriage, Divorce, and Children's Adjustment*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Emery, R.E., & Forehand, R. (1994). Parental divorce and children's well-being: A focus on resilience. In R. Haggerty, L. Sherrod, N. Garmezy & M. Rutter (Eds). *Stress, risk and resilience in children and adolescents. Process, mechanisms and interventions*. (pp.64-99). Cambridge: University Press.
- Emery, R.E., Kitzmann, K.M., & Waldon, M. (1999). Psychological interventions for separated and divorced families. In E. M. Hetherington (Ed.), *Coping with divorce, single parenting, and remarriage: A risk and resiliency perspective*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Emery, R.E., Waldron, M., Kitzmann, K.M., & Aaron, J. (1999). Delinquent behavior, future divorce or nonmarital childbearing, and externalizing behavior among offspring: a 14-year prospective study. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 13(4), 568-579.
- Epston, D., & White, M. (1992). *Experience, contradiction, narrative and imagination*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.

- Erikson, E.H. (1965). *Childhood and Society*. London: Vintage.
- Ertmer, P.A. (1997). Common qualitative research designs. In P.D. Leedy (Ed.), *Practical research: Planning and design* (pp. 157-171). Englewood-Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Everett, L.W. (1998). Factors that contribute to satisfaction or dissatisfaction in stepfather-stepchild relationships. *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care*, 34(2), 25-34.
- Fattore, T., Mason, J., & Watson, E. (2007). Children's conceptualization(s) of their well-being. *Social Indicators Research*, 80, 5-29.
- Fabricatore, A.N., & Handal, P.J. (2000). Personal spirituality as a moderator of the relationship between stressors and subjective well-being. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 28, 221-228.
- Fauber, R., Forehand, R., Thomas, A.M., & Wierson, M. (1990). A mediational model of the impact of marital conflict on adolescent adjustment in intact and divorced families: The role of disruptive parenting. *Child Development*, 61, 1112-1122.
- Festinger, L. (1957). *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press.
- Ferrer, M., & Mc Crea, S. (2005). *Talking to children about divorce*. Retrieved September 10, 2006 from <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>
- Fields, L., & Prinz, R.J. (1997). Coping and adjustment during childhood and adolescence. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 17 (8), 937-976.

- Finch, J. (1986). *Research and policy. The uses of qualitative methods in social and educational research*. Sussex, UK: Falmer Press.
- Firestone, W.A. (1993). Alternative arguments for generalizing from data as applied to qualitative research. *Educational Research*, 22 (4), 16-23.
- Fischer, K. (1980). A theory of cognitive development: The control and construction of hierarchies. *Psychological Review*, 87, 477-531.
- Fischer, R.L. (1999). Children in changing families. Results of a pilot study of a program for children of separation and divorce. *Family and Conciliation Courts Review*, 37(2), 240-256.
- Fontana, A., & Frey. J.H. (1994). Interviewing: The Art of Science. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp.361-376). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Forehand, R., McCombs, A., Long, N., Brody, G., & Fauber, R. (1988). Early adolescent adjustment to recent parental divorce: The role of interparental conflict and adolescent sex as mediating variables. *Journal of Counselling and Clinical Psychology*, 56, 624-627.
- Forehand, R., Middleton, K., & Long, N. (1987). Adolescent functioning as a consequence of recent parental divorce and the parent-adolescent relationship. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 3, 305-315.
- Forehand, R., Thomas, A.M., Wierson, M., Brody, G., & Fauber, R. (1990). Role of maternal functioning and parenting skills in adolescent functioning following parental divorce. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 99, 278-283.
- Frisco, M.L., Muller, C., & Frank, K. (2007). Parents' union dissolution and adolescents' school performance: Comparing methodological approaches. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69(3), 721-741.

- Furstenberg, F.F. Jr. (1990). Divorce and the American family. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 16, 379-403.
- Furstenberg, F.F., & Allison, P.D. (1989). How marital dissolution affects children: Variations by age and sex. *Developmental Psychology*, 25, 540-549.
- Furstenberg, F.F., Peterson, J.L., Nord, C.W., & Zill, N. (1983). The life course of children of divorce: Marital disruption and parental contact. *American Sociological Review*, 48, 656-668.
- Futterman, E.H. (1980). Child psychiatric perspectives: After the "civilized divorce". *Journal of American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, 22, 392-398.
- Gadamer, H. (1975). Hermeneutics and Social Science. *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 2, 307-316.
- Gelman, D. (1991). The miracle of resiliency. *Newsweek*, 117 (26), 44-47.
- Gardner, R.A. (1987). *The parental alienation syndrome and the differentiation between fabricated and genuine child sex*. New Jersey: Creative Therapeutics.
- Gardner, R.A. (1992). *The parental alienation syndrome. A guide for mental health and legal professionals*. New Jersey: Creative Therapeutics.
- Glaser, B.G. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity: Advances in the methodology of grounded theory*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology.
- Glaser, B.G. (1992). *Basics of grounded theory analysis: Emergence vs forcing*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology.
- Glaser, B.G. (1998). *Doing grounded theory: Strauss and Corbin's (1990). Issues and discussions*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology.

- Glaser, B.G., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Goldstein, N. (2003). *An exploration of the experience of living with and making meaning of HIV: A phenomenological study*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg.
- Goldstein, J., Freud, A., & Solnit, A.J. (1973). *Beyond the best interests of the child*. New York: Free Press.
- Greene, S., & Hill, G. (2005). Researching children's experiences: Methods and methodological issues. In S. Greene & D. Hogan (Eds), *Researching Children's Experience: Methods and Approaches*. London: Sage.
- Grossmann, R. (1984). *Phenomenology and existentialism: An introduction*. London: Routledge & Kegan.
- Grych, J.H., & Fincham, F.D. (1990). Marital conflict and children's adjustment: A cognitive-contextual framework. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108, 267-290.
- Grych, J.H., & Fincham, F.D. (1992). Interventions for children of divorce: Towards greater integration of research and action. *Psychological Bulletin*, 111, 434-454.
- Grych, J.H., & Fincham, F.D. (2001). *Inter-parental conflict and child development*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Guba, E.G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1981). *Effective evaluation: improving the effectiveness of evaluation results through responsive and naturalistic approaches*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Guidubaldi, J., Cleminshaw, H.K., Perry, J.D., & McLoughlin, C.S. (1983). The impact of parental divorce on children: Report of the Nationwide NASP Study. *School Psychology Review*, 12 (3), 300-323.

- Hammond, M., Howart, J., & Keat, R. (1991). *Understanding Phenomenology*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Harrist, A., & Ainslie, R. (1998). Parental discord and child behaviour problems. *Journal of Family Issues*, 19, 140-163.
- Harter, S. (1983). Developmental perspectives on the self-system. In P.H. Mussen (Ed.) *Handbook of child psychology. Vol IV. Socialization. Personality, and social development. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. New York: John Wiley.
- Healy, J.M., Stewart, A.J., & Copeland, A.P. (1993). The role of self-blame in children's adjustment to parental separation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 19 (3), 279-289.
- Hess, R.D., & Camara, K.A. (1979). Post-divorce relationships as mediating factors in the consequences of divorce for children. *Journal of Social Issues*, 35, 79-96.
- Hetherington, E.M. (1972). Effects of parental absence on personality development in adolescent daughters. *Developmental Psychology*, 7, 313-326.
- Hetherington, E.M. (1986). Family relations six years after divorce. In K. Paley & M. Ihinger-Tallman (Eds), *Remarriage and stepparenting today: Research and theory* (pp. 185-205). New York: Guilford.
- Hetherington, E.M. (1989). Coping with family transitions: Winners, losers, and survivors, *Child Development*, 60, 1-14.
- Hetherington, E.M. (1993). An overview of the Virginia longitudinal study of divorce and remarriage with a focus on early adolescence. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 7, 1-18.

- Hetherington, E.M., Bridges, M., & Insabella, M. (1998). What matters? What does not? Five perspectives on the association between marital transitions and children's adjustment. *American Psychologist*, 53(2), 167-184.
- Hetherington, E.M., Cox, M., & Cox, R. (1978). The aftermath of divorce. In J. H. Stevens, & M. Mathews (Eds), *Mother-child, Father-child relations* (pp. 110-155). Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Hetherington, E.M., Cox, M., & Cox, R. (1979). Play and social interaction in children following divorce. *Journal of Social Issues*, 35, 26-49.
- Hetherington, E.M., Cox, M., & Cox, R. (1982). Effects of divorce on parents and children. In M. Lamb (Ed.), *Nontraditional families* (pp. 233-288). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Hetherington, E.M., Cox, M., & Cox, R. (1985). Long-term effects of divorce and remarriage on the adjustment of children. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, 24, 518-530.
- Hetherington, E.M., & Stanley-Hagan, M. (1995). Parenting in divorced and remarried families. In M.H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of Parenting*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Hetherington, E.M., & Stanley-Hagan, M. (1997). The effects of divorce on fathers and their children. In M. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of the father in child development* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pp. 191-211). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Hetherington, E.M., & Stanley-Hagan, M. (1999). The adjustment of children with divorced parents: A risk and resiliency perspective. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 40 (1), 120-140.
- Hetherington, E. M., Stanley-Hagan, M. & Anderson, E. R. (1989). Marital transitions: A child's perspective. *American Psychologist*, 44 (2), 303-312.

- Heyink, J.W., & Tymstra, T.J. (1993). The function of qualitative research. *Social Indicators Research*, 29, 291-305.
- Hill, M. (2005). Ethical considerations in researching children's experiences. In S. Greene & D. Hogan (Eds), *Researching Children's Experience: Methods and Approaches*. London : Sage.
- Hilton, J.M., & Desrochers, S. (2002). Children's behaviour problems in single-parent and married-parent families: Development of a predictive model. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 37 (1/2), 13-36.
- Howard, K.I., Cornille, T.A., Lyons, J.S., Vessey, J.T., Lueger, R.J., & Saunders, S.M. (1996). Patterns of service utilization. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 55, 676-703.
- Huysamen, G.K. (1993). *Metodologie vir die sosiale en gedragwetenskappe*. Johannesburg: International Thomson.
- Jacobs, J.W. (1988). Euripides' Medea: A psychodynamic model of severe divorce pathology. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 2, 308-319.
- Jansen van Rensburg, P. (2004). *Psigologiese kenmerke van kinders uit intakte en egskeidingsgesinne*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein.
- Jenkins, J.M., & Buccioni, J.M. (2000). Children's understanding of marital conflict and the marital relationship. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 41 (2), 161-168.
- Johnston, J.R., Gonzalez, R., & Campbell, L.E. (1987). Ongoing post-divorce conflict and child disturbance. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 15, 497-509.



- Johnston, J.R., Kline, M., & Tschann, J.M. (1989). Ongoing postdivorce conflict in families contesting custody: Do joint custody and frequent access help? *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 59, 576-592.
- Jonassen, D.H., & Grabowski, B.L. (1993). *Handbook of personal differences. Learning and instruction*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Jouriles, E.N., Bourg, W.J., & Farris, A.M. (1991). Marital adjustment and child conduct problems: A comparison of the correlation across sub-samples. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 59, 354-357.
- Kail, R.V., & Cavanaugh, J.C. (2007). *Human development: A life-span view*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Canada: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Kasberger, E.R. (2002). *A Correlation Study of Post-Divorce Adjustment and Religious Coping Strategies in Young Adults of Divorced Families*. Conference proceedings of the Second Annual Undergraduate Research Symposium held in Milwaukee. Conducted by the CHARIS Institute of Wisconsin Lutheran College: Wisconsin Lutheran College.
- Katz, L.P., & Gottman, J.M. (1997). Buffering children from marital conflict and dissolution. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 20, 434-438.
- Kellam, S.G., Ensminger, M.A., & Turner, T.J. (1977). Family structures and the mental health of children: Concurrent and community wide studies of children. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 34, 1012-1022.
- Kelly, J. B. (1988). Longer-term adjustment in children of divorce: converging findings and implications for practice. *Journal of Family psychology*, 2, 119-140.
- Kelly, J.B. (2000). Children's adjustment in conflicted marriage and divorce: A decade review of research. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 39, 963-983.

- Kelly, J.B., & Emery, R.E. (2003). Children's adjustment following divorce: Risk and resilience perspectives. *Family Relations*, 52, 352-362.
- Kelly, J.B., & Johnston, J.R. (2001). The alienated child: a reformulation of parental alienation syndrome. *Family Court Review*, 39(3), 249-266.
- Kelly, J.B., & Wallerstein, J.S. (1977). Brief interventions with children in divorcing families. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 47, 23-39.
- Kerig, P. (1998). Gender and appraisals as mediators of adjustment in children exposed to inter-parental violence. *Journal of Family Violence*, 15, 345-363.
- Kerig, P. (1999). Gender issues in the effects of exposure to violence on children. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 2, 87-105.
- Kerig, P. (2001). Children's coping with inter-parental conflict. In J. Grych & F. Fincham (Eds), *Inter-parental conflict and child development* (pp. 213-248). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kim, L.S., Sandler, I.N., & Tein, J.Y. (1997). Locus of control as a stress moderator and mediator in children of divorce. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 25(2), 145-155.
- King, V., & Heard, H.E. (1999). Non-resident father visitation, parental conflict, and mother's satisfaction: what's best for child well-being? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 61, 385-396.
- Kirk, J., & Miller, M.L. (1986). *Reliability and validity in qualitative research* (qualitative Research Methods Series, Vol. 1). Beverley Hills, CA: Sage.
- Kitzmann, K.M., & Emery, R. (1994). Effects of marital conflict on subsequent Triadic family interactions and parenting. *Developmental Psychology*, 36 (1), 3-13.

- Knowles, R.T. (1986). *Human development and human possibility: Erikson in the light of Heidegger*. Pittsburgh: University Press of America.
- Kohlberg, L. (1964). The development of moral character and moral ideology. In M. Hoffman & L. Hoffman (Eds), *Review of child development research, Vol. 1*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Krantz, S.E., Clark, J., Pruyn, J.P., & Usher, M. (1985). Cognition and adjustment among children of separated and divorced parents. *Cognitive Therapy and Research, 9*(1), 61-77.
- Kurdek, L.A., Blisk, D., & Siesky, A.E. (1981). Correlates of children's long-term adjustment to their parents' divorce. *Developmental Psychology, 17*, 565-579.
- Kurdeck, L.A., & Berg, B. (1983). Correlates of children's adjustment to their parents' divorces. In L.A. Kurdeck (Ed.), *New directions in child development: Vol 19. Children and divorce* (pp. 47-60). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kurdeck, L.A., & Berg, B. (1987). Children's beliefs about parental divorce scale: Psychometric characteristics and concurrent validity. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 55*, 712-718.
- Kurtz, L. (1996). Relationships between coping resources and strategies in children with divorced and nondivorced parents. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 25*(3/4), 39-55.
- Kvale, S. (1983). The qualitative research interview: A phenomenological and hermeneutical mode of understanding. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 14* (2), 171-196.
- Kvale, S. (1989). To validate is to question. In S. Kvale (Ed.), *Issues of validity in qualitative research*. Lund, Sweden: Student-litteratur.

- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research and interviewing*. California: Sage.
- Lahey, B.B. (1989). *Psychology: An introduction*. Iowa: Wm. C. Brown.
- Lahey, B.B., Hartdagen, S.E., Frick, P.J., McBurnett, K., Connor, R., & Hynd, G.W. (1988). Conduct disorder: Parsing the confounded relation to parental divorce and antisocial personality. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 97, 334-337.
- Lamb, M.E. (1977). Father-infant and mother-infant interaction in the first year of life. *Child Development*, 48, 167-181.
- Lamb, M.E. (2002). Infant-father attachments and their impact on child development. In C.S. Tamis-LeMonda & N. Cabrera (Eds), *Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives* (p. 93-117). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Earlbum Associates.
- Lamb, M.E., Sternberg, K.L., & Thompson, R.A. (1997). The effects of divorce and custody arrangements on children's behaviour, development, and adjustment. *Family and Conciliation Courts Review*, 35 (4), 393- 404.
- Lazarus, R.S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal and coping*. New York: Springer.
- Lee, C.M., Picard, M., & Blain, M.D. (1994). A methodological and substantive review of intervention outcome studies for families undergoing divorce. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 8, 3-15.
- Leedy, P.D. (1997). *Practical research: Planning and design*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Leon, K. (2003). Risk and protective factors in young children's adjustment to parental divorce: A review of the literature. *Family Relations*, 52, 258-270.

- Levy-Schiff, R. (1982). The effects of father absence on young children in mother-headed families. *Child Development*, 53, 1400-1405.
- Long, N., & Forehand, R. (1987). The effects of parental divorce and parental conflict on children: A overview. *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, 8, 292-296.
- Lutzke, J., Wolchik, S.A., & Braver, S.L. (1996). Does the quality of mother-child relationships moderate the effect of postdivorce interparental conflict on children's adjustment problems? *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 25, (3/4), 15-33.
- Macann, C. (1993). *Four phenomenological philosophers: Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty*. London: Routledge.
- Maddi, S.R. (1972). *Personality theories: A comparative analysis*. Illinois: Dorsey.
- Main, M., & Weston, D. (1981). Security of attachment to mother and father: Related to conflict behaviour and readiness to establish new relationships. *Child Development*, 52, 932-940.
- Malterud, K. (2001). Qualitative research: standards, challenges, and guidelines. *Lancet*, 358 (9280), 483-489.
- Manegold, J., Pather, R., & Richter, L. (2004). *Interventions for Children Affected by AIDS*. Cape Town, S.A.; HSRC Publishers.
- Manderson, L. (2005). Introduction: The social context of well-being. In L. Manderson (Ed.), *Rethinking Wellbeing*. Perth: API Network.
- Maxwell, J.A. (1992). Understanding and validity in qualitative research. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62 (3), 279-300.

- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1945). *Phenomenology of perception*. New York: The Humanities.
- McIntosh, J. (2003). Enduring conflict in parental separation: Pathways of impact on child development. *Journal of Family Studies*, 9 (1), 63-80.
- McKane, M.L. (1991). Split identity and children of divorce. *Family and Conciliations Court Review*, 29(19) 63-72.
- McLoyd, V., Harper, C., & Copeland, N.K. (2001). Does gender moderate the effects of marital conflict on children? In J. Grych & F. Finchqm (Eds), *Interparental conflict and child development* (pp.9-38). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Medina, A.M., Margolin, G., & Wilcox, R.R. (2000). Family hostility and children's cognitive processes. *Behavior Therapy*, 31, 667-684.
- Meissner, W.W. (1978). Conceptualization of marriage and family dynamics from a psychoanalytic perspective. In T.J. Paolino & B.S. McCrady (Eds), *Marriage and marital therapy* (pp.25-88). New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Meyer, W.F., Moore, C., & Viljoen, H.G. (1989). *Personality theories - from Freud to Frankl*. Johannesburg: Lexion.
- Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M., (1994). *An expanded sourcebook: Qualitative data analysis* .(2<sup>nd</sup> ed.).Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Miller, S.M. (1987). Monitoring and blunting: Validation of a questionnaire to assess styles of information seeking under threat. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, 345-353.
- Miller, S.M., & Green, M.L. (1985). Coping with stress and frustration: Origins, nature and development. In M. Lewis & C. Saarni (Eds), *The socialization of emotions* (pp. 263-314). New York: Plenum.

- Minuchin, S., Baker, L., Rosman, B.L., Liebman, R., Milman, L., & Todd, T.G. (1975). A conceptual model of psychosomatic illness in children: Family organization and family therapy. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 32, 1031-1038.
- Moos, R.H., & Billings, A.G. (1983). Conceptualization and measuring coping resources and processes. In I. Goldberg & S. Breznitz (Eds), *Handbook of stress: Theoretical and clinical aspects*. Free Press: New York.
- Morley, J (2001). Inspiration and expiration: yoga practice through Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body. *Philosophy East & West*, 51 (1), 73-83.
- Mosher, J.P., & Handal, P.J. (1997). The relationship between religion and psychological distress in adolescents. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 25, 449-457.
- Mott, F.L., Kowaleskijones, L., & Menaghan, E.G. (1997). Parental absence and child behaviour: Does a child's gender make a difference? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 59, 103-118.
- Mouton, J. (1986). Die filosofie van kwalitatiewe norvorsing. In Ferreira, M., J. Mouton, G. Puth, E. Schurink, & W. Schurink, *Module 3: Inleiding tot kwalitatiewe metodes*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council.
- Mulholland, D.J., Watt, N.F., Philpott, A., & Sarlin, N. (1991). Academic performance in children of divorce: Psychological resilience and vulnerability. *Psychiatry*, 54, 268-280.
- Muller, J.H. (1999). Narrative approaches to qualitative research. In B.F. Crabtree & W.L. Miller (Eds), *Doing qualitative research* (p. 221-238). London: Sage.

- Nucci, L. (2002). Moral development and moral education: An overview. *Studies in Moral Development and Education*, Retrieved July 16, 2006 from <http://tigger.uic.edu/~lnucci/MoralEd/overview.html>
- Omizo, M., & Omizo, S. (1990). Children and stress: Using a phenomenological approach. *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling*, 25(1),30-36.
- Osborn, J.W. (1995). Some similarities and differences among phenomenological and other methods of psychological qualitative research. *Canadian Psychology*, 35 (4), 167-189.
- Oshman, H.P., & Manosevitz, M. (1976). Father absence: Effects of stepfathers upon psychological development in males. *Developmental Psychology*, 12, 479-480.
- Owen, I.R. (1994a). Introducing an existential-phenomenological approach. Part 2-theory of practice. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 7(4), 347-359.
- Owen, I.R. (1994b). Introducing an existential-phenomenological approach: Basic phenomenological theory and research. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 7(3), 261-274.
- Pagani, L., Boulerice, B., Remblay, R.E., & Vitario, F. (1997). Behavioural development in children of divorce and remarriage. *Journal of Child Psychology and Child Psychiatry*, 38(7), 769-781.
- Pagani-Kurtz, L., & Derevensky, J.L. (1997). Access by noncustodial parents: Effects upon children's postdivorce coping resources. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 27(1/2), 43-54.
- Peterson, I. (1989). Coping by children undergoing stressful medical procedures: Some conceptual, methodological, and therapeutic issues. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 57, 380-387.



- Peterson, J.L., & Zill, N. (1986). Marital disruption, parent-child relationships, and behavior problems in children, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 48, 295-307.
- Piaget, J. (1953). *The origins of intelligence in the child*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Pike, L.T. (2003). The adjustment of Australian children growing up in singleparent families as measured by their competence and self-esteem. *Childhood*, 10(2), 181-200.
- Pintrich, P.R., & Schunk, D.H. (1996). *Motivation in education: Theory, research and applications*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Merrill/ Prentice-Hall.
- Polkinghorne, D.E. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In R.S. Valle & S. Halling (Eds), *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology: Exploring the breadth of human experience*. New York: Plenum.
- Polkinghorne, D.E. (1991). Scientific forum: Two conffliction calls for methodological reform. *The Counselling Psychologist*, 19, 103-114.
- Porter, B., & O'Leary, K.D. (1980). Marital discord and childhood behavior problems. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 80, 287-295.
- Power, M.J., Ash, P.M., Schoenberg. E., & Sorey, E.C. (1974). Delinquency and the family. *British Journal of Social Work*, 4, 17-18.
- Pryor, J., & Rogers, B. (2001). *Children in changing families. Life after parental separation*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Raab, H. Esq. (2006). *Children and divorce*. Retrieved September 10, 2006 from <http://www.divorcesource.com/FL/ARTICLES/raab3.html>

- Register, L.M., & Henley, T.B. (1992). The phenomenology of intimacy. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 9, 467-481.
- Rennie, D.L. (2000). Grounded theory methodology as methodical hermeneutics: Reconciling realism and relativism. *Theory and Psychology*, 10(4), 481-502.
- Rew, L., Bechtel, D., & Sapp, A. (1993). Self-as-instrument in qualitative research. *Nursing Research*, 42 (5), 300-301.
- Richardson, W.J. (1980). Phenomenology and psychoanalysis. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 2 (2), 1-19.
- Richter, L. (2004). The impact of HIV/AIDS on the development of children in families and community. In R. Pharoah (Ed.), *HIV/AIDS, Vulnerable Children and Security in Southern Africa* (pp. 9-32). Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, ISS. Monographs Series 109.
- Richter, L. (2004). *The importance of caregiver-child interactions for the survival of healthy development of young children*. Geneva, World Health Organization.
- Richter, L., Manegold, J., & Pather, R. (2004). *Family and community interventions for children affected by AIDS*. Pretoria: Human Science Research Council.
- Risman, B. (1986). Can men mother? Life as a single father. *Family Relations*, 35, 95-102.
- Rorty, R. (1979). *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*. Princeton, NY; Princeton University Press.
- Rosnow, R., & Rosenthal, R. (1996). *Beginning behavioural research: A conceptual primer*. Upper Saddle, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

- Roth, S., & Cohen, L.J. (1986). Approach, avoidance, and coping with stress. *American Psychologist*, 41, 813-819.
- Rothbaum, F., Weisz, J.R., & Snyder, S.S. (1982). Changing the world and changing the self: A two-process model of perceived control. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 42, 5-37.
- Rotter, J.B. (1954). *Social learning and clinical psychology*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Rotter, J.B. (1966). Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. *Psychological Monographs*, 80, 1-28.
- Rutter, M. (1971). Parent-child separation: Psychological effects on the children. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 12, 233-260.
- Rutter, M. (1979). Maternal deprivation, 1972-1978: New findings, new concepts, new approaches. *Child Development*, 50, 283-305.
- Rutter, M. (1980). Protective factors in children's responses to stress and disadvantage. In M. W. Kent & J. E. Rolf (Eds), *Primary prevention of psychopathology: III. Promoting social competence and coping in children* (pp. 49-74). Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- Sandler, I.N., Tein, J.Y., Mehta, P., Wolchik, S., & Ayers, T. (2000). Coping efficacy and psychological problems of children of divorce. *Child Development*, 71(4), 1099-1118.
- Sandler, I.N., Kim-Bae, L.S., & MacKinnon, D. (2000). Coping and negative appraisal as mediators between control beliefs and psychological symptoms in children of divorce. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, 29(3), 336-347.
- Santrock, J.W. (1996). *Child Development*. London: Brown & Benchmark Pubs.

- Santrock, J.W. (1975). Father absence, perceived maternal behavior, and moral development in boys. *Child Development*, 26, 753-757.
- Santrock, J.W., & Warshak, R. (1979). Father custody and social development in boys and girls. *Journal of Social Issues*, 35, 112-125.
- Santrock, J.W., Warshak, R.A., Lindbergh, C., & Meadows, L. (1982). Children's and parents' observed social behaviour in stepfather families. *Child Development*, 53, 472-480.
- Schlesinger, B. (1982). Children's viewpoints of living in a one-parent family. *Journal of Divorce*, 5(4), 1-23.
- Schurink, E.M. (1998a). Deciding to use a qualitative research approach. In A.S. De Vos, (Ed.), *Research at grass roots: A primer for the caring professions* (pp.239-259). Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Schurink, E.M. (1998b). Designing qualitative research. In A.S. De Vos, (Ed.), *Research at grass roots: A primer for the caring professions* (pp.239-259). Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Schurink, E.M. (1998c). The methodology of unstructured face-to-face interviewing. In A.S. De Vos, (Ed.), *Research at grass roots: A primer for the caring professions* (pp.297-312). Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Schurink, E.M., & Schurink, W.J. (1988). Developing practice wisdom into theory: The use of qualitative methodology in social work. *Die Maatskaplikewerk-Navorser Praktisyn*, 1, 27-37.
- Schwartz, L.L. (1992). Children's perspectives of divorce. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 20, 324-332.

- Segal, A.M. (1999). *Architectural metaphor in psychotherapy: a phenomenological study*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg.
- Segilman, C.K., & Rider, E.A. (2003). *Life-span human development (4<sup>th</sup> ed)*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
- Shaffer, D.R., & Kipp, K. (2007). *Developmental psychology: Childhood and adolescence (7<sup>th</sup> ed)*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Shaw, D.S. (1991). The effects of divorce on children's adjustment: Review and implications. *Behavior Modification*, 15 (4), 456-485.
- Shaw, D.S., & Emery, R.E. (1987). Parental conflict and the adjustment of school age children whose parents have separated. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 15, 269-281.
- Shaw, D.S., Emery, R.E., & Tuer, M. (1993). Parental functioning and children's adjustment in families of divorce: a prospective study. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 21, 119-134.
- Shinn, M. (1978). Father's absence and children's cognitive development. *Psychological Bulletin*, 85, 295-324.
- Skinner, E.A., & Zimmer-Gembeck, M.J. (2007). The development of coping. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 58, 119-144.
- Skinner, E.A., & Wellborn, J.G. (1994). Coping during childhood and adolescence: A motivational perspective. In R. Lerner, D. Featherman & M. Perlmuter. (Eds), *Life-span development and behaviour* (vol. 12, pp. 91-123). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

- Smith, J.A. (1995). Semi-structured interviewing and qualitative analysis. In J.A. Smith, R. Harré & L. Van Langenhove (Eds), *Rethinking methods in psychology* (pp.9-26). London: Sage.
- Statistics South Africa (1999). *Marriages and Divorces*. (Report P0307/1999). Pretoria: State Press.
- Statistics South Africa (2005). *Marriages and Divorces*. (Report P0307/2005). Pretoria: State Press.
- Spinelli, E. (1989). *The interpreted world. A introduction to phenomenological psychology*. London: Sage.
- Strauss, A. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social sciences*. New York: Cambridge.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded theory and methodology: An overview. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp.273-285). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research : Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Steyn, G.M. (1989). Die onderwyser en die kind uit die eenouergesin. *Educate*, 18(1), 95-101.
- Stohlberg, A., & Mahler, J. (1994). Enhancing treatment gains in a school-based intervention for children of divorce through skill training, parental involvement

and transfer procedures. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 62, 147-156.

Strümpfer, D.J.W. (2001). Psychofortology: Review of a new paradigm marching on. <http://general.rau.ac.za/psych>

Stiles, W.B. (1993). Quality Control in Qualitative Research. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 13, 593-618.

Taylor, S.E., Peplau, L.A., & Sears, D.O. (2003). *Social Psychology*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Tein, J.Y., Sandler, I.N., & Zautra, A.J. (2000). Stressful life events, psychological distress, coping, and parenting of divorced mothers: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 14(1), 27-41.

Thévenaz, P. (1962). *What is Phenomenology?* Chicago: Quadrangle.

Thiessen, I. (1993). The impact of divorce on children. *Early Child Development and Care*, 96, 19-26.

Thompson, C.L., & Henderson, D.A. (2007). *Counseling children* (7<sup>th</sup>ed). Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole.

Tschann, J.M., Johnston, J.R., Kline, M., & Wallerstein, J. S. (1989). Family process and children's functioning during divorce. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 51, 431-444.

Turket, I.D. (1999). Divorce-related malicious parent syndrome. *Journal of Family Violence*, 14(1), 95-97.

Ullrich, P.M., & Lutgendorf, S.K. (2002). Journaling about stressful events: effects of cognitive processing and emotional expression. *Annals of Behavioural Medicine*, 22, 244-250.

- Valle, R.S., King, M., & Halling, S. (1989). An introduction to existential phenomenological thought in psychology. In R.S. Valle & S. Halling (Eds), *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology: exploring the breadth of human experience*. New York: Plenum.
- Van den Berg, J.H. (1972). *A different existence*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- Van Loggerenberg, M., & Roets, H.E. (1993). Die belewing van die kind in die enkelouergesin. *Educare*, 22 (1). 106-119.
- Van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived in experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Van Rensburg, E. (2001). *Die ontwikkeling van 'n sielkundige spanbenadering vir die bepaling van beheer, toesig en toegang by egskeidingsdispute*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of the Free State, Bloemfontien.
- Von Eckartsberg, R. (1998). Introducing existential-phenomenological psychology. In R.S. Valle (Ed.), *Phenomenological inquiry in psychology: Existential and transpersonal dimensions*. New York: Plenum.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1981). The genesis of higher mental functions. In J.V. Wertsch (Ed.), *The concept of activity in Soviet psychology* (p 141-148). Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Wakeford, E. (2001). *Ouervervreemdingsindroom by geskeides: 'n Verkennende ondersoek*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of the Orange Free State, Bloemfontein.



- Wallerstein, J.S. (1986). Children of divorce: Preliminary report of a ten-year follow-up of older children and adolescents. *Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry*, 24, 545-553.
- Wallerstein, J.S., & Blakeslee, S. (1989). *Second chances: Men, women and children a decade after divorce*. London: Bantam Press, Transworld Publishers.
- Wallerstein, J.S., & Kelly, J.B. (1980). *Surviving the breakup: How children actually cope with divorce*. New York: Basic.
- Wallerstein, J.S., & Kelly, J.B. (1996). *Surviving the breakup: How children and parents cope with divorce*. New York: Basic Books.
- Warshak, R.A., & Santrock, J.W. (1983). The impact of divorce in father-custody and mother-custody homes: The child's perspective. In L.A. Kurdeck (Ed.), *New directions for child development: Vol. 19. Children and divorce*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Weiss, R.S. (1979). Growing up a little faster: The experience of growing up in a single-parent household. *Journal of Social Issues*, 35, 97-111.
- Wells, K. (1995). The strategy of grounded theory: possibilities and problems. *Social Work Research*, 19, 33-37.
- Wenar, C., & Kerig, P. (2005). *Developmental psychopathology: From infancy through adolescence* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Westcott, H. L., & Littelton, K.S. (2005). Exploring meaning in interviews with children. In S. Greene & D. Hogan (Eds), *Researching Children's Experience: Methods and Approaches*. London : Sage.
- White, M. (1995). *Re-authoring lives*. Adelaide; Dulwich Centre Publications.

- Wierson, M., & Forehand, R. (1992). Family stressors and deficits in adolescent functioning: A consideration of models for early versus middle adolescents. *Behaviour Therapy*, 23, 681-688.
- Williams, F.S. (1990). *Preventing parentectomy following divorce. Keynote address, Fifth Annual Conference National Council for Children's Rights*, Washington DC, October 20.
- Wilson, H.S., & Hutchinson, S.A. (1991). Triangulation of qualitative methods: Heideggerian hermeneutics and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research*, 1(2), 263-276.
- Wimpenny, P., & Gass, J. (2000). Interviewing in phenomenology and grounded theory; Is there a difference? *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 31(6), 1485-1492.
- Wolchik, S.A., & Sandler, I.N. (1997). *Handbook of children's coping: Linking theory and intervention*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Wolchik, S.A., West, S.G., Westover, S., Sandler, I.N., Martin, A., Lustig, T., Tein, J., & Fisher, J. (1993). The children of divorce parenting intervention: Outcome evaluation of an empirically based program. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 22, 293-331.
- Wolchik, S.A., Wilcox, K.L., Tein, J.Y., & Sandler, I.N. (2000). Maternal acceptance and consistency of discipline as buffers of divorce stressors on children's psychological adjustment problems. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 28(1), 87-102.
- Young, M.H., Miller, B.C., Norton, M.C., & Hill, E.J. (1995). The effect of parental supportive behaviours on life satisfaction of adolescent offspring. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 57, 813-822.

- Zaslow, M.J. (1988). Sex differences in children's response to parental divorce: 1. Research methodology and postdivorce family forms. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 58, 355-378.
- Zautra, A.J., Reich, J.W., & Newsom, J.T. (1995). Autonomy and sense of control among older adults: An examination of their effects on mental health. In L.A. Bond, S.J. Cutler & A. Grams (Eds), *Promoting Successful and Productive Aging* (pp.153-170). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Zill, N., Morrison, D.R., & Coiro, M.J. (1993). Long-term effects of parental divorce on parent-child relationships, adjustment, and achievement in young adulthood. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 7, 91-103.

## Interview Schedule

**Name:**

**Gender:**

**Date of Birth:**

**Age:**

1. How old are you?
2. How old were you when your parents divorced?
3. What grade are you in?
4. What grade were you in when your parents divorced?
  - Do you find school-work easy or difficult?
  - Have you ever had to repeat a year?
  - If so, when?
  - What do you think the reason was for repeating that grade?
  - Did you have to change schools after your parents got divorced?
  - If yes - How do you feel about this? Tell me about changing your school.
  - Do you think that your parent's getting divorced affected your school work? If yes, Tell me about this?
  - How do you feel about this?
5. Do you go to after-care?
  - If they do attend after-care -How is it at after-care?
  - Did you go to after-care before your Mom and Dad got divorced?
  - If they had to start going to after-care after their parents divorce ask - how do you feel about having to go to after-care now that your parents are divorced?
6. Do you have any brothers and sisters?
  - What are their names?
  - How old are they?
  - How do you get on with your brother/sisters ?
  - Do you feel this has changed since the divorce and how?
7. Who do you live with?
  - Tell me about your house?

- Do you have your own bedroom at your home?
  - How do you feel about that?
8. Did anyone have to move house when your parent's got divorced? If so, who?
- How did you feel?
9. Did you have to move house when your parents got divorced?
- If so, why?
  - How did you feel about leaving the old house?
  - How do/did you like the new house?
  - Have you moved again since then? If so - how many times?
  - How have you felt about that? Explore feelings
10. How often do you see the other parent?
- Tell me about that house?
  - Do you have your own bedroom at that home?
  - How do you feel about that?
11. Do you have grandparents?
- Who?
  - How often do you see them?
  - Is there anything different between you and your grandparents since your parents got divorced? If so, how?
  - How do you feel about that?
  - Do you see them more or less now? Why is that, and how do you feel about that?
12. Are there other significant/special people such as aunts, uncles, cousins, friends in your life etc.?
- Who?
  - How often do you see them?
  - Is there anything different between you and those special people mentioned, since your parents got divorced? If so, how?
  - How do you feel about that?

- Do you see them more or less now. Why is that, and how do you feel about that?

13. Is your Dad remarried or does he have a girlfriend ? If so, ask for her name.

- Tell me about her?
- Does she have children of her own?
- Do her children live with your Dad?
- How do you feel about that?
- Tell me about them
- Have your Dad and his wife/girlfriend had their own children?
- How do you feel about that?
- Tell me about them?

14. Is your Mom remarried or does she have a boyfriend? If so ask for his name.

- Tell me about him?
- Does he have children of his own?
- Do the children live with your Mom?
- How do you feel about that?
- Tell me about them.
- Have your mom and her husband/ boyfriend had their own children?
- How do you feel about that?
- Tell me about them.

15. Do you play sports or do extra-mural activities? If so what?

- Is this the same as before the divorce? If yes - how do you feel about this and has it helped in any way? If yes - how? If no - do you think it could have and how?
- If no - how has it changed and how do you feel about this? How would you like it to be? Do you feel that extra activities could have helped you cope with the divorce and how?

16. How were you told your parents were going to get divorced?

- Who told you?
- What did they tell you?

- Did you believe that?
  - What did you think when you were told your parents were going to get divorced?
  - How did you feel when they told you?
  - What did you go and do after you were told?
17. Do you think there is a better way to tell children about their parents getting divorced than the way you were told? If so, how do you think children should be told?
18. Did your Mom and Dad treat each other badly when they were married? Tell me about it?
- If they argued/fought/treated each other badly - What did you do when they argued? What did they argue about? How did you feel?
  - So do you feel it is better that they got divorced?
19. Do you Mom and Dad still argue and/or fight or treat each other badly?
- How do you feel about it?
  - If the answer is yes - What do they argue/fight about?
  - What do you do?
20. Did you teachers at school know your parents were divorcing and did they help?
- Do your teachers that you have now know that your parents are divorced- Does it help you? - If so how?
21. Did you talk to your friends about it?
- Was it difficult to tell them? Explain
  - Did it help talking to them? If yes - How did it help. If no - why do you feel it did not help?
22. Do you feel your friends think you are different because your parents got divorced?
- In what way do you feel they think you are different?
  - How do you feel about this?
23. How has your social life changed since your parent got divorced?
- How do you feel about this?

24. What religion are you?

- Did you go to church before your parents got divorced?
- Do you go to church now?
- Did the people at the church know your parents were divorcing?
- Do you think they helped at all? If yes - how did they help and how do you feel about this? If no - how do you feel about this and what should they have done?

25. Have you spoken to anyone about how you feel about your parents' divorce?

- Tell me about that
- How do you feel about that?

26. Have you had any counseling?

- Do you feel it helped you?
- If yes - How did it help? If no -, what did not help and what would have helped rather?
- If no - would you have liked to have been able to go for counselling? If yes - how do you think it could have helped? If no - Why do you feel that?

27. How do you feel about the way it has been organised that you see you Mom/Dad?

- Would you want to change it?
- If so, why and to what?
- Have you ever felt you would want it changed?
- If so, why, and to what?
- Are there any problems with seeing or speaking to the other parent? If yes-what and how do you feel about this?

28. Is anything different between you and your Mom since the divorce?

- If so, how?
- How do you feel about this?

29. Is anything different between you and your Dad since the divorce?

- If so, how?
- How do you feel about this?



30. What's different in your life since the divorce?
- Do you have to do more things? (Looking at responsibilities/chores etc.)
31. Has your Mom changed since the divorce? If so, in what way?
- How do you feel about this?
32. Has your Dad changed since the divorce? If so, in what way?
- How do you feel about this?
33. Did your Mom and/or Dad talk to you a lot about the divorce while it was happening?
- If so, what did they tell you?
  - How did you feel about them talking to you about these things?
  - Did that help you or did it make it more difficult? Explain
34. Do your Mom/Dad still talk to you about the divorce?
- If so, does it help you or does it make it more difficult? Explain
  - How do you feel about them talking to you about these things
  - What things do they say?
35. Does your Mom talk to you about your Dad and his family ?
- What sort of things does she say?
  - How do you feel about this?
36. Does your Dad talk to you about your Mom and her family ?
- What sort of things does he say?
  - How do you feel about this?
37. What was life like before your parents got divorced?
- Look for economic factors, parental support and relationships with parents, sibling relationships, schooling, social life, grandparents' involvement in their lives, violence in the marriage, non-physical violence.
- How did you feel about these things?
38. What was it like right after your parents separated?
- Look at same factors as for 43.
- How did you feel about these things?
39. What is it like now?
- Look at same factors as for 43.

- How did you feel about these things?
40. What things helped or worked for you with your parents' divorce?
  41. What things made it difficult for you with your parents divorce?
  42. What are the good things that have happened as a result of your parents' divorce?
  43. What are the bad things that have happened as a result of your parents' divorce?
  44. What things would you like to tell parents about how they could help their children with divorce?
  45. What things would you like to tell parents about what they should not do if they have to get divorced?
  46. What would you want me to tell judges about what should happen to children when their parents get divorced?
  47. What advice could you give to other children whose parents are about to get divorced?
  48. Are there any things about divorce that you want to say that we haven't talked about?

### **Rationale Behind the Questionnaire**

Types of Questions: Initially the questions are of a more biographical date collecting nature. This is to allow the child an opportunity to relax and for the researcher to build up a rapport with the child. The questions then begin to explore what the child thinks, experiences and feels on different topics. These questions are of a more open-ended nature, allowing the child the opportunity to voice personal perspectives, feelings, and impressions. The opportunity to also make suggestions and impact some of the wisdom gained from experience is also allowed for.

Aspects the Questions Deal With: The researcher has tried, as far as is humanly possible, to "bracket" her preconceived ideas, and has tried to explore all areas

of a child's life and the influence of/ or as a result of, in the questionnaire. These aspects include:

- The immediate family, the relationships within and changes in these relationships,
- The reconstructed family and relationships within,
- The extended family and relationships within,
- School and after-care and reactions from people within these structures,
- Friends and their influence,
- The church/ religion and its role,
- Academic achievement and the impact of the divorce on this,
- Extra-mural activities and changes,
- The living conditions in the two homes,
- Feelings about the access arrangements,
- Conflict between the parents during the marriage, after the separation and after the divorce,
- Parents discussing divorce/parental issues with the child,
- Possible parental alienation,
- Counselling and its possible influence
- Changes in discipline received,
- Changes in life style including economic factors,
- Changes in responsibilities and expectations placed on the child

Finally the child is given the opportunity to voice possible positives and negatives and to give recommendations to others regarding dealing with divorce, from their perspective.

It is anticipated that while these areas have been covered that information on aspects not specifically questioned about will also be revealed.

## SUMMARY

The effect of divorce on children has, since the 1970s, received much attention in the literature. Factors that influence children's coping within this context have also been widely investigated and reported on. Considering that statistics indicate that there has been an increase of over 300% in the number of children that have been involved in divorces since 1970 to date in South Africa, it is of extreme importance that children's coping, and that which assists them in coping with the impact of their parents' divorce, is explored within the South African context. The divorce of a child's parents has been taken to be one of the most stressful events with which a child may have to cope. It is not surprising that it has been found that children are negatively impacted upon by divorce. Divorce has been found to influence children emotionally, academically, socially and even physically.

While the effects have been researched extensively the results have over time proven to be somewhat contradictory. This has in the last decade resulted in an international resurgence in interest into the effects of divorce on children. It has been suggested that children are not always negatively impacted upon by their parents' divorce and do not necessarily show long-term negative side-effects. Furthermore, in investigating children's coping with their parents' divorce it was found there was a need to explore the ways in which children cope with this phenomenon specifically from the children's perspective. Previous studies have relied largely on adults' perspectives on children's coping.

From a phenomenological perspective this study employed a grounded theory methodology, in order to allow the data from interviews with forty one children from white, middle-class families to elucidate their perspectives enabling a new understanding of children's coping within the context of divorce to be developed. Eight categories were developed incorporating coping strategies pertaining to personal factors, relationships, spiritual and therapeutic interventions, the role of extra-mural activities and a stable environment, as

well as the role of conflict and resiliency. It was found that children need to develop a personal understanding of their parents' divorce and be given the opportunity to voice their opinions in developing a sense of consistency in their lives.

A new conceptualisation of children's coping was developed, giving recognition to the intentionality and unintentionality of children's coping that existing taxonomies of coping strategies did not address.

Although this study was begun prior to the ratification of the Children's Act, 2005 (Act No. 38 of 2005), the findings of this study support some of the principles enshrined in this new Act. The children's expressed desire to have a voice on matters pertaining to themselves, the need for co-parenting and "equal time" and the value of involvement of other significant people in their lives were all concepts that were found to assist children in their coping with divorce.

**Key Words:** phenomenological study, grounded theory, coping strategies, children, divorce, co-parenting, the right to have a say, relationships.

## OPSOMMING

Sedert die jare sewentig het die uitwerking van egskeiding op kinders baie aandag in die literatuur geniet. Daar is veral wyd ondersoek ingestel en nagevors oor die faktore wat kinders in staat stel om egskeiding te hanteer. Die statistiek toon dat getal kinders wat van 1970 tot op datum in egskeidings in Suid-Afrika betrokke was, met 300% toegeneem het. Dit is dus uiters belangrik dat kinders se hantering van die uitwerking van hulle ouers se egskeiding tesame met die faktore wat hulle help om dit te hanteer, in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks ondersoek word. Die egskeiding van 'n kind se ouers word beskou as een van die stremmendste gebeurtenisse wat 'n kind die hoof moet bied. Dit is nie verrassend nie wat daar bevind is dat egskeiding kinders benadeel nie. Daar is bevind dat egskeiding kinders emosioneel, akademies, sosiaal en selfs fisies beïnvloed.

Hoewel die uitwerking van egskeiding indringend nagevors is, was die gevolgtrekkings taamlik teenstrydig. Oor die laaste dekade was daar gevolglik 'n internasionale opswelling van belangstelling in die uitwerking van egskeiding op kinders. Daar word beweer dat kinders nie altyd deur hulle ouers se egskeiding benadeel word nie en nie noodwendig negatiewe langtermyn-effekte oorhou nie. Die ondersoeke na kinders se hantering van hulle ouers se egskeiding het aan die lig gebring dat dit nodig is om die maniere waarop kinders hierdie fenomeen behartig, spesifiek van die kinders se perspektief te ondersoek. Vorige studies het hoofsaaklik gebruik gemaak van volwassenes se perspektiewe van kinders se hantering.

Uit 'n fenomenologiese oogpunt het hierdie studie gebruik gemaak van 'n begronde teorie-metodologie, sodat die data uit onderhoude met 41 kinders uit blanke middelklasgesinne die kinders se perspektiewe kon toelig en sodoende 'n nuwe insig van kinders se hantering in die konteks van egskeiding ontwikkel kon word. Agt kategorieë is ontwikkel wat hanteringstrategieë omvat wat betrekking het op persoonlike faktore, verhoudinge, geestelike en terapeutiese intervensies, die rol van buitemuurse

aktiwiteite en 'n stabiele omgewing, sowel as die rol van konflik en veerkragtigheid. Daar is bevind dat kinders 'n persoonlike insig in hulle ouers se egskeiding moet ontwikkel en die geleentheid moet kry om hul menings te lug terwyl hulle 'n gevoel van bestendigheid in hul lewens ontwikkel.

'n Nuwe konseptualisering van kinders se hantering is ontwikkel, wat erkenning gee aan die doelbewustheid en ondoelbewustheid van kinders se hantering wat die bestaande taksonomieë van hanteringstrategieë nie ingeneem het nie.

Hoewel hierdie studie aangepak is voor die bekragting van die Kinderwet, 2005 (Wet No. 38 van 2005), ondersteun die bevindinge van die studie sekere van die beginsels wat in die nuwe Wet vervat is. Die kinders se uitgesproke begeerte om seggenskap te mag hê in sake wat op hulle betrekking het, die behoefte aan gesamentlike ouerskap en 'gelyke tyd' en die waarde van die betrokkenheid van ander belangrike mense in hulle lewens was almal konsepte wat kinders help om egskeiding te hanteer.

**Sleutelwoorde:** fenomenologiese studie, gegronde teorie, hanteringstrategieë, kinders, egskeiding, gesamentlike ouerskap, die reg op seggenskap, verhoudinge.