

Data Trends

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This news brief alerts you to a very comprehensive article on the status of research on coping with stress in children and adolescents. In their article, *Coping with stress during childhood and adolescence: Problems, progress, and potential in theory and research*, Compas et al. discuss past and current research on coping, and provide findings generalized from the literature review upon which the article is based. They also propose critical areas of research that have yet to be explored, such as research on youth with minority ethnic/racial backgrounds, children with low socioeconomic backgrounds, and research directly linking coping strategies to children having severe emotional problems. In fact, almost all of the research conducted to date on coping in children and adolescents has involved Caucasian, middle class children, and no known studies utilize DSM-IV diagnostic criteria as a research variable.

Primary problems related to research on coping in youth concern the various and detailed conceptualizations of coping itself. For example, sub-categories that may appear in coping research can include: emotion-focused, problem-focused, and behaviorally regulated coping strategies (active, passive, or withdrawn), primary and secondary coping strategies, and conscious and unconscious coping strategies.

Other challenges to researchers concern relationships between children's development and coping strategies. The authors suggest that "[a]t least three questions are fundamental to understanding coping from a developmental perspective. First, do the nature and structure of coping change with age or developmental level? Second, can coping be reliably and validly measured over the course of development during childhood and adolescence? And third, do the important correlates of coping, including symptoms of psychopathology, change with development?" (p. 91).

Methodological problems constitute yet another challenge to research on coping in children and adolescents; and indeed this section of the article represents a thorough and reflective discussion of methodological problems involved in interviews, questionnaires, observational and self-report instruments often used to measure coping. To this end, three tables are included that list interview, questionnaire, and observational measurements and their internal validity and test-retest reliability.

A fourth table lists studies of the association between coping and psychological adjustment and symptoms of psychopathology and significant findings. The authors write: "Evidence from more than 60 studies suggests that coping matters in the psychological adjustment of children and adolescents exposed to stress. The way that children and adolescents cope with stress in their lives is an important correlate of psychological adjustment and symptoms of both internalizing and externalizing syndromes of psychopathology. At the most general level, problem-focused and engagement coping have been found to be associated with better adjustment, whereas emotion-focused coping and disengagement coping have been found to be related to poorer adjustment" (p. 121). In sum, this article provides a rich source--including 185 references--of coping literature in general, and in children and adolescents, and may be a "must read" for researchers interested in this area of children's mental health services delivery.

Full reference for the article is: Compas, B. E., Connor-Smith, J. K., Saltzman, H., Thomsen, A. H., Wadsworth, M. E. (2001). Coping with stress during childhood and adolescence: Problems, progress, and potential in theory and research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 127(1) 87-127.

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