ATTACHMENT IN THE STEPFAMILY –
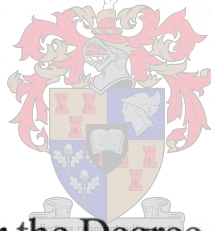# A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE

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Social Work at the University of Stellenbosch

Promotor: Professor S Green

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and has not previously, in its entirety or in part, been submitted at any University for a degree.

31-01-2003

SUMMARY

Since demographers are predicting that by the year 2010 stepfamilies will be the most prevalent type of family in the USA, it is not surprising that stepfamily members in South Africa also constitute a significant proportion of the clients of therapists, counsellors and social workers.

From a developmental approach the present study examined attachment in stepfamilies with children in middle childhood. The literature review was focused on research findings related to the issues examined in the study. Information was collected using multiple informants and multiple methods. These included interviews, questionnaires and checklists of attachment behaviour symptoms. Because differences in perspectives were expected, information was sought from parents and target children in order to obtain a broad view of family attachment. The research design was qualitative and quantitative in nature.

The main findings revealed that, although stepfamily members considered their families to be attached, factors such as the stepparent-stepchild relationship, length of marriage and unrealistic expectations had a negative influence on attachment. Findings confirm that attachment to the parents remain the primary source of security and that the child's willingness to participate in the partnership, influence attachment.

The results clearly demonstrate that the children did not necessarily hold similar perceptions of the attachment in the family as the parents. Attachment theory provided a framework for understanding the complexities in stepfamily relationships.

A synopsis of social work intervention with stepfamilies was developed based on an extensive literature study. Structured techniques within the five forms of play were used to consciously replicate healthy parent-child relationships in order to facilitate attachment. A central feature of the interventions discussed, is the active participation of the parent with whom the child is expected to learn to form an attachment relationship.

OPSOMMING

In die lig van demograwe se voorspelling dat stiefgesinne teen die jaar 2010 die mees algemene gesinsvorm in die VSA gaan wees, is dit nie vreemd dat in Suid-Afrika stiefgesinne reeds 'n beduidende persentasie van terapeute, beraders en maatskaplike werkers se ladings uitmaak nie.

Vanuit 'n ontwikkelings benadering is ondersoek ingestel na binding in stiefgesinne met 'n kind/ers in die middelkinderjare. Die literatuurstudie het verband gehou met veranderlikes wat in hierdie navorsing bestudeer is. Inligting is ingewin deur gebruik te maak van meervoudige respondente en metodes. Dit het onderhoude, vraelyste en 'n oorsiglys van bindingsgedrag ingesluit. Aangesien daar verwag is dat gesinslede se persepsies sal verskil, is kinders en ouers genader ten einde 'n breë oorsig te verkry van gesinsbinding. Beide kwalitatiewe en kwantitatiewe navorsingsmetodes is gebruik.

Bevindinge het aan die lig gebring dat lede van stiefgesinne opvallend ooreenstem oor die binding in die gesin. Stiefouer-stiefkind verhoudings, die duur van die huwelik en onrealistiese verwagtinge is van die veranderlikes wat blyk 'n invloed te hê op die vorming van binding. Bevindinge bevestig dat kinders in die middelkinderjare se primêre binding steeds met die ouers is, maar dat hierdie binding afhanklik is van die kind se bereidheid om te deel in hierdie vennootskap.

Resultate dui ook onteenseglik daarop dat die kinders en ouers nie noodwendig saamstem in hulle beoordeling van binding in die stiefgesin nie. Bindingsteorie het 'n raamwerk gebied vir die bestudering van die kompleksiteit van stiefgesin verhoudinge.

Praktykgerigte maarskaplikwerk-hulpverleningstrategieë is ontwikkel, gegrond op 'n uitgebreide literatuurstudie. Die strategieë is gestruktureerd en gegrond op vyf spelvorme met ondersteunende tegnieke. Deur normale bindingsgedrag tussen ouer en kind na te boots, word binding gefasiliteer. Die sentrale kenmerk van hierdie hulpverleningstrategieë is die aktiewe betrokkenheid van die stiefouer.

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9. All honour to the Great Friend of Families. To God be the Glory.

L Corrie   January 2003

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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION REGARDING THE STUDY

1.1   Introduction

That the family is the primary and strongest system to which an individual can belong, since it conditions and determines the future of its members, is generally accepted. Given this assumption, it follows that it is important to understand how differences in family structure influence the function of the family as a system, as well as that of its individual members.

This researcher has been a practising social worker for the past 18 years, of which the past six years were spent as a social worker in private practice. During this period, she became increasingly aware of the fact that, in South African society, stepfamilies are rapidly becoming a widely occurring type of family. Furthermore, stepfamilies are perceived to be complex, with their own distinctive problems.

To work with such a distinctive family unit requires thorough knowledge of, and insight into, the special dynamics and developmental tasks of this particular form of family. It requires attention to both the power of the present, and the lingering impact of the past. The social work profession, with its distinctive ecosystems approach, is especially suited to meet the unique needs of stepfamilies.

Without knowledge of, and insight into, the dynamics of a stepfamily (including the role of the child) the social worker cannot possibly guide the family into a strong family unit during their period of adjustment and attachment. The intervention of social work should assist stepfamilies to master developmental tasks, thus becoming an integrated family structure.

This chapter deals with the problem statement, the motivation for the proposed study, aim of the study, field of research, research methodology, factors facilitating or limiting the research and a clarification of the main terms used.

1.2   **Problem statement**

The stepfamily is an important family form to be studied and understood, since it is believed to be the fastest-growing family form in the United States in the 1990s, as well as in South Africa. A marked tendency in the South African white society is that contemporary family life is changing rapidly and that there is an increase in stepfamilies replacing the traditional family. According to the Central Statistical Service (1990), the number of children involved in cases of divorce has increased considerably in South Africa from 1985 to 1989. Burman and Fuchs (1986) state that between 1978 and 1982 the rate of divorce for whites in South Africa has increased by 47%. They suggest that, if the existing divorce rate remains the same as in 1982, one in 2.24 marriages will probably culminate in divorce at some time. No more recent statistics, however, could be obtained; but if it is borne in mind that 80% of divorced males and 75% of females in the USA remarry (Furstenberg & Spanier, 1987; Graham, 1988:3) we can assume that the incidence of stepfamilies is increasing. If one adds to these numbers those families where one parent has died, or where a parent had not married at all, the large number of stepfamilies becomes apparent. From their demographic projections, Glick and Lin (1986) conclude that this type of family will outnumber all others by the year 2000 (Kelly, 1995:3; Papernow, 1993:5). The result is a family with a very special set of developmental tasks and challenges. Now, a rapidly expanding body of academic, clinical, and popular literature explores stepfamilies (Ganong & Coleman, 1984, 1986; Stepfamily Association of America and National Council on Family Relations).

Larson (1992:15) states that the most common type of stepfamily is the stepfather family; in other words, the biological mother has received custody of minor children in most cases.

Knaub, Hanna and Stinnett (1984:42) opines that: "...the remarried family is made up of parts having already participated in disparate and usually unhappy family experiences. The primary task of the remarried family, then, is the integration of two previously established part families which will inevitably be a stressful process." Conflict in the stepfamily usually causes stress, because the children are biologically related to only one parent. With little support and almost no preparation for dealing with their new roles, stepparents find that it more difficult than they could have imagined to establish solid family relationships (Craig, 1986:453).

Hepworth and Larsen (2002:481) state that stepfamilies are especially vulnerable to becoming dysfunctional, inter alia, because of the absence of a history of emotional attachment among their members. "Attachment" is the emotional bond or connectedness that grows between children and parents, and vice versa, and this facilitates healthy development. Research by Amato (1991) confirms that children in stepfamilies experience a lesser degree of attachment than those in traditional families, as each of the members of a stepfamily goes his/her own way and they seldom do things together as a family. A survey among stepfamilies who have approached a certain organisation for help, found, inter alia, that the main problem revealed itself as tension due to a lack of attachment (Wald, 1981:131). Attachment involves the continuous selective and reciprocal building of connections between individuals and the family as a group, and it is integral to each member's social role, as determined by the culture. The existence of an attachment denotes a relatedness, an attachment, between persons.

All members of stepfamilies have faced numerous losses and changes, sometimes concomitant with psychological damage. Many stepfamilies soon find themselves faced with a task more challenging than they could ever dream of. Recent studies indicate that stepchildren often experience behaviour problems (Lofquist, 28-01-2001) and that adults show a lack of commitment, which could lead to the remarried parent not allowing him-/herself to have an adequate attachment with the new spouse and children (Visher & Visher, 1988:166).

According to Delaney (1997:iv), answers to this problem symptomatology can be found in Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory that stresses the emotional attachment between a child and its care-giver (in this case, the parents). Dysfunction in these relationships leads to disrupted attachment, and may intensify a predisposition towards insecurity, hostility and negative behaviour. Attachment is not restricted to infancy. In the young child, attachment can be supplemented by new attachments. In the stepfamily, subsequent attachments must be formed between the stepparent and the child. The chasm between parents' experiences of their family not only lies in their different positions in the family structure, but also in the very different quality of each adult's attachment to the children in the family.

Although a stepfamily is a complex family unit, its family relationships need not necessarily be characterised by a lack of attachment. The researchers' experience has shown that stepfamilies are often brought to the attention of professionals (e.g., counsellors, psychologists and social workers) by their symptomatic behaviour. In order to render goal-directed service, it is essential that social workers possess some knowledge of attachment behaviour and how young children are affected by remarriage, since this influences attachment behaviour. A perspective of attachment will help practitioners to understand the character of stepfamily relationships and what the developmental consequences might be if a child experiences non-attachment. Social workers must consider how to maintain, strengthen or provide affectional attachments and an experience of good quality attachment for children who are brought to their attention. A developmental approach, as described by Sager *et al.* (1983) and Wald (1981), endorses the importance of attachments for children and adults. It is important that new warm, responsive relationships should be established in the stepfamily. Since not much is known in the social work profession about children in stepfamilies, particularly as regards the attachment process, it is essential that research be undertaken to increase knowledge and allow social workers to offer an effective professional service to these families.

In the context of this study, the problem areas can be summarised as follows:

- The stepfamily has a very special set of developmental tasks and challenges, the primary task being to integrate two separate families through a process of attachment.
- Stepchildren often experience behavioural problems, and family members' lack of commitment to the new family inhibits attachment.
- The social work profession, with its distinctive developmental approach, is especially suited to meet the unique needs of stepfamilies in their formation of attachments.

1.3   Motivation for the proposed study

Literature, with regard to the attachment process between a stepparent and a stepchild, is limited. Some authors, such as Sager *et al.* (1983), Visher and Visher (1979) and Wald (1981), do refer to the attachment process, but to a limited extent. More recent studies include Greenberg *et al.* (1983; 1990) and Waters *et al.* (1991). The available literature on step-relationships mainly emphasises the complexity of these relationships. A preliminary literature review and discussions with experts in

the field of attachment and stepfamilies have supported the researcher's conviction that a comprehensive study undertaken from a social work perspective such as this, has not yet been done in South Africa.

Social work, as a helping profession, has been involved historically with the family on a firm foundation based on theory and practice. Therefore, relationships and the quality of experience within relationships are of the utmost interest and relevance to social workers who are involved with children and their families.

The three relationships that are of importance during their life cycle and which reveal individuals' attachment history and personality type are:

1)   Relationships with parents,

2)   Relationships with a sexual partner, and

3)   Relationships with own children.

Social workers work with all of these three types of relationships. An attachment perspective is conducive for an understanding of the character of relationships - in this case, in stepfamilies.

Today, the phenomenon of the stepfamily constitutes one of the most marked changes in family life. Therefore, the social work profession should study this phenomenon and take cognisance of literature, research and practice in this field. The ability to understand what takes place in families allows practitioners to keep their thoughts clear and their emotions engaged (Howe, 1996:3). The intervention of social work can make a difference, turning a hopeless struggle into a constructive movement towards the integration of stepfamilies, on condition that the social worker is knowledgeable about stepfamily issues and dynamics. During discussions with social workers, it became clear that they felt uncertain about intervention. From the perspective of social work, it is evident that information on attachment and the adverse effect of inadequate attachment in stepfamilies is overdue.

In South Africa, there is a dearth of literature and research on how the young child in a stepfamily experiences their family relationships, especially regarding the attachment process. This study will

demonstrate that remarriage adds certain additional tasks to the child, which may obstruct the successful completion of important developmental tasks, as described by Erikson (1963) and Piaget (1972). Intervention by the social work profession with stepfamilies may help to prevent pathological outcomes. Therefore, this study may add a new dimension to the services of professional social work to stepfamilies by providing the social worker with technological skills in the interest of effective service. It is believed that the attachment information presented in this dissertation could also be applied effectively to adoption and fostercare families.

Stepfamilies approach the offices of social workers for numerous reasons. Whether because of embarrassment or a lack of information, few identify themselves as members of stepfamilies. The following examples illustrate how these individuals are unaware to what degree stepfamily dynamics contribute to their pain:

> X, age twelve, is referred to counselling because she is failing in school. During the family interview, her stepmother begins talking about how unresponsive this young girl has been despite her efforts to provide the parenting missed from an alcoholic mother. The father sits uncomfortably between his daughter and his wife, and the child looks sullenly at the floor.
>
> Y is referred to counselling because his work is deteriorating. He is divorced and the non-custodial father of two young daughters whom he rarely sees, and is now married to a woman with two young children. His wife is concerned that he doesn't seem involved with her children. He wonders if this is a sign of his "inability to love" and is worried that he might fail at yet another marriage.
>
> Z: "I hate my stepmother. I don't know why I hate her because she is a nice person, really. I feel terrible that I hate her. I feel guilty about it sometimes. I don't know why I hate my stepmother. She is a nice person".

None of the people described above attributed their struggles to involvement in the normal developmental process of becoming a stepfamily. In fact, what is most striking in the researcher's work with members of stepfamilies, is that they do not view themselves as members of a special kind of family that faces unique challenges. They rather regard themselves - and helping professionals often view them - as members of poorly functioning biological families. While normal stepfamily dynamics remain unfamiliar, none of the people described above can be assisted adequately with the central dilemma in their lives: the process of making attachments in their stepfamilies.

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In her private practice, this researcher experiences such a need for information to provide guidelines on how to deal with relationship problems or problem symptomatology resulting from inadequate attachment. As this research relies on the attachment and development theory (with special emphasis on the life cycle), it will supply social workers with a body of knowledge that could be implemented as a base for more effective and appropriate intervention directed at attachment in the stepfamily.

A personal interest in the stepfamily, the dearth of relevant literature, and the fact that there is an increasing need for skills to foster attachment in clinical services in practice, has motivated this research.

1.4   Aim of the study

The aim of the study is the description and measurement of the attachment of middle childhood children in stepfamilies, and to suggest strategies for social work intervention to facilitate attachment.

In order to achieve the aim of this study, the following objectives have been formulated:

- To describe the process of stepfamily development.
- To reflect on the development of children in middle childhood and to illustrate that their parents' remarriage brings about major adjustments.
- To examine and describe attachment behaviour in middle childhood, based upon the attachment theory and related clinical literature.
- To examine and describe adult attachment as applied to the stepfamily.
- To make recommendations, based on the findings in the empirical study, as to how the social work profession can contribute toward facilitating attachment in the stepfamily.

1.5   Field of research

The focus of this study is upon stepfamilies with children in middle childhood. Pre-primary children and adolescents were not included. The study also excluded outside family members, for example non-custodial parents and non-residential children. Social work intervention with children younger

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than 6 years and older than 12 years is possible, but requires a different approach. Younger children often find it difficult to verbalise their emotional needs and are extremely dependent on physical nurturing. Findings by Armsden *et al.* (1990), Greenberg *et al.* (1983) and Paterson *et al.* (1994) suggest that, from early to late adolescence, substantial changes take place in attachment relationships with parents as well as with peers. It is not the goal of this study to cover all of these areas.

When children sense that the principal attachment figure is unavailable, which often happens when parents remarry, they may seek alternative attachment figures. An important instance of unavailability of the attachment figure is the loss of, or separation from, this figure through death, a relationship break-up, divorce, and remarriage. The loss of an attachment figure is a powerful stressor.

Several researchers (Ainsworth, 1985; Bowlby, 1969/1982; Delaney, 1997; Hughes, 1997; Marcus, 1991) have argued that children, who fail to establish secure attachments to parents, are likely to seek surrogate attachment figures. The trauma associated with divorce and remarriage could lead to unsatisfactory attachments. Alternative attachment figures could be any reliable person who proves to be accessible and responsive; they may be teachers, older siblings or stepparents. This research is based on the latter assumption and will examine the strength of attachments in simple, as well as complex stepfamilies.

Due to the nature of the problem under investigation, the researcher did not place a geographical restriction on the target group. There were strong elements of a snowball sampling technique in order to include stepfamilies in the study. For practical reasons, such as the location of the researcher and the goodwill of colleagues and stepfamilies, the geographical area for the empirical research was Gauteng, the Northern and the Western Cape.

The evidence for the cross-cultural validity of the attachment theory is impressive (Van Ijzendoorn & Sagi, 1999:727). Van Ijzendoorn and Sagi (1999:730) emphasize that cross-cultural studies are specialised and limited. The researcher considers South Africa as an uncharted territory in respect of the development of attachment. Existing studies cannot be considered to be representative of the

entire South African population (1999:731). The choice of white stepfamilies was based on the fact that data on attachment in the coloured and black communities are still lacking. Very little, too, is known about the occurrence of remarriage in these communities. In future, this could be a relevant field for research. In the light of these facts, and also because the latter would be an independent field of research, it was decided to eliminate culture as a variable.

1.6   Research methodology

The exploratory research method, as applied in this study, does not propose any hypothesis. This study mainly aims to refine concepts and develop questions and hypotheses for further research (Mouton & Marais, 1990:43). The strategies implemented for this exploratory research include a review of available relevant literature and a survey among parents and children in stepfamilies by means of appropriate questionnaires. Although the aim of the research is description and exploration, standardised tests and measures (FACES II and IPPA) were incorporated. The main advantage of these measuring instruments was that they provided uniform administration and scoring procedures as a basis for comparison. This ensures the validity and reliability of the collected data (Grinnell, 1993:199).

The research is both quantitative and qualitative by nature (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Grinnell, 1993). The results of quantitative studies done by other researchers (Ainsworth, 1985; Sager *et al.,* 1983; Wald, 1981) will be implemented, especially when describing the formation of a stepfamily and their attachment behaviour. Support for the qualitative nature of this study was found in the writings of Clingempeel, Brand and Segal (1987:69,89) who formulated ideas regarding research methods and the quality of stepfamily relationships. These writers propose a multilevel-multivariable-developmental approach to research on stepfamilies (Clingempeel, Brand & Segal, 1987:65).

Babbie and Mouton (2001:270) and De Vos (1998:242-243) describe characteristics of qualitative research. The following methodology also applies to this study:
- Respondents were actively involved in the research process.

- Rich qualitative data was gathered in interviews with more than one member of the stepfamily (multiple sources).

- From a basic process orientation, the phenomena being studied were viewed as dynamic and ever-changing.

- The researcher is strongly convicted of the uniqueness of each stepfamily and its circumstances. Meaning was derived from the respondents' perspective ("Verstehen").

No single theory is pre-eminent in guiding stepfamily research. This research was based on multiple theories. The attachment theory predicts that the formation of strong attachments of affection and involvement between stepparents and stepchildren would be difficult (Hetherington *et al.,* 1999:4). However, the attachment theory, which is also based on the evolutionary theory, does not propose that warm, caring relationships cannot develop between stepparents and stepchildren, but suggests that such relationships would be more difficult to attain than those between biological parents and children. Time-related changes in the functioning of families may be viewed from a family development perspective (Clingempeel, Brand & Segal, 1987:86). According to this perspective, families progress through a series of stages, coinciding with the ubiquitous life-cycle stages. This may alter role relationships among family members (e.g. shifts in custody arrangements for children from prior marriages, the birth of a child to the current marriage, re-divorce, and age-related transitions of children).

1.6.1 Empirical study

A non-random, incidental sample of the population of stepfamilies in Gauteng, the Northern and the Western Cape was drawn. Respondents who met certain criteria (e.g., married, age of stepchild 6 to 12 years) were selected on the grounds of availability (Grinnell, 1993). In this exploratory study, it was not important for the sample to be representative in order to generalise. Because it was difficult to identify and locate stepfamilies who met the criteria, the strategy of snowball sampling, as described by Babbie and Mouton (2001) and Grinnell (1993), was applied. Respondents were resident in Pretoria, Cape Town, Upington, Kimberley, Springbok, Kathu, Kuruman and Postmasburg. In total, 100 adults and 68 children in ages ranging from 6 to 12 years were included in the study. Parental permission was sought for the participation of the children. A convenience

sample of available social workers in Gauteng, the Northern and Western Cape was identified to assist with the completion of questionnaires.

The criteria for participation in this study were that one or both of the remarried partners should be a stepparent, and that the stepchildren should be residential and between the ages of 6 to 12 years. Various types of stepfamilies, for example, stepfather and stepmother families, whether custodial or non-custodial parents, irrespective of a second or third marriage, were represented in this study.

Instruments for data-collection

The incorporation of self-report instruments (IPPA, FACES II Couple version and FACES II Family version) was viewed as justified, given the aim of the research, namely to examine and describe attachment behaviour in stepfamilies. These scales were standardised in the USA, but not in South Africa. However, they were considered to be appropriate for use in this study as the characteristics of families in America are relatively similar to those of South African families. Both IPPA and FACES II measure linearly and are more fully described in chapter 6. However, these were the only available scales, and were the most appropriate for the aim of this research. In addition to these scales, the researcher formulated two questionnaires containing both coded and uncoded items for data collection from parents and children. The questionnaires consisted largely of structured questions, but they also provided various unstructured or open-ended questions in order to give respondents the opportunity to answer questions in their own words.

This study has some special features that should be noted, as they are rare in studies of stepfamilies. Firstly, it studies different types of stepfamilies and includes a large sample of blended families involving unrelated stepsiblings from both the parents' previous marriages. Secondly, the study examines attachment at three levels: that of the couple, the parent-child and the family. Thirdly, the focus is on the child in middle childhood, as very little is known of the development of attachment in this phase. Fourthly, this study obtained data from multiple sources, for example, from both adult members of the family, as well as the targeted child, to attain a true picture of their family life. At the time of this study, the researcher was unaware of similar comprehensive studies.

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1.6.2 **Literature review**

The researcher conducted an extensive literature review and she analysed local and foreign literature in books and journals. The purpose of the literature review was dual by nature: firstly, to ascertain what research had already been done in this field and, secondly, to determine the appropriateness and feasibility of this study. With the assistance of a subject reference at the J.S. Gericke Library at the University of Stellenbosch, she identified applicable sources and also utilised the libraries of the Universities of the Free State and of Pretoria, as well as the Reading Room of the Department of Social Work at the University of Stellenbosch. CD ROM searches were done on Sociofile and Popfile. Towards the end of 2000 she applied for, and received, a computer printout from the Human Sciences Research Council to determine what research had been or was currently being done in this field. She found that there was no current research and that no study focusing on attachment behaviour had yet been undertaken from a social work perspective. Apart from her studies on stepfamilies, the researcher similarly investigated related literature on emotional attachment, and also examined literature on attachment in the case of adoption and fostercare, as the study raises similar points in these cases.

She extended the search for appropriate material to include websites and information network systems. Garbers (1996:74) rightly stated that the crucial challenge for the utilisation of modern technology would be the evaluation of the quality, and the selection of, the relevant information from the plethora of available data.

As information relevant to this field is limited, and none from a social work perspective was available, the researcher extended the search to the fields of psychology, education, sociology and the neurological sciences. This focused mainly on literature published after 1990, although some earlier authoritative research reports were also implemented.

Literature focusing specifically on the attachment process in the stepfamily is limited. Therefore, the researcher contacted professional persons abroad, who kindly provided literature and other sources of information in this field. There is a serious shortage of literature and theory on the attachment behaviour of children in their middle childhood years. On the limitation in the attachment theories of

Bowlby and Ainsworth, Waters *et al.* (1991) remark as follows: "... the Bowlby/Ainsworth perspective will remain vulnerable to the criticism that it is a theory of infant attachment, a theory of adult attachment, and a great deal in between left to the imagination."

1.7 Factors facilitating or limiting the research

The main limitations and deficiencies of this study could be summarised as follows:

Initially, the lack of literature regarding attachment in the stepfamily, especially from a social work perspective, was a serious problem. However, this problem was resolved by consulting foreign literature on several related disciplines, as well as by taking cognisance of attachment in the case of adoption and fostercare.

Stepfamilies were often reluctant to participate in research of this nature. Factors that played a role included cases where there were pending custody disputes, or where stepfamilies thought that the information would present a possible risk, despite the fact that they were assured of confidentiality.

There were numerous obstacles in the process of involving parents and children in the research. For some families, the time factor was a problem as it would take approximately one and a half hours of their time.

Another limiting factor was the shortage of suitable measurement scales to measure attachment in the system. In an attempt to solve this problem, both the parents and the children were involved, that is multi-source and multi-level information was used. A further limitation was that one cannot make any generalisations from this random sample, neither can one infer any conclusive deductions, because of the exploratory nature of the research.

Research of this nature is costly. Besides the permission that the researcher received for the use of the two measurement scales, she had to import scales, related material and literature from Britain and Minneapolis. This was a time-consuming process that negatively influenced the time schedule for the completion of the research project.

1.8   Clarification of terms

Attachment

Bowlby (1969) uses the term "attachment" to describe the strong affectional ties that bind a person to an intimate partner. Broadly speaking, attachment may be defined as a "... lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (Delaney, 1997:3). Attachment is the emotional bond that grows between children and parents, and vice versa. Olson (2000:145) uses the same definition when he refers to attachment as the "... emotional bonding that family members have toward one another." Essentially, attachment is an abstraction - an unseen internal state in the child and parent (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Mahler *et al.*, 1975). Hughes (1997:10) refers to attachment as a unique relationship between a child and his/her parent that facilitates the healthy developmental patterns that need such a relationship. Just having a relationship with a parent does not ensure that the child is "attached" to the parent. The mother's affectionate feelings for the child are regarded as maternal attachment. Bowlby (1969) believes that, if children do not have attachment before the age of five, they can experience problems with normal psychological development. During infancy, attachment behaviour focuses on one person, that is the care-giver (or mother). In later years, the attachment that the child had with his/her mother may be supplemented with new attachments, but these do not destroy the primary attachment with the mother figure. In the stepfamily, the child has to attach with the stepparent. This parent's behaviour is of great importance for the development of attachment behaviour. In the researcher's opinion, a strong causal relationship exists between individuals' experience with their parents and their (the individuals') capacity to form emotional attachments in later life.

In this dissertation, the term "attachment" will be used when reference is made to attachment and/or bonding. Although bonding is a term characteristic of the Circumplex Model, and given that attachment refers to the same constructs as bonding, only the term attachment will be used for the purpose of clarity.

Attunement

Daniel Stern (1985:141) describes affective attunement in the mother-child relationship as building blocks for the strength of the relationship. Attunement depends upon the capacity for non-verbal communication, for example, eye movement and tone of voice. According to Stern (1985), in affective attunement, the mother's activities match the emotional state of her child and do not simply imitate his/her behaviour: if the child vocalises, so does the mother. Experiences of attunement also help children to learn to regulate and integrate feelings, so that they eventually form the early experience of "self." In therapy, such experiences of attunement are crucial to help poorly attached children to feel connected to their therapists and parents, and to begin to regulate their emotions (Hughes, 1997:14).

When a parent is attuned to a child, the parent manifests an attitude that has five central characteristics. In general, the parent is able to maintain an attitude that is **accepting**, **empathic** and **loving**, as well as **curious** and **playful**. The underlying attitude that these behaviours convey is ideal and appropriate for facilitating an attachment between parents and children. The same attitude is crucial in convincing a poorly attached 8 or 10 year-old child that forming a reciprocal relationship with a stepparent does elicit varied and rich pleasurable feelings.

The child in middle childhood

According to the Child Care Act (74/1983), Bosman-Swanepoel and Wessels (1992:13) regard a "child" as "a person under the age of 18 years." For the purpose of this study, the term "child in middle childhood" refers to the period during the child's 6th and 12th years. This period is considered critically important for the development of children's self-concept, as well as their cognitive, social and emotional powers (for a full description, see chapter 3).

Custodial parent

The term "custodial parent" denotes the parent who received legal custody of minor children at the time of divorce. This parent could also be referred to as "the residential parent." He/she could be the

biological father or the biological mother. It is beyond the scope of this work to traverse, in detail, the general powers of the custodial parent, but Schäfer (1993:98) imparts that this implies that the custodial parent has the decisive say in issues concerning the children's education, religion, choice of associates, medical care and treatment. Powers of the custodial parent apply equally to the mother and the father.

Non-residential parent

The "non-residential parent" is the parent with whom the child lives less than the majority of the time (Visher & Visher, 1996:3).

Residential parent

Visher and Visher (1996:3) describe a "residential parent" as the parent with whom the child lives most of the time. Usually, but not always, this is the custodial parent (Schäfer, 1993).

Stepfamily

In recent years, attempts have been made to normalise stepfamilies by using different names to reduce the negative connotation. Thus, the words "blended" (Poppen & White, 1984), "re-married" (McGoldrick & Carter, 1988), "bi-nuclear" (Ahrons & Rodgers, 1987) and even "re-constituted" (Robinson, 1984) have been used. Kelly (1995:4) states that a return to the use of the term "step" seems to be a recent trend.

Wald (1981:2) refers to the stepfamily as a "two-parent, two-generation unit that comes into being on the legal remarriage of a widowed or divorced person who has biological or adopted children from a prior union with whom he or she is regularly involved." A stepfamily can be created due to divorce, death or an illicit relationship. After the loss of a spouse, as a result of death or divorce, an adult thus forms such a family after remarriage to someone with, or without, children.

According to the literature, there are many kinds of stepfamilies (Papernow, 1993; Sager *et al.*,

1983; Visher & Visher, 1979). A "simple stepfamily" forms when a single adult with no children enters into an already established parent-child relationship.

A "complex stepfamily" is one into which both adults bring children, creating a structure that, from the outset, includes two fully developed parent-child teams (Hetherington *et al.*, 1999). A "stepfather family" comprises a mother, her biological children, and a stepfather; and a "stepmother family" includes a father, his biological children, and a stepmother (Papernow, 1993).

This research borrowed a definition from Visher & Visher (1988:9) who define a stepfamily as "a household in which there is an adult couple, at least one of whom has a child from a previous relationship." This definition is broad enough to include families who have, or do not have, primary custody of the children; couples who are, or who are not married; families with one or two biological parents; and families where one parent has been divorced, widowed, or not previously married.

1.9   Presentation of the research report

CHAPTER 1:   GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION REGARDING THE
                        STUDY

This chapter discusses the problem statement, motivation for the proposed study, purpose of the study, field of research, research methodology, factors facilitating or limiting the research and clarifies terms.

CHAPTER 2:   STEPFAMILY DEVELOPMENT

This chapter outlines the myths about stepfamilies and follows with a discussion of the development of the stepfamily, based upon the developmental approach and the Circumplex Model of marital and family systems.

CHAPTER 3: MIDDLE CHILDHOOD AND THE STEPFAMILY

This chapter focuses on the physical, cognitive, personality and social development of children in middle childhood, as well as the impact of remarriage and its influence on this stage of development.

CHAPTER 4: ATTACHMENT THEORY AND THE CHILD IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

Besides the development of attachment, this chapter examines attachment in middle childhood, particularly attachment styles and behaviours. It also examines the role of working models and attachment disorders.

CHAPTER 5: ATTACHMENT IN ADULTS

This chapter describes styles in adult attachment, analyses the role of internal working models and presents the attachment theory in remarriage.

CHAPTER 6: EMPIRICAL STUDY: ATTACHMENT IN THE STEPFAMILY

Based on empirical research, this chapter describes attachment in stepfamilies.

CHAPTER 7: SYNOPSIS OF SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION WITH STEPFAMILIES

This chapter incorporates the empirical work and the literature review to describe a helping model for social workers.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research report contains comments and recommendations based on the research findings.

1.10 Conclusion

The stepfamily is a rapidly increasing form of family life in South African society. There are reasonable grounds for assuming that one in every two current families will be affected by step-parenthood. Going beyond a mere description of the formation and the effect of the stepfamily on the child in middle childhood, the main aim of this study is to examine attachment in the stepfamily and to provide an outline for intervention in stepfamilies. The social work profession, with its

distinctive developmental approach and concern about families, is especially suited to meet the unique needs of stepfamilies in the formation of attachments.

CHAPTER 2

STEPFAMILY DEVELOPMENT

2.1   Introduction

"The stepfamily has been compared to a challenging and complex chess game, to a delicate and intricate spider's web and to a chaotic toddler's birthday party" (Einstein, 1980, in Mullins, 1990:11). These analogies provide some indication of the complexity of the stepfamily, which is a little-understood segment of family life. In order to understand the complexity of a stepfamily's functioning more fully, an awareness is necessary of such a family's network of roles and relationships that affect its development.

Stepfamilies are formed when people remarry after a divorce or after the death of a spouse, and then establish a new family. Such a family may consist of children from a previous marriage, from either the husband or the wife's side, or from both. Often children are also born from this new union – thus children are literally "yours, mine and ours" (Papernow, 1993; Sager *et al.*, 1983; Seuling, 1985; Visher & Visher, 1996:3). The prior divorce and the formation of a stepfamily create a network of people and relationships, which includes:

- the former spouses of one or both of the parents.
- the families of origin of all the adults.
- the children of each of the adults.

The result is a family with a very special set of developmental tasks and challenges.

Stepfamilies and helping professionals involved with them need a developmental map (Papernow, 1993:8) because, within a developmental context, events can be perceived to be the normal effects of early stepfamily realities. "The power of a developmental model is that it offers workable ideas about what is normal and predictable as opposed to what signals a crisis" (Papernow, 1993:8). A full understanding of the developmental tasks involved in becoming a stepfamily requires an appreciation of the context within which this developmental process must take place.

This chapter begins with a discussion on stepfamily myths, the unique structure of the stepfamily and the decision to remarry, followed by two theoretical models of family functioning: the Developmental Approach and the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems. This will help to set the stage for a discussion on the development of stepfamilies.

2.2   Myths about stepfamilies

The majority of stepfamilies seem to be enmeshed in myths. "Myths" are beliefs that strongly influence the way that members of a stepfamily adjust to their new family, and react to one another. Visher and Visher (1988:121) discuss myths in greater detail. Most myths are negative and tend to affect behaviour toward stepfamily members, as such. Wilson and Daly (1987:215) are of the opinion that stepparents have a rather poor reputation, due to myths. For this research, the following myths about stepfamilies can be regarded as stumbling blocks in the development of these families.

Myth # 1 - The stepfamily is the same as a biological family

This is a myth that suggests that a stepfamily is exactly like a biological family. In brief, stepfamilies are families "born out of loss," with adults and children merging at very different stages in their life cycles. The parent/child relationships precede the new couple's relationship, and children frequently move back and forth between two households, as they now have a parent in more than one household (Visher & Visher, 1988). Clinicians have identified the tendency of some stepfamilies to deny their status (Visher & Visher, 1979), and researchers have reported that members of stepfamilies have a common desire that others should perceive them to be a "normal" family (Coleman & Ganong, 1987:21; Duberman, 1975). Structurally, the stepfamily is different from the nuclear family, but "different" does not mean "abnormal." Each kind of family is valuable, but has different characteristics. Just because there now are two adults in the stepfamily does not mean that this recreates a biological family. To attempt to fit a stepfamily into the mould of a biological family will do more harm than good. Visher and Visher (1988:122) regard this myth to be the greatest stumbling block to stepfamily integration. For a successful adjustment to the stepfamily, the reality of the stepfamily situation must be discussed before the remarriage takes place. It stands to reason that the stepfamily cannot function similarly to the biological family, given the complex structure and number of relationships that must be managed (Coleman & Ganong, 1987:160).

Myth # 2 - Love occurs instantly between the child and the stepparent

The expectation is that, because the partners love each other, they will automatically love each other's children; or that the children will automatically love them, because they are such "nice" people. When this fails to happen, the family members experience guilt and feel compelled to conceal their real feelings (Visher & Visher, 1988:252). Although it is possible for stepfamily members to develop love and attachment for one another, such attachment grows out of the cumulative effect of affective experiences that require time and effort. A more realistic expectation of how the relationships will develop in future will foster stepfamily adjustment.

Myth # 3 - Children of divorced and remarried families are damaged forever

Children go through a painful period of adjustment after their parents' divorce or remarriage. Adults often respond to their children's pain with guilt. These feelings of the parents lead to difficulties in responding appropriately their children's hurt, and setting appropriate limits – an important part of parenting. Researchers have indicated that, although it takes some time, most children do recover their emotional equilibrium (Liebert *et al.*, 1986:285).

Myth # 4 - Adjustment to stepfamily life occurs rapidly

People are optimistic and hopeful when they remarry. Because stepfamilies are such a complicated type of family, the time that people take to get to know each other, to create positive relationships, and to develop a family history is significant - usually at least two years (Papernow, 1993; Visher & Visher, 1988).

Myth # 5 - Stepmothers are wicked

This myth is based on fairy tales (Botha, 1986:22). The community sentiment engendered by this myth portrays the stepchild as being abused, neglected or unloved, and the stepparent as unloving, uncaring and cruel - particularly the stepmother who is viewed as "wicked," "bad" and "mean" (Coleman & Ganong, 1987:20; Ganong & Coleman, 1984:164; Norwood & Wingender, 1999:53-55; Sager *et al.*, 1983:48; Wald, 1981:53). This negative concept of the stepmother's role impacts on her and she may be extremely self-conscious about her stepparenting. Research

confirms that stepmothers have the most difficult role in the stepfamily (Duberman, 1975; Norwood & Wingender, 1999).

> **Myth # 6 - Children adjust to remarriage more readily if biological fathers (or mothers) withdraw**

Children will always have two biological parents. Of special relevance to the researcher's view, is the finding of Nolan (1977:25-29) that children of remarried parents function best if they are able to maintain satisfactory contact with both parents, including the non-residential parent, and to think well of him or her. It helps if the residential parent and stepparent can work toward a "parenting partnership" together with all the adults involved (Visher & Visher, 1988:193).

> **Myth # 7 - Stepfamilies formed after the death of a parent are easier**

Duberman (1975) recorded cases where family integration was better if the previous spouse was deceased (not divorced). However, people need time to grieve for the loss of a loved one. A remarriage may "reactivate" this unfinished grieving. These emotional issues may be played out in the new relationship, with detrimental effects. When people remarry after the death of a spouse, they may want a relationship similar to their previous one. New partners may find themselves competing with a ghost (Botha, 1986:22).

> **Myth # 8 – Non-residential stepfamilies are easier**

Visher and Visher (1996:3) describe non-residential (or part-time) stepfamilies as stepfamilies with whom the children live less than the majority of the time. Building relationships takes time. Stepfamilies, where the children visit only occasionally, are hampered by the lack of time to work on relationships (Liebert *et al.*, 1986:285). There is less time for one-on-one interaction between stepchildren and stepparents, and less time for family activities. Since stepfamilies follow stages of development, it may take the part-time stepfamily longer to move through the process (Botha, 1986:23), due to a lack of time together for working on their relationships.

Myths, or negative stereotypes, affect stepfamilies adversely in two ways: Firstly, these stereo-types may influence the prejudice with which the larger social system regards these families,

thus exacerbating the difficulty of family adjustment. Secondly, these stereotypes may increase the disharmony in the family, contributing to problems related to the formation of attachment. Myths that lead to misguided hopes and, ultimately, disappointments, must be recognised for what they are.

Maintaining close touch with reality will help family members to guard against living up to the myths. Doing so would assist the new family to experience the reality of the new combined family life. Kaufman (1993:22) summarises some of the realities as follows:

> Reality # 1 - The only resemblance between stepfamilies and nuclear families is the presence of an adult couple

Contradictory to early research methods, no comparison can be drawn between the nuclear and the stepfamily. The stepfamily is a unique kind of family and must be entered into as such.

> Reality # 2 - Remarriage will not solve all a single parent's problems

Remarriage will not necessarily improve matters for previously single parents. The problems of one-parent family life may simply be exchanged for the even more complex problems of combined family life.

> Reality # 3 - Divorce does not erase the (previous) couple's ties to each other

Mutual children are the threads that bind parents together - for life.

> Reality # 4 - Everyone entering a stepfamily has a personal agenda

Mutual goals cannot be taken for granted in stepfamilies. Expectations must be discussed in advance, and differences have to be resolved.

> **Reality # 5 - There is no way of knowing what lies ahead for family members when they enter a stepfamily**

Problems cannot always be anticipated. However, adults who formulate a plan of action prior to their marriage can make the transition to stepfamily life far easier for their families than it would be had all the combined family members simply merged.

In the context of a therapeutic relationship, clients can be helped to recognise some of the normal and expected kinds of adjustments to be made that are specific and unique to the stepfamily. Social workers can facilitate this process by specifying the inherent realities that are concomitant with the step situation.

2.3   Stepfamily structure

In discussing the unique structure of the stepfamily, Wald (1981:40) describes "structure" as the organisation of the parts of a whole system, and the family structure facilitates the differentiation of each person in terms of two basic kinship ties – biological and marital. Remarriage re-establishes a new two-parent generational family. The step-position, introduced for parent/child and sibling subsystems, is central to the new kinship group.

Sager *et al.* (1983:23-37) describes the structural change that is created in the remarried family as follows:

- Marital and parental tasks are often shared with an ex-spouse. This exerts a powerful influence on the remarried family.
- Frequently, the purpose of marriage is to support and nurture each other.
- The parent-child unit predates the marital unit. The new spouse may find it difficult to join a close parent-child unit.
- At least two members are part of another family system.
- As regards the inclusion of members, it is a relatively open system. Boundaries are semi-permeable, as they often are biologically, legally, and geographically blurred. Membership is not clearly defined.
- An increased number of significant others may be experienced in a positive, negative or ambivalent way, depending upon to "whose side" they belong. Loyalty conflicts are

common.

- Legal ties are asymmetrical. The stepparent has no prior legal rights regarding stepchildren and does not acquire any with the remarriage. Stepsiblings do not share legal ties.

From the above, it is apparent that the stepfamily starts with a structure that is different in terms of family systems. A stepfamily structure presents a number of dilemmas and challenges to the creation of an integrated family. This is an important variable to be kept in mind in intervention, because each family has its own unique goals.

Sager *et al.* (1983:26) emphasise that, in the stepfamily, generational and sexual boundaries are often vague and that society's expectations, rules, roles and tasks in this family system remain ill-defined. Remarriage commences with at least one spouse who has experienced the termination of a primary relationship with all its concomitant pain, with continuing responsibilities and ties to children, as well as possible ties to a former spouse. Often stepfamilies are financially encumbered, and children in stepfamilies have suffered serious disruption and losses in life. These matters affect and condition future attitudes and relationships.

Sager *et al.* (1983) highlight the importance of acknowledging the dual family structure of a stepfamily, in order to comprehend the structural, dynamic and behavioural issues involved. Such issues include boundaries, roles and attachment within the stepfamily.

2.3.1   Boundaries within the stepfamily

Family boundaries and transactions are disrupted when divorce occurs in the nuclear family. The psychic boundaries of the family are further threatened when either parent begins a courtship. When remarriage takes place, an ongoing relationship with the absent parent precludes the possibility for the child to include a new adult within the psychic boundaries reserved for a parent. If the new spouse was previously married and has children, yet another boundary must be eliminated to allow affection and economic resources to flow to yet another household.

McGoldrick and Carter (1988:269) describe boundary difficulties in the stepfamily to include issues of:
- Membership (who are the "real" members of the family?)

- Space (what is my personal and physical space? Where do I really belong?)
- Authority (who is really in charge of discipline, money and decisions?)
- Time (who gets how much of my time, and how much of their time do I get?)

These issues are central in stepfamilies. Great flexibility is called for to enable the new family, constantly, to expand and contract its boundaries.

The establishment of physical boundaries at the outset will help to establish later more complex psychological boundaries, which may include bathroom habits, food preferences and sleep rituals - out of which an individual identity and family structure will develop. Permanent household residents will eventually settle territorial boundary disputes, but what happens when non-residential children come to spend a few days?

In an article, social scientists Pauline Boss and Jan Greenberg (1984) mention the concept of *boundary ambiguity* as a term describing and predicting "the effects of family membership loss and change over time." In the stepfamily, role strain related to the maintenance of boundaries intensifies because of the lack of a definition of appropriate step role behaviour. Pasley (1987:222) suggests that remarried parents with only "their" children have little basis for ambiguous boundaries, while those with children from either parent's former marriages are likely to have perceptual confusion about whether those children are in or out of the family. Pasley (1987) also suggests that the longer the period between marriages, the less the ambiguity.

A major task of the stepfamily is to reach a middle ground that takes into account blood ties, loyalties, sensibilities, realities of the loss, remarriage, and sensitivity to the impact of exclusion or inclusion of others. Both ocean-permissive boundaries, which encourage children in their fantasies of reconciliation and discourage remarried couple unity, and rigid boundaries, which preclude ex-spouses and their families, must be avoided. Strong couple attachments are important to withstand the pull of remarried parents' prior attachment to their children. In complex combined families, both adults are remarried parents, as well as stepparents. The children of one remarried parent may feel threatened by the other remarried parent's attachment to non-residential children. Also, members of newly established combined families can feel "at the mercy" of outside parents who arbitrarily dictate when non-residential children can or cannot live in the combined family households.

Because the boundaries surrounding combined families are less rigid than those surrounding nuclear families, there often is a good deal of confusion about personal boundaries separating former spouses. While it is important for two formerly married adults to establish a parenting coalition on behalf of their mutual children, it is imperative that these adults effect an emotional divorce, so each can continue with his or her own life (Kaufman, 1993:186). This can be done by increasing the distance between themselves and their former spouses by limiting the scope of their relationship to the area of parenting.

2.3.2   Roles in the stepfamily

Kelly (1995:39) refers to Epstein, Bishop and Baldwin (1982:124) who defined "family roles" as the repetitive patterns of behaviour by which family members fulfil family functions. Epstein *et al.* (1982) cite the following functions of family roles: the provision of resources, nurture and support, adult sexual gratification, personal development, and maintenance and management of the family system. Role is a transactional concept; it is a set of behaviours that is based on the expectations, obligations and prescriptions expressed in a relationship.

Traditionally, the provision of resources has been viewed as the man's role, while nurture and support have been the woman's role. Although these rigidly applied gender roles are no longer viewed as functional by many families today, and role flexibility is increasing in some families, these role expectations are especially maladaptive for most stepfamilies. As McGoldrick and Carter (1988:400) note, these traditional family gender roles have no chance in a system where the children are strangers to the wife, and where the finances include sources of income and expenditures that are not in the husband's power to generate or control. Roles, then, are basically about "who does what?" and most family theoreticians agree that stepfamilies require different role definitions. Instead of a step-by-step progression, remarried families have to plunge into instant multiple roles.

The increased number of subsystem combinations and persons in the stepfamily that derive from the unique step position are also reflected in the increased number of role positions. Researchers have identified the lack of a definition in respect of appropriate step role behaviour as a major source of dysfunction in stepfamilies (Hetherington *et al.*, 1999:6; Messinger *et al.*, 1978; Pasley, 1987:206-223; Sager *et al.*, 1983:26 and Wald, 1981:103). Graham (1988:99), Hetherington *et al.* (1999:6), Mills (1984:368) and Visher and Visher (1988:18) agree that an

early task for the stepfamily involves developing and delineating constructive, negotiated, and acceptable stepparent roles, relationships and responsibilities. Wald (1981:103-105) maintains that the imbalance between husband and wife regarding ties with children must be harmonised, and focus on defining realistic normative expectations to strengthen the stepparent tie. Step role behaviour must be defined in order to take cognisance of a child's earlier ties to an absent parent and, if the stepparent had no children, the step role must be defined with acknowledgement of the absence of qualities derived from the gradual process of learning a parental role from a child's birth, onward. This study identifies parenting styles as an important factor in the facilitation of attachment bonds.

However, role strain is especially aggravated in stepfamilies, because the stepparent role is characterised by the loss and gain of roles (Visher & Visher, 1988:20). There is a lack of clarity regarding parenting roles and boundaries (Ahrons & Wallisch, 1987:18; Kelly, 1995:40) and there is a lack of congruence between how stepparents think they should feel and act, and how they in fact do (Whitsett & Land, 1992:80). In a study on stepparents, these researchers report that stepmothers reported more role strain than stepfathers did (Whitsett & Land, 1992:79-92). They studied coping patterns in stepfamilies and found that the self-esteem of a stepparent and the marital satisfaction of the married couple correlated positively with a decreased role strain. These findings suggest the importance of focusing on the marital relationship rather than the parental roles in developing healthy stepfamilies.

Another source of role complexity and role strain is associated with the linking position. This position exists for persons who connect old and new family systems and ties. Wald (1981:105) believes that the linking person is pulled in two directions. In these situations, role strains are related to the tensions that arise out of conflicting loyalties.

What to call a stepparent is an important issue, since it also suggests that parent's role. Kelly (1995:43) has found that the terms "mother" and "father" are very special, and that children did not use them for stepparents, despite their relationships being close. However, the families studied did not report negotiation about parental terms. Most children called their stepparents by their first names (1995:44). In other situations, where calling the stepparent "mom" or "dad" worked well, this practice was introduced very gradually, and the children usually initiated it.

As will be noted later in this chapter, the biological parent usually best imposes discipline. In addition, the biological parent needs to be the main nurturer in the family. Kelly (1995:47) suggests that child rearing, household tasks and income production must be more equally shared. Thus, role flexibility is advisable.

Money management is closely related to role-division. Who earns the money (role of bread winner), who manages the household finances (role of manager), and who allocates resources and makes decisions (head of household)? In the stepfamily, these are important issues. In second marriages, these issues become very complicated. In a study by Kelly (1995), money management was the area in which there was the least agreement. It is also surprising that very little has been written on finance management. Social workers should be knowledgeable about financial matters and the relationship process that underlies them. Kelly (1995:50) refers to Guerin, Fay, Burden and Kautto (1987:57) who offered four useful guidelines that they found useful in assisting families to resolve financial problems.

1. Money inherited or acquired by a person prior to marriage belongs to that person, unless negotiated otherwise before the marriage.

2. Money earned by either spouse during the marriage belongs to both spouses, unless negotiated otherwise prior to the marriage.

3. Money inherited during the course of a marriage belongs to the spouse who inherited it, unless otherwise agreed upon at the time of the inheritance.

4. Whenever possible, children are the financial responsibility of the biological parents, even after divorce and even if one stepparent is more affluent.

Guerin, Fay, Burden and Kautto (1987) further note the importance of separating the financial realities from the relationship as much as possible. While the academic literature on stepfamilies' finances is sparse, those who have written on the subject (Knaub, Hanna & Stinnett, 1984; McGoldrick & Carter, 1988; Messinger, 1976) agree that money matters are especially complicated in stepfamilies, that symbolic issues regarding money must be distinguished from real financial issues and that, for handling money matters, stepfamilies need different rules and norms than biologically based families. In her research, Kelly (1995:52) found that families could be grouped roughly into two categories: those who mostly pooled their resources and those who mostly kept their resources apart. However, there does not seem to be a right way for dealing with finances; each of these families had to work out an individual plan. Kelly (1995)

suggests that money matters be discussed and plans agreed upon by both marital partners as a team.

Graham (1988:99-113), Norwood and Wingender (1999:68-70), Pickhardt (1997:59-63) and Scheepers (1991:139-157) provide detailed descriptions of parental roles in the stepfamily, especially that of the stepmother and the stepfather. Therapeutic interventions, sensitive to role complexities and strains, should begin to develop a body of norms about appropriate step role behaviour that could guide families in their search for realistic expectations. When consensus has been reached on what behaviour patterns contribute to step role adequacy, remarried families can move toward a workable family balance.

2.4   The decision to remarry

Divorce and remarriage is becoming increasingly common. From the literature it is evident that the motives for remarriage are similar to those that induce people to marry for the first time (Franks, 1988:42; Sager *et al.*, 1983:60). For many divorcees, remarriage often seems a solution to their problems. Remarriage is especially probable if the divorcee is still relatively young, partly because of the availability of potential partners (Louw *et al.*, 1998:561).

Sager *et al.* (1983:61) refers to research conducted by Seagrave (1980) who found the prospect of a caring and loving relationship to be the prime motivation for remarriage. Other motivations flow from one or more of the following:

- Utopian dreams, for example that the new partner will be a perfect loving person. For many couples, remarriage represents a second chance to start anew.
- The desire to have a family. Some like the idea of having ready-made families, while many look for "fathers" or "mothers" for their children.
- The desire for an opportunity in a second marriage to fulfil what they did not do, or have, until now – a different lifestyle, work or fun.
- The desire to escape from the parental home.

It follows that many of the motivations to marry a second (or third) time are similar to those that induce people to marry for the first time. Expectations seem to be somewhat unrealistic and

could contribute to people moving impulsively into second (or third) marriages, without considering all the implications.

Remarriage often brings initial happiness and other rewards (Berger, 1994:164): remarried women often acquire greater financial security, while men often become physically healthier and more involved socially. However, this does not mean that "love is better the second time around," as the lyric implies. Among the older generation, the reasons for remarriage seem to centre on the need for companionship and, sometimes, financial security (Louw *et al.*, 1998:634).

People who remarry often report less marital satisfaction than during their first marriage (Kurdek, 1991), and the divorce rate for second marriages is also higher than for first marriages (Hetherington & Clingempeel 1992; Sager *et al.*, 1983:63). Of American remarriages, 60% end in divorce and approximately one-quarter of remarriages terminate within five years (Hetherington, Henderson & Reiss, 1999:2). A possible reason for this could be that divorcees tend to remarry too soon after their divorces. In many instances, the presence of stepchildren increases, by 50%, the risk of marital dissolution in a remarriage. This may partly explain why couples with remarried wives (who are more likely to have custody of children) are twice as likely to be divorced as those with remarried husbands (Hetherington *et al.*, 1999:11; Louw *et al.*, 1998:561). It is also possible that previously married persons may identify the signs of a disintegrating marriage much sooner and, therefore, may decide to obtain a divorce much earlier than was the case with the first marriage (Coleman & Ganong, 1990:930). Furthermore, it is possible that, due to their particular temperament, some persons are more vulnerable to divorce (Amato, 1991; Berger, 1994:170; Hetherington *et al.*, 1999:9). This implies that people who are generally dissatisfied, difficult and intolerant, or very adventurous, may find it difficult to find happiness within a marriage.

Generally speaking, it seems that remarriage during late adulthood is happier than remarriage during earlier adulthood (Louw *et al.*, 1998:635). A possible reason for this may be that both spouses then are widowed, rather than divorced. They also do not have the additional problems of resident stepchildren.

From the preceding discussion, the conclusion can be drawn that the process whereby the remarried family system stabilises, is complex. Society abounds in romantic myths about the

joys of family life. This seems to require second families to bend themselves into the shape of the mythological "happy intact family," whose structure is barely relevant to the shifting boundaries and roles of remarried families. Remarriage causes families and children to cope with challenges associated with both normative and non-normative transitions in life. Different stages of development and different kinds of family transitions present families and their members with varied developmental challenges.

The next section explores the developmental approach in the study of stepfamilies. It examines the stages in the developmental life cycle and developmental tasks related to each stage, with special attention to attachment processes involved. Although developmental aspects of stepfamilies are examined, it must be remembered that structural and developmental issues are inextricably intertwined in the real life experiences of stepfamilies.

2.5   Developmental approach

The developmental approach has long been an important clinical tool in social work. In the study of stepfamilies, many theorists have commented on the need for a developmental frame of reference (Wald, 1981:114). For the purpose of this research, it follows that the developmental approach was considered appropriate.

The developmental approach's contribution to family analysis is its delineation of normal developmental stages of family life, as well as the developmental tasks to be mastered, which accompany each stage. Practitioners have found this an enriching approach when examining the interaction between individual developmental dynamics and family processes. Also micro-analytic in perspective, this approach builds on structure-functional and interactional approaches (Erikson, 1959; Sander, 1979; Wald, 1981).

The developmental approach is a conceptual framework for understanding some aspects of change over time. McGoldrick and Carter (1988:4) support this in their statement that this approach is crucial to understanding the emotional problems that people develop as they struggle through this basic process of development. A family developmental approach emphasizes the importance of temporal factors in predicting the ease, or difficulty, of family reorganisation following remarriage, as well as the psychological adjustment of members of the stepfamily. According to this approach, families progress through a series of stages that coincide with the

ubiquitous life-cycle changes. This may alter role relationships among family members (e.g., shifts in custody arrangements of children from prior marriages, the birth of a child to the current marriage, re-divorce, and age-related transitions of children). Relevant for this study is Wald's (1981:44) description of three key concepts as central to the psychosocial developmental approach: life cycle stages, developmental tasks and attachment bonds.

2.5.1   Life cycles

Erikson (1959:50) suggests that a life cycle can be viewed as a series of stages marked by a biologically based thrust toward growth and development. This is comparable to Wald's (1981:114) description of the life cycle as a longitudinal time frame, in which universal and pre-dictable natural sequences of critical events and changes in individual and family life are marked off. The life cycle model is intended to reflect the natural sequence and process of transition, therefore entry into, and exit from, a stage is variable. Stages may overlap or co-exist. A specific event may mark the beginning or ending of a stage. The biological or social readiness of the persons or families involved and the cultural matrix within which they function affect the timing and duration of each stage.

The formation of a stepfamily creates a network of people and relationships. One of the keys to an understanding of stepfamilies is an appreciation of the fact that a *new* marital and family system life cycle has been introduced. With remarriage, the network of people is connected by step, as well as blood and in-law ties. Sager *et al.* (1983:4) use the descriptive term "supra-system" (as illustrated in figure 2.1), to refer to the network of various subsystems that impinge on remarried members.
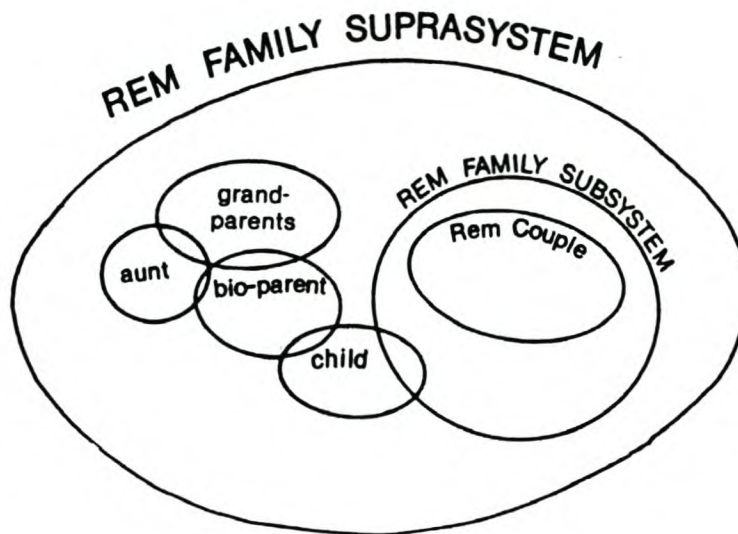
FIGURE 2.1: The stepfamily supra-system

Figure 2.1 illustrates how some of these subsystems cross two households, such as the bio-parent subsystem. Sager *et al.* (1983:4) state that each subsystem is, simultaneously, a system in its own right and a subsystem in relationship to the supra-system. Sager *et al.* (1983:5) concludes that the supra-system could be an important positive force, a strongly negative force, or a melange of contradictory forces, but it cannot be ignored. He acknowledges that the supra-system affects the quality and viability of the stepfamily and that it could provide important leverage in the treatment of stepfamilies. The stepfamily supra-system (Sager *et al.*, 1983) and the complexity of stepfamily systems render the use of diagrams (or genograms) of particular importance (Visher & Visher, 1996) to reduce confusion. Chapter 7 builds on this assumption. A stepfamily can be fully appreciated only in the context of the supra-system. Each family member lives his or her life cycle, as described in the following section.

2.5.1.1   Individual life cycles

Over time, the characteristics of individual family members may change. It is important for social workers to understand what developmental processes will unfold at phase-specific times (Erikson, 1968). Failure to have needs met adequately in any phase leads to failure in successfully mastering the developmental tasks of that phase, with deficits occurring in that, as

well as subsequent phases.

Until recently, individual life cycle approaches began at birth and stages were marked by chronological age that reflects biological, psychological, social and intellectual maturation throughout the life span (Wald, 1981:114). Erikson suggests (1959:52) that interaction between the individual and society results in phase-specific tasks for the developing individual, and reciprocal tasks for the social and physical environment. Erikson's observation is important, namely that optimal development is the spiralling interaction of biological maturation with adequate responses from the environment to individual needs. Then, personality can be said to develop "according to steps predetermined in the human organism's readiness to be driven toward, to be aware of, and to interact with a widening radius of significant individuals and institutions" (Erikson, 1968:93). This supplements Germain and Gitterman's statement (1986:628) that human beings are in constant exchange with their environment.

This study focuses on attachment in the stepfamily, with specific reference to the child in middle childhood. Middle childhood is a time of notable physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural changes, as will be discussed in chapter 3. Some of the normative developmental tasks encountered in middle childhood include becoming more independent and autonomous, while maintaining bonds of attachment with the family. Hetherington & Clingempeel (1992) suggested that this life transition may be particularly difficult for children in stepfamilies.

As described by Germain and Gitterman (1986:628-630), the developmental approach, supported by the life model approach, represents human beings as active, purposeful, and with potential for growth, development, and learning throughout life.

When the individual successfully masters phase-specific tasks through learning and other exchanges with the environment, innate adaptive potentialities are released, for example motor abilities, cognition and sensory perception.

Germain and Gitterman (1986:628) and Sager *et al.* (1983:40) correlate failure in having needs met with various factors: poor interaction between individuals and their environment; physiological or psychological deficiencies within the individuals; the inability of significant others to meet phase-specific needs; or various combinations of all of these. The disruption of remarriage jeopardises the attainment of needs.

By means of their research with children, various researchers (Bowlby, 1969,1973,1980; Erikson, 1968; Freud, 1963; Mahler *et al.*, 1975) have contributed enormously to the understanding of early development. Other researchers, such as Gould (1972), Levinson (1978) and Neugarten (1968), focused on adult development by building on Erikson's (1968) view that development is a lifelong process "… with the individual optimally reaching increasing levels of intra-psychic integration and interpersonal differentiation" (Sager *et al.*, 1983:40).

Across the life cycle, various changes in status occur. This results in new and sometimes conflicting role demands. As a transition in life, remarriage has an enormous impact on an individual and a family. Remarriage poses adaptive tasks for both the individual and family that may, or may not, mesh with the developmental tasks of the individual members.

2.5.1.2   **Marital and family life cycles**

Sager *et al.* (1983:41) state that the application of the systems theory contributes to the expansion of the unit of attention from the individual to the marriage and family systems. "Family stages" refers to the changes in family life that occur as the family's composition, its members' ages, and the nature of its interaction with its environment change over time and space (Rhodes, 1977:301-311). According to some experts, the development of adults as parents is best described by means of a family life cycle (Berger, 1994:236; Papalia & Olds, 1986:424). There is a correlation and reciprocity between individual development and family development. The individual's life cycle is played out within marital and family systems (for this research, stepfamilies), but these systems are not static. The family life cycle proceeds through a series of sequential stages, each with certain developmental tasks primarily associated with child rearing, thus integrating the individual and family theory. Sager *et al.* (1983:41) state that families have their own developmental processes and life cycles, with tasks and responsibilities to be mastered at phase-specific times, in order for systemic and individual needs to be met and for development to continue. Optimally, individual, marital, and family life cycles are congruent, so that the most individual needs are met through family task fulfilment. Sager *et al.* (1983:41) state: "We are both family and individual."

Stages are specified according to criteria, such as changes in marital status and parental relationships, gain or loss of family members, role transitions, education and the developmental

status of adult family members. Central issues within each stage are designated as developmental tasks (Germain & Gitterman, 1986:629; Wald, 1981:115).

In their discussion on marital and family life cycles, Sager *et al.* (1983:41) refer to research done by Berman and Lief (1975) and McGoldrick and Carter (1988). In their work with marital couples, Berman and Lief (1975) found that critical stages in marriages were related to critical stages in the individual life cycles (Sager *et al.*, 1983:41). They point to the fact that issues that appear to be purely individual, or purely dyadic, often were the result of complicated interaction between marital and individual points of crisis. McGoldrick and Carter (1988) present the view that the family could be considered as a basic unit of emotional development. At each phase of its life cycle there are emotional tasks to be fulfilled.

Visher and Visher (1979) report that Lewis, Beaver, Gossett and Phillips (1976) found that the marital couple's attachment is a very important dimension in psychologically healthy families. Although the alliance between the couple is particularly important, this is extremely difficult to achieve.

Whiteside and Auerbach (1978) reiterate that a primary task of the remarried couple sub-system is the development of a close spouse relationship that can negotiate conflict, without using the children as go-betweens. Some of the closeness between parent and child must be relinquished without leaving the child in a rejected, unsupported position. Children can recognize any sense of solidity in the marital relationship. This permits the child in middle childhood to revert to involvement in school achievement and peer activities.

Sager *et al.* (1983:45) refer to the work of Terkelsen (1980) who made a useful distinction between first order developments, such as adaptation and integration into the system, and second order developments, such as remarriage. His concept of the superstructure of the family life cycle matches Erikson's concept of an individual's life cycle. McGoldrick and Carter (1988:11) support the researcher's view that remarriage can be considered as a dislocation in the family life cycle that requires additional re-stabilising steps before ongoing development can be resumed. Remarriage takes place when change occurs in the remarrying individual. Feelings and past mistakes play an important role: individuals may be afraid that the same mistakes may be repeated and that the feelings of hurt will return. The past will remain an integral part of the

current situation. Strong *et al.* (1983:518) refer to remarriage as "The triumph of hope over experience."

According to Sager *et al.* (1983:63), approximately 65% of formerly married couples display greater maturity and a healthier marital interaction in second marriages. Therefore, successful re-coupling appears to be potentially possible, and among important factors contributing thereto, are:

- An optimum period of time between relationships. Old relationships will impinge heavily on the new, if remarriage occurs too soon after death or divorce, or before separation or divorce has taken place.

- The way in which the former marriage ended.

- Open communication between the remarried couple, although this often proves to be painful, thus avoided.

- Realistic expectations of the remarried couple for their family situation, for each other and for all other family members.

Visher and Visher (1979) maintain that, provided the remarried couple nurture their relationship and are committed to it, there is a future for the stepfamily unit.

Disturbances often occur between individual needs and capacities, and environmental demands and qualities. Germain and Gitterman (1986:628) identify three areas of the life space that generate stress:

- *Transitions in life*. These include developmental changes across the life cycle, changes in status that the present, new or conflicting role demands, and crisis events – all with reciprocal tasks for the individual family, group or community, and the environment.

- *Environmental pressures*. Relevant for this research on stepfamilies is the unavailability or unresponsiveness of organisational and network structures, for example the legal system in dealing with transitions in life. A study by Kelly (1995:68) emphasises the importance of a support network for developing healthy families and promoting integration into, and acceptance by, the greater community.

- *Maladaptive interpersonal processes*. Families are powerful mediating forces for coping with life's transitions. Germain and Gitterman (1986:630) link maladaptive patterns of communication and relationships to tension in families, for example, the relationship

between the stepmother and the biological mother, or the making of arrangements with regard to access.

The developmental approach, with its focus on the concept of life cycles, contributes to a better understanding of stepfamilies. The quality of family relationships, as well as children's social and cognitive development, is not frozen at any point in time. The assumption that families, the nature of relationships among family members and individuals change over time and in accordance with life's events and changing social contexts, is an important variable in therapy and can influence the success of therapeutic intervention. Each new stage brings with it certain developmental tasks that must be accomplished.

2.5.2 Developmental tasks

Wald (1981:115) defines developmental tasks, the second concept of the developmental approach, as "… psychosocial and cultural demands on individuals or families to master tensions and problems associated with each stage." During each stage, families face different sets of adaptive tasks related to internal and external demands. The expectation is that mastery of the task or crisis results in the acquisition of skills, knowledge or attitudes that facilitate movement into the next developmental stage. Each stage has its roots in an earlier stage and builds a bridge to the next stage (Wald, 1981:116).

Hetherington *et al.* (1999:6) summarise the developmental tasks that confront stepfamilies as follows:

- The development and sustenance of a strong marital attachment in the presence of children.
- The maintenance of a supportive relationship by biological parents with their children.
- The development and delineation of constructive, agreed-upon, and acceptable stepparent roles, relationships, and responsibilities.
- The adjustment of the child to the parents' conjugal relationship, to possible alterations in the relationship with the biological custodial parent, and to the formation of a relationship with a new stepparent.
- The development or maintenance of relationships by children with biological siblings, half siblings, and stepsiblings within, and outside of, the household.
- Coping with relationships with relatives and step-relatives outside of the household.

The basic premise of the individual and family developmental life cycle theory is that developmental tasks of one stage require mastery, for successful adjustment and functioning in the subsequent stage. Therefore, for successful stepfamily adjustment, it is a prerequisite that the developmental tasks involved are accomplished; this will facilitate the forming of pre-requisite attitudes that are described in figure 2.3 of this chapter.

The developmental tasks specific to the stepfamily are expected to facilitate healing, so that the trauma related to earlier losses can be overcome, and subsequent attachment and the achievement of a workable family balance can occur.

2.5.3   Attachment

Although a broad body of literature exists on the formation of attachments between the mother and children (Ainsworth, 1985, 1990, 1991; Bowlby, 1969/1982; Bretherton, 1985; Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Cicchetti *et al.*, 1990; Colin, 1996; Greenberg *et al.*, 1990; Howe, 1996; Karen, 1994), scant attention has been paid to the formation of attachments between step-persons in the stepfamily. A core problem that many stepfamilies experience is the formation of attachment bonds. The reason for this is that stress, which results from the loss caused by a divorce or death, renders it difficult for many adults and children to trust and love again (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992:2-3).

Wald (1981:115) discusses attachment as the central process in each stage of the individual's and family's developmental life cycles; she defines it as "… the process [of] … continuous selective and reciprocal building of connections between individuals and the family as a group…." Especially relevant for this study is Wald's (1981:116) conclusion that the existence of a bond denotes an attachment between persons. It is assumed that the fewer the discontinuities and stressful events there are in the process of individual and family development, the greater the potential will be for normal growth and development for all family members (Germain & Gitterman, 1986:629; McGoldrick & Carter, 1988:11; Sager *et al.*, 1983:45; Wald, 1981:116).

Attachment strains may result from attachment shifts, for example in the stepfamily, when the step-role position is added to the prior biological position. In a similar vein, the attachment shift sometimes occurs when attachments between siblings of a prior marriage are shifted to step-siblings. Still another variation of this pattern occurs when a child shifts his or her attachment

from the biological parent to the stepparent. Marital attachment is frequently inhibited by prior parent-child attachments that intrude on the successful mastery of marital tasks (Wald, 1981:129). It is not unusual for the marital partner to feel as though he or she is an outsider and that the spouse and child of the prior marriage constitute the primary relationship. These shifts are aspects of the structural rearrangements that take place in stepfamilies. Ralph Turner's (1970) concept of "crescive bonding," that is the cumulative process of developing feelings of affiliation through shared experiences over time, is considered particularly useful in working with stepfamilies (Wald, 1981:187).

Wald (1981:116) views the optimal developmental situation as one in which mastery of the task assigned to a stage occurs while the individual or family is in that stage. This mastery is assumed to result in higher levels of functioning for those systems in that stage and also in subsequent stages. The developmental approach implies a "second" chance to resolve tensions, or acquire skills not achieved earlier. The orientation is toward normal transitions and growth and the possibility that later stages provide opportunities to heal or correct feelings and behaviours that have resulted from earlier discontinuity. As such, this approach is particularly useful in therapeutic intervention with stepfamilies.

2.5.4 The life cycle of the stepfamily

Currently, remarriage brings about far-reaching changes in the life cycles of individual, marital and family systems. As a consequence, individual life cycles are often lived out over the course of two or more marriages. Husbands and wives may simultaneously be bio-parents and stepparents; children are often raised in two households with the co-parenting efforts of two bio-parents, one or two stepparents, and assistance from a plethora of bio-grandparents and step-grandparents. On the systems level, this means that, upon remarriage, there may be an "old" nuclear family life cycle continuing in some form, an "old" marital system life cycle that changes and may, or may not, become defunct with divorce, a new marital life cycle beginning with the remarriage, and a new remarried family life cycle that may begin simultaneously. On the individual level, there is similar complexity, with each individual living his or her life cycle on multiple tracks.

While the stepfamily passes through life's stages as a whole, each member of the family works through other life cycles, which may, or may not, mesh with the group. These include:

- the individual cycle,
- the marital cycle,
- the stepfamily cycle (all members of the new family), and
- the subsystems cycles within the stepfamily. The stepfather and his children form one such "mini-family" (Keshet in Norwood & Wingender, 1999:33); the stepmother and her biological children form another. These "mini-families" have a common history and they have their own shared rhythms, rules and ways of operating – built over years of connection and often intensified in the single-parent stage (Norwood & Wingender, 1999:101).

Often, conflicts in stepfamilies occur because the individual cycles of one or more members are not in harmony, either with each other, or with the family cycle. Norwood and Wingender (1999:101) provides the example of a newly wed who wants to complete the getting-to-know-you phase with her husband. The husband, however, is occupied with his mini-family cycle, feels guilty and wants to compensate to his children, while they are still mourning the disintegration of their family of origin, and are unwilling to form a new family cycle (Visher & Visher, 1988:151). Another major problem that confronts the remarried couple occurs when a new wife desires children of her own and her husband insists that his child-rearing days are over. There can also be wide discrepancies in the length of the previous marriages of two adults in a stepfamily, the ages and sex of their children, and the length of time in a single-parent household, to name but a few differences. A common discrepancy occurs when a parent marries a person whose age is close to that of the stepchildren (Visher & Visher, 1988:160). Another source of remarried confusion is a wide discrepancy in career phases. McGoldrick and Carter (1988:274) found that the wider the discrepancy in family life cycle experience between new spouses, the greater the difficulty of transition and the longer it will take to integrate a workable new family. When remarried spouses come together at the same phase of the family life cycle, they have the advantage of bringing the same life cycle tasks and the same general previous experience to the new family. Unfortunately, as McGoldrick and Carter (1988:275) point out, the advantage of having similar tasks and responsibilities is frequently eliminated by a competitive struggle that arises from an overload of these tasks and concerns, the intense emotional investment in good parenting, and the need to include ex-spouses in many arrangements regarding the children.

Sager *et al.* (1983:45) consider that these developmental discrepancies produce various and, at times, incompatible "tracks." It seems extremely important to alert social workers, who are focused on therapeutic intervention, to be aware of the many simultaneous tracks on which the systems and their members are likely to operate, and to ascertain if needs are being met adequately in the different systems.

The following figure (table 2.1), adapted from Graham (1988), Schulman (1981) and Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) in Louw *et al.* (1998:573), outlines the problems in making the transition to remarriage. Obviously, this list can be expanded, given the unique situation of each stepfamily.

The psychological factors which hinder the adjustment of the stepfamily may be summed up as follows (Louw, 1998:573):

- Unfinished mourning for what has been lost
- A non-cooperative relationship with a former spouse
- Unresolved issues with one's family of origin (e.g. one's parent or other family members
- A lack of preparation for remarriage
- Unrealistic expectations concerning the new relationship
- Rigid family boundaries that exclude certain important family members, such as grandparents
- Weak attachment between the couple
- Denial of concerns and differences
- A poor understanding of the children's problems and needs
- A tendency to choose sides as regards the children, and thus becoming polarised
- Spouses have little time for one another, as so much time must be given to the children
- Financial difficulties are frequently experienced because of the demands of the bigger family that, for example, might require moving to a larger home.

TABLE 2.1: Adjustment in the stepfamily

A stepfamily's success in coping with adaptive challenges depends to a great extent on their past histories, expectations, and beliefs (Hetherington *et al.*, 1999:6). An overarching challenge that confronts all families lies in constructing and agreeing on acceptable, fulfilling family roles and

developing salutary relationships that promote the wellbeing of family members (1999:7). This task may be more difficult in stepfamilies as a result of diverse marital and family histories, a more complex family structure, and because of less social and legal consensus on stepparent roles and responsibilities.

McGoldrick and Carter (1988:275) consider the process of remarriage, amongst others, as a dislocation in the family life cycle, which requires additional re-stabilising steps before development can be renewed. Building on the work of Ransom, Schlesinger and Derdeyn (1979:15), they began the task of describing stepfamily development. The researcher compiled table 2.2 while drawing on the work of Goetting (1982:213-222), Mills (1984:365-372), Norwood and Wingender (1999:103-106), Papernow (1993:67-230), Ransom *et al.* (1979:36-43), Visher and Visher (1988:10) and Wald (1981:116-143). This figure demonstrates the developmental complexity that stepfamilies experience by the increased number of stages and developmental tasks. McGoldrick and Carter (1988:273) refer to a study by Stern (1978) who found that it takes an average of two years for stabilisation to occur in stepfamilies.

Stage	Attitude	Developmental tasks

Early stage	▪ Recovery from loss	-Recommitment to marriage:
		  ▪ Emotional remarriage
		  ▪ Psychic remarriage
		  ▪ Setting goals
		  ▪ Handling fantasies
		  ▪ Assimilation
		  ▪ Awareness

Middle stage	-Adjustment to complexity and ambiguity of:
	▪ Multiple new roles
	▪ Boundaries: space, time, membership, authority
	▪ Affective issues: guilt, loyalty conflicts, desire for mutuality, past hurts
		- Remarriage on
		  ▪ Community
		  ▪ Parental
		  ▪ Economic levels
		- Parental limit setting
		- Blending family rules
		- Mobilisation
		- Action

Later stage	- Acceptance of new roles - Final detachment from previous spouse	- Legal remarriage - Commitment - Contact - Stability - Restructuring boundaries - Attachment

TABLE 2.2: Stepfamily development

The formation of the stepfamily can be divided into three stages: the early, middle and later stage. These need not necessarily occur with the same intensity and in the same order for all

remarrying people. Some people avoid some stages altogether.

2.5.4.1   Early stage

Ransom *et al.* (1979) consider the prerequisite **attitude** of this early stage of entrance into the new relationship to be recovery from the loss of the first marriage (adequate "emotional divorce"). This task takes time and is accomplished with difficulty, if at all.

Goetting (1982:217) states that remarriage begins with **emotional** remarriage. Often, this is a slow process, in which the divorced person re-establishes an emotional attachment with a person of the opposite sex. The fear of an additional failure and the threat of once again being disappointed and alone if this relationship also ends in divorce, makes the emotional remarriage an arduous and volatile process.

Goetting (1982:218) defines **psychic** remarriage as "… the process of changing one's conjugal identity from individual to couple." This requires the divorced person to relinquish the autonomy established and take up a lifestyle as a member of a partnership. Goetting (1982) claims that a psychic remarriage involves less of an adjustment for men, than for women. This is due to the fact that a man's occupational status dictates his role in society, while a woman's identity is closely related to her marital status. But, even amongst women, the process of psychic remarriage is not of equal intensity. Changes in marital status have a greater effect on women who hold traditional gender role attitudes as, for them, psychic remarriage involves the recovery of their valued identity as a wife. The non-traditional woman will be likely to experience more adjustment problems, as she will be inclined to view the psychic remarriage as representing a loss of her highly valued autonomy.

During the first stage of Mills's (1984) model, the remarried couple must decide on the desired long-term **goal** for the stepfamily, based on the needs of all the members. During this time, the focus should be on the stepparent-child relationships that enable the stepparent to explore various possible roles in the family. Roles to be considered are: friend, uncle/aunt, brother/sister, coach, counsellor or parent. The children should be allowed to contribute some input, but the couple should make the final decision. Mills (1984) warns against the stepparent choosing a parental role, as this requires time and effort and is particularly difficult with adolescent children, and where physical custody resides in another household.

Norwood and Wingender (1999:102) stress the notorious fact of **unrealistic expectations**, namely, "we'll all be one, big, happy family." In line with this, Norwood and Wingender (1999:103) warn against the fantasy of a "rescue" - imagining that they will solve everyone's problems and rescue themselves from anger, bitterness, and sadness.

Papernow (1993:71) views **fantasy** as a universal phenomenon during the first stage. Many authors comment on the desire for "instant-family" feelings. All note the danger that unrealistic expectations present to stepfamily development (Jacobson, 1979; Norwood & Wingender, 1999:103; Papernow, 1993:71; Visher & Visher, 1979).

The term **"assimilation"** captures the intention, but not the accomplishment, of this phase, as family members (particularly the adults) strain to fulfil the fantasy of a blended family; to "keep swimming" (Papernow, 1993:85). The fact that stepparent, biological parent, and child may experience the same family event quite differently makes communication necessary for movement to the awareness stage, which is an important task in the first stage.

The **awareness** stage is characterised by "getting to know" each other and mapping the part of the family that each member inhabits. The adults have a joint task of gathering data about the resident family members across the experiential gaps created by the stepfamily structure. Papernow (1993:149) observes that successful stepfamilies allow themselves to remain biologically organised during this period. This means that each biological parent continues disciplining his or her children, while the strangers in the family get to know each other.

In the early stage, stepfamily members grapple with the consequences of their unique family structure. This phase ends with increasing clarity and diminishing shame about these realities, and with the biologically organised family system still in place. As implied in all of the above, completion of these tasks is critical to moving on. The completion, primarily, will determine the stepfamily's developmental pace and pattern. Researchers, such as Norwood and Wingender (1999:102) and Papernow (1993:150), agree that fast families complete this stage in two years; average families take two to three years; and slow families require four or more years. Families who are stationary, may never leave this phase.

2.5.4.2 **Middle stage**

Norwood and Wingender (1999:104) describe the middle stage as "crazy time" and "make-or-break time." Papernow (1993:53) agrees with this description because differences are aired more fully and, as a result, family members come into more open conflict. The task is to define boundaries around its step-subsystems more clearly and specifically. To establish a workable stepfamily, requires the loosening of biological parent-child ties.

Upon remarriage, the stepparent and bio-parent are placed in a position of sharing decisions related to the parental role. The absence of societal guidelines for the sharing of these responsibilities results in confusion, frustration and resentment. Predictably, the stepparent is on the side of more discipline, more boundaries around the couple, and clearer limits with the ex-spouse, whereas the biological parent defends the need to spare the children more loss and change. Other problems that Goetting (1982:218) mentions in relation to **parental** remarriage are marital role expectations and the discipline of the children. Many of the disciplinary problems are similar to those that parents in nuclear families experience. However, remarried parents have not had the opportunity to develop a comfortable marital relationship before the birth of children (Ransom *et al.*, 1979:37; Wald, 1981:126). Marital and parental adjustment must be confronted simultaneously and they may easily confound one another. It is helpful for the remarried couple to know that stepchildren will reject discipline if they do not have a meaningful relationship with the adult involved. Regarding discipline, co-parenting should be implemented gradually.

Goetting (1982:220) uses the term "**economic** remarriage" that defines the re-establishment of a household as a unit of economic productivity and consumption. Economic remarriage can be considered as an extension of the parental remarriage; its main difficulty is related to the existence of children from a previous marriage. The standard of living usually increases at remarriage, due to the fact that the income that maintained two residences is combined to support only one. Uncertainty relating to child support, and the needs of the husband's children living with their mother causes inconvenience in the household (Messinger, 1976). Graham (1988:125) refers to research by Bernard (1956) and Langer and Michael (1963) who found that a higher socio-economic status relates to better stepfamily functioning.

According to Mills (1984:370) the second stage involves the arrangement that the parent is to be entirely in charge of setting and enforcing **limits** for that parent's biological children. Mills

(1984) believes that the implementation of this stage creates the opportunity for stepparent attachment.

Mills (1984), supported by Wald (1981:125), maintains that all stepfamilies need to develop their own new **rules and traditions**. The extent to which this is done, depends on the goals of the stepparent-child relationship. At a minimum, comfortable rules for household functioning must be developed. Mills (1984) suggests that, if the parent and stepparent cannot agree on any specific rule, the biological parent's decision must apply, as the children are not likely to obey rules that the biological parent does not approve. To achieve this goal is difficult for many remarried families. In fact, many of the problems raised by stepfamilies tend to arise from their struggle to feel like a "real" family. As Goldner (1982:201) says: "Crises that paralyse remarried families are ultimately rooted in fundamental questions of family identity that can be traced back to fundamental problems with family development."

According to Elizabeth Einstein (23-03-2002), the stage during which the identity of a stepfamily is being built offers a perfect time for establishing new traditions. The creation of new traditions provides good opportunities for the new stepfamily to gain a hold on intimacy. Examples include Christmas, holidays and birthdays. Roots and memories are important, and sharing histories could also bring stepfamilies together.

In their study, Hetherington *et al.* (1999:8) found that the formation of a stepfamily implies difficult changes and interpersonal losses for children and adults. A reactivation of feelings of depression, helplessness and anger are concomitant with remarriage (McGoldrick & Carter, 1988:267). Adults and children who have experienced many losses tend to fear interpersonal commitment and find difficulty in forming attachments.

Mullins (1990:38); Papernow (1993:343); Visher and Visher (1988:48); and Wald (1981:186) propose that the issue of **mourning losses** is the primary task in the middle stage, as unresolved mourning will interfere with the formation of the new family unit. Sometimes, unresolved grief manifests in continuous warfare and hostility between some parents, or in the inability of a child to accept a stepparent. Both adults and children grieve, as the researcher has set out in the following table:

Adults mourn
- The loss of a partner
- The loss of a marriage relationship
- The loss of dreams, because they are not "the first" for their new partner
- Losses involved in the changes of life style, jobs and neighbourhood.

Children mourn
- The loss of a parent (even if the non-residential parent visits regularly)
- The loss or lessened availability of the remaining parent when remarriage occurs
- The loss of stability
- Losses involved in the changes of school, friends and residence
- The loss of their fantasy of family - the way they wished it to be.

TABLE 2.3: Mourning losses in the stepfamily

During this stage, many of the issues that cause conflict may appear to be trivial. Papernow (1993) explains it as a struggle in the new family about who will be "insiders" and who will be "outsiders." "The stepparent is fighting to get entrance .... The biological parent and children are fighting to retain some of their ... comfortable routines" (1993:158).

As the couple begins to work together through a clearer understanding, the family can initiate larger moves to reorganise its structure. New **rituals, rules and boundaries** must be created in the family. The boundary around the couple must be established, and building the boundaries around the stepparent-stepchild relationship must begin.

Papernow (1993:158) describes the stepparent as the agent for change at the beginning of this stage. Norwood and Wingender (1999:6) support the opinion that the ability of the stepmother to take on a pivotal role, starting from a position of strength, self-esteem and respect, determines the integration of the stepfamily.

Gradually, as stepparents and their stepchildren get to know each other, and the biological parents confer more with stepparents about rules, visitation arrangements, and financial matters involving children and ex-spouses, the couple becomes a task force and a decision-making team. This will result in the stepparent moving more directly into the stepparent role, for example regarding eating habits and bedtimes (Papernow, 1993:160).

With reference to boundaries, Papernow (1993:184) is of the opinion that stepparents and

stepchildren must now move towards each other and that the biological parent must release responsibility and control. In contrast to the early stage, where differences of opinion regarding all issues in their daily lives confront stepfamilies, some resolution of these differences is evident in the middle stage. To discuss the challenge of creating a stepfamily culture, Mary Whiteside (1988) makes use of Wolin and Bennett's description of three levels of family ritual. They include daily routines of living (such as eating and sleeping), family traditions (such as holiday rituals) and rites of passage (weddings and graduations) (Papernow, 1993:186).

During this stage, children also gain stronger voices in areas of their concern: resolving loyalty conflicts, spending time alone with biological parents, and continuing familiar family routines. A sense of accomplishment and mastery marks the end of this stage. Now, the family is ready to move on to the later stage.

2.5.4.3 Later stage

The stepparent's role emerges only in the later stage, **after** the reorganising work of the middle stage, and **after** boundaries around step subsystems have become firm enough to allow satisfactory interaction with step relationships. An intimate sharing of step issues categorises the couple's relationship and the stepparent has now established a solid stepparent role within the new stepfamily structure (Goetting, 1982:220; Norwood & Wingender, 1999:105).

Step issues continue to arise, for example custody shifts. However, they can now be tackled within the context of stability and positive relationships. Although the content of stepparents' roles may vary, Papernow (1993:207) is of the opinion that there are certain common qualities. For instance, the stepparent's role does not compete with the parental role of the same-sex parent. The special relationship between a child and the absent parent must be acknowledged. Secondly, the biological parental spouse must support the role. (In fact, the entire family must help to develop a workable stepparent role.) Thirdly, the stepparent's role must express the individual style and strengths that he/she brings to the new family. Fourthly, the role must observe an intergenerational boundary. Papernow (1993:208) identifies the roles of friend, teacher and role model that are non-competitive to the absent parent. Papernow (1993:208) describes the fifth role as "mutually suitable." This means that the amount of closeness and distance, the content of the role and the amount of discipline and nurturing that the stepparent supplies, must be "mutually suitable" for the stepparent and stepchild, as well as for both adults

in the family. Lastly, the mature stepparent's role often places the stepparent in an "intimate outsider" position with stepchildren. The ongoing presence of another same-sex biological parent (dead or alive) leaves stepparents in a somewhat more distant position with their stepchildren. In the later stages, stepparents know their stepchildren well, and then often are "safe" adults with whom these children can share very personal matters.

It is clear that to invent a set of roles that really works for stepfamilies requires time and a degree of connectedness. This process involves every member of the new family in the formation of a new family structure that can provide safety and nourishment for all. As boundaries become firmer, the stepparent can move into an insider position and "... the family at last has its honeymoon" (Papernow, 1993:212).

2.6   The Circumplex Model

Developed nearly a decade ago, the Circumplex Model of family systems has been one of the most respected and widely used approaches of its kind in family studies. Not only is it useful in the assessment and treatment of families, but also in theorising about them.

Olson, Russell and Sprenkle (1989) developed the Circumplex Model of marital and family systems to facilitate the linkage between family research, family systems theory and family therapy. The Circumplex Model is dynamic in that it assumes that changes in family/couple types can, and do, occur over time, depending on the stage of the family life cycle and the composition of the family, as these will have a considerable impact on the type of family system (Olson *et al.*, 1989:70). This links this model to the developmental approach. Family attachment, flexibility and communication are the three dimensions of the Circumplex Model. The development of these dimensions, which are central to general systems theory, is in no way unique to the Circumplex Model. A variety of family theory models and family therapy approaches have focused independently on variables related to attachment, adaptability and communication dimensions (Beavers & Voeller, 1983; Epstein, Bishop & Lewis, 1978; Gottman, 1979; Kantor & Lehr, 1975; Leff & Vaughn, 1985). Minuchin's (1974) concepts of boundaries, disengagement and enmeshment are related to attachment. The following discussion outlines these dimensions as they are significant for understanding and treating marital and family systems.

2.6.1 Dimensions of the Circumplex Model

Family attachment, flexibility and communication are the three dimensions in the Circumplex Model. Hereafter, a discussion of these three dimensions, as developed to describe marital and family dynamics, will follow.

2.6.1.1 Attachment

Olson (2000:145) defines family attachment as "the emotional bonding that family members have toward one another." Emotional attachment is among the variables that can be implemented to measure family attachment. Within the Circumplex Model, some of the specific components of this dimension are: emotional attachment, boundaries, coalitions, time, space, friends, decision-making, interests and recreation. The four levels of attachment range from disengaged (very low), to separated (low to moderate), to connected (moderate to high), to enmeshed (very high). (See Figure 2.2.).
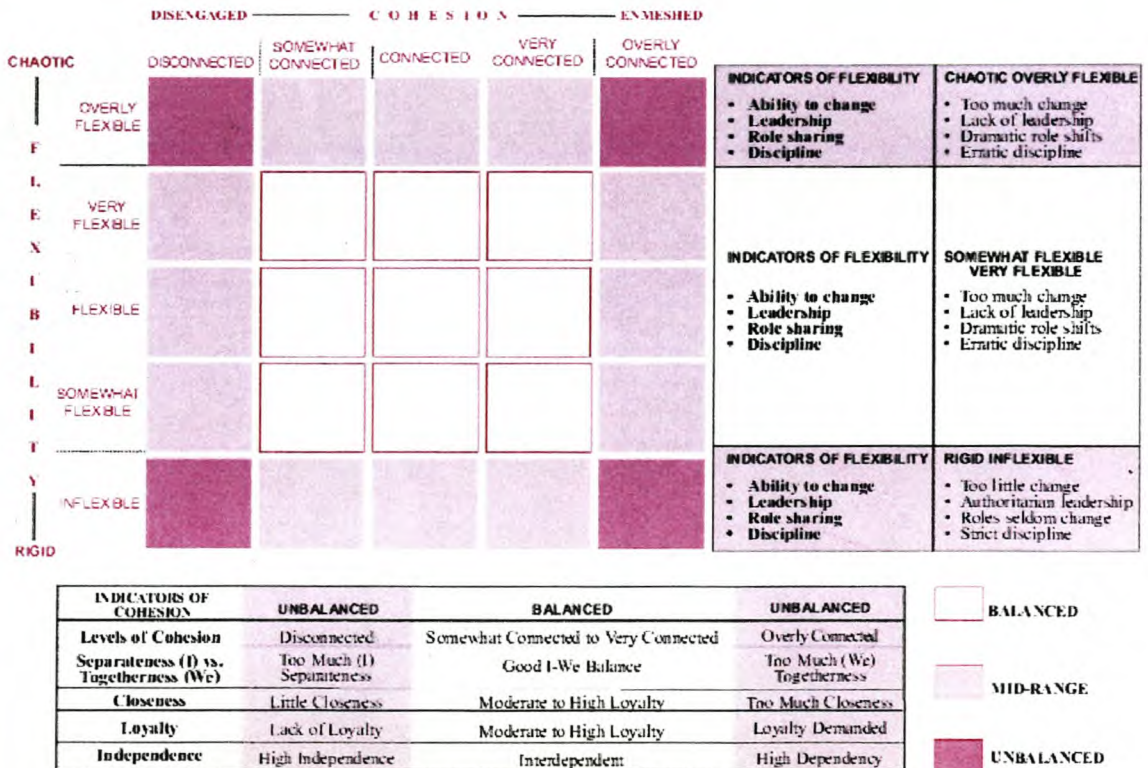
FIGURE 2.2: Circumplex Model-Couple and Family Map

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The hypothesis is that the central or balanced levels of attachment (separated and connected) contribute to optimal family functioning. Individuals are able to experience and balance, being both independent from, and connected to, their families. Generally, the extremes (disengaged or enmeshed) are viewed as problematic. When attachment levels are high (enmeshed systems), too much consensus, and too little independence, exists within the family. Low attachment (disengaged systems) is associated with limited attachment or commitment to the family. In the model's central area (separated and connected), individuals are able to experience and balance their independence from, and connection to, their families. Thus, the central levels of attachment (separated and connected) were considered the most viable for couple/family functioning, whereas the extremes (disengaged or enmeshed) were generally perceived to be problematic. Balanced family systems tend to be more functional across the life cycle.

A **separated** relationship has some emotional separateness, but it is not as extreme as the disengaged system. While time apart is more important, there is some time together, some joint decision-making and marital support. Generally, activities and interests are separate, but a few are shared. A **connected** relationship has emotional closeness and loyalty to the relationship. Time together is more important than time alone. There are friends of the individuals, but also friends shared by the couple. Shared interests are common, with some separate activities.

Unbalanced levels of attachment are the extremes: either very low (disengaged) or very high (enmeshed). A **disengaged** relationship often has extreme emotional separateness. There is little involvement among family members and a great deal of personal separateness and independence. Individuals often do their own thing. Separate time, space and interests predominate, and members are unable to turn to one another for support and the solution of problems. In an **enmeshed** relationship, there is very much emotional closeness, and loyalty is demanded. Individuals are extremely dependent on, and reactive to, one another. There is a lack of personal separateness and little private space is permitted. The energy of individual members focuses mainly inside the family and there are few outside individual friends or interests.

Figure 2.3 summarises the characteristics of the four balanced and four extreme relationships (Olson *et al.*, 1989:15).
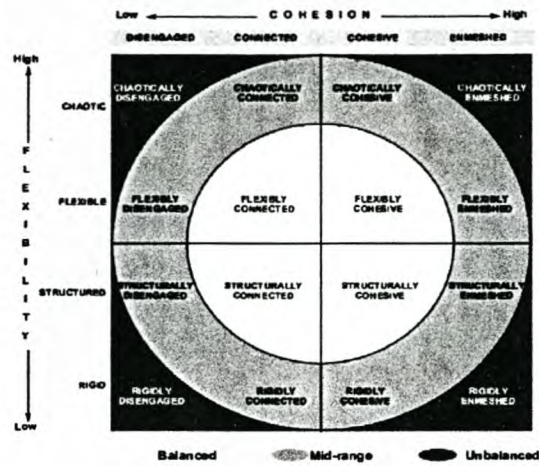
FIGURE 2.3 : Circumplex Model - balanced and extreme types

In the long run and based on the Circumplex Model, both high levels of attachment (enmeshed) and low levels of attachment (disengaged) tend to be problematic for individuals and relationship development. On the other hand, relationships with moderate levels of attachment (separated and connected) are able to balance being alone, versus being together, in a more functional way. Although there is no absolute best level for any relationship, many will have problems if they function at either extreme of the model (disengaged or enmeshed) for too long.

2.6.1.2   **Flexibility**

"Family flexibility" is defined as the ability of a family system to change its leadership, role relationships and relationship rules in response to situational and developmental stress (Olson, 2000:147). Specific concepts include leadership (control, discipline), negotiation styles, role relationships and relationship rules. The focus of flexibility is on how systems balance stability, versus change. The hypothesis is that central levels of adaptability (structured and flexible) are more conducive to family functioning, with the extremes (rigid and chaotic) being the most problematic for families, as they move through the family life cycle.

The four levels of flexibility range from **rigid** (very low), to **structured** (low to moderate), to **flexible** (moderate to high), to **chaotic** (very high). Basically, flexibility focuses on change in a family's leadership, roles and rules. Much of the early application of the systems theory to families emphasised the rigidity of the family and its tendency to maintain the status quo. Olson,

Russell and Sprenkle (1989:12) indicate that "couples and families need both stability and change, and the ability to change when appropriate distinguishes functional couples and families from dysfunctional ones."

Balanced couple and family systems (structured and flexible types) tend to be more functional over time. A **structured** relationship tends to have a somewhat democratic leadership with some negotiations, including the children. Roles are stable and rules firmly enforced. A **flexible** relationship is characterised by a democratic approach to decision-making. Negotiations are open and include the children. Roles are shared and rules can be changed.

Unbalanced marriages and families tend to be either rigid or chaotic. A **rigid** relationship develops when one individual is in charge and is highly controlling. Negotiations tend to be limited, with the leader imposing most decisions. The roles are strictly defined and rules do not change. A **chaotic** relationship is characterised by limited leadership. Decisions are impulsive. Roles are unclear and often shift from one individual to the next.

Based on the Circumplex Model, very high levels of flexibility (chaotic) and very low levels of flexibility (rigid) tend to be problematic for individuals and relationship development in the long run. Relationships with moderate levels of flexibility (structured and flexible) are able to balance change and stability in a more functional way. Although there is no absolute best level for any relationship, many relationships tend to have problems if they always function at either extreme of the model (rigid or chaotic) for an extended period of time.

2.6.1.3 Communication

Family communication is the third dimension in the Circumplex Model and is considered to be a facilitating dimension. Although not graphically included in the model, communication is considered crucial for facilitating movement on the other two dimensions (Olson *et al.*, 1989:13). Positive communication skills (i.e., empathy, reflective listening skills, speaking skills, self-disclosure, clarity, continuity tracking, and respect and regard) are applied to measure couple and family communication. In terms of listening skills, the focus is on empathy and attentive listening. Speaking skills include speaking for oneself, and not for others. Self-disclosure relates to sharing feelings about self and the relationship. Tracking means staying on the topic, and respect and regard relate to the affective aspects of the communication and problem-solving

skills in couples and families. Negative communication skills (i.e., double messages, double binds and criticism) restrict the family's movement on these dimensions. Olson (2000:159) refers to Rodick, Henggles and Hanson (1986) who found strong support for the hypothesis that balanced families have more positive communication skills.

It is clear that the Circumplex Model, as described, allows one to integrate the systems theory and family development approach (Olson, 2000:153). It is assumed that the stage of the family life cycle and composition of the family will have a considerable impact on the type of family system (McGoldrick & Carter, 1988:266). The researcher is of the opinion that remarriage presses for change in the family system and it can facilitate change in the family, despite resistance from within the new stepfamily. The next section explores certain factors that could influence attachment and flexibility in the stepfamily.

2.7   Factors affecting attachment and flexibility in the stepfamily

The previous section revealed that attachment and flexibility are two dimensions of the Circumplex Model. Attachment requires an emotional attachment among family members, while flexibility demands that a family system is able to change. This section will highlight which factors have an influence on the development of attachment, flexibility and, ultimately, attachment.

2.7.1   Attachment

"Family attachment" is defined as the emotional attachment/attachment that family members have toward one another (Olson *et al.*, 1989:9). Some of the components of this dimension can be described as follows:

2.7.1.1 Family involvement

Literature describes a very low involvement in the stepfamily (Papernow, 1993:92-93; Kaufman, 1993:87). This derives from the fact that membership of the same family is the only feature that the members have in common. One of the most significant aspects of the attachment dimension is inclusion, or exclusion, of family members. However, exclusion of family members from participation in the family system leads to an increase in stress and ambiguity. Over time, the

family must identify itself as a unit with common goals, purposes and a sense of continuity (Visher & Visher, 1979).

2.7.1.2 Parent-child coalitions

Troubled families are characterised by the absence of clear sub-system boundaries, and a lack of appropriate parent-child closeness is perceptible. The occurrence of neglect and/or abuse leads to the conclusion that protective boundaries are lacking.

2.7.1.3 Marital relationship

Although the combined family rises on the basis of the parent-child relationship, it is likely to fall on the weakness of the couple attachment. Members bring along their emotional scars of "failure." Fears of further loss may diminish their investment in the relationship. Negotiating conflict remains a primary task for the couple, and fear of conflict could weaken the marital attachment. Wald (1981) notes that simultaneous assumption of marital and parental roles complicates the mastery of marital tasks, as self-interest and prior family interests merge. Early marital adjustment must be made in the context in which marital and children's needs compete for the available time. Therefore, the remarried couple face special vulnerability, as conflicts over the handling of children can rapidly escalate into questioning the commitment to the marriage, and invoking threats that one or other partner will leave. A common discrepancy in stepfamilies occurs when a parent marries a person whose age is close to that of the stepchildren. There is the likelihood that the stepparent and stepchild may draw together in a non-productive attachment due to similarities in the level of their experience of life. Wald (1981) emphasises that it is crucial for the remarried couple to master the task of balancing old attachments with children and new attachments with a new marital partner. A further critical task is that husband and wife must expand their boundaries to include another person's children. Fear of intimacy, arising from past experience, may hinder marital attachment. A powerful emotion that could prevent adequate attachment in the couple's relationship is the guilt that a remarried parent often feels if he/she forms a strong attachment with a partner (Visher & Visher, 1988:166). However, to stay together, a couple in a stepfamily needs to develop a solid couple attachment.

2.7.1.4 Internal boundaries

Internal boundaries are characterised by high separateness, in that family members rarely spend time together with each other and each usually occupies a separate space in the home. Issues of time and space can be generalised to many stepfamilies. It often happens that space is a factor when a family moves into the same quarters that previously housed the other family. Often, a child's space in the family hierarchy is pre-empted when both spouses bring children of former relationships into the new stepfamily. This kind of change in ordinal position has ramifications for the nature and quality of the individual identity, and family interactions. Space problems arise because of relocation, crowding, and issues of territoriality. With the typical increase in the number of people and decrease in the amount of space, stepfamily members often feel deprived of adequate time, space or privacy. Paradoxically, carving out necessary personal time and space can be an important component in building stepfamily attachment.

In stepfamilies, when there are new relationships to be fostered and old relationships to be maintained, the issue of too little time for too many people is common and frequent. The reality is that there is a lack of time. Contradictory findings are recorded insofar as the influence of the time between divorce and remarriage is considered. Mullins (1990:71) refers to White, Brinkerhoff and Booth (1985) who reported that speed of remarriage seems to have no effect. However, content with Sager's warning, the researcher wishes to contend that the single period should not be too long, particularly if children are involved (1983:45).

Children may have membership in two households, but each household needs to feel that there is a clear psychological and, for many adults, a clear physical boundary around each of the two households. All too frequently, the stepparent senses the lack of an adequate boundary when the remarried parent has not yet psychologically separated from his or her former spouse, and this failure could have many negative repercussions in a new marriage. It could create an obstruction to the formation of a couple's attachment and lead to confusion and misconduct by the former couple's children.

Boundaries in the stepfamily can stretch and shrink as children come and go, especially during holidays. When children move between households, there is a need for "looser" (more permeable) household boundaries than in nuclear families (Visher & Visher, 1988:203). Generational boundaries become blurred when a remarriage takes place; children may feel

displaced while parents may feel guilty and torn. However, satisfactory family functioning appears to depend on adequate boundaries between generations (Minuchin, 1974). Intergenerational boundaries can also be extremely important when the stepparent's age is close to that of a stepchild. Visher and Visher (1988:201) identify two major stumbling blocks to the formation of an adequate boundary around the couple:

- the remarried parent's guilt, and
- fear of the loss of a relationship with their children.

By developing an attachment with their new partner, parents fear that they are betraying their children.

Mullins (1990:72) refers to research by Lutz (1983) who agrees with Visher and Visher (1979) that it takes a minimum of two years for remarried families to begin to stabilise.

2.7.1.5 External boundaries

Interfamilial problems often occur around reconstitution and involve acculturation, role, attachment and legal issues. Extended family members may have the same problems as members within the stepfamily regarding the inclusion of the stepfamily's new persons, role definitions and accommodation to different values, priorities, and other aspects of the new family lifestyle. Grandparents may show favouritism toward their natural grandchildren, thus creating problems of competition and jealousy among the children.

As a new lifestyle, absent parents may have difficulties in adjusting to co-parenting while apart, defining new roles for themselves, and allowing attachment to take place for their natural child within the new stepfamily unit. In addition, there may be problems related to legal issues of child custody, child support, and visitation. These problems intrude on stepfamily attachment.

Non-custodial parents may use their visitation time with their children to undermine the children's possible growing attachment to the stepfamily. Finding an appropriate balance between the legal rights of a biological father and the psychological rights of the stepfather can be a difficult problem.

Seeing individual friends alone or having separate recreational interests, may be viewed as disloyalty to the new stepfamily. External boundaries, mainly focused outside the family, must change to be more focused inside, than outside, the family. Loyalty conflicts and boundary ambiguities are intimately entwined, as divided loyalties prevent the formation of clear inter-personal boundaries. "Boundary ambiguity" means that the family does not know who is in and who is out of the system (Visher & Visher, 1988:183). This can be a fundamental source of stress for stepfamilies.

2.7.1.6 Emotional attachment

Attachment problems involve trouble in forming attachments and establishing affiliations between two or more remarried family members. This is related to the emotional or affective relationship between persons in the family. Problems would include attachment preferences of children of prior marriages to other stepfamily ties, attachment shifts, attachment cross-pressures (split loyalties), and residual attachments between formerly married partners. A stepmother may resent her husband's preference of attachment to his children over his attachment to her. A mother may be troubled because she resents her stepdaughter's intrusion into her relationship with her newborn natural child.

2.7.2 Flexibility

"Family flexibility" refers to the amount of change in its leadership, role relationships and relationship rules (Olson, 2000:147). The following concepts are considered to be important:

2.7.2.1 Leadership

Due to role ambiguity and uncertainty over power structures in the stepfamily, it often happens that neither the father, nor the mother, exercises much leadership in the family. This leads to unsuccessful parental control. The discipline of the children often is very lenient and the parents are inconsistent with their punishment.

2.7.2.2 **Negotiation style**

Negotiation regarding problems is often endless and, while spouses agree on decisions, they rarely carry them out. Making decisions, such as which family moves, who changes schools, and who remains in the same neighbourhood, often stimulate much conflict and dissension. Impulsive decisions may complicate the integration process.

2.7.2.3 **Roles**

Problems related to roles involve difficulties regarding the reallocation of roles, learning new roles, and the resolution of differences resulting from disagreement between two or more persons within the family about appropriate role behaviour, reciprocal role expectations, or role priorities. Ambiguity about specific step role behaviour is a frequent cause of remarried family problems. A daughter may, for example, find it difficult to relinquish to her stepmother her accustomed role as surrogate-parent to siblings and spouse-companion to her father. A great deal of role ambiguity (when no one feels responsible for taking care of the most routine responsibilities) could characterise roles in the household.

2.7.2.4 **Rules**

Family rules are often volatile and inconsistently enforced. Frequent changes of rules can be confusing in the household.

2.7.3 **Communication**

Aspects of concern are whether communication facilitates understanding or movement and whether members have respect or regard for each other. Attachment does not occur if negative communication behaviour, such as sending mixed messages, double binds, insults, blaming and criticism dominate the family's interaction over decisions. Listening skills are considered to be low if the levels of empathy and attentive listening are low. Family communication is essential to ensure stability and flexibility in the family. Families must possess both skills that enable them to understand their rules and patterns of interaction, and skills that enable them to change the rules and patterns in response to other changes. This ability to adapt has been correlated with successful family adjustment (Mullins, 1990:63). Positive communication skills enable couples

and families to share with each other their changing needs and preferences, as they relate to attachment and flexibility.

2.8 Attachment in the stepfamily

A child's attachment to his/her parent is strongly influenced by the parent's investment. Parental investment includes any actions performed by a parent for a child that increase the child's chance of survival. Research indicates that parental investment is lower in families with at least one stepparent (Simpson, 1999:127). Simpson (1999:122) refers to Daly (1989) who states that attachment tends to be inhibited when:

- One or both parents are step-relatives.
- The father's paternity is uncertain.
- A child is deformed or appears weak.
- Poverty, lack of food, and too many children in the family reduce the chances of long-term survival.

From an evolutionary perspective, each of the factors listed above have incrementally deleterious effects on a parent-child attachment, setting the stage for the development of insecure attachment.

Forming a new relationship could represent an act of disloyalty, loss of hope or lack of love. The child or adult who lives apart from an attachment figure may be unable, or unwilling, to form an intimate relationship with another person, because doing so may represent a threat to the existing but unavailable attachment figure (James, 1994:4). For example, some divorced parents who no longer live with their biological children resist forming attachments with stepchildren, because doing so would make them (the parents) feel disloyal. Children living apart from biological parents may resist forming new attachments, because they believe that any positive relationship with other adults will ensure that the estranged parents will not return. A parent who has a history of attachment disturbances may have considerable difficulty in forming a later attachment relationship, because he/she does not know how to relate to another person in an intimate reciprocal relationship.

Sager *et al.* (1983:27) identify the following factors, which could influence attachment in the stepfamily:

- Stepfamily attachment may be less resilient because members bring with them emotional scars of "failure," death and loss. Fears of further loss may diminish affective investment in attachment with the spouse, children and stepchildren. Children may also move away from emotional involvement with their own parents. Learning to trust again can be a prolonged task. Attachment difficulties could also result from partners' earlier attachment experiences. All stepparents must come to terms with the fact that no matter how "terrible" a parent the child's other parent is, the child will have "a certain attachment to her that he will never have to me" (Bernstein, 1989:48).

- Milestones may heighten feelings of loss, sorrow and divided loyalty. "Visiting" children are a reminder of the loss of the nuclear family, which creates a wedge in attachment possibilities. The biological parent and stepparent may experience the same child in a fundamentally different way. The biological parent may feel guilty when intimate couple time excludes the child. Stepparents are more likely to be rejected, ignored and treated with hostility by the same child (Papernow, 1993:60). This difference in a couple's experience could hamper attachment.

- History and traditions are inchoate, which implies less security. Differing values and backgrounds may be experienced as "culture shocks." A stepfamily's history and structure also dictate that, fundamentally, children feel differently about biological parents and step-parents. Children in stepfamilies have a second parent outside the new family to whom they are more likely to feel attached than to either of the adults in the new family. Papernow (1993:60) reminds social workers that family membership is both physical and psychological: "You can divorce a spouse. You cannot divorce a parent."

- Spontaneity may be difficult, as issues of time, money, and commitments are shared elsewhere.

- Stepfamilies are not always accepted or supported by extended family members. This can impact negatively on attachment. Ihinger-Tallman (1987:165) cites studies that demonstrate that stepfamilies may be isolated because of the non-institutionalised status of stepfamilies. It follows that support networks in developing healthy stepfamilies are of the utmost importance. Stepparents, especially those who marry for the first time, feel frightened and inadequate for the task of parenting. If the stepparent lacks essential support systems, or if there are ego disturbances, attachment may proceed with great difficulty.

- The insecurity produced by structural changes that occur in the stepfamily makes tolerance of ambivalence more difficult. Many mothers fantasise about the children prior to the marriage. Soon the discrepancies between reality and fantasy become apparent followed by disappointment. In order for attachment to proceed, the stepparent must accept the loss of the fantasy child.

Watkins (1987:59) refers to Jewett (1978) who has also written extensively about adoption. The following is considered relevant to attachment in the stepfamily:

- The child's willingness to accept the loss of a relationship with a bio-parent and the growth of ties with a new family.

- The child's acceptance that the stepfamily is permanent and that a return to the nuclear family is impossible.

- Acceptance of the stepchild by the other siblings and grandparents is important for the success of attachment relationships.

- The development of behaviour that indicates a willingness to be part of the new family and the development of a sense of solidarity with one another.

- The discovery of some common ground upon which the relationship can be established.

The above confirms that the child is an active partner in the attachment relationship and that, to a large extent, attachment in middle childhood is an intentional decision.

Further conditions essential for successful attachment concerns opportunities for physical closeness and nurturing of the child, and the child's response to parental overtures. The stepparent needs opportunities to undertake care-taking functions successfully. Stepparents may face several problems in the nurturing, care-taking aspects of their roles. For example, the child may no longer be small and probably has formed an attachment to a parent. In addition, the child is likely to have clearly established preferences for food, toys, activities, and a daily schedule that the stepparent has neither influenced nor seen while it developed. Nonetheless, the stepparent must acknowledge and accept this, rather than treat the child like a blank slate, empty of prior impressions or experiences. The stepchild may neither want, nor need, the specific care-giving envisioned by the stepparent. One child may be wary or unwilling to engage in such interactions at first, while another child may be self-sufficient and unable to accept certain forms of care-

taking. Although this may be a barrier to the formation of attachment, care-taking problems can be overcome in time.

In a stepfamily, the parent-child attachment predates the couple's relationship, and may be very strong. For a primary couple to form attachment in the stepfamily may be difficult. Another reason may be that the adults become so involved with the children's needs that they spare no thought for deepening the attachment between them. A common discrepancy in stepfamilies occurs when a parent marries a person whose age is close to that of the stepchildren. The likelihood exists that the stepparent and stepchild may draw together in a non-productive attachment, due to similarities in the level of their experience of life.

Watkins (1987:60) quotes Jewett (1978) who believes that the following should be avoided in order to promote attachment:

- Criticising any past relationships or adults, who have been part of a child's life.
- A permissive or lenient attitude toward discipline.
- An attempt to relate to the child as a friend, rather than as a figure of authority.
- Stepparents' unreasonable expectations for the children's development or performance.

Varying attachments in the stepfamily add to the challenge of getting to know each other well enough to form a family that meets enough of its members' needs. The first-time parent experiences the arrival of a mutual child more as "a part of me," than the stepchild. Bernstein (1989:46) states that the mutual child is often perceived to be an extension of the self and a link to the genetic chain of the past, while stepchildren are experienced a-historical and as "not self." Bernstein (1989:49) attributes the greater closeness between stepparents and the mutual child to the absence of the tension between the biological parents, as in the case of stepchildren. Taking care of a mutual child may also contribute towards stepsiblings becoming better friends and family members growing closer to each other.

In the stepfamily, different sets of circumstances affect attachment and they occur on a different timetable than in biological families. For the stepfamily, social workers must emphasise the strength and importance of attachment born of many years of nurture, care-giving and shared experience, rather than that of an attachment forged only in the maternity ward. Relationships with stepparents are often formed after an initial attachment relationship had been constructed and then lost. As described in Howes (1999:679-680), research studies on attachment

relationships between children with prior difficult life experiences and alternative care-givers, suggest that the construction of secure attachments appears dependent on particularly skilled and sensitive adult behaviour. It seems possible that alternative attachment figures could provide children with a "safety net" for their future development.

Finally, the nature of the attachment process in stepfamilies may be an important variable in various family members' quality of functioning (Santrock & Sitterle, 1987:296). While extensive information has been collected on the attachment of infants in intact families, little is known about the nature of attachment in stepfamilies. The researcher believes that the concept of secure attachment, as developed by Ainsworth (1979), Bowlby (1969), and Sroufe and Fleeson (1986), needs to be examined in stepfamilies. Secure attachment is an important concept, not just in infancy, but throughout the life-span (Bretherton, 1985). However, from an empirical perspective, there is little direct knowledge about this process in stepparent families (Amato, 1991:1021; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992:57). This relative neglect contrasts sharply with the range of other perspectives (legal, economic and social) that apply to remarriage (Rutter & O'Connor, 1999:831).

A relationship of high quality is indeed possible and stepfamilies can function well. While some researchers have noted the strengths in stepfamilies (Duberman, 1975; Knaub, Hanna & Stinnett, 1984; Sager, *et al.*, 1983), most of the academic research on stepfamilies has been problem-focused. However, Kelly (1995) devoted her entire research to the development of healthy stepfamilies.

It can be concluded that response to the individual child's needs and the provision of a firm but loving environment will facilitate the growth of attachment.

2.9   Steps for stepfamily integration

Although a stepparent will never be able to take the same place as an idealised parent in the child's life, he or she can create a loving, secure home that is often more satisfying than the conflict-ridden original family. To enable positive adjustments and establish their own identity, Emily and John Visher (1988:235) identified the following tasks that members of a stepfamily need to accomplish:

2.9.1 Dealing with losses and changes

As mentioned earlier, stepfamilies are born out of loss. Incomplete mourning over past relationships could interfere with efforts to create a successful new stepfamily. Everyone entering a stepfamily must learn to adjust to uncertainty in the stepfamily's initial stages. The new couple can help the children to deal with their losses and feelings of anger, guilt, rejection and despair by supporting the expression of feelings. Kaufman (1993:260) emphasises that children must be informed of plans that involve them. Biblioplay, which incorporates bibliotherapy, is widely used in intervention with children. The researcher believes that stories (or trauma books) can be a powerful means to help children to accept change, make changes and express their feelings.

2.9.2 Negotiating different developmental needs

If members in the new stepfamily find themselves in different life cycle phases, this contributes to the stress of integrating the stepfamily. Visher and Visher (1988:235) emphasize that individual needs must be communicated clearly, and that incompatible needs must be negotiated. In this way, family members develop tolerance and flexibility.

2.9.3 Establishing new traditions

At the outset of stepfamily life, daily and personal activities are thrown into disarray. To become an integrated stepfamily requires adjustments that include new ways of doing things and, especially, changes in values. Decisions must be made concerning new sets of roles, rules, and traditions for the new household. In order to achieve this, every member's input is needed. Meaningful traditions from any member's past must be maintained to demonstrate to the children that there is neither a right, nor a wrong way of doing things. Visher and Visher (1988:235) suggest that parents should focus only on those events that are most important to them as a family unit. Besides the retention or combination of appropriate rituals, new traditions could be created. Dealing with problems and showing appreciation could take place at family meetings. Changes and the enforcement of discipline must be introduced gradually.

2.9.4 Developing a solid couple attachment

In the case of a remarriage, the healthy development of the marriage often suffers due to the

premature presence of the children. Couples in stepfamilies have many conflicting internal and external forces that can weaken their relationship, for example financial inequality, feelings of guilt, children's non-acceptance of the new partner and extended family ties. Remarried couples need to nourish their relationship and make a conscious commitment to one another. Time must be set aside weekly for the couple to spend together alone, along with daily quiet time. Open communication, that is keeping each other informed and involved in the household's daily activities, is crucial. The children must regard the couple as a strong unit who support each other in disciplinary matters, and whom they can trust. The couple needs to work out money matters together, and accept different parent-child and stepparent-stepchild feelings.

2.9.5   Forming new relationships

The stepfamily is only as strong as the relationships that prevail. Therefore, it is crucial that room should be made for stepparent-stepchild one-on-one time, as well as parent-child one-on-one time. During this process, instant love must not be expected and the children's decision as to what to call the stepparent must be accepted. The ability of the whole family to relate and resolve conflicts in mutually satisfactory ways serves the best interests of the new stepfamily. Kaufman (1993:265) mentions doing fun activities together as another way of establishing family integration.

2.9.6   Creating a "parenting coalition"

The remarried parent must establish a parenting coalition with the outside parent to resolve issues of childcare and custody - and avoid using a child as a "go-between." Parents must avoid asking the children to be "messengers" or "spies." By establishing new boundaries, this will ensure that the lines of communication are kept open between the households. Visher and Visher (1988:235) suggest that power struggles should be avoided and that nothing negative should be said about the adult in the other household. In this way, the parenting skills of the former spouse are respected.

2.9.7   Accepting continual shifts in household composition

Parents must respect the child's right to have an open and independent relationship with each of its bio-parents. To permit the coming and going of children between two households, it is

essential that the boundary around the household is sufficiently permeable (Kaufman, 1993:266). Children must be granted enough time to adjust to household transitions. Inter alia, the advice of Visher and Visher (1988:236) is that non-residential children must be provided with personal space. Consequences must be determined that only affect their own household. To ease children's transitions, special times must be planned for the various households.

2.9.8 Risking involvement

Family members may resist being drawn into the new family for a number of reasons. They may feel that, in order to be close to their new families, they must abandon their former families. "The success of the combined family depends on the willingness of its members to risk (yet again) getting involved and possibly getting hurt" (Kaufman, 1993:267). Visher and Visher (1988:236) suggest the following:

- Stepparents must be included in school, religious and sports activities and they must refrain from excluding themselves from a stepchild's activities.
- Stepparents must be given legal permission to act, when necessary.
- When attachment has developed, the stepparent-stepchild relationship must be maintained after the death or divorce of a parent.

The survival of the stepfamily depends on the ability of its members to recognise differences, resolve conflicts and participate in the slow process of family integration. The growing feelings of attachment and affection may bring fears of rejection, as frequently are experienced by children in middle childhood.

2.10 Conclusion

In order to understand the complexity of stepfamily functioning, this chapter has provided an overview of its complexity and it described a number of challenges to become an attached family. The majority of stepfamilies seem enmeshed in myths, most of which are negative and tend to affect the behaviour toward stepfamily members, as such. It seems that the motivations to remarry are similar to those that move people to marry for the first time; many perceive remarriage to be a solution to their problems. The stepfamily is a family with a special set of developmental tasks.

In this research, the developmental approach offered a conceptual framework for the understanding of stepfamily development. The three key concepts identified were life cycle stages, developmental tasks and attachment. The stepfamily's formation was divided into the early, middle and later stages. The Circumplex Model is closely linked to the developmental approach. Attachment, flexibility and communication are the three dimensions in the Model. The growth of attachment appears to depend on various factors that laid the foundation for the empirical study.

CHAPTER 3

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD AND THE STEPFAMILY

3.1   Introduction

In a person's life, the period from approximately the sixth to the twelfth year is generally known as the middle childhood years. Freud (1963) refers to this period as "the years of psychosexual latency," while Erikson (1963) calls it "the period of industry versus inferiority." Louw *et al.* (1998:322) describe this as "a period of relative calmness and stability," considering the rapid development in the earlier pre-school and later adolescent years. Nevertheless, it is an important period in children's cognitive, social, emotional, and self-conceptual development. The school's contribution should not be underestimated, although the influence of parents and family remains of cardinal importance. Well-balanced development during this period lays a solid foundation for subsequent development.

During the middle childhood years, the child has to master several developmental tasks. An analysis of the descriptions of these developmental tasks by Child & Family Canada (www.cfc-efc.ca, 26-12-2001); Golan (1981); Louw *et al.* (1998:322); Nuttall (www.nnc.org, 26-12-2001) and Sheafor, Horesji and Horisji (1994) leads to the following resume:

- Additional refinement of motor development.
- The consolidation of gender-role identity.
- An extended development of cognitive and language skills.
- An increase in social participation.
- The growth of greater self-knowledge.
- The further development of moral judgement and behaviour.

The researcher compiled the following figure (figure 3.1), based on the work by Erikson (1963), Golan (1981:153) and Sheafor *et al.* (1994):

Individual developmental age-specific tasks and needs	Possible transitional crises and typical problems
School 6-12 years **Tasks** Industry vs. inferiority • Increased physical activity • Competitiveness • Dealing with authority in the school and environment • Co-operation with others • Team play • Same gender role-identification • Introspection **Needs** Intellectual and social stimulation	Coping with an expanding world and increasing stimuli **Typical problems** • Social and learning failures • Lack of self-confidence

TABLE 3.1: The developmental tasks and crises of middle childhood

Erikson (1950) proposes that "industry versus inferiority" is a central developmental task for this period. He also stresses the importance of "mutual regulations" between parent and child during this period, a concept somewhat similar to Bowlby's (1969/1982) notion of a "goal-corrected partnership" between children and their attachment figures. This chapter will discuss this later.

Children in middle childhood spend much more time away from home. They also spend far less time with their parents. "Nevertheless, the child's home is still the place that offers the most security and the family is still the pivot on which his or her life hinges" (Louw *et al.*, 1998:350). A second marriage disrupts the child's development and major adjustments are demanded.

This chapter focuses on the physical, cognitive, personality and social development of middle childhood and discusses fully the impact of remarriage and its influence on this stage of development.

3.2   Physical development

Physical development is less rapid in middle childhood. Wide individual and cross-cultural differences exist. Greater awareness of internal bodily sensations may lead to complaints of a somatic nature, such as headaches. Discussion of sensory responses to stressful events is possible.

3.2.1   General physical development

Louw *et al.* (1998:322) identified two outstanding characteristics of physical development during middle childhood as slower overall growth rate and rapid growth of the arms and legs in comparison with the body. Apart from individual variations, the average annual growth is approximately six centimetres, while mass increases by approximately 20 to 40 kilograms. The child's body begins to take on a shape similar to that of an adult.

Other physical changes include the following (Louw *et al.*, 1998:323):
- The brain reaches its adult size and weight
- Breathing becomes deeper and slower
- The heart is smaller in relation to the body than at any other stage of life
- Permanent teeth replace the milk-teeth.

An important issue in middle childhood is physical ability, as children gain a growing sense of competence in relation to their physical ability. Successful engagement in physical activities plays a major role in their development of self-esteem and personality. Due to this importance, social workers need to assess this aspect during intervention.

The child's physical development in middle childhood will now be described more fully.

3.2.2   Motor skills

It is with good reason that Louw *et al.* (1998:324) highlight the psychomotor skills in middle childhood. Children are expected to take part in activities that require the application of motor skills. Nutall (2001) states that children like to run, jump, skip, cycle, skate, swim and

participate in a variety of other sports. As regards motor activities, boys usually develop more rapidly than girls. Usually, these differences are attributed to the fact that boys have more muscle tissue than girls and, therefore, are stronger.

Children's motor development facilitates the development of various facets of their personality. On the cognitive level, the acquisition of skills, such as drawing, writing, painting and playing a musical instrument, becomes possible. Participation in individual and team sports enhances social development. Usually, children who excel at sport are popular with their peers and this could enhance their self-esteem. Because of improved motor development, boys and girls can now engage in a wider range of motor activities.

3.2.3 Cognitive development

Piaget (1971) refers to middle childhood as a "concrete operational period," as children are able to understand conservation and numbers, as well as multiple and hierarchical classification. Rapid cognitive growth results from learning skills, such as reading and writing. The following distinctive features of the concrete operational period are emphasised.

- **Decenting**

  "Decenting" is the ability to consider various aspects of a matter. Thus, reasoning is more logical.

- **Classification**

  When children are able to understand and perform multiple classification, then they can classify objects simultaneously on the basis of more than one criterion. As for South Africa, the investigation of Miller and Meltzer (1978), as quoted in Louw *et al.* (1998:327), illustrates the influence of schooling.

- **Conservation**

  An understanding identifies the concrete operational period as that "quantitative relationship between things stays the same, even though perceptual changes take place, just as long as nothing is added or taken away" (Louw *et al.*, 1998:328). In other words, cause and effect are better understood and logical explanations can be grasped.

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- **Seriation**

  "Seriation" refers to children's ability to arrange objects systematically in a series from small to large, or from large to small.

- **Number concept**

  During their middle childhood, children master the number concept and can comprehend. concepts of time, causality, space and measurement.

Considering the above-mentioned, one could conclude that schooling and the quality of schooling plays an important role. Parents' educational level is also an important factor in children's cognitive development. Parents also begin to expect more consistent conformity to family rules, and the range of rules and contingencies expands at whatever rate parents estimate that the children's cognitive development allows. Reaching these developmental milestones makes it easier for children to understand remarriage and negotiate its implications.

3.2.4 Memory

During middle childhood the memory span increases greatly. There is also an increase in processing speed and the amount of information retained. Recall memory improves. Anxiety commonly interferes with memory and the retrieval of information regarding critical incidents.

3.2.5 Language development

School children's language development not only involves an increased vocabulary and sentences with better structures, it also involves the improved ability to adapt language to the context in which it is used. Children start to understand metaphorical language, irony and humour (Louw *et al.*, 1998:340). Although communication ability improves, even older children may not have a complete awareness of knowledge about communication. The child's ability to express needs and negotiate exceptions to a rule are important elements of the partnership between the parent and children. The spoken word plays an important part in forming attachment during this stage.

3.2.6 Creativity

This aspect could be important, especially where school children are part of a stepfamily. Their exposure to uncertain circumstances can offer them the opportunity to meet divergent thinking and learning to cope, which, in turn, could enhance their self-worth and self-respect. Along with new perspectives come new avenues for working through feelings and, ultimately, integrating traumatic life experiences. Children's memories play an important role when they have to learn new facts and skills. Apart from physical development, middle childhood also is an important period in the development of children's personalities.

3.3 Personality development

As mentioned earlier, Freud (1963) called the middle childhood years "the latency period," while Erikson (1963) perceived it to be the stage of "industry versus inferiority." Current literature pays particular attention to how self-concept, emotional development and sensitivity toward others contribute to personality development (Papalia & Olds, 1986; Turner & Helms, 1995; Van der Westhuÿsen & Schoeman, 1988).

3.3.1 Self-concept

When children become part of a group of children of the same age, their self-concept changes. To feel and act with confidence, a basic sense of safety is needed. In stepfamilies, children may often feel unsafe and insecure.

During middle childhood, children develop a concept of who they are (the real self) and also how they would like to be (the ideal self). According to Papalia and Olds (1986:283), school children develop the ability to assess themselves accurately. This knowledge of themselves is based upon their achievements, needs and on what others expect from them. Relevant to this research, is the study by Coopersmith (Louw *et al.*, 1998:345) on the self-esteem of children. Coopersmith (1967) provides evidence that the way in which adults (particularly the parents) treat children plays an important role in the development of their self-esteem.

3.3.2   Emotional development

Middle childhood is a time of greater emotional maturity; this implies greater independence and self-sufficiency (Louw *et al.*, 1998:345). Emotions are more specific, more diverse and more sophisticated. Often, children in middle childhood are out of touch with their feelings and may hide them. Gender-role stereotyping may often prevent boys from crying or showing fear, while girls are often criticised if they become aggressive. Vander Zanden (in Louw *et al.*, 1998:345) points out changes in the understanding of their emotions and emotional experiences. They increasingly attribute emotions to internal causes; they become aware of social rules in the expression of emotions; they learn to "read" facial expressions; they understand that emotional states can be changed psychologically; and they realise that people can experience different emotions simultaneously. They begin to show better understanding of how other people feel and why they feel as they do. They have an improved ability to control their emotions and to hide their feelings.

Because children attend school, and because their social boundaries have expanded, new **fears** regarding academic performance, teachers and friends emerge. Many children fear that their parents could die. Louw *et al.* (1998:348) refer to research by Flaste (1977) where many children stated that, of all people whom they fear, they fear their fathers most. This fear could stem from disciplinary actions, sexual abuse or a divorced father who threatens to kidnap his children. Louw *et al.* (1998) point out that today's children are afraid of AIDS, pollution and nuclear power.

Children in middle childhood learn that **love** can be expressed in different ways, for instance by being communicative and charitable. During middle childhood, children begin to show **aggression** openly against others, primarily in order to hurt them. Research quoted by Louw *et al.* (1998:348) confirms that:

- children, who are aggressive during their early years, tend to be aggressive later in life
- boys are more aggressive than girls at this stage, due to biological and cultural variables.

As they meet non-parental figures, school children come to realise that authority is connected to specific roles. Respecting authority may be challenged. Besides conforming to many rules, these children have to confront their own emotions.

3.3.3 Decline in egocentrism

Egocentric thinking is reduced when children begin to view the world also from the perspective of others. Papalia and Olds (1986:278) describe the way in which children develop sensitivity towards other people during middle childhood: they take other people's needs and feelings into account and they show a need to help others. They become aware that other people perceive them, and that this perception could influence the others' behaviour towards them. The most common way for children to express emotional problems is by their behaviour, for example, they fight, lie, steal or break rules.

3.4 Social development

During middle childhood, children are exposed to many new social learning experiences. As their social understanding develops, their personality forms. The most important facets of social development will be highlighted in what follows.

As rightly stated in the introduction, children in their middle childhood spend much more time away from home and less time with their parents. However, they make big demands on their parents. Louw *et al.* (1998:350) and Papalia and Olds (1986:262) summarise the parental role in their children's middle childhood as follows:

- Transportation of children to and from various activities.
- Helping to plan daily and weekly activities with children.
- Supervision and assistance with children's homework and school projects.
- Absorbing financial pressure.
- Serving as a buffer between the child and the community.
- Teaching children moral, religious and cultural values.
- Teaching behaviour towards authority.
- Guidance with interpersonal relationships.
- Teaching children problem-solving skills.
- Encouraging achievement (academic, athletic, social).
- Helping children to achieve a high self-esteem.

During middle childhood, socialisation extends to the peer group, older children and new figures of authority. The way in which children view themselves socially plays an important role in their self-concept, which influences their seeking closeness in a relationship.

Children's roles are also subject to change:
- They become less dependent on their parents in respect of assistance with their homework, getting dressed, preparation for examinations and the choice of best friends.
- They want opportunities, on their own or jointly with parents, to make decisions that affect their lives.
- They often express dissatisfaction with existing rules regarding playtime, bedtime and pocket money.
- They compare various aspects of their family life with those of other families.
- They begin to question their parents' decisions.

Although children want to do things by, and for, themselves, they need adults who can provide guidance, rules and limits. It follows that parents influence children's development in important ways.

Middle childhood is marked by rapid cognitive and emotional development as children leave the safety of the home to move into the outside world with new challenges and demands. During this period, children should experience stable homes and social networks from whence to move out and cope with new experiences. It may be extremely harmful when developmental arrest occurs due to stressful life events, for example, divorce and a subsequent remarriage. Normal development may stagnate or regress with serious long-term consequences and lapses in development.

The converse is also true that, where a child experiences a stable home situation, this enhances cognitive and emotional development. The following section focuses on parenting style, which is closely connected to parent-child attachment.

3.4.1 Parenting style

Naturally, the way in which parents bring up their children, that is the parenting style, plays an

important role in a child's development. Baumrind (1976) and Louw *et al.* (1998:351) identified the best-known parenting styles and Maccoby and Martin (1983) extended them. The researcher compiled table 3.2, based on characteristics specified by the above-mentioned researchers.

It is clear that the parenting style is closely connected to parent-child attachment. It has been well substantiated that parents are more involved and less disengaged with their own biological children than with stepchildren (Hetherington *et al.*, 1999:11), and that parents may be willing to assume more responsibility and do more work for their own children than for stepchildren. Louw *et al.* (1998:353) warn that the influence of the parenting style should be interpreted with caution, as there are many other factors that could also play a role. In this regard, Berger (1994:266) is of the opinion that the impact of a parenting style is modest, considering other elements that also have an impact on a child's development. Parents and their personalities produce the social environment within which their children develop and this contributes to the understanding of the development of attachment.

Authoritarian parent	Authoritative parent	Permissive parent	Uninvolved parent
• Restrictive and punitive style • Places high premium on conformity and obedience • Very little communication between parent and child • Children are severely punished if they do not behave as expected • Dominant	• Sets clear guidelines for children • Allows children freedom within reasonable limits • Warm, sensitive and patient • Encourages children to contribute to family discussions on decisions • Democratic approach • Rights of both parents and children are respected • Inductive discipline	• Children are responsible for regulating their own behaviour • Little control exercised over children • Children do as they please	• Undemanding • Emotionally detached from children • Does the minimum • Fails to set long-term guidelines and goals • Responds to certain short-term demands (food and clothes) • Little interest in children in general • Personal problems
Children: • Low self-esteem • Less skilled in relationships • Reserved / aggressive • Antisocial behaviour • Do less well in school • Socially incompetent • Poor communication skills • Feelings of incompetence	**Children:** • High self-esteem • Internalise moral standards • Perform academically • More independent • Mastery • High degree of altruistic behaviour • Socially responsible	**Children:** • Impulsive and aggressive • Lack of self-control • Do not accept responsibility • Do less well in school • Poor relationships • Less mature in behaviour and attitude towards friends and school • Feelings of insecurity	**Children:** • Impulsive • Antisocial • Less achievement-orientated at school • Show disturbances in their relationships • Feel unloved

TABLE 3.2: Parenting Styles

3.4.2 Adjustments related to stepfamilies

Therapists agree that there are few events that can disrupt a child's development as much as divorce. Thousands of children in South Africa become victims of divorce. Most parents who become divorced, marry again. It has been suggested that the middle childhood transition may be particularly difficult for children in remarried families and that it may trigger off problems in adolescence (Hetherington *et al.*, 1999:5).

Changes brought about by a second marriage demand major adjustments. The children not only acquire a new (step)parent, but often also a (step)sibling(s). It has been found that the change from accustomed practices to new (particularly disciplinary) practices is very stressful and confusing (Visher & Visher, 1979:213; Wald, 1981:33-34). Children may regard the presence of new step relations as a violation of their relationship with the parent in whose custody they have been placed. Research has revealed that children's opportunities to build up a relationship with the parent who had been denied custody are also adversely affected (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1982). Remarried fathers visit their daughters less often, probably because they want to break their links with their old life and start a new life.

Parents who have acquired stepchildren also faces no easy task. For instance, stepmothers often have to contend with prejudices, such as those illustrated in children's stories, for example Cinderella (Louw *et al.*, 1998:357).

As regards differences between the genders, most of the research has been done with families that have a stepfather (the mother usually gains custody of the children). Almost all of the research (Liebert *et al.*, 1986:285; Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995) indicate that boys adjust better to a stepfather than girls. Boys with stepfathers are also less likely to develop personality disturbances or cognitive developmental problems than boys in single-parent families. Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1985) have even found that, within two years, boys in a mother-stepfather family function just as well as boys in a normal family. The fact that girls adjust less well is attributed to the breaking of the close relationship that most girls establish with their mother, while living as a single-parent family.

Available research on father-stepmother families indicates that girls also adjust less well to such a situation than boys (Clingempeel & Segal, 1986). In this case, the girls' less satisfactory

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adjustment is attributed mainly to the probability that girls regard their stepmothers as unworthy substitutes for their biological mothers, and/or as intruders, who threaten their relationship with their fathers. However, research has also indicated that the stepmother-stepdaughter relationship usually improves and that they can even establish a very close relationship (Clingempeel & Segal, 1986).

The effect of a second marriage is not necessarily negative and not always similar (Liebert *et al.*, 1986). Research has revealed that, in their adjustment and cognitive development, children in stepfamilies differ very little from children in bio-families (Louw *et al.*, 1998:357). Shaffer (1989:587) adds: "… there is little or no support for the notion that most stepparents are cruel, aloof disciplinarians who are unconcerned about their stepchildren. On the contrary, the stepparents who have been studied to date seem to be competent parents who are involved with the stepchildren and sensitive to their needs."

During their life cycle, a stepfamily's children in their middle childhood are prone to have periods of greater vulnerability owing to external or internal factors. Social workers should be sensitive to periods of growth or change in the family life cycle. Such vulnerability will compound in the family 's responses and adaptation to attachment formation.

3.4.3   Influence of schooling

Although the family still has a major influence, the school also plays a very important role in the development of children during the middle childhood years (Shaffer, 1989:612). School problems may include the deterioration of academic performance, excessive cutting of classes, suspension or expulsion, or other problems in the school setting that prove to be related to some aspect of the stepfamily situation, for example problems with concentration. In research on children from homes with marital violence, O'Keefe (1994:412-413) found that competence in school was a protective factor. When children cope well in school, they often feel better about themselves. Intervention should build on such areas of strength.

3.4.4   Peer group

During middle childhood, children are more inclined to interact with other children of the same gender and age, but attachment to their parents remains the primary source of security. They

associate with many more children than before for the sake of friendship, affection and fellowship. They terminate relationships that are not satisfying and they are inclined to practise and refine their social skills in interaction with other children.

Greater solidarity and attachment develops within the peer group. The important role that the peer groups play in children's development, can be summarised as follows:

The peer group:

- provides comradeship, that is, the child has friends with whom to play;
- provides opportunities for trying out new behaviour and learning positive social skills;
- facilitates the transfer of knowledge and information;
- teaches its members obedience to rules and regulations;
- helps to enforce gender roles;
- weakens the emotional attachment between the child and his/her parents; and
- provides experience of relationships in which they can compete with others on an equal footing.

Papalia and Olds (1995) warn that excessive conformity and attachment to the peer group could be detrimental. Except for their taking part in undesirable activities, it could harm the development of their self-reliance and independence.

Besides the above-mentioned factors that have an influence on the child's social development, the researcher wishes to emphasise the role that television, the working mother and divorce - often followed by remarriage - plays.

In summary, children's social development takes place within relationships. To be a human being is to be a social being. This means that the quality of relationships has a direct bearing on the development of personality. The more children are able to make sense of the particular social world in which they find themselves and understand their own place within it, the more adept, skilled and relaxed they can be in social relationships. This improves their chances of developing mutually rewarding friendships and becoming caring parents. In turn, children who are exposed to serious adversities will often be less confident and less competent in dealing with social relationships. The parenting style, the child's experience in a stepfamily, the influence of schooling and the peer group, are closely linked to the child's personality development.

Therefore, relationships and the quality of experience within relationships are of the utmost interest and relevance to social workers involved with children and their families.

3.5 Moral development

The ability to differentiate and judge behaviour in a society as "good" or "bad" is one of the most important developmental tasks to be mastered during the middle childhood years. Piaget (1972) and Kohlberg (1985) have contributed extensively to the understanding of children's moral development. They contend that moral development coincides with cognitive development and that this process takes place over a long period. In middle childhood, up to ten years of age, children regard rules as sacrosanct and believe that any violation should be punished. After this age, children begin to show a greater degree of moral flexibility. They begin to realise that rules are made by fallible human beings, and that moral values differ from one culture to another and from one society to the next.

3.6 Factors that influence the adjustment of children in middle childhood and in a stepfamily

Often, it is quite erroneously assumed that the childhood years are carefree, without any responsibilities. However, normal development comprises a series of cognitive, physical, emotional and social changes. Several tasks, as discussed in the previous section, must be mastered. Additional life crises, such as parental divorce and remarriage, may inhibit the completion of development tasks of a normal life cycle. This can be concomitant with a wide range of reactions, which will be expounded in the following paragraphs.

Visher and Visher (1988) agree with Sager *et al.* (1983) that, at the time of parental remarriage, age and specific stages of development are significant factors in adjustment to a stepfamily. As children advance in age, adjustment becomes more difficult. However, according to Maxwell-Jones (1978), the intensity of the adjustment is more likely related to the way both parents have communicated aspects concerning the divorce to the child, their attitudes to each other, and the pressures they place on the child to reject or denigrate the absent parent.

Remarriage is the result of choices made by adults in which children had no say. Then, children enter the stepfamily with certain feelings that originate from their previous family history. To

children, the reconstruction of the new family often represents the loss of the continuous, intimate parent-child relationship; they must now share the parent with one or more additional persons.

In evaluating the probable issues involved in stepfamilies with children, it is necessary to consider several important factors: the degree of recognition of previous loss (whether by death of divorce); the length of time between marriages for dealing with the previous loss; the extent to which previous family loss and/or conflict has actually been resolved; and the recognition and acceptance of emotional issues that were important to children at the time of remarriage, including their age-related methods of handling these issues (McGoldrick & Carter, 1988:276).

According to Boyd (1998:80), the average age of children who enter stepfamilies is ten years. Visher and Visher (1988) report that children in middle childhood (6-12 years) have the most difficulty in resolving feelings of divided loyalty. They often cling tenaciously to fantasies of parental reunion and continue to believe that their behaviour can either separate or reunite biological parents. About the fate of these children, Knaub and Hanna (1984:73) remark as follows: "A stepfamily, by definition, cannot exist without children. And there remains little doubt that an increasing number of children are affected by the growing numbers of remarriages in this society." Thompson and Rudolph (1992:370) allege that these children are often labelled "maladjusted" or "delinquent" because they have experienced a restructure of the family. Children's reactions to parental remarriage may include the following:

- Anger at their loss, general feelings of helplessness and uncontrollable hostility - often the result of antagonism, which cannot be resolved, toward the biological parent. Children perceive it to be dangerous to express such antagonism in case they lose a biological parent completely, and direct it toward the stepparent. Such displacement accounts for many of the mystifying aspects of their aggressive and irrational behaviour toward stepparents.

- With feelings of low self-esteem and self-doubt, besides grieving for parental loss, children in middle childhood differentiate themselves from their parents. They experience extreme rejection if absent parents abandon them, in which case the children often perceive their own behaviour or personality as the cause of the parents' disappearance.

- Boys, who usually identify with their fathers at this age, often retain fierce loyalty to them, and reject their stepfathers.

- Rivalry with the same sex stepparents for the attention and affection of the biological parents.

- Embarrassment about being stepchildren.

- Resentment about sharing space with stepsiblings and sharing a parent, and about new rules, which may, initially, result in stubborn, provocative or passive-aggressive behaviour.

- A child's intense feelings (e.g. loss) may cause deterioration in schoolwork and, in some cases, depression.

Visher and Visher (1988) point out that this age group could be helped to realise that they can have extra parental figures, rather than having to give up parents if they accept a stepparent. When a biological parent has disappeared, the child in middle childhood must be helped to come to terms with the loss involved so that, instead of clinging to the past, he/she can accept a new parental figure and appreciate the positive aspects of the stepfamily situation.

There is great diversity in children's response to remarriage. For many years, research has been carried out to determine how remarriage influences children; they were then compared to children from nucleus or single parent families. Their adjustment was measured in terms of their self-concept; anxiety or stress; academic achievement; behavioural problems; social relationships and attitude towards family life. The results varied. Some studies showed that children from stepfamilies were maladjusted, while others demonstrated that there were no differences between such children and children from nucleus families. Why are there such conflicting results? A possible reason is that different studies are carried out in different ways, which makes comparison difficult. Moreover, in some cases, simplistic questions are asked, which leaves out multi-faceted aspects. Thus, sensitivity to the complex dynamics of a stepfamily is lost in the process.

Lofquist (28-01-2001) holds the view that in the existing literature the following two findings are constantly reported. Firstly, there is no difference in their self-concept between children from stepfamilies and those from traditional families. Secondly, children from stepfamilies leave home at an earlier stage. Lofquist quotes recent research, which implies that children from stepfamilies are in greater danger of developing behavioural problems (e.g., juvenile delinquency, drug abuse and poor relations within peer groups) than children from first

marriages. Lofquist (28-01-2001) attributes these findings to the fact that children from stepfamilies are more vulnerable to peer pressure, which could lead to juvenile delinquency, and that girls from stepfamilies are more at risk of alcohol abuse.

In comparison to those in non-divorced nuclear families, children in stepfamilies, on average, are more likely to exhibit behavioural and emotional problems, lower social competence, lower self-esteem, less socially responsible behaviour and poorer academic achievements (Amato & Keith, 1991; Bray, 1999; Bray & Berger, 1993; Fine, Kurdek & Hennigen, 1992). The largest and most consistently obtained differences are in externalising disorders and a lack of social responsibility, and, to a lesser extent, in achievement (Amato & Keith, 1991). Problems in relationships with parents and peers, and in relationships with romantic partners and spouses in adulthood (Amato, 1999; Hetherington *et al.*, 1999:21) have also been recorded. Children, whose parents have made multiple marital transitions, show the most severe problems in conduct disorders and achievement (Kurdek, Fine & Sinclair, 1994, 1995).

However, there are studies that face up to the fact that most children in stepfamilies do not develop these problems; they become reasonably competent individuals, functioning within the normal range of adjustment (Hetherington *et al.*, 1999:22). The researcher contends that it is important to consider behavioural problems in the light of children's adjustment prior to the remarriage.

The individual life cycle of the child is once again disrupted upon the remarriage of one or both bio-parents, which adds one or two new family life-cycle tracks. What follows, is a description of internal and external factors that influence the child's experience in the process of becoming part of a stepfamily. For the purpose of this research, certain factors in the child which could influence his/her adjustment to the stepfamily will be addressed, namely the so-called internal variables. External variables refer to factors in the stepfamily itself that influence the child's adjustment to the family.

3.6.1   Internal factors

Internal factors, or personal variables, are indicated to have an influence on a child's experience and adjustment in the stepfamily. Internal factors are those internal, intra-psychic variables that differ according to each individual's personality and traits. Internal factors that potentially

influence responses in the stepfamily are varied and extensive. Therefore, to include an all-encompassing list will be impossible. Literature about stepfamilies indicates consensus about the most important factors covered in this research. Personal variables, discussed in this part, include intelligence, temperament and self-esteem. Demographic variables that will be examined include age, gender, birth order and sexuality. Other personal variables are fantasies, feelings of guilt and dealing with loss. Individual characteristics may predict a child's reaction to stressful events. When planning intervention, internal factors must obviously be taken into account.

3.6.1.1   Intelligence

Authors, such as Barnes (1997:10), Ganong and Coleman (1984:400), Louw (1992:374) and Williams (1995:8), agree that a second marriage need not necessarily be judged only negatively. Research by Gormly and Brodzinsky (Louw, 1992:374) reveals that children in stepfamilies do not necessarily differ from children in nucleus families as regards adjustment or cognitive development. A child of higher intelligence will possibly find it easier to cope with daily tasks, such as schoolwork, because it will take less effort to master such work. Higher intelligence can also promote understanding of events and, as such, be considered a protective factor.

3.6.1.2   Age

Children react to difficult life situations according to their developmental stage, as this determines their cognitive understanding of life's events, their emotional state and the nature of their relationships (Gordon & Wraith, 1993:564). Cognitive, emotional and social immaturity renders young children extremely vulnerable to traumatic events. Older children have more developed problem-solving skills and a greater range of social relationships from which to gain social support. Bernstein (1989:46) concludes that the younger the child is when a stepparent enters the picture, the closer the attachment will be. Young children's dependence on care for their survival elicits most effectively the care-givers' attachment. The target group for this study are in the middle childhood phase, the period from 6 to 12 years. The beginning of chapter 3 provides a broader discussion of the development.

The degree to which the child's life-cycle stage or developmental needs blend, or conflict with, the phases of the stepfamily, has a positive or negative influence on the child's prognosis for a

successful adjustment and ability to develop in a growth-nurturing ambience (Sager *et al.*, 1983:236).

Various studies have shown that the younger children are at the formation of a stepfamily, the more readily will they accept the stepparent and accomplish an adjustment (Buchler, 1994:24; McGoldrick & Carter, 1988:404; Olivier, 1991:53). Older children tend to challenge some aspects of stepfamily life, thus creating relationship issues with stepparents (Mullins, 1990:74). Sager (1983, 232) summarises the experience of a child in middle childhood as follows: "… the middle age group present the most problems." This could relate to their specific stage of development, or the fact that they are not capable of predicting the range of changes associated with stepfamily life, and these changes may be responsible for delayed consequences for these children.

3.6.1.3 Gender

As regards differences between genders, most of the research has been done with families that have a stepfather (the mother usually gains custody of the children; thus, most stepfamilies have a stepfather rather than a stepmother). However, it appears that boys adjust better to a stepfather than do girls (Liebert *et al.*, 1986). Boys with stepfathers are also less likely to develop personality disturbances or cognitive developmental problems than boys in single-parent families. Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1985) have even found that, within two years after remarriage, boys in a mother-stepfather family function just as well as boys in a normal family. The fact that girls adjust less well is attributed to the breaking of the close relationship that most girls had established with their mother while living as a single-parent family (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1985; Peterzon & Zill, 1986).

Although relatively little research has been done on father-stepmother families, the available research indicates that girls also adjust less well to such a situation than boys (Clingempeel & Segal, 1986). In this case, the girls' less satisfactory adjustment is attributed mainly to the probability that a girl regards her stepmother as an unworthy substitute for her biological mother, and/or an intruder, who is threatening her relationship with her father. However, Clingempeel and Segal's (1986) research also revealed that the relationship between the stepmother and stepdaughter tends to improve in time, and that a very close relationship can be built.

While boys exhibit more problems than girls following divorce, girls have greater difficulty than boys after a remarriage (Clingempeel, Brand & Ievoli, 1984; Visher & Visher, 1988:19; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Adams (1982), as quoted by Visher and Visher (1988:19), found that all female stepchildren of a stepmother augured her unhappiness the strongest, regardless whether she was a residential or a non-residential stepmother.

Examining the source of variable gender behaviour, Kavangh and Hops (1994:45-53) refer to significant gender differences in socialisation practices, such as play and friendships. These may influence children's cognitive, behavioural and affective dimensions. It is more acceptable for girls to react emotionally. The anger that boys display may be part of acting-out behaviour.

Communication differences have been found in boys and girls. Girls often communicate so that it fosters closeness and social attachments. Boys focus their communication on establishing and maintaining their position.

The effect of the gender variable in stepfamilies influences role stereotypes in the family and community. It is essential to consider gender differences in plans for intervention, as they may influence the attachment of children in middle childhood in the stepfamily.

3.6.1.4   Temperament

Temperament refers to that aspect of personality that is about feelings and their expression. Thomas and Chess (1977), who did pioneering research on the development of temperament, found that temperament plays an important role in the psychosocial adjustment of children and that temperament could be modified by environmental influences.

There are indications that temperament can be an important factor in the formation of attachment. Children in middle childhood exert an influence on their care-givers. A child of easy temperament, for example, tends to be adaptable and positive in outlook, curious and persistent in explorations. A child of difficult temperament generally is inflexible and easily alarmed by new stimuli, negative in outlook, irregular and intense in reaction. The slow-to-warm-up child, as described by Thomas and Chess (1977), displays slow adaptability, a certain reluctance to explore and a low intensity of reaction. It is not difficult to see that children of difficult, or slow-to-warm-up, temperament may be particularly vulnerable to stressful experiences. Arnold

(1990:35) refers to Rutter (1978), who observed that children with unfavourable temperamental predispositions were twice as liable to parental criticism, anger and anxiety as other children. Children, who are temperamentally predisposed to stress situations, fear or anger, may form insecure attachments, as their social interactions are impaired. A good fit between child and stepparent is necessary for the promotion of attachment.

Existing data do not support any strong conclusion that attachment and temperament domains are related (Vaughn & Bost, 1999:221). However, much of the research addressing this issue has been criticised on methodological grounds. It does seem likely that both influence the formation and expression of personality - which is a variable in attachment. Children, characterised as being difficult, are less likely to regard their care-givers as a secure base and haven of safety, than are less temperamentally difficult children. Temperament can be described as an antecedent to being attached.

3.6.1.5 Birth order

In a stepfamily, children may find the network of relationships, in which they find themselves, very confusing. Now, it may happen that the eldest child may no longer be the eldest, while a younger child may not be the youngest. An only child may suddenly acquire two or more brothers and sisters and the eldest may, for example, now become a middle child. It may also happen that numerous new responsibilities may be thrust on the eldest child and that hypermaturity is expected of him/her. Although it is not possible to generalise about birth order, it is a factor to be borne in mind when evaluating a child from a stepfamily.

3.6.1.6 Self-esteem

Joseph (1994:xi) points to self-esteem as a major trait that determines people's chance of success in life. The concept of self-esteem suggests what stepchildren feel about themselves, how they view themselves and what they think of themselves. Children with good self-esteem know their strengths and weaknesses; they view themselves realistically. Parents contribute greatly to the self-esteem of their children. Roosevelt and Lofas (in Scheepers, 1991:114) believe that the identity of a child is bound up with both biological parents. From this statement, it may be deduced that stepchildren, who have experienced parental conflict, divorce, and life in a single-parent family, bring their uncertain self-concept and a feeling of insecurity with them. Loss of a

parent, plus multiple changes in their lives may create crises for them. Children in stepfamilies fear rejection; this contributes to uncertainty about their identity (Einstein, 1982:141). However, in stable stepfamilies these children may possibly recover.

3.6.1.7 Sexuality

A stepfamily consists of members who, although not related by blood, are obliged by remarriage to live together in an intimate family relationship. Children, who are suddenly thrown together and have to live in the same house, often feel attracted to one another. They deal with their feelings by arguing with the object of their attraction.

A problem often mentioned in literature about stepfamilies is that of sexual activity among step-siblings. Berman (1980:41) contends that children living in stepfamilies may act provocatively because of the intimacy of living in close proximity without the blood relationship that is operative in the ordinary family situation. If it is borne in mind that, prior to the divorce, most children experienced much strife and few expressions of affection in the marriage relationship, their finding the new household more romantic and sexually stimulating than their previous family is understandable (cf. Belovitch, 1987:119; Visher & Visher, 1982). However, Ihinger-Tallman and Pasley (1987:107) mention that their study found the opposite to be the case: only 3,8% of their respondents admitted to having experienced problems in this respect.

If such problems should arise, parents should act with great discretion with regard to duress between stepsiblings. If two stepsiblings fall in love with each other, this should be discussed openly and a rearrangement of living space and rules regarding privacy should be considered, to avoid a very explosive situation. Should sexual attraction exist between stepparent and stepchild, Belovitch (1987:120) recommends that professional help be sought.

3.6.1.7 Fantasies

When one parent remarries, this challenges the child's fantasy of uniting his/her bio-parents (McGoldrick & Carter, 1988:276; Sager et al., 1983:231). Sometimes the child tries, consciously or unconsciously, to alienate the new couple from each other in an attempt to realise his/her fantasy. In some families, this fantasy becomes a reality if the biological parents remarry. According to Judge (1981:41), this may happen in cases where the biological parent,

bowed down with feelings of guilt, is unable to withstand pressure that the children exercise. The biological parents then resume their intimate relationship. Sometimes, this attempt at reuniting fails, and the children yet again have to experience the loss of a biological parent. This time, however, the children are more certain of their influence, and may become tyrannical in applying their power to the household, believing that they can reach their goal again.

According to Roosevelt and Lofas (1976:118), not all stepchildren share this desire that the marriage in a stepfamily should fail. Many children try hard to contribute to the success of the marriage, as they have watched the disintegration of their first family and experienced the loneliness of a single-parent family. However, authors do sound a warning note that children cannot be responsible for the success or failure of the marriage. This feeling that anyone has the power to destroy or save the parents' marriage is a fantasy that should be dispelled. Children should realise that they do not have the power to drive a wedge between spouses.

3.6.1.8   Feelings of guilt

There is a marked correlation between children's fantasies about their biological parents' reconciliation and their guilt about having caused the divorce. According to McGoldrick and Carter (1988:276) and Visher and Visher (1979:175), some children bear an even heavier burden of guilt and anxiety in their own later marriages, fearful that their conduct may once again cause a divorce. As the relationship between the adults and children in the family often causes tension in second marriages, there may be a realistic base for the children's feelings of guilt. These feelings cause resistance, anxiety and anger, and children behave in corresponding ways, which adults find difficult to endure (Judge, 1981:42). As such, these feelings of guilt often cause behaviour that leads to problems between adults and children in the stepfamily, since these problems usually enter the new family at the time that the children enter it (cf. Coleman, 1991:28).

3.6.1.10   Dealing with loss

The way in which the bio-parents responded to the loss involved in the marital break-up is meaningful to the child and affects his/her ability to regard the stepfamily as a positive force. If the parents are unable to mourn the loss of the spouse and nuclear family, they will not be able to provide adequate routes for the child to mourn (Sager *et al.*, 1983:233).

3.6.2 External factors

External factors, or social variables, could add protection to children who find themselves in a stepfamily situation. On the other hand, it could also render children and their families more vulnerable. External factors are those factors unique to the stepfamily situation, for example, role expectations, discipline, rules, stepchild-stepparent relationships and the relationship between the bio-parents. Ecologically significant external variables are religious and culture-based backgrounds and norms. Individual family members may also react differently to the stepfamily experience, which is synonymous with unrealistic expectations, membership in two households, sibling rivalry, support from the extended family and changes in school, residence and peer groups. The following section will focus on external factors that may affect the adjustment of children in middle childhood to their stepfamily.

3.6.2.1 Stepfamily experience

Children in stepfamilies may experience this kind of family structure positively, negatively, or as a combination of both. Whether the family functions positively or negatively is of more importance in shaping the skills and self-concept of children than the specific structure of the family. The myth or assumption that all stepfamilies have a negative influence only on the children in the family is simply not true. In this respect, Lasswell and Lasswell (1987:417) state: "Second marriages fare quite well and give strong evidence for the belief not only that divorce may be the best solution for some troubled marriages, but also that some couples who divorce do learn how to succeed better the second time around." In studies about children's self-concept, academic abilities and achievements and also the stepfamily experience, it was found that the effects of living in a stepfamily were not always purely negative (Amato & Ochiltree, 1987; Ganong & Coleman, 1984). Children from stepfamilies did not display significantly lower levels of reading skills and confidence than children from nucleus families or from single-parent families. Neither were there significant differences between children from stepfamilies and those from nucleus families regarding social and interpersonal skills (Wilson, Zurcher, McAdams & Curtis, 1975). However, other studies demonstrate that children from stepfamilies do have lower levels of confidence and learning skills than children from nucleus families (Amato & Ochiltree, 1987).

A successfully integrated stepfamily can offer children much. It exposes them to a variety of values, lifestyles, opinions, emotions and relationships that could be far-reaching. These children have the opportunity to watch one or both parents in a marital relationship, which they can use as a frame of reference for their own future relationships. Thompson and Rudolph (1992:371) summarise the advantages of the new family as follows:

- It offers various role models.

- Family members learn skills for dealing with conflict.

- It improves the child's standard of living.

- It helps the child to find more happiness with his/her parents.

- The child acquires brothers/sisters for play and learning.

- The number of people who care for the child increases.

- It enhances adaptability, since the child has to adapt to new circumstances.

A study by Dahl *et al.* (1987:41) indicated that children regarded stepfamilies more positively three years afters its inception. They were pleased to see their parents happy again and had learnt to accept and appreciate the stepparent. Moreover, they had also welcomed their "new" brother and sisters. Lasswell and Lasswell (1982:431), too, found that the adjustment of children to new families usually takes up to two years.

It has to be conceded that stepfamilies may be of a very complex nature, as marriage and parent-hood have not taken their normal course. Scheepers (1991:31) recognised that the members of a stepfamily have not experienced, together, the normal process of family growth and development.

The new life cycle in which the stepfamily finds itself makes new demands on the parent, stepparent, child and stepchild alike. In order to adapt, new skills are required from both the parent and the stepchild. Judge (1981:40) points out that the question of where each person belongs in this family is repeatedly raised in his/her mind. Many children experience their stepfamily as not authentic. In their thoughts, they live as though they were still a part of their bio-families. Bradley (1982:52) describes the nucleus family as the "ghost" family within the stepfamily, since the child experiences the nucleus family as his/her "real" family.

Children often enter the stepfamily with feelings of loss. They are accustomed to different role expectations, rules and discipline. The stepparent is perceived to be competing for the attention of the biological parent. According to Olivier (1991:49), children often experience inner conflict because of their loyalty to the biological parent, who is not a direct member of the new family. In the stepfamily, conflicting loyalties, expectations and jealousy may interfere with the formation of relationships (Amato, www.stepfam.org/education/articles/skids/amato.htm 28-01-2001). Children may also experience fear that the whole situation will change. The entry of a stepparent often entails a move for the whole family, new schools, new friends, a different diet and new rules. Too many changes too soon may intensify the children's feelings of insecurity (Boyd, 1998:83). As a result of these factors Amato (www.stepfam.org/education/articles/skids/amato.htm 28-01-2001) identifies inadequate attachment in stepfamilies. He contends that children in stepfamilies are more independent and inclined to lead their own separate lives. However, he makes the point that the longer a stepfamily lives together, the better they will begin to function as a family.

Children should find their basic security and loving relationships in their families. The family should provide a firm and steady springboard from where children can venture out into the world with confidence. The family should provide them with a safety net when they experience the world outside as unfriendly, strange and often unsafe. Unfortunately, the same family often is one of the unsafest places for children to be. Their family lives may be tainted with prolonged and chronic stresses, such as abuse. As discussed earlier, the establishment of parental love depends on the initial strength of the substitute parent's wish to stimulate attachment.

There is abundant evidence that the experience of being a stepparent is not always very rewarding (Louw et al., 1998:573; Norwood & Wingender, 1999:19; Sager et al., 1983:21; Wilson & Daly, 1987:219). Wilson and Daly (1987:219) refer to research done by Perkins and Kahan (1979) who found that all parties in stepfather households were much more dissatisfied with family relationships than their counterparts in natural-father households, even within a volunteer sample of families judged to be functioning "successfully." Stepmothers are found to be more anxious, depressed and angry regarding family relationships (Duberman, 1975; Einstein, 1982; Giles-Sims, 1987; Messinger, Walker & Freeman, 1978; Mills, 1984; Papernow, 1993). Role ambiguity is described as a contributing factor.

Daly and Wilson (1987:223) found evidence that implies that stepparents are greatly over-represented in the most destructive cases of child abuse. Fergusson, Fleming and O'Neill (1972) and Wadsworth, Burnell, Taylor and Butler (1983), cited by Daly and Wilson (1987:224), agree that a potentially higher risk of abuse exists in the stepfamily.

No direct correlation could be found between poverty and maternal age at the child's birth and abuse in stepfamilies. It does appear, however, that stepparent households are especially risky (by comparison to natural-parent households) for the youngest children. It is interesting that, despite overt tempestuous conflicts, the relative risk of abuse from stepparents, as opposed to natural parents, is minimal for adolescents (Wilson & Daly, 1987:227).

3.6.2.2   Membership in two households

At the formation of the new stepfamily, the child inevitably becomes part of two households. Where one parent remarries while the other still has a single-parent status, the child is, on the one hand, a member of a stepfamily, while, on the other hand, he/she is also part of a single-parent family. Although membership of two families may entail some advantages, most children do not experience this as such.

Underlying the intense feelings of disruption that most children experience is the fact that a child is the issue of two parents (Visher & Visher, 1979:166). According to Botha (1991:49) one of the most important questions that confront the child after a parent's remarriage is whether or not contact with the other biological parent will be reduced, or perhaps totally severed. Both parents' remarriage may even intensify the child's inner conflict. To the child, the stepfamily is a new system to which he/she has a strong sense of not belonging. The child's loyalties are divided, especially towards the stepparent and he/she always feels endebted to stay loyal to the biological parent. It simply is a fact that blood is thicker than water. Several researchers in this field have discussed the importance of children maintaining contact with both parents, except in special circumstances (Ahrons & Wallisch, 1981; Hetherington, 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980:431). Feelings of guilt may develop if the child cannot integrate his/her affection towards the stepparent with the feelings he/she may still have towards the estranged biological parent (Coleman & Ganong, 1987:62). There is evidence that contact between parents and non-resident children is often lost (Hinings, 1996:102). Divorced parents have voiced their reasons for withdrawing from the relationship with their children: a feeling that a step-parent has taken their

place, that visits are a cause of distress to a child, that the practicalities are overwhelmingly difficult and sometimes because the parent, with whom the child normally lives, denies access to the non-residential parent. The insights from the attachment theory underline the importance of responding to the anxiety of those involved in contentious contact.

According to Capaldi and McRae (1979:81), an additional aspect of divided loyalties with which stepchildren have to contend are their feelings of love for, and identification with, the absent biological parent, in contrast with their growing respect and, sometimes, even love for, and identification with, the stepparent. Children are caught up in this situation. Thus, a child may, for example, always describe his/her staying with the stepmother in negative terms – viewing any positive comment regarding the stepmother as being disloyal. "By giving a child permission to enjoy a relationship with a stepparent, you free the child to some degree from the loyalty bind" (Belovitch, 1987:124).

Children's struggles with these issues surface as school and/or behaviour problems, withdrawal from family and peers, or "acting out" behaviour, any of which complicates, or may completely obstruct, the process of stepfamily reorganisation. Children of middle childhood seem to have the most difficulty to resolve their feelings of divided loyalty (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980:257) and benefit from careful attention to their need for contact with both parents.

Louw (1992:374) points out that the parent who acquires a stepchild also has no easy task. Thus stepmothers, for example, have to contend with prejudices inspired by fairytales, such as Cinderella and Hansel and Gretel, and perhaps further inflamed by the children's biological mother, who usually wants to stab the proverbial knife into her.

The relationship between the former spouses also has a determining effect on the child's experience of commuting between two homes. Children can feel torn in two by being made messengers, spies or co-conspirators between the two households in which they live (Kaufman, 1993:164). Children must have the freedom to work out their own relationships with each parent, stepparent, stepsiblings, and half siblings. In some cases, children alternate as members of two households. New parents and new children are not really related to one another. This supplies the child with additional role models and a wider variety of experiences for learning and growth. Many children, however, regard commuting between two households as a negative experience and develop a feeling of confusion, helplessness and loss of control. The question

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that haunts children is: "Where do I belong?" and this can be linked to shifts in sibling position, role in family structure and family traditions. According to Brenner (1984:36), most children experience distress because there may not be a room available for them when visiting the other parent. Because of the large size of many combined families, physical space may be at a premium. On the positive side, many children express their satisfaction at having many adults who love them. An only child may be delighted at having new brothers and sisters. For an older child, the second home may be a source of support, if all is not well in the first home.

Information resources (Scheepers, 1991:112) indicate that children in stepfamilies have more household responsibilities than children in traditional two-parent families. This possibly is a consequence from single-parent days when their assistance with housekeeping was essential. As a result these children command a relatively high level of life skills. They know how to prepare meals, clean house and function independently.

In the light of some children's negative experience, Visher and Visher (1979:172) recommend that parents should consider visiting the children as resident members of the household, even though for short periods only, since this will establish a more positive attitude among all family members towards the whole situation. Weekends can also be traumatic for the visiting child, as well as the whole family. "The visiting child may resent having to follow a schedule instead of being free like other kids on weekends. It can also be upsetting to see Dad living in another home with another set of kids and a new wife. It can feel unfair sleeping on a sofa-bed or an army cot in a strange room, when her kids have beds and rooms of their own" (Belovitch, 1987:115). Writers recommend that children who have to commute between two households should know which one functions as their home base. They should have the freedom to develop in this home's constant and continuous system of order (Capaldi & McRae, 1979:88).

Children have the ability to adjust to two sets of rules, or two ways of doing things, as long as they are not asked to choose which is best. The researcher is of the opinion that the parent and stepparent should discuss rules for the households, rules for the children's behaviour and the consequences of breaking rules. Once the adults reach consensus about the rules, the biological parent must communicate them to the children in the family.

3.6.2.3   Role expectations

Franks, as quoted in Scheepers (1991:104), states that children, who commute between two households, must learn the household's new roles. This could feel like a betrayal towards the parent with whom they normally live and could cause rebellion and confrontation, or a testing ground, to determine how acceptable they are to their parent and the new partner. Therefore, children in the stepfamily live in conflict with themselves regarding divided loyalties towards the absent parent and the new stepparent.

The child enters the stepfamily from a history of different roles, namely, that of a child in a single-parent family and that of a child in the nucleus family. An example of this is reflected in the teenage boy who, for several years, has been acting the part of the man in the house and who, upon his mother's remarriage, suddenly has to surrender this role to a strange new male. He is, for example, no longer responsible for cleaning the car. Although he previously complained about this chore, it gave him a recognised status in the family, which he now has lost (Visher & Visher, 1979:171). The responsible eldest may suddenly become the youngest, or an infantalised youngest may lose his special position (Sager *et al.*, 1983:235). Thompson and Rudolph (1992:370) summarise the situation as follows: "… children experience changes in roles, alliances, parenting arrangements, household responsibilities, rules, expectations, and demands. For children who are attempting to regain stability … this lack of structure brings additional stresses and strains."

Furthermore, children are caught up in a very complicated network of relationships, in which it will take time before they find their place as members of this family, or these families. When children do not experience the feeling of "belonging somewhere," this causes intense inner conflict, which has a negative influence on their personal development. This complicated network, in which they find themselves, is intensely confusing. A change in status may also entail that these children experience a reduction or change in fields, such as their living area and the perception of what belongs to them. They also have to learn to share their biological parent and/or siblings with others (Coleman & Ganong, 1987:62).

Kelly (1995:46) comes to the conclusion that, in stepfamilies, it works best not to have the gender roles defined as clearly as in many families. Both parents also need to take on the

functions of nurturing and providing. Since there are no socially prescribed roles, this can offer the opportunity for the development of exciting and fulfilling new roles to meet personal needs.

3.6.2.4   Discipline

An additional problem that stepfamilies experience is that of discipline (McGoldrick & Carter, 1988:268; Visher & Visher, 1988:213). The term, "discipline," is used to describe the manner in which family rules are enforced, and the style of leadership that parents exert. Nelson *et al.* (1997:25) and Buchler (1994:21) point out that, for the stepparent, to discipline a stepchild is a very sensitive issue, and the child may experience it as unwarranted. To maintain discipline may also be difficult when the children are not biologically related to one another. There are societal and familial expectations that exacerbate the problems in the area of child discipline. When men with children remarry, they often expect the new wife to be a mother to their children. On the other hand, children often resent a new woman as a replacement for their mother, and do not accept discipline. Discipline becomes especially complicated in the stepfamily where "my children", "your children" and "our children" are involved. Experts agree that the right to discipline comes gradually, over at least 24 months (Kaufman, 1993:198; Kelly, 1995:30). A stepparent has to earn the child's respect in order to apply discipline effectively. In the case of older children, it is believed that a stepparent should never assume that role (Kelly, 1995:33).

Children may find it difficult to accept the stepparent (especially the stepfather) as the authoritative figure; consequently, the application and acceptance of discipline may lead to confusion, withdrawal, or even rebellion (Coleman & Ganong, 1987:62). Differences between the disciplinary structures of the two complementary households may create an unsafe, unprotective disciplinary climate that may have a negative influence on the child.

Although stepmothers have the most difficult roles and are viewed with the most negativity (Visher & Visher, 1988:19), stepfathers may also have expectations that are also problematic (Pickhardt, 1997:20). There is a societal view that stepfathers should assume the role of "shaping up the kids." Pickhardt (1997:116) avers that stepfathers, who, at the outset, do not take the responsibility for the children's discipline immediately but rather fulfil a more secondary role, have a more positive relationship with their stepchildren. The stepchildren do not regard a new stepparent as having the authority to discipline them, and his authority may also be undermined by a non-resident bio-parent. Concerning this, Lasswell and Lasswell

(1987:432), supported by Kelly (1995:31), write: "The stepfather who moves slowly and attempts to make a friend of the child before moving to control him has a better chance of having his discipline integrated into the sentimental order of the family." They emphasise the importance of first developing relationships. In their research, Fine and Kurdek (1992:727) found that biological parents, who took a more active part as primary disciplinarians in their families, contributed to their children's more positive adjustment. In a situation where the father travels a great deal, his new wife needs some authority. Family meetings, where rules are clearly spelled out with both parents' agreement, and the children having an input, is important. In complex stepfamilies, where there are fundamental differences with regard to discipline, the solution is for each to discipline his or her own child, and to accept that there are different rules for the children of the house.

Therefore, the stepparent must be wary of applying discipline before a sound relationship between stepfather and stepchild has been established. The adolescents, especially, may rebel against the stepparent and undermine his discipline. Visher and Visher (1991:64) stress that married couples should present a united front regarding discipline. Initially, should concentrate upon a maximum of three to five areas only. They should insist upon a certain standard of behaviour and both parents should maintain this. It is desirable that discipline should first be discussed with, and clearly outlined to, the children, preferably before they form the new stepfamily.

In conclusion, each family has to find its own unique way of operating. It works best if the stepparent does not come in as a disciplinarian right away. Another general rule would be for the family to have meetings about rules of the house. Clear expectations must be set. Each family must find the balance between "flexibility" and "clarity." Stepparents may become partners sooner in raising the children when the children are younger, and if the non-custodial parent is either not very involved with the children, or is very co-operative with the former spouse, and if a firm relationship had formed between stepparents and children before the marriage.

3.6.2.5 Rules

Children recognises their place in the stepfamily by developing a sense of "belonging" and a feeling of "unity." Thus, the stepfamily can continue constructively. For this purpose rules must

be laid down. Children frequently find themselves faced with two entirely different sets of rules, depending in which of their parents' houses they happen to be living. Children can learn to live with that, but they need time to adjust to the differences between the two environments in which they live.

The establishment of rules in the newly formed family places limits upon the children. This helps them to identify their place in the stepfamily more clearly and brings more security into their lives. To summarise: Knaub, Hanna and Stinnett (1984:42) are of the opinion that the numbers and the more complex organisation of the new relationships (i.e., stepparent, additional in-laws, grandparents or siblings) complicate the setting of rules. The lack of norms, guidelines and defined roles, together with negative stereotypes of the stepfather and –mother's roles, complicate the process.

3.6.2.6   Sibling rivalry

Duberman (1975:67) reports that the relationship among siblings, as well as among stepsiblings, is one of the most important in a child's life. After a remarriage, stepsiblings are suddenly thrown together into new relationships with one another where they are expected to get on well together. Sibling relationships fulfil various important functions. The fact that a child has a brother or a sister makes the socialising process more complete, as it supplies peer role models. It also offers experience in co-operation, living together and resolving conflicts. Moreover, siblings offer one another companionship, emotional security and love. To have a brother or a sister means that the child learns to share privileges and duties at an early age. This relationship promotes the concept of justice and an early concept of social reality. Botha (1986:59) is of the opinion that these positive aspects of sibling interaction could very possibly flow over into the relationship among stepsiblings. Then the interaction would probably be less intense.

However, little is known about the role of diverse sibling relationships found in stepfamilies. Children in stepfamilies may have to relate to a complex array of full-, half-, and stepsiblings internal or external to their primary household (Ganong & Coleman, 1994; Ihinger-Tallman, 1987). In stepfamilies, close protective relationships are found in a subsystem of female full-siblings, but such boys rarely receive support from either male or female siblings (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). As siblings move through middle childhood and adolescence, increasing disengagement from siblings occurs as they become more involved in relationships outside the

family (Hetherington *et al.*, 1999:19). This disengagement is more marked for siblings in stepfamilies (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992).

When remarried parents combine their children from previous relationships in blended households, children experience many life changes. These include changes in family size, the children's position in the family, competition over scarce resources such as parental attention, space and privacy, relating to someone without a shared family history and with whom the child may have little in common, and possible sexual attraction (Hetherington *et al.*, 1999:20; Walsh, 1992). However, it may be easier for children to justify the basis of biological relatedness; this leads to less sibling rivalry. Many residential stepsiblings form successful satellite relationships that provide both support and companionship (Ihinger-Tallman, 1987), and conflict between stepsiblings does not appear to be excessive (Duberman, 1975; Ganong & Coleman, 1986).

Some evidence exists that sibling relationships in stepfamilies may be more troubled and less warm than those in nuclear families. Compatibility is difficult to achieve when different personalities and backgrounds are thrown together, especially where children compete for the parents' attention. Siblings are often viewed as a threat and as competitors, and competition among siblings is regarded as normal. Cliques may also be formed, with the rest of the family feeling left out. Duberman (1975:67) reports that little research has been done on competition among stepsiblings, irrespective whether they are mere visitors or permanent residents in the new household. Competition among siblings can take on serious proportions. Competition is often heightened when stepsiblings are of the same age and sex, and in the same grade. Different personalities and backgrounds plus competition for the parents' attention may make compatibility difficult. Conflict between step- and natural children may lead to an escalation of conflict between the parents, since the parents may find it difficult to regard the children's everyday conflicts as a possible natural interaction in a functional family. According to Coleman (1991:36), the conflict often is not the cause of the problem, but the negative mechanisms used when dealing with it. Research, described by Botha (1986:60), confirms that the better the relationship among stepbrothers and -sisters, the stronger the family attachments will be.

The degree to which stepsiblings experience financial inequality, due to differences in resources of families of origin, may adversely affect the child's adjustment to the stepfamily. This can exacerbate the sense of competition, deprivation and isolation (Sager *et al.*, 1983:237). A child may also experience divided loyalties between his/her natural and stepsiblings, particularly

where a stepsibling is close in age. Siblings may be especially sensitive to differential parenting by the residential biological parent.

Although this study deals mainly with children, for the sake of completeness it should be mentioned that there are also other possibilities for conflict in the stepfamily. Einstein (1982:110) points out that there are six relationships in a stepfamily that have the potential for competition:

- Between the child's biological parents.
- Between the new parent and the biological parent of the same sex.
- Between the previous in-laws and the new spouse.
- Between the new father and the children.
- Between the new mother and the children.
- Among the children.

Visher and Visher (1982:159) provide suggestions to parents in stepfamilies on how to handle competition and conflict. Most importantly, parents should remember that all children in all kinds of families have differences among themselves, that parents should be just towards biological as well as stepchildren, and that parents should put up a united front toward the children.

3.6.2.7   Unrealistic expectations

Judge (1981:41) writes that, just as the myth of an instant loving relationship brings unhappiness to the stepparent in a stepfamily, the expectation that a child will immediately start feeling affection for a stepparent, brings unhappiness to the child. Children sense instinctively that it takes time to develop trust and affection. They may withdraw and become distrustful if the stepparent tries to enter the relationship with words of love too soon.

A stepchild's age is crucial when determining what can be expected of him/her. Visher and Visher (1979:173) mention that the situation becomes increasingly more difficult the older a child becomes. According to Roosevelt and Lofas (1976:116), children respond to any threat to their emotional security with anxiety, denial, distortion and transference of feelings. Children can transfer their anger with their biological mothers to their stepmothers and intensify it many

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times. They may direct their anger with the stepfather at their stepbrothers and –sisters and may express it in various ways, for example, by denial, distortion and refusal to agree. Furthermore, they may direct all their negative feelings to the wrong persons. Generally, the other members of the stepfamily will not accept such behaviour. In turn, they will exhibit the discomfort and hostility aroused by it. Thus, the stepchildren will find themselves in an even worse situation. Much of the transferred anger, that is typical of step relationships, has its roots in the original disintegration of the nucleus family and the sorrow and confusion concomitant to it. Therefore, it is unreasonable to expect that the members of a stepfamily will behave affectionately towards one another immediately. Loving relationships take time to develop and will not grow easily in an atmosphere of demands and obligations. On the whole, children in a stepfamily find it easier to build close relationships among themselves than do stepchildren and stepparents.

3.6.2.8   Stepparent-stepchild relationships

It has been argued that the stepparent-stepchild relationship is pivotal in stepfamilies (Crosbie-Burnett, 1984). Moreover, it has been suggested that marital functioning and instability is a product of parent-child/stepchild relationships (Clingempeel, 1981; Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman, 1987). Stepparents and -children have little choice in their relationship, as they enter a family situation that is incidental to the mutual attraction of the adult couple. Although this has not been tested empirically, it has been suggested that mutual attachment of the stepparent and -child will take as long as the child's age at the time of remarriage (Mills, 1984). For example, if the child is four at remarriage, it will take four years for attachment to develop. Most studies report great conflict and negativity between stepparents and children (Hetherington *et al.*, 1999:16; Kurdek & Fine, 1993). The rate of physical abuse by stepfathers being seven times higher than by biological fathers (Wilson & Daly, 1987:221-230; Wilson, Daly & Weghorst, 1980), homicide rates with infants and young children being 100 times higher (Daly & Wilson, 1996), and rates of incest over four times higher (Finkelhor, 1987), reflects this finding. Hetherington *et al.* (1999:16) cautions that stepparents must adopt the role of a disciplinarian with caution. Stepparents who, initially, are the most effective establish a warm supportive role with stepchildren and support the biological parent's discipline. Attempts to regulate the child's behaviour must be made gradually or control may not be attained at all (Bray & Berger, 1993; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Kelly, 1995). Stepparents' discipline is most effective when the biological custodial parent and stepparent agree on methods of child rearing, and the biological parent supports the stepparent's efforts without abdicating any responsibilities as the

primary parent (Clingempeel, Brand & Segal, 1987). Stepmothers have more problematic relations with their stepchildren than do stepfathers (Hetherington *et al.*, 1999:17; Santrock *et al.*, 1988; Visher & Visher, 1978).

The stepparent often enters the life of a child at a later stage, so that the initial attachment stage is lacking. However, it is essential that the stepparent should create an artificial attachment stage in accordance with the child's age to initiate the attachment process. The stepparent cannot handle this initial attachment process on his/her own, and will be dependent on the support of the bio-parent (Mills, 1984:369).

Although discussions of parent-child relationships in stepfamilies usually focus on the role of the parent and stepparent, children play an active role in shaping this relationship. Some research indicates that, in the face of a resistant stepchild, even a well-intentioned stepparent may fail in building a close constructive relationship (Brown, Green & Druckman, 1990). In the early stage of remarriage, children are more negative, and less warm and communicative toward both the custodial parent and the stepparent (Bray & Berger, 1993; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Hetherington, 1993). Relations between younger stepsons and -fathers improve over time and boys are more likely than girls to form, and benefit from, a close relationship with a stepfather (Amato & Keith, 1991; Hetherington, 1993). After studying a child's experience of life in a stepfamily, Amato and Ochiltree (1987:75) came to the conclusion that most of the problems in a stepfamily occur in the parent-child relationship.

Many studies, conducted on the relationship between stepparent and –child, found that both parent and child viewed this relationship extremely negatively (cf. Amato & Ochiltree, 1987:75; Ambert, 1986:796, Hobart, 1987:260; Norwood & Wingender, 1999:153; Ziegahn, 2001:59). Some of these studies were conducted shortly after the second or third marriage, and the length of time that it takes a family to adjust and become accustomed to one another was not taken into account. For his research, Hobart (1988:381) questioned respondents who had been married for at least seven to eight years. This researcher found that, by that time, many of the problems in the relationship between parents and children in the family had been sorted out and resolved. In his study, Hobart (1988:390) demonstrates that, in a stepfamily, there are first-class children (born from the marriage relationship in the stepfamily); second-class children (born from the mother's previous marriage) and third-class children (born from the father's first marriage). The parents have a more positive relationship with children born from their own marriage

relationship than with the children from previous marriages.

The perception that stepparents are bad, cruel and vindictive may contribute to children's negative experience. They may take it for granted that the myth is true, especially if they will not, or cannot, fit into the new family situation (Ganong & Coleman, 1984:406).

Stepmothers, too, report on relationships with stepchildren that are poorer than those with stepfathers. Ambert (1986:798) found that stepchildren often have a negative influence on the marriage relationship in the stepfamily, which may even lead to another divorce (in the stepfamily). This same study also made it clear that parents in the stepfamily maintain better relationships with residential children than with children who only visit during holidays and weekends.

In Duberman's (1975) study on the integration of the family and the parent-child relationship in the stepfamily, he observed that:

- All parent-child relationships improve if the new couple have children of their own.
- All parent-child relationships are better if the mother in the stepfamily has custody of her own children
- The relationship with stepchildren is not very positive in cases where the stepfather does not have custody of his own children
- Stepmothers have better relationships with the younger children in the family than with the adolescents.

Lastly, stepparents need proper names to identify their positions and for identities of their own. This will give them the freedom to establish open, honest relationships with their stepchildren. Kaufman (1993:133) proposes that children in stepfamilies could identify their stepmother as their *matu*, and their stepfather as their *patu*. When family members know who and what they are to one another, they can make decisions about the desirable nature of their future relationships.

3.6.2.9 Relationship between bio-parents

If there is ongoing hostility between the bio-parents, the child's adjustment to the stepfamily is more difficult. The hostility is often exercised by using the child as a messenger between households, or negatively identifying him/her with the ex-spouse ("You're just like your father – no good") (Sager *et al.*, 1983:234). If a child perceives his bio-parents' unhappiness, he/she may feel too guilty to begin an attachment to the stepparent.

3.6.2.10 Cultural, religious, socio-economic factors

Divergent cultural, religious, and socio-economical backgrounds are common in stepfamily households. Often, the home household and the visited household are also divergent. How these differences are dealt with is an important consideration. Sager *et al.* (1983:236) emphasises that, if differences are respected both between households and within each household, this will establish a more favourable situation for the child.

3.6.2.11 Stepfamily supra-system

Grandparents and extended family members could play a highly significant role in a child's adjustment to the stepfamily, particularly if they were deeply involved with the child during the double- and single-parent stage. Their approval may be needed for the child to feel free to form a new attachment.

3.6.2.12 Change of residence, school, peer group

The integration of a child into a stepfamily is more difficult if he/she is uprooted and moved to a new community and new school and, therefore, needs to make new friends (Sager *et al.*, 1983:237).

Certain internal and external factors have been identified as having an influence on a child's experience and adjustment in the stepfamily. These factors obviously need to be taken into account in the planning and intervention of social work. It is clear from the description of middle childhood and the influence of remarriage as a consequence, that major adjustments are brought about by second marriages. Certain changes are found to be very stressful.

Naturally, in this phase, marriage makes it harder to master life tasks since the stability of the home environment has been disrupted. Remarriage of one or both parents may cause a child to adopt inappropriate roles and responsibilities. Loyal attachments, chronic sorrow for the loss of the nuclear family and fears of abandonment may tap the developing child's vital energy that is needed to master life-cycle tasks. A core problem is the formation of attachment; a factor that also has an influence on a child's development.

3.7   Conclusion

Although middle childhood is a period of relative calm in respect of physical development, nevertheless, it is an important period in children's personality, social and moral development. The remarriage of a parent brings about major adjustments. Certain internal and external factors have been explored that not only have an influence on a child's adjustment in the stepfamily, but also render the child more vulnerable.

Naturally, remarriage makes it harder for the child to master life tasks in this phase, since the stability of the home environment has been disrupted. Remarriage of one or both parents may cause the child to adopt inappropriate roles and responsibilities. Loyalty attachments, chronic sorrow for the loss of the nuclear family and fears of abandonment may tap the developing child's vital energy that is needed to master life-cycle tasks. A core problem is the formation of attachment with the new stepparent, a factor that also has an influence on a child's development.

The next chapter will examine attachment in the middle childhood stage, with special reference to the stepfamily.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ATTACHMENT THEORY AND A CHILD IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

4.1   Introduction

The attachment theory is the joint work in the 1950's of the British researchers, John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. Drawing on concepts from ethology, cybernetics, information processing, developmental psychology and psychoanalysis, John Bowlby formulated the basic tenets of this theory. Thereby, he revolutionised the thinking about children's tie to their mothers and their disruption through separation, deprivation and bereavement. Bowlby (1977:201) conceptualised attachment as "the propensity of human beings to make strong affectionate bonds to particular others." Ainsworth *et al.* (1978) contributed the concept of the attachment figure as a secure base from which an infant can explore the world. Bowlby (1951:13) is convinced that all children, at the core of their beings, need to be attached to someone who considers them to be very special and who is committed to providing for their ongoing care.

Many consider John Bowlby's (1979:129) work over several past decades to be the foundation for understanding the nature and importance of attachment in the lives of human beings. The attachment theory underscores the central role of relationships in human development from the cradle to the grave. One of the most moving passages of Bowlby's (1980:280) writing illustrates how one attachment figure can be more central and important to a child's wellbeing than others:

> About four weeks after her mother had died, [four-year-old] Wendy complained that no one loved her. In an attempt to reassure her, her father named a long list of people who did (naming those who cared for her). On this Wendy commented aptly, "But when my mommy wasn't dead I didn't need so many people – I needed just one."

"Attachment" is a term used to refer to the emotional attachment that takes place between two individuals (usually between a child and mother or primary care-giver). Attachment is one of the most researched aspects of emotional and social development.

In describing how an infant's attachment to its mother develops, Bowlby (1969) focuses on the moment-to-moment, day-to-day interaction between mother and child. These small, ordinary moments – not dramatic, extraordinary experiences – build a strong attachment. Bowlby (1969) emphasises the role of social networks and economic as well as health factors in the development of well-functioning mother-child relationships. Play between mother and baby both reflects and facilitates this vital reality that exists within their relationship. These interactions contain eye and physical contact, movement, rhythm, excitement, anticipation and, at times, mild anxiety. Most of all, they contain a wonderful emotional tone that fill the parent and child with joy and full engagement. Because such universal interaction is so vital in the living attachment of the normal parent-infant attachment, they also definitely have a role in facilitating attachment for much older children who enter a relationship with a new parent.

When a child loses a parent through death or divorce, the dialogue continues within the child. The child remains attached to the parent in profound ways and this attachment has a great influence on the child's thoughts, feelings, plans, and behaviours throughout his/her life. This continuing dialogue cannot be ignored; it must be integrated into all efforts of helping the child to form a dialogue with his/her new parent.

To social workers, the attachment theory continues to appeal intellectually as well as practically. The theory focuses particularly on the relationship between personality development, interpersonal behaviour and the quality of the social environment during childhood. The quality of close relationships throughout childhood has a long-lasting impact on personality and people's style of interpersonal relationships. A person's sense of wellbeing and self-worth, ability to form satisfying intimate relationships, confidence and competence as a parent, can be affected by adverse social relationships during childhood. Child and family social work takes into account people's present needs as well as their long-term behavioural and relationship prospects. This chapter outlines the nature of the attachment theory, introduces the patterns of attachment behaviour, and traces their influence on relationships in the lives of both children and adults.

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4.2   The nature and function of attachment behaviour

In humans, as with other mammals, offspring attachment to its care-giver (e.g., the mother) offers children an advantage for survival, protecting them from danger by keeping them close to the primary care-giver, usually the mother (Howe, 1996:4). In turn, by encouraging the care-giver to remain close by, the child contributes to his/her own survival. In addition to physical survival, the child's psychological wellbeing is predicated on secure attachment formation. Indeed, children who lack secure attachment manifest behavioural and emotional problems at various levels of severity.

Bowlby (1969) further proposes that human infants' behaviour toward their primary care-givers is regulated by an attachment behaviour control system. That is, a varied set of behaviours (e.g., smiling, crying) serves a single function: maintaining proximity to the care-giver. Bowlby (1969) described this control system as a homeostatic control system that maintains a relative balance between attachment behaviour (proximity seeking) and exploratory behaviour, taking into account the accessibility of the attachment figure. Infants perceive separation from their attachment figure as a threat to their wellbeing and try to remain within the protective range of this figure. In general, the attachment figure serves as a secure base from which the infant feels safe to explore and master the environment. Thus, in situations of no apparent threat, the infant is likely to engage in exploratory activities rather than in attachment behaviour. On the other hand, proximity to the care-giver is most likely sought when the infant perceives a threat in the immediate environment. According to Bowlby (1973), Feeney and Noller (1996:4) and Simpson (1999:124), the three defining features and three primary functions of an attachment relationship are:

1)   proximity maintenance (staying near to, and resisting separations from the attachment figure),

2)   safe haven (turning to the attachment figure for comfort and support), and

3)   secure base (using the attachment figure as a base from which to engage in non-attachment behaviours, e.g., play and exploration).

"Separation anxiety" refers to the fear and accompanying behaviour that children demonstrate when their care-givers are separated from them for short periods of time. In middle childhood, intense longing for, and their regular telephone calls to, their parents characterise separation anxiety.

The basic features of the attachment system are illustrated in Figure 4.1 (Feeney & Noller, 1996:5; Fraley & Shaver, 2000:135).
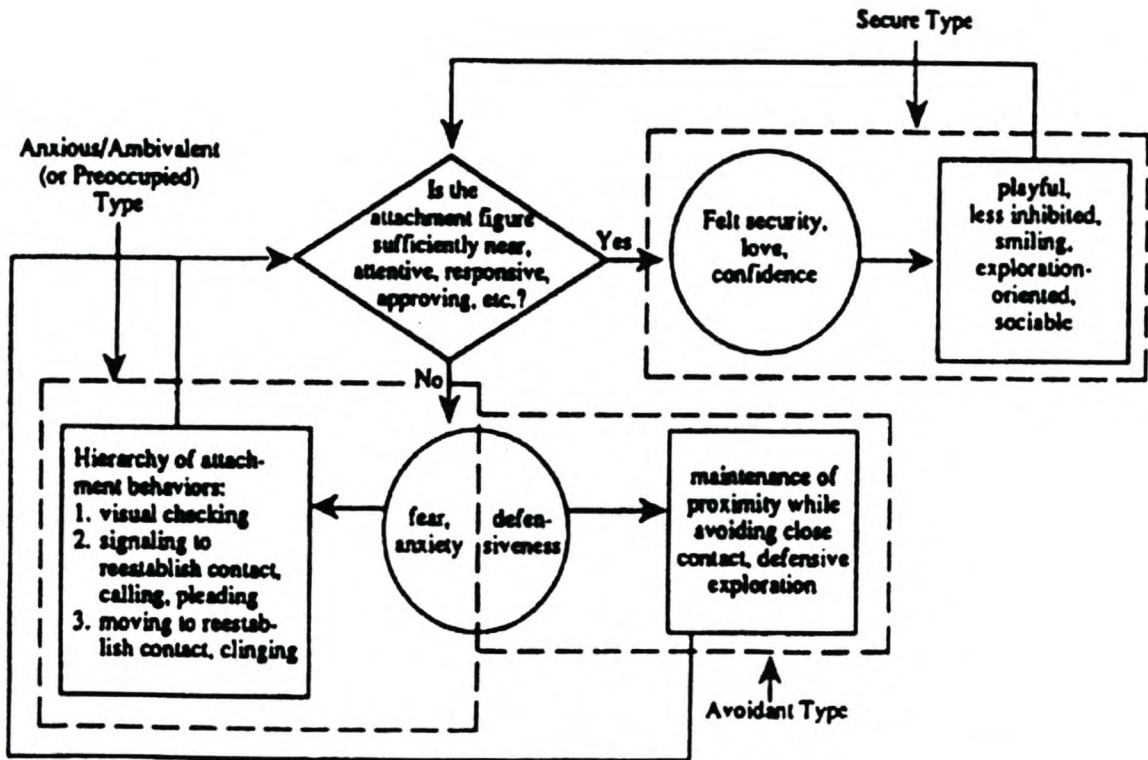
FIGURE 4.1: Features of the attachment system

The model depicted in Figure 4.1 reveals how attachment and exploratory behaviours are influenced by the child's perception of the availability and responsiveness of the care-giver. When children feel secure and confident with their care-givers, they are likely to be more sociable, less inhibited and are likely to engage in more play and exploration. On the other hand, when children feel insecure and lack confidence in the care-giver, they are likely to respond either with fear and anxiety, or with defensiveness. Response with fear and anxiety leads to behaviour such as crying

and clinging, whereas response with defensiveness leads to avoidance of close contact with the attachment figure.

In brief, attachment behaviour is conceived as any form of behaviour that results in a person attaining or retaining proximity to some other differentiated and preferred individual. The particular patterns of attachment behaviour depend partly on his/her present age, sex and circumstances, and partly on the experiences he/she had with attachment figures earlier in his/her life.

4.3   Stages of normal attachment development

The quality of the mother's emotional attunement with her child is crucial in determining the nature of the child's biological, affective, behavioural, and cognitive development. Mahler *et al.* (1975) describes attachment from a developmental perspective. Greenspan and Lieberman (1988) also consider attachment to be a developmental process. With each stage, the child integrates his/her emotional, behavioural and cognitive states in a way that best meets his/her "best interests." Hughes (1997:16) emphasises the role that the parent's consistence, congruence and engaged presence plays in the fluent, integrated and spontaneous development of the child.

The birth of the child and the formation of attachment are not simultaneous (Mahler *et al.*, 1975). While the infant's physical birth occurs with a sudden, remarkable event, attachment emerges over time and through a series of comparatively gradual stages. As shown in Table 4.1, attachment to the care-giver has been found to develop across four predictable stages during the critical period of his/her first three to five years of life (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1982; Hughes, 1997:17, Louw, 1998:213; Mahler *et al.*, 1975).

Age	Stage	Description
Birth to 3 months	Pre-attachment	Infant orients towards the sound of the care-giver's voice; he/she tracks visually. Infant smiles reflexively.
3-8 months	Recognition / Discrimination Attachment-in-the-making	Infant differentiates between primary caretaker and others. Smiles are based on recognition. Infant scans the care-giver's face with excitement. Infant greets care-giver and vocalises differently to her.
8-36 months	Active attachment	Reaction to a stranger emerges. Infant shows clear preference for the chief care-giver. He/she checks back to his care-giver's face. Child crawls or walks away from care-giver and explores without anxiety. Child acts intermittently in dependent, then independent ways.
36 months	Goal-corrected partnership	Attachment solidifies. Child shows increased ability to communicate needs verbally. Child negotiates differences.
(Delaney, 1997:8)		

TABLE 4.1: Stages in attachment formation

In the **pre-attachment stage,** infants are totally dependent upon the care-giver, who reacts protectively toward them (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978). Although totally dependent, infants are not completely inert in attachment interaction. They orient towards the sound of a female voice; track moving objects with their eyes, and reflexively reach out to be held. At this first stage, their smiles are relatively indiscriminate and reflexive and, on the whole, they are comparatively passive players in the attachment drama.

In the **recognition/discrimination stage** (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982) infants differentiate visually between their primary care-giver and others. In their mothers' presence they vocalise differently and become upset when their mothers leave the room (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982). They smile at and "greet" the mothers after brief separations. The greater

degree of attachment that develops between babies and their primary care-givers is particularly noticeable.

In the **stage of active attachment**, from eight months to three years of age, children show clear preference for their primary care-givers (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982). Correspondingly, these children display a "stranger reaction," which indicates that they clearly discriminate between their primary attachment figures and strangers. In addition, the children crawl (or walk) away from their care-givers. They become intoxicated by their new-found mobility and begin to explore the world outside their immediate attachment relationships (i.e., they "practice separating") (Mahler *et al.*, 1975). If children in this phase encounter prolonged separations from their attachment figures, they will experience three stages of response to separation: protest, despair and detachment. In this phase, most babies also develop an attachment to parents who are not primary care-givers: grandparents, siblings and even other family members and friends.

During the later half of this stage (i.e., from 18 to 36 months of age), children oscillate between a desire for independence and a yearning for dependence (Mahler *et al.*, 1975). Much more ambivalent about exploration, these children periodically seek to reunite with their mothers and remain aware of the mothers' presence or absence. At this stage, the children "refuel" with the care-givers by running to them for hugs, calling to them for attention from afar, and looking in their direction for a glance of approval (Mahler *et al.*, 1975). Temporarily refuelled, children could then return to confident exploration until such time as their "fuel" runs low; then they reunite for refuelling once again. By this stage in attachment formation, "internal working models" begin to develop. These children have also become much more active and more sophisticated players in the attachment relationship (Louw, 1992:220, Waters *et al.*, 1991).

In the **goal-corrected partnership stage** (i.e., 36 months and over), children solidify attachment relationships and become more sophisticated in verbal communication of needs and in verbal negotiation of difference with their care-givers (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978; Bowlby, 1969/1982; Louw, 1992:222). This allows children to incorporate the goals, plans and desires of their interaction partners into their decision-making, resulting in the negotiation of joint plans and activities.

As children pass through the toddler years, a desire to achieve and maintain psychological proximity (i.e., felt security) slowly replaces the desire for physical proximity. According to Waters *et al.* (1991), Bowlby's description of the fourth phase should be a critical part of his developmental model. The critical task of the attachment theory, in the last phase of the sequence, is to form a bridge with adult attachment patterns. This theory fails to accomplish this and remains a theory of infant attachment and a theory of adult attachment, with a great deal in between left to the imagination.

Vera Fahlberg (1994:29), a child psychotherapist, who has been very influential in the application of the attachment theory to social work practice, also uses the notion of cycles to describe the attachment process. As a starting point, she examines a child who expresses a need and is in a state of high arousal until that need is met. Once the parent meets the need, the child is quiescent and relaxed until the next need arises, and so the cycle revolves. According to Fahlberg (1994), a sense of security and attachment emerges from this cycle (Table 4.2). The quality of the relationship is the means to an end, which is the child's healthy development. Attachment, she suggests, helps the child to:

Benefits of attachment
- attain full intellectual potential
- sort out what he or she perceives
- think logically
- develop social emotions
- develop a conscience
- trust others
- become self-reliant
- cope better with stress and frustration
- reduce feelings of jealousy
- overcome common fears and worries
- increase self-worth

TABLE 4.2: The benefits of attachment

These elements that Fahlberg (1994:14) identifies, embrace key elements in a child's emotional, intellectual, social, moral and behavioural development. An analysis of the attachment relationships in families implies the assessment of children's development by social workers. Howe (1996:42)

believes that, although the theoretical basis of the attachment theory may not be familiar to all social workers, these links must be acknowledged during assessment.

From the beginning, children are active participants in the busy social world in which they find themselves. Reciprocal relationships are a particular source of pleasure and stimulation. The more sensitive, empathic and reciprocal the communication within relationships, the more fully children learn to understand the basis of their own thoughts and feelings.

4.4   The role of the brain in the development of attachment

Attachment between an infant and a care-giver is a prime example of a behaviour pattern that is rooted in biology and evolution. To further understand attachment, the function and chemistry of the brain must be examined. The brain is composed of four parts, the brainstem, midbrain, limbic system and neocortex, each evolving at a different time and for a different purpose. The limbic system and neocortex control much of human social behaviour. Goleman (1995:15) refers to the research by Le Doux (1995), a neurologist at the Centre for Neurological Sciences at the University of New York. Le Doux's research dealt with the crucial role that the amygdala plays in the brain. The "amygdala" refers to an almond-shaped structure in the brain that embodies the seat of all emotion. In case of a traumatic experience, the amygdala stores information regarding the emotional trauma. Impulses from eyes or ears reach the amygdala before they are processed by the rational neocortex. This process, from the sensory perception to the registration of emotional information in the amygdala, takes about 24 milliseconds. If, in the past, eye/ear input preceded stress, then the amygdala feeds the brain circuits with stress hormones before the higher brain registers the event. The more this pathway is used, the easier it becomes triggered. The brain circuits remain excited for days with the brain being on high alert. This process takes about 12 milliseconds, which is half the time schedule needed for the previous process. If the amygdala is stimulated in this way, it not only recalls emotional information, but also releases the hormone norepinefrine in the brain. This hormone increases the senses' sensitivity to stimulation and causes the person's memory to be refreshed (Goleman, 1995:18).

It can be concluded that patterns of emotion regulation that were established in early childhood may have a substantial influence on processes in the amygdala. Greenberg (1999:483) cites that there may also be linkages among affective communication, attachment processes and neural organisation. Because attachment disorder has been linked, inter alia, to depression, this aspect warrants further investigation.

4.5 Factors that influence attachment

Social interaction plays a vital role in the formation of attachments, but all social interaction does not result in healthy attachments. Certain factors could contribute to this:

- Research findings indicate that the mother's personality and her relationship with her baby play a major role in the formation of an attachment relationship (Louw *et al.*, 1998:215; Weber, Levitt & Clarke, 1986). Mothers of babies who showed positive attachment were, among other factors, friendlier, more supportive, more affectionate, better adjusted psychologically and more responsive toward babies' needs. The re-searcher believes that these factors also influence attachment in middle childhood and contribute to the development of attachment in stepfamilies.

- There are indications that a baby's temperament could also be an important factor in the formation of an attachment between the mother and her child. Thomas and Chess (1977) believe that the "goodness-of-fit" between the temperament of the baby and the parents' personalities, expectations and wishes play a role. In middle childhood this is categorically important.

- Psychosocial factors, such as an unhappy marriage and a lack of social support, could be responsible for unsatisfactory attachment between a mother and her child (Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1984). This is equally true for stepfamilies. Negative conditions can take so much of the parents' time, energy and attention that they simply are not able to develop and maintain a strong attachment with the children.

It is clear that attachment is not automatically present at birth; it develops gradually and a number of factors determine the security that develops from such a relationship. As shown, not all social interaction results in healthy attachments.

4.6 Attachment in middle childhood

Attachment remains an important and central issue beyond infancy. Firstly, the biological function of attachment – namely, the protection of children from danger while they develop the skills to protect themselves – continues to play a paramount role in middle childhood. Secondly, not all problems in attachment necessarily have their roots in infancy (Greenberg & Speltz, 1988:180; Mahler *et al.*, 1975). For example, a previously secure child may become insecure due to changes in family circumstances. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, it was considered of paramount importance to take note of the Waters *et al.* (1991) proposed recasting of Bowlby's four-stage model in terms of eight developmental phases, as illustrated in Table 4.3.

Developmental phases of attachment

1. Early dyadic interaction
2. Emergence of the self-other distinction
3. Self as object
4. Onset of secure base behaviour in infancy
5. Declining of protest against separation
6. Consolidation of secure base behaviour in early childhood
7. Emergence of a positive orientation toward parental socialisation goals and internalisation of family values in early childhood
8. A period in which a partnership of sorts develops around the task of maintaining communication and supervision once the child begins to be independent.

(Waters *et al.*, 1991)

TABLE 4.3: The developmental phases of attachment by Waters *et al.* (1991)

Phases 7 and 8 re-conceptualise Bowlby's (1973) notion of a goal-corrected partnership (phase 4), which, in this analysis, is placed in middle childhood and linked to socialisation practices in specific cultures and social strata. Waters *et al.* (1991), supported by Main (1991), describe this presentation as the key to linking developmental theories of attachment with perspectives on attachment among adults.

According to Freud (1963), correlation between infant attachment security and later socialisation outcomes is among the most widely cited findings in attachment literature. However, it is not obvious that a secure attachment could keep a child from putting a rock through the school window. Part of the explanation for this fact is that socialisation pressures on children are not entirely comparable across families. Individual differences in temperament, IQ and other traits might also contribute. Lastly, some children also do not care as much as others. During infancy, the child is typically enmeshed in secure base relationships with both parents. As already described, parents provide much of the matrix upon which the child organises his/her behaviour.

During infancy and toddlerhood, the home-reared child is largely insulated from rule systems that differ dramatically from, or offer alternatives to, those of the family. Parents are in a position to state the rules of the game and to shape the child's initial conceptualisation of him-/herself, of them, and of the world beyond the family. When sensitive, consistent, facilitative care-givers make the most of this situation the development of secure attachment is a predictable outcome. Although the child does not yet make an intentional commitment to the family's norms of good behaviour, he/she is committed behaviourally to the family system long before these norms are even explained or imposed as rules. Participation in attachment relationships allows the child to maintain organised behaviour and to maximise a wide range of benefits over time. Accordingly, the child enmeshes itself in the family system to whatever extent parental behaviour supports. Herein lie the seeds of pro-social motivation.

During middle childhood, the rules of the game become increasingly complex. Parents begin to expect more consistent conformity to family rules, and the range of rules and contingencies expands at whatever rate the parents estimate that the child's cognitive development allows. If the child's behaviour is not integrated with that of one or a few care-givers, contingency management can

control him/her, until independence renders this impractical. The child's orientation toward norms will remain that of conformity, rather than commitment.

As long as the child's social world is mainly within the family, identification can be explained as an informal inference from participation in parental attachments and the family's behavioural affective economy. When parents "reveal" that a particular behaviour or attitude is part of the family's system, the child can reasonably infer that "If that's the system, then that's for me." Insofar as the child is already committed behaviourally to parental attachments and to the family, he/she is biased toward accepting explicit training of persuasion. The child should find that conformity of newly defined norms confirms central self-theory and, thus, engenders positive emotion. This conceptualisation involves identification with the family norms rather than with one parent or the other. If a child cares about parental socialisation goals, and if the parents' socialisation practices are sound, then effective and enduring outcomes are expected. If, on the other hand, attachment problems have resulted in an indifferent attitude toward socialisation pressures, then even appropriate practices will be only effective in the short term. Attachment does not explain socialisation outcomes; it moderates them through the interaction of identification with child-rearing practices.

In infancy and early childhood, a key function of attachment is to foster the development of independence. The transition from sensor-motor to representational thought in middle childhood brings major changes in proximity seeking, contact maintenance, and the communication between parent and offspring. The secure base acquires a cognitive representation and, as it becomes portable, exploratory and social excursions can become increasingly extended and extensive. Peremptory proximity and contact seeking in response to moderate uncertainty, discomfort, or stress replaces communication and direct coping. With increasing age and cognitive sophistication, children learn to inhibit goal-directed behaviour and to communicate their goals and plans through language. They move toward what Bowlby (1969/1982) calls "goal-corrected partnership" (Ainsworth, 1990:467).

By means of goal-corrected partnership, Bowlby (1973) emphasises that age-related changes in overt proximity seeking represent reorganisation within and among behavioural systems, not attenuation of the infant-mother relationship. This is a crucial insight. The organising role that

parent behaviour serves throughout childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood in many cultures and families may be overlooked. In middle childhood, relationships with peers become very important, but attachment to the parents remains the primary source of security (Greenberg, *et al.*, 1983). Beginning in middle childhood, a child can enter into a wide range of "contracts" with adults. These arise within and across families. Within families, many key socialisation practices entail exchange agreements between parent and child, for example, rewards for good behaviour. Often, the need to care for younger children, share transportation, and divide household duties lead to agreements about division of labour and reciprocity. Across families, an adult may agree to extend privileges contingent upon a child's good behaviour, offer instruction or pay in exchange for the child's assistance, or supervise and assist the child on the expectation that the child's parents will reciprocate.

In middle childhood, the child's social world widens rapidly and dramatically. As explained in chapter 3, at this age, children's major tasks are to find a place in the peer group, gain recognition, establish and maintain friendships. They still view their parents as sources of nurture, emotional support and instrumental help (Grossman, Grossman & Zimmermann, 1999:777). Attachment, in the sense of seeking protection, help, and comfort under conditions of adversity, is still a salient issue in middle childhood. Studies related to attachment in middle childhood are few, but Grossman *et al.* (1999:779) summarise the main findings as follows:

- Parent-child interaction and the child's peer relations were found to be related positively to the parents' support, availability, care giving and trustworthiness.
- Children's representation of their parents, as emotionally available and supportive, was not linked to attachment history.
- A father's sensitivity in play with his toddler predicted the child's representation of the father as emotionally available and supportive at age ten in the intact family.
- The parents' self-reported supportiveness of a child at age ten was not related to early patterns of attachment, but corresponded with the child's concurrent report of parental supportiveness.

In the South African culture, children between 6 and 12 years of age spend a considerable amount of time away from the parents' immediate supervision; yet many parents undertake to maintain some level of consistent supervision. The child's time with the peer group, or in other activities, is viewed

as a continuation of exploration and training that had begun earlier, not as detachment or independence. Within this arrangement, child and parent share the goal of maintaining a degree of supervision and contact when the child is away from direct parental supervision for long periods.

In a sense, a supervision partnership is an extension of the parental role as a matrix for the child's behaviour and as a secure base, but now the sharing of responsibility between child and parent is more evenly balanced than in infancy. The parent must want to maintain supervision and availability during this transitional period and ensure that the child co-operates. However, unlike the task of serving an infant as a secure base, the parent's intention to supervise an older child is not sufficient. The parent can only supervise and serve as a secure base if he/she is always aware of the child's excursions and plans, both when the plan is first formulated and later when plans and playing sites change significantly during the day. This is a responsibility that only the child can fulfil. Parents, of course, have a similar responsibility to keep the child up to date, should they venture forth while the child is away at play. The supervision partnership has to include arrangements for a mode of communication, a set of contingency plans, or alternative supervision during the parent's absence. Parents may also wish to limit a child's activities to places where supervision by other adults is close at hand. It becomes the child's responsibility to operate within these limits, or to negotiate exceptions in advance. In middle childhood, the child can make do with periodic assurance that the parent is accessible. The relinquishing of the parents as attachment figures proceeds in fits and starts.

Obviously, both the parent's initiative and consistency and the child's willingness to participate are critical to this kind of partnership. It is unlikely that such a partnership could arise solely as a result of early sensitive care or a secure attachment in infancy. Yet, the parent's role in the partnership is analogous to sensitive early care, and the quality of early attachment may influence the child's willingness and desire to participate. Based on Waters *et al.* (1991), in Table 4.4, the researcher listed the types of child behaviour that might be used to assess the child's participation in such a partnership.

- Seeks parent when injured
- Comes to parent for help when in trouble
- Helps parent by keeping certain areas of the home tidy
- Accepts restrictions related to safety
- Is willing to stay within reach of parent's supervision
- Enjoys talking to parent before going to bed
- Returns home at a predictable time
- Is open with parent about social worries when they occur
- Asks parent for information about physical maturation
- Shows an interest in parent's work

Table 4.4: Supervision partnership from 6 to 12 years

Erikson (1950) proposed that "industry versus inferiority" was a central developmental issue for this period, and that parents should present children with firm outer limits and freedom of expression and control in order to allow their children to develop a sense of autonomy. Erikson (1950) stressed the importance of "mutual regulation" between parents and children during this period, a concept somewhat similar to Bowlby's (1969/1982) notion of "goal-corrected partnership" between children and their attachment figures. During middle childhood, children continue to be vulnerable to a wide range of dangers, and continue to use their attachment figures as secure bases from which to explore (Ainsworth, 1990:467; Marvin & Britner, 1999:62). However, they use other adults and groups of specific peers more and more in the same manner. With their much more sophisticated communication skills and internal working models, children in this phase of the life cycle become able to assume primary responsibility for their own protection through their integration into the larger social structure for longer periods of time and under conditions of greater physical separation from their parents (Cassidy, 1988:121; Main *et al.,* 1985:66).

In their study, Hazan and Zeifman (in Feeney & Noller, 1996:72) were interested in the processes

by which young people transfer their primary attachment from parents to peers. Although all subjects in the sample preferred to spend their time in the company of peers rather than parents, other components of attachment showed clear developmental trends. A shift in the target of the safe haven function occurred between the ages of 8 and 14, with peers being preferred to parents as sources of comfort and support. Peers replace parents only in late adolescence with regard to separation protest and secure base functions. Where supervision partnerships are evident, the researchers validate the insight that Bowlby (1969/1982) conveys in his references to goal-corrected partnership; attachment does not simply decline as the child's horizons expand. The attachment behavioural system continues to serve as an important resource as other behavioural systems mature, even into adulthood.

4.7   Types of attachment

To study attachment, Ainsworth *et al.* (1978) devised a "Strange Situation Test" to call forth behaviour that would reveal feelings of closeness between parent and child. Having observed infants' responses to these episodes, researchers identified a secure attachment pattern and three patterns of insecurity (Ainsworth, *et al.,* 1978; Delaney, 1997:13; Main & Solomon, 1990). First identified in infants, these patterns appear to show some permanence over time, as children mature.

The researcher compiled Table 4.5 from various authors' inputs (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978; Colin, 1996:38; Howe, 1996:9-13; Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 1999:521-536; Main & Hesse, 1990; Main & Solomon, 1990). Categories of attachment are listed together with the parent and child qualities:

1. SECURE ATTACHMENT	
The parent: • is available, consistent, responsive and warm • is sensitive to, and aware of, the child's physical and emotional needs • reaches out spontaneously to the child • fulfils the child's needs in a suitable manner • and child are happy to see each other after separation • communicates reciprocally, accurately and harmoniously.	The child: • develops a sense of trust in the parent's love, availability and helpfulness • uses the parent as a secure base • is able to separate readily from the mother to go off and investigate the surroundings • trusts that the parent will not reject/discard him/her • trusts him-/herself • gives a positive response to the caregiver and other people (strangers) • and parent are happy to see each other after separation • shows active exploration • is distressed when separated from the mother • exhibits suitable play • can approach the mother spontaneously when needed • enjoys physical contact with the mother.
2. ANXIOUS AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT	
The parent: • acts with rejection towards the child • is rigid • is hostile • reacts aversely to contact • punishes the child's dependency needs • is not available to the child's emotional needs • is depressed sometimes • discourages the child's fondling behaviour • is indifferent towards the child.	The child: • rarely cries when the mother leaves, and avoids her upon her return • makes no attempt to explore the environment • exhibits detachment behaviour • avoids the care-giver • fails to reach out in time of need and tends to be very angry • ignores and avoids strangers • shows separation anxiety when separated from the mother • shows signs of the "parental child" • shows animosity • idealises his/her parent when older • may deny parent's mistakes when older • attempts to fulfil his/her own emotional needs • becomes independent immaturely and suppresses dependency needs • displays more independent behaviour, e.g. becomes aggressive.
3. ANXIOUS AMBIVALENT ATTACHMENT	
The parent: • is insensitive • reacts intrusively • displays inconsistent conduct	The child: • both demands parental attention and angrily resists it at the same time • does little exploration and is harder to comfort

• confuses her/his own emotional needs with that of the child • uses the child to fulfil her/his own emotional needs.	• becomes anxious even before the mother leaves • behaves ambivalently when mother returns; tries to make contact, but also tries to avoid her by crying, kicking and hitting • is wary of strangers • exhibits protest behaviour • is distressed at separation • shows anger-ambivalence towards care-giver • is dishonest and manipulative • is in need of the parents' proximity • is in need of the parents' recognition • accepts any attention from the parent – positive or negative • may reject the parent • tries to elicit reaction from the parent.
4. DISORGANISED/DISORIENTED ATTACHMENT	
The parent: • has unresolved child trauma • is preoccupied with her/his own unfinished business • is unaware of the child's emotional needs • is unresponsive to the child's needs	The child: • shows a variety of confused, contradictory emotions at reunion • may exhibit controllable behaviour when older, to bring predictability into his/her life • reacts in a disorganised way when attention is needed • reacts with bewilderment • is not capable of exhibiting coherent behaviour when he/she needs the parent's attention • does not receive consistent attention.

TABLE 4.5: Attachment styles

From the above, it is clear that the **securely** attached child has a primary care-giver who is warm, sensitively attuned, consistent, and quickly responsive and who encourages mutually enjoyable interaction. Securely attached infants are affectionate and can be comforted and calmed when distressed. At two years they are enthusiastic and persistent in solving easy tasks and effective in using maternal assistance when tasks become more difficult. By school age, they are flexible, curious, socially competent, and self-reliant. They are assertive about what they want and are likely to be leaders.

The parenting styles associated with **insecure** attachment are unresponsive, unavailable, or hurtful. There are three basic patterns of insecure attachment: ambivalent, avoidant, and disorganised. Two

year-old children, who are **ambivalently** attached, lack self-reliance, show little enthusiasm for problem solving, and are easily frustrated and whiney. By school age they are often seen as problem children with poor peer relations and little resilience. They seem hopeless in response to imagined separations.

At two years of age, **avoidant** children are less able to engage in fantasy play than secure children, but even when fantasy play is present, it is full of irresolvable conflict. These children tend to victimise other children. By school age, they are often sullen and antagonistic and not inclined to seek help when injured or disappointed. Both the **avoidant** and the **disorganised** groups of children had parents who showed some aversion to physical contact with their children.

However, for the **disorganised** group there was an additional factor. Disorganised children had parents who rejected their approach and, simultaneously, expressed fear themselves, or were frightening to these children. When an attack or fear comes from the haven of safety it arouses conflicting tendencies. These children showed tense mannerisms (pulling their ears and rocking) during the reunion phase of the observation. Even when happy, they avoided eye contact. Children's angry behaviour correlates highly with their mothers' earlier resistance to child-initiated contact (Main & Hesse, 1990). When referring to the section on behaviours of children with attachment disorder, it will be noted that many of the behaviours listed there correspond to the descriptions of children who fall into the three categories of insecure attachment.

Depending on the nature and degree of emotional loss and anxiety experienced in the attachment relationship, children can adopt a number of defensive strategies. These strategies make sense within the emotional climate of the attachment relationship. Each type of attachment behaviour is an attempt by the child to cope with the fears and anxieties generated by their relationship with their prime caregivers. It is important to understand the consequences of these behaviours, as the child develops. For social workers, the value of using and adapting the Ainsworth *et al.* (1978) classifications lies in an understanding of the patterns of behaviour, rather than seeking to replicate this test (Howe, 1996:22).

4.8   Attachment behaviours

The psychologist, Mary Ainsworth (1978), defines "attachment behaviours" as those behaviours that primarily promote nearness to a specific person to whom the child is attached. These behaviours of the child towards the care-giver change with age. Young children engage in three classes of behaviours to establish or maintain proximity to the care-givers. Signalling behaviours (e.g., vocalising, smiling) regularly draw care-givers toward children, usually for positive interaction. Aversive behaviours (e.g., crying, screaming) bring care-givers to children, typically, to terminate such actions. Active behaviours (e.g., approaching) function to move children toward care-givers. These classes of behaviours, as illustrated in table 4.6, serve the same biological function: to keep vulnerable infants in close physical proximity to their care-givers, thereby increasing their chances of survival.

Signalling behaviour
- Crying
- Smiling
- Vocalising
- Signalling or calling to caretaker

Orienting behaviour
- Looking / eye contact
- Searching

Aversive behaviours
- Crying
- Screaming

Movements relating to another person
- Following
- Approaching
- Reaching

Active physical contact behaviour
- Seeking to be picked up
- Embracing
- Clinging or holding
- Protesting separation
- Sitting with

TABLE 4.6: Child attachment behaviour

As the child becomes more verbal, speech replaces increasingly some of these earlier primitive, physical forms of engagement between parent and offspring (Mahler *et al.*, 1975). Older children may resort to highly primitive forms of attachment behaviour, for instance clinging to the parent. From an attachment formation standpoint, these children are developmentally arrested. In the normal child, attachment behaviours emerge very clearly in specific critical situations as illustrated in table 4.7:

> - Illness
> - Unavailability of caretaker
> - Presence of stranger
> - Aloneness
> - Darkness
> - Novel settings
> - Injury
> - Danger
> - Hunger
> - Fatigue
>
> (From Bowlby, 1973)

TABLE 4.7: Critical situations which elicit attachment behaviours

These critical situations (see Figure 4.8) evoke a strong feeling of anxiety in the child, who reacts by increasing attachment behaviours, such as crying or seeking out the parent for comfort or protection.

4.9   Internal working models

In order to discover the child's inner working model, the following theories are relevant:

- Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982)
- Emotional attunement (Schore, 1994; Hughes, 1997)
- Information processing – EMDR (Shapiro, 1995)
- Trauma (Perry, 1995)
- Symbolic Interaction Theory (Mead, 1934).

Bowlby's (1969/1982) concept of internal working models has described human action as guided by perception, a concept attributed to the Symbolic Interaction Theory (Mead, 1934). When a child internalises a perspective of the parent as being unavailable, this viewpoint is likely to be applied to parents in general. Bruce Perry (1995) is an internationally recognised authority on brain development of children in crises, especially the long-term effects of trauma in children. His work has been instrumental in describing how traumatic events in childhood change the biology of the brain. Shapiro (1995) hypothesised that an experience of trauma results in a blockage of the information processing system. This neurological obstruction causes the incident, or series of incidents, to remain in its anxiety-producing form. This means that the conclusions formed during a time of trauma are frozen. This concept is very similar to Bowlby's (1969/1982) concept of "inner working models." Emotional attunement means being aware of, and responsive to, another. Throughout life, attunement helps build and maintain relationships, and "inner working models" influence it.

These theories are instrumental for describing how traumatic events in childhood change the biology of the brain. This means that conclusions formed during a traumatic event are frozen and will influence the building and maintenance of relationships. As such, these theories reveal similarities and are linked to Bowlby's (1969/1982) concept of inner working models.

The concept of inner working models is central to Bowlby's (1969) theory of attachment. Delaney (1997:20) refers to the working model as a "cognitive snapshot / mental representation" that the child forms about him-/herself, his/her care-givers, and their relationship to him/her (Bowlby, 1973). Main *et al.* (1985:66-67) define the internal working model as a "set of conscious and/or unconscious rules for the organisation of information relevant to attachment and for obtaining or limiting access to that information, that is, to information regarding attachment-related experiences, feelings and ideations." Functioning as "filters," internal working models either facilitate or limit access to information, thus shaping the construction of current and future interpersonal transactions and behaviour (Main *et al.*, 1985; Sperling & Berman, 1994).

There is an increasing awareness that an individual's healthy identity requires the presence of relatedness with others as much as the presence of individuation. Beyond infancy, attachment

relations become governed additionally by internal working models that young individuals construct from the experienced patterns of interaction with their principal attachment figures. They serve to regulate, interpret and predict the attachment of both the figures and themselves, related to behaviour, thoughts, and feelings (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999:89; Delaney, 1997:9; Howe, 1996:5; Hughes, 1997:3). Thus, the working model is an inner reflection of external realities. In this way, past experiences influence the way in which present experiences are approached and understood.

By the age of 12 months infants already show clear individual differences in working models, although they cannot yet verbalise it (Delaney, 1997:20; Thompson, 1999:267). However, by three years of age the contents of the working model are relatively fixed and resistant to change (Greenberg & Speltz, 1988:180).

In secure attachments, each partner is aware of, interested in, and alert to the other's perspective. There is "behavioural synchrony" (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999:90; Howe, 1996:6) and the child can pay full attention to other concerns, such as learning and mastery of the world around him/her without fears concerning the loss of his/her parents.

A coherent optimistic expectation, mental representation, or 'blueprint' regarding themselves, their care-giver, and their relationships characterise a positive internal working model. This includes opposite qualities of themselves, such as being "naughty" at times and "good" at other times. Table 4.8 outlines the working model of a normal, well-attached child.

About him-/herself
• I am worthwhile / wanted
• I am safe
• I am capable
About care-givers
• They are available
• They are responsive
• They meet my needs
• They are supportive

TABLE 4.8: The positive working model

Securely attached children have developed what Erikson (1950) calls "basic trust": an expectation that the world will be generally safe and that close relationships will be satisfying. Furthermore, they are secure in themselves and in their relationships to primary attachment figures; they know that they belong (Bowlby, 1969). Normally attached children also have a well-formed conscience, a sense of right and wrong that grows out of their desire to please their attachment figures. They show need awareness, a range of genuine emotion, the ability to identify and express needs in a discerning fashion, and they display affection and anger freely (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978; Bretherton & Munholland, 1999:90; Colin, 1996:245; Howe, 1996:6).

Many maltreated or abused children develop a "negative working model" or "defeatist" internal working model. That is, these children's mental blueprints consist of highly negative expectations about care-givers and themselves. Problem behaviour often is a reflection of this negative perspective or "defeating internal working model." As seen in table 4.9 that was compiled by the researcher, these children view themselves as worthless, unsafe and impotent to make an impact on others (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999:92; Cicchetti *et al.*, 1990:17). Simultaneously, they view care-givers as unreliable, unresponsive, and dangerous.

In critical situations, attachment-disordered children do not act as expected. Many of them do not come to the parents when they are sick, injured or frightened. In fact, these children often avoid their caretakers in critical situations, preferring to handle the crises themselves.

About the self:
- I am worthless / bad
- I am unsafe
- I am impotent / incapable
- Others deserve my hate
- I deserve to be hated
- I can do nothing that is right
- The only way I can survive is to be in control
- I do not deserve enjoyable experiences and loving relationships

About the care-givers:
- He / she is unresponsive to emotional, physical, sensory and mental developmental needs
- He / she is unreliable / unpredictable
- He / she is not to be trusted
- He / she is threatening, dangerous, rejecting, insensitive

TABLE 4.9: The negative working model

Though operating at an unconscious level, the negative working model has a dramatic influence on children's behaviour and on the maintenance of conduct problems. Interestingly, representations and expectations, arising from the earliest relationships with the care-giver, may transfer to other, subsequent relationships (Colin, 1996:245). At a preverbal stage, these children have learned that the world is a scary and treacherous place. This lesson has taken place at a biochemical level in the brain (Shapiro, 1995). If, in the past, children have learned to expect rejection, loss and insensitivity, they continue to expect that in the present, even with other available, sensitive, accepting care-givers (e.g., stepparents). In essence, the negative internal working model is unfairly superimposed upon any subsequent intimate relationship, despite the fact that its relationship to the reality of the new relationship could be non-existent. This destructive perspective can be permanently shifted and healed.

4.10   The parent's role in attachment

Children's attachment cannot be understood while disregarding the context of their relationship to

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attachment figures, that is, their parents or care-givers. Indeed, infant attachment develops, not in a vacuum, but in interaction. Therefore, it is important to consider the parents' role in attachment formation.

Two care-giver qualities, accessibility and responsiveness, strongly influence infants' development of secure attachment. "Accessibility" means that the parent is present and available, physically and emotionally, to the child. That is, the attachment figure is with the child throughout the period of attachment. By "parental responsiveness" is meant that the care-giver addresses the child's needs sensitively, accurately and directly. The responsive attachment figure successfully identifies the child's needs from cries, facial expressions, vocalisations, body language, and overt behaviour. Howe (1996:8) adds three qualities, namely predictability, reliability and sensitivity.

Depending upon the specific children's stage of attachment, the parents' responses differ. It is not enough for parents to spend long periods of time with their children. The quality of time spent makes the difference in stimulating a strong attachment. Studies by Londerville and Main (1981), Source and Emde (1981), and Craig (1989:185) confirm this statement. An aspect of attachment that has recently received much attention is the father's role in the baby's development of attachment. It would thus appear that attachment does not necessarily imply an exclusive relationship with the mother, but that the father's role should not be underestimated. Louw *et al.* (1998:221) emphasise that the quality of the father-child relationship is of far greater importance than the father's mere physical presence. Research findings indicate that when babies are upset, they look at their mother more often, whereas when they want to play, they look more at their father (Berk, 1994).

Research in families has revealed that high stress is associated with more insensitive, harsh, inconsistent, and/or unpredictable parenting behaviour. Specifically, economic hardship (McLoyd, 1990: 314), occupational stress (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1982:54), marital discord (Belsky, 1984:84), and psychological distress (McLoyd, 1990:315) are all precursors of dysfunctional parenting styles.

In contrast, greater social support and more economic resources appear to facilitate more sensitive rearing practices (Lempers, Clark-Lempers & Simons, 1989:25), perhaps because less taxed parents are more patient with (or tolerant of) their young children (Belsky, 1984:89).

Arising from the above, it can be summarised that the attachment figure must meet three criteria: provision of physical and emotional care, facilitation of continuity or consistency in a child's life, and emotional investment in the child. This behaviour will have long-term effects on the child's emotional development.

4.11   Long-term effects of attachment

Craig and Kermis (1995) found that children at age 11, who were securely attached to their mothers as babies, exhibited better social skills and had more friends than those who experienced insecure attachments. The importance of attachment bonds with the parents and the development towards industry is of particular importance. Secure attachment with parents is also related to successful peer relationships (Louw *et al.*, 1998:447).

Many researchers believe that the effects of the quality of attachment continue even into adulthood. Insecure attachment during childhood could, for instance, be related to psychological problems during adulthood, such as inadequate interpersonal relationships (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Louw *et al.* (1998:220) warn that such findings should be treated with caution. Secure attachment alone does not ensure self-confidence and self-reliance. Authors, such as Schaffer (1993), have pointed out that current parent-child interaction is as responsible for the child's behaviour as the earlier unsatisfactory attachment.

4.12   Disruption in the attachment relationship

Although minor disruptions in care-giver-child relationships are common and often harmless, major separations from, and losses of, the care-giver can disrupt the child's attachment in very destructive ways. Major disruptions to attachment may occur in cases of parental mental or physical illness and/or death; abandonment of the child by the parent; chronic abuse, neglect or exploitation of the

child; and periodic rejection of the child (Mahler *et al.*, 1975; Main & Hesse, 1990; Main & Solomon, 1990). Delaney (1997:11) alludes to the fact that certain factors in a child can also precipitate disruptions in the growing care-giver–child attachment. Relevant for this study are hyperactivity and aggressiveness that may negatively impact on the continuity of the attachment relationship.

Table 4.10 shows the predictable three-part cycle in the child's response to disruptions in attachment (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978).

Protest – Crying, distress, anger, fear, pursuit of the mother, searching after the mother, temper tantrums.

Despair – Depression, quiet withdrawal, refusal to be comforted by a stranger, disinterest in play or exploration.

Detachment – Lack of interaction with the primary care-giver after reunion, active avoidance of the care-giver, and failure to recognise the care-giver.

(Delaney, 1997:11; Kobak, 1999:24)

TABLE 4.10: Reaction to disruption in attachment

Upon first becoming aware of their care-givers' absence, children initially protest and signal separation distress. Finding that their protests are lodged in vain and that their attempts to induce their care-givers to return are futile, children might despair, that is, become saddened, depressed and lethargic. They refuse strangers' attempts at comforting them. Thirdly, children eventually detach from others in a withdrawn, somewhat cynical posture. Even if reunited with the care-givers, these children may rebuff them, fail to recognise them, and remain remarkably disinterested in becoming involved with them again. A grasp of the protest–despair–detachment cycle in normal children can foster an understanding of serious attachment problems (in children of all ages), caused by chronic separation and loss. Bowlby (1973) also emphasises that infants' reactions to separation and loss are more than mere cries. They reflect the same grief and mourning process that adults experience (Waters *et al.*, 1991).

Neither the evolutionary theory, nor the attachment theory, would propose that warm, caring relationships cannot develop between stepparents and -children, but suggest that such relationships would be more difficult to attain than between biological parents and children. Although negative or harmful biological relatedness and early attachment may be important, their influence can be modified by later positive experiences and family relationships (Hetherington *et al.* 1999:4).

This cycle in infants/toddlers can be used as a prototype for understanding reactions in older step-children who have experienced significant separations and losses. Indeed, depending upon the chronicity and severity of care-giver-child disruptions (and perhaps upon the child's innate temperament and age at time of disruption), attachment becomes weakened, seriously damaged, and abnormal (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978; Main & Solomon 1990; Hughes, 1997:23).

For the child, one of the most distressing experiences is to be separated from, or lose, one's attachment figure.

4.13   Attachment disorder

Delaney (1997:17) refers to attachment disorder as serious, relatively fixed emotional and behavioural disturbances in children whose early attachment relationships were abnormal. Children, who have been exposed to destructive factors early in life, may have lost their sense of security and trust in care-givers. Hughes (1997:25-33) describes the cause of attachment disorder as inadequate, hostile, deficient and/or abusive caregiving. It follows that these children may be subjected to many separations from, and losses of, their primary care-givers. They have most probably moved through the protest-despair-detachment sequence innumerable times. Such a history will greatly impede a child's ability to relate to a new stepparent in a healthy way.

Attachment disorder may underlie many diagnoses, such as disorders of conduct, oppositional defiance, separation anxiety, avoidant personality and identity (DSM IV, 1994).

A variety of problem behaviours result from children having missed out on the kind of parenting that produces healthy, resilient children. Not all behaviour problems reflect a current dysfunction in

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the parent-child relationship, but may reflect early experiences that continue to make it difficult for a child to accept what his/her parents have to offer. Some children do well in the structured environment of school, but fare poorly at home where the potential for intimacy makes them uncomfortable. On the other hand, it is not uncommon for children to do well at home, where they feel secure and well understood, but have problems in school, where the situation is too stimulating and their special needs cannot always be met.

Although attachment disorder can take many shapes, the researcher will address only that attachment disorder which most closely resembles the "conduct disordered" or the "unattached" child. Table 4.11 has been adapted from Delaney (1997:18) and lists some of the symptoms or conduct problems associated with attachment disorder.

Category and examples:
Sadism/violence
Cruelty to animals and children; vandalism/destructiveness; assaultive behaviour; self-injurious behaviour; firesetting
Disordered eating
Stealing and hoarding food; gorging; refusal of food
Counterfeit emotionality
Theatrical display; superficial charm; emotional radar; indiscriminate attachment
Kleptomania/compulsive lying
Chronic stealing; pathological lying
Sexual obsessions
Seductive behaviour or clothing; sexual activity with other children; bestiality
Passive-aggression
Face-to-face compliance; refusal to answer questions; provoking anger in others; wetting and soiling
Defective conscience
Absence of guilt; denial and projection of blame
(See Cline, 1979 and Delaney, 1997)

TABLE 4.11: Symptoms of the attachment-disordered child

A brief summary of the behaviour problems exhibited by attachment-disordered children follows. The most extreme behaviours are exhibited by children who have had early disruptions in their attachment relationships, followed by multiple foster placements. Children, who have developed an insecure attachment to their biological parents, have similar, but usually less severe, behaviour problems.

- **Problems relating to people**

  Many insecure or attachment-disordered children have problems relating to people. Either they are unable to be close to any one person, or they are indiscriminately responsive to many people. They have poor peer relationships and are unable to maintain long-term friendships.

- **Problems accepting care**

  Many children experience problems to accept care from others. Although some children take adequate care of themselves and insist that they need no help from anyone, others are reckless and accident-prone. Jernberg and Booth (1999:27) state: "It is not unusual to find these children covered with little scratches, bumps, and bruises."

- **Problems with transitions**

  Many children have difficulty in dealing with change and transitions. Their experience of being unable to count on others to keep their world safe and predictable leads them to insist on clinging to their own special routines. Even routine transitions may cause them to fall apart.

- **Lack of conscience**

  Many children appear to lack a conscience. Behavioural evidence of this lack ranges from cruelty to animals and human beings, to stealing and lying. Teachers often note a lack of empathy when a peer is hurt.

- **Emotional immaturity**

  Children with attachment problems are emotionally immature, as shown in their impulsive behaviour, frequent temper tantrums, and lack of awareness of the needs of others. The

immature, explosive nature of their anger also relates to their insecure attachment. In the process of becoming securely attached, a child develops the capacity to modulate the more violent expression of emotions.

- **Problems with trust and self-esteem**

  Some unattached or insecurely attached children with low self-confidence and not much trust in their world are clingy and immature. Others conceal their insecurity with a facade of pseudo-maturity and independence.

For the social worker, it is important to be aware of the characteristics of attachment disorder. Transference to a stepparent may take place and reduce the formation of attachment. The researcher contends that a poorly attached child places an extremely high emotional demand on parents and may challenge the parents' maturity. Conflict will be a central reality, with which the parents must be comfortable. The support and encouragement from social workers in addressing these issues is of great importance. However, it is crucial that the therapist does not approach the stepparents with the assumption that they are responsible for the child's problems.

4.14   Conclusion

Many, if not most, of South African children today have multiple care-givers. The construction of attachment relationships between children and their alternative care-givers appears to be similar to the construction of infant-mother attachment. Therefore, in the stepfamily, a phase of attachment must be consciously recreated. Literature on the subject (Howes, 1999:685) suggests that the construction of secure attachment depends on particularly skilled and sensitive adult behaviours. A negative working model has a dramatic influence on a child's behaviour and, in the stepfamily, it can prevent the formation of attachments, despite available sensitive, accepting care-givers. Although the quality of attachment experienced in infancy may affect attachment in the stepfamily, evidence exists that positive experiences in the stepfamily can modify these distressing experiences. Although much has yet to be learned about alternative attachment relationships, such as in the stepfamily, it seems possible that stepparents can provide children with a "safety net" for their future development.

In respect of attachment in middle childhood, there has, regrettably, not been a substantial body of empirical research findings to review. Indeed, a major theme of this chapter has been the lack of systematic studies of attachment in middle childhood and attachment relationships in the stepfamily. Both theory and practice would benefit from a much closer integration than has taken place to date.

The next chapter will explore adult attachment, with special reference to marriage. The researcher's conviction is that there is a future for the stepfamily, provided the remarried couple nurture their relationship and are committed to the new family unit.

CHAPTER FIVE

ATTACHMENT IN ADULTS

5.1   Introduction

Attachment behaviours and the affective bonds to which they lead are present and active throughout the life span. For an adult to be attached to a spouse, lover, friend, or parent is normal and healthy.

Although John Bowlby (1969/1982, 1973, 1980) originally designed his attachment theory to explain the emotional attachment between infants and their care-givers, he (Bowlby, 1969:129) believed that attachment is an important component of human experience "from the cradle to the grave." Bowlby (1980:40) viewed attachment relationships as playing a powerful role in adults' emotional lives:

> "Many of the most intense emotions arise during the formation, the maintenance, the disruption and the renewal of attachment relationships. The formation of an attachment is described as falling in love, maintaining an attachment as loving someone, and losing a partner as grieving over someone. Similarly, threat of loss arouses anxiety and actual loss gives rise to sorrow while each of these situations is likely to arouse anger. The unchallenged maintenance of an attachment is experienced as a source of joy. Because such emotions are usually a reflection of the state of a person's affectional attachments, the psychology and psychopathology of emotion is found to be in large part the psychology and psychopathology of affectional bonds."

During the past 12 years the attachment theory has become one of the major frameworks for the study of romantic relationships. Fraley and Shaver (2000:132) describe a reason for the popularity of this theory as its provision of a unified framework for explaining the development, maintenance, and dissolution of close relationships, while simultaneously offering a perspective on personality development, emotion regulation, and psychopathology. This theory also merges data and insights from disciplines as diverse as ethology, physiological psychology, the control systems theory, developmental psychology, cognitive science, and psychoanalysis. Only when

Hazan and Shaver (1987:516), Shaver and Hazan (1988), and Shaver, Hazan and Bradshaw (1988) reported their groundbreaking studies of romantic love did the attachment perspective on adult romantic relationships become firmly established. Their basic argument is that romantic love can be conceptualised as an attachment process. According to this perspective, established relationships between lovers and spouses are attachments, as described by Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980). Hazan and Shaver (1987) also argue that three of the four major attachment styles described in the infant literature (secure, anxious-avoidant and anxious-ambivalent) manifest in adult romantic love.

According to the attachment theory, to seek and maintain attachment is healthy and normal at all stages of human life; to do so is part of human instinctive nature. For adults, as for infants and children, attachments are a source of security. What is desired is that the attachment figure is accessible when needed, is responsive to communications, and permits bodily contact when a threat is perceived to the self.

In Ainsworth as well as Bowlby's opinion, the goal of the attachment system is access to the attachment figure (Ainsworth, 1991; Bowlby, 1982; Colin, 1996:294). For adults, actual physical contact may often not be necessary; cognitive processes become more central. By Ainsworth's criteria, most marriages, many lasting sexual relationships and many non-sexual friendships include attachment components as part of the relationship (Ainsworth, 1991:44). Even in marriages that have much conflict, each partner's attachment to the other tends to be very persistent, and the relationship provides a more or less stable base from which each spouse can move into the domains of employment, child rearing, and community involvement. The institution of marriage, in itself, tends to foster attachment in that it creates the context for familiarity and interdependence (Weiss, 1991:66).

5.2   Defining adult attachment

In the 1970s and early 1980s, several investigators started to use Bowlby's ideas as a framework for understanding the nature and etiology of adult loneliness and love. It soon became clear that many lonely adults reported troubled childhood relationships with parents and either distant or overly enmeshed relationships with romantic partners, suggesting that one's attachment history influences the frequency and form of adult loneliness (Shaver & Hazan, 1987:105-124; Weiss, 1991:66-76). Furthermore, these people approached love relationships differently, ranging from

intense preoccupation to active avoidance (Fraley & Shaver, 2000:133). Still, there was no theoretical framework until Hazan and Shaver (1987) conceptualised romantic love, or pair-bonding, as an attachment process - one that follows the same sequence of formative steps and results in the same kinds of individual differences as infant-parent attachment (Feeney & Noller, 1996:20-21). The central propositions of the theory can be summarised as follows (Feeney & Noller, 1996:28; Fraley & Shaver, 2000:134; Shaver & Hazan, 1987):

5.2.1   The emotional and behavioural dynamics of infant-care-giver relationships and adult romantic relationships are governed by the same biological system. For example, when adults feel safe, the partner may be used as a "secure base" from which to explore the environment, or engage in creative projects as part of leisure or work (Feeney & Noller, 1996:20). When an individual feels sick, distressed, or threatened, he/she regards the partner as a source of safety, comfort, and protection (proximity seeking). Furthermore, attunement characterises both kinds of relationships.

5.2.2   As described by Ainsworth (1991:42), the major patterns of attachment are similar to the types of romantic, or pair-bond attachment that exist: secure, anxious-ambivalent and fearful-avoidant. In response to Hazan and Shaver (1987), Bartholomew (1990) proposes a four-category model of individual differences in adult attachment that result from a unique combination of positive and negative internal working models of self (anxiety/security) and others (avoidance/fear). Figure 5.1 illustrates this.

Positive
model of other

SECURE	**PREOCCUPIED**
Comfortable with intimacy and autonomy in close relationships	Preoccupied with close relationships Overly dependent on others for self-esteem and support

Positive model of self — — — — — — — — — — — — — — — **Negative model of self**

DISMISSING	**FEARFUL**
Down-plays importance of close relationships Compulsive self-reliance	Fearful of intimacy due to fear of rejection Socially avoidant

Negative
model of other

FIGURE 5.1: Two-dimensional, four category model of adult attachment

This figure explores the potential range of adult attachment patterns. Four prototypic attachment patterns are defined in terms of the intersection of two underlying dimensions. The *"positive model of self"* dimension (on the horizontal axis) indicates the degree to which individuals have a sense of self-worth. A positive self-model facilitates individuals feeling self-confident in close relationships. In contrast, a *"negative model of self"* indicates a dependency on the approval of others, which fosters anxiety in close relationships. The *"positive model of others"* (on the vertical axis) reflects expectations of the availability and supportiveness of others. A positive others-model facilitates the willingness to seek support from close others. In contrast, a *"negative model of others"* is associated with the tendency to withdraw and maintain a safe distance in close relationships, particularly when feeling threatened (Bartholomew *et al.*, 2001:45).

5.2.3   Individual differences in adult attachment behaviour (i.e., "attachment styles") are reflections of the expectations and beliefs that people have formed about themselves and their close relationships on the basis of their attachment histories. Working models of attachment continue to guide and shape close relationship behaviour throughout life. Fraley and Shaver (2000:134) describe these "internal working models" as relatively stable reflections of early care-giving experiences. If care-givers have been responsive and supportive, children are hypothesised to develop secure models that, in turn,

facilitate the development of secure attachment relationships in adulthood. In contrast, insecure models would tend to lead individuals to recreate insecure patterns in their adult relationships (Bartholomew *et al.*, 2001:44).

5.2.4   Romantic love can be understood in terms of the mutual functioning of three behavioural systems: attachment, care-giving and sex.

5.2.5   The researcher wishes to add the presence of distress and disruption that follow at the termination of the relationship (e.g., divorce or death), as this is relevant to the current study. Research on bereavement has revealed that individuals frequently find ways to continue their attachments with deceased spouses (Fraley & Shaver, 2000:141). However, little is known about how this reorganisation works after a divorce. The loss of any attachment relationship would seem to lead to separation protest (Weiss, 1991:69).

It seems clear that the attachment system is active in adult life and integral to pair attachments. The processes by which a pair bonds and infant-care-giver relationships develop appear to be quite similar.

5.3   Styles in adulthood attachment

Several investigations have explored the possibility that attachment styles, such as the ones identified by Ainsworth *et al.* (1978) in infancy, continue to exist in adulthood and play a role in romantic and parenting relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Main *et al.*, 1985).

According to the attachment theory, individual differences in the organisation of the attachment system (i.e., the "attachment style") emerge from care-giving interactions with attachment figures (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978; Bowlby, 1973) and, subsequently, have numerous influences on relationship dynamics, ranging from partner selection to relationship maintenance.

5.3.1   Partner selection

Adults, who seek long-term relationships, identify responsive care-giving qualities, such as attentiveness, warmth and sensitivity, as most "attractive" in potential dating partners (Miller & Fishkin, 1997; Zeifman & Hazan, 1997). However, despite the attractiveness of secure qualities,

not everyone is paired with a secure partner. Some evidence suggests that some people end up in relationships with partners who confirm their existing beliefs about attachment relationships (Brennam & Shaver, 1995:271).

5.3.2 Secure base and safe haven behaviour

Secure adults tend to be more satisfied in their relationships than insecure adults. Their relationships are characterised by greater longevity, trust, commitment, and interdependence (Simpson, 1990:971). They are also more likely to regard romantic partners as a secure base from which to explore the world (Fraley & Davis, 1997:132). Research quoted in Fraley and Shaver (2000:145) discovered that secure adults are more likely than insecure adults to seek support from their partners when distressed.

These findings suggest that part of the reason why some individuals feel more secure in their relationships is that they express their worries openly and receive reassurance and support. Furthermore, the data suggest that some people feel insecure in their relationships because they cannot turn to their partners for comfort and support; secure individuals viewed their partners in a more positive light (Fraley & Shaver, 2000:147).

Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies indicate that, the longer they have been together, partners become less anxious about attachment-related issues (such as separation or abandonment) (Fraley & Shaver, 2000:148). Cross-sectional evidence also suggests that, over time, partners become more similar to one another in security (Fraley & Shaver, 1998:1198). This observation suggests that, as a relationship develops, reciprocal influence processes affect attachment security (Crowell *et al.*, 1999:446).

5.3.3 Attachment styles

In their theoretical writings, Hazan and Shaver (Shaver, Hazan & Bradshaw, 1988:68-99) and Shaver and Hazan (1993:29-70) identified parallels between the dynamics, feelings and behaviour associated with attachment between infant and care-giver on the one hand, and those associated with the experience of romantic love in adulthood, on the other. These similarities include seeking and maintaining close physical proximity to one's partner; reliance on the partner's continued availability; turning to the partner for comfort when threatened physically or

emotionally; and being distressed by separations, threats to the relationship, and losses. Hazan and Shaver hypothesised that the three infant attachment styles, identified by Ainsworth *et al.* (1978), correspond to the three distinct styles of love in adulthood (cf. 5.2.3).

When forming close relationships, people generally adopt one of three attachment styles: secure, avoidant, or anxious/ambivalent (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1996:7; Hazan & Shaver, 1987:512).

The following attitudes characterise a **secure** attachment style:
- I find it relatively easy to get close to others.
- I feel comfortable to depend on others.
- I am comfortable when others depend on me.
- I don't often worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me.

Studies by Levy and Davis (1988) and Simpson (1990), as described by Feeney (1999:365), link secure attachment with high levels of commitment, satisfaction and trust in close relationships. These people have a high self-esteem and feel that others like and care for them. A secure attachment style relates to the desire to appreciate, care for, and sacrifice oneself for significant others. People with a secure attachment style are comfortable with trust, closeness and dependency, because they expect others to respond with acceptance, closeness, and support (Kleinke, 1998:152). A study by Kobak and Hazan (1991), discussed by Feeney (1999:366), indicates that spouses with secure working models reported higher dyadic satisfaction than those with insecure models. Secure husbands were less rejecting and more supportive during problem solving, and secure wives were less likely to be rejected by husbands on the same task, thus manifesting better marital adjustment. They used constructive strategies in dealing with conflict.

The following attitudes characterise an **avoidant** attachment style:
- I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others.
- I find it difficult to trust people.
- I am nervous when anyone comes too close.
- I don't enjoy being dependent on others.

People with an avoidant attachment style tend to keep to themselves and they "hold back" from getting too involved in relationships. They view trust, closeness, and dependency as risky because they expect others to hurt and reject them (Kleinke, 1998:152). An avoidant attachment style is associated with a lack of passion and love for significant others. Relationships of avoidant men may be stable, because they tend to involve secure or ambivalent partners. Avoidant men may also engage in such behaviour as conflict avoidance, which may contribute to long-term stability, although not to concurrent happiness.

In summary, avoidant individuals organise their interpersonal behaviour in a way that minimises attachment-related issues. This defensive strategy is reflected in the ways they regulate their attention behaviour and emotions (Fraley *et al.*, 1998:249-279).

The following attitudes characterise an **anxious / ambivalent** attachment style:

- I find that others are reluctant to come as close as I would like.
- I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me.
- I want to merge completely with another person, and this desire sometimes scares people away.
- I am worried about getting too close to someone and then being abandoned.

People with an anxious/ambivalent attachment style tend to be insecure and jealous in their close relationships. They approach relationships with an attitude of wanting to be close, but they are preoccupied with the fear of rejection. A study by Collins and Read (1990) indicates that ambivalent women rated their relationships negatively. However, the relationships were quite stable over time, despite the negative ratings of relationship quality. Why would this be? Ambivalent women are frequently paired with avoidant men, for whom their dependent behaviour may confirm working models (Feeney, 1999:366). Ambivalent individuals reported more self-disclosure than avoidant individuals.

It is not surprising that people with a secure attachment style are more satisfied with their close relationships and feel a greater sense of trust, commitment, and pleasure with others (Simpson, 1990:975). An avoidant attachment style helps to protect people from feeling too bad when

relationships are terminated, but people who relate with this style pay the price of not enjoying their relationships very much while they last.

5.4   Internal working models of attachment

As discussed in chapter 4, the concept of inner working models is central to Bowlby's (1969) theory of attachment. Bowlby proposes these inner working models as the mechanism by which early attachment experiences affect a person throughout life. "To be able to predict and manage their world, individuals need both a model of their environment (environmental model) and a model of their own skills and potentialities (organismic model)" (Feeney & Noller, 1996:91). These inner working models simulate and predict the behaviours of others in social interaction and help to plan one's own behaviour to achieve relational goals.

A child develops internal working models out of relationship history. When parents are supportive and caring, the children are likely to develop inner working models that enable them to have positive relationships with others, as well as to explore the environment with a sense of confidence and mastery (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978; Bowlby, 1988; Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney, 1999:363; Main *et al.*, 1985).

Adults' models of attachment are likely to reflect the complexity and density of the networks of relationships typical of adults. It is important to realise that Bowlby (1969) does not claim that working models are stable throughout life. For example, becoming involved in a stable, satisfying relationship may lead to change for those whose models of self and others have led to scepticism about the possibility of having such a relationship, as does the following comment:

> I had a real problem trusting anyone at the start of any relationship. A couple of things happened to me when I was young, which I had some emotional difficulties getting over. At the start of our relationship, if B had ever been separated from me, I would have been constantly thinking: "What was he doing?; Was he with another girl?; Was he cheating on me?"; all that would have been running through my head. Over a 3-year period of going out, you look at it in a different light; you learn to trust him.

Similarly a secure person who is involved in a particularly negative relationship may become insecure as a result of that experience:

Before I started seeing T. I was in another long relationship with another fellow. That lasted for about a year, and things then were just totally different from things now. It was good up until about 10 months, and then the last couple of months were really bad. I was always really confident about myself and secure about myself, but what he made me feel in 2 months - just seemed to ruin everything I'd ever felt good about myself, and I felt bad about everything I did, and he made me feel bad. And so I've got this constant thing in the back of my head that maybe that might happen again (Feeney, 1999:365).

Collins and Read (1994) have suggested that working models include four interrelated components: memories of attachment-related experiences; beliefs, attitudes, and expectations of self and others in relation to attachment; attachment-related goals and needs; and strategies and plans for achieving these goals. Persons who endorsed the different attachment styles differed in attachment history, the self and relationships, and reports of romantic love experiences. As described in table 5.1, the specific pattern of group differences on these measures was consistent with predictions based on the attachment theory. The three-group model, as described by Collins and Read (1994:53-90), Feeney and Noller (1996:98) and Feeney (1999:364), is applied here because much of the research is based on this model.

Secure persons	Avoidant persons	Ambivalent persons
Memories		
Parents warm and affectionate	Mothers cold and rejecting	Fathers unfair
Attachment-related beliefs, attitudes		
Few self-doubts; high in self-worth	Suspicious of human motives	Others complex and difficult to understand
Generally liked by others	Others not trustworthy or dependable	People have little control over own lives
Others generally well-intentioned and good-hearted	Doubt honesty and integrity of parents and others	
Others generally trustworthy, dependable, and altruistic	Lack confidence in social situations	
Interpersonally oriented	Not interpersonally oriented	
Attachment-related goals and needs		
Desire intimate relationships	Need to maintain distance	Desire extreme intimacy
Seek balance of closeness and autonomy in relationships	Limit intimacy to satisfy needs for autonomy	Seek lower levels of autonomy
	Place greater weight on goals such as achievement	Fear rejection
Plans and strategies		
Acknowledge distress	Manage distress by cutting off anger	Heightened displays of distress and anger
Modulate negative effect in constructive way	Minimise distress-related emotional displays; withhold intimate disclosure	Solicitous and compliant to gain acceptance
Mental models Easy to know, few self-doubts, others well-intentioned, romantic love lasts	Romantic love rarely lasts, romantic love loses intensity	Self-doubts, misunderstood by others, easy to fall in love, but real love rare, others unwilling to commit
Love experience Happiness, friendship, trust	Fear of intimacy, difficulty in accepting partner	Obsession and jealousy, desire for union and reciprocation, strong sexual attraction, emotional extremes

TABLE 5.1: Attachment style differences on measures of attachment history, working models and love experiences

Studies of adult attachment that involve retrospective reports of relationships with parents, show that **secure** individuals tend to remember their parents as warm and affectionate, **avoidant**

individuals remember their mothers as cold and rejecting, and **anxious-ambivalent** individuals remember their fathers as unfair (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1996:97). These findings are in line with predictions from the attachment theory. In retrospective reports, one problem stated by Feeney and Noller (1996:97) is that one cannot be sure to what extent memories are affected by current views of the world and overall satisfaction with life. Research on the effects of mood on memories of childhood suggests that the individual's current state does have an effect on such memories, although not strong (Rothbard & Shaver, 1994:54).

The attachment-related beliefs and attitudes of **secure** subjects are consistent with their higher self-esteem and self-confidence (Feeney & Noller, 1996:97). They have few self-doubts and a high sense of self-worth. They tend to be interpersonally oriented and to view themselves as generally liked by others. **Avoidant** individuals tend not to be interpersonally oriented; rather they may be minimally involved in social relationships. They tend to regard others as not trustworthy and to be suspicious of their motives (Feeney & Noller, 1996:98). **Anxious-ambivalent** individuals view others as complex and difficult to understand. They see people in general as having little control over their own lives.

With regard to attachment-related goals and needs, it is clear from the above that **secure** individuals are comfortable with closeness, but they also value autonomy and are happier in relationships where needs for both closeness and autonomy can be met. For **avoidant** persons, important goals are maintaining distance and preventing others from coming too close. They are also likely to emphasise achievement and work to avoid intimacy. **Anxious-ambivalent** individuals, such as those who are secure, desire intimate relationships, although these relation-ships are often stressful for them. Despite the stress associated with close relationships, anxious-ambivalent individuals seek extreme intimacy and are willing to forgo needs for autonomy to have their needs for intimacy met.

With plans and strategies, **secure** individuals tend to acknowledge their distress and to deal with their negative effect in constructive ways. They express these emotions in ways appropriate to the level of distress. They seek help when needed (Feeney & Noller, 1996:100). **Avoidant** individuals tend to minimise, or even deny their emotions. These individuals have difficulty in seeking help from others to deal with their negative emotions. **Anxious-ambivalent** individuals tend to experience more distress than others, because of their low levels of self-esteem and

heightened levels of anxiety. In line with their high need for the approval of others (Feeney & Noller, 1996:100), they are also inclined to be overly solicitous and compliant and to deny their own needs for fear of being rejected.

5.4.1 Gender differences and similarities

In contrast with empirical studies by Hazan and Shaver (1987), who applied a three-group measure, measures of Bartholomew's four attachment prototypes have yielded gender differences. Brennan *et al.* (1991:451-466) found that males are much more likely than females to endorse the dismissive style, and less likely than females to endorse the fearful style. Gender differences support these results: Males obtain higher mean ratings of dismissive attachment, whereas females obtain higher mean ratings of preoccupied attachment (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994:23-43).

It seems that males are more likely than females to regard relationships as secondary to achieve-ment (Feeney, Noller & Hanrahan, 1994:128-152). This finding fits with reports that men are more avoidant of attachment than women (Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994:23-43). Wives report greater comfort with closeness than husbands (Feeney & Noller, 1996:123), together with greater willingness to rely on a partner (Kobak & Hazan, 1991:861-869). Females' greater comfort with intimacy can be understood in terms of socialisation patterns, with females being encouraged to be more nurturing and more relationship-oriented.

In 5.3, mention was made of the implications of own and the partner's attachment style for relationship quality; gender differences in the pattern of results were shown. Collins and Read (in Feeney & Noller, 1996:124), for example, reported that men's comfort with closeness was the strongest predictor of their own and their partners' relationship evaluations, whereas women's fear of abandonment (anxiety) was the strongest predictor of their own and their partners' relationship evaluations. Collin and Read (1990, in Feeney & Noller, 1996:124) relate these gender differences to traditional sex-role stereotypes: "That is, women are socialised to value emotional closeness, whereas men are socialised to value independence."

To summarise: The original measure of adult attachment style appears to be unrelated to gender. In contrast, subsequent measures suggest that males are more dismissing of attachment and that,

on some attachment measures, females show greater comfort with closeness and greater preoccupation with relationships. The latter is linked to sex-role stereotypes.

5.4.2   Attachment and personality

Early research into the correlation of adult attachment style established clear relevance to high self-esteem and low levels of negative affection (Collins & Read, 1990:652). Furthermore, established links between attachment style and measures of sociability, assertiveness, and interpersonal confidence (1990:652) suggest possible relevance to the extraversion dimension of personality.

5.4.3   Attachment and well-being

Although adults are clearly less dependent on social attachments for basic survival, there is ample evidence that they incur health benefits from having such attachments, and suffer health decrements as a consequence of the absence or loss of these attachments (Hazan & Zeifman, 1999:343). Relationship disruption (especially divorce) makes one more susceptible to a wide range of physical and psychological ills, including disease, impaired immune functioning, accidents, substance abuse, suicide, and various other forms of psychopathology (Feeney & Noller, 1996:88). Studies also indicate a reliable positive association between attachment and measures of social and emotional adjustment, but no reliable association with measures of academic adjustment (Feeney & Noller, 1996:129). In their research, Richman and Flaherty (1987) confirm the link between the quality of early attachments and later levels of depression (Feeney & Noller, 1996:130).

5.5   Attachment theory and marriage

From the attachment theory perspective, a study of marriage began with examination of disruptions of marital attachments (Sperling & Berman, 1994). Since the attachment drive is only active at times of threat, stress, or perceived unavailability, initial efforts to understand adult attachment examined points of threat or unavailability through bereavement (Parkes, 1972), divorce (Weiss, 1975), and prolonged separation (McCubbin et al., 1976). In fact, many researchers have argued that the intensity of an attachment can only be measured by the reaction to disruption of that attachment.

A number of researchers have explored the links between attachment and communication in marital relationships. Pistole (1989) found that secure individuals were more likely to apply an integrating strategy than those who were avoidant or anxious-ambivalent. Secure individuals also compromised more than anxious-ambivalents, whereas anxious-ambivalents were more likely to oblige the partner, than were avoidants. These findings support the theory that secure individuals tend to use more constructive strategies in dealing with conflict, that is, strategies that reflect concern for both their own interests and for enhancing the quality of the relationship. Levy and Davis (1988) support the link between secure attachment and quality of relationship.

The link between the attachment style and self-disclosure was also investigated (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991). Secure individuals showed the most flexibility (in terms of the range of self-disclosure across various social situations) and reciprocity (in terms of the particular topics discussed with partners).

Kobak and Hazan (1991) investigated the role of working models in marital functioning. They were interested in both the degree of security and the accuracy of working models. Spouses with secure working models reported higher marital adjustment than those with insecure working models. Secure wives were less likely to be rejected by husbands during problem solving, and secure husbands were less rejecting and more supportive on the same task.

Feeney, Noller, and Callan (1994) explored the links between attachment, communication, and relationship satisfaction using a longitudinal design with young couples in the first two years of marriage. They found that communication patterns and marital satisfaction related to own and partner attachment dimensions. Members of secure couples reported less suppression of negative feelings than insecure couples. For husbands, comfort with closeness related positively to ratings of involvement, recognition, disclosure, and satisfaction (Simpson, 1990; Sternberg, 1986). For wives, anxiety over relationships was negatively related to ratings of domination and conflict. Thus, which dimension of attachment is most clearly related to quality of day-to-day communication depends on gender, with comfort with closeness having the strongest effect on communication for husbands, and anxiety having the strongest effect for wives (Feeney & Noller, 1996:40,69).

All partners in close relationships experience some conflict. The attachment theory helps us to understand the sources of such conflict, together with individual differences in dealing with con-

flict. Husbands, who reported being comfortable with closeness, were more likely to describe their conflicts with the partner as high in mutuality; husbands who were anxious about their relationships tended to report their conflicts as high in coercion, destructive processes, and post-conflict distress and low in mutuality. Anxious wives reported high levels of coercion and post-conflict distress and low levels of mutuality. These results suggest that, in conflict situations, anxiety over basic relationship issues relate to destructive patterns of communication for both husbands and wives (Feeney & Noller, 1996:114).

Overall, communication in the marital relationship was clearly linked to the two attachment dimensions of anxiety over relationships and comfort with closeness, although the effects varied according to the gender of the spouse. Analysis over time showed that attachment scales predicted later relationship variables. Specifically, anxiety predicted later negative conflict patterns for wives and lower levels of decoding accuracy and relationship satisfaction for husbands; comfort with closeness predicted later decoding accuracy for wives. However, quality of marital interaction also predicted later attachment security for husbands. George and Solomon (1999:660-661) cite that conflict, violence, communication, depression and marital quality are related to a child's attachment to the parent. These states are perceived to threaten the availability of the partners. The key finding to emerge from a study by Simpson, Rholes and Phillips (1996) was that attachment differences are stronger under conditions that seem to threaten the marital relationship.

In her study, Feeney (1994) found that secure individuals tended to be paired with secure spouses. Secure spouses were generally high in marital satisfaction. Moreover, the combination of an anxious wife with a husband, who was uncomfortable with closeness, provided the least satisfactory relationship for both partners. Mutual negotiation of conflict was the single most important predictor of satisfaction for both husbands and wives (Feeney & Noller, 1996:115). From cross-sectional studies carried out in the USA, available evidence by Cummings and Davies (1994) is consistent that children who grow up in families with better-functioning marriages are more likely to develop secure attachments than those who grow up in households where spouses are less happy in their marriages (Thompson, 1999:271). The conclusion can be drawn that the attachment system influences the expression of care giving.

Questions concerning compatibility between partners in relationship can also be addressed within the attachment framework. The emphasis of attachment theory on perceived availability and responsiveness helps to highlight the importance of trust within interpersonal relationships.

Individual differences in attachment history are also likely to be relevant to compatibility issues. An individual who has experienced inconsistent care-giving, for example, may have unmet attachment needs that are of prime importance, but that may hinder the development of open and effective communication with a partner (Cowan & Cowan, 2001:62). Bartholomew *et al.* (2001:61) suggest that individuals who lack confidence in the availability and responsiveness of their partners will be prone to high levels of attachment anxiety, which, in some cases, may lead them to act aggressively in counterproductive ways, in an attempt to gain proximity to their partners.

Couples, both partners of which are classified insecure, are significantly more likely to break up than other types of couples (Clulow, 2001:42). Therefore, while attachment representations, based upon childhood, certainly relate to secure base behaviour in the relationship, it is the representation of attachment in the current relationship that is associated with separation and divorce. Cowan and Cowan (2001:74) come to the conclusion that "… to help them improve the quality of their relationship as a couple, it seems clear that enhancing their communication skills will address only part of the problem …. We … need to help them modify some of the attachment patterns they refer to in their arguments."

Results from Cowan and Cowan's (2001:63) longitudinal preventive intervention study provide support for the hypothesis that parents' attachment patterns from their families of origin tend to be replicated in the family relationships that they create in the next generation.

Attachment to parents ➡ **Attachment to partner** ➡
Parent-child relationship quality ➡ **Child's early adaptation**
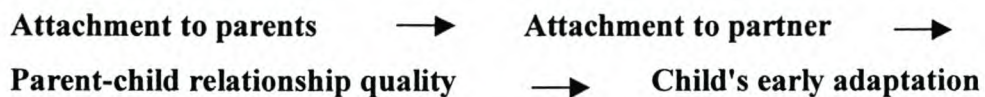
However, Cowan and Cowan (2001:64) make the statement that, despite considerable consistency across relationships, the attachment template is not rigid and monolithic. This means that the cycle can be broken, in which negative family relationships in one generation are replicated in the next. The potential of preventive intervention programmes, as agents of change, needs to be emphasised.

Evidence that attachment is an integral part of pair-bond relationships comes from literature on bereavement, as well as from studies of routine marital separation (Hazan & Zeifman, 1999:343). Based on his observation of infants and children who were separated from their primary care-givers, Bowlby identified what appeared to be a universal pattern of reactions, the "protest-despair-detachment" sequence. Several studies have documented essentially the same sequence in adults who grieve for the loss of a spouse: initial anxiety and panic, followed by lethargy and depression, and eventually by recovery through emotional detachment (Hazan & Shaver, 1992; Weiss, 1975:56-57), or emotional reorganisation (Fraley & Shaver, 1999:735-758). This sequence of reactions is not limited to situations of permanent loss. Even brief, routine separations are enough to trigger the same pattern of responses in marital partners (Vormbrock, 1993). Weiss's work suggests that the availability and responsiveness of attachment figures remain critical aspects of adult security and happiness (Kobak, 1999:36).

5.6   Attachment in remarriage

Studies have found that the step situation is a high-stress condition for children and parents and, at times, a threat to marital happiness (Wald, 1981:34). Forming a solid attachment can be difficult in stepfamilies. So much happens simultaneously: adjusting to the couple relationship, working out relationships with stepchildren, dealing with former spouses in connection with the children, and attempting to keep the household running smoothly. Too often, nourishment of the couple's relationship is neglected in the midst of competing needs. Yet, an adequate relationship of the couple seems crucial for the success of the stepfamily.

In the remarried family, at least one of the spouses has been married, then widowed or divorced, and subsequently remarried to someone who was single, widowed, or divorced. This yields eight possible marital status combinations. Similarity in prior marital status may contribute to an underlying empathy between spouses; dissimilarity may contribute to tension based on the lack of a shared experience. Wald (1981:91) attributes problems in role performance and emotional attachment to differences in husband-wife ties to children of a prior marriage. McGoldrick and Carter (1980) consider a wide discrepancy in life cycle stages as a predictor of remarriage difficulty.

The absence of an adequate psychological separation between former spouses can have many negative repercussions in a new marriage. Sometimes, frequent contact between former spouses

"to work together for the children" may obscure the fact that one or both of these parents have not yet truly separated (Visher & Visher, 1988:193; Sager *et al.*, 1983:29). It can create a barrier to the formation of a solid relationship with the new spouse and cause confusion and misbehaviour by the children of the former couple. Visher and Visher (1979) report that Lewis, Beaver, Gossett and Phillips (1976) found that the attachment of the marital couple is a very important dimension in psychologically healthy families. As there are more strains in the remarried family than in most nuclear families, the alliance between the couple is particularly important and, simultaneously, much more difficult to achieve.

The process of balancing new and old family attachments is much more complex in the remarried family. The need to balance old attachments with one's children, and new attachments with one's marital partner is a critical issue with which remarried couples must deal. Mastery of the task of marital interest versus self-interest is often impeded because self-interest and prior family interest are merged. Sager *et al.* (1983) consider that a major source of tension in stepfamilies is the internal conflict of parents over love for their children and love for their new spouse (Papernow, 1993:180).

The simultaneous assumption of marital and parental roles inherent in the remarried family situation further complicates the mastery of marital tasks, because privacy, time and energy is not readily accessible to those who remarry while children are immediately present. Thus, early marital adjustment must be worked out in a context in which marital and children's needs compete for the available time, space, and energy (Wald, 1981:126). Frequently, these remarried parents experience strong feelings of guilt, as though they are betraying their relationship with their children if they develop an intimate couple relationship. Often, the adults become so involved in an attempt to meet all the children's needs that they give no thought to deepening the attachment between themselves (Visher & Visher, 1988:140). In a stepfamily, for a couple to stay together, solid couple attachment needs to be developed. The couple relationship must be of primary concern. In Kelly (1995:82), suggestions made by stepparents include spending time together as a couple, and devoting time to their own friends and professional activities.

Visher and Visher (1988:166) write about the lack of commitment between stepfamily couples that leads to a vertical split of the unit along biological lines, which delays or prevents the development of family integration. The viability of the stepfamily will be in jeopardy if a remarried parent does not allow him-/herself to attach adequately with the spouse: "The

difficulty in keeping the adult-pairing love separate from parent-child love reappears as a common problem of Rem [remarried] families" (Sager *et al.*, 1983:9). Loyalty conflicts and boundary ambiguities are intimately entwined: "… therapists can educate remarried parents and give them 'permission' to form a new adult / adult relationship" (Visher & Visher, 1988:167).

Papernow (1993:180) holds the view that couples in stepfamilies need to become a team in two ways: they need to build an intimate relationship (for nourishment and support), and they also need to become a decision-making team for the new family. This often materialises only in the later stage of stepfamily formation (Papernow, 1993:217).

Difficulty in forming an attachment with their new spouse may also stem from their own family of origin, because they experienced their parents' couple relationship as distant and the parent(s)/child relationship as primary. Awareness of each other's earlier attachment experience can often change the partner's perception of present attachment difficulties and move toward greater attachment: "I guess it's not because you don't love me; it's more that you never did see your mother and father together very much and your model was your close relationship with your mother" (Visher & Visher, 1988:142).

Visher and Visher (1988:235) suggest the following for the development of a solid couple attachment as part of a process of family integration:

- Accept couple relationship as primary long-term attachment.
- Nourish couple relationship.
- Plan for couple "alone time."
- Support one another with the children.
- Expect and accept different parent-child stepparent-stepchild feelings.
- Avoid using children as intermediaries between spouses.

While it is important for the marriage to be strong, a good marriage does not ensure stepfamily satisfaction or contentment among the children (Clingempeel, Brand & Ievoli, 1984; Kelly, 1995:83). For example, there may still be problems between children and stepparents, between stepsiblings, or the children may not be happy with the situation.

5.7   Conclusion

Evidence indicates that needs for attachment persist from the cradle to the grave. In adulthood, such needs are satisfied by pair-bonds or marriage. As for children, attachments are a source of security for adults. The same divergent attachment styles, reflected by infants, continue to play an influential role in adulthood, ranging from partner selection to relationship maintenance.

The step situation is a high-stress situation that may be a threat to marital happiness. So much happens simultaneously that nourishing a couple's relationship often is neglected in the midst of competing needs. Although a strong couple attachment does not ensure stepfamily attachment, it does bring stability to the family.

CHAPTER 6

EMPIRICAL STUDY : ATTACHMENT IN STEPFAMILIES

6.1   Introduction

From the literature study it is clear that the parent-child attachment relationship is of great importance. Karen (1994:94) describes this relationship as a "built-in necessity" that is biologically programmed. Although the loss of a parent through death or divorce can affect a child's security negatively, it must be recognised that healthy new experiences can be created. Through remarriage of a parent the child is exposed to a relationship with the stepparent after an initial attachment relationship (with bio-mother or bio-father) has been constructed and then lost. Children encounter alternative attachment figures at varying points in their development. This study focuses specifically on the child in middle childhood.

The aim of the empirical study was not to add to the theoretical knowledge of attachment theory, but rather to do so by qualitative and evaluative description. This will result in a better understanding of how stepfamilies evaluate their own attachment, which factors contributed positively and negatively to the formation of attachment and what activities families plan to foster attachment. This information will also contribute to the discussion on social work intervention with stepfamilies as discussed in chapter 7.

6.2   Empirical study

The empirical study was based on the aim of the study as described in chapter 1, and also on the content of the literature review as presented in chapters 2 to 5 of this dissertation. The following section contains the findings of the empirical research undertaken.

6.2.1   Research method

In Chapter 1 the research design and methodology used in this study was described. The exploratory research method was applied in this study and both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used. The empirical study was conducted from April 2002 - October 2002.

6.2.1.1   Sample

A non-random, incidental sample (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Grinnell, 1993) of the population of stepfamilies was recruited for this project from throughout South Africa. Families were recruited through local newspaper advertisements, church bulletins, announcements at conferences about families, and persons conducting groups for stepfamilies in the towns respectfully. A part of the sample (42; n=168) was obtained by the snowball technique (Grinnell, 1993; Mouton & Marais, 1990) which involved asking the respondents to provide the names of other stepfamilies meeting the requirements of the study.

Although the researcher aimed at diversity of the families for the study, certain parameters had to be set so there would be some basis for comparison. Only white families where the adult couple in the home was married and where there was at least one child in middle childhood who was a stepchild to one of the adults, and who was living in the home, were recruited. This decision does not negate the importance of other forms of stepfamilies, but the issues are so different for unmarried couples and for families who do not have primary custody of children that findings would not be comparable. This decision, however, did reduce diversity. It came under the researcher's attention that there is a tendency for couples to either live together than remarry.

6.2.1.2   Procedure of data collection

The qualitative part of the study included semi-structured interviews (Annexures D, E, I) with the parents and at least one residential child in middle childhood. Six social workers in Gauteng, Northern- and Western Cape assisted with the interviews and completion of questionnaires. A small stipend was offered to each colleague in hopes of having a broad representation. In all, 100 adults and 68 children were interviewed. The interviews were conducted in the families' home, or in the interviewers' offices. Voluntary participation was emphasised at all times. Initial contact was made to ensure that respondents meet the criteria and to explain the procedure of data collection. Several families were lost through this process: Four families were not appropriate because the stepchildren were too old and in five cases the children were not residential. The researcher is aware of eight couples who had not yet married. Three families chose not to participate when they found out that the interviews would last one hour, and in four situations one family member agreed to participate and the idea was vetoed by a spouse or child. The researcher came across five families where the children has not yet been informed that the one

parent was a stepparent. Four families were caught in court cases. It follows that these 28 families did not partake in the study.

All of the families complied to the request to be present for at least a part of the session. All the families that were interviewed enjoyed the process and said so. Interviews were conducted following the schedule, but time was allowed for free discussion and recommendations from the family. While there was serious discussion, the interviews were lively, with good humour prevailing.

The social workers explained the aim and general procedure of the session, assured the family of the confidentiality and anonymity of all information and received their consent for participation (Annexure C). Access to the results of the study was promised to the respondents, which highlighted the value of their participation. The father and mother then completed the FACES II Family Version and FACES II Couple Version while the child/children completed the FACES II Family Version and the IPPA. In cases where a respondent did not possess the reading skills needed to complete the questionnaire alone, the social worker read the question in a matter-of-fact manner. The questionnaires and interviews were completed in one session. The parents were blind to the children's responses on the self-report questionnaires.

6.2.2   Instruments of measure

In this study use is made of questionnaires as a means of gathering data. Besides the demographic questionnaires that was designed by the researcher it will be illustrated in this section that the IPPA and FACES II was also used. The researcher was aware of the fact that these questionnaires were not standardised for South African conditions. Considering the aim of the study, these two questionnaires were found best in measuring attachment. It was not the aim to accurately measure, but to identify tendencies and look at attachment in the stepfamily in order to come to a synopsis of social work intervention. Data will therefore mainly be used as part of the description of findings.

6.2.2.1   Demographic questionnaires

The father and mother jointly completed the demographic questionnaire (see Annexure D) which assessed the level of education, marriage specifics (e.g., number of current marriage, years

passed since previous marriage and how the previous marriage was dissolved), the rationale for the decision to remarry, the impact of stepchildren and their perception of the attachment in the family. Demographic information obtained from the children (see Annexure E) included particulars of age, parent status (e.g., stepfather or stepmother), frequency of contact with the non-custodial parent, and nature of family activities.

The use of coded items provided ease in completion and scoring, and open-ended questions provided the researcher with insight into the behaviour of the particular family being studied. Utilising both item types in this study, helped the researcher to economise on time, and also to gain understanding and more clarity regarding stepfamily attachment.

6.2.2.2   The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA)

Each child completed the IPPA (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) as part of a larger battery of self-report scales.

The IPPA (Annexure H) is a self-report instrument designed to assess the positive and negative affective and cognitive dimensions of children's relationships with their parents - particularly how well these figures serve as sources of psychological security (e.g., accessibility and responsiveness). The theoretical framework of the IPPA is attachment theory as originally formulated by Bowlby (1969/1982) and recently expanded by others (e.g., Bretherton & Waters, 1985; Main et al., 1985; Shaver & Hazan, 1988). Three broad dimensions are assessed: degree of mutual trust, quality of communication and degree of anger and alienation. Attachment was conceptualised as the quality of the relationship with the father and the mother: the availability of communication and trust and the absence of alienation. The revised version of the IPPA was used, which consists of 25 identical items in each of the mother and father items (the peer items were not used in this study).

The instrument uses a 5-point Likert-scale response format, in which respondents indicate to what extent each statement is true for them (from *Almost never* or *never true* to *Almost always* or *always true*). Examples of Parent Attachment items are: "*My father/mother respects my feelings*", "*My father/mother can tell when I'm upset about something*", and "*My father/mother trusts my judgement*". The IPPA has been used successfully in studies with children as young as 10 years (Armsden et al., 1990: 686).

Armsden and Greenberg (1987) have reported high test-retest reliability over three weeks and evidence that the scores on the IPPA have been associated with indices of family functioning and family coping (Crowell, 1999:447). The IPPA is a linear scoring instrument which means there are no specific cut-offs for high versus low scores (M.T. Greenberg, personal communication, 29-07-2002). The IPPA has been related to a number of theoretically relevant outcome variables. For example, secure peer and parental ratings are positively correlated with self-esteem and life satisfaction (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). It was not designed to determine attachment styles as delineated by Ainsworth and her colleagues (1978).

6.2.2.3   Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES II)

Olson, Russell and Sprenkle (1983) presented a promising attempt to unify the myriad conceptualisations of family systems theorists. They clustered more than 50 concepts from the family therapy and family research literatures and postulated three dimensions of family behaviour: attachment, flexibility and communication. *Attachment* is defined as the emotional bonding (attachment) family members have toward one another. *Flexibility* is the capacity of the family system to change its power structure, role relations and relationship rules in response to situational and developmental stress. *Communication* is important for facilitating a family's movement along the attachment and flexibility dimensions.

FACES II is the second version in a series of FACES scales developed to assess the two major dimensions on the Circumplex Model, i.e. family attachment and flexibility. This aspect is discussed in detail in Chapter 2. FACES II consists of a Family Version (Annexure F) and a Couple Version (Annexure G) with 30 items each: 16 attachment items and 14 flexibility items. Because the scale was designed to measure family dynamics, the items focus on system characteristics of all the family members living together (L. Knutson, personal communication, 10-10-2002).

Indications are that the alpha reliability in FACES II are high: attachment ($r=.87$) and flexibility ($r=.78$). The five week test-retest reliabilities were .83 for attachment and .80 for flexibility (Olson, 1992:7; Rodick et al., 1986). Although this scale is not standardised for South African conditions, this scale was considered the most appropriate for the purpose of the study, namely to describe attachment in stepfamilies. A correlation between the FACES II and the IPPA revealed

a significant correlation ($p<0.01$) in the expected directions between the sub-scales of the two instruments. This is shown in the table below.

		Cohesion on family version	Adaptability on family version	M_TRUST	M_COMM	M_ALIEN	F_TRUST	F_COMM	F_ALIEN	M_ATT	F_ATT
Cohesion on family version	Pearson Correlation	1	.656	.578	.609	-.611	.461	.441	-.533	.637	.512
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	168	168	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68
Adaptability on family version	Pearson Correlation	.656	1	.394	.298	-.317	.419	.319	-.328	.363	.382
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.001	.014	.009	.000	.008	.006	.002	.001
	N	168	168	68	68	68	68	68	68	68	68

TABLE 6.1 : Inter-correlation between the IPPA and FACES

Although the validation of the measuring instruments used were not an explicit aim of this study, the table above does show that the FACES II and the IPPA scores correlated significantly with each other in the expected directions. For example, mother trust (IPPA) showed a significant positive correlation with attachment (r = 0.574; p<0.01) and flexibility (r = 0.394; p<0.01) as did father trust (r = 0.461; p<0.01) and r = 0.419; p<0.01 for attachment and adaptability respectively. In the same way, the level of alienation from both father and mother show a negative correlation with attachment and adaptability as can be seen from the table. These correlations contribute towards evidence of construct validity for the two questionnaires, although further research on larger samples will be needed to establish this conclusively.

For the sake of clarity, the scores that were used in this study were as follows:

FACES II Family Version   -   Individual scores on attachment
                           -   Individual scores on flexibility
                           -   Individual scores on family type

FACES II Couple Version   -   Individual scores on attachment
                           -   Individual scores on flexibility
                           -   Individual scores on marriage type

6.3.   Profile of respondents

The following data presented in the profile was gathered from the questionnaires completed by the adults (Annexure D) and children (Annexure E) respondents. A total of 100 adults and 68 children (total 168) were involved as respondents in the research. The first factor of importance was the place of origin of the respondents. The distribution is reflected in the table below.

Place	Frequency	Percent
Kathu	32	19.0
Kimberley	15	8.9
Postmasburg	3	1.8
Pretoria	18	10.7
Springbok	3	1.8
Upington	97	57.7
Total	168	100.0

(n=168)

TABLE 6.2: Place of origin

Although respondents originated from a variety of locations, the majority (57.7 %) were from the Northern Cape. This can be attributed to the fact that the researcher is based in this area and the sample is a convenience sample. Participation was voluntary and the researcher was dependent on the goodwill of the collaborators.

6.3.1   Socio-demographic profile of the adults

The sample consisted of 100 adults. Descriptive data concerning demographic details are presented in the following section.

6.3.1.1   Education

The first question in Annexure D dealt with the adults' level of education. The education range for both husbands and wives was from less than matric to post graduate, with most (63 %) having matric or less. It can be concluded that the sample as whole represents the middle-class jobs and incomes of the population in general. This aspect is not evaluated in this study.

6.3.1.2   Marital status

Marital specifics were derived from questions 2 to 7 (Annexure D) of the demographic questionnaire. For 17 (10.2 %) of the adult respondents it was their first marriage, for 71 (42.5 %) it was their second marriage, and for 12 (7.2 %) it was their third marriage. This confirms that for the biggest part of the sample, it was their second marriage. This contributes to a more complex family structure. Family structure is a variable which several researchers have found to

be significant in adjustment in the stepfamily (Clingempeel et al., 1984; Ihinger-Tallman & Pasley, 1987). Usually, the more complex the family structure, the more difficulty there is in the stepfamily adjustment (Kelly, 1995) since there are more relationships and extended families that need to be managed.

Keeping in mind that 17 of the adult respondents hadn't been previously married, divorce (72 %) seemed to be the main factor for the dissolution of the previous marriage in the total sample (17 not previously married excluded), followed by death (11 %). (This excludes the 17 respondents who have never been married before). Fifty percent (50 %) of the adult sample was biologically related to the child or a stepparent. In the case of five families there were both a father and a stepmother with two or three sets of children ("yours, mine, ours"). This inherent complexity may invite many complexities (Hetherington ete al., 1999; Visher & Visher, 1979), but the fact that both adults are parents and stepparents means each of them have parenting experience and a shared involvement in being stepparents.

Particulars of the children show that 55 % of their parents were divorced, while 13 (19.1%) lost a parent through death. These findings are consistent with the high divorce rate in South Africa and can be linked to the traditional caring role of the mother in society (Burman & Fuchs, 1986; Schäfer, 1993).

Information presented by the adult respondents (n=100) further revealed that on average the period that lapsed since the dissolution of the previous marriage was 3.7 years. The other factor thought to have an influence on attachment, was the length of the current marriage. The adult sample as whole had been married, on average, for 3.55 years, suggesting that developing attachment is a process.

6.3.1.3 Families with mutual children

Some studies have found that having a mutual child has a positive effect on stepfamilies (Bernstein, 1989), although again the circular effect could be operating in that the families who feel that they are functioning well are more likely to have children. This study (question 9 Annexure D) showed that the number of these families having a mutual child was small: twelve families (24 %) had one mutual child and two (4 %) had two. The majority (36) of adult couples in this study (72 %) did not have a mutual child. With the FACES II no significant difference

was found between stepfamilies that have a mutual child and stepfamilies that do not have a mutual child with regard to their perception on attachment and flexibility. This finding supports a finding by Ganong and Coleman (1988) that a mutual child makes no difference in the quality of stepfamily relationships. The researcher's interpretation of these results is that a new baby may be a blending tool or an alienating force depending on the developmental stage of the family into which the child is born.

6.3.1.4   Rationale for the present marriage

Item 8 of the questionnaire for stepparents (Annexure D), explored the rationale of respondents for the present marriage: "Why did you decide to remarry?" More than one reason could be given and the findings are as follows:

- **Love and companionship** is described by 29 respondents (29 %) as the main reason to remarry. The following statement summarise this:

> "We love and complement each other" (Wife, married 4½ years to second partner).

This support the finding by Sager et al. (1983:61) namely that the promise of a loving relationship is the prime motivation for remarriage.

- **The desire to have a family**: Twenty three (23 %) respondents uttered the desire to have a family as reason for their remarriage. As two respondents replied:

> "Life carries on and we did not want to be alone" (Stepfather, married 10 months to second wife).
> "I think I can mean something to the kids" (Stepfather, married 8 months to second wife).

These respondents express the desire to be a parent to someone else's children.

- Fourteen (14 %) respondents declared **security and stability** for themselves and their children to be a motivating factor in their decision to remarry. This desire is closely linked to financial and material security as is reflected in the following statements:

> "My ex-husband doesn't pay maintenance…I couldn't afford a home with four kids…I am unemployed. Then I decided to remarry" (Wife, married 3 months to second husband).
>
> "My husband gave my children security" (Wife, married 3 years to third husband).

- **Flow from utopian dreams**: Nine (9 %) respondents cited the above as a reason for the present marriage. In other words they considered this new partner as having all the pluses: e.g. loving, kind and understanding. This is illustrated in the following statements:

> "I found true love at last!" (Husband, married 6 years to his third partner).
>
> "My husband is a lot like my father: calm, understanding" (Wife, married 4½ years to her third partner).
>
> "For the first time I am marrying for the right reason!" (Wife, married 1½ years to her third husband).

The second respondent sees her husband as a "good" parental figure who will provide security. From the above it is clear that the new mate is described as the perfect loving person.

- **An opportunity to fulfil what they have not done up to now** was considered an important factor for 6 (6 %) respondents. As one respondent explains:

> "My first wife was a lesbian…this one is different" (Husband, three children, married to his second partner).

The subsequent marriage provides an opportunity to fulfil what he did not have up to now, namely a different lifestyle.

It can be concluded that couples who took part in this study, seem to have somewhat unrealistic expectations of their second or third marriages as less marital attachment is reported the longer the couple is married. They have certain expectations that may lead to distress when they are not met. Love is not necessarily "better the second time around." These findings correspond with Graham (1988:260) who observed that a need for emotional and financial security, and a desire to establish a two parent home, appears to be more significant reasons for remarrying than is admitted. This observation is shared by the present researcher with regard to the adult respondents in this study.

6.3.2 Socio-demographic profile of the children

6.3.2.1 Age and sex of children

The age and sex distribution of the children (Annexure E) are reflected in the table below:

Males	Females	Mean age	SD	Total
37 (54.4 %)	31 (45.6 %)	10.50	1.49256	68

(n=68)

TABLE 6.3: Age and sex of children

As illustrated in Table 6.3 the sample consisted of 68 children (37 boys; 31 girls) between the ages of 6.25 years and 12 years of age (mean age: 10 years 5 months). This complies with this study's criterion of children in middle childhood, as described by Erikson (1950), namely 6 to 12 years.

Both sexes were nearly equally represented: 37 (54.4 %) males and 31 (45.6 %) females. An analysis showed that, in 70 % of the families, children formed part of complex stepfamilies, that is two sets of children ("yours and mine"). Information (question 5, Annexure E) revealed that 66.2 % of the children had stepfathers, while 33.8 % had stepmothers. This was not surprising, given the scenario that, in most cases, mothers are the custodial parents. Of the children, 67 % were part of stepfamilies where both partners had either a second or third marriage. This observation confirms the complexity of the stepfamilies who participated in the study (Kelly, 1995; Visher & Visher, 1979).

6.3.2.2 Contact with non-custodial parent

Findings in this study (question 11, Annexure 11) are consistent with earlier studies by Fanshel and Shinn (1978) who related visitation by natural parents and its effects on foster children's adjustment. They found that maintaining contact improved children's emotional and behavioural adjustment over time. It was meaningful to find that 33 (48.5 %) of the children in this research

had regular contact with the non-custodial parent, 13 (19.1%) had little contact and 22 (32%) had no contact (death included).

6.3.3 Stepparent-stepchild relationship

The review of the literature in chapters 2 and 3 points to the important influence of the relationship between the remarried custodial parents and their children. Coleman and Ganong (1987), Hetherington *et al.* (1999) and Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) emphasise that children must integrate their affection towards the stepparent with the feelings they may still harbour toward the biological parent. The meaning of this focus on the stepparent/stepchild relationship does not belittle this relationship. In this research, findings confirmed that children perceived their relationship with their bio-parent as more attached than with their stepparent. The contribution of the stepparent/stepchild relationships to marital attachment in stepfamilies is of importance in this study.

Question 10 of the parents' questionnaire (Annexure D) explored the fact whether the presence of stepchildren has a negative impact on the current marriage. Responses to the question "Does the presence of stepchildren have a negative impact on your current marriage?" were tabled. There was a high incidence, an overwhelming majority (32, 84 %) of marital relationships that reported to be influenced by the presence of children from former marriages. Of the respondents, 16 % reported that this was not their case. The study found a positive correlation between the impact of stepchildren and couples' evaluation of their attachment, as shown in table 6.4.

Correlations

		ATTACHED	Stepchildren
ATTACHED	Pearson Correlation	1	.311*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.028
	N	50	50
Stepchildren	Pearson Correlation	.311*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.028	.
	N	50	50

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

TABLE 6.4: Correlation between attachment and the impact of stepchildren

This finding is confirmed where a significant Spearman's rank order correlation of 0.747 (p<0.10) was found between attachment and the impact of stepchildren. The conclusion can be drawn that the stronger the attachment, the more the impact of the stepchildren on the family. This finding highlights the critical issue of balancing the attachment with the children and the marital partner (Sager *et al.*, 1983; Wald, 1981).

6.3.3.1 Presence of children from previous marriages

Clinical literature reports that the presence of children from prior marriages places the marital relationship in jeopardy (McGoldrick & Carter, 1988; Sager *et al.*, 1983; Visher & Visher, 1979; Wald, 1981). Research reports a high rate of conflict regarding child-rearing (Schultz, Schultz & Olson, 1991) and that child-rearing issues frequently are a source of dissension (Knaub, 1984; Walker & Messinger, 1979). It has been suggested that marital instability in stepfamilies is a product of children's presence and of parent-child/stepchild relationships (Clingempeel, 1981; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman, 1987). In this study, the researcher was also interested in how the presence of stepchildren had an influence on the marital relationship. These responses could be categorised as follows:

- **Co-parenting roles**

  Respondents explained the problems related to child-rearing as follows:

  > "We have lots of arguments about the upbringing of the children. The financial burden on the stepparent causes arguments as well."
  >
  > "There are different sets of rules."
  >
  > "We argue about the discipline of the children. I am strict and consequent while my husband is more lenient."

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In this study, apart from some ex-husbands' reneging on maintenance payments, finance did not emerge as a significant problematic area among remarried couples. However, as most of the couples were representative of the middle-class socio-economic group, financial difficulties appeared secondary to the issue being studied, namely attachment. However, remarried couples did view their relationships as more open and willing to confront conflict.

Complexity in stepfamily relations within the household, with children differing in patterns of biological relatedness to the parents, may increase conflict over child-rearing. It has been well substantiated that parents are more involved and less disengaged with their own biologically related children than with stepchildren (Bray & Berger, 1993), and mothers and fathers may be willing to assume more responsibility and do more work for their own children than for a stepchild.

- **Interference in the family**

Papernow (1993:346) has remarked that stepfamilies are confronted by an outsider's potential interference in the family. Besides grandparents, this study revealed the interference by ex-spouses as a major source of conflict and contention:

> "Conflict with my husband's ex-spouse with regard to the child's weekend visits, causes stress in our relationship."
> "I get furious when the non-custodial parent does not collect her child for a visit, as arranged."
> "My ex-husband refuses to pay maintenance. That puts a financial burden on my husband."
> "My husband and his ex-spouse do not get on well. My husband is jealous when my daughter has contact with my ex-husband."

Although four respondents (n=100) noted that remarriage isolated them from the extended family, another four respondents described the disruptive effect of interference by, for example grandparents. In one case the biological mother and her child lived with her parents for three years after the divorce. After her remarriage, the grandparents continued to play a vital role, as the child subjected herself to their discipline - excluding the stepfather and bio-mother. The lack of boundaries added to conflict in this remarriage. These conflictual relationships were a source of stress for everyone involved.

- **The child's behaviour toward the stepparent**

The management of relationships within the stepfamily is problematic. Within the stepfamily, there are built-in alliances and coalitions that complicate this developmental task. Research has confirmed the role of age and gender (Hetherington *et al.*, 1999:12). Respondents describe stepchildren's behaviour towards their stepparents as follows:

> "The stepchildren are selfish and inconsiderate."
> "I have difficulty in relating to my older stepchildren…I don't understand them."
> "My stepdaughter does anything to make it difficult for me."
> "Children cause a lot of stress. They irritate my husband."

This research (Annexure D) highlighted the role that children play in shaping relationships. The attachment theory interpreted in chapter 4, emphasises the active role that children in the middle childhood play in fostering attachment (Waters *et al.*, 1991). In the face of resistant stepchildren, even well-intentioned stepparents fail in building close constructive relationships (Brown, Green & Druckman, 1990). Bray and Berger (1993), Clingempeel, Brand and Ievoli (1984) and Hetherington (1993) consider negative communication toward both the custodial parent and stepparent as a quality in the early stage of stepfamily development. However, this study does it not deal with this. Factors that Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) identified, which determine long-term negative outcomes for children involved in parental divorce are: parental divorce characterised by acrimony and hostility, litigation regarding custody, access or maintenance of children, emotional instability of the custodial mother and ongoing negative interactions between the ex-spouses and the remarried family unit.

- **Relations between boys and stepparents**

Relations between younger stepsons and -fathers improve over time and boys benefit more than girls from a close relationship with a stepfather (Amato & Keith, 1991). Younger girls are more likely to exhibit disruptive behaviour toward both their biological mothers and stepfathers (Hetherington, 1993). The researcher is of the opinion that more problems may emerge in complex stepfamilies, as more relationships must be managed.

In the following tables the IPPA and FACES II scores of boys in stepfather and -mother families respectively were compared.

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference		Lower	Upper
Cohesion on famiy version	Equal variances assumed	.293	.592	.876	35	.387	3.16	3.605		-4.162	10.477
	Equal variances not assumed			.794	15.527	.439	3.16	3.975		-5.291	11.606
Adaptability on family version	Equal variances assumed	.530	.472	1.426	35	.163	2.85	1.998		-1.207	6.907
	Equal variances not assumed			1.619	25.676	.118	2.85	1.760		-.771	6.470
M_TRUST	Equal variances assumed	20.683	.000	1.964	35	.057	4.14	2.107		-.138	8.418
	Equal variances not assumed			1.476	11.758	.166	4.14	2.805		-1.985	10.265
M_COMM	Equal variances assumed	4.074	.051	.478	35	.636	1.19	2.481		-3.852	6.223
	Equal variances not assumed			.404	13.825	.692	1.19	2.932		-5.110	7.481
M_ALIEN	Equal variances assumed	5.510	.025	.073	35	.942	.14	1.867		-3.654	3.927
	Equal variances not assumed			.061	13.593	.952	.14	2.230		-4.661	4.933
F_TRUST	Equal variances assumed	.033	.857	-.747	35	.460	-1.95	2.611		-7.252	3.349
	Equal variances not assumed			-.853	26.002	.402	-1.95	2.288		-6.655	2.753
F_COMM	Equal variances assumed	.012	.912	-1.072	35	.291	-2.63	2.456		-7.618	2.353
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.141	21.851	.266	-2.63	2.307		-7.420	2.154
F_ALIEN	Equal variances assumed	.127	.724	1.479	35	.148	2.53	1.712		-.943	6.006
	Equal variances not assumed			1.603	22.851	.123	2.53	1.579		-.736	5.799
M_ATT	Equal variances assumed	10.517	.003	.981	35	.333	6.03	6.149		-6.448	18.518
	Equal variances not assumed			.774	12.484	.454	6.03	7.801		-10.889	22.959
F_ATT	Equal variances assumed	.065	.800	-1.033	35	.308	-6.71	6.489		-19.880	6.468
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.089	21.349	.288	-6.71	6.156		-19.496	6.083

TABLE 6.5: Independent samples t-test for the difference in means on the IPPA and FACES II for boys in stepfather and stepmother families respectively

Upon examining table 6.5, the conclusion can be drawn that there is no difference in attachment between boys in stepfather families and boys in stepmother families. The t-table shows that the difference in scores with regard to mother trust approaches significance as indicated, but looking at the t-test when equal variances are not assumed, no significant difference can be found. From the findings, it appears that boys adjusted well in stepfather and stepmother families. In support, Hetherington *et al.* (1985) and Liebert *et al.* (1986) found that boys in stepfather families function just as well as boys in nuclear families. This finding is in accordance with research findings by Clingempeel and Segal (1986) who found that, on average, boys adjusted better than girls in stepfamilies.

- ### Relations between girls and stepparents

In the following table the IPPA and FACES scores of girls in stepfather and stepmother families, respectively, were compared.

An independent samples test for daughters (table 6.6) found significant differences (p<0.05) on father communication where daughters had stepmothers. Where daughters were members of stepmother families, a significant difference (p<0.10) was found regarding father attachment. It can be concluded that, in cases where girls had stepmothers, the attachment and communication with the bio-father was significant and meaningful.

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Cohesion on family version	Equal variances assumed	1.420	.243	-.319	29	.752	-1.33	4.168	-9.853	7.195
	Equal variances not assumed			-.295	17.946	.771	-1.33	4.507	-10.800	8.142
Family cohesion coded	Equal variances assumed	2.292	.141	-.320	29	.751	-.23	.713	-1.686	1.230
	Equal variances not assumed			-.295	17.708	.772	-.23	.774	-1.856	1.400
M_TRUST	Equal variances assumed	19.514	.000	1.554	29	.131	5.11	3.288	-1.615	11.834
	Equal variances not assumed			1.326	13.795	.206	5.11	3.852	-3.164	13.384
M_COMM	Equal variances assumed	11.242	.002	.267	29	.791	.77	2.892	-5.144	6.688
	Equal variances not assumed			.233	14.838	.819	.77	3.311	-6.291	7.835
M_ALIEN	Equal variances assumed	7.450	.011	.571	29	.572	1.11	1.934	-2.850	5.061
	Equal variances not assumed			.521	17.088	.609	1.11	2.121	-3.369	5.579
F_TRUST	Equal variances assumed	.056	.815	-.776	29	.444	-2.00	2.583	-7.288	3.279
	Equal variances not assumed			-.812	26.870	.424	-2.00	2.468	-7.070	3.061
F_COMM	Equal variances assumed	.044	.836	-2.850	29	.008	-6.91	2.424	-11.865	-1.951
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.939	25.846	.007	-6.91	2.351	-11.741	-2.075
F_ALIEN	Equal variances assumed	.429	.517	1.257	29	.219	2.16	1.717	-1.353	5.669
	Equal variances not assumed			1.207	20.485	.241	2.16	1.788	-1.566	5.881
M_ATT	Equal variances assumed	23.337	.000	.700	29	.489	5.43	7.745	-10.416	21.266
	Equal variances not assumed			.598	13.786	.560	5.43	9.077	-14.071	24.922
F_ATT	Equal variances assumed	.003	.955	-1.737	29	.093	-10.92	6.283	-23.768	1.934
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.789	25.736	.085	-10.92	6.103	-23.469	1.635

TABLE 6.6: Independent samples t-test for the difference in means on the IPPA and FACES II for girls in stepfather and stepmother families, respectively

Findings by Duberman (1975) and Visher and Visher (1979) indicate that the most difficult step-relationship is that between stepmother and stepdaughters. Of the children in this sample, 66.2% resided with their bio-mothers and 33.8 % with the bio-fathers. It can be argued that, for the major part of the sample, there was not a total break in the continuity of care. Where the father was the custodial parent (in other words, a stepmother) the hypothesis can be suggested that it was in the child's best interest, because the child presumably has a more significant relationship with the father. This could also, in part, explain why contact with the non-custodial parent does not have such a significant impact - newer relationships overshadow older attachments. Another factor of importance is the quality of the parenting in the parent-child relationship. Marcus (1991:387) indicates that the quality of parenting relates to children's attachment. The fact that most respondents in this study were part of second and third marriages, can contribute to a better understanding of the children, sensitivity to their needs and nurturance. This may have helped the children to develop newer attachments.

This study's finding support findings by Clingempeel *et al.* (1984), Visher and Visher (1988) and Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), namely that girls have greater difficulty following the parents' remarriage than boys, especially in the case of a stepmother.

- **Discipline and differential treatment in the stepfamily**

Closely related to the aspect of a stepparent/stepchild relationship, is discipline and differential treatment in the stepfamily. Attempting to take on a disciplinary role too soon has been found to impede stepfamily integration (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1985; Visher & Visher, 1988). To discipline is difficult when the authority to do so has not been sanctioned, or accepted.

Clinicians in the field have often recommended that biological parents be in charge of their own children, especially at first. The main focus between stepparents and children should be on building trust and respect for each other, which permits the stepparent to initiate attachment with the children. Table 6.1 confirms this finding and indicates a significant relationship between trust and attachment.

6.3.4. Quality of marital relationship

Ganong and Coleman (1994) identify personality characteristics as a contributing factor in marital conflict, such as aggressiveness or interpersonal insensitivity. Reports by respondents touched on some of the elements:

> "Sometimes my wife gives too much attention to the kids and not me. Their needs are paramount."
> "I want to protect my child, my husband is strict. I think I feel guilty. Sometimes I think my husband is unjust, although he does not hit my child."
> "My stepchildren are closer to their mother; that excludes me".

The above findings reflect the complexity of the stepfamily relationship structure. Findings support the view of several researchers (Bray & Berger, 1993; Hetherington *et al.*, 1999:11) that differences in patterns of biological relatedness to the parents may increase conflict over child-rearing. Feelings of failure and inadequacy often follow this scenario. It is clear that different children relate to stepparents in different ways, depending on many factors related to divorce and concomitant losses and disruptions. Five stepfathers considered their wives' overprotection of, and closeness to, their children as a factor prohibiting them and their stepchildren from developing mutually acceptable relationships. Overprotection arose from guilt about their previous divorce and what the children had to endure. Sager *et al.* (1983) describe parents' internal conflict over love for their children and love for their new spouses as a major source of tension in stepfamilies.

Of the stepfathers/-mothers, 17 were not previously married and that raised problems arising from differences in life cycles and the experience that they were the "odd man out." Three stepfathers found it hard to accept that their wives had previous intimate relationships with their husbands leading to the birth of children. For two stepfathers, who previously lived as bachelors, the idea of sharing their belongings and food with children, as well as tolerating their noise, was difficult. Four previously unmarried stepmothers found themselves with older stepchildren; this presented problems in relationships and discipline. The above illustrations support McGoldrick and Carter's (1988) description of discrepancy in the family life cycle. In these families, it may lead to difficulty in transition and the length of time needed to complete the stepfamily life cycle, culminating in integration.

The above exposition of findings, regarding the impact that stepchildren have on a remarried couple relationship, support the view of Bray and Berger (1993), namely that the stepparent/-child relationship is pivotal in stepfamilies. Most couples generally agreed that this influence produced tension and, at times, disharmony in their relationship. The above findings also support the view of Sager *et al.* (1983) that life cycle differences may interfere with the new marriage. The life cycle stages, as described in chapter 2, thus help to make sense of phenomena observed in remarriages. In the findings, there is also support for the statement of Mills (1984) that most remarried couples implicitly make a "parental" choice, without considering the consequences or alternatives. This demonstrates a need for exploration of the various possibilities for the stepparent role among remarried couples, in accordance with the particular circumstances of any given stepfamily. It must be noted that although stepparents in the present study reported the above elements of strain between themselves and stepchildren, the researcher did not gain an impression of total unhappiness in stepparent/stepchild relationships, except in three extreme cases.

6.3.5   Feelings about the stepparent

Given the fact that 42 (84 %) of the adults, who participated in this study (Annexure E), identified the presence of stepchildren as having a negative impact on their marriage, the question was put to the children: "How do you feel about your stepparent?" and the following conclusions can be drawn (there was one with no response):

- The majority of children (82 %) (n=56) valued their relationship with their stepparents as **positive**. The following remarks reflect on this:

> "I like her. Whenever my father is cross with me, she helps me ..." (boy, 9½ years with stepmother).
>
> "He is good to us and I like him" (girl, 12 years with stepfather).
>
> "Sometimes when I am sad, it feels like he is my own father" (boy, 12 years with stepfather).
>
> "Good. I discuss my personal problems with her" (girl, 10 years with stepmother).

What seems important is that the children feel they have someone to talk to - a listening ear and they feel wanted.

- **Mixed** emotions were recorded in two cases (2.9 %; n=2). One respondent explains:

> "She thinks she is my mother, but my mother is more beautiful" (boy, 11½ years with stepmother).

The stepmother is regarded to be attempting to replace the bio-mother. The stepparent must be willing to develop the relationship with the child gradually. This process may take longer with boys.

- Ten respondents (14.7 %) expressed **negative** feelings toward the stepparent:

> "We don't get along at all" (girl, 9½ years with stepfather).
> "He is unfair ... makes me cross" (girl, 12 years, stepfather).
> "She is cross with us. She says we tell tales" (boy, 12 years with stepmother).

The researcher was also interested in the influence that contact with the non-custodial parent has on the child's relationship with a stepparent. However, a cross-tabulation, done in the table below on how children felt about their stepparents and the amount of contact with non-custodial parents, unexpectedly revealed that the children who felt positive about their stepparents were also more likely to have regular contact with their non-custodial parents.

How do you feel about your stepparents ? * Contact with non-custodial parent Crosstabulation

			Contact with non-custodial parent			
			No contact	Little contact	Regular	Total
How do you feel about your stepparents ?	Mixed	Count		2		2
		% within Contact with non-custodial parent		15.4%		3.6%
	Negative	Count	3	1	4	8
		% within Contact with non-custodial parent	33.3%	7.7%	12.1%	14.5%
	Positive	Count	6	10	29	45
		% within Contact with non-custodial parent	66.7%	76.9%	87.9%	81.8%
Total		Count	9	13	33	55
		% within Contact with non-custodial parent	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

TABLE 6.7 : A cross-tabulation on how children feel about their stepparents and the amount of contact with the non-custodial parents

From the above table, it seems that the majority of children (29, 87.9 %) who had regular contact, felt positive about their stepparents. Almost 67 % (66.7 %) of the children, who had no contact, felt positive about their stepparents. Of those who had no contact, 33 % felt negative, while 12.1 %, who had regular contact, felt negative. Cell counts are too small to influences significance, yet there seems to be a moderate tendency that the children who had regular contact with the non-custodial parents were also more likely to feel positive about their stepparents.

The majority of the children in the sample (67.6 %) do have contact with the non-custodial parents. The evidence from the research indicates that non-custodial parents have significance and importance for the children, and that maintenance of the relationship is beneficial. This scenario does not seem to have a negative impact on stepchild/stepparent relationships. This finding is in line with research findings by Fanshel and Shinn (1978) and Marcus (1991). The above findings also correlate with those of Duberman (1975), who concluded that the most stepchildren have a positive attitude toward their stepparents and get along reasonably well with them.

With regard to contact with the non-custodial parent, quantitative variables may mask what actually happens on a qualitative basis and may lead to inconsistent results. For example, the results may depend more on the relationship with the stepparent than on reasons why custody was not granted to the bio-mother. Maintaining contact with the non-custodial parent may be a positive experience for some children, but the question can be asked whether the correlation would hold equally well if the relationship between bio-parent and child were hostile and ridden with conflict, for example, where the child is old enough to choose to live with the non-custodial parent. Stepparents frequently reported that for days, if not weeks, visitation by certain natural parents invariably leads to regression and disruption in the household.

In summary, concerning the children's feelings towards the stepparent, it can be concluded that the majority of the stepchildren had a positive attitude toward their stepparents and got on reasonably well with them. This finding supports the view of Duberman (1975), who, in a study of 88 remarried families, concluded overall that the majority of stepfamilies seemed to make conscious and sincere efforts to form integrated and happy families.

6.3.6   View of stepparent toward the stepchild

The above was followed by the question in Annexure E: "How do you believe your stepparent sees you?" The following was evident:

- The majority of the respondents (67.6 %) (n=47) perceived their relationship with their stepparent as **positive**. The following extract summarises their experience:

> "He loves me as his own daughter. He makes no distinction" (girl, 10 years with stepfather).

There is correspondence between the children who valued and perceived their relationship with their stepparents as positive.

- Eleven respondents (17.6 %) **vacillated** between uncertain and unhappy, as evident in the following comments:

> "Uncertain. He laughs at me" (girl, 12 years with stepfather).
> "I don't know. She treats me different from the other children" (girl, 12 years with stepmother).

- Then, ten respondents (14.7 %), who reported **negatively** on how they perceived their stepparent, concluded with the following comments:

> "A burden - always there" (girl, 12 years with stepfather).
> "She thinks I am rather stupid. She says I am like my mother" (girl, 12 years with stepmother).
> "He thinks I am bad and misbehaved" (boy, 9 years with stepfather).
> "I don't think he accepts me" (girl, 9½ years with stepfather).

The majority of children in this study (82 %) projected positive feelings about their stepparents and less (67.6 %) reported stepparents as having positive feelings about them. Treating the children's behaviour differently is found to be detrimental to the blending of the family. Children who reported feeling negatively, felt that the stepparent was rejecting them. This lack of trust destroys relationships in the stepfamily.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the majority of marriages in this sample were influenced by the presence of stepchildren, with an eventual decline in attachment. Problems experienced were related to co-parenting roles, interference by the supra-system members, the child's behaviour toward the stepparent and the quality of the marital relationship. This finding corresponds with relevant clinical literature (Hetherington *et al.*, 1999; McGoldrick & Carter, 1980; Sager *et al.*, 1983; Visher & Visher, 1979). The majority of the children felt positive about their relationship with their stepparent and the majority reported their stepparents as having positive feelings toward them. These findings suggest that, despite the problems and stresses concomitant with remarriage, most stepfamilies who participated in this study considered their families to be reasonably happy.

6.3.7 Attachment in the stepfamily

According to Bray and Berger (1993) and Visher and Visher (1988) stepfamilies, compared to non-divorced nuclear families, inter alia, are less attached. Expectations of attachment within the stepfamily are viewed in relevant literature as unrealistic, given the characteristics of its structure, as described in chapter 2 of this study. The difference in perceptions of attachment between the biological and stepparents was investigated and the report follows:

Group Statistics

	Biological or stepparent	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Cohesion on famiy version	Biological parent	46	64.20	9.894	1.459
	Stepparent	46	63.93	10.657	1.571
Adaptability on family version	Biological parent	46	46.70	6.359	.938
	Stepparent	46	46.83	7.410	1.092
Cohesion: couples version	Biological parent	46	67.65	11.068	1.632
	Stepparent	46	67.46	10.490	1.547
Adaptability : couples version	Biological parent	46	52.41	8.355	1.232
	Stepparent	46	53.00	8.006	1.180

TABLE 6.8: Mean FACES scores of biological and stepparents on attachment in the stepfamily

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Cohesion on famiy version	Equal variances assumed	.230	.632	.122	90	.903	.26	2.144	-3.999	4.520
	Equal variances not assumed			.122	89.508	.903	.26	2.144	-3.999	4.521
Adaptability on family version	Equal variances assumed	.803	.373	-.091	90	.928	-.13	1.440	-2.991	2.730
	Equal variances not assumed			-.091	87.975	.928	-.13	1.440	-2.991	2.731
Cohesion: couples version	Equal variances assumed	.000	.988	.087	90	.931	.20	2.248	-4.271	4.662
	Equal variances not assumed			.087	89.742	.931	.20	2.248	-4.271	4.663
Adaptability : couples version	Equal variances assumed	.124	.725	-.344	90	.732	-.59	1.706	-3.976	2.802
	Equal variances not assumed			-.344	89.836	.732	-.59	1.706	-3.976	2.803

TABLE 6.9: Independent samples t-test of the difference between mean scores on FACES between biological and stepparents

An independent samples t-test (using the significance level of 0.10 and reflected a probability of 0.091) confirmed that, in this study, no significant difference was found between biological and stepparents with regard to their perception on attachment and flexibility in the stepfamily. This non-significant result was expected, considering the means reported above.

6.3.7.1 Attachment in the current stepfamily

To investigate this issue of attachment in the stepfamily further, adult respondents were asked: "How attached is your current family?" (question 10; Annexure D). The responses can be seen in the following table:

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Attachment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Uncertain	12	5.7	12.0	12.0
	Unattached	6	2.8	6.0	18.0
	Attached	48	22.6	48.0	66.0
	Strongly attached	34	16.0	34.0	100.0
	Total	100	47.2	100.0	
Missing	System	112	52.8		
Total		212	100.0		

TABLE 6.10: Frequency of perceptions of attachment

The adult respondents' perception of attachment in the current stepfamily was judged jointly by the couple. From these findings it is evident that the majority of the adults in the sample (82 %) described their family as attached, while 18 % described this not being the case. An outstanding feature of couples who described their families as attached, were that they made a purposeful choice that the stepfamily would be successful and, as a result of this, they handle interference in the family in a constructive way.

A cross-tabulation of the parents' view on attachment (Annexure D) and the children's impact on their marriage relationship are tabled together in the following table (6 parents, uncertain about their attachment, were excluded):

Stepchildren	Unattached	Attached	Strongly attached	Total
Always		1	10	11
Often		3	4	7
Sometimes		17	3	19
Seldom	2	3		5
Never	1			1
Total	3	24	17	44

TABLE 6.11: Cross-tabulation of perception of attachment and the impact of stepchildren

The Spearman negative and significant correlation (-.747; $p < 0.01$) was obtained between adults' perception of family attachment and the level of impact that stepchildren have on their marriage.

This implies that the more attached the family is perceived to be, the higher the impact of stepchildren will be rated. This finding is in line with the couple and family scores on attachment from the FACES II. This can partly be so, as should the family be attached, then the children form a part of the structure and decision-making. Stepfamilies also revealed a willingness to communicate their problems frankly.

In the following tables the researcher examined the differences in mean scores on the FACES between individuals who perceived their relationships as attached, strongly attached and unattached, respectively.

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Cohesion on family version	Unattached	6	44.00	5.367	2.191	38.37	49.63	38	50
	Attached	48	64.79	5.611	.810	63.16	66.42	50	76
	Strongly attached	34	71.00	7.556	1.296	68.36	73.64	52	80
	Total	88	65.77	9.177	.978	63.83	67.72	38	80
Adaptability on family version	Unattached	6	33.17	3.371	1.376	29.63	36.70	31	38
	Attached	48	46.96	5.120	.739	45.47	48.44	36	64
	Strongly attached	34	50.44	6.684	1.146	48.11	52.77	35	66
	Total	88	47.36	7.032	.750	45.87	48.85	31	66
Cohesion: couples version	Unattached	6	39.33	7.711	3.148	31.24	47.43	30	47
	Attached	48	68.29	7.724	1.115	66.05	70.53	51	79
	Strongly attached	34	72.15	7.754	1.330	69.44	74.85	54	80
	Total	88	67.81	11.039	1.177	65.47	70.15	30	80
Adaptability : couples version	Unattached	6	34.67	9.136	3.730	25.08	44.25	23	42
	Attached	48	53.52	6.032	.871	51.77	55.27	36	66
	Strongly attached	34	55.68	7.294	1.251	53.13	58.22	33	65
	Total	88	53.07	8.412	.897	51.29	54.85	23	66

TABLE 6.12: Descriptive of the difference in mean scores on the FACES II between individuals' perception of attachment

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Cohesion on famiy version	Between Groups	3819.538	2	1909.769	46.275	.000
	Within Groups	3507.917	85	41.270		
	Total	7327.455	87			
Adaptability on family version	Between Groups	1539.231	2	769.616	23.675	.000
	Within Groups	2763.132	85	32.507		
	Total	4302.364	87			
Cohesion: couples version	Between Groups	5516.201	2	2758.101	46.099	.000
	Within Groups	5085.515	85	59.830		
	Total	10601.716	87			
Adaptability : couples version	Between Groups	2272.837	2	1136.419	24.878	.000
	Within Groups	3882.754	85	45.679		
	Total	6155.591	87			

TABLE 6.13: A one-way repeated measure analysis of variance across individuals' perception of attachment

In the above tables (6.12 and 6.13), that examine attachment on the family version, it appears that the respondents' evaluation of their family attachment correlates with their measurement of family attachment in the FACES II.

Contradictory to previous studies by Hetherington *et al.* (1999) and Papernow (1993), this study found that stepparents and bio-parents agree largely on attachment and flexibility in the stepfamily, despite the impact of stepchildren.

6.3.7.2 Attachment behaviour

According to Bowlby (1969/1982), a varied set of behaviours have the function of retaining proximity to the care-giver, taking into account the care-giver's accessibility and responsiveness.

In view of the lack of information available on attachment in middle childhood, this study built on the writings by Waters *et al.* (1991), who emphasised the child's willingness to participate in the partnership. Howes (1999:677) adds that a relationship with alternative attachment figures (here the stepparent) must be formed after an initial attachment relationship has been constructed and then lost. In sequentially formed attachments, children already have an internal working model of an attachment relationship. Research on the formation of new attachment relationships has also examined attachment behaviours (e.g., Marcus, 1991) as a measure for the formation of attachment. Behaviours that signify the development of a "goal-corrected partnership" mark

attachment behaviour in middle childhood. Language development enables the child to negotiate plans and activities. In middle childhood, the three major functions of attachment, proximity maintenance, safe haven and secure base, are gradually transferred from parents to peers (Bowlby 1969/1982; Ainsworth, 1990; Waters *et al.*, 1991).

However, Greenberg *et al.* (1983) stress that, in middle childhood, attachment to parents remains the primary source of security. This aspect is clearly evident in the next finding. The following table illustrates the frequency of attachment behaviour, as recognised by the parents (Annexure I; n=50) in their relationship with their child/children in middle childhood.

Behaviour	Never	Sometimes	Always
1. Signalling behaviour			
• Seeks parent when injured	4	13	33
• Open with parent about social worries when they occur	9	20	21
• Comes to parent for help when in trouble	4	17	29
• Jokes with parent	0	20	30
• Interested in parent approval when achieving something new	1	12	37
Total	18	82	150
2. Aversive behaviour			
• Screams at parent in anger	24	25	1
• Stays angry at parent for a long time	36	13	1
• Feels like parents are always in the way	28	21	1
• Gets angry when disciplined	11	35	4
• Lies to parent	14	34	1
Total	113	128	8
3. Movements relating to another person			
• Pulls away if parent is affectionate	36	11	3
• Proud of parent	1	18	31
• Reminds parent or retells stories of good times	11	21	18
Total	48	50	52
4. Active physical contact behaviour			
• Enjoys having parent scratch back or talk before going to bed	8	15	27
• Is clinging and immature with parent	32	16	2
Total	40	31	29
5. Conformity to rules			
• Accepts restrictions related to safety	2	18	31
• Helps parent by keeping certain areas of the home, sets of toys or clothes tidy	2	34	14
• Accepts that parent is right when disciplined	3	30	17
Total	7	82	62
6. Degree of security			
• Requires close supervision	15	24	11
7. Home as base of security			
• Uses home as a main base for play activities	4	16	30

TABLE 6.14: Frequency of attachment behaviour

An analysis of the above table leads to the conclusion that parents are always aware of signalling behaviour and, mostly, do not consider their relationship with their children to be characterised by aversive behaviour. It appears that children in middle childhood were still open with their parents about social worries and joked with them. They were the least prone to seek their parents when hurt and interested in their parents' approval when achieving something new. This, however, does not imply aversive behaviour to be non-existent, because an average of 44 % of the parents agreed that the following behaviour does occur sometimes:

- The child stays angry at the parent for a long time
- The child gets angry when disciplined
- The child screams at the parent in anger
- The child tells lies
- The child feels like the parents are always in the way

When examining movements relating to another person and orienting behaviour, there was a more equal distribution of parents who said children in middle childhood would, for example, never (24 %), sometimes (33 %) and always (34.6 %) pull away if the parent was affectionate, display pride in the parents and/or retell stories of past good times.

Almost 55 % (54.6 %) of the respondents responded by saying that children in middle childhood sometimes conform to rules while 40.6 % felt they always conformed to rules. Only 0.04 % felt they never conform to rules. From the findings, the parents were also aware that their children do not always (40 %) use the home as a secure base. A gradual tendency is thus clear for the children to start transferring their attachment from their parents to peers. For 78 % of the parents, close supervision was no longer required. This supports Bowlby (1969/1982) and Waters's *et al.* (1991) statement on the close supervision partnership in middle childhood. Only 29 % of the parents indicated active physical contact in their relationship toward their children, e.g. scratching their backs, in contrast with 40 % who said this never happened. Findings in this study are also in line with predictions that children who approach adolescence will increasingly experience their relationships with age-mates as more significant (Hetherington *et al.*, 1999; Waters *et al.*, 1991).

6.3.8 Family life cycle

A major focus of this study is an examination of how families evaluate their attachment at the different stages of the family life cycle, as described by Papernow (1993:387). The length of

time it takes the average family to complete the stepfamily cycle is applied as a criterion (table 6.15). It has been recognised that some families may be fast-paced and yet others slow/stuck, but the researcher considers the average family's time appropriate for this study. Based on the duration of the couple's present marriage, families were classified as being in the early, middle or later stages of development. An analysis of the sample showed that 46 % of the families were in the early stage. This corresponds with the finding that the couples, on average, had been married for 3.55 years.

Stage	Average families	Frequency	Percent
Early stage	0-36 months	23	46
Middle stage	36-72 months	17	34
Later stage	72 +	10	20
Total	c.7 years	50	100

TABLE 6.15: Average length of time required for families to complete the stepfamily cycle

From the demographic questionnaire (Annexure D) a significant relationship was not found between the length of marriage and the level of attachment. The table below reflects this finding.

Correlations

		ATTACHED	Length of marriage
ATTACHED	Pearson Correlation	1	-.113
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.434
	N	50	50
Length of marriage	Pearson Correlation	-.113	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.434	.
	N	50	50

TABLE 6.16: Correlation between attachment and the duration of the marriage

Papernow (1993:381) describes the early stage as that stage when differences in insider/outsider, step/biological and adult/child perspectives become increasingly obvious. Shaming and blaming, due to unrealistic expectations, can cause communication to cease. It is striking that, despite this,

adults describe their families as attached. Current findings show that time leads to a strengthening of ties to the stepparent. A possible explanation can be that the respondents do not necessarily associate conflict and differences as signs of unattachment. This raises questions about the use of the word "unattached" in the demographic questionnaire. In chapter 4, categories of attachment were listed together with the parent and child qualities. Inputs from Ainsworth *et al.* (1978); Howe (1996); Lyons-Ruth and Jacobvitz (1999); Main and Hesse (1990) and Main and Solomon (1990), inter alia, were used. It seems that all children are exposed to an attachment relationship, but that the styles differ depending on the quality of the parenting. Clearly, more research in needed when attachment is linked to attachment styles. The question seems to be, "What is the style of attachment between the parent and child?" and not, "Is the child attached or not?" The figure designed by the researcher in Chapter 4 on attachment styles can be a valuable assessment tool to the social worker to determine what the attachment style is, as well as the criteria for each style.

The Circumplex Model (Olson *et al.*, 1989) was applied as the basic foundation and underlying theme for the evaluation of attachment in the stepfamily. Families can be classified along the two separate dimensions of attachment and flexibility. Based on this classification, the family can be placed into four main family types: Balanced, Moderately Balanced, Mid-range and extreme.

In order to classify each family, members of the family (parents and stepchildren in middle childhood) completed the FACES II. To classify families, their scores on each of the two separate dimensions (attachment and flexibility) were combined to determine placement on the Circumplex Model. This study is somewhat unique in that it systematically obtained the views of several family members. Babbie and Mouton (2001:282) describe the value of multiple sources of data more fully. The results clearly demonstrate that the children's perceptions of the attachment in the family were not necessarily similar to those of the parents. As a result, the analysis will be done using both individual and couple scores.

6.3.9 Family attachment according to the children

Several researchers (Bray & Berger, 1993; Visher & Visher, 1988) conclude, in comparison to non-divorced nuclear families, that stepfamilies, inter alia, are less attached. Relevant literature views expectations of attachment within the stepfamily as unrealistic, given the characteristics of

its structure, as described in chapter 2 of this study (Ganong & Coleman, 1984; Visher & Visher, 1979).

The parental attachment scores on the IPPA were found to be unrelated to the **age** of the children (Pearson r, p>0.05 for each). Correlations ranged from -0.099 to -0.180 and were all non-significant. This study was restricted to children in middle childhood.

As indicated in the table below, also no significant correlation was indicated to the child's **gender**.

Group Statistics

	Gender of child	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
M_TRUST	1	37	43.00	6.087	1.001
	2	31	41.55	9.124	1.639
M_COMM	1	37	36.38	6.825	1.122
	2	31	34.81	7.722	1.387
M_ALIEN	1	37	13.46	5.119	.841
	2	31	13.68	5.186	.931
F_TRUST	1	37	40.81	7.214	1.186
	2	31	41.35	6.960	1.250
F_COMM	1	37	34.51	6.842	1.125
	2	31	31.52	7.312	1.313
F_ALIEN	1	37	13.32	4.837	.795
	2	31	14.32	4.700	.844
M_ATT	1	37	102.51	17.087	2.809
	2	31	98.74	20.826	3.740
F_ATT	1	37	97.38	18.059	2.969
	2	31	95.23	17.604	3.162

TABLE 6.17: Mean IPPA scores for boys and girls, respectively

That the boys' scores, on average, were higher than those of the girls is meaningful. This confirms an earlier finding, namely that boys adjust better to stepfamilies than girls.

However, the IPPA revealed meaningful information on attachment differences between children with stepfathers and with stepmothers. The difference with regard to father attachment approached significance (p<0.10), but no other difference was found to be significant, as the following table shows:

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Group Statistics

	Stepparent	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Cohesion on famiy version	Stepfather	26	64.88	9.253	1.815
	Stepmother	11	61.73	11.731	3.537
Adaptability on family version	Stepfather	26	47.58	5.968	1.170
	Stepmother	11	44.73	4.361	1.315
M_TRUST	Stepfather	26	44.23	4.023	.789
	Stepmother	11	40.09	8.927	2.692
M_COMM	Stepfather	26	36.73	5.889	1.155
	Stepmother	11	35.55	8.937	2.695
M_ALIEN	Stepfather	26	13.50	4.366	.856
	Stepmother	11	13.36	6.830	2.059
F_TRUST	Stepfather	26	40.23	7.814	1.533
	Stepmother	11	42.18	5.636	1.699
F_COMM	Stepfather	26	33.73	7.097	1.392
	Stepmother	11	36.36	6.104	1.840
F_ALIEN	Stepfather	26	14.08	4.995	.980
	Stepmother	11	11.55	4.108	1.239
M_ATT	Stepfather	26	104.31	13.047	2.559
	Stepmother	11	98.27	24.442	7.370
F_ATT	Stepfather	26	95.38	18.651	3.658
	Stepmother	11	102.09	16.422	4.952

TABLE 6.18: Independent samples t-test for the difference in means on the IPPA and FACES for girls in stepfather and stepmother families, respectively

The above finding is in accordance with available research by Clingempeel and Segal (1986) that indicates that girls adjust less well to stepmother families than boys. As also found in this research, the main reason for this is that girls regard stepmothers as unworthy substitutes for their biological mothers.

An independent samples t-test between children with stepfathers and stepmothers respectively revealed that the differences were significant (p<0.10) with regard to father communication, father alienation, father attachment and mother trust. These differences were in the theoretically expected directions. Children with stepmothers (i.e., own fathers) scored higher on father attachment, while those with stepfathers (i.e., own mothers) scored higher on mother trust. This finding confirms that children in middle childhood experience attachment with their own biological parents as more significant than with same sex stepparents.

An analysis of the contact with the non-custodial parent revealed that the frequency or absence of contact with the non-custodial parent had no significant influence on the children's perception of attachment. This is illustrated in the next table.

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval Mean Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
M_TRUST	No contact								
	Little contact	13	42.23	8.598	2.329	37.16	47.31	27	50
	Regular	33	42.36	7.660	1.333	39.65	45.08	20	50
	Total	55	42.67	7.318	.987	40.69	44.65	20	50
M_COM	No contact	9	36.78	5.974	1.991	32.19	41.37	28	44
	Little contact	13	36.23	8.308	2.304	31.21	41.25	22	45
	Regular	33	36.45	7.151	1.245	33.92	38.99	20	45
	Total	55	36.45	7.138	.963	34.52	38.38	20	45
M_ALIEN	No contact	9	13.11	4.256	1.419	9.84	16.38	7	19
	Little contact	13	14.00	6.506	1.805	10.07	17.93	6	24
	Regular	33	13.33	5.103	.888	11.52	15.14	6	24
	Total	55	13.45	5.256	.709	12.03	14.88	6	24
F_TRUST	No contact	9	38.89	7.928	2.643	32.79	44.98	27	50
	Little contact	13	41.00	9.452	2.621	35.29	46.71	12	48
	Regular	33	41.91	6.482	1.128	39.61	44.21	23	50
	Total	55	41.20	7.435	1.002	39.19	43.21	12	50
F_COM	No contact	9	31.89	9.089	3.030	24.90	38.88	21	45
	Little contact	13	34.15	8.611	2.388	28.95	39.36	15	45
	Regular	33	33.67	6.958	1.211	31.20	36.13	11	45
	Total	55	33.49	7.613	1.027	31.43	35.55	11	45
F_ALIEN	No contact	9	15.00	6.062	2.021	10.34	19.66	7	23
	Little contact	13	13.15	5.490	1.523	9.84	16.47	6	26
	Regular	33	13.06	4.257	.741	11.55	14.57	6	23
	Total	55	13.40	4.837	.652	12.09	14.71	6	26
M_ATT	No contact	9	102.44	12.972	4.324	92.47	112.42	83	122
	Little contact	13	101.08	22.596	6.267	87.42	114.73	61	125
	Regular	33	102.48	18.683	3.252	95.86	109.11	55	125
	Total	55	102.15	18.591	2.507	97.12	107.17	55	125
F_ATT	No contact	9	90.89	20.337	6.779	75.26	106.52	64	124
	Little contact	13	99.15	22.854	6.339	85.34	112.96	37	121
	Regular	33	98.03	16.953	2.951	92.02	104.04	47	125
	Total	55	97.13	18.858	2.543	92.03	102.23	37	125

TABLE 6.19: Mean IPPA scores of the different contact levels with the non-custodial parent

Upon examination of the mean scores in the descriptive table (table 6.19) it is clear that the differences between the contact groups are very small. The ANOVA table on the next page confirms that not one of the f-tests performed yielded significant results for the difference between contact levels.

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
M_TRUST	Between Groups	33.943	2	16.971	.309	.736
	Within Groups	2858.166	52	54.965		
	Total	2892.109	54			
M_COMM	Between Groups	1.591	2	.796	.015	.985
	Within Groups	2750.045	52	52.885		
	Total	2751.636	54			
M_ALIEN	Between Groups	5.414	2	2.707	.095	.910
	Within Groups	1486.222	52	28.581		
	Total	1491.636	54			
F_TRUST	Between Groups	65.184	2	32.592	.580	.563
	Within Groups	2919.616	52	56.146		
	Total	2984.800	54			
F_COMM	Between Groups	29.831	2	14.915	.250	.780
	Within Groups	3099.915	52	59.614		
	Total	3129.745	54			
F_ALIEN	Between Groups	27.629	2	13.814	.581	.563
	Within Groups	1235.571	52	23.761		
	Total	1263.200	54			
M_ATT	Between Groups	19.449	2	9.724	.027	.973
	Within Groups	18643.388	52	358.527		
	Total	18662.836	54			
F_ATT	Between Groups	430.558	2	215.279	.596	.555
	Within Groups	18773.551	52	361.030		
	Total	19204.109	54			

TABLE 6.20: Results of the one-way analysis of variance in the difference of mean scores on the IPPA between the different contact levels

6.3.9.1 Family attachment

The two dimensions of the Circumplex Model, as described by Olson *et al.* (1989; 2000), are family attachment and flexibility: too many (very connected) or too little (disengaged), which are viewed as problematic. A balance on these dimensions relates to more adequate functioning. However, according to Olson *et al.* (1989) being, balanced means that a family can experience the extremes, but they do not typically function at these extremes. Comparing the children's and the parents' scores on family attachment led to the results found in Figure 6.1.
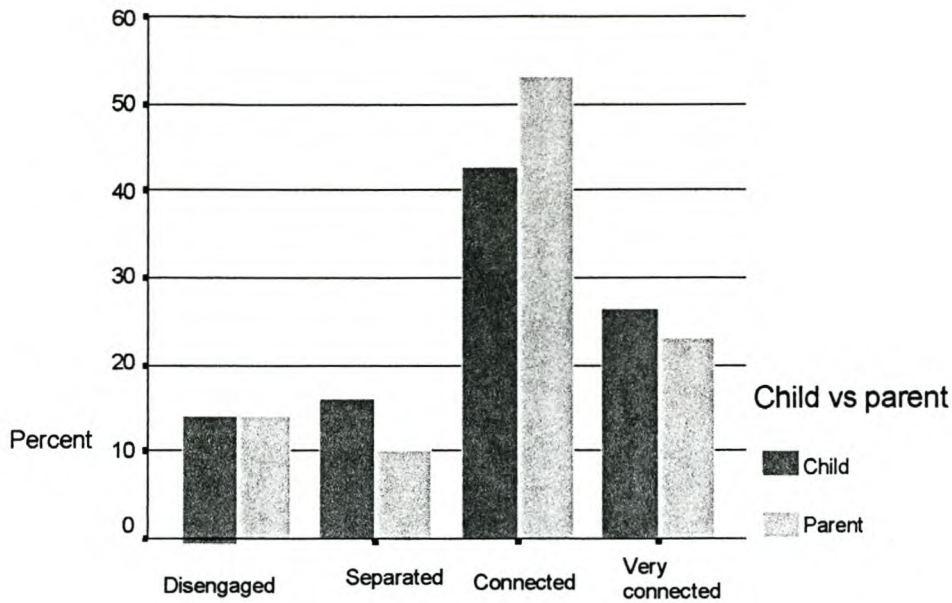
FIGURE 6.1 : Family attachment

It follows from the above figure that on family attachment:

-   Children (31.4 %) experience more separateness in the stepfamily than the parents. This means they experience little involvement between parents and themselves, and all family members "do their own thing" (Olson *et al.*, 1982).

-   At the other extreme, the majority of children (26.4 %) view their families as "very connected", meaning that an extreme emotional closeness is experienced. Energy is mainly focused inside the family and Olson *et al.* (1989) adds that boundaries are blurred.

-   The possibility exists that the parents described their families as more connected than they are in reality. Adults (53 %) described their families as connected and that they reflect emotional closeness and time together, in contrast with the children where 42.6 % described their families as connected.

-   Attachment is the aspect where children and parents differ the most.

Despite the difference in the assessment of family attachment, it can be concluded overall that adults perceive their families to be more connected than the children, but that most families experience their families as "attached units" (at the central levels), which means that they experience a balance between being connected and independence. This finding is in accordance

with findings in studies by Duberman (1975) and Papernow (1993). Olson (1983) also reported pre-adolescents who tended to view their families as lower on attachment that their parents did.

The fact that the stepfamilies, who participating in the study, have been together for more than three years and reflect attachment, also support the statement by Visher and Visher (1979) that stepfamily integration could take as long as two years.

6.3.9.2 **Family flexibility**

"Family flexibility" is the ability of the family to change. Based on the children's and parents' scores on the FACES II (Annexure F), findings are listed in the following figure:
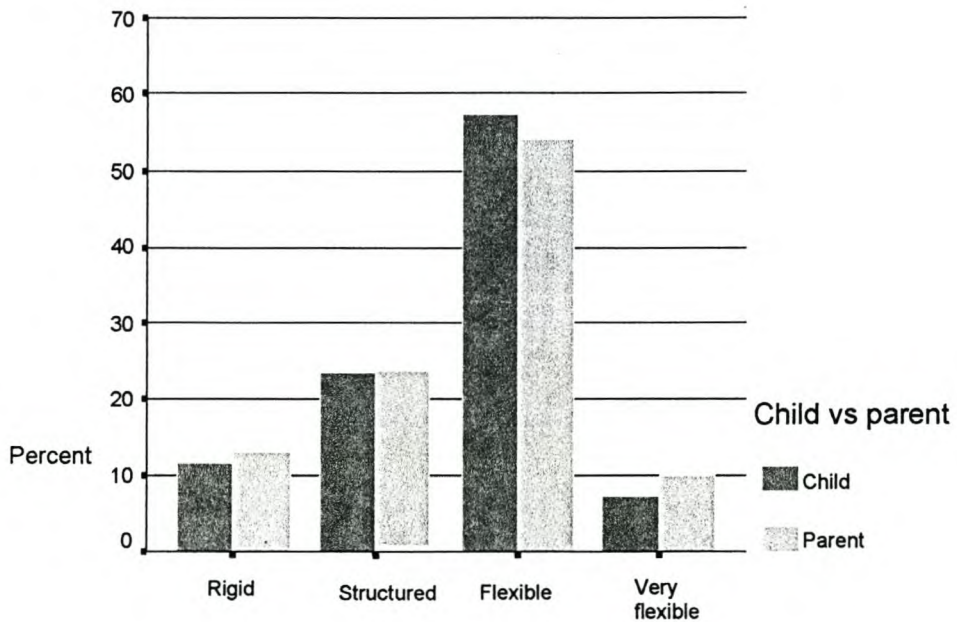
FIGURE 6.2: Family flexibility

According to the above figure, it can be summarised that:
- There is not a remarkable difference in the ratings of children and parents, as is the case with attachment. The lowest frequency of cases is found at the extremes, for example, rigid and very flexible.
- Stepfamilies were mostly evaluated as structured and flexible. These levels of flexibility are found to be conducive to family functioning (Olson, 1989:12).

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- This pattern of responses implies that, in the stepfamily, the parents share authority that is not rigid.
- The perception is that families provide a basic level of stability, but are able to change when necessary. This reflects a healthy balance in these families.

Olson *et al.* (1983) identify a linear relationship between attachment and flexibility in family functioning, meaning that higher levels of attachment and flexibility seem to be associated with better family functioning. In this study, this finding supports the view that respondents have reflected healthy family functioning. Yet again, this finding can relate to the time that the families have been together (average 3.55 years).

The family type elaborates further on the attachment in the stepfamily.

6.3.9.3 Family type

Placement of the scores for attachment and flexibility on the Circumplex Model determines the designation of families by type. This moves to the simultaneous consolidated assessment of both dimensions. As discussed by Olson *et al.* (1989) the family types are: Balanced, Moderately balanced, Mid-range and Extreme.

The type of family is important for the development of relationships within the family. In this study, there was general agreement and most families were rated as balanced and moderately balanced. The findings on family type are reflected in figure 6.3.
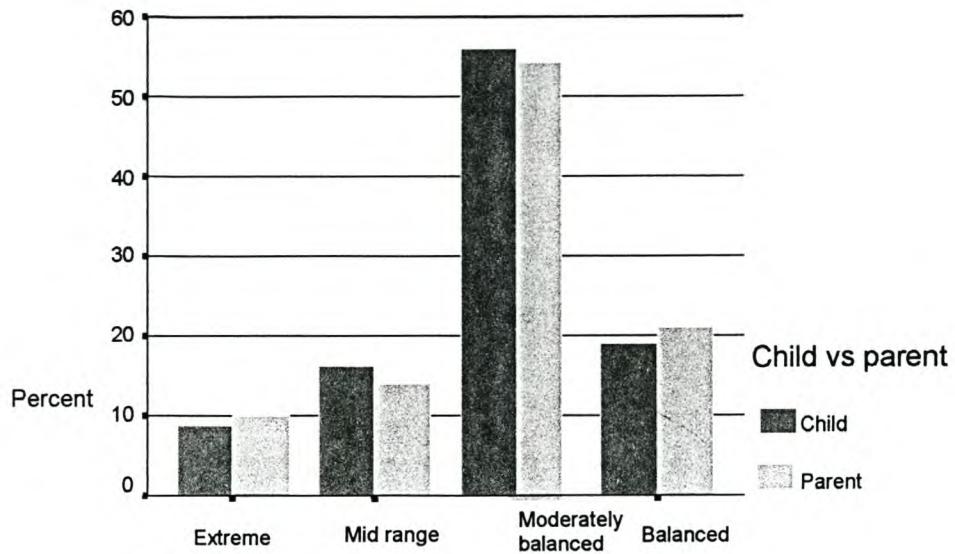
FIGURE 6.3: Family Type

The findings of figure 6.3 suggest that:

-       The parents and children agreed on family type matters.

-       The majority of the sample placed their families in the moderately balanced type, which confirms their healthy functioning, as shown in attachment and flexibility.

From the literature (Mullins, 1990; Olson *et al.*, 1989, 2000), the following can be ascribed to the moderately balanced family types:

-       There is a good balance between togetherness (we) and separateness (I)

-       Levels of attachment are connected, to very connected

-       Moderate to high loyalty towards each other

-       Family members are interdependent.

It can be concluded that the majority of stepfamilies, who took part in this research, feel positive about their communication skills and that a good balance exists between togetherness and separateness. The conclusion can be drawn that these families function adequately and that they are able to alter their family system to adapt to family crises (Olson, 2000:156).

This study evaluates attachment in the stepfamily as the remarried couple and at least one stepchild in middle childhood perceived it to be. Not all members of the family were included. This caused stepsibling relationships not to be assessed and an input by other family members

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regarding attachment not being obtained. However, it has been recognised that stepsibling relationships can reverberate dramatically and negatively on the couple and family relationships.

6.3.10   Couple's view of their relationship

In order to examine the differences among couples or families more effectively, it is necessary to develop a score that represents the family as a unit. One of the purposes of the Circumplex Model (Olson, 1989) is not only to assess how individuals view themselves within the context of their families, but also to determine how couples view their relationships.

The couple is placed in the cell (family type) appropriate to their individual scores on the two dimensions (attachment and flexibility). This placement also indicates whether the couple is classified as Balanced, Moderately Balanced, Mid-range or Extreme. A one-way analysis of FACES II scores among couples in the early, middle and late stages of marriage revealed that, with time, there was a significant decline in couple attachment.

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Cohesion on famiy version	Early	46	66.50	7.682	1.133	64.22	68.78	49	80
	Middle	34	63.82	12.052	2.067	59.62	68.03	38	77
	Late	20	61.70	11.943	2.671	56.11	67.29	38	80
	Total	100	64.63	10.305	1.031	62.59	66.67	38	80
Adaptability on family version	Early	46	47.57	6.879	1.014	45.52	49.61	35	66
	Middle	34	47.29	6.450	1.106	45.04	49.54	31	64
	Late	20	46.10	8.938	1.999	41.92	50.28	31	63
	Total	100	47.18	7.143	.714	45.76	48.60	31	66
Cohesion: couples version	Early	46	71.20	7.396	1.090	69.00	73.39	54	80
	Middle	34	68.56	8.753	1.501	65.50	71.61	41	79
	Late	20	60.20	15.251	3.410	53.06	67.34	30	79
	Total	100	68.10	10.591	1.059	66.00	70.20	30	80
Adaptability : couples version	Early	46	54.48	8.194	1.208	52.04	56.91	33	66
	Middle	34	53.00	4.703	.807	51.36	54.64	39	60
	Late	20	49.95	10.952	2.449	44.82	55.08	23	65
	Total	100	53.07	7.988	.799	51.49	54.65	23	66

TABLE 6.21: Mean scores on the FACES II for couples in the early, middle and later stages of stepfamily development

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Cohesion on famiy version	Between Groups	354.669	2	177.334	1.693	.189
	Within Groups	10158.641	97	104.728		
	Total	10513.310	99			
Adaptability on family version	Between Groups	30.597	2	15.298	.296	.745
	Within Groups	5020.163	97	51.754		
	Total	5050.760	99			
Cohesion: couples version	Between Groups	1696.179	2	848.089	8.743	.000
	Within Groups	9408.821	97	96.998		
	Total	11105.000	99			
Adaptability : couples version	Between Groups	286.082	2	143.041	2.301	.106
	Within Groups	6030.428	97	62.169		
	Total	6316.510	99			

TABLE 6.22: Results of the one-way analysis of variance of the difference in mean scores on the FACES II between the different developmental stages

From the table of means, it is clear that attachment and flexibility decline with length of marriage on both the FACES II family and couple version. This decline was found to be significant (P<0.01) in the case of attachment on the couples version as seen in the Anova. Building on the developmental approach, Carter and McGoldrick (1988) hypothesised that the stage of life cycle will have an influence on attachment. Findings in this research on stepfamilies showed the same tendencies as research described by Olson *et al.* (1983:88). Using the individual couple scores, results showed a gradual drop in attachment from families with young children to families with adolescents. This can be partly because children in middle childhood and adolescence spend much more time away from home and less time with the parents. A greater solidarity and attachment gradually develop with the peer group.

6.3.10.1   Couple attachment

Couples were classified on the basis of the individual FACES II couples scores in terms of the four levels each of couple attachment, flexibility and marriage type. The following figures present these findings:
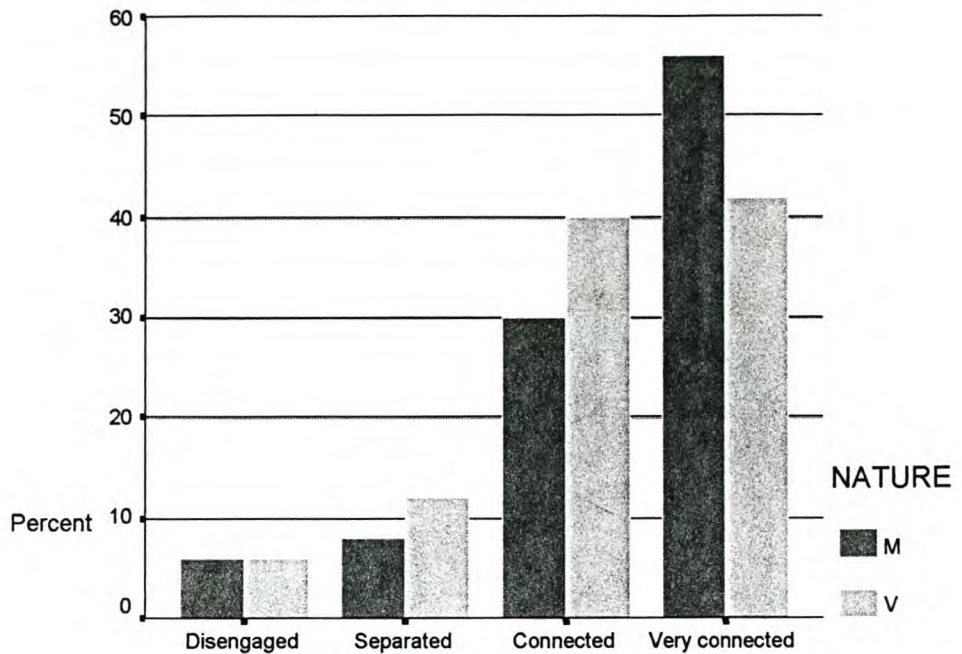
FIGURE 6.4: Couple attachment

Looking at the findings on couple attachment in this study, it seems clear that:

- Nearly half the sample (49 %) described their relationships as very connected. This means that they experience a lack of personal separateness and little private space (Olson et al., 1989). This reflects little outside interests also found in the family attachment. Men (55 %) were inclined to describe their marital attachment in more extreme terms.

- Women (30 %) were more moderate in their evaluations, rating attachment more connected. They consider togetherness important and they project shared interests.

- In comparison, a small percentage of adults (6 %) described their marriage as disengaged where everyone do their own thing and have separate interests.

- The high levels of connectedness reported by the adults (84 %), may be problematic for relationships if they always function at the extreme level of the map.

These findings support results by Olson et al. (1983) who found significant difference between husbands and wives on their perceptions of attachment.

It can be concluded that most couples in this sample perceived their attachment as either "connected" or "very connected". Although this partially confirms findings reported for family attachment, there is some concern over the high frequency of very connectedness reported by the sample, and men in particular. The question could rightfully be asked whether these extreme scores could relate to the impact of stepchildren (Olson *et al.*, 1983; Rodick *et al.*, 1986). Olson (1989, 2000) describes the very connected relationship as being extremely close and that loyalty

is demanded. Individuals are very dependent upon each other and little private space is permitted. This situation can be problematic for the marital relationship in the long run.

6.3.10.2 Couple flexibility

Flexibility focuses on the ability of the marital system to change. The perception of men and women on couple flexibility is reported in figure 6.5.
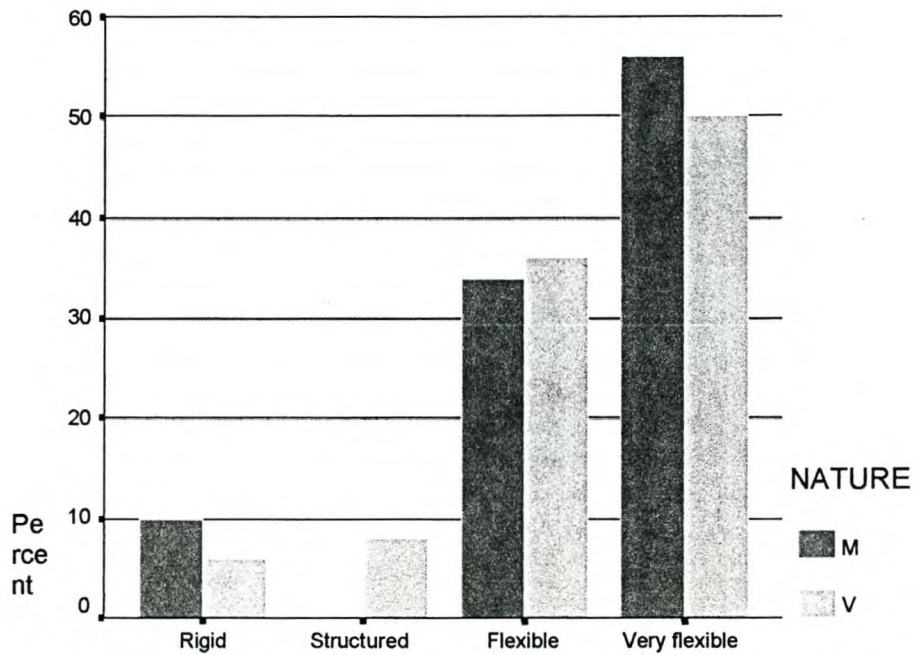
FIGURE 6.5: Couple flexibility

Analysis of the above figure with regard to couple flexibility indicates that:
- Of the adults, 36 % described their marriage as flexible, thus less rigid. This represents equally shared leadership and roles, as described by Olson (2000).
- The very flexible ratings (56 % husbands and 50 % wives) is striking. It can be concluded that adults in the study reflect high levels of adaptability to change, which could be problematic in relationships in the long run.
- As regards attachment, it has been found that women tend to be more cautious in their judgement. Men reflect more extremes as they move through the family life cycle.

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According to Rodick *et al.* (1986), Olson *et al.* (1989) and Olson (2000), very flexible relationships are subject to too much change, a lack of leadership, dramatic role shifts and erratic discipline. In the context of this study, these factors could relate to the stepfamily structure. Chapter 2 of this dissertation discusses the complex stepfamily structure, as described by Sager *et al.* (1983) and Wald (1981).

6.3.10.3 Marriage type

Figure 6.6 provides a summary of the marriage type as described by the adult respondents in the FACES II couples version.
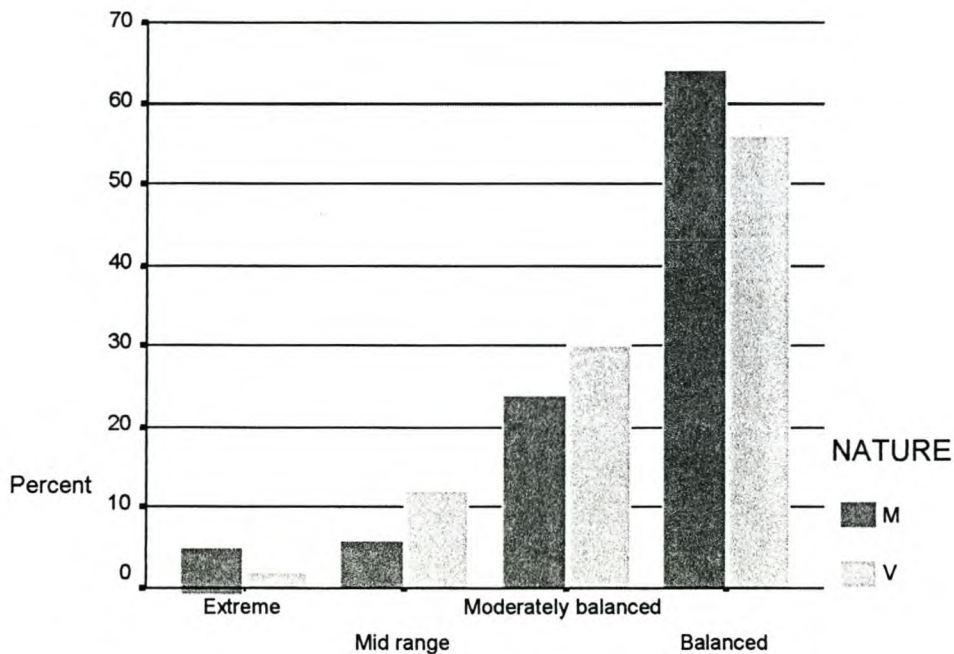
FIGURE 6.6: Marriage type

The findings of figure 6.6 suggest that:

- Of the wives, 42 % described their marital relationships as balanced/moderately balanced, while 44 % of the husbands felt that this was the case.

- Men were likely to be more extreme in their judgement of their marriage type, while women were more moderate in their evaluations (as was the case with couple attachment).

- The majority of the sample (86 % wives; 88 % husbands) perceived their marriages as balanced. This could be interpreted as couples having agreed on how they actually view their marriage. According to Olson *et al.* (1989), this reflects satisfaction with their relationship.

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Overall, there was thus general agreement on how couples evaluate their marriage type.

6.4 Activities that promote attachment according to the respondents

The researcher was keen to ascertain what activities the stepfamilies engaged in with their children that fostered attachment (Annexure D); interesting findings prevailed. Responses were categorised as spending time together, playing games, visiting, religious activities, relaxing, sports and holidays.

From the parents' perspective, 35.16 % of the responses referred to spending time together. This included having meals, talking, picnics and outings together. Approximately 44 % (44.04 %) of the children's responses were in support of spending time together. The major factor reported to enhance attachment could be summarised as family involvement. For the children, 23.85 % of the responses (n=68) showed that activities involving relaxation were relevant, in contrast to the 17.58 % of parental responses (n=100). These activities included watching television and listening to music. Of the parental responses, 17.58 % considered the practise of sport another activity that fostered attachment, while 10.09 % of the children's responses rated this as an activity that they, as a family, do together. Almost 15 % (14.68 %) of the children's responses referred to playing games, in contrast with the 8.79 % of the adults. Visits and holidays did not receive a significant amount of responses and children did not take religious activities into account to foster attachment.

There was a remarkable focus on spending time together (mainly with meals) and relaxing (mainly watching television), but with less emphasis on playing together. Eating and watching television together does not reflect a family atmosphere of mutual enjoyment and respect - it implies less reciprocal interaction. Thus, physical proximity is still shown to be important. This result must be seen in the context of children in middle childhood who spend much more time away from home and less time with their parents. Thus, greater solidarity and attachment develops within the peer group, as described in chapter 3 (Louw *et al.*, 1998; Waters *et al.*, 1991).

6.5   Suggestions for others

At the close of each interview (Annexure D), an open-ended format was used as the remarried couples were finally asked what advice, if any, they would give to others who are beginning a new stepfamily. Respondents were very articulate in offering suggestions. This question brought different responses from all the family members. In extracting key themes from these families as to what works, several concepts seemed to be striking:

6.5.1   Marital relationship

While there is no evidence (Hetherington *et al.*, 1999) that a solid marriage ensures stepfamily satisfaction (e.g., there may still be problems between the children and stepparents, or the children may be unhappy with the situation), most of the couples felt that, for the family to work at all, it is important to have a strong marriage. The general consensus among these families was that the situation will be rough at first, but a strong couple relationship gives them the strength to negotiate other problems and to form a basis for the merging of the rest of the family. Indeed, the words "patience" and "time" were used frequently as key words for new families to heed. Other advice included:

-        "Spend 'our time' together, without the children."
-        "Live together, because a legal marriage carries 'too much' baggage."
-        "Do not compare each other with previous partners."
-        "Be honest about feelings and difficulties."
-        "Do not marry too soon after divorce. Think carefully. Do not rush things."
         Further advice included, "give space for privacy," "be realistic," "don't get polarised," "discuss money management" and "detach from your previous partner." To spend time developing the couple relationship was an idea echoed by most of these families.

6.5.2   Relationships within the stepfamily

Elements of strain was evident in the stepparent/stepchild relationships studied. Remarried couples offered the following advice with regard to relationships in the stepfamily:

-        "Never try to love the stepchildren like your own - you will fail. The best you can do is to treat them with the same respect and attitude you would have toward anybody else. Don't try to be their parents."

- "Let everyone adjust at his or her own pace. Don't force relationships."

- "Spend time with the kids."

- "Allow time for hugs and chats alone with the biological parent."

- "Include the children in activities and decision-making."

- "Work from the start. Do not assume that everything will work out fine."

- "Handle the issues and be flexible."

- "Each child must have photo's from the past in order to retell stories."

- "Show affection without making exceptions."

- "Talk is best. Talk it out and listen to each other."

- "The stepparent should not be too dominant at first. It is all right to voice opinions, but not to reshape things. Wait..."

Several families stressed the importance of family meetings. Regular family meetings to discuss and agree upon rules were suggested. One respondent reminded stepparents of the following: "Remember, there is no such thing as a perfect family, otherwise you frustrate yourself trying to attain something that is impossible." Other suggestions included, "ability to disagree," "go slowly," "communication, consistency, honesty and love" and, "the stepparent should make a slow transition into discipline." Another related theme that emerged was respect being more important that love in step-relationships. Lastly, comments about the importance of a sense of humour, not holding grudges, and being flexible were very common among most of these families.

6.5.3 Preparation for remarriage

Two families who described their relationships as unattached, stressed that couples should gather information about the stepfamily from professional services before they decide to remarry. "... it didn't work and I got frustrated, and it made things worse. I wish I had the knowledge to handle my stepdaughter from the start, before the breakdown of relationships. We didn't know where to go. We did what we thought was right - at the end I think it was wrong." For all family members, this stepmother recommends premarital counselling to resolve the past and learn what can be expected.

Other suggestions were also made:

- "Watch against 'incomplete' divorce."

- "Weigh up all the factors before deciding to remarry. Think twice before marrying anyone with children when a hostile 'ex' is involved."
- "Have no unrealistic expectations about the situation - expect problems."
- "Do not make the grandparents part of the family structure."
- "Commit yourselves to the integration of this new family. Divorce is not an option."

6.5.4 Relationship with the non-custodial parent

In this study, the negative influence of ex-spouses emerged as being paramount in hindering stepfamily attachment. This may be attributed to enmeshed boundaries with the ex-spouse, as described in chapter 2 of this study. Several couples discussed the importance of drawing boundaries around the new unit. In this study, it was clear that ex-spouses were cited as a major problem and that many children are victims in a tug-of-war. In five cases, juvenile respondents decided to stay with the non-custodial parent and reports were positive on the adjustment. Needless to say, expensive and bitter court battles are impending. It is also problematic when the ex-spouse resides in the same town as the stepfamily. In order to establish a co-operative relationship with the former spouse, the following advice was offered:

- "Do not control telephone contact between the child and the non-custodial parent. The child will always long for the other parent, irrespective of poorer conditions."
- "Don't talk badly about the non-custodial parent in front of the kids."
- "As the stepfather, I arrange visitation, otherwise it's just a fight."

This study values children maintaining contact with the non-custodial parent. While Furstenberg and Nord (1985) report that 75 % of non-custodial stepfathers lose contact with their children within three years of divorce, this study indicated that 48.5 % of the children in this study maintained contact with the biological parents.

In these findings, it is surprising that there is no mention of:
- the need for strong community support systems, and
- decreased sex role stereotyping.

The way in which these factors influence integration in the stepfamily and the formation of attachment could be an interesting field for further investigation.

6.6 The development of hypothesis

In view of the exploratory research method applied in this study, it is appropriate to point out certain trends that can stimulate further research.

- In the past, courts acted on the assumption that the bio-mother, of necessity, is in a better position to care for a child than the father. However, it is believed that this assumption belongs to a past era. The father is capable of exercising custody over a child as well as the mother.

  The hypothesis suggests that there will be no significant difference in attachment experience between families where the father, or where the mother is the custodial parent.

- A comparative study of clinical stepfamilies who were subject to the developmental attachment theory and a non-clinical group who were not.

  A hypothesis suggests that the clinical group would experience the stepfamily as more attached than the non-clinical group. Multiple variants, for example, school achievement and behavioural problems, may be incorporated for further comparison.

- There is no difference between stepfathers and stepmothers with regard to role differentiation.

- When parents are responsive and supportive, children are hypothesised to develop secure models which, in turn, facilitate the development of secure attachment relationships in adulthood.

- Insecure models will lead individuals to recreate insecure patterns in their adult relationships.

- The quality of parenting is linked directly to attachment.

- Marital problems in the stepfamily are related to an individual's attachment history.

- Adults end up in relationships with partners who confirm their existing beliefs about attachment relationships.

- Children in stepfamilies are more at risk to develop academic, social, emotional and behavioural problems than children in nuclear families.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided an explanation of the research design used in this study, together with details of measuring instruments and the procedure followed. It, furthermore, supplied particulars of the sample and sampling method, as well as the statistical method employed to test the significance of the findings. This chapter finally outlined the findings of the empirical study.

This empirical study was exploratory by nature. In this chapter quantitative data are presented in the form of tables and figures. Qualitative data are presented in the form of quotations and analytical discussions, in order to elaborate on the nature of attachment in the stepfamilies who participated in the study. The research findings contained in this chapter reflect a wide scope of factors that influence attachment in the stepfamily, for example, the duration of the marriage, gender of the stepchild and contact with the non-custodial parent. Most of the findings correlate with the findings of studies conducted by other authors who were referred to in chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation, and a few minor differences were highlighted. The information obtained from the findings is crucial for social workers who must be knowledgeable about stepfamilies in order to improve their intervention strategies with them. The researcher observed that attachment measures must be upgraded to meet therapists' needs to make a full assessment of relationships in the stepfamily.

CHAPTER 7

SYNOPSIS OF SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION WITH STEPFAMILIES

7.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses social work intervention strategies that are viewed as a guide to intervention with stepfamilies. This can make the difference between a hopeless struggle and a constructive movement towards stepfamily integration. Ihinger-Tallman and Pasley (1987:120-121) stress that stepfamilies tend to wait until problems get out of hand before they seek assistance from counsellors. At that stage, educational programmes are no longer feasible, thus alternatives must be available to the social worker. In the same vein, Visher and Visher (1988:236) furthermore say that, on average, stepfamilies appear to remain in therapy for a much shorter time than nuclear families.

This chapter focuses on attachment-based strategies that are appropriate for stepfamilies and children in middle childhood. Activities are aimed at assisting parents to consciously recreate a phase of attachment through mutually enjoyable activities. Intervention is goal-directed and structured (McMahon, 1992) and based on five forms of play with supporting techniques (Schoeman & Van der Merwe, 1996). These techniques are based on focused therapeutic play more than on play therapy. Hughes (1997), James (1994), Jernberg and Booth (1999), and Papernow (1993) suggest attachment strategies to which this chapter will especially refer. The basic point of reference is a developmental perspective that emphasises the recreation of a phase of developmental attachment between stepparent and stepchild. The activities must not be evaluated in isolation, but viewed in the context of a mutual respectful relationship between the parent and child. The scope of this research does not allow for elaboration on all aspects of enrichment and preventive programmes, couple and family intervention, the enhancement of adult attachment, an integrative approach with stepfamilies and/or other specific techniques to use with children, for example, to build self-esteem. This broad spectrum of service delivery is recognised as having a place in the full scope of interventions with stepfamilies. The researcher believes that the literature describes this and that it can be integrated, with suggested interventions, in this study. Social workers should strive to build out their armamentarium of techniques for application to this target group.

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It seems clear that social workers do not necessarily need an entirely new array of skills in order to facilitate the process of stepfamily development. Social workers can draw on already existing skills in problem-solving, individual and systems therapy. Wald (1981:191) stresses that social workers must have an informed body of knowledge and the necessary skills in counselling to help stepfamilies to cope with their problems. Therefore, much will be implied regarding the so-called microskills, but not spelled out again.

7.2   Attachment theory and counselling

"Attachment" is a term that is used to refer to the emotional attachment that takes place between a child and his/her care-giver. Bowlby (1951:13) is convinced that all children need to be attached to someone who considers them to be very special and who is committed to providing for their ongoing care. Ralph Turner's (1970) concept of "crescive bonding," which refers to the development of affiliation through shared experiences over time, is particularly useful in working with stepfamilies (Wald, 1981:187). Universal interaction, for example, eye contact, physical contact, movement, rhythm, excitement, anticipation and, at times, mild anxiety, are vital for normal parent-child attachment and they also have a role for much older children who are entering a relationship with a new parent.

According to chapter 3, it is clear that remarriage brings about major adjustments for the child in middle childhood. It may cause the child to take on inappropriate roles and responsibilities that could hamper the formation of attachment. For adults, as for children, attachment is a source of security. Chapter 4 identified signalling, aversive and active behaviours, movements relating to another person, and active physical contact behaviour as child attachment behaviour to establish proximity to the care-giver. Although little is known about attachment in middle childhood, it follows that the parents remain the primary source of security and that the child's willingness to participate is critical to this partnership. Chapter 5 concluded that attachment styles continue to play an influential role in adulthood and that they determine the quality of the parent-child relationship.

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The attachment theory does not propose that warm, caring relationships cannot develop between stepparents and stepchildren, but suggest that such relationships would be more difficult to attain than between biological parents and children.

The attachment theory, which synthesises aspects of interworking models with the interactional dynamics of the dynamic marital and family systems, is of great explanatory value. This model also attends to individuals' personal histories. This research built on a developmental, life-cycle orientation within an attachment theory orientation. For Lyddon (1995:479-483), the attachment theory is of practical use in three main ways:

1) It provides a means to map out developmental pathways leading to adjustment and maladjustment.

2) It explains how clients' working models may be altered through the experience of counselling and counselling relationships.

3) It provides a framework within which counselling hypotheses may be tested.

Bartholomew and Thompson (1995:484-490) suggest the practical applications of the attachment theory in areas such as the counselling of couples, grief and loss, and coping with childhood abuse, but do not regard attachment as providing a unifying framework for the counselling theory and practice. This study also revealed the inability of the attachment theory to describe satisfactory attachment in middle childhood. It seems that attachment must be viewed as one of a number of viewpoints that can contribute to an understanding of relationships, but it is not considered to be a metaperspective. Lopez (1995:395-416) considers the need for a metaperspective and suggests that the attachment theory may provide the "scaffolding" on which such a metaperspective could be built.

For the purpose of this study, it was not important to provide a developmental view of marriage itself, but to explore factors relevant to attachment in stepfamilies. It was also not considered paramount to investigate counselling in view of clients and social workers' attachment styles. However, the attachment theory did provide a framework for understanding the complexities in stepfamily relationships. When considering therapeutic strategies, this research will also rely on other approaches, such as Theraplay, Filial Therapy, Dynamic Play Therapy and the developmental approach, as described by Papernow (1993).

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7.3   Role players in social work intervention

As described in more detail in chapter 2, stepfamilies are more complex than biological families. Members of stepfamilies face numerous challenges. A very brief summary of the role players in social work intervention follows.

7.3.1   The child

This study describes the child who is in middle childhood, that is, 6 to12 years old. There are three general characteristics that capture the essence of the period of middle childhood, corresponding to trends in the areas of intellectual, social and personality development, as described in chapter 3. From an intellectual standpoint, the child's thinking now becomes more orderly, structured and logical. Therefore, play will be more realistic and more rule-oriented and will also reflect a developing **need for order**. The child of school-going age is also socially more involved with age-mates than before. Now, the peer group starts to provide support that formerly was offered only within the family. Acceptance by one's peers is of great importance to children in this age group, and their play sometimes reflects an overwhelming **need to belong**. Finally, in the realm of personality development, a major challenge is to demonstrate to themselves and others that they are competent, that they have talents, skills and abilities of which they can be proud. Their play reflects this **need for industry**.

For a better understanding of the stepchild, a number of losses, beginning with the loss of a continuous relationship with one or both of the bio-parents and familiar caregiving routines, must be considered. They are often expected to adapt with the least possible show of stress. The child's awareness and understanding of these losses have an impact on the development of subsequent attachments. Their level of cognitive development, which may include magical and concrete thinking, limits their understanding of events and explanations. Jernberg and Booth (1999:293) describe magical thinking (between 18 months and 7 years) as a tendency to personalise events. In other words, children believe that their thoughts, wishes and actions are the cause of whatever happens; they assume cause and effect between unrelated events; and they have difficulty in discriminating between reality and fantasy. The clear message that the parents and social workers must give to the child in middle childhood is: *"It was not your fault. It was not because you were bad in any way, or because you were unlovable. There is nothing you can*

do to make things different." Concrete thinking (6 to12 years, or older) includes literal interpretations and thinking in absolutes. In this stage, children think in terms of "either/or" (Jewett, 1984:9). Children in middle childhood need reassurance that the custodial parent will not leave them, as their non-custodial parents did. Therefore, at different ages, children will understand their experience in different ways. The researcher is of opinion that children in middle childhood must be active participants in the therapeutic process if the situation involves them. The level of cognitive development permits participation in the process, especially through play techniques.

School-aged children tend to become angry and depressed at the time of remarriage (Visher & Visher, 1996:151). They tend to have many fantasies that they can reunite their divorced parents. At times, they may make conscious attempts to do this by excluding the stepparent or exhibiting behaviour that aims to bring the two bio-parents together. This is a developmental period during which children become judgmental and form strong loyal attachments. They tend to take sides as they view one parent as being "right" and the other as being "wrong." Hostile ex-spouses often encourage this behaviour. As described in chapter 3, these children regard changes in ordinal positions in the family as important, that is, for example, now becoming a middle child in the stepfamily instead of the eldest or youngest, as they were in their previous family.

It is important that new parents respect the child's need to mourn his/her loss. It is also important that the child be given permission from his biological parents to become attached to his/her new stepparent(s). At some time in the child's life, he/she needs to be able to talk about his experience. Clinical practice has shown that especially boys in middle childhood often minimise or deny problems (Hughes, 1995; Visher & Visher, 1996). Verbalisation may be shallow and not directed to deeper feelings. All these factors may lead to sessions that are not nearly optimally productive. The researcher believes that attachment-based activities and utilising the five forms of play, as described by McMahon (1992) and Schoeman and Van der Merwe (1996), will provide boys in this age group with success, although this is a qualitative observation. During the empirical study, it became clear that very few stepparents "play" with their stepchildren. As parents and children work to build a secure attachment relationship between them, play therapy techniques help the parents to understand how their children's inner experiences affect their behaviour (Jernberg & Booth, 1999). Stepparents must be committed to

learn how to provide a family life and maintain a comfortable atmosphere in their home, while presenting reasonable choices and consequences for the children.

7.3.2 The parent

Adults have very little preparation for raising children. Many stepfamilies seek help because of the chaos in their families and their concerns regarding their children. Various aspects also confront parents. Simultaneous to their couple attachment, they must strengthen their relationship with their stepchildren. The management of their own loss determines their ability to be attached in the new couple relationship.

In building an attachment with a stepchild, the personal qualities of the stepparent are important. The task is difficult and inner strength and a great capacity is needed to meet the child's needs. Parents are asked to provide children with a high degree of affective attunement. This experience of attunement is the foundation of all change.

Stepchildren often have a history of unattachment, which greatly impedes their ability to relate to their new parents in healthy ways. Instead, they may generalise from previous relationships with their parents and engage the stepparent in destructive and manipulative ways (transference). Sometimes, the emotional demands placed on these parents are extremely high. For parents, it is crucial to be able to identify and meet their own psychological needs, apart from their relationship with the children, who must not be expected to provide their parents with satisfaction. The parents must find ways to avoid power struggles, using natural consequences as the central way of teaching the children.

Since conflict is a central reality, the parents must be comfortable about dealing with it. It is crucial that the parents and children maintain open, trusting relationships. The parents must be aware of the social worker's support and encouragement and be certain that the social worker understands how extremely hard it can be to raise stepchildren. It is crucial that the social worker does not approach the parents with the assumption that they are responsible for the child's problems. It follows that a crucial and central feature of the treatment of attachment-related problems in stepfamilies, is the parents' participation. Visher and Visher (1996:157)

support Weston (1993) in that beginning therapy provides an opportunity of helping stepparents to learn to improve the parenting of their children.

7.3.3 The therapist

Therapists can make the difference between a hopeless struggle and constructive movement in a floundering stepfamily (Papernow, 1993:304). Intervention should be structured, individualised and goal-directed, but should provide for attachment-based and structured play activities. Visher and Visher (1996:156) stress the importance of thinking in supra-family-system terms when working with stepfamilies. Adapting intervention strategies to specific circumstances and family characteristics is not at all new to the social work profession. In this challenging profession, social workers are constantly expected to adapt their knowledge base and to apply it differentially, according to many diverse problems and needs. Prime needs of social workers are flexibility in intake procedures, techniques and theoretical approaches. Intervention strategies, discussed in this chapter, provide certain guidelines and offer a creative springboard from which social workers can apply their own skills to a somewhat unfamiliar set of circumstances, but they must be tailored to suit the needs of each individual stepfamily.

It is necessary to distinguish normal feelings created by the stepfamily structure from feelings rooted in previous history. For example, when intervention seems to have little impact, due to intense stepparent's feelings, it is important to consider underlying psycho-dynamics that may intensify an already difficult experience. A primary task is to validate sources of feelings in stepfamily events. The process may proceed with weaving back and forth between step issues and family-of-origin issues. In some cases, individual therapy may be indicated in order for the family to move forward. Social workers should take care not to take sides, and to intervene with empathy for, and awareness of, the unique feelings generated by each member in the stepfamily structure. Social workers must be cautious to keep a full picture of the entire stepfamily map, especially when doing individual, couple or family therapy. Social workers consider it as a huge challenge to attend to resistance in a sensitive way.

Probably the greatest threat to the treatment process lies in the social worker's sense of uncertainty and doubt. Visher and Visher (1996) conducted a study of stepfamily therapy with 267 stepfamily couples, and explored their experience with this therapy. Nearly half of the

responses were clear and direct: the therapists were not knowledgeable about stepfamily issues and dynamics. Another problematic source is the possibility of counter transference acting out (Jernberg & Booth, 1999:134-138; Sager *et al.*, 1983:90). To become aware of the problem and understand potential dangers are the first steps in avoiding counter-transference acting out. The researcher contends that the planning and structuring of sessions and supervisory discussions could help to avoid counter-transference acting out.

Delaney (1997:47) stresses that helping professionals must aggressively involve the parents in treating the child otherwise they may be doing more harm than good. The discussion of play therapy techniques, which is aimed at parent participation, is based on this statement. Although working directly with the child can be helpful - particularly as they mature - this "close relationship" may give the child an escape route and can prevent the development of attachments within the stepfamily. The researcher is of the opinion that attachment-based activities, as described in this chapter, with the incorporation of the parents, will assist social workers in preventing coalitions to form that will impede negatively on intervention.

The child, parent and social worker each bring their own unique baggage to the intervention process. In order to be fully effective, social workers should be aware of these factors, as well as certain guidelines that can guide intervention. Work with stepfamilies requires a systemic approach, as the urge to take sides can be especially destructive. In order to combat these problems, social workers must involve all members of the stepfamily supra-system.

7.4   How play in middle childhood is different from play with the young child

In middle childhood, play demonstrates emerging intellectual, physical and social skills, as described in chapter 3. The following section provides a description of changes in play, described by Hughes (1995), Jernberg and Booth (1999) and Visher and Visher (1996), as this is relevant for social workers.

7.4.1   A decline in symbolic play

As children make greater efforts to adapt to reality, symbolic play naturally evolves into games that have rules.

7.4.2 Play and the acquisition of skills

School children take great pride in developing and refining a variety of motor and intellectual skills that, on the one hand, enhance their sense of industry and, on the other, are likely to promote acceptance by the peer group and establish their position within the group, for example, skateboarding, shooting baskets, jumping rope or climbing trees (Louw *et al.*, 1998). They can also demonstrated skills intellectually by demonstrating how well they can play a game of cards, read a book, tell a joke, or negotiate their way through a tongue-twister.

7.4.3 The child as a collector

Children, in elementary school, often acquire a genuine passion for collecting (Papalia & Olds, 1986:276). They may collect poker cards, Barbie dolls, stickers, and many more. These collections can be of great significance to their social, intellectual, and personality development, as described more fully by Hughes (1995:110). As the collection enlarges, this may boost the children's self-esteem by providing them with a sense of industry, which is important during this stage.

7.4.4 Play rituals

In middle childhood, play has many rituals, such as "Eeny meeny miny mo ...," or "One potato, two potato, three potato, four...." It often reflects both the order lines of children's thinking and the extent to which they involve ritual in the socialisation process. Learning these rituals puts a child "in the know," and learning to abide by them teaches a child how to obey rules and follow a moral order (Hughes, 1995:111).

7.4.5 Games with rules

As mentioned earlier, the order lines of thought also finds their way into children's play in the form of games with rules. These games may be sensorimotor by nature (marble or ball games, hopscotch, hide-and-seek) or intellectual (cards, Monopoly, Boogie) (Hughes, 1995; Louw *et al.*, 1998). Competition and regulations, agreed upon in advance by all players, characterise the games between two or more players. The adherence to a set of rules requires sensitivity to the

viewpoints of others, mutual understanding, willingness to delay gratification and a high degree of co-operation. It follows that games can be implemented with success in therapy with the child in middle childhood.

7.4.6   Organised sports

During childhood, the benefit of sports participation is threefold: overall physical fitness, building self-esteem and getting on with others, and working co-operatively within a group (Louw, *et al.*, 1998). By, inter alia, learning the necessary skills and winning is not all-important; the possibility that children will feel like losers in sports could be minimised.

Social workers, who work with children in middle childhood, need to act with self-confidence, imagination and a sense of humour. Beside physical size, the child's sexual and intellectual development must be taken into account.

- **Physical size**

    Due to the 6 to 12 year-old child's greater height, weight and strength, the therapist's tone of voice, sure movements and commanding attitude must convey the message, "You are capable" in a safe, playful and appropriate manner (Jernberg & Booth, 1999:342). The room should also be big enough.

- **Sexual development**

    In middle childhood, children become more aware of their sexuality. It is of crucial importance that appropriate activities be selected. Jernberg and Booth (1999:343) suggest that the therapist be of the same sex as the child. As a precautionary measure, sessions should be video-taped.

- **Intellectual development**

    In middle childhood, children are intellectually more mature, feel more self-conscious and are verbally more challenging than younger clients (Jernberg, 1979; Louw *et al.*, 1998). The social worker needs to contend with accusations with humour and confidence. Jernberg and Booth (1999:343) state: "... protest often seems to be a necessary precondition first of his acceptance and then of his enjoyment."

7.5 Common goals for intervention

No blueprint exists for unfailing success with stepfamilies. Common goals are closely linked with critical components and focus on the helping process and problems or needs of the target groups. The goals presented here are general guidelines to foster attachment (Hughes, 1997; Jernberg & Booth, 1999; Visher & Visher, 1996) and should be adopted according to the needs of each stepfamily. Intervention goals are closely linked to the intervention strategies discussed in 7.6 of this chapter. In the context of this study, the aim of intervention is to foster attachment (Hughes, 1997; Jernberg & Booth, 1999) by using age-appropriate words, language, toys and games (Schoeman & Van der Merwe, 1996).

- Social workers often need to **combine child and family work** (Hughes, 1997; Jernberg & Booth, 1999) in a milieu that

  (1)   provides ongoing support and guidance to build a sense of identity and family relationship,

  (2)   deals with life's experiences that may have led to an impaired ability to trust others,

  (3)   provides safety and guidance for grieving lost relationships, and

  (4)   establishes a protective environment in which to create and maintain new relationships between parents and children (Papernow, 1993; Visher & Visher, 1996).

- Stepfamilies should be helped to improve the relationship between the parents and children through **attachment-based activities**.

- Intervention should teach parents the necessary skills to respond with more empathy to their children's needs (**empathic attunement**).

- By establishing a **safe environment**, children should be given the opportunity to express their feelings freely. Promoting attachment behaviour, in conjunction with the parents, is relevant (Hughes, 1997:77; James, 1994:222; Jernberg & Booth, 1999:33).

- Through intervention, a healthy parent-child relationship is **replicated** by imitating active, engaging, playful and nurturing ways in which parents interact with their own children (Jernberg & Booth, 1999).

- From a **psycho-educational** approach, preventive education should be offered (Papernow, 1993:397; Visher & Visher, 1996). Knowledge about stepfamily development and feelings, normal for each stage, will empower parents and children to handle and adapt to

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certain situations more effectively. By lowering anxiety in the family, members can become more connected through shared problem-solving and communication skills (Papernow, 1993:350). By means of a better understanding of attachment, parents are assisted to identify behaviour that could foster attachment.

- Through **structured activities,** the child is relieved of the burden of maintaining control (Jernberg, 1979). The parental role strengthens as they set limits, keep the child safe and help to complete the activities (Jernberg & Booth, 1999:37).

- The parents should be helped to establish and maintain a connection with the children and to entice them into enjoying new experiences through **engagement activities** (Jernberg, 1979; Jernberg & Booth, 1999).

- Parents should be assisted to provide care, without the child having to ask. **Nurture activities** will reinforce the message that the child is worthy of care. The importance of touch in attachment must be acknowledged (Jernberg & Booth, 1999:44,400).

- Through **challenge activities,** the child is helped to feel more competent and confident by encouraging the child to take a slight risk and to accomplish an activity with the parent's help (Jernberg & Booth, 1999).

- Joint activities, aimed at acknowledging and loosening of the child's **loyalty binds,** can contribute positively to the fostering of attachment (Jernberg & Booth, 1999; Visher & Visher, 1996).

- Through play activities, children begin to **trust** that their current parents relate to them in a manner that is in their best interests (Marcus, 1991; Papernow, 1993).

- By facilitating play activities, the child should take **pleasure** in interacting with the step- and bio-parent in a reciprocal fashion (Hughes, 1997; Papernow, 1993). Through play, the emphasis is on physical, concrete, here-and-now experiences, rather than on insight and discussion (Jernberg & Booth, 1999:35).

- The child should begin to recognise, regulate, integrate and appropriately express the wide range of affect that forms the core of his stepfamily experience and developmental stage (Visher & Visher, 1996).

- Ultimately, stepfamilies should be helped to formulate **realistic expectations** from each other in terms of the new attachments (Papernow, 1993; Visher & Visher, 1996).

It can be concluded that social work intervention in fostering attachment is aimed at the parent and the child. Play activities are implemented to produce fun and exciting mutual expression in the stepfamily.

7.6   Fundamentals of social work intervention

The underlying critical components form the building blocks for social work intervention and, essentially, are part of the process's goals. Visher and Visher (1988:30; 1996), supported by Papernow (1993), stress that stepfamily members must be guided to view their problems as difficulties that are inherent in their situation. This may help them to cope more effectively with their challenges. Based on an eclectic approach, the following is considered to be important in working with stepfamilies (Papernow, 1993; Visher & Visher, 1996).

7.6.1   A supportive therapeutic relationship

In many approaches to intervention with families (Hepworth & Larsen, 2000; Minuchin, 1974; Wald, 1981), a therapeutic relationship is viewed as a primary component for the promotion of integration. Papernow (1993) and Visher and Visher (1988, 1996) describe the importance of therapeutic acceptance and support. As described in chapter 2, powerful myths, which frequently interfere with the process of integration, confront stepfamilies. This may cause stepparents to feel that something is wrong with them, guilty about not loving their stepchildren and they may become angry because of the rejection they receive from these children. Frustration may arise from the fact that the family arrangement does not bring happiness to either the children or the adults in the stepfamily. Children often feel responsible for causing tension, and regard themselves as bad or not loveable. Despite this considerable emotional pain, there tends to be little support and validation available within the family system.

A study by Papernow (1993:19) emphasises the importance of therapeutic support to restore a sense of worth to stepfamily adults. A therapists' counter-transference acting out can affect their ability to be supportive to all members of the stepfamily. Visher and Visher (1988:31-32) describe how therapists' inability to identify with the feelings of stepparents can exclude these stepparents from intervention and thus impede integration. On the other hand, over-

identification can prevent therapy from continuing on a smooth course. Sometimes, therapeutic support can reverse negative trends with surprising rapidity.

7.6.2 **Psycho-education**

Stepfamilies, who responded to this research, listed educational information as one of their recommendations to other couples who consider remarrying. One respondent wrote: *"The three most important aspects of our therapy were education, education and education."* The use of information and education focuses on the child's cognitive life and aims to develop necessary skills, but the affective and behavioural aspects are not ignored. When therapists have little knowledge of stepfamily issues, they may have difficulty in building a trusting relationship with stepfamilies. There is a great deal of information about stepfamilies that therapists can supply and which are discussed in chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation. From this research, four important areas, where education is especially important, are the following:

- stepparent roles,
- remarried parent roles,
- maintaining positive relationships with bio-parents, and
- the need for dyadic relationships within the stepfamily unit.

The researcher believes that this study's guidelines, normative data and general background can be applied as a basis for helpful educational comments. Hughes (1997:116), supported by Visher and Visher (1988:42), emphasises that information must not be supplied in a boring, dry manner with elements of criticism or belittling of the parents or children. The social worker's appropriate statements and discussion of stepfamily norms can do much to relieve tension. This study found many families who kept their status a secret. This results in them remaining unaware of, and unable to utilise, resources that might help them to understand their situation and thus deal with it more effectively. According to Papernow (1993:308), social workers, who refrain from education, are not doing enough to help these families. Their willingness to coach and share information with stepfamilies includes encouraging them to make use of literature on the subject.

Many stepparents try to change stepchildren - an effort that meets with great resistance from the children. It can be a relief to all concerned when, at an appropriate time, a social worker suggests the futility of expecting major personality changes. Pointing out the "predictable

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consequences" of stepfamily characteristics, which can cause stress in the stepfamily, can reframe a problem situation into a manageable challenge (Visher & Visher, 1988:43). When information is presented as observations, without taking sides or expressing an opinion, it can be extremely helpful.

7.6.3 Dyadic relationships

The focus of the treatment is on both the children's relationship with the therapist, and their relationship with their parents. Hughes (1997:63) identifies the following three ways of relating that enable the therapist to engage the children in any situation: empathy, curiosity, interest and playfulness. Since a new stepfamily has no history, it is important to help members to become acquainted with one another. Besides the couple attachment, there are no characteristic family feelings, because interpersonal relationships have not yet developed. Just to rely on time will take longer to yield shared memories than is comfortable. The social worker can encourage the development of relationships by assisting the family to share personal information. Chapter 2 discusses the necessity for one-to-one time in stepfamilies. The encouragement of direct communication between members can facilitate attachments. Parents consciously need to plan pleasurable times together, without feeling guilty. In the long run, this will contribute to family stability. As attachments develop, household regulations can be discussed and decisions made. The children may also feel more a part of the new family.

In a stepfamily, children often experience a loss of the biological parent's attention. Times alone with their parent, while building relationships with the other members, can reduce this impact. One boy stopped his destructive behaviour after he learned that he still had a direct line to his father. In another family, the researcher was able to help a remarried mother to understand her son's depression. She then planned to have some quality time alone with him. In the flush of her new relationship, this mother had overlooked the extent to which she had withdrawn from her son.

The situation often seems impossible if there are several children. Parents need to recognise that such contacts need not be daily, nor for lengthy periods. For example, a visit to the store to shop, driving the child to a netball game, helping with homework, chatting while cooking, or reading a Bible story might suffice.

Visher and Visher (1988:59) state that stepparent-stepchild relationships can often develop more easily in the absence of the biological parent. Many remarried parents long for good relationships between their spouses and their children, while unconsciously they sabotage the formation of these relationships by being unable to release a little of their closeness with their children, so that there will be room for the stepparents to form a good relationship with these children. The understanding and support of a social worker can enable many families to make the necessary shifts in their relationships with their children, so that attachment has room to develop.

7.6.4   Directive and structured

Hughes (1997:42) explains that, initially, a directive stance may be important in working with poorly attached children. As soon as it is no longer necessary, the therapists transfer control to these children, who then are able to use it therapeutically, rather than by controlling and manipulating others. Children may misinterpret the non-directive stance as permissiveness. Other therapists emphasise the need to adapt a directive approach with children who experience difficulty in forming an attachment to others. Ann Jernberg and Phyllis Booth (1999) indicate that therapists must be in charge of the therapeutic activity, or the children will manipulate the treatment to avoid becoming engaged with the therapists in any possible beneficial way. Beverly James (1994) also stresses the need to be active and direct, while Stanley Greenspan (1988) emphasises the need for mild directiveness when children avoid two-way communication with the therapists, and for even greater directiveness when children engage in misbehaviour. Therapista muar direct the therapeutic process persistently, patiently, playfully and relentlessly. Hughes (1997:56) explains the benefit of this approach: "With the therapist in control … the child will … find himself being drawn into a close relationship with another human being."

For Visher and Visher (1988:57) it is also important that social workers offer specific suggestions to help reduce anxiety in the stepfamily. For example, when non-residential children visit and do not want to include the younger residential child in activities, the social worker can suggest to the adults that the younger child invite a friend home. This may bring about a positive change. In a somewhat similar stepfamily with a visiting nine-year-old girl with no friends during these weekends, the parents could take an active role in inviting children in the

neighbourhood to a barbecue or a visit to the park. By so doing, the girl will have more security to reach out to friends in subsequent weekend visits.

7.6.5 Empowerment

Individual experiences in the area of dependency in the family of origin may be powerful determinants of how a person will react to a future sense of helplessness. For adults who have had poor dependency relationships in childhood, the lack of control and ambiguity in stepfamily life could be extremely difficult. As discussed in chapter 2, a stepfamily forms part of a larger supra-system. The connection that exists between a child and two parents, who live in two different homes, result in it being impossible for one household to make unilateral decisions. Ex-spouses often have little desire to be co-operative. Legally, custodial parents have greater powers than non-custodial parents, concerning their parent-child relationships. Although therapy cannot change society's impact in this area, therapists must recognise the resultant anger and depression. Stepfamily members feel that they have little control over many situations. This could contribute to a sense of helplessness. In this area, social work intervention can be extremely helpful. Visher and Visher (1978:155) summarise this as follows: "A stepfamily is forever scrambling to maintain some semblance of equilibrium. There is an ever-present ambiguity and sense of confusion ..." Visher and Visher (1988:207) contend that this is why parents turn to the authority of the courts to try to gain greater access to the children, or to change the custody or living arrangements. In so doing, the power of the person seeking this support is enhanced. Tension may be released if the residential parent does not contend the case for more power. Instead, the parental control can be converted into productive actions, for example planning pleasant outings with the children, using money in the family interest, and relaxed telephone conversations with the children.

For a remarried parent, a source of trouble, particularly concerning the children, is the need to share power with his/her new spouse. A lack of balance may tend to create tension between the couple (Kaufman, 1993; Sager *et al.*, 1983; Visher & Visher, 1988, 1996). This sharing of power may stir deep fears. Learning what these fears are, where they may have originated, and the necessity and value of sharing power can be extremely important therapeutic tasks.

A social worker can assist the family to understand their helpless feelings and work with them to delineate the areas of control that exist in that household. As soon as adults accept that they cannot control the other household, feelings of impotence are reduced and effective situational changes can be sought. Another way of increasing adults' feelings of mastery and control is to concentrate initially on three areas of concern that need to be changed. This is necessary for the family's emotional wellbeing. Visher and Visher (1988:47) explain that, although children imply that they want full control, they still want adults to be in charge. More often, it is a case of them wanting to be heard on issues being discussed. Two simple ways of giving children some control over their lives, is by:

- giving them opportunity to choose their own breakfast, or
- determining their own dress code.

The rule seems to be: allow children age-appropriate responsibilities of controlling their own lives, while being appropriately considerate of others.

7.6.6   Reducing therapeutic tension

The lack of family loyalty creates a fragile family system – it can fragment stepfamilies, splitting them along biological lines. Frequently, it is necessary to reduce anxiety and tension in therapeutic sessions. When the chaos in the family continues into the therapy session, the following suggestions by Visher and Visher (1996:146) may be helpful to reduce the tension:

1) Reduce direct interaction between family members if there is a lot of anger, or suggest that they communicate via the therapist. This allows the therapist to reframe positively what has been said.

2) Individual needs can be more adequately met in individual sessions.

3) With permission from the remarried parents, a tape recorder or videotape recording can be used. This can allow individuals to experience the impact of their behaviour on others and can be an invaluable tool in some situations.

Visher and Visher (1988:60) come to the conclusion that certain stepfamilies are unable to achieve integration, despite therapeutic assistance.

7.6.7 Language

As play is children's natural way of expression and communication, the researcher considers implementing it as a means of entering the world of stepchildren in middle childhood. As such, it is a critical component of social work intervention. School-aged children's play reflects their general trends in social, intellectual and personality development, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Thompson and Rudolph (1996:80,343) support the statement that techniques of play should be primary in reaching out and counselling children younger than 12 years. Because interaction (e.g., singing, laughing, and clapping) is so vital in the living relationship of the normal parent-child attachment, these play activities certainly have a role in fostering attachment with children in middle childhood who are entering a relationship with a new stepparent.

The language that social workers use in therapy with stepfamilies has great significance, because it conveys what therapists mean by the concept, "family." Visher and Visher (1988:61) warn that inaccurate terms could reinforce unrealistic beliefs held by stepfamily members. It has been suggested that the term "household" be used, rather than "family" and "living at weekends" instead of "visiting at weekends." Phrases that should be avoided include "your new father," or "your new mother" (Visher & Visher, 1996). Reference to the stepfather as "father" may cause children to mistrust the therapist, because the stepparent's role is different from that of the biological parent, not interchangeable with it. To combat this problem, therapists can ask the child in the initial interview: *"What do you call your stepparent?"* Therapists can then subsequently use the same designation.

7.6.8 Distinguish feelings from behaviour

Although people have little control over their feelings, they can exercise a great deal of control over actions - (Covey, 1997; Papernow, 1993; Visher & Visher, 1996). Stepparents, who feel negative towards a stepchild, may be relieved to know that they can decide on how they wish to behave towards them. However, stepparents need to be "fair" in their dealings with these children. Shifting behaviour in this manner could result in a positive change in relationships.

7.6.9 Restructure and reframe

Attitudinal studies (Covey, 1997) illustrate that the perception of an event, rather than the event itself, determines the influence of that event on the individual. Social workers often find themselves in the position of having to reframe situations and, in so doing, turning "problems" into "challenges" (Visher & Visher, 1996). For example, a stepparent, who complained about a stepchild who constantly tried to come between his parent and stepparent, can be assisted to grasp that the child is merely afraid of being left out. This could reduce the tension and help the couple to work out acceptable guidelines.

7.6.10 Negotiation

The structure of the stepfamily stresses the importance of extraordinary negotiation skills. Visher and Visher (1988:52) found that household chores could be negotiated well in stepfamilies. To work out "who does what" is an important developmental task. Regarding household jobs, adults need to be aware of the influence of children who move between households.

The conference method, correlating with the win-win approach that Mol (1981) describes, can be applied with success. In short:

- Each member has two minutes to state how he/she feels about a subject (avoiding a "right" or "wrong" evaluation of members' differences).
- After a period of silence, each member suggests three different ways that might work for the family.
- The family settles on an acceptable solution.

In a situation where the children are part of the discussions, they can, for example, help by taking responsibility for drawing up a list of tasks. By involving the children in family management decisions, this often produces their feeling of participation and belonging.

To help stepfamily members to state their needs, accept their validity when they differ, and work out satisfactory solutions through negotiation, are essential for a stepfamily's happiness.

To master these skills of negotiation not only benefits the household, but is also valuable in a variety of settings outside the family milieu.

7.6.11 Relate past family experiences to present situations

Visher and Visher (1988:47-51) identify the following four areas that could lead to current problems for stepfamily members:

7.6.11.1 Losses

A stepfamily is a family born of loss. As described in chapter 2, adults and children may fear interpersonal commitment, due to previous losses. To learn to trust again could be a protracted therapeutic task.

7.6.11.2 Attachment experience

Insight into attachment patterns that the remarried couple experienced in their families of origin, may explain their failure to establish satisfactory adult attachments in their new stepfamily situation. This is in line with the attachment theory that suggests that early childhood attachment experiences determine later adult relationships (Bartholomew *et al.*, 2001:44; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver & Hazan, 1993:29-70).

7.6.11.3 Child-rearing experiences

Adults' individual differences regarding child-rearing practices can often be traced back to child-rearing in their families of origin. This could pave the way for negotiating situations that they consider to be important. Inclusion of the children could foster mutual understanding and improve the household's functioning. Initially, the position of the children's biological parent may be of importance, and changes in the household should be made gradually.

7.6.11.4   First marriage experience

Not only do the former spouse's expectations and behaviour affect the expectations of the new spouse, but serious problems may stem from a lack of severance from a previous partner. Understanding earlier experiences can be crucial in the resolution of current problems.

7.7   The intervention strategies of social work with stepfamilies

In this section, the developmental stages of the stepfamily will be applied to outline the effective intervention of social work. Although this study's purpose is not to describe general intervention strategies, such as marital and family therapy, to explore stage-specific strategies, as they may influence attachment-based interventions is considered to be necessary. Attachment work must be viewed in the context of family work.

Stepfamilies confront a range of problems that often are diffuse and intertwined. Problems are interrelated, which means that one gives rise to, or results from, another. In working with stepfamilies, social workers must remain systemic. Empathy with the individual who requires assistance is necessary, but without blaming absent role players. Taking sides can be very destructive, given the fragility of members' connections with each other. Social workers need to appreciate each family member's dilemma. Wald (1981:187) contends that, if social workers can intervene before destructive communication patterns are fixed, stepfamilies can be helped to build "crescive bonds." In this way, attachment can be strengthened. Resistance must be treated with respect and sensitivity. As Papernow (1993:371) states, stubbornness may often be the only protection against the painful awareness of a wish that cannot be.

7.7.1   Intervention in the early stage

Positive fantasies of stepparents loving the children and being loved by them, as discussed in chapter 2, suffuse the early stage of becoming a stepfamily. The prerequisite attitude of this stage is recovery from the loss over the first marriage. It follows that social work intervention will aim at helping the stepfamily to (a) attend to fantasies and (b) facilitate the process of "getting-to-know" each other while remaining biologically organised (Papernow, 1993; Visher & Visher, 1996).

Papernow (1993:311) warns that, during education and therapeutic work, therapists must have great respect and caring when raising awareness to unvoiced longings. As differences between family members become increasingly obvious, painful emotions may emerge. Successful interventions will help members to connect negative emotions (jealousy, loyalty binds, inadequacy) to real events. Social workers, who make use of the genogram (Hartman, 1978; McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985), will support efforts to create an understanding of the feelings experienced. Awareness of each member's inner working model could also be helpful. Social workers can explore losses and provide empathic support for an individual, couple, stepfamily or the entire supra-system. When working with an individual member, social workers must be cautious about not taking sides while retaining a full picture of the entire stepfamily.

Visher and Visher (1996:47), supported by Browning (1994:175-198), devote a part of their writings to "Whom to see in therapy." In the early stage, the stepfamily does not have a "family" perspective and parent-child attachments may be stronger than the attachment between the new couple. The above writers suggest that the couple and the children be interviewed individually at this stage. The following are important suggestions for social workers when working with stepfamilies in the early stage:

- Social workers must sense the presence of fantasies with great respect and caring.
- They must identify the influence of external systems (e.g., grandparents).
- They must ascertain to what extent individual tasks have been completed.

Stepparent: Stepparents are apt to interpret that they are the cause of everything going awry in the new family. These stepparents must be assisted to grasp that their feelings are normal. They need help in naming their feelings and tying them to actual specific events. Furthermore, they need to be heard and understood, and the fact that they are operating on foreign ground must be acknowledged. Social workers could help by asking the stepparent to list all their "*I sure wish(es)* ..." and considering them in the light of the real situation. Books and drawings can address grief work (e.g., following a previous spouse's death, or losses). Intimate time with their partners, familiar routines and belongings, sources of mastery and nourishment outside the stepfamily (employment, friends, hobbies) must be encouraged. Stepparents must be considered as agents of change in the family: they must decide on a couple of agenda items that really matter, and disregard the rest.

Bio-parents: The social worker can help the parent to name feelings, for example, feeling torn and needing to keep the peace, grief work with the non-custodial parents, for example, guilt about parenting the partner's kids when "*I can't parent my own kids.*" Other needs that therapists might become aware of, include:

- The need to decrease the pace of change.

- The need for one-to-one relationships.

- The need for some time alone.

Bio-parents must be encouraged to spend some separate time and space with each child, as well as with their new partner. They manage many people and feelings and occasionally need some relief from that task. Biological parents often speak on behalf of their children's needs and frequently advocate maintaining the status quo in the new family. They may need to be coached to provide the empathy and intimacy that outsider stepparents require.

Children: Observation and clinical experience suggest that the following issues impact on most children (Lutz, 1983; Visher & Visher, 1996:155):

- Conflict between the biological parents (e.g., over the telephone or at the door).

- Hearing the biological and stepparent argue.

- Feeling "caught in the middle" between the two biological parents.

- Adjusting to the rules that are set by the stepparent.

- Not being able to see the non-custodial parent.

- Being blamed for everything that goes wrong.

- Accepting discipline from the stepparent.

- Sharing a room with other siblings.

- Wishing things could revert to the way they were before the divorce.

- Feeling responsible for making the new family work.

With children in middle childhood, the following could be kept in mind (Visher & Visher, 1996:155):

- Children's routines must be changed gradually, but then only as much as necessary.

- Children must be kept informed about plans and general arrangements.

When children return from their other household, a gradual entrance must be allowed by first sharing what has taken place during their absence. Parents must refrain from pushing them to share information about their activities while they were away, or commenting negatively when they do share information regarding their sojourn in the other household.

While all children experience loss, children in middle childhood deal specifically with conflicts concerning loyalty. Helping parents and stepparents in therapy to understand their children's concerns, is a major avenue of support for these children. Conversely, working directly with children can also be helpful, particularly as they mature and grow more independent. For Papernow (1993:328), it is important that children hear that their own hearts have lots of room, that they will always have a special place for their bio-parent(s) and that, when they are ready and if they want to, they will have enough room to make a special place for the stepparent(s). This is an aspect that will be discussed more extensively in a following section.

Drawing from chapter 3, issues where children need help, could be listed as follows:

- Losses (of friends, family, time with custodial parent, access to non-custodial parent, familiar routines).
- Conflicts regarding loyalty.
- Residential children: feeling invaded and displaced.
- Non-residential children: not having an own place, unfamiliar rules and rituals.

Children may also be assisted to identify their needs, for example:

- Time alone with a bio-parent.
- Input into changing rules.
- No more disparaging of one parent by the other.
- A say into family rituals.
- A slower pace of change.
- Some personal space for non-residential children (e.g., a special dresser, in which to unpack, or bed to sleep on).

In the early stage, stepfamilies should be encouraged to spend most of their time in mini-families. This provides time when bio-subsystems (parent-child, siblings) do not have to adjust their familiar routines to include a stranger. It gives the new subsystems (couple, stepparent-child, or stepsiblings) time together, without competing with bio-subsystems. Families must be encouraged to identify a few areas where they can easily function together. Rituals, such as "family nights" or negotiating holidays, offer options for creating a new middle ground. They must have the opportunity to name feelings accurately and hear other family members' experiences.

7.7.2 **Intervention in the middle stage**

Conflict and couples searching for help mark the middle stage. Social work intervention aims at lowering their anxiety and completing their developmental tasks. As identified by Papernow (1993:384), the stepfamily's tasks in this stage can be summarised as follows:

- To confront differences between insider and outsider needs and between adults and children's experiences without blaming.
- To begin to influence each other constructively for changes.
- To generate new stepfamily rituals, customs and codes of conduct.

Placing conflict within a developmental context can be very comforting (Visher & Visher, 1996:7); in other words, informing the stepfamily that they are in the middle stage of stepfamily development and on their way towards accomplishing stepfamily integration. Social workers also need to assess whether the family members are able to communicate specifically about their feelings and needs. In the middle stage, it is important that stepfamily members master certain skills:

- Asking questions for clarity.
- Being specific.
- Being creative in solving problems by focusing on one or two items.
- Stopping to savour work that they have accomplished.
- Learning from their efforts.
- Having a break before they handle the next issue.

Stepfamilies are dependent on these skills for becoming an integrated family, and social workers can assist in this process.

Papernow (1993:339), supported by Visher and Visher (1996), suggests the following strategies in this stage:

- Every intervention must begin with positive feedback about what the family is doing.
- The amount of empathy must increase amongst family members with statements, such as *"That must have hurt."* This will lower the anxiety.
- Family members must be guided to slow down and listen to each other; this can increase the sense of togetherness.

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- Social workers must acknowledge their noticing contact in the family by saying: "*Look what happens when you just let her/him know you heard her/him, even though you don't agree!*"

- Therapists need to be sensitive to unexpressed losses and issues of the family of origin (e.g., where both partners come from homes with alcohol abuse).

- Problem-solving and communication skills must be taught.

- Assist with strategic planning on potentially problematic family events. These may include:

  - Family celebrations, where biological and step rituals have already been defined (e.g., Christmas, birthdays).

  - Events that bring together the binuclear family (e.g., school plays).

  - Life cycle celebrations where the new family meet people connected to the previous family (e.g., an aunt's birthday party, weddings or graduations).

Stepfamily members need to be aware of how differently each member could experience these rituals. The family can then create new traditions.

A special kind of strategic planning is needed for supra-system events. Before potentially divisive family gatherings, step-couples could plan a special time together that may provide the necessary "glue." Being aware of life-cycle events, the social worker can play an important role in establishing norms of binuclear co-operation. For example, where the event revolves around a child, a joint session with the adults to co-operate could help to loosen the child's loyalty ties. Although plans sometimes do not succeed, careful planning could ensure that celebrations will serve the function of integrating the new family, rather than split the system. Couples learn to work together only toward the end of the middle stage. Family and marriage therapy may then be appropriate.

7.7.3   Intervention in the later stage

Because satisfactory communication characterises the later stage, help is seldom needed now. Social workers could add to the stepfamily's support by recognising what has been accomplished. New issues will now arise in the context of solid, reliable step-relationships as an identity had been formed. Individual family members may need assistance if they find themselves sabotaging new feelings. Intervention may require work on an individual (loss of

family), couple (custody disputes), family (addition of another stepchild), or binuclear level across households (minimising loyalty conflicts). New challenges must be received in the context of already established stepfamily ties and accomplishments.

The expense of a wedding or impending college fees may send stepfamilies back to earlier stages. Stepfamilies must be reminded of all that they have already accomplished. Papernow (1993:356) emphasises that stepfamilies must be assured that reverting is not a sign of failure, but a common and normal developmental occurrence. Work then proceeds according to the stage in which the family is functioning. New life events may revive old fantasies. The social worker must create space for each member to express feelings and sometimes question each other. Slowing down the pace may also help to lower anxiety.

7.8   Social work intervention with children in middle childhood who are part of stepfamilies

With the number of stepfamilies increasing (Central Statistical Service, 1990; Kelly, 1995), it is reasonable to expect social workers to become more involved with stepfamilies and the problems of these adults and children. Due to their increased language development, children in middle childhood are often very clear in verbalizing their feelings about loss, loyalty and lack of control. One respondent said: "*It's not easy having two moms ... I keep missing someone ... I want to be with everyone ...*" (girl, 8 years). It follows that children in middle childhood can often be directly involved in intervention. Due to the focus of this study, social work intervention with children in this phase will be explored. This section will provide a basis for a discussion about the application of forms of play and techniques.

7.8.1   Provide emotional support

Many therapists find that anger and grief are present in stepchildren whom they interview. Difficulties in the new family must be acknowledged and children need to know that "stepfamilies can become families ... full of respect and joy" (Kaufman, 1993).

7.8.2 Validate feelings

By means of therapy, the child has an opportunity to express feelings freely. To understand the cause and accept the validity of their feelings could be of major importance to children (Visher & Visher, 1996).

7.8.3 Help with mourning of losses

Since death or divorce precedes stepfamily formation, children must be permitted to express their sorrow about their losses. Chapter 2 describes losses in greater detail. For Visher and Visher (1996:166), children are only able to recognise gains in their new situation after they have acknowledged and expressed their grief. Grief and mourning are processes that are not concluded when the crying stops (Freud, 1963). Jewett (1984) provides an extensive description of techniques that the social worker can apply to assist a child who mourns for losses.

7.8.4 Empower children

A feeling of lack of control may contribute to a child's anger and depression. Often, children would rather consider being responsible for the divorce, than feel that they were helpless to prevent it from happening. To address this issue, Visher and Visher (1996:167) suggest that children first identify areas where they can exercise control. This may include the freedom to choose clothes, breakfast, a hairstyle, or what school activities they wish to join. This will give them control and mastery over their lives in areas commensurate with their age.

7.8.5 Release children from their responsibility for parents

While completing the IPPA, children often commented that they do not discuss their problems with a certain parent, because they do not want to burden the parent with their feelings. Children often take responsibility for their remarried parents after the remarriage. Hostility between bio-parents makes children especially vulnerable. By means of therapy, children may need to understand that an adult's behaviour is his/her responsibility (Visher & Visher, 1996).

7.8.6 Coping with anger

Gardner (1976) believes that hostility and anger are extremely common reactions found in these children. Hostility may be felt toward the natural parent, then displaced onto the stepparent without caring about the "loss" of this person. The child can clarify the source of his/her anger to arrive at a better understanding of the situation in the safety of a therapeutic relationship: "I guess you're really upset … with your mom, but it's easier to be mad at your stepmom …. I'll bet they each do a lot of things that are different - some things you like a lot, and some you wish were different, and it makes you angry" (Visher & Visher, 1996:172).

7.8.7 Help children "out of the middle"

As explained in chapter 3, children are often trapped in the middle between two hostile bio-parents. Depending on the child's age and personality, the social worker can talk to the parents or teach the children to defend themselves by saying, for example: "I don't want to carry messages back and forth. The two of you must telephone, write or talk to each other."

7.8.8 Help children to talk about their feelings

In the light of children's cognitive development as discussed in chapter 3, in middle childhood, they have more verbal ability to put their feelings into words. Yet, sometimes they may behave in ways that frequently upset the adults. A trusting and supporting therapeutic relationship is essential to help children to talk about their feelings. The children may write a letter to their parents, or be assisted by the therapist to talk in a less threatening way. For James (1994:71), weather is a great metaphor for effect. Weather, like emotion, is always present. People cannot make it disappear, and they really would not want to, because it makes life interesting. Children can understand that they can deal with any amount of weather if their house is good and strong, but that even a small rainstorm could be uncomfortable if they are not accustomed to it, or if they are caught unawares.

Visher and Visher (1996:173) warn that parents must not meet only around negative interactions. They should also contact each other for positive reasons. Children must be able to talk to the adults about their wishes to get to know, or be with, the other parent.

7.8.9 Time together

Following a parent's remarriage, children often experience the loss of time and attention from that parent. Social workers can help these children to understand that less time does not mean less love. An example of their reactions to their toys or to their friends may be used. Many situations can change; the time each child may spend with certain toys or friends may change, but their caring for them does not change. This is an area in which social workers may need to educate the parents to the need for one-to-one times in their homes.

7.8.10 Use supportive techniques

In literature, Schoeman and Van der Merwe (1996) describe fully the five forms of play, upon which the following discussion is based. The use of play techniques is an accepted method in social work intervention. In South Africa, Smith (1982) and Porter (1983) had described it previously from a social work perspective. The purpose of this study does not allow for a complete discussion of the many techniques that could be applied. This discussion, by no means, is all-inclusive, but aims to serve as a creative springboard for social workers to include these techniques and other forms of play suitable for intervention with children in stepfamilies. Activities that are described in this section are not designed to address all the important problems that stepfamilies face. The attachment therapy, as described, has been designed for short-term intervention. This is in line with Visher and Visher's (1988:236) observation, namely that stepfamilies appear to remain in therapy for a much shorter time than nuclear families.

Schaefer (1988:1) describes techniques as "… step-by-step procedures used by practitioners to induce and guide change." Techniques aim at promoting stepfamilies' new understanding of the supra family system's complexity and providing a direction of where they need to go. Members should eventually be able to view themselves and their family as an attached and integrated system. Play therapy may be used in various ways to facilitate communication about stepfamily matters. A range of techniques to further the helping process has been identified and briefly described (Jennings, 1993:1999; Jernberg, 1979; Jernberg & Booth, 1999; McMahon, 1992; Sager *et al.*, 1983; Schaefer, 1988; Visher & Visher, 1996:127; Wald, 1981):

7.8.10.1   **Genograms**

Like ecomaps and family trees, literature describes genograms as a technique for assessment of play, which are widely used (Hartman, 1978; McGoldrick & Gerson, 1985; McMahon, 1992:39, 188; Schoeman & Van der Merwe, 1996:105). The social workers' accept "differences" in the two households and demonstrate this by having two sets of toy family figures in the office, and by their respect for the various surnames in the family. This is further facilitated by collaboration with the family in drawing a genogram during the assessment stage. Children are able to participate with the adults in a creative process. In this way, the children's later treatment could be more acceptable to them and less likely to be unconsciously sabotaged by the adults. Genograms are helpful aids to:

- Provide information about previous marriages, the length of the single-parent household and details about shifts in the children's living arrangements.
- Shorten the length of the assessment, because of the correctness of the interpretations or by the elimination of irrelevant material.
- Provide an understanding of incomplete mourning and the feelings experienced.
- Give the family a specific task on which to work together, while, simultaneously, providing the therapist with important information.
- Clarify structural causes of the bio-parents' and non-custodial parents' experiences.
- Identify what some of the major difficulties are.
- Discuss all the individuals in the family. For the child, the genogram makes the absent parent "real" and gives him/her permission to discuss this parent.

The following genogram is included to illustrate the basic principles.
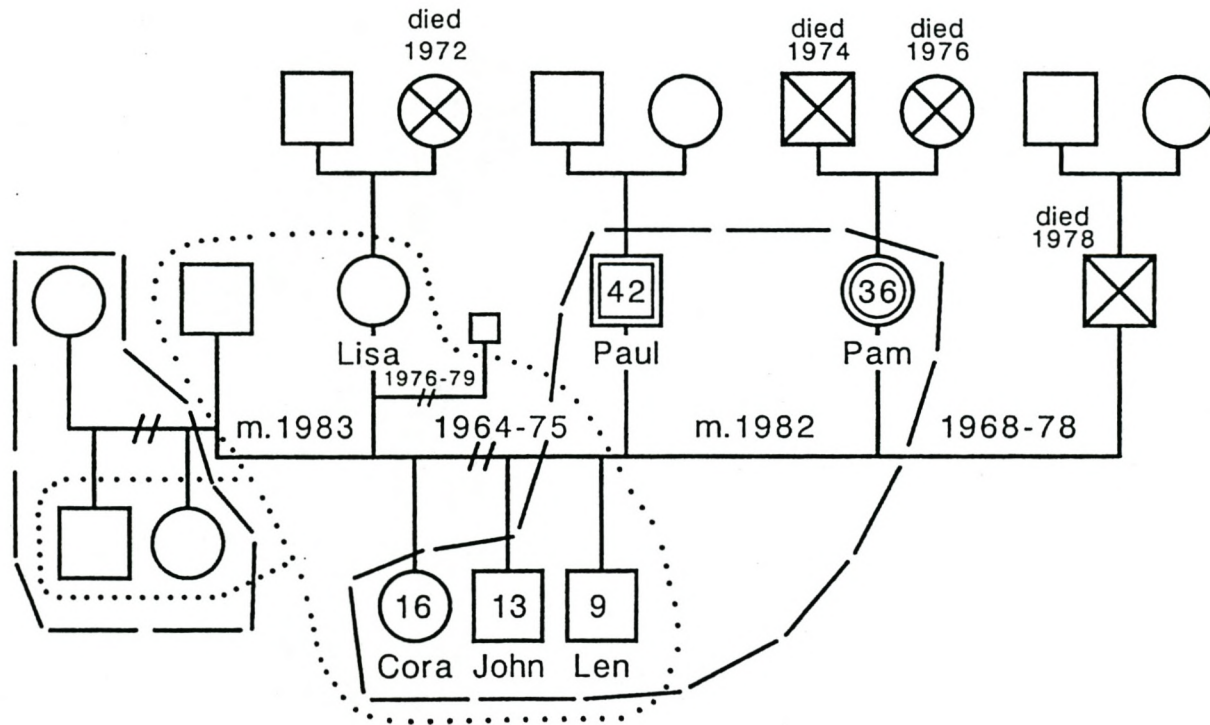
FIGURE 7.1 : Sample genogram

7.8.10.2 Relaxation play

Aimed mainly at sustaining the helping process, **relaxation play** helps to create an atmosphere and motivation for children, which is optimal for intervention. This form of play is especially prominent in the initial and final parts of each session. In working with children who form part of stepfamilies, the following examples of relaxation play could be helpful:

- **Board games** of physical skill, strategy or chance could be used to enhance socialisation, and communication, to assess and teach problem-solving, and for ego enhancement (Schaefer & Reid, 1986:19,109,195,277). By playing with the family, the social worker informs the children that grown-ups are willing to meet them on their own territory and that they understand their need not to be interrogated and lectured endlessly. These games give the family members a chance to communicate with each other simply and directly, in the presence of a neutral witness.

In the initial and final phases of intervention, board games could promote a strengthening of the therapeutic relationship. To see how children respond to winning or losing also has assessment value. Three boardgames could be suggested. **Don't talk to Strangers** has a strong psycho-educational approach, educating children about sexual abuse, behaviour toward strangers and relationships. Secrets (good or bad) can also be discussed. The latter aspect is especially relevant to children who are caught "in the middle." **That's Life** is another board game educating children about life's situations. In this case, cards with situations that occur in stepfamilies could be added. Another appropriate game is the **Dice Game** that Keshet (1995) describes. This game focuses on family members who tell each other what they like about each other. Sharing positive comments in a game with a therapist helps family members to feel safe. Hearing what others have to say reinforces each person's self-esteem and hearing that others appreciate them, later increases people's capacity to endure difficult times. The last board game for relaxation is the **Tangram**. Valuable conclusions can be drawn regarding a child's problem-solving style, and the impact it could have on the rest of the family.

- **Puzzles**, with figures that fit into a wooden frame, can help children to see who fits where in the child's daily life, and to realise that everyone has something different to offer (McMahon, 1992:146).

-   **Stick and peel houses, finger puppets** and **play people** can, for example be used to rehearse with a child how he/she will manage an access visit. It could also be done with the whole family.

7.8.10.3   Assessment play

Ideally, assessment of the child should start with parents and teachers. **Assessment play** helps the social worker to gain a clearer picture of the child's experience, by using some of the following techniques:

-   The use of **board games** and the **genogram** as tools in assessment has already been discussed.
-   **Incomplete sentences** can provide valuable information about the child's experience and coping skills. The following examples illustrate this:

-   Sometimes stepchildren feel or think …
-   Some kids who are learning to trust their new mom need to …
-   After you learn to ask with words, you'll probably get …
-   When you hug this way, your mom is likely to feel good about it …
-   Because you are a stepchild, you probably haven't learned …

7.8.10.4   Creative play

Creative play can activate growth and change by expressing feelings. For some children, art is an important medium of communication (Hughes, 1997:129; Schoeman & Van der Merwe, 1996:138).

-   Besides **clay** and **dough, drawings** are found to be very useful. A child in middle childhood can be asked to draw his new family in shapes and colours, explaining that everyone has smooth sides as well as jagged bits.
-   A demonstration by Hughes (1997:130) involves **drawing** a picture of a child with a large hole in his body. The drawing represents the child; the hole represents the empty feeling that the child often feels inside. Since that feeling is so unpleasant, the child tries to fill up the hole to feel complete, for example, by eating, stealing or lying. The only thing that can

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fill the hole is attachment to the new parents by means of signs of love (hugs and smiles). The therapist can refer back to this image by asking how far the hole has been filled up.

- To illustrate their different perceptions to the family, the researcher flashes three pictures for 15 seconds to each of the family. Everyone is asked to write down what he/she has seen. In the same manner, members receive the opportunity to write down what they think the other members of the family saw. They then discuss different perceptions, as well as the fact that they need each other to have a full picture. One cannot assume that one knows how another member is thinking or feeling.

7.8.10.5   Dramatic play

Dramatic play is often combined with creative or biblio-play to provide emotional distancing in order to confront reality:

- **Tug-of-war**. Divide into teams, for example, parents versus the child and the therapist. With each team holding onto the ends of a rope, the parents pull as hard as they can to bring the child to their side. This game is used to enact the process of claiming the child and drawing him/her into the family.

- Pulling one side of a hanging **mobile** and asking what happens, is a technique to help a family to understand that everyone is affected when one member is disturbed or unhappy.

- **Balloons** can be used to demonstrate the effect of stress.

- By using a **model family** and wooden rods of differing lengths, the child's needs for firm links and boundaries can be illustrated. It also shows who is in contact with whom.

- Through play, children can also be helped to express grief. By using a **mosaic set,** patterns can be made showing how the child's family previously lived together. Then the child can be helped to talk about moving away, close relationships and new family members. The child can also be asked to show how he/she would like things to be.

- A **graffiti wall** can be drawn, covered with all the words or slogans associated with stepfamilies, such as school, fear, stepparent, visiting, rules and conflict. Each aspect is then explored.

- The **face game** (Jewett, 1984:56-58) is very versatile to encourage children to talk about their feelings. The face can be drawn to resemble what he/she feels like when, for example, thinking about ... Christmas or a new family. The question could be asked: "What does the face look like when mom phones?" To describe angry and sad feelings as

shapes or sounds can also be effective. Ways of dealing with these feelings can also be explored. It is important that the child learns to differentiate feeling bad, and/or having a parent who feels bad because of something the child did, or did not do, because of being a bad person.

- A game of **This could happen** could be adapted for stepfamily circumstances (Schaefer & Reid, 1986:174) to develop the skill of expressing feelings further. This game was initially developed to facilitate a discussion of children's problems and fears in the light of changing families. The therapist tells the child about a hypothetical situation and the child must guess one of the following:

  I'm sure this could happen

  I think this could happen, but I'm not sure

  I don't think this could happen, but I'm not sure

  I'm sure this could not happen.

Examples could include:

- A child's parents are remarried. The child needs braces for her teeth. The mother and stepfather do not have enough money. The father has enough money but refuses to pay for the braces. Could this happen?

- A mother tells a child that the child's father is a bad person. Could this happen?

- Children in school tease a child because she has a stepmother. Could this happen?

- A child is angry with his father. But, instead of acting angrily with his father, he acts kindly with his father and acts angrily with his stepmother. Could this happen?

This game can be constructed to address a wide area of children's concerns in stepfamilies, for example, communication, sibling relationships, hostility between bio-parents, happiness in the stepfamily or loyalty issues. This is considered to be appropriate for children in middle childhood.

McMahon (1992:192) and Jewett (1984) are valuable sources of ideas for **anger work**. Children need to first recognise the source of their feelings so that they can direct their anger appropriately. After becoming aware of the part of the body, hands, feet or mouth that a child uses to express anger, the child's attention is directed to the safe discharge of anger by means of, for example, yelling or writing expletives, thumping clay or tearing newspaper, kicking or stamping on a cushion or a punch ball. McMahon (1992:192) refers

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to Owen and Curtis (1988) who further suggest throwing paper balls at a target, drawing, modelling feelings or the object of anger, and then destroying it, the empty chair and role play directed by the child. The researcher has found that once anger has been discharged, other deep-seated feelings of hurt, sorrow or loneliness start to emerge.

- Anger work may often precede the **candle ceremony** as part of mourning the loss of a parent and letting the child know that he/she can love a new family without giving up the parental love. The child may light a candle, signifying love and feelings of care, for each member of the family. Sorrow is expressed by moving the candle, still alight, representing loss of that person but showing that love and feelings of care remain as a good memory. Jewett (1984:17) described an alternative to the above-mentioned as follows: The social worker holds a candle and explains that when the child was born, he/she had the gift to give love and to receive love. This gift is like a light; it makes you feel warm and happy. At first, the child became accustomed to the mother (light candle for the mother). She cuddled and the child and he/she felt close to her. Then another candle can be lit for the father. It could be explained that the child was really special also to the father. He played with the child after work and helped to bath him/her. Then, depending on the situation, this can be followed by the father and mother having stopped loving each other. The dad went to live in a different house, but the child's love light kept burning. (In case of death, the candle can be extinguished.) Now, the social worker can explain that the mother is going to marry Danny (fictitious name). He will be living in their house and doing some of the things for the child that the dad used to do when he and the mother were still married. In time, the child may become accustomed to having Danny to help him with things. He/she may get close to him. (Light a new candle representing the stepparent.) When that happens, there will be one more person for the child to love and who loves him/her. Important for the child to remember is that the light of love for his dad will not go out. Loving is not like soup that you dish up until it is all finished. The child can love as many people as he/she becomes close to. But, no one will make the child blow out any of the candles. The child needn't take the love away that he/she feels for the dad, so as to love the stepparent. This ritual can be easily adapted to almost all circumstances; for example, when children are caught in a tug-of-war. Because the candle was chosen for its symbolic connection with how children perceive love, as light and warmth, it is important to close the ritual

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carefully. One can say: "*I can see that you understand about loving. I don't think you need the candles any more today to help you. This candle is not really your mother. She will not stop loving you if we put it out. Are you ready to help me blow it out?*" This needs to be repeated for each candle before it is extinguished. McMahon (1992:192) warns that this technique must not be used lightly and it should be used only at an appropriate stage.

7.8.10.6   Biblioplay

In the early stage, **biblioplay**, which incorporates bibliotherapy, can be a powerful and dynamic means to help children explore their own experiences. In South Africa, biblioplay has been fully described by Porter (1983:276) and Schoeman and Van der Merwe (1996:108), and hence, will not be discussed in this study.

- One family who took part in this study experienced major relationship problems. Parts of the book, *Dinosaurs divorce* (Brown & Brown, 1986) was worked through with one of the children, especially sections relating to feelings and misconceptions. Other subjects raised were access arrangements and her relationship with her parents and peers.

- Another stepchild experienced fear about the new family and adjustments that had to be made. *What kind of family is this?* (Seuling, 1985) not only helped her to understand her own feelings, but the distance that the book provided from her own situation, seemed comforting, while offering her the opportunity to ask questions and talk about her feelings.

- The *Life book* is a written record using photo's, pictures or children's drawings that supply children with information about their birth, who they lived with, their family background and their present living arrangements (Jewett, 1984:129). James (1994:152) describes it as a "… chronicle of their life … events up to the present." The *Life book* is a useful tool for children who have been separated from their bio-parents. It could convey the following:
    * The reason why the child has been separated from one parent.
    * It was not the child's fault.
    * A child has the right to his/her parents.

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Besides assisting the social worker to address loyalty conflicts or attachments to stepparents, feelings of fear that the new family will not work out, and fear of change, can be handled. Misinformation, feelings and values can be clarified. The *Life book* also provides a possibility for grief resolution (Schaefer, 1988:377-394). Since the *Life book* promotes the fostering of attachment, the step- and bio-parent's help can be a powerful resource. Helping children to work through feelings about the past can support both the parent and child in their relationships.

- An effective way to help the stepfamily to develop a map is the adjustment of the **Life Line,** as described by Papernow (1993:331). Attention is drawn to the fact that each family member had to travel a different road to arrive where they are now. Members are asked to describe their experience in the family, chronologically, from the time they first met and are encouraged to ask each other questions. In this way, family members are encouraged to be curious about each other and to improve the quality of the information that they give each other.

The Life Line can be adapted for children in stepfamilies. Children must be enabled to incorporate the new family as part of their life stories. The researcher usually incorporates such life reviews in the early stage when working with a visual lifeline. A language develops that could form part of communicating problems at home, for instance, problems may be referred to as knots, and life compared to a washing line. Concretising may enhance communication about stepfamily issues.

One daughter (10) and her biological mother joined the researcher in an interview where the lifeline was implemented. By working concretely with props, such as houses, dolls, pictures and photos on the line, sexual abuse by the stepfather was explored. The daughter used this opportunity to ask her mother questions such as:

Why did you allow it to happen?

Do you believe me?

Why don't you divorce him?

In the safe therapeutic space, they could show the emotions that they previously had repressed to keep a façade of being "OK." The daughter could also discuss concerns about her access to, and her safety with, her mother. Although there were still many unresolved issues, the lifeline promoted the therapeutic process.

In working with stepfamilies, a new line is connected to the child's line, with dolls representing the significant people in the child's life. Movement of the dolls plays out the dynamics in the family. Children see how their lines get tangled up with the lines of parents when they experience problems (e.g., custody disputes). The whole line shakes when one or two of the dolls move, showing the mutual influence of family members on each other.

Parents are encouraged to use the lifeline technique and life storybook as part of their family's problem solving and communication. Children learn to trust the strengths of their care-givers, as they are singled out as skilful unravelers of knots and family tangles during the intervention.

7.9   Facilitating attachment in stepfamilies

Winnicot (1960) considers a "good enough" attachment between a care-giver and a child as a relationship that meets the needs of both. Attachment activities confirm that the child is special and loveable, that the world of the child is now a place of responsiveness, lively experiences and growth and that the child can count on others. In the session, the parent and child enact assurances by recreating the early attachment process for the parent-child. So, stepchildren can begin to experience their new parents as reliable and trustworthy.

As described in chapter 4, all stepchildren have suffered the trauma of the absence or loss of a care-giver. Children, who have suffered neglect, as well as abuse, may benefit by attachment therapy, but, sometimes, a more comprehensive program is necessary to address attachment-trauma problems more directly (Jernberg & Booth, 1999:295). This study does not aim to address severe attachment disorders. For that purpose, reference can be made to three comprehensive and effective treatment models for trauma:

1)   *Attachment trauma therapy* by Beverly James (1994)

2)   *Method for facilitating developmental attachment* by Daniel Hughes (1997)

3)   *Treating attachment-disordered foster children* by Richard Delaney (1997).

Attachment may be promoted by offering parents guidelines for attachment activities with their children. By playing together, positive interaction between parents and children mostly follows. Central to these reciprocal experiences are touch, smiles, eye contact, facial expressions and movement. In this way, attachment behaviour can be fostered by uncomplicated but enriching activities modelled on Theraplay or Sensorimotor play (James, 1994:134; Jernberg & Booth, 1999; McMahon, 1992:44; O'Connor & Schaefer, 1994:371). Attachment activities may be included as part of Filial therapy, where parents are trained to work with their children. In general, parents must be able to maintain an attitude that is accepting, empathic, loving, as well as curious and playful. Social workers may select relevant activities as homework exercises. Activities must be chosen on a case-by-case basis and custom-tailored for each child's needs. It can move children to feeling nurtured and protected as attachment contact with the parent increases. For children who have a stepparent, often the most pressing need is to build a trusting relationship. Although not precluding the value of traditional play therapy with the child, the present study builds on the assumption by Jernberg (1979:138) that the most effective therapy treats a child and his/her parent(s) simultaneously. The parents are essential to the process of changing the relationship between themselves and their child. They are the ones to whom the child should turn for security and comfort. When both the bio-parent and stepparent cannot be present, they may attend the sessions alternately.

The following activities, borrowed from Jernberg (1979), Jernberg and Booth (1999), and Jewett (1984), are especially suitable for use when the parent(s) are present. Depending on how an activity is carried out, it may fit more than one dimension. Activities already discussed can be adapted and used in sessions.

7.9.1 Structure activities

The purpose of structuring activities are to "… delineate time and space clearly and to teach mastery through the internalisation of rules" (Jernberg & Booth, 1999:90). Structuring activities with stepfamilies may include the following:

- Follow-the-leader train. All participants stand and form a line holding onto the waist of the person in front of them. The first person moves in a particular way and all the others imitate him/her. The leader goes to the back of the line and the new leader demonstrates a

new way to move around the room. This can also be done by sitting in a circle and moving only arms, head and shoulders.

- Funny ways to cross the room. The adult and child stand at one end of the play space, another adult stands at the other end of the room. The second adult directs the child to come toward her in a funny way, for example, hopping, crawling, crab walk, elephant walk or sliding.

- Hide something on the child and find it. One adult hides and the other finds something on the child.

- Making life-size body tracings, hand-and-foot prints and aluminium-foil nose or ear moulds. One can explain that the head-to-foot length is equal in span to the arms spread. The child can be made alert to the fact that he/she is unique and special in his/her own way.

7.9.2 Engagement activities

Jernberg and Booth (1999:90) define the purpose of engaging activities as to: "… entice the child into engagement with his caretaker, to maintain an optimal level of arousal, to teach the child where he leaves off and the rest of the world begins, and to enhance his experience of himself as a separate individual." Engaging activities may include:

- Free throw. Divide into teams. Using cotton balls, marshmallows or newspaper balls, each team throws the balls at the other, trying to get rid of all the balls on their side.

- Hide and seek. The child hides under a blanket or under pillows and the parents are asked to find him/her. Parents should be coached to make appreciative comments about their child as they look for him/her. Once the child is found, the parents hug him/her.

- Counting freckles.

- Any unexpected activities suggested by the child's own actions.

7.9.3 Nurturing activities

Nurturing activities are intended to communicate to the child that he/she can get what he/she needs without always having to work for it, deny the existence of the need for it, or be rejected for expressing the need. Nurturing activities are generally soothing, calming, quieting and reassuring (Jernberg, 1979). Such activities with stepfamilies can include:

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- Hair combing, lotioning, powdering, giving a manicure, face painting, making powder or paint footprints, or trying on flattering hats are acceptable forms of nurturing.
- Soft and floppy. The parent gently jiggles each arm and leg and lets it flop to the floor. Once the child is relaxed, ask him/her to wiggle just one part of his/her body: stomach, tongue, big toe, and so forth.
- Look for letter or number shapes in the lines of the child's palms.

7.9.4 Challenging activities

The purpose of challenging activities are to: "… enhance feelings of competence, provide the frustration that makes it possible for the child to master tension-arousing experiences and teach that playful combat, competition and confrontation can release and focus pent-up tension and anger in a safe, direct, controlled way" (Jernberg & Booth, 1999:91). Challenging activities include:

- Competition in challenging activities for a child in middle childhood is stiffer. Thumb, arm or leg wrestling becomes a more strenuous exercise.
- Crawling race. The parent and child crawl on their knees as fast as they can around a stack of pillows. They must try to catch each other's feet and then switch direction.
- Straight face challenge. The child has to keep a straight face, while the parent tries to make the child laugh either by gently touching him (avoid sensitive spots or prolonged tickling) or by making funny faces.
- Balance pillow on head, feet or stomach.
- Pillow fights.

All the activities that were described, can serve to:
(a) Offset the child's experience of mistrust, loneliness or isolation.
(b) Enlist the child's co-operation.
(c) Negate the child's "bad," worthless, alienating or impotent self-image.
(d) Allow the child to view him-/herself as a contributing team member.

This makes them suitable for working with stepfamilies.

7.10   Conclusion

Social workers who want to integrate play therapy techniques in working with stepfamilies, often find themselves at a loss for ideas. The activities illustrated in this chapter are intended to guide them to build their armamentarium of techniques to use for this target group. From the empirical study, it is clear that children are adaptable to changes, provided that the rules are clear and unambiguous. Their way of expressing feelings with behaviour can make things difficult for the stepparent. Interventions discussed in this chapter could make a huge difference.

This chapter reviews 11 specific therapeutic interventions that are considered helpful in working with stepfamilies. It is important to help stepfamily members to begin to feel more comfortable, more hopeful, less helpless and to have some understanding that what they have been experiencing is normal. This may require therapists to be more active and more directive than they are with other patients.

To foster attachment remains the task of parents and their children. As described in this study, social workers should apply, adapt and refine a structured and goal-directed approach as part of the facilitation of this process. Within the five forms of play, children can use symbolic communication to voice their feelings. While following the lead of juvenile clients, social workers are not non-directive and totally child-centred. They implement structured techniques, within the five forms of play, to recreate healthy parent-child relationships in order to foster attachment between the children and their parents (stepparents).

A central feature of the intervention strategies discussed, is the active participation of the parent with whom the child is expected to learn to form an attachment relationship – in this case the stepparent. The child's new parent becomes a co-therapist whose abilities and commitment are necessary components of the therapeutic process.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1   Introduction

In the USA, as well as in South Africa, the stepfamily is believed to be the fastest growing form of family. From a developmental approach, chapter 2 discussed the development of a stepfamily that entails certain developmental tasks. Since a significant percentage of remarriages take place when children are in their middle childhood years, chapter 3 discussed the developments that take place during this stage, as well as the impact of remarriage on this stage of development. Chapter 4 investigates the attachment theory and concludes that very little is known of attachment behaviour in middle childhood. In order to justify the marital relationship's unique contribution in stepfamily integration, chapter 5 provides a description of adult attachment, as applied to the stepfamily. In order to fulfil the aims of this study, attachment in the stepfamily from the child and parent's points of view were examined. The final domain of investigation was on how social workers can assist stepfamilies to consciously recreate a phase of attachment, in order to facilitate this process in stepfamilies. The empirical research yielded rich descriptions of attachment in stepfamilies from which social work interventions could be described. The forms of play, with supporting techniques, provided a framework for discussion in intervention. The findings, presented in detail in chapter 6 on attachment in the stepfamily, will be evaluated in the following sections of this chapter.

The purpose of this section is not to repeat all the findings, but to highlight the major trends in this study.

8.2   Conclusions

The following conclusions are based on the study of literature, empirical research and the researcher's clinical experience in intervention with stepfamilies.

8.2.1 Families with mutual children

In this research, the number of families with a mutual child was small (28%; n=14). In support of research findings by Ganong and Coleman (1988), this research found no significant difference with regard to their perception on attachment between stepfamilies with a mutual child and stepfamilies without a mutual child. The conclusion has been drawn that a mutual child may be a blending tool, or an alienating force, depending on the developmental stage of the family into which the child was born.

8.2.2 Rationale for the present marriage

The empirical research verified that, although remarried couples marry for love and companion-ship, as in first marriages, they seem to have somewhat unrealistic expectations of their second or third marriages that may lead to distress when they are not met.

8.2.3 The children's contact with the non-custodial parent

In this research, it was found that 46 (67.6%) of the children had contact with their non-custodial parent. Earlier studies by Fanshel and Shinn (1978) and Marcus (1991) found that, over time, maintaining contact may improve the children's emotional and behavioural adjustment. The majority of the children (87.9%; n=29) in this sample who had regular contact with the non-custodial parent, felt positive about their stepparents. It appears that more open family boundaries, which facilitate multiple exits, may be adaptive in these stepfamilies.

However, the contrary is also spelled out in clinical literature. Frequent contact between former spouses "to work together for the children" may obscure the fact that these parents have not yet truly separated (Visher & Visher, 1988; Sager et al., 1983). This may create a barrier to the formation of a solid relationship with the new spouse. It has also been suggested that, in the case of regular contact, stepmothers and biological mothers are more likely to engage in competitive relationships that precipitate conflicts regarding loyalty in children (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992).

8.2.4 Stepparent-stepchild relationships

It has been argued that the stepparent-stepchild relationship is pivotal in stepfamilies (Crosbie-Burnett, 1984). Moreover, the suggestion has been made that marital functioning is a product of the children's presence and, more specifically, the parent-child/stepchild relationships (Clingempeel, 1981; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Pasley & Ihinger-Tallman, 1988).

As confirmed in this study, many stepparents enter remarriage with an unrealistic expectation of instant reciprocal love in their relationships with their stepchildren (Visher & Visher, 1988). Although not tested empirically, Mills (1984) has suggested that mutual attachment of the stepparent and stepchild will take as long as the child's age at the time of the remarriage.

In this research, lower attachment levels in stepmother-stepchild relationships were reported. It appeared that stepmothers have more problematic relations with their stepchildren than stepfathers, as confirmed in the writings by Clingempeel et al. (1984), Duberman (1975), Furstenberg and Nord (1985), and Visher and Visher (1978). Two factors may contribute to this:

1. The stepmother is often expected to assume the primary role of caretaker and disciplinarian (Fine et al., 1992) and this leads to the children's resentment and conflict - especially by daughters.

2. Non-custodial mothers remain much more actively involved with their children than do non-custodial fathers (Hetherington, 1999), and stepmothers and biological mothers are more apt to engage in competitive relationships. This may precipitate loyalty conflicts in the children (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992).

It appeared that the stepparent-stepchild relationship varies with gender. Lower attachment levels were reported specifically in stepdaughter-stepparent relationships, as regards children in middle childhood.

Research findings indicated that the more attached the stepfamily is perceived to be, the greater the impact of the stepchildren. Stepdaughters are more likely to experience problems with adjustment in the stepfamily than stepsons (Clingempeel et al., 1984). The researcher ascribes this tendency to the fact that the more positive the marital relationship, the more positive the stepparent-stepchild relationship will be.

8.2.5 Couple attachment

In contrast to research findings by Furstenberg *et al.* (1987), Giles-Sims (1987), and Hetherington *et al.* (1992), who consistently found differences between spouses on dimensions of the marital relationship, this study found none. That women tend to evaluate their relationship as more attached than men, was interesting. Significant differences in self-reports of marital attachment have not been found in this study (Ganong & Coleman, 1994).

Remarried couples have been observed to be, inter alia, more conflictive and less supportive (Bray & Berger, 1993; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). In this study, remarried partners reported a high rate of conflict regarding childrearing issues. This is in support of findings by Schultz, Schultz and Olson (1991). The researcher is of opinion that the complexity in stepfamily relations, and children having different patterns of biological relatedness to the parents, may contribute to more conflict. It has been well substantiated that parents are more involved and less disengaged with their own biologically related children (Bray, 1999; Bray & Berger, 1993).

It is clear that marital attachment is connected to the parent-child relationships and that it relates to the child's gender and/or the duration of the remarriage. Age was not a variable, since this study restricted the children to middle childhood. Fine and Kurdek (1992) supported this finding, namely that in stepfamilies there is a positive correlation between the adult's perception of marital attachment and the relationship with the stepchildren.

The empirical study verified that couple attachment and flexibility declines with the course of the marriage. Building on the developmental approach, Carter and McGoldrick (1988) and Olson (1983) found that the children's stage of the life cycle (in middle childhood near the adolescent stage) has an influence on attachment.

From the literature study in chapter 5 (Ganong & Coleman, 1994), it appears that marital dissolution occurs more rapidly and frequently in remarried families. Besides the problems of building couple attachment in the presence of children, this study identified that difficulty in co-parenting is a contributing factor to conflict. The researcher contends that the spouses' individual personality characteristics increase the probability of their having problems in their intimate relationship, for example, depression and alcoholism.

8.2.6 Family attachment

Contradictory findings are reported on family attachment. In this research, on the self-report measuring scales, most participating stepfamily members (82%) considered their families to be attached units. However, an examination of the stepparent-stepchild relationships, couple and family attachments, proved that these families are not strongly attached (Amato, 1994; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). This study supports the findings that stepfamilies are less attached and more flexible in response to change (Bray & Berger, 1993; Visher & Visher, 1988).

The results clearly demonstrate that the children did not necessarily hold similar perceptions of the attachment in the stepfamily as those of the parents.

8.2.7 Attachment behaviour

Findings confirm that attachment to the custodial parent remains the primary source of security, and that the child's willingness to participate in the partnership is of interest (Waters *et al.*, 1991). The variable of gender has already been discussed. Research findings from this study support the statement of Bowlby (1969/1982) and Waters *et al.* (1991) on the close supervision partnership in middle childhood. The researcher is of opinion that, when stepparents persistently encounter resistance and aversive behaviour, they may become more distant and disengaged (Bray & Berger, 1993; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). The question remains if this could contribute to the men's extreme scores on couple attachment.

There has, regrettably, been little research into the attachment in middle childhood and the subsequent attachment in the stepfamily.

8.2.8 Social work intervention with stepfamilies

The proposed intervention strategies, discussed in chapter 7, and aimed at children in middle childhood to facilitate attachment, are not meant to be final and static. They are regarded as a starting point, open for adaptation to the child's needs and characteristics.

For social workers in private practice and at welfare agencies, it is important to have an informed body of knowledge about the child, the parents as part of the stepfamily, and the process of intervention. Then social workers will constantly be able to adapt their knowledge base and apply it differentially according to the needs.

The critical components of social work intervention with stepchildren in middle childhood have been identified as follows:

- Provide emotional support
- Validate feelings
- Help with the mourning of losses
- Empower children
- Release children from their responsibility for parents
- Cope with anger
- Help children "out of the middle"
- Help children to talk about their feelings
- Time together
- Use supportive techniques

The five forms of play, together with strategies to facilitate attachment, must be viewed as the starting point for attachment work with stepfamilies (or adoption and foster families).

8.3   Recommendations

The following section contains recommendations, based on the findings and conclusions drawn in the research.

8.3.1   Assessment instruments

Greater attention should be paid to attachment indices for researchers' full investigation into attachment behaviour in middle childhood. Making use of cut-off points will enable social workers to interpret information at hand more accurately.

8.3.2   Ongoing training of professionals

Attachment therapy is a relatively new field for social workers and it is necessary to incorporate this into undergraduate and postgraduate university training. Valuable information is available

in this dissertation. The attachment information can also be applied to adoption and foster care work.

It is recommended that social workers, in private practice and at welfare agencies, accept responsibility for their own further education on subjects, such as stepfamily intervention.

8.3.3 Social work intervention

The researcher suggests that social workers help stepfamilies with the developmental approach described in this study. This implies strategies appropriate to each stage, five forms of play and supporting techniques.

Each social worker must be knowledgeable about stepfamily development, as well as the child in middle childhood. The social worker can make a difference between a hopeless struggle and a constructive movement towards stepfamily integration. Social workers must have the necessary skills in counselling stepfamilies, as well as children.

Regarding attachment intervention, the custodial parents must be considered as co-therapists and must also be involved in therapy, as such. The non-custodial bio-parent must be advised to give the child permission to attach to the stepparent.

To ensure that intervention strategies suit the needs of each individual child and his or her family, social workers should use various approaches eclectically, but also integrated to promote stepfamily integration.

The significance of custody modification has increased in South Africa and the assumption that only the mother can care for a child, belongs to a past era. The father, as well as the mother, is capable of exercising custody over a child. Collaboration is needed between social workers and social systems, such as legal and education systems. This would facilitate a sharing of relevant information and skills with regard to stepfamilies and custody matters. The social work profession has a meaningful contribution to offer in cases of custody disputes.

The social worker could participate in parent education programmes by providing information and guidelines regarding remarriage. Emphasis should be on understanding the process of stepfamily integration within the developmental framework, rather than on pathology.

Attachment-based intervention must be viewed in the context of the broad spectrum of integrative service delivery, for example, couple and family intervention and enrichment programmes.

8.4   Research directions

It is recommended that further research be conducted on the following topics:

- Longitudinal studies of custody arrangements should be undertaken, with particular focus on the effect of children's changing developmental and social needs, sex role identification, children's satisfaction with custody and visitation arrangements and how this satisfaction affects remarried family adjustment.

- There is a lacuna of information in the area of attachment behaviour in middle childhood. South Africa can enter into this debate and contribute to the expansion of the attachment theory. That collaboration is needed between relevant professionals in conducting research of this nature and extent, is realised.

- The researcher became aware of the extent of family violence in stepfamilies. Research should focus on this tendency, and strategies for prevention and intervention should be outlined.

- Clearly more research is needed on the long-term effect of stepfamilies on adult attachment behaviour. Ways to restore attachment should be explored. The effects of shattered basic assumptions and changed views of the world with regard to family life should be included in such a study.

- As described in this study, social work intervention strategies should be researched and developed further. It can also be tested with adoption and foster care families.

- Research is needed into the development of standardised attachment scales for South Africa.

- South Africa is an uncharted territory in respect of cross-cultural attachment research. That this kind of research is specialised and requires major investments on the part of the researcher, is realised. Given the situation of Aids orphans and cross-cultural and international adoptions increasing, this kind of research is overdue.

8.5   Conclusion

There are several conclusions and recommendations that were made based on the findings of this study.

By describing stepchildren's attachment needs and also specific intervention tools, this study will assist social workers with focused therapeutic interventions to reach out to children in middle childhood, who are part of stepfamilies. By constantly developing and refining the forms of play and underlying techniques suggested here, social workers will be able to help stepparents and children to build better relationships through attachment-based play.

The children described in this study have experienced care-taking inconsistencies, failures or losses early in their lives that may influence the development of secure attachment in adult life.

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ANNEXURE A

2001

Permission to Use FACES II

I am pleased to give you permission to use **FACES II** in your research project, teaching or clinical work with couples or families. You may either duplicate the materials directly or have them retyped for use in a new format. If they are retyped, acknowledgement should be given regarding the name of the instrument, the developers' names, and Life Innovations.

In exchange for providing this permission, we would appreciate a copy of any papers, theses or reports that you complete using **FACES II**. This will help us to stay abreast of the most recent developments and research regarding this scale. We thank you for your cooperation in this effort.

In closing, I hope you find **FACES II** of value in your work with couples and families. I would appreciate hearing from you as you make use of this inventory.

Sincerely,

David H. Olson, Ph.D.

AWARE   PREPARE   PREPARE-MC   ENRICH   MATE
Building Relationships   Empowering Couples   Coping & Stress Profile

Sarel

From:	"Mark Greenberg" <mxg47@psu.edu>
To:	"Lesley Corrie" <lcorrie@mweb.co.za>
Sent:	04 Februarie 2002 02:04
Subject:	Re: IPPA

ANNEXURE B

Yes, Lesley same in the US.

This email serves as official authorization for Lesley Corrie to utilize the IPPA in her thesis research. In return, please send a copy of the thesis when completed.

regards

UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH
Department of Social Work
20 April 2002

ANNEXURE C

STEPFAMILY ATTACHMENT – A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE
Consent

1. With this I, ..., consent that we as a family, my child/ren between 6-12 years of age and we as parents may be included in a research project conducted by Lesley Corrie, focusing on attachment in the stepfamily.
2. It is explained to us that the procedure that will be followed includes semi-structured interviews as well as the completion of questionnaires by the parents and child/ren.
3. We understand that this study will contribute to a understanding of attachment in the stepfamily and that this will be to the benefit of social workers as well as stepfamilies.
4. We take note of the fact that all information will be confidential, but that it will be described as part of the doctorate thesis.
5. I am comfortable with the language that the study is conducted in. We had the opportunity to ask questions whenever necessary.
6. Our participation is completely voluntarily and free of charge.

Signed on ....2002.

....
RESPONDENT

STATEMENT BY INTERVIEWER
I declare that:
1. The information as stated above, is explained to the respondent and ample time is given for questions.

2. The interview is conducted at:

	Yes	No
My office		
The respondents' home		
Public place		
Other		

3. My impression about the credibility of the responses
....
....

4. Duration of interview
....

Signed on 2002

....
INTERVIEWER

I

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COMPLETION BY (STEP-)PARENTS

```
No of region.........................
No of group........................
No of family.......................
```

1. Highest level of education?

	Self	Spouse
Matric	1	1
Diploma	2	2
Grade	3	3
Post grade	4	4
Other	5	5

2. Is this your *first / second* or *third* marriage? (Circle the correct answer).

3. Is this your spouse's *first / second* or *third* marriage? (Circle the correct answer).

4. Length of current marriage

Years	Months

5. How is your previous marriage dissolved?

Death of spouse	1
Divorce	2
Not previously married	3

6. How is your spouse's previous marriage dissolved?

Death of spouse	1
Divorce	2
Not previously married	3

7. How many years passed since your previous marriage and your remarriage?
   Husband: ....
   Spouse: ....

8. Why did you decide to remarry?
   ....
   ....

9. Age and gender

	Age	Gender	Relation		
			Father	Mother	Both
Father					
Mother					
Residential children					
Non-residential children					

10. Does the presence of stepchildren have a negative impact on your current marriage?

Always	1
Often	2
Sometimes	3
Seldom	4
Never	5

Please describe ……………………………………………………………………………………
………

> **Attachment is the emotional bond which grows between a child and his parents and vice versa.**

10. How attached is your current family?

1	2	3	4
Strongly attached	Attached	Uncertain	Unattached

11. Explain in your own words why you consider attachment important in a stepfamily?
………
………
………

12. Which factors positively contributed to your family's attachment?
………
………
………

13. What family activities do you have that is aimed at developing attachment?

....

....

....

14. Which factors had a negative impact on your family's attachment?

....

....

....

15. What impact do you think will unattachment have on a stepfamily?

....

....

....

....

16. Do you have any words of wisdom for other stepfamilies regarding attachment?

....

....

....

....

17. Any advice you'd like to offer?

....

....

....

Thank you for your time

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CHILDREN IN STEPFAMILIES

ANNEXURE E

No of region: ....
No of group: ....
No of family: ....

1. Gender

Male	1
Female	2

2. Age

Years	Months

3. In what grade are you?

Grade: ....

4. Describe in your own words who your family is.

....
....

5. Do you have a stepfather or a stepmother?

	Yes	No
Stepfather		
Stepmother		

6. Are your biological parents divorced or has one of your parents passed away?

	Yes	No
Deceased		
Divorced		

7. How many stepbrothers and –sisters do you have?

8. Where does your stepbrothers and –sisters stay?

	Yes	No
Biological mother		
Biological father		
Grandfather		
Grandmother		
Other family / friends		
Foster care		
Children's Home / Industrial School		

9. Who decided where you must stay?

    ....
    ....

10. How do you feel about that?

    ....
    ....

11. How often do you see your other parent?

    ....

12. With whom do you discuss your personal problems?

    ....

13. How do you feel about your stepparent?

    ....
    ....

14. How do you believe your stepparent see you?

    ....
    ....

15. What does your family do when you are all together?

    ....
    ....

FACES II: FAMILY VERSION

ANNEXURE F

David H. Olson, Joyce Portner & Richard Bell

1	2	3	4	5
Almost Never	Once in Awhile	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost Always

Describe Your Family:

____ 1. Family members are supportive of each other during difficult times.

____ 2. In our family, it is easy for everyone to express his/her opinion.

____ 3. It is easier to discuss problems with people outside the family than with other family members.

____ 4. Each family member has input regarding major family decisions.

____ 5. Our family gathers together in the same room.

____ 6. Children have a say in their discipline.

____ 7. Our family does things together.

____ 8. Our family discuss problems and feel good about the solutions.

____ 9. In our family, everyone goes his/her own way.

____10. We shift household responsibilities from person to person.

____11. Family members know each other's close friends.

____12. It is hard to know what the rules are in our family.

____13. Family members consult other family members on personal decisions.

____14. Family members say what they want.

____15. We have difficulty thinking of things to do as a family.

____16. In solving problems, the children's suggestions are followed.

____17. Family members feel very close to each other.

____18. Discipline is fair in our family.

____19. Family members feel closer to people outside the family than to other family members.

____20. Our family tries new ways of dealing with problems.

____21. Family members go along with what the family decides to do.

____22. In our family, everyone shares responsibilities.

____23. Family members like to spend their free time with each other.

____24. It is difficult to get a rule changed in our family.

____25. Family members avoid each other at home.

____26. When problems arise, we compromise.

____27. We approve of each other's friends.

____28. Family members are afraid to say what is on their minds.

____29. Family members pair up rather than do things as a total family.

____30. Family members share interests and hobbies with each other.

FACES II: COUPLES VERSION
David H. Olson, Joyce Portner & Richard Bell

ANNEXURE G

1	2	3	4	5
Almost Never	Once in Awhile	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost Always

Describe Your Marriage:

_____ 1. We are supportive of each other during difficult times.

_____ 2. In our relationship, it is easy for both of us to express our opinion.

_____ 3. It is easier to discuss problems with people outside the marriage than with my partner.

_____ 4. We each have input regarding major family decisions.

_____ 5. We spend time together when we are home.

_____ 6. We are flexible in how we handle differences.

_____ 7. We do things together.

_____ 8. We discuss problems and feel good about the solutions.

_____ 9. In our marriage, we each go our own way.

_____10. We shift household responsibilities between us.

_____11. We know each other's close friends.

_____12. It is hard to know what the rules are in our relationship.

_____13. We consult each other on personal decisions.

_____14. We freely say what we want.

_____15. We have difficulty thinking of things to do together.

_____16. We have a good balance of leadership in our marriage.

_____17. We feel very close to each other.

_____18. We operate on the principle of fairness in our marriage.

_____19. I feel closer to people outside the marriage than to my partner.

_____20. We try new ways of dealing with problems.

_____21. I go along with what my partner decides to do.

_____22. In our marriage, we share responsibilities.

_____23. We like to spend our free time with each other.

_____24. It is difficult to get a rule changed in our relationship.

_____25. We avoid each other at home.

_____26. When problems arise, we compromise.

_____27. We approve of each other's friends.

_____28. We are afraid to say what is on our minds.

_____29. We tend to do more things separately.

_____30. We share interests and hobbies with each other.

i

INVENTORY OF PARENT AND PEER ATTACHMENT (IPPA)

Authors:

© Gay C. Armsden, Ph.D. and Mark T. Greenberg, Ph.D.

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This questionnaire asks about your relationships with important people in your life; your mother, your father, and your close friends. Please read the directions to each part carefully.

Part I

Some of the following statements asks about your feelings about your <u>mother</u> or the person who has acted as your mother. If you have more than one person acting as your mother (e.g. a natural mother and a step-mother) answer the questions for the one you feel has most influenced you.

Please read each statement and circle the <u>ONE</u> number that tells how true the statement is for you now.

	Almost Never or Never True	Not Very Often True	Some-times True	Often True	Almost Always or Always True
1. My mother respects my feeling.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I feel my mother does a good job as my mother.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I wish I had a different mother.	1	2	3	4	5
4. My mother accepts me as I am.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I like to get my mother's point of view on things I'm concerned about.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I feel it's no use letting my feelings show around my mother.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My mother can tell when I'm upset about something.	1	2	3	4	5

	Almost Never or Never True	Not Very Often True	Some-times True	Often True	Almost Always or Always True
8. Talking over my problems with my mother makes me feel ashamed or foolish.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My mother expects too much from me.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I get upset easily around my mother.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I get upset a lot more than my mother knows about.	1	2	3	4	5
12. When we discuss things, my mother cares about my point of view.	1	2	3	4	5
13. My mother trusts my judgment.	1	2	3	4	5
14. My mother has her own problems, so I don't bother her with mine.	1	2	3	4	5
15. My mother helps me to understand myself better.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I tell my mother about my problems and troubles.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I feel angry with my mother.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I don't get much attention from my mother.	1	2	3	4	5
19. My mother helps me to talk about my difficulties.	1	2	3	4	5
20. My mother understands me.	1	2	3	4	5
21. When I am angry about something, my mother tries to be understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I trust my mother.	1	2	3	4	5
23. My mother doesn't understand what I'm going through these days.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I can count on my mother when I need to get something off my chest.	1	2	3	4	5
25. If my mother knows something is bothering me, she asks me about it.	1	2	3	4	5

Part II

ANNEXURE H

This part asks about your feelings bout your <u>father</u>, or the man who has acted as your father. If you have more than one person acting as your father (e.g. natural and step-father) answer the question for the one you feel has most influenced you.

	Almost Never or Never True	Not Very Often True	Some-times True	Often True	Almost Always or Always True
1. My father respects my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I feel my father does a good job as my father.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I wish I had a different father.	1	2	3	4	5
4. My father accepts me as I am.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I like to get my father's point of view on things I'm concerned about.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I feel it's no use letting my feelings show around my father.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My father can tell when I'm upset about something.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Talking over my problems with my father makes me feel ashamed or foolish.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My father expects too much from me.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I get upset easily around my father.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I get upset a lot more than my father knows about.	1	2	3	4	5
12. When we discuss things, my father cares about my point of view.	1	2	3	4	5
13. My father trusts my judgment.	1	2	3	4	5
14. My father has his own problems, so I don't bother him with mine.	1	2	3	4	5
15. My father helps me to understand myself better.	1	2	3	4	5

	Almost Never or Never True	Not Very Often True	Some-times True	Often True	Almost Always or Always True
16. I tell my father about my problems and troubles	1	2	3	4	5
17. I feel angry with my father	1	2	3	4	5
18. I don't get much attention from my father.	1	2	3	4	5
19. My father helps me to talk about my difficulties.	1	2	3	4	5
20. My father understands me.	1	2	3	4	5
21. When I am angry about something, my father tries to be understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I trust my father.	1	2	3	4	5
23. My father doesn't understand what I'm going through these days.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I can count on my father when I need to get something off my chest.	1	2	3	4	5
25. If my father knows something is bothering me, he asks me about it.	1	2	3	4	5

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COMPLETION BY STEPPARENTS

No of region:...............................
No of group:................................
No of family:...............................

Age of child:....................

Which of the following statements is true in your child's relationship with you?

	Never	Sometimes	Always
1. Seeks parent when injured.			
2. Screams at parent in anger.			
3. Accepts restrictions related to safety.			
4. Enjoys having parent scratch back or talk before going to bed.			
5. Stays angry at parent for a long time.			
6. Open with parent about social worries when they occur.			
7. Helps parent by keeping certain areas of the home or sets of toys or clothes tidy.			
8. Feels like parents are always in the way.			
9. Gets angry when disciplined.			
10. Uses home as a main base for play activities.			
11. Pulls away if parent is affectionate.			
12. Requires close supervision.			
13. Accepts that parent is right when disciplined.			
14. Lies to parent.			
15. Comes to parent for help when in trouble.			
16. Is clinging and immature with parent.			
17. Jokes with parent.			
18. Proud of parent.			
19. Interested in parent approval when achieving something new.			
20. Reminds parents or retells stories of good times had with parent.			