

## **Coping and the Development of Regulation:**

### **Introduction**

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*Abstract. Emerging conceptualizations of coping as “regulation under stress” highlight the synergies between coping and regulatory processes. In this volume, experts on regulation and/or coping during childhood and adolescence explore how these theoretical and empirical efforts can inform the developmental study of coping. All authors emphasize the utility of integrative multi-level perspectives that incorporate neurobiology, temperament, attachment, regulation, personal resources, relationships, stress exposure, and social contexts.*

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Developmental conceptualizations emphasize coping as “regulation under stress.” From this perspective, coping describes how people manage and coordinate their behavior, emotion, and attention under stress. These processes have been studied under many labels, including self-regulation and behavioral, emotion, attention, and action regulation. Narrow bands of this work focus on age-graded changes in how these processes function under stress. These theoretical and empirical efforts can orient and enrich the developmental study of coping.

### **Purpose of the Volume**

This volume is the first to explore synergies between coping and regulation, using essays from experts on the development of regulation and/or coping during childhood and adolescence. The book is geared toward researchers working in the broad areas of regulation, coping, stress, adversity, and resilience. For regulation researchers, it offers opportunities to focus on development and to consider multiple targets of regulation simultaneously (i.e., emotion, attention, behavior) that typically are examined in isolation. For coping researchers, this volume offers invigorating theoretical and operational ideas. For researchers studying stress, adversity, and resilience, the book highlights coping as one pathway through which adversity shapes long-term development. All authors emphasize the importance of multi-level perspectives for integrating processes from the neurobiological to the socio-cultural that contribute to the developmental dynamics of coping.

### **Overview of the Chapters**

In the introductory chapter, we lay out the progress that has been made toward constructing a developmental framework for the study of coping. We explain what is meant by coping as “regulation under stress” and identify points of overlap and distinctiveness in definitions of coping and regulation. We point out two primary challenges for the developmental

study of coping, namely, describing age-graded shifts in how children and adolescents cope, and explaining the developmental processes that underlie these shifts. Each of the chapters that follow offers expert guidance about how to advance a developmental agenda for the study of coping.

In Chapter 2, Rosario Rueda and Mary Rothbart explore the contributions of temperament to the development of coping. Drawing from their important work, they define temperament as constitutionally based individual differences in reactivity (emotional, motor, and attentional) and self-regulation, and argue that temperamental systems shape coping because they influence encoding and interpretation of stressful events, internal cues generated by these events, and the pattern of responses. They argue that some of the mechanisms by which temperament shapes coping can be found in the brain systems and neural chemistry underlying temperament. Rueda and Rothbart propose a fascinating developmental model of temperament and coping as influenced by maturation and experience. This chapter provides a foundation for the developmental study of coping.

In Chapter 3, Claire Kopp brings her insightful analysis of the development of emotion regulation during early childhood to bear on a developmental analysis of emotion-focused coping. Starting with the assumption that emotion-focused coping emerges as children negotiate parental requests for compliance, she describes age-graded changes in stress reactivity and important self, cognitive, and linguistic developments that likely underlie qualitative shifts in emotion-focused coping up to age four. Kopp analyzes the skills and motivations as well as the regulatory capacities required for young children to increasingly balance the needs of self and other when dealing with the normative stressors created by parental demands. This chapter represents a key segment of a larger integrative theory of the development of coping.

In Chapter 4, Dante Cicchetti and Fred Rogosch draw on their extensive work on resilience in maltreated children to explore processes and resources that may be important to competent coping, yet less readily detectable under more normative circumstances. They describe an integrative developmental framework incorporating processes from multiple levels. Cicchetti and Rogosch argue that the sub-systems underlying effective coping, as well as coping strategies themselves, are critical components of resilience. This chapter guides the developmental study of coping by articulating an overarching framework that includes a place for coping, and by pointing to specific processes that influence adaptive coping.

In Chapter 5, Patrick Tolan and Kathryn Grant provide a needed corrective to typical research on coping by encouraging a comprehensive consideration of the critical role played by higher-order contextual factors. Drawing from their research on inner-city youth, they illustrate the many ways neighborhoods and communities influence coping, for example, by determining the chronic and acute stressors children face and by limiting the social and personal resources available to them. They also argue that a comprehensive model is essential to successfully intervene with youth to promote adaptive coping. Tolan and Grant highlight the contexts of stress and coping, urging researchers to focus on higher-order social and cultural processes that have been largely overlooked. This chapter poses challenges but also offers specific suggestions to guide more ecologically valid research on the development of coping.

In Chapter 6, Nancy Eisenberg, Carlos Valiente, and Michael Sulik draw from their expertise on self, emotion regulation, and coping to formulate concrete suggestions for how the study of regulation can inform the study of coping. They underscore common themes and problems in conceptualizations of regulation and coping, and recommend operationalizations that will promote research on how regulation at the physiological level shapes children's coping

with stress. They also place considerable emphasis on the role of social partners, especially their emotion socialization, in shaping the development of children's coping. This chapter finds common ground for the study of regulation and coping, and highlights promising directions for future research.

In the final chapter, Bruce Compas, one of the early architects of the study of coping during childhood and adolescence, identifies four key challenges to researchers interested in the development of coping and regulation, and proposes specific theoretical and empirical strategies for addressing them. These challenges focus researchers on the investigation of how coping processes are organized and integrated with regulation, neurobiology, memory, attention, and the social context. As with all of Compas' contributions to the developmental study of coping, this chapter provides an eloquent guide to important next conceptual and empirical steps for the field.

### **Key Themes of the Volume**

Despite the variety of perspectives and range of expertise represented by the authors, three key themes run throughout this volume. The first is the emphasis on *multi-level frameworks* that identify coping processes and resources on levels from the genetic and biological to the cultural and societal. Since coping has largely been studied on the level of the individual and his or her thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, frameworks that emphasize lower-order constitutional and higher-order contextual processes are especially welcome.

The second theme is *integration*, not only of processes from different levels but also of research from closely-related areas of study. Since coping has typically been studied as an episodic process, it is especially useful to incorporate overarching perspectives that position coping as a process of resilience as well as to build on work that focuses on real-time interactions that are potentially stressful, as represented in research on emotion regulation.

The third theme is the importance of close attention to *conceptualizations, measurement, and methods*. This includes clarifying areas of conceptual and operational confusion, working out common terminologies for researchers from different traditions, and branching out from familiar methodologies. In the case of coping research, this means thoughtfully supplementing questionnaire studies with observations and markers of biological and neurological functioning on the one hand, and indicators of neighborhood and community functioning on the other. Together, the chapters bring fresh insights and challenges, both orienting and energizing researchers working in the broad areas of regulation, coping, stress, adversity, resilience, and, of course, development.