



1991a). These studies indicate the importance of moving beyond the study of individual and global risk indicators (such as global reports of marital dissatisfaction) to the study of risk mechanisms—that is, understanding the specific underlying processes within the risk factor (i.e. how the conflict is managed or expressed) that play a role in the causal chain leading to children's conduct problems. The important question then becomes, what aspect of the marital conflict carries the risk?

We hypothesize that a couple's negative conflict management skills (defined as the inability to collaborate and problem-solve, to communicate positively about problems, and to regulate negative affect) is a key variable in marital relationships contributing to the development of conduct problems and to the way children learn to communicate and manage conflict with their parents and peers. We find support for this theory from the work of Cummings and colleagues (E. M. Cummings, Ballard, El-Sheikh, & Lake, 1991b; E. M. Cummings & Davies, 1994), who indicate that resolution of conflict between couples and providing children with explanations of their conflict (absolving children from blame) is helpful for children's emotional adjustment. These researchers conclude that adult resolution of conflict results in significantly reduced children's anger and negativity.

Although these latest observational studies have provided a great deal more precision in assessing specific aspects of marital interactions, they have not necessarily provided comparable precision in assessing children's outcomes. Invariably, effects of marital conflict have often relied on mother reports of child behavior

standing the underlying mechanisms that may be common to several risk factors, we can then design interventions that are more effective in addressing multiple family risk factors at the same time. We can build therapeutic programs for distressed couples and minimize the negative consequences for children.

The present study examines the direct effects of overt marital conflict management style as well as couple's



Reliability checks for home observations were randomly selected from both the clinic and community conditions. Observers were blind to whether the families were in the clinic or community conditions and were assigned equally to observe families representing both conditions. Intraclass correlation

Table 2  
*Descriptive Statistics for Component Items of Marital, Parenting, and Child Construct Scores*

Construct scores } Component items	Mother		Father	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Negative marital conflict management				

**Marital Conflict**

---

*Figure 3.* Reduced model of paths among fathers' marital functioning, fathers' parenting behaviors, and child conduct problems.





their parents. For example, a model that also includes

Kazdin, A. E. (1987). Treatment of antisocial behavior in