

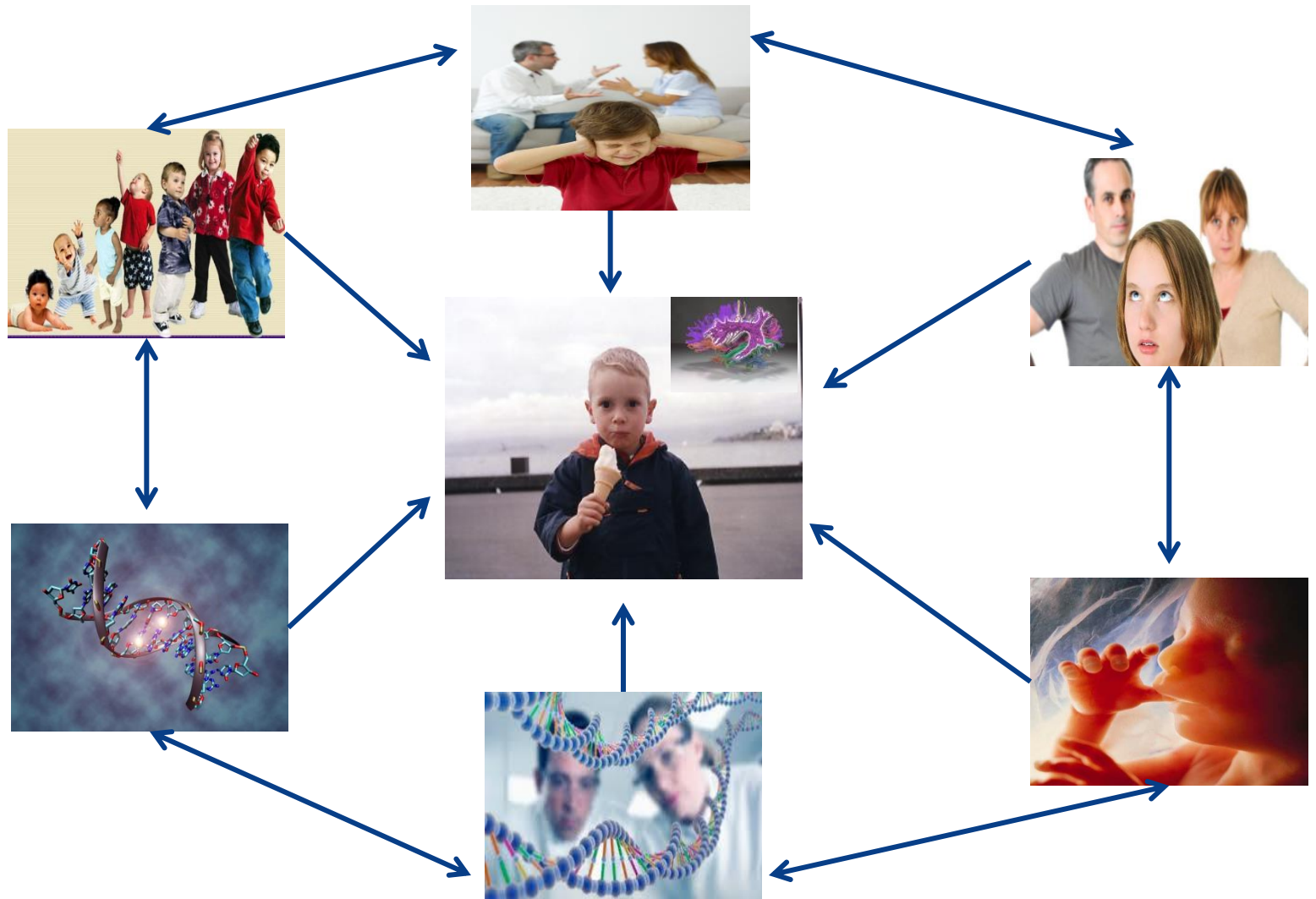
# Family Relationship Processes and Children's Mental Health: An Adoption Perspective

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# Processes Underlying Children's Psychological Development



# Children and Mental Health

- How are Children affected by family factors

- Emotional problems
- Behaviour problems
- Social competence
- Academic attainment
- Physical health

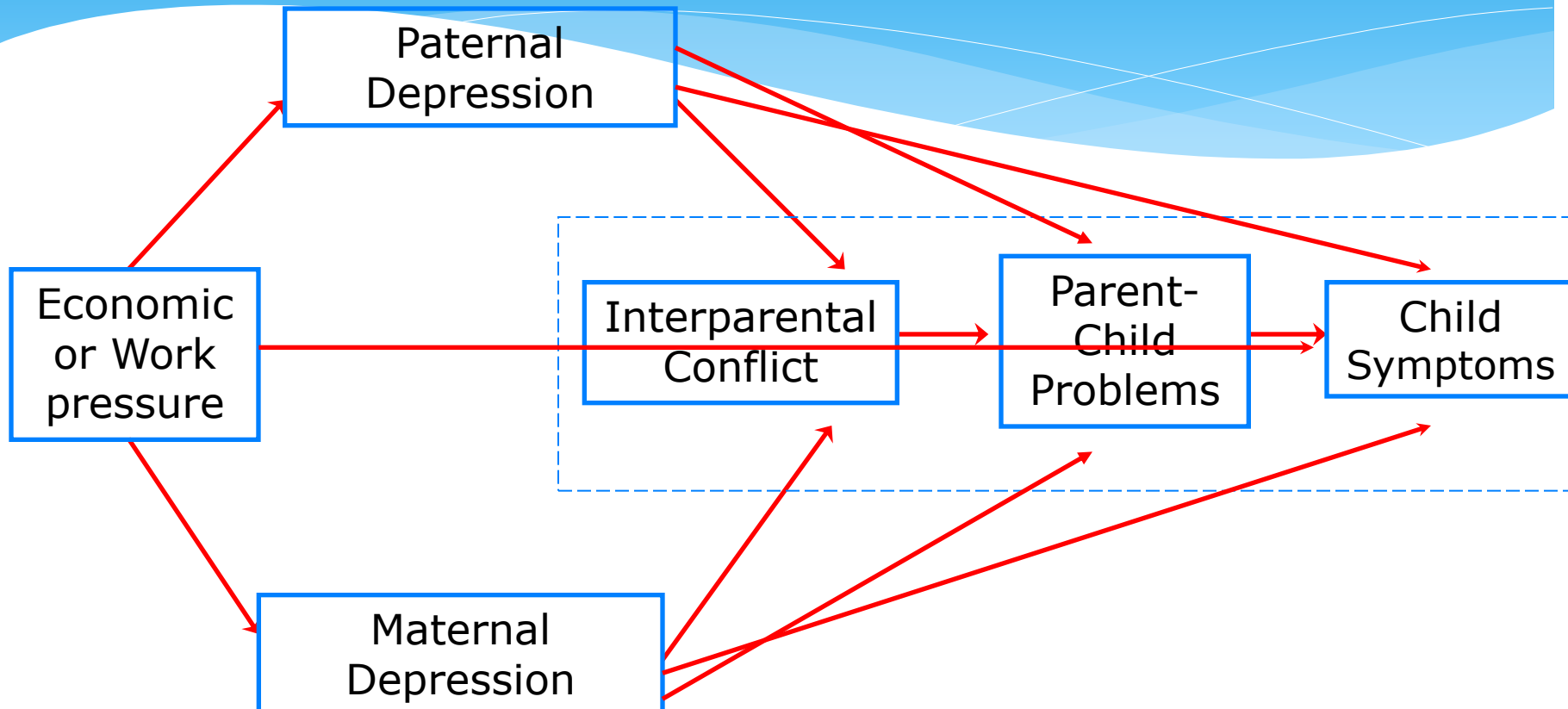


- What family factors affect children

- Economic pressure/poverty
- Parent mental health
- Parenting practices
- Inter-parental conflict, domestic violence
- Parental separation-divorce



# A Process Model of Family Relationship Influences on Children's Mental Health



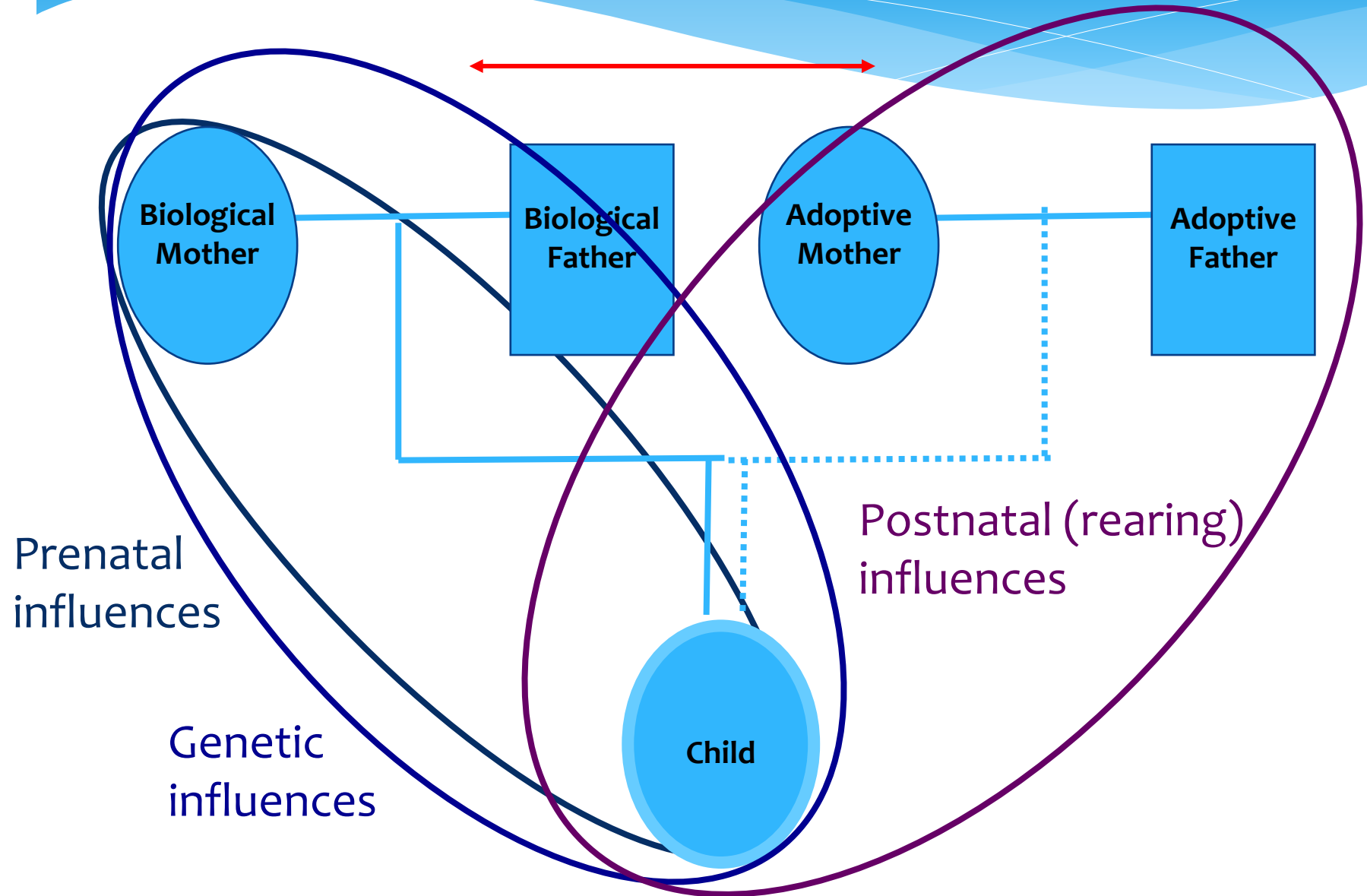
Conger and colleagues 1989-2007

# Caveats of Past Research

- \* Salience of the family environment ?
  - Predominantly conducted with biologically related parents and children
  - Limited examination of maternal versus paternal parenting influences on children
- \* What if it is all in the genes?
  - Associations between parental behaviour (e.g. parenting) and child behaviour is BECAUSE children share genes with their parents??
    - Passive rGe; Evocative rGE
- \* Disentangling genetic factors from rearing environment factors
  - A question of research design



# Research Attributes of an Adoption Design



# Early Growth and Development Study (Adoption at Birth Design)

## Sample

- 561 sets of adopted children, adoptive parents, and birth parents
  - Sample retention: Adoptive family = 90% Birth parent = 92%
  - Families assessed at child age 9-, 18-, 27-months of age; ongoing assessments at 4.5 years, 6 years, 7 years, 8 years, 9 years
  - Present sample included 341 linked families assessed at 27 months, 4.5 years, and 6 years
- Nationally-representative sample of families who made domestic infant adoption placements in the United States between 2003-2009

## Method

- Videotaped Observation – adoptive families
  - Child temperament, parent-child interactions, marital interactions video recorded in the home during 3-hour home visits at each wave. Coding for these tasks is ongoing
- Questionnaire – adoptive parents
  - Couple relationship, parent-child relationship, symptoms of depression and anxiety, family economic conditions, styles of family interaction, parenting style, children's emotional and behavioural well-being, child sleep problems
- Questionnaire – birth parents
  - Couple relationship, diagnosis and symptoms of psychopathology, drug use, economic conditions, life stress, temperament

# Cardiff In Vitro Fertilization Study (An Adoption at Conception Design)

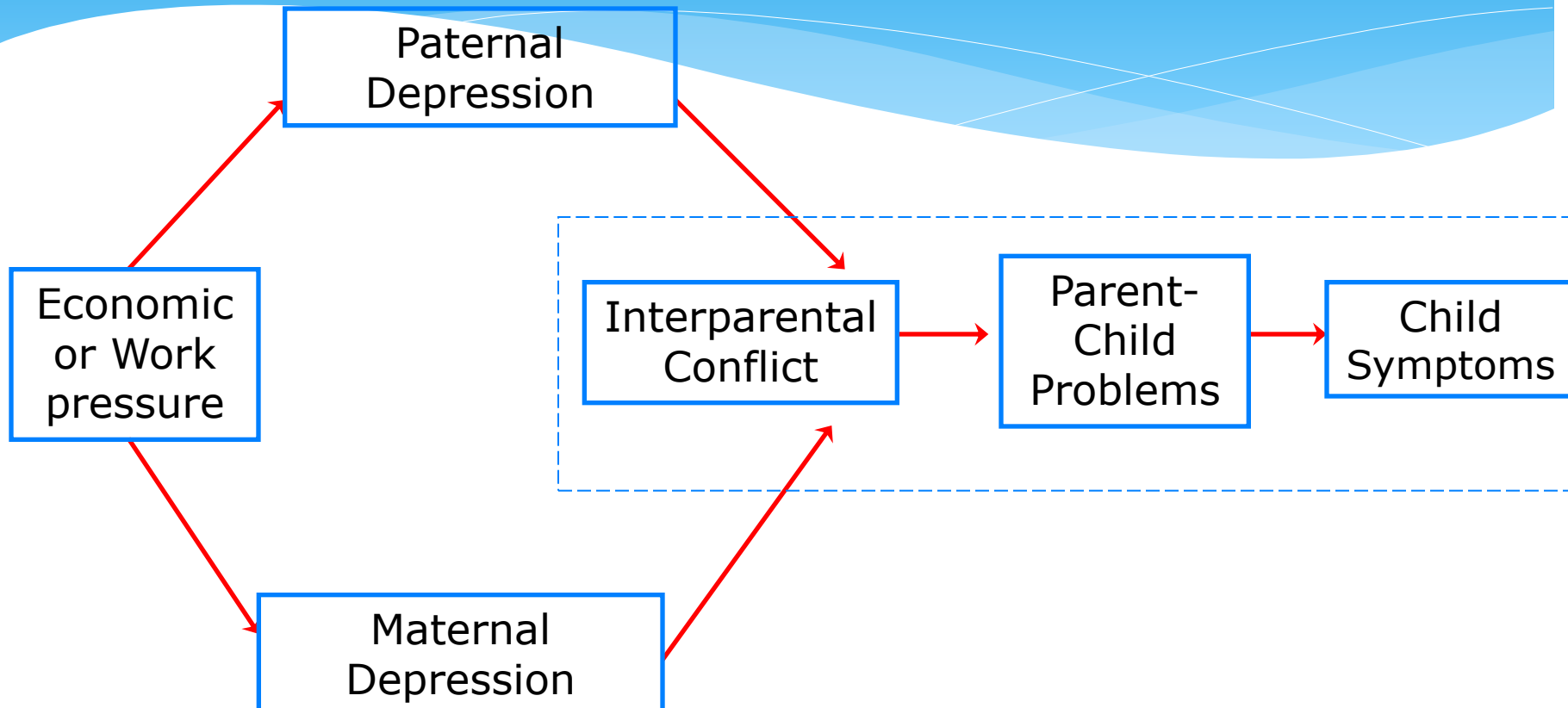
- Children born through *in-vitro* fertilisation (IVF)
  - 20 fertility centres within the UK (1 in US)
    - 888 families
      - Homologous IVF N = 444
      - Sperm donation N = 210
      - Egg donation N = 175
      - Embryo donation N=36
      - Gestational surrogacy N=23
  - Families who had a live birth (1994 – 2002)
    - Children aged between 4 – 10 years (mean = 6.80 yrs, SD=1.23)
    - Demographics (family income, parent education, ethnicity)
    - Present sample included children aged 5-8 years old ( $m = 6.49$ ,  $sd = .85$ )
- Genetically related versus unrelated groups
  - Genetically Related
    - Mothers (N=546): Homologous, sperm donation, surrogacy
    - Fathers (N=531): Homologous, egg donation, surrogacy
  - Genetically Unrelated
    - Mothers (N=160): Egg and embryo donation
    - Fathers (N=173): Sperm and embryo donation



# Inter-Parental Conflict, Hostile Parenting and Children's Conduct Problems

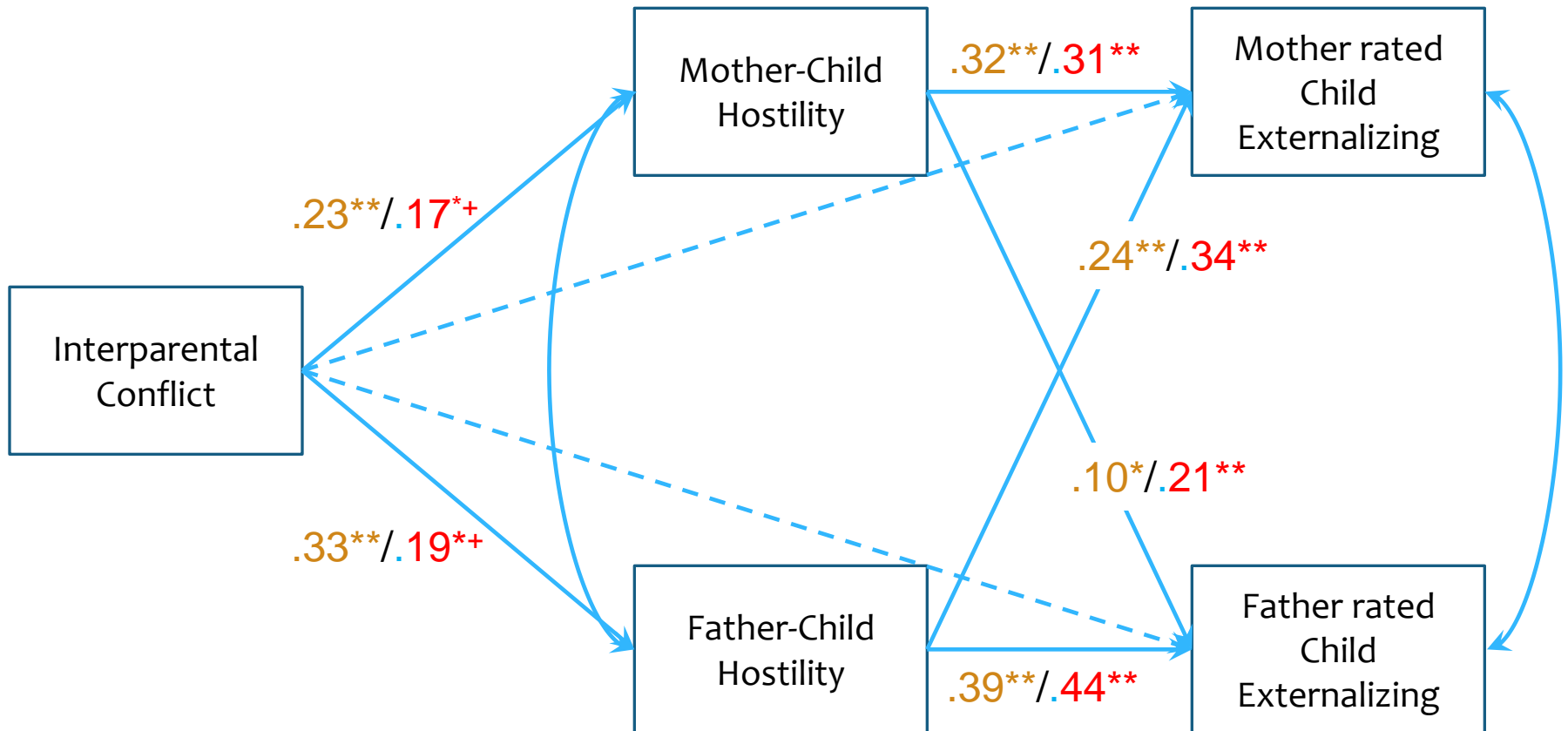
Harold, G. T., Leve, L. D., Elam, K., Thapar, A., Neiderhiser, J., Natsuaki, M., Shaw, D., Reiss, D. (2013). The Nature of Nurture: Disentangling Passive Genotype-Environment Correlation from Family Relationship Influences on Children's Externalizing Problems. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 27(1), 12-21.

# A Process Model of Family Relationship Influences on Children's Psychopathology



Conger and colleagues 1989-2007

# Does Parenting REALLY Matter? (IVF-H/EGDS)



\* $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

# Summary and Implications

- **Family relationship influences on children**
  - Inter-parental conflict affects children's behaviour problems through disrupted mother-child and father-child relationships
  - Associations present EVEN WHEN mothers and fathers are not genetically related
  - Inter-parental conflict as context may have greater disruptive influence on father-child compared to mother-child parenting practices – Implications?
- **Implications for intervention, prevention and knowledge exchange**
  - The inter-parental and parent-child relationships matter for children
    - Common genetic factors do not explain associations
    - Adoption, IVF, foster-care, step-parent households and others
- **Limitations and considerations**
  - What about the role of the child in affecting how parents parent?? Role of child in affecting parental mental health??



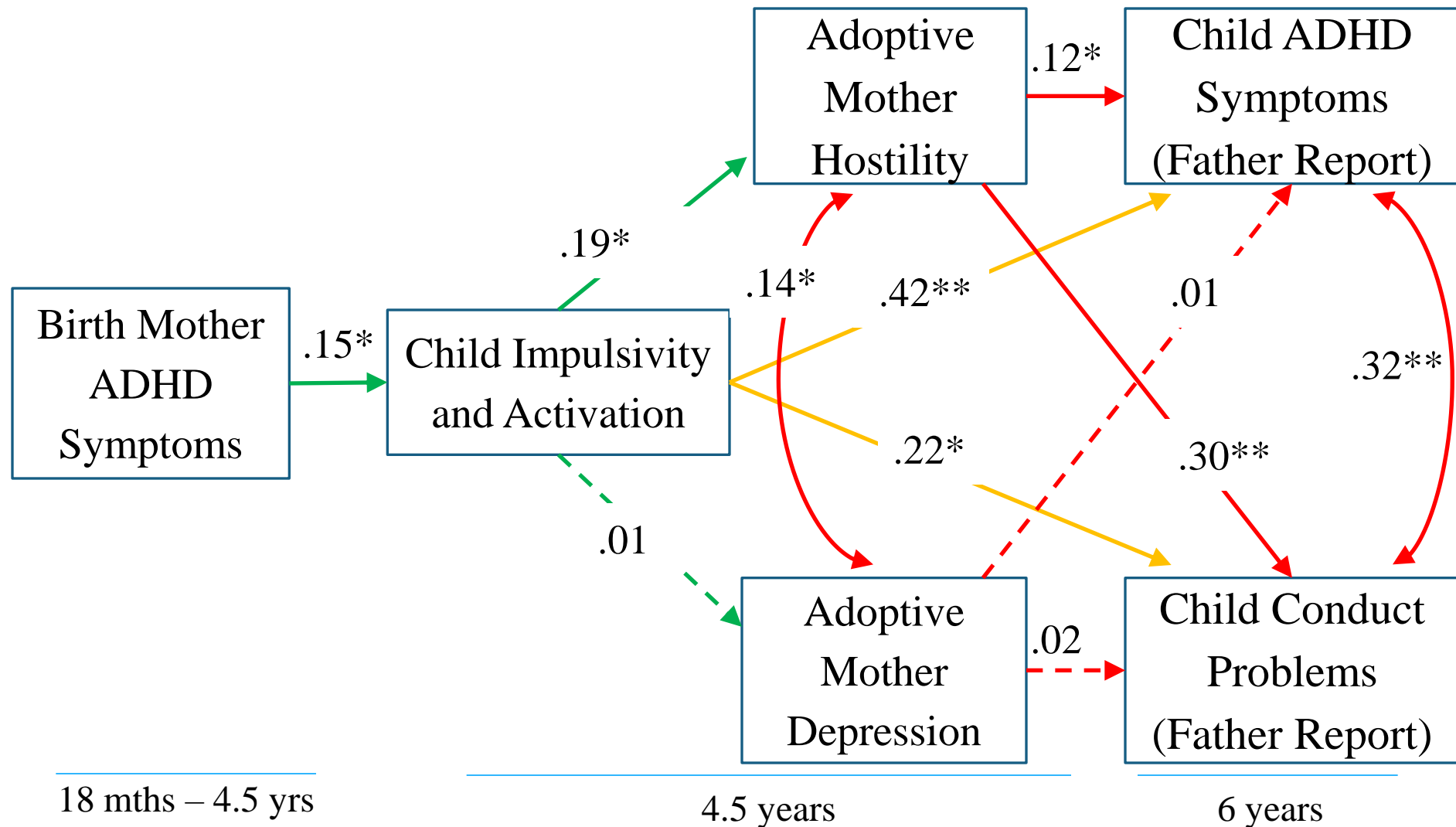
# Intergenerational Transmission: The Role of Early Child Behaviour on Maternal Depression and Parenting Practices

Harold, G. T., Leve, L. D., Thapar, A., et al., (in preparation). Adoptive mother-to-child hostility and children's ADHD symptoms and conduct problems: Examining the role of genetically-informed child attributes on pathways to psychopathology.

# Child ADHD – Conduct Problems

Genetically Related

Genetically Unrelated



# Bringing it All Together: What can we conclude?

- Highlighting the role of family relationship influences on children 's psychological development (and vice versa)
  - Family relationship influences (mothers and fathers parenting)
    - What happens at home really matters (genes or not)
      - Adoption, IVF, foster-care, parental remarriage, other family types
    - Genetically informed attributes in the child may influence rearing environment (parenting)
      - **BUT** rearing environment influences the continuity/development (or not) of symptoms
- Implications for practice and policy
  - Evidence-based guidance as to intervention focus
  - When do we target, who do we target, what do we target?
    - Salience of family relationship influences for children (peer outcomes, school outcomes, other outcomes)
- Bottom line point/purpose of research
  - Translating research into practice
    - Putting research findings into the hands of parents, families, practitioners and policy makers (and the next generation of students, educators, clinicians, policy makers)



# **Family Relationship Influences on Children's Psychological Development**

Conducting and Translating Research that  
Improves Outcomes for Parents, Children and  
Families



## Andrew and Virginia Rudd Centre for Adoption Research and Practice



About the Centre



People



Partnerships

### Contact

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Publications



Research funding



News and events

The Andrew and Virginia Rudd Centre for Adoption Research and Practice is a newly established research Centre located in the School of Psychology, and partnered with the School of Education and Social Work at the University of Sussex.

The Rudd Centre for Adoption Research and Practice was established with the core purpose of promoting understanding through the implementation and real-world application of rigorous research that focuses on illuminating the particular support needs and challenges facing children, parents and families in an adoption context. While the Centre has at its core a

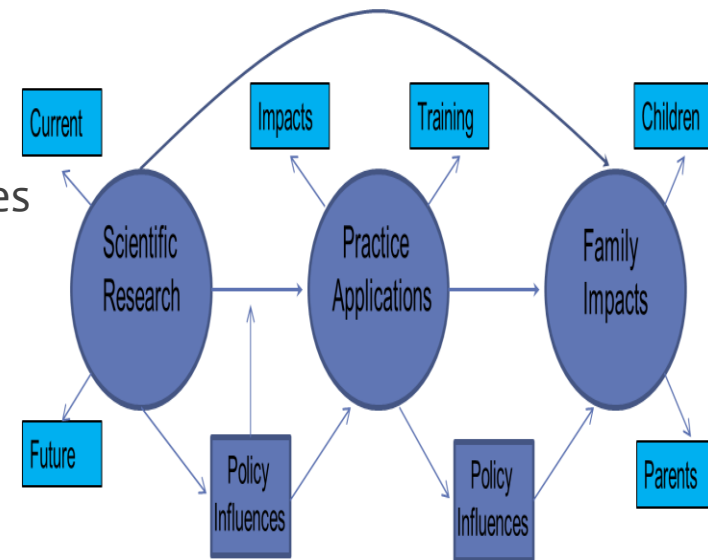


Andrew & Virginia Rudd (left, centre) and Gordon Harold (right)

# The Sussex Rudd Centre

## (Schools of Psychology and Education-Social Work)

- Scientific Research
  - Advancing understanding of the interplay between family processes and child development (with a focus on adoption)
- Practice Applications
  - Implementation of evidence-guided practice
  - Efficacy of intervention and prevention programmes
  - Development of interdisciplinary training and development programmes
- Family Impacts
  - Improving child and family outcomes (policy/practice)
  - Parents and children today, children as parents in families tomorrow (future)
  - Application of an evidence-based science and practice implementation model



# The Salience of the Inter-Parental Relationship for Children's Mental Health



# Research to Practice and Policy

What Works To Enhance I... X +

www.eif.org.uk/publication/what-works-to-enhance-inter-parental-relationships-and-improve-outcc

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## WHAT WORKS TO ENHANCE INTER-PARENTAL RELATIONSHIPS AND IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN?

EARLY INTERVENTION FOUNDATION

Our assessment of programmes that aim to enhance the inter-parental relationship and improve outcomes for children shows that many of these need more testing

The Early Intervention Foundation have carried out a review of 'What works to enhance inter-parental relationships and improve outcomes for children' for the Department for Work and Pensions.

The review has been led by Professor Gordon Harold, an expert on the role of the family in children's psychological development, and Dr. Ruth Sellers from the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Centre for Adoption Research and Practice at the University of Sussex.

Key findings include:

- » The quality of the inter-parental relationship, specifically how parents communicate and relate to each other, is increasingly recognised as a primary

US UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX | Department for Work & Pensions

What Works To Enhance Inter-Parental Relationships and Improve Outcomes for Children?

Search the web and Windows

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# Summary and Bottom Line

- Family relationship experiences matter for children's psychological development
  - Highlighting 'how' family processes affect children (and vice versa)
  - Utilising UK and international research to inform policy and practice with the primary objective of promoting improved outcomes for parents and children (an intergenerational perspective)
- Shifting the focus from quick “fixes” for outcomes to investment in promoting knowledge, practices and supports that remediate problems in the long-term
  - Upstream investment = downstream solutions
  - When to help, how to help, promoting practitioner capacity and capability
- What can we conclude from the evidence presented today?
  - As a parent, you matter to your child (genetically related or not)
    - Dads, you matter too!
  - Supporting parents and children today; promoting improved outcomes for parents and children tomorrow
    - Recognising the importance of supporting adults/partners as parents in promoting positive outcomes for children – a new focus! Next steps.

# Acknowledgements

## EGDS

Leslie Leve

Jenae Neiderhiser

Misaki Natsuaki

Daniel Shaw

David Reiss

Laura Scaramella

Rand Conger

Jody Ganiban

Xiaojia Ge

## Cardiff IVF Study

Anita Thapar

Frances Rice

Gemma Lewis

Alyson Lewis

Dale Hay

Jacky Boivin

XiaoJia Ge

The Wellcome Trust

The Nuffield Foundation

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)

The National Institutes of Health (USA)