

Development of the Hope in Children concept and measure:

Presented at the Indicators of Positive Development Conference, Washington, DC, March 12-13, 2003. This article is based, in part, on Snyder, Hoza, et al. (1997). For additional information about hope research, contact C. R. Snyder, 1415 Jayhawk Blvd., Psychology Dept., 340 Fraser Hall, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045, or send e-mail to crsnyder@ku.edu.

Hope in Children 1

For Indicators of Positive Development Conference
March 12-13, 2003

Abstract

Hope is defined as goal-directed thinking in which the person has the perceived capacity to find routes to goals (pathways thinking), and the motivation to use those routes (agency thinking). Using this hope theory, the author and his colleagues have developed and validated a self-report instrument called the Children's Hope Scale for children ages 7 through 15. An overview of the available validation research is given.

Measuring Hope in Children

"Hope is our children's window for a better tomorrow"

The Evolution of Hope Theory

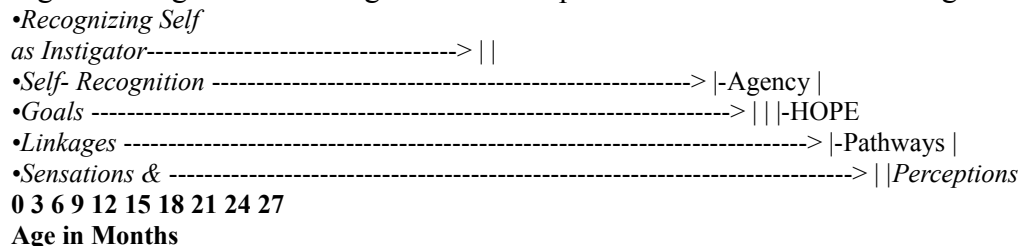
Many times, I have heard people say something akin to the opening quotation with hope and children always going hand-in-hand. Appealing as this sentiment may be, however, very little psychological theory and research has addressed the topic of children's hope. The only related research has been that by Kazdin and his colleagues (1983), where children's *hopelessness* was described in terms of negative expectancies toward oneself and one's future.

Using this hopelessness definition, Kazdin et al. developed the Hopelessness Scale for Children, and this instrument has been used to study the suicidal intentions of children with severe psychological problems (see Snyder, 1994, Chapter 4). As such, the Hopelessness Scale for Children reflects the pathology viewpoint that prevailed during the 1950's through the 1990's, and this approach differs from the more recent positive psychology approach for the study of adults (Snyder & Lopez, 2002) and children (Roberts, Brown, Johnson, & Rienke, 2002). Along these latter lines, my colleagues and I have construed hope in general, and children's hope in particular, in terms of positive expectancies. Our work in developing this theory of hope and its related measure for children is the focus of this paper. We started by observing that many previous scholars had conceptualized hope as an *overall perception that one's goals can be met* (e.g., Menninger, 1959; Stotland, 1969). Likewise, we were influenced by the research on adults (e.g., Pervin, 1989) and children's goal-directed thinking (e.g., Dodge, 1986). Springing from these sources of influence, our model and measures of hope were predicated on the assumption that adults and children are goal-directed in their thinking, and that such thinking can be understood according to the associated components of pathways and agency (more on these later).

We define hope as a cognitive set involving the self-perceptions that one can produce routes to desired goals (the pathways component), along with the motivation to use those goals (the agency component). Both components must be assessed together so as to obtain an overall sense of a child's hope. To provide a context for these pathways and agency components as they are related to the shared anchor of goals, I will review their development as part of the normal steps of early childhood (see Snyder, 2000; Snyder, McDermott, Cook, & Rapoff, 2002). As shown in Figure 1, pathways thinking involves the perceptual recognition of external stimuli, the

acquisition of temporal linkages between events, and the formation of goals. Acquired somewhat later temporally, agency thinking reflects the child's recognition of him- or herself, along with the recognition of the self as the source of actions, and the formation of goals. When aggregated, these goal-directed pathways and agency thoughts define hope in this model.

Figure 1. Cognitive Building Blocks of Hope in the Infant to Toddler Stage



A brief elaboration of each of the processes in Figure 1 may help to clarify the underpinnings of hope (see Snyder, 1994, Chapter 3). In regard to sensations and perceptions, the newborn inputs stimulation so as to code it mentally with meaning. Examples include the identification of mother relative to other people through the auditory (Stevenson, Ver Hoeve, Roach, & Leavitt, 1986), olfactory (Schaal, 1986), and visual sensory channels (Barrera & Maurer, 1981). Newborns also quickly learn the temporal connection of events because their survival depends on such "this follows that" chronologies (Schulman, 1991). From birth onward, newborns refine these abilities to form such linkages as they anticipate and plan for events (Kopp, 1989). The aforementioned perception and linkage learning leads to the infant's pointing to desired objects (from three to 12 months; Stevenson & Newman, 1986). This pointing behavior is called proto-declarative conversation, and it signals the infant's ability to single out one goal and even recruit an adult's help to obtain it (Bates, Camaioni, & Volterra, 1975). Taken together, pathways thinking involves (1) "what's out there" perceptions and (2) the temporal "this follows that" linkages as the infant (3) focuses on selected goals. So far in this analysis, the infant does not have a sense that s/he is the instigational agent (thus the term agency) of action toward goals. The next processes to be acquired, therefore, involve agency thinking. Learning to identify oneself is necessary for an eventual sense of agency. Such self-recognition increases over the first several months, and it is clearly in place by twelve to 18 months (Kaplan, 1978). Markers of this "psychological birth" include the toddler being able to identify her- or himself in a mirror, the correct usage of the personal pronoun "I," and toddler statements about inner feelings and thoughts (Bretherton & Beeghly, 1982). Along with such unfolding self-awareness, toddlers also realize around 21 months that they are the ones who are making things happen. In this regard, the earliest verbal referents that toddlers make pertain to volitions and capacities (e.g., "I can..."; Corrigan, 1978). These thoughts about selfhood, along the insight that one is the author of actions aimed at reaching desired goals, form agency thoughts. As can be discerned in Figure 1, goal-directed thinking is shared in both pathways and agency thinking. To help in understanding this definition more fully, it is necessary to discuss children's thoughts about themselves when they run into goal blockages. Early research showed that children get upset when encountering goal impediments (Barker, Dembo, & Lewin, 1941). Such impediments to goal pursuits, according to the premises of hope theory, should elicit negative emotions; conversely, the successful pursuit of goals should produce positive emotions (Snyder, 1994). In other words, emotions are the causal sequelae of perceptions about goal pursuits, and our research supports this contention (Snyder, Sympton, et al., 1996). The foundation of hope is set by age two years and, lacking some profound later childhood stressor, the level of hope should remain stable as the child navigates the preschool, middle, and adolescent years. Even though

they are relatively set in their hopeful thinking, toddlers still lack the necessary language skills to respond accurately to self-report measures. These requisite language skills for responding to simple questions about themselves should be in place, however, by the second or third grade. Accordingly, we set out to develop and validate a self-report hope scale for children starting at age seven and going to age 15.

Notes: When administered to children, this scale is not labeled "The Children's Hope Scale," but is called "Questions About Your Goals." The total Children's Hope Scale score is achieved by adding the responses to the six items, with "None of the time" = 1; "A little of the time" = 2; "Some of the time" = 3; "A lot of the time" = 4; "Most of the time" = 5; and, "All of the time" = 6. The three odd-numbered items tap agency, and the three even-numbered items tap p

Appendix: The Children's Hope Scale

Directions: The six sentences below describe how children think about themselves and how they do things in general. Read each sentence carefully. For each sentence, please think about how you are in most situations. Place a check inside the circle that describes YOU the best. For example, place a check (✓) in the circle (O) above "None of the time," if this describes you. Or, if you are this way "All of the time," check this circle. Please answer every question by putting a check in one of the circles. There are no right or wrong answers.

Questions about your goals:

1. *I think I am doing pretty well.*

☐ None of the time ☐ A little time ☐ Sometimes ☐ A lot of times ☐ Most times ☐ All times

2. *I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.*

☐ None of the time ☐ A little time ☐ Sometimes ☐ A lot of times ☐ Most times ☐ All times

3. *I am doing just as well as other kids my age.*

☐ None of the time ☐ A little time ☐ Sometimes ☐ A lot of times ☐ Most times ☐ All times

4. *When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it.*

☐ None of the time ☐ A little time ☐ Sometimes ☐ A lot of times ☐ Most times ☐ All times

5. *I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future.*

☐ None of the time ☐ A little time ☐ Sometimes ☐ A lot of times ☐ Most times ☐ All times

6. *Even when others want to quit, I know that I can find ways to solve the problem.*

☐ None of the time ☐ A little time ☐ Sometimes ☐ A lot of times ☐ Most times ☐ All times