



Unhealthy Conflict & Adjustment: Validating the Conflict Resolution Style Inventory for Coparenting Adolescent Parents



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ABSTRACT

- Healthy conflict resolution** (active listening, compromise, and collaborative problem-solving) is essential for healthy relationships, family functioning, and wellbeing^{1,2}. **Unhealthy conflict resolution** (verbal, physical violence, withdrawal, parental alienation) is linked to greater behavioral and adjustment problems^{3,4,5}. **Adolescent coparents**, who must navigate both developmental transitions and coparenting demands, also report higher rates of coparenting conflict than adult parents^{6,7}. To address this issue, validated measures of conflict are needed among coparenting adolescents to assess unhealthy relationship conflict as adolescents navigate adolescence, adjustment to parenthood, and family relationships.
- To assess the unique experience of adolescent coparenting, this study validated an adapted **Conflict Resolution Style Inventory**⁸ for adolescent coparents, incorporating two coparenting-specific behaviors (e.g., parental alienation⁹). Confirmatory factor analysis supported the original four-factor structure with good model fit. Unhealthy conflict styles were associated with greater parental stress, depressive symptoms, and relationship abuse.
- Findings support the Conflict Resolution Style Inventory's utility for assessing adolescent coparenting conflict and informing prevention efforts aimed at promoting healthy coparenting and reducing relationship violence among coparenting adolescents.

METHOD

518 coparenting adolescents, recruited through parenting education programs from Central Texas high schools, completed an online Qualtrics survey, provided in English and Spanish ($M_{age} = 17.21$; $SD = 1.79$; 76% girls; 87% Latinx).

Measures

- Conflict Resolution Style Inventory**⁸: Participants responded to the prompt “*In the past month, rate how frequently you used each of the following styles to deal with parenting arguments or disagreements with your child's other parent?*” across 16 items (Fig. 1). Response options ranged from (1) never to (5) always ($\alpha = .82$). This measure contained two adapted, co-parenting specific items:
 - “**Insulted the other person's parenting**.”
 - “**Refused to interact with him/her even if it meant that my child spent less time with them**.”

Individual Outcomes:

- Self-esteem**⁹: 10-item tool (e.g., “I certainly feel useless at times.”) with response options ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree ($\alpha = .84$).
- Depressive Symptoms**^{10,11}: 6-item tool (e.g., “During the past month, my sleep was restless.”) with response options ranging from (1) rarely or none of the time to (4) most of the time ($\alpha = .80$).

Parenting Outcomes:

- Parental Stress**¹²: 12-item tool (e.g., “The major source of stress in my life is my child.”) with response options ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree ($\alpha = .83$).
- Communication Frequency**: single-item tool (i.e., “How frequently do you have contact with your child's other biological parent in a typical month?”) with response options ranging from 0 (never) to 6 (daily/almost daily).

Relationship Outcomes:

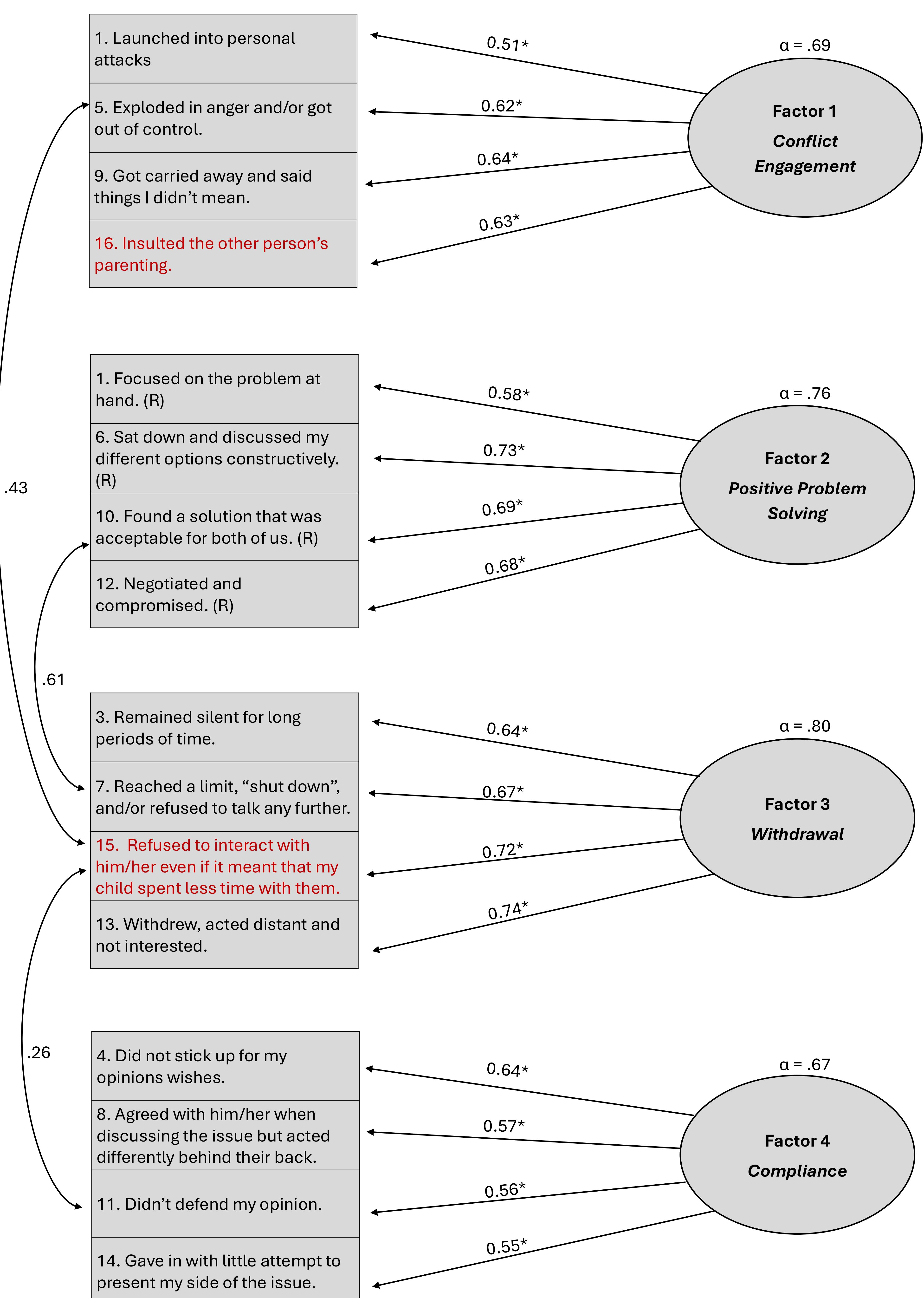
- Relationship Abuse**¹³: 7-item tool (e.g., “Pressures me to do risky things I don't want to do.”) with response options ranging from (0) none of the time to (4) all of the time ($\alpha = .81$).
- Positive Communication**¹⁴: 6-item tool (e.g., “When discussions get heated, my child's other parent and I stop and take a break.”) with response options ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree ($\alpha = .84$).

Analytic Strategy

- Analyses were conducted in R Studio¹⁵. Missing data were handled using full information maximum likelihood¹⁶ (FIML) in lavaan.
- Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)** was conducted to assess the original four-factor structure of the Conflict Resolution Style Inventory⁸.
- Model fit** was assessed using commonly accepted thresholds¹⁷: Comparative Fit Index ($CFI > .90$); Standardized Root Mean Square Residual ($SRMR < .06$); Root Mean Square Error of Approximation ($RMSEA < .08$).
- Reliability** was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α).
- Correlation analyses examined associations between the overall measure, the four-factors it contains, individual outcomes and parenting outcomes (**predictive validity**), and relationship outcomes (**convergent validity**).

RESULTS

Figure 1. Four Factor Structure of the Conflict Resolution Style for Coparenting Adolescent Parents



Note. Diagram depicts confirmatory factor analysis results: $\chi^2(95) = 227.79$, $p < .001$, $CFI = .91$, $RMSEA = .07$, 90% CI [.06, .08], $SRMR = .07$. Correlation estimates listed beside left-hand curved arrows represent allowed residual covariances between specific items for the final path model; (R) denotes reverse coding to reflect positive behavioral aspects captured in factor; items in red text represent additional coparenting specific language adaptation of the CRSI⁸. * $p < .001$.

Validating the four-factor structure

- CFA supported the four-factor structure, with all items loading onto respective factors. Each subscale yielded good reliability (see Fig. 1).
- To further validate the four-factor structure, additional CFAs were conducted on each of the four factors, revealing good model fit across: $\chi^2(95) = 227.79$, $p < .001$ ($CFI = .91$, $SRMR = .07$, $RMSEA = .07$ (90% CI [.06, .08])).

Predictive and convergent validity

- The overall scale and subscales performed as expected (see Table 1), demonstrating the associations between relevant constructs (summarized below).

Predictive Validity:

Individual and Parenting Outcomes

Conflict Resolution Style Inventory:
 \downarrow self-esteem
 \uparrow depressive symptoms
 \uparrow parental stress
 \downarrow communication frequency

Factor 1, 3, 4:
 \downarrow self-esteem
 \uparrow depressive symptoms
 \uparrow parental stress

Factor 2:
 \uparrow self-esteem
 \downarrow parental stress
 \uparrow communication frequency

Factor 1, 3, 4:
 \uparrow relationship abuse
 \downarrow positive communication

Factor 2:
 \uparrow positive communication

Table 1. Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. CRSI	-										
2. Conflict Engagement	.77**	-									
3. Positive Problem Solving	-.46**	-.04	-								
4. Withdrawal	.78**	.70**	.01	-							
5. Compliance	.66**	.54**	.15*	.60**	-						
6. Self-esteem	-.52**	-.41**	.31*	-.42**	-.28**	-					
7. Depressive Symptoms	.46**	.46**	-.12	.49**	.26**	-.53**	-				
8. Parental Stress	.39**	.33**	-.19**	.31**	.22**	-.47**	.36**	-			
9. Communication Frequency	-.17**	-.10	.28**	-.03	.04	.06	-.00	-.12**	-		
10. Relationship Abuse	.38**	.31**	-.11	.33**	.23**	-.32**	.43**	.34**	.02	-	
11. Positive Communication	-.54**	-.48**	.38**	-.37**	-.19**	.49**	-.40**	-.39**	.27**	-.44**	-
Mean	2.00	1.51	3.16	1.82	1.81	3.13	1.79	1.87	4.65	1.31	3.98
Standard Deviation	0.54	0.64	1.05	0.82	0.77	0.54	0.68	0.57	2.27	0.45	0.90

Note. CRSI=Conflict Resolution Style Inventory⁸. Correlations in bolded text indicated significance. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

DISCUSSION

This study is the first to validate the Conflict Resolution Style Inventory among adolescent coparents, with adaptations to items made to capture coparenting-specific behaviors. These adaptations assessed acts of restricting coparents' access to their child and insulting individuals' parenting, helping to better reflect the range of conflict tactics used among adolescent coparents, and can possibly extend to other coparenting populations.

Limitations & Future Directions

- Limited geographically (Central Texas):** results may not be generalizable to other regions of the U.S.
- Majority of sample was Latinx adolescents:** the validation of this scale might not be consistent for adolescents across other racial and ethnic backgrounds; future research should prioritize more diverse adolescent coparenting populations.
- Uneven number of mothers and fathers:** a larger, more balanced sample of coparents would allow for further validation analyses across gender.

Implications

This validated measure helps us move beyond assessing the quantity of coparenting conflict, to assess the quality of coparenting conflict in young parents. Such information can better inform interventions designs aimed at reducing coparenting conflict, promoting healthy relationship behaviors, and promoting better outcomes for adolescent coparents and their families.

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This research was funded by a Department of Human Services Administration for Children and Families grants (HHS-2015-ACF-OFA-FM-0985 & 90ZD0006-01-00) and a Family Youth Services Bureau grant (90SR0086-01-00) with approval by the Texas State University Institutional Review Board (2014 T2817).

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The authors acknowledge funding from the Frances McClelland Institute for Children, Youth, and Families.

References

