



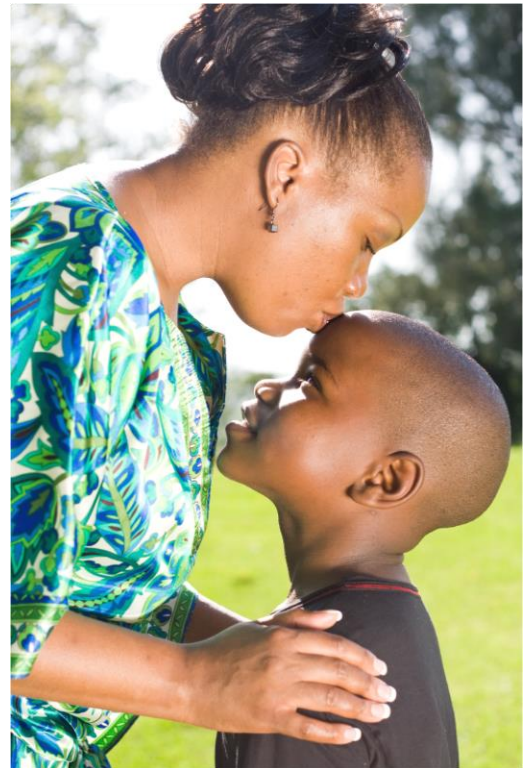
EXTENSION CENTER FOR FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

2014 Parents Forever™ Annual Report

A YEAR OF CHANGE FOR PARENTS FOREVER™

The year 2014 was one of significant developments for Parents Forever™, an 8-hour course offered in person and online to divorced and otherwise separated parents. Created more than 20 years ago by the Extension Center for Family Development (FD), the course gives participants skills and information to support their efforts to successfully raise their children while living apart. Highlights of 2014 for Parents Forever™ include:

- Updates to the curriculum to reflect the latest research and best practices in parent education.
- Restructuring of the in-person program to ensure its quality and providers' fidelity to core elements.
- Growing success of the online course, which reached its highest level of enrollment in 2014 and showed positive outcomes for participants in several areas.



REVISION OF THE CURRICULUM

The year 2014 marked the culmination of two years' work to update the "Parents Forever™ Education for Families in Transition" curriculum to reflect the latest research and best practices in parent education.

The Parents Forever™ team, including Extension educators, project managers, and communication specialists from the Center for Family Development, updated two primary documents: a parent handbook and facilitator's guide for use with the in-person course.

The new parent handbook for course participants distills the best of five previous handbooks and includes worksheets for use in the classroom, as well as at home after the course.

The new facilitator's guide for instructors contains updated activities and research sections. A presentation for use in conjunction with the facilitator's guide also has been updated. The facilitator's guide, including an extensive list of additional resources, has been moved online for instructors to download and print.



RESTRUCTURING OF THE IN-PERSON PROGRAM

Ellie McCann, a lead Extension educator for the Parents Forever™ program, describes the impetus for restructuring the in-person program for Minnesota residents as “who let the dogs out?” This reference to a popular song captures what was happening in the late 1990s and early 2000s as some Parents Forever™ facilitators made adaptations to the curriculum that diluted core content — and thus the impact of the course.

To address this situation, members of the Parents Forever™ team decided to take steps to ensure facilitators’ fidelity to the core elements of the program, as well as uphold its quality. These steps, which were implemented in 2014, included:

- Requiring anyone interested in offering a Parents Forever™ program to attend an introductory webinar on the program’s “big picture.” In 2014, a total of 140 individuals completed the nine webinars offered.
- Establishing a system of authorized providers of the Parents Forever™ curriculum that are pledged to maintain program standards. Authorized providers are community and non-profit organizations employing facilitators to teach the course.
- Requiring authorized providers to sign a contract with Parents Forever™ administrators — a contract saying facilitators will teach according to the curriculum and not change essential content.
- Requiring authorized providers to undergo training on the curriculum. Training sessions led by Extension educators began in 2014, when seven such sessions were offered across Minnesota. Both new and existing facilitators were required to attend a 6-hour training session, resulting in the certification and recertification of 75 Parents Forever™ facilitators.
- Requiring authorized providers to participate in at least one Parents Forever™ professional development webinar annually. In 2014, team members facilitated webinars on topics such as family stress and resilience. About 30 individuals attended the webinars.
- Requiring authorized providers to submit evaluation forms from participants, as well as complete self-reflection “fidelity” forms to confirm their adherence to the curriculum and report any adaptations made.
- Assigning Extension educators as regional coordinators throughout Minnesota to act as liaisons and consultants for Parents Forever™ programs within their regions.



GROWING SUCCESS OF THE ONLINE COURSE

The Parents Forever™ online course was launched in 2012 at the request of the Minnesota Supreme Court. The online course has grown in popularity since then, with 1,569 people taking it in 2014 — an increase of 15 percent from 2013.

Research shows the online course is effective in helping divorced and separated parents better handle the transition to a new life and relationship with their children and ex-partners. Course participants are asked to take a pre-survey, post-survey, and a 6-10-month followup survey.



Analysis of survey responses collected since 2012 found that 6–10 months later, participants reported significant improvements in several areas:

- Increased ability to control angry or negative responses when communicating with the other parent.
- Reduced level of conflict with the other parent, as observed by their children.
- Greater feelings of well-being when comparing themselves to others going through a divorce or other type of separation.
- Increased ability to cope with their own experiences of divorce or other type of separation.

Because of the continuing success of the Parents Forever™ online course, a team of Extension staff and educators is updating it to incorporate elements of the new in-person curriculum and findings from recent research on adult online learning and technology. The revamped online course will be piloted in September 2015.

GROWTH OF BEHIND-THE-SCENES EFFORTS

The year 2014 also saw the growth of several behind-the-scenes efforts in support of continuously improving the Parents Forever™ program. Those efforts included:

- Strengthening existing partnerships with North Dakota and Wisconsin and exploring new partnerships with Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Washington. These partnerships provide opportunities for learning and collaboration.
- Expanding research and evaluation efforts in order to assess the effectiveness of Parents Forever™ curriculum content and presentation. Study results will inform future course modifications, as necessary, as well as assess the impact of the program.
- Increasing contributions to publications and conferences about Parents Forever™, allowing team members to share what they have learned with other professionals across the country, as well as market the program to potential partners.

CONCLUSION

The Parents Forever™ program saw significant changes in 2014, while staying focused on its primary goal of giving divorced and other separated parents the information, skills, and tools they need to meet the challenges of parenting while living apart. Parents Forever™ will continue to help families cope with the effects of divorce and separation for the benefit of *both* children and parents.

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

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