

Parents Forever

The Impact of Divorce on Children Educator Guide

EDUCATION FOR FAMILIES IN DIVORCE TRANSITION

Credits

Authors

Rose M. Allen, M. Ed.	Extension Educator
Ellen M. McCann, M.S.	Extension Educator
Joanne L. Musich, M. Ed.	Extension Educator
Minnell L. Tralle, M. Ed.	Extension Educator

Reviewers

Dr. Denise J. Brandon	The University of Tennessee Extension
Kari Robideau	University of Minnesota Extension
Cynthia Strasheim	University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension
Sandie Syverson	University of Minnesota Extension, Retired

This publication is a revision of *Parents Forever: The Impact of Divorce on Children Educators Guide* published by University of Minnesota Extension Service in 1997. The original authors of this publication were:

Rose M. Allen	Extension Educator
Nancy Kristensen	Parent Educator
Trisha A. Sheehan (Lewis)	Extension Educator
Nancy J. Hegland (Neil)	Extension Educator
Phyllis Onstad	Extension Educator
Minnell L. Tralle	Extension Educator
Vant A. Washington	Extension Educator

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Components of this Educator Guide	5
Additional Teaching Resources	7
The Parents Forever Curriculum	8
Teaching Adult Learners	10
What Parents Bring to the Session	16
Evaluating Parents Forever	18
Part 1: How Children Experience Family	
Transition	19
Overview	21
Teaching Outline	23
Part 2: Co-parenting Your Children	61
Overview	63
Teaching Outline	64
Teaching Handouts	87
How Loss Affects My Child	89
What My Child Needs	90
Emotion Coaching Role Play	91
Mr. Gray’s Bunny	93
How Divorce Affected Me: A Reflection of a Ninety Year Old	95
“I” Messages: Improving Communication	96
How Positive Is My Parenting Style?	97
Custody: Making Custody a Win-win Solution	98
Important Information About Our Child	100
Appendix	101
Parent Education: Mandatory Curriculum Topics	103
Parents Forever Instructor Checklist	105
Parents Forever Session Evaluation: The Impact of Divorce on Children	107
Parents Forever Course Evaluation	110

Introduction

As a Parents Forever instructor, you have taken on a challenging but rewarding role. The families you will touch, parents and children alike, are going through a very challenging transition. The focus of the Parents Forever curriculum is to help parents understand how the divorce transition affects their children and what they, as parents, can do to make this easier on their kids. Parents Forever is based on the research about divorce and its effects on kids and on evidence-informed practices in the field of parent education.

This Parents Forever Educator Guide is intended to help you teach parents about the impact of divorce on children by providing content, suggested teaching methods, activities, and background. This guide is designed to be used in conjunction with the Parents Forever: The Impact of Divorce on Children Parent Handbook, the Parents Forever PowerPoint presentation, and the Parents Forever and Padres para siempre DVD. You will also find helpful resources at our website — www.parentsforever.umn.edu.

Components of this Educator Guide

This Educator Guide and the related Parent Handbook are divided into Parts 1 and 2. Part 1 focuses on how the process of divorce affects children. Part 2 discusses co-parenting strategies and skills. Teaching in two 2 ½-hour segments is a logical way to split the content.

Each part is divided into two sections: Overview and Teaching Outline.

Overview

This section provides a general overview for the entire part of the curriculum. The overview section highlights the following information.

Objectives — Lists the full objectives for parents for that part of the curriculum.

Topics and Timing — Lists all of the topics that are covered in that part of the curriculum in the order that they appear. The Topics and Timing table also lists the estimated time it will take to teach that topic and the corresponding page numbers in the Educator Guide.

Teaching Outline

This section provides instructions for teaching each topic found in that part of the curriculum. Each topic has a separate teaching outline. Each teaching outline contains the following information.

Purpose — Helps you to understand the purpose of the section.

Materials Needed — Lists special materials that you will need to teach that topic. You will need the following materials for teaching all sections of The Impact of Divorce on Children curriculum:

- ✓ Computer
- ✓ LCD projector
- ✓ Parents Forever: The Impact of Divorce on Children Educator CD
- ✓ Parent Forever: The Impact of Divorce on Children Educator Guide (included on the CD)
- ✓ Parents Forever PowerPoint presentations, parts 1 and 2 (included on the CD)
- ✓ The Impact of Divorce on Children Parent Handbook (one copy for each participant)

If there is no Materials Needed in a section, only the above materials are required.

Preparation — Identifies what materials the instructor should read and review prior to the class.

Estimated Time Needed — Estimates the time needed to teach each topic. These times are also listed in the Topics and Timing table in the Overview section found at the beginning of each part. The time needed will vary depending on the size of the group, the willingness of the group to share ideas, and the questions that parents have. If you have less time to teach than is indicated, you will want to plan how to shorten the section. Refer to the Parent Education: Mandatory Curriculum Topics in the Appendix to help determine which segments may be reduced or eliminated and still meet the court mandate. Mandatory topics are also in the Topics and Timing tables.

Instructions — Provides step-by-step instructions for teaching the section. In some cases, there will be activities for the group to complete and process. In some sections, there is a video segment to view and discuss. Information is given about key points to make sure you cover.

Background for Instructors — Provides additional background that may be helpful to you as an instructor.

Sources — Identifies sources used in the development of the section. If you are interested in more background than is provided, refer to the original sources of the information.

Teaching Handouts

After the second part of the Educator Guide you will find the Teaching Handouts section. This section contains all the activity sheets, including

the evaluation tools, you will need for teaching the curriculum. Many of these are included in the Parent Handbook as well.

Appendix

At the very end of the Educator Guide is the Appendix section. Here is more information at what is found in that section:

- ✓ Minnesota Minimum Standards for Parent Education — If you need to shorten your class time, refer to this document to ensure you have included the points that are required by statute for court-ordered parent education in Minnesota. Required content is also starred on the Topics and Timing section.
- ✓ Evaluation Tools — See Evaluating Parents Forever at the end of this Introduction section for a description of these tools.

Additional Teaching Resources

Besides this Educator Guide, you will need the following resources to teach *The Impact of Divorce on Children*.

Parent Handbook

You should have received a copy of this handbook with the complete Educator Package for this curriculum. The Parent Handbook is the main curriculum resource for parents and is the basis for this Educator Guide. You will want to review the content of the Parent Handbook as you prepare to teach. Each parent should be provided a Parent Handbook to follow along and take notes. Some pages include activities for parents to complete for their child. To order one or more copies of *The Impact of Divorce on Children Parent Handbook* (item #06772), see the Parents Forever website: www.parentsforever.umn.edu.

Educator CD

You should have received a copy of this CD with the complete Educator Package for this curriculum. The CD contains the following resources.

Educator Guide — This is the resource that you are currently reading. It includes an overview, instructions for teaching, as well as teaching handouts. It is highly recommended that you print a copy of the entire Educator Guide and assemble it in a three-ring binder. Use the binder covers found with the Educator Guide files on the CD as desired.

PowerPoint Presentations — The presentations have been developed to closely match the Parent Handbook. Each slide has notes that will be helpful to you as an educator and is labeled with the section it is used with. If you do not use PowerPoint in your teaching, it can be a good guide

for you as you discuss each of the topics. You may consider changing your teaching style to incorporate the slides.

A note of caution: evaluations have consistently indicated that instructors who read the slides or content to the parents are the least effective educators. This is the reason that the curriculum is not “scripted.” Get to know your content well enough that you don’t need to read it. Adapt it to your style as an educator.

Instructor Presentation Notes — This is a notes page version of the PowerPoint presentations complete with script. It is recommended that you print a complete set of the Presentation Notes and place them in your assembled Educator Guide binder.

Parent Presentation Notes — This version of the Presentation encourages parents to take notes. It is designed as an optional handout.

Parents Forever and Padres para siempre DVD

This DVD (previously named “Parents Forever DVD”) was developed to enhance teaching of the Impact of Divorce on Children section of the curriculum. There are five segments to the DVD:

- ✓ Cycles — 4 minutes
- ✓ Games Parents Play — 5 minutes and 47 seconds
- ✓ Owning My Feelings — 3 minutes and 53 seconds
- ✓ Parenting Styles — 2 minutes
- ✓ Parallel Parenting — 1 minute and 24 seconds

Discussion questions are provided in the DVD Guide and in the Educator Guide Teaching Instructions. The Parents Forever DVD (item #08450) can be purchased online at www.parentsforever.umn.edu.

Parents Forever Website

The Parents Forever website — www.parentsforever.umn.edu — has additional resources for both instructors and parents. Visit this site frequently to enhance your teaching experience.

The Parents Forever Curriculum

This section will provide a brief overview of the Parents Forever curriculum. Parents Forever: Education for Families in Divorce Transition is a comprehensive curriculum that gives parents tools to make the divorce transition smoother.

The curriculum involves up to 12 hours of education. Although the components of this curriculum have been arranged in a logical sequence, it is not a fixed order. The curriculum is flexible in at least two ways:

1. Each component can stand alone and can be mixed with other components.
2. Each component can be presented briefly or in detail, depending on the time and interests of educators and participants.

The curriculum is divided into these five sessions.

The Impact of Divorce on Adults

Adults feel the impact of divorce in many ways. The Impact of Divorce on Adults focuses on taking care of oneself, including recognizing and managing both anger and stress. Safety issues are also addressed, including spousal abuse, child abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases.

The Impact of Divorce on Children

This is the teaching component that corresponds with this Educator Guide. Children are often the most impacted when parents divorce. The Impact of Divorce on Children focuses on what children are likely to experience, how parents can work together to help their children through this time of transition and how parents can create a co-parenting relationship that supports the needs of the children. Parenting plans are also introduced in this component.

Money Issues in Divorce

Money Issues in Divorce helps parents understand the present and long-term costs of raising their children. Such knowledge will help parents make more informed decisions about practical financial issues that will support their children.

Legal Issues and the Role of Mediation in Divorce

This component offers an introduction to common legal practices and the vocabulary of the divorce process. In addition, an introduction to mediation is presented, so that parents can review this option to resolving decisions that need to be made in divorce.

Pathways to a New Life

This component presents a discussion on communication skills and challenges and gives suggestions for possible directions the parents' future may take: reconciliation with the other parent, single parenting, new relationships, and remarriage. It also provides a conclusion to the curriculum.

Teaching Adult Learners

For many parents, this is the only parent training they have ever had. It is a highly teachable moment. The family is changing. Both fathers and mothers need encouragement to 1) try new approaches to parenting and 2) help their children through the process of divorce. *The Impact of Divorce on Children* includes information on parenting during divorce and basic information on child development and discipline.

Adults can be a challenge to teach. They are intelligent, inquisitive, and usually highly motivated to learn. Adults want their learning to be problem-centered and personalized. Many adults enjoy learning. They are life-long learners who are comfortable with “school-like” settings. Other adults are not and may have had negative experiences with school settings. As a teacher of adults, you’ll see a wide range of differences in the adults you teach.

Characteristics of Adult Learners

Here are some things to consider as you teach the parents. Remember that they as adults:

- ✓ Have a broad base of experience upon which to draw and to share with others.
- ✓ Have many other things going on in their lives: family, job, community and social responsibilities. This class may be viewed as one more thing to add to a busy schedule.
- ✓ May face barriers to learning such as unlearning, unrealistic goals, or poor self-image.
- ✓ May not risk failure in learning situations.
- ✓ Want information to be relevant to their needs and immediately applicable.
- ✓ Respond better when the material is presented through a variety of teaching methods and when information is understood through different sensory experiences.

Barriers to Learning

Adults may also have barriers to learning that you as their instructor need to be aware of. The following describes some of the barriers you may come across in your class.

Resistance to change

If what you are teaching is in conflict with the belief system of the adult learner, he/she will resist “buying into” the concepts or ideas you are presenting. Adults have definite mind-sets which resist new ideas. Be sensitive to opposing viewpoints. There are many “right ways” to accomplish the same task.

Adults need to integrate new ideas with what they already know. Ideas that conflict with what they know or believe are integrated more slowly. Integration of new knowledge requires transition time and focused effort to hear things. Adults need to process against their own experience, then unlearn and begin to accept new learning and try new things. This adult learning theory is the premise on which the format of Parents Forever is based. The shorter classes spread over several weeks allows people to process and practice what they have heard between sessions.

Negative self image

A low self esteem and lack of confidence make it hard to learn, especially when a person is afraid to ask questions. Many parents view divorce as a failure and will have a negative self image as a result.

Fear of failure

Although we are capable of learning new things at all ages of our lives, some adults feel insecure and will not participate so as not to look inadequate in a group situation. Parents may feel like they have failed at marriage and are embarrassed. The presenter can help by providing a respectful environment that is free from blame and shame. Parents may also be apprehensive or fearful of what the instructor or class will be like or whether there will be tests they are expected to take.

Assumptions about parents

What are some assumptions that are made about divorcing or single parent families? A common assumption is that two parent families are healthy and one parent families are unhealthy. Assumptions such as this need to be examined and discarded to be effective with this group. The words that come from a teacher’s mouth will reflect bias and will generate resentment from the learners. It is important in Parents Forever to assume that parents want to be better parents, to assume that they may be doing the wrong things for the right reasons, and that they know more than they think they know. Affirming their strengths as a parent is important to setting a good learning environment.

Hints for Success

When planning educational sessions for adults, it is important to provide an environment that makes it easy to learn. The ideas below will help when designing a meaningful and comfortable learning environment:

1. Consider *physical factors* that will help learners feel comfortable. Things to consider include:
 - Room size, location, and structure as well as pleasant environment.
 - Seating arrangement — types of chairs and tables.
 - Lighting quality and noise levels.
 - Ventilation and temperature.
 - Proximity to restrooms and vending machines.
 - Parking.
2. Consider *psychological factors* that will help learners feel at ease and minimize anxiety in the learning environment. Adults will learn better if you:
 - Recognize that adults come to a learning experience with their own goals and objectives, which may be similar or different from the goals of the class.
 - Include sensory experiences such as sound, sight, smell or taste in learner activities. These experiences may be used to welcome people and set the stage for learning.
 - Give encouragement to and show interest in each learner.
 - Be sensitive to learner's needs by planning breaks and flexibility in the schedule.
 - Use time well.
 - Show learners practical applications for what they are learning.
3. Consider *social factors* to help learners get acquainted with each other and the instructor. As you teach try to:
 - Take time to get acquainted, drawing upon adult expertise and life experiences.
 - Identify the needs, interests, and concerns that motivate learners.
 - Provide opportunities for group interaction.
 - Involve learners in the learning process so they become more motivated.

- Acknowledge that adult learning also tends to affect others, such as family or friends.
4. Consider *cultural factors* to help learners feel they are important. Ensure you:
- Respect and be sensitive to the cultural and ethnic diversity of learners.
 - Acknowledge that group learning needs may vary depending on their language, norms, customs, morals, beliefs and conventions.
 - Recognize that groups with similar backgrounds or incomes often have similar interests.
 - Use and respect learner information and feedback when planning content and activities.

How People Learn

Adults learn best by utilizing three primary information processing modes. These are:

1. Visual (images) — Visual learning is strong in all people; however it is more pronounced in some. Visual learners learn best when they can:
 - See what a presenter, book, or computer program is talking about.
 - See examples, diagrams, and images of what they are learning about.
 - Create images of what they are learning.

Examples of elements that incorporate visual learning include:

- Handouts that engage the learner in activity (fill-in-the-blanks, case studies, etc.).
- Visualization. Have learners describe a picture or image that comes to mind when they think of topics related to the content — how their kids adjust to divorce, successful co-parenting, themselves as emotion coaches, etc.
- Images and pictures in presentation slides.
- Props to illustrate ideas or metaphors.
- Videos.
- Graphics such as the grief cycle.

2. Auditory (sounds) — All learners, especially those with strong auditory sense, learn by talking and hearing. Auditory learners learn best when they:

- Read out loud.
- Talk about their experiences and what they are learning.
- Talk out loud when solving problems, learning new skills, or making action plans.

Examples of activities that incorporate auditory learning include:

- Incorporating handouts that provide discussion, and small group work where learners talk out loud when solving problems or working on activities.
- Asking learners to share what they already know about a topic such as “How are your children reacting to this family change?” or “How would you describe a business-like relationship?”.
- Asking learners a variety of questions on a topic and letting them share the answers out loud.
- Having learners take turns reading out loud from one of the Parent Handbook pages. Remember not everyone is comfortable reading out loud.
- Dividing the class into pairs or small groups and have them discuss information they have learned — such as how divorce affects children of different ages and stages. You may want to split couples that attend together.
- Letting learners create a question about what they have learned, such as “What are two things you want to remember about successful co-parenting strategies?”. Share the question and answer within the small group or the larger group.

3. Kinesthetic (feeling or action) — Moving and doing improves brain circulation and enhances learning. Kinesthetic learners do best when they:

- Use hands-on learning.
- Stand and move about when learning.
- Do something that involves body movement.

Examples of activities that incorporate kinesthetic learning include:

- Having learners circle or highlight key concepts and terms that are important to remember within each of the units.

- Letting learners interact with written materials by filling in blanks in Parent Handbook, discussing answers to questions, or practicing concepts such as emotion coaching.
- Ask learners to stand up and tell the person next to them two important ways a parenting plan can help them. Ask them to sit when they are done.
- Asking learners to stand up and toss a soft object, such as a stress ball, to another person in the group stating an action step they plan to take after completing the class. Keep tossing the object until all have had a chance to participate.
- Having learners write on an index card a question, comment, or concept they learned. Have them walk around the room trading cards with others several times. Tell them when to stop. Give them instructions as to what they are to do with the card they now have, such as read the card aloud, answer the questions, or discuss cards they think are most important.

It is important to incorporate a variety of activities, being sensitive to different types of learner levels and learning styles. Provide activities that create interest and practice what has been learned. Adults often learn or remember the following after one month:

- ✓ 10% of what they read.
- ✓ 20% of what they hear.
- ✓ 30% of what they see.
- ✓ 50% of what they see and hear.
- ✓ 70% of what they say.
- ✓ 90% of what they do and say.

Sources

Anderson-Porisch, S.A., Heins, R.K., Petersen, C.M., Hooper, S.E., and Bauer, J.W. (2007). *Dollar works 2: A personal financial education program (item 08503)*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension.

Land-Grant University Cooperative Extension 4-H System (n.d.). *Training trainers to teach (t3)*. Extension Service, United States Department of Agriculture, and National 4-H Council.

What Parents Bring to the Session

Most parents attending your class will come because of a court order. This may lead them to feel apprehensive, anxious or even hostile about being there. It will be up to you to help them feel at ease and make the most of this learning opportunity. It is important to note several areas that you may come across as you teach parents on this topic.

Gender Differences

Parents must understand that the well-being of their children requires both parents. Often the process of divorce ignores the important role fathers play in parenting. Many fathers are very unsure how to parent if they have been less involved or feel less competent. In addition fathers often get a clear message that they are important only for financial support. When talking about parenting, be sure to discuss how important it is that fathers stay involved and maintain a relationship with their children. Dads are parents forever, too. We need to acknowledge that men and women parent differently — not better or worse, just differently. The good news is that children benefit from these different approaches. Consider these research findings: Both fathers and mothers are important to their children from the beginning of life. Fathers and mothers are equally sensitive to infants. Children who are nurtured by both their fathers and their mothers develop better cognitively and socially. Two involved parents are better than one.

Fathers who have higher levels of involvement with their children are associated with children and adolescents who have fewer behavior problems, higher levels of sociability, and a high level of school performance (Minnesota Fathers & Families Network, May 2004, www.mnfathers.org).

A particularly challenging scenario may be when a father's involvement with his children depends on his relationship with the children's mother. This curriculum is designed to strengthen communication between parents so that the children have ready access to both parents.

Cultural Differences

The parents who attend this program have varying economic, educational, and cultural backgrounds. It is a challenge to remain inclusive with one curriculum in the face of such diversity. As an expert on people who live in your community, be sure you remain aware and sensitive to:

- ✓ Your community's values and attitudes about divorce.
- ✓ Your community's attitudes and stereotypical beliefs about different cultural, religious or ethnic groups.
- ✓ The impact culture and experience have on beliefs about divorce, marriage and the family.

It is important to help parents feel safe and less isolated when attending your program. You can create a better learning environment by using examples from your participants' varied cultural religious, social, and economic backgrounds.

Family Violence

Some parents attending this program will have experienced family violence, another challenging issue. These parents need information about how conflict and violence affect their children. If the parents in your session have had this experience, be sure to make the following points:

- ✓ Violence shows up in many parts of our lives.
- ✓ Violence means actions and words that hurt people, families and communities.
- ✓ Violence includes intimidation and threats.
- ✓ Violence is a misuse of power and control.

Despite possibly good intentions, forcing someone to “do it my way” or controlling a situation by exerting force, is a misuse of power. Each of us is personally responsible for how we use power in our relationships with our spouse, children, family, co-workers, and friends. No one “makes” someone hit them or act violently toward them. Each person must take responsibility for his or her own behavior. Blaming the victim — claiming they got what they asked for or they deserved what they got — is never right. We all choose our behavior: we can be a perpetrator, a victim, or an observer of violence. When people recognize their behavior, they can take steps to change it.

Violence is learned. When children are born, they don't know how to hit or verbally abuse one another. It is learned in families; it is passed from generation to generation. Children watch the adults in their lives deal with conflict and anger; they watch how adults “stay in control.” They imitate what they've seen. Children who experience violence in their lives experience a great deal of trauma, even if they are not physically harmed. As adults, they are more likely to abuse, or be abused by a partner. It is important to have a list of local agencies that deal with family violence issues available for participants.

Unmarried Parents

Nearly 40 percent of the children born today are born to unmarried parents. Although this program is written specifically for divorcing parents, there may be parents in the class who did not marry their child's other parent. The information is equally valid for them because they are still parents with legal obligations and a responsibility to be a part of their child's life. Legal parenthood (paternity) must be established to qualify for many benefits and collect child support. To establish paternity, parents sign a

Recognition of Parentage form in the hospital, courthouse, or child support office. Even if they do not sign a declaration, the courts can establish paternity. One way to insure that a father is indeed a child's biological parent is through genetic testing of the alleged father, the mother and the child. Once paternity is established, child support may be ordered. Having paternity established also grants fathers the right to request visitation and/or custody of their children through the court system.

The experiences of unmarried parents will vary greatly. Some will have been together for many years and have jointly cared for their children. Others will be relative strangers. Some men may not have known they were fathers until court-ordered to take a paternity test. Be sure you understand these parental circumstances and acknowledge the issues they bring up.

Another curriculum that addresses building co-parenting skills for never-married parents is "Together We Can." This curriculum was developed by Michigan State University Extension and is available on-line. Find the link to this resource at: www.parentsforever.umn.edu.

Evaluating Parents Forever

Evaluation is an important and valuable part of the Parents Forever program. It enables us to continue to improve the program and increase class quality with every session. As instructors, we review the evaluations written by the participants after each session to get a sense of how well they received the information. It is also important that we evaluate ourselves before and after a presentation, taking the time to reflect on how well the presentation went from our own perspective.

There are four evaluation tools that can be found within the Appendix section of this Educator Guide. They include:

1. Parents Forever Instructor Checklist is designed to facilitate the evaluation process. You should review this checklist before and after your presentation. It is not required to be shared with the Parents Forever staff or other instructors.
2. Parents Forever Session Evaluation: The Impact of Divorce on Children to be used at the end of this session, The Impact of Divorce on Children.
3. Parents Forever Course Evaluation is used at the end of the Parents Forever course if all of the sessions are taught.

In addition to these three tools, Parents Forever also incorporates evaluable activities to help parents practice skills and techniques taught during the session. The activity used for this unit is "I" Messages: Improving Communication, which can be found in the Teaching Handouts section of this Educator Guide.

Parents Forever

The Impact of Divorce on Children Educator's Guide

EDUCATION FOR FAMILIES IN DIVORCE TRANSITION

Part 1

How Children Experience Family Transition

Overview

Objectives

In Part 1: How Children Experience Family Transition parents will:

- ✓ Understand the experience of family transition and how it effects children.
- ✓ Understand loss and grief and how they impact children.
- ✓ Learn how family transition affects children according to age and developmental stage.
- ✓ Learn strategies to parent children during family transitions.

Topics and Timing

Topic	Estimated Time Needed	Page #
Introduction	5 minutes *	23
The Journey Through Family Transition	5 minutes *	24
What Affects a Child's Adjustment to Divorce?	10 minutes	25
How to Talk to Your Children About Divorce	5 minutes	29
Grief and Loss: – Is There a Difference Between Divorce and Death? – How Loss Affects My Child – Ambiguous Loss – When Children Cycle Through Grief and Loss	15 minutes *	31
Psychological Tasks for Children Experiencing Divorce	5 minutes *	38

(continued on the next page)

Topic	Estimated Time Needed	Page #
Family Transition: What Children Need from Parents as They Grow <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Early Years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infants — birth to 18 months • Toddlers — 18 months to 3 years • Preschool — 3 to 5 years - The Elementary Years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Elementary — 6 to 8 years • Late Elementary — 9 to 12 years - Adolescence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Adolescence — 12 to 15 years • Late Adolescence — 16 to 18 years - Young Adults — 18 years and older 	20 minutes *	41
What My Child Needs	5 minutes	44
Divorce and Family Transition: Through Your Child’s Eyes	5 minutes	45
Emotion Coaching: A Tool to Help Your Child	10 minutes *	46
“Games” Parents Play Are You Working With or Against the Other Parent? List of “Games” Parents Play Respect for the Other Parent Is a Gift You Give Your Child	10 minutes *	49
Abandonment Abandonment Happens in Different Ways What to Say to Your Child About Abandonment	5 minutes	51
Are You Alienating Your Children from Their Other Parent?	5 minutes	53
Strengthening Your Communication Skills “I” Messages Active Listening	15 minutes *	58

* Items marked with a star are required by the Minimum Standards set by the Minnesota State Supreme Court. See “Parent Education: Mandatory Curriculum Topics” in the Appendix section for more information.

Teaching Outline

Introduction

Purpose

To provide parents with the overall messages of the curriculum, to define some of the terms used in the curriculum, and to discuss safety issues.

Materials Needed

- ✓ Flipchart
- ✓ Markers

Preparation

Read through the introduction on pages 5-6 in the Parent Handbook. Review slides 1-8 and accompanying notes pages. Read the section on family violence in the “What Parents Bring to the Session” section in the Introduction to Parents Forever.

Estimated Time Needed

5 minutes

Instructions

1. Introduce yourself.
2. Begin by having participants introduce themselves and give the names and ages of their children. List the children on a flip chart to remind everyone why they are there.
3. Review the introductory PowerPoint slides 1-8. These slides cover the objectives and key topics and what parents can do to help their children. Safety is important and there are important concepts to review about safety and family violence.
4. Emphasize that not all of the co-parenting information will be applicable when there is family violence. Safety should be first and foremost.

Background for Instructors

The introduction sets the stage. It is time for the parents to focus on the reason they are here — their children. Introductions can be first name only if you think the group will be more comfortable with that. Have them keep their children in mind throughout this course. Writing the first names and ages of the children on the flipchart will keep them front and center. This will also be useful when you discuss the ages and stages later in the session.

The Journey Through Family Transition

Purpose

To help parents understand that all family members experience changes when a family goes through transition, but that the changes are different for the parents and the children.

Preparation

Read “The Journey Through Family Transition” section in the Parent Handbook pages 7-8. Review slides 9-11 and the accompanying notes pages.

Estimated Time Needed

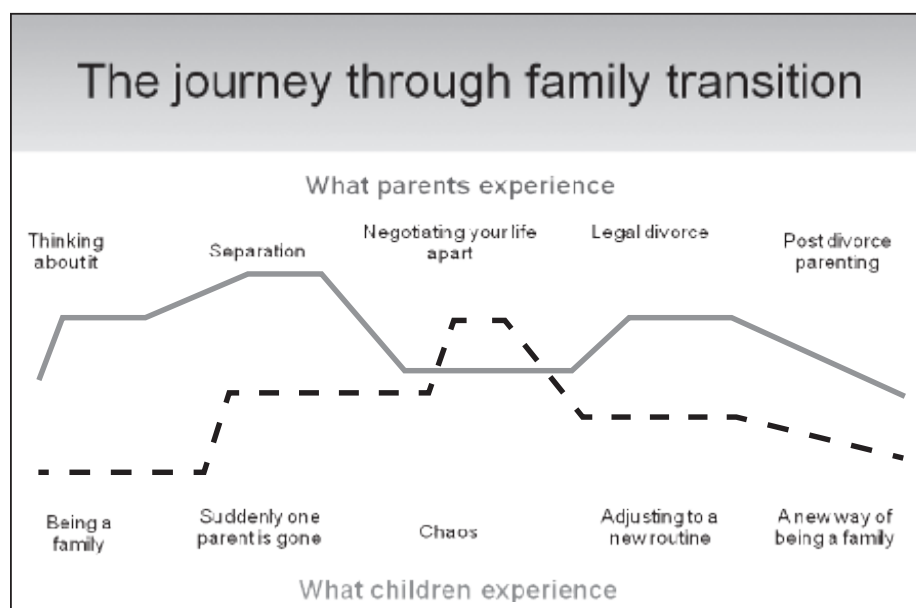
5 minutes

Instructions

1. Introduce concept of family transition. This concept is demonstrated using a PowerPoint slide with animation; as you read the notes, you can click to add each of the elements of the slide. This will allow you to walk parents through the process of family transition both for them and for their children.
2. Stress that this is a hypothetical family and the process for parents and children will be different in every family.

Source

Allen, R., McCann, E., Musich, J., & Tralle, M. (2010, May). *Parents forever: Education for families in divorce transition (Item #06772)*. St. Paul, MN; University of Minnesota Extension.



What Affects a Child's Adjustment to Divorce?

Purpose

To teach parents what may affect their children's adjustment to divorce and give them ideas on how to support their children through the process.

Preparation

Read the background research article summary "Children's Adjustment Following Divorce: Risk and Resiliency Perspective" in the Background for Instructors. Read the section on "What Affects a Child's Adjustment to Divorce?" in the Parent Handbook, pages 9-11. Review slides 12-19 and the accompanying notes pages.

Estimated Time Needed

10 minutes

Instructions

1. Review PowerPoint slides "What Affects a Child's Adjustment to Divorce?" (12-18) with participants. As you review these slides, use the animation to discuss first the risk and then the protective factors. For example, the stress of separation is due in part to the fact that kids do not understand what is happening and what it means to their life. Communication can help children understand and can reduce the stress they may be feeling.
2. Slide 19 — emphasize what needs to happen for kids to do well.
3. Ask for questions or comments.

Background for Instructors

The following is a research article summary of J. B. Kelly and R.E. Emery's 2003 article, "Children's Adjustment Following Divorce: Risk and Resilience Perspectives." It discusses a literature review on a variety of studies on adjustment, stressors, and risks for children of divorce. Here are the conclusions of that study.

Summary

Although there are differences in the average well-being of children from happy intact families and divorced families, it is also true that a majority of children from divorced families are emotionally well-adjusted. Here are some key findings.

The divorce process causes stress. Stressors for children include:

1. Stress of the initial separation.
 - Children receive little emotional preparation.
 - Children may be inadequately informed by their parents about the divorce.
 - Shifting from one physical space to another can be stressful for children.
2. Parental conflict.
 - Parental conflict is a major stressor for children.
 - 20-25% of children experience high conflict in their parent's marriage.
 - High conflict will most likely be destructive when post-divorce parents use their children (put them in the middle) in conflicts.
 - It is not uncommon to find one engaged parent and one disengaged parent following divorce.
3. Diminished parenting after divorce.
 - Parents may be preoccupied with their own emotional responses to the divorce.
 - Demands of integrating single parenting, work, and social needs may diminish parenting.
 - Depression, alcoholism, drug abuse, and psychosomatic complaints are more frequent for divorced parents than for non-divorced parents, and can diminish parenting.
 - Less positive involvement with custodial parent decreases parenting after the divorce.
4. Loss of important relationships
 - The non-resident parent (typically the father) is not around the children as much after the divorce, which can allow the children to have a diminished view of their father's importance.
 - 18-25% of children do not have contact with their non-residential parent 2-3 years after the divorce.
 - Studies have shown that children want to have more time with their fathers.
 - Moving can bring loss of friends, activities, and routines to children.

- Maternal attitudes may also influence the loss of children visiting their fathers. The study found 20-25% of mothers interfered with their children visiting their fathers.
5. Economic opportunities may become decreased.
- Divorce often reduces the standard of living for custodial parents and children.
 - Reduced income may be very stressful for children if they do not have the money to be involved in the same programs, schools, and leisure activities as before the divorce.
6. Remarriage and re-parenting.
- 75% of men and 66% of women remarry after divorce.
 - 50% of divorced adults cohabitate before they remarry.
 - One-third of children will live in a remarried or cohabitating family before age 18.
 - Remarriage is most stressful for children when entered into soon after the divorce.

Divorce poses a risk.

- ✓ Divorce increases the risk for adjustment problems in children and adolescents.
- ✓ Conduct disorders, antisocial behaviors, and problems with authority figures and parents can be common for children of divorce.
- ✓ Depression, anxiety, and self-esteem issues have also been found to be associated with children of divorce.
- ✓ Academic problems may also occur for children of divorce.
- ✓ Children of divorce may have problems in relationships as adults.

Protective factors do exist.

- ✓ One of the best predictors for children's adjustment is the psychological adjustment of the custodial parent and the quality of parenting.
- ✓ Parenting behaviors of warmth, emotional support, monitoring, authoritative discipline, and age-appropriate expectations are considered to be protective factors for children.
- ✓ Timing and appropriate parenting by the non-residential parent is also considered to be a protective factor.
- ✓ Low parental conflict is also a protective factor for children of divorce.

- ✓ 25-25% of parents are considered cooperative, meaning they do joint planning, have flexibility, communicate, and coordinate.
- ✓ 50% of parents engage in parallel parenting where there is low conflict, low communication, and emotional disengagement.
- ✓ 8-12% of parents continue to have high conflict after the divorce.
- ✓ Education techniques do help decrease conflict.
- ✓ It helps to give parents information about how parental conflict negatively affects children.
- ✓ It helps if parents are given information about resources to help them resolve their legal conflicts.

Implications

Some implications from this study are that:

- ✓ Interventions are most likely to help children if they seek to lessen parental conflict, promote authoritative and close relationships between children and both parents, and enhance economic stability. Children should be involved in interventions when appropriate.
- ✓ Parent education programs that are research-based and focused on skill development are better at educating parents and promoting change than those that are effect-based.
- ✓ Researchers should be encouraged to develop objective, reliable, and valid measures of the important struggles associated with divorce that can be implemented in schools and/or clinical practice.

Source

Kelly, J. B. & Emery, R. E. (2003). *Children's adjustment following divorce: Risk and resilience perspectives*. *Family Relations* 52, 352-362.

How to Talk to Your Children About Divorce

Purpose

To help parents understand how their children may feel when they learn about their parents' divorce.

To encourage parents to communicate with their children about their family transition.

Preparation

Review Background for Instructors. Read pages 12-13 in the Parent Handbook. Review slides 20-21 and the accompanying notes pages.

Estimated Time Needed

5 minutes

Instructions

1. Display slide, "How to Talk to Your Children About Divorce." Discuss main points using the notes on the slide and "How to Talk to Your Children About Divorce" in the Parent Handbook (pages 12-13).
2. Display slide, "What Don't Children Need to Know?"
3. Ask parents if they have questions or would like to share how they have talked to their children about divorce.
4. It is important to emphasize that talking to the children is not a one-time occurrence but there should be on-going communication between parents and children.
5. Refer parents to the parent handbook pages 12-13 for more information.

Background for Instructors

Many parents in class may have already told their children about the divorce. However, they may not understand how important it is to keep the communication open about what is happening with their family. Research shows that many parents do not adequately explain the divorce process or keep their children informed about what the plans are as the family changes. Emphasize that children often need to hear the same messages again in order to understand; they may have questions that parents have not thought about, fears that parents need to address, and misunderstandings.

It is useful to know that tone and content should be about building trust and being able to communicate. Sometimes children will need others to talk to about the separation or divorce because of the strong emotions that this topic may bring out in their parents. Encourage parents to be sensitive and perceptive to the needs of their children.

Source

Neuman, M. G. (1998). *Helping your kids cope with divorce the sandcastles way*. New York, NY: Random House.

Grief and Loss: Is There a Difference Between Divorce and Death?

Purpose

To help parents understand the grief and loss associated with family transition and the ways reaction to divorce and death differ.

Preparation

Read Background for Instructors. Read the section on “Grief and Loss: Is There a Difference Between Divorce and Death?” in the Parent Handbook on pages 14-15. Review slides 22-24 and the accompanying notes pages.



Estimated Time Needed

5 minutes

Instructions

1. Introduce the concept that family change creates a loss that can be grieved (from background, notes pages and Parent Handbook). The slides show how grief from divorce is different from the grief due to the death of a parent.
2. Share the PowerPoint slides on “Grief and Loss: Is There a Difference Between Divorce and Death” (slides 22-24).
3. If there is time, ask parents to share what, if any signs of loss they have seen in their children.

Background for Instructors

For children, family change can be experienced as a loss. Children feel two profound losses when parents divorce: the loss of their family as they know it and the loss of one parent in their daily lives. When people experience change and loss, they go through different stages in the way they react to the event. The loss that occurs during divorce and family transition is often compared to that of experiencing a death. However, with a death, sorrow is usually uppermost after bereavement. The lost one can be remembered with love and affection and be idealized. With divorce, anger is often uppermost and sorrow can be very hard to locate.

In divorce, the fact that one parent has chosen to leave voluntarily can influence how children feel about what has happened. Children often have little information about what is going on and nobody to ask, so they may blame themselves for what has happened. Or they may become angry

because they feel powerless in the situation. Thus, in divorce the wishes, interests, and thoughts of parents and children are likely to be opposed, which rarely happens following bereavement.

Sources

Clulow, C. F. (1990). Divorce as bereavement: Similarities and differences. *Family and Conciliation Courts Review*, 28(1), 19-22.

Wallerstein, J. S. (1986). Children of divorce: The psychological tasks of the child. In R. H. Moos (Ed.), *Coping with Life Crises: An Integrated Approach*. New York, NY: Plenum Press.

Grief and Loss: How Loss Affects My Child

Purpose

To help parents gain an understanding of how much and what types of loss their children are experiencing during their family transition.

Materials Needed

- ✓ Teaching Handout: “How Loss Affects My Child”
- ✓ Pencils

Preparation

Review the “How Loss Affects My Child” worksheet and slide 25 and the accompanying notes.

Estimated Time Needed

5 minutes

Instructions

1. Direct parents to worksheet on page 16 of Parent Handbook or provide worksheet as a handout (see Teaching Handouts).
2. Have participants fill out each column, thinking about each of their children. Provide a few examples to help parents get started, if needed.
3. Process together as a large group:
 - Ask participants what they came up with under each column.
 - Ask which column had the most items and which had the least — and if they expected that result.
 - Ask participants what they have tried to do to keep their children’s losses minimal.
 - Point out that there are positives to be found if they look for them. Ask if there are any parents willing to share examples of “gains” that their children have experienced

Grief and Loss: Ambiguous Loss

Purpose

To help parents understand the concept of ambiguous loss as it relates to their children in the separation and divorce process.

Preparation

Read Background for Instructors. Read the section on “Ambiguous Loss” in the Parent Handbook on page 17. Review slide 26 and the accompanying notes page.

Estimated Time Needed

5 minutes

Instructions

1. Introduce the concept of ambiguous loss to parents. This may be an unfamiliar concept to them. This confusion or ambiguity may interfere with the ability to resolve the loss.
2. Review slides about “Ambiguous Loss.”
3. Ask if parents have questions or need clarification.

Background for Instructors

Experiencing divorce and family transition also means experiencing loss. For some children and youth, the loss they experience can be described as “ambiguous loss.”

Ambiguous loss may happen when a...

- ✓ Situation is complex and confusing.
- ✓ Person may seem to be present and not present at the same time.
- ✓ Person is physically gone but psychologically present such as in a divorce or separation.

In the situation of separation or divorce for children and youth:

- ✓ Youth may feel uncertain about who is part of the family and who is not.
- ✓ Time with one parent may end or be sporadic.
- ✓ Youth may transition between parents’ homes and experience a variety of losses.

- ✓ Youth may feel unsure about how to handle the loss, not due to any specific problem they are having, but because of the confusion of the situation.

How can ambiguous loss affect youth and their families?

- ✓ There may be confusion about family roles and responsibilities.
- ✓ When an absent parent has been responsible for certain family decisions, families may have trouble moving on when a decision needs to be made.
- ✓ A child may be confused about what to expect now and in the future
- ✓ After a separation or divorce, children may have confused expectations about how the absent parent will be a part of their life.
- ✓ If the family continues to change and grow after a divorce, there may be confusion about roles of new family members such as step-family members and new partners.
- ✓ Ambiguous loss often affects other family members (grandparents, other relatives) as well.
- ✓ If parents and/or other family members are confused about the situation, youth may be unable to cope positively with the situation.
- ✓ Family members may deny or attend to only parts of the divorce by not wanting to discuss or validate the absent parent or by continuing to work on reconciliation after the divorce.

Youth have lost their status of being children and have not reached adulthood and the independence it brings. Youth often feel uncomfortable in their own changing bodies and at the same time may be receiving mixed messages from others about how to act and who they are. Ambiguous loss may be more intense during the teenage years because of the complex issues teens deal with through becoming mature. Feelings of uncertainty can also get in the way of teens' ability to resolve their loss.

Sources

Ashbourne, L., Baker, L., & Male, C. (2002). *Ambiguous loss in adolescents: Increasing understanding to enhance intervention*. London, ON: Center for Children and Families in the Justice System.

Boss, P. (1999). *Ambiguous loss: Learning to live with unresolved grief*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Grief and Loss: When Children Cycle Through Grief and Loss

Purpose

This segment looks at grief from a child's perspective. It explains that grief is cyclical and children revisit grief issues at each of their developmental stages.

Materials Needed

- ✓ "Cycles" segment from the Parents Forever DVD
- ✓ DVD player and TV

Preparation

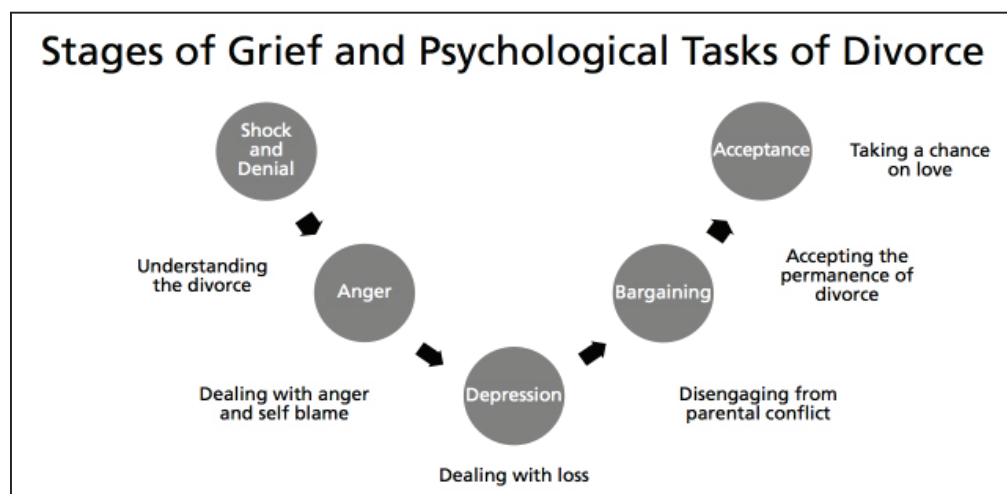
Read "When Children Cycle Through Grief and Loss" in the Parent Handbook, pages 18-19. Preview DVD segment titled "Cycles." Review slides 27-30 and the notes pages accompanying the slides.

Estimated Time Needed

10 minutes

Instructions

1. Introduce the children and grief topic with slide 27.
 - Explain that children grieve their losses throughout the process of divorce and go on grieving in different ways at different times as they grow.
 - Children grieve differently from adults and a variety of behaviors may appear at each stage of a child's development.
 - Urge parents to identify their children's current stage of grief.



2. Discuss the five stages of grief on slide 28 using the definitions and examples from the parent handbook pages 18-19.
3. Explain the “cyclical” nature of grief using slide 29.
4. Introduce and show the “Cycles” segment from the DVD.
5. Ask the following discussion questions:
 - What is the main message of this segment?
 - How do children express grief differently from adults?
 - How can parents determine whether a child’ depression is “normal” or whether the child needs professional help? (See page 21 of the Parent Handbook.)
 - How can parents help their children through their cycles of grief?

Sources

Corr, C., Nabe, C., & Corr, D. (2006). *Death and Dying, Life and Living (5th ed.)*. Florence, KY: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Kubler-Ross, E. (1969). *On death and dying*. New York, NY: Scribner.

Meyers, S., Allen, R., Tralle, M., Sheehan, T., Neil, N., Stoppa-Godoy, P., et al. (1997). *Cycles. Video segment from Parents Forever and Padres para siempre DVD (item 08450)*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service.

Meyers, S., Allen, R., Tralle, M., Sheehan, T., Neil, N., Stoppa-Godoy, P., et al. (1997). *Parents forever: Education for families in divorce transition (EP-08451)*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service.

Psychological Tasks for Children Experiencing Divorce

Purpose

To help parents understand the psychological tasks children must go through before, during, and after divorce.

Preparation

Review the background for this section. Read “Psychological Tasks for Children Experiencing Divorce” on pages 20-21 in the Parent Handbook. Review slide 31 and the accompanying notes. Additional notes are on slide 32.

Estimated Time Needed

5 minutes

Instructions

1. Review Background for Instructors.
2. Display slide 31, “Psychological tasks for children experiencing divorce.” This slide is animated for each of the psychological tasks.
3. Stress the following points while reviewing the slide:
 - While children move along a common developmental ladder, they move at an individual pace.
 - As they move through the developmental stages, children develop coping skills, conscientiousness, and the capacity to give and receive love.
 - Children who experience divorce face an additional set of tasks, specific to divorce, in addition to the normal developmental tasks of growing up.
 - Children’s psychological tasks begin as their parents’ conflicts escalate during the marriage, and continue through the separation, divorce, and post-divorce years.
 - The psychological tasks correlate with the grief cycle. During the shock and denial stage, understanding the divorce is a key task for children. During the anger stage, working through anger and guilt is an important task. Dealing with loss is important in the depression stage, and accepting the permanence of divorce is important to the acceptance stage.

Background for Instructors

Divorce is a stressful experience for children. It is similar in some ways to experiencing the death of a parent. Children may experience a period of adjustment similar to the grief process and as part of this process have a series of psychological tasks to navigate, both immediately and in the years ahead. These tasks follow a time sequence beginning with the parental separation and culminate at late adolescence or early adulthood. These tasks represent a major addition to the normal developmental tasks of growing up.

Understanding the divorce

A child's first task upon the parents' separation is to understand the meaning of the divorce and to understand the family and household changes it will bring. With the parents' help, children begin to understand the reality and begin to adjust to the changes that divorce brings. Children feel a need to deny in order to avoid thoughts and feelings they don't know what to do with. The task of understanding what led to the marital failure requires the perspective of the more mature adolescent and young adult.

Disengaging from parental conflict

Children and adolescents need to get on with their own lives as soon as possible after the divorce, to resume their normal activities at school and play, and to return to the normal tasks of growing up. They should strive to remove the divorce from the center of their thoughts so they can return to their own tasks, interests, problems, and peer relationships. To achieve this task, children need to deal with the feelings that accompany the family disruption and be encouraged by their parents to remain children.

Dealing with loss

Through divorce, children experience multiple losses including the loss of the intact family and the loss of the presence of one parent from their daily lives. Other losses include the loss of familiar routines, traditions, the family home, school, and neighborhood. The task of absorbing loss is the single most difficult task of divorce. It requires children to overcome their inevitable sense of rejection, unlovability, and powerlessness. The loss of the parent intertwines with a lowered self-esteem. Absorbing loss becomes easier if children have a good relationship with both parents and an on-going, reliable, parenting time schedule.

Dealing with anger and self-blame

Children know that to a large degree, divorce is voluntary. They know that their unhappiness has been caused by the very people who are supposed to protect and care for them. As a result, children get angry at their parents. They experience divorce as indifference to their needs. They may perceive their parents as self-centered and uncaring, as preaching a double standard, or as weak and unable to deal with their problems. At the same time, children are aware of their parents' neediness and vulnerabilities and may feel guilty that they are at fault. Such anger keeps kids alienated from their parents and may contribute to acting out behavior, school difficulty, and low achievement. Anger that does not subside seems to keep youth from healing. The children's major tasks are to work through their anger, to recognize their parents as human beings with weaknesses, and to respect them for their real efforts and courage. This cooling of anger and the task of forgiveness may require the emotional maturity of an older child.

Accepting the permanence of divorce

Children need to come to accept that the divorce is permanent and will not be undone. At first, children feel a strong need to deny the divorce. This may be the first step in the coping process. Some children refuse to accept divorce as a permanent state. They may not overcome the fantasy of reunification until they finally separate from their parents and leave home, or until a parent remarries. Younger children have greater difficulty with this task than children who are older at the time of the break-up.

Taking a chance on love

This is probably the most important task for growing children and the central task of adolescence and young adulthood. They must hold on to a realistic vision that they can love and be loved. This involves being able to turn away from a model of parents who could not stay committed to each other. They must learn to take a chance on loving with the full knowledge that all relationships will end (in death or divorce) but with the realistic hope their relationships will flourish and endure. This last task is built on successfully negotiating all the other tasks. In order to trust in the reliability of relationships and maintain the capacity to love and be loved, the child of divorce needs to have acquired confidence in his or her lovability and self-worth.

Source

Wallerstein, J. (1983). Children of divorce: The psychological tasks of the child. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 53(2), 230-243.

Family Transition: What Children Need from Their Parents As They Grow

Purpose

To describe basic child development at different ages and stages and provide suggestions about how parents going through family transition can support their children. This section includes information on children birth through young adult.



Materials Needed

- ✓ Assortment of toys (see Exercise 1 below)
- ✓ Flipchart paper
- ✓ Markers
- ✓ Pencils and paper (Exercise 2)

Preparation

Read “What Children Need from Their Parents as They Grow” on pages 22-29 in the Parent Handbook. Review slides 33-52 and the notes accompanying slides. Decide which exercise to use.



Estimated Time Needed

20 minutes

Instructions

1. Introduce the topic of how the age and developmental stage of children can affect their response and adaptation to family change.
 - Children have a set of developmental tasks to master at each age or stage.
 - Their stage of development affects how they think about things, their physical abilities and their emotional responses.
 - At different ages, divorce and family transition may impact them differently.
2. Conduct Exercise 1 or Exercise 2 (below) depending on the size of your group and the amount of time you have for this exercise.
3. Ask them to come back together and share what they wrote.

4. Review the slides for each age group (slides 36-51) to affirm their observations and add anything else that was missed.
5. Ask if parents have questions or comments about any of the age groups.
6. Emphasize that regardless of their age, all children need emotional support, economic support, effective parenting, and freedom from parental conflict (slide 52).

Exercise 1

This activity will help parents think about the different ages of children they have and how separation and divorce affects them based on their developmental stage.

Explain to parents that they will find objects or toys at their table that represent ages of children:

- ✓ Infant to 2 years — stacking blocks
- ✓ Preschool (2 to 5 years) — puzzle and play dough
- ✓ School age (6 to 8 years old) — ruler and book (early reading)
- ✓ School age (9 to 12 years old) — book (more advanced) and violin
- ✓ Teens — iPod and cell phone or car keys
- ✓ Young adults — college catalogue, job application

Break up participants into six groups (these may be based on the age of their children) and give each group an object that represents the age child they will be talking about.

Once they are in groups ask them to:

- ✓ Identify the age of the children they will be talking about by the object you gave them.
- ✓ Write their age group at the top of a piece of flipchart paper.
- ✓ Brainstorm with others in their group about how children are affected by divorce at this age and what parents can do to help them.

Exercise 2

This will take less time than Exercise 1. Do the following:

- ✓ Ask parents to write down the names and ages of their children.
- ✓ Have them think about how this family change is affecting each child.

- ✓ Have them write what they think their children need from them.

Sources

Brotherson, S., and Jacobson, B. (2007, April). *Talking to children about divorce (publication FS-638)*. Fargo, ND: North Dakota State University Extension Service.

University of Minnesota Extension Service (1995). *Positive parenting I: A parent education curriculum*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service.

University of Minnesota Extension Service (1997). *Positive parenting II: A video-based parent education curriculum*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service.

University of Minnesota Extension Service (1999). *Positive parenting of teens*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service.



What My Child Needs

Purpose

To help parents consider the individual needs of their children.

Materials Needed

- ✓ Teaching Handout: “What My Child Needs”
- ✓ Pencils

Preparation

Parents will need Parent Handbooks or make copies of handout “What My Child Needs” from Teaching Handouts. You may want to have multiple copies per parent so they can fill out one for each child. Decide whether this will be an in-class exercise with discussion or homework to discuss the next time the group meets.

Estimated Time Needed

5 minutes

Instructions

1. Ask parents to think about what their child is like. If they have more than one child, ask them to complete a form for each child. Review the forms using slide 53 and reading the questions parents are asked to respond to about their child.
2. Ask parents to share a few examples of special things they want to make sure are considered about their child as they and the other parent plan for how they will parent in two homes. Emphasize that this is a good way to begin thinking about a parenting plan — and that we will cover how to create a parenting plan in the next section of this class.

Source

Allen, R. M., and Tralle, M. (2004). *We agree: Creating a parenting plan (BU-08019)*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service.

Divorce and Family Transition: Through Your Child's Eyes

Purpose

To help parents understand what their child may be thinking and what parents can say or do to address the child's fears and provide reassurance.

Preparation

Read the Parent Handbook page 32. Review slides 54-55 and the notes accompanying them.

Estimated Time Needed

5 minutes

Instructions

1. Introduce the topic by explaining to parents that children look at the world differently than adults. Here are some things your child may believe about the changes in your family. Show slide 54. Read the quotes in the bubbles and ask parents how they might respond. Suggested responses are on the notes pages as well as page 32 in the parent handbook. Repeat with slide 55.
2. Sometimes the parent responses may differ from those that are the ideal. The next section on "Emotion Coaching" will help parents understand how important this tool will be in helping their children deal with their feelings.

Emotion Coaching: A Tool to Help Your Child

Purpose

To teach parents how to use emotion coaching as a way to talk to children and help them deal with their feelings.

Materials Needed

- ✓ Copies of “Emotion Coaching Role Play” from the Teaching Handouts, if desired.

Preparation

Read Background for Instructors and the section on “Emotion Coaching” in the Parent Handbook on pages 33-34. Review the role play and think about how you will use it. Make copies if needed. Review slides 56-60 and the accompanying notes pages.

Estimated Time Needed

10 minutes

Instructions

1. Display slides 56-58.
2. Emphasize the following points:
 - Research shows that emotion coaching helps children resist the negative effects of divorce (slide 57).
 - Share information about how parents react differently to their children’s emotions (the four styles of parenting: dismissing, disapproving, laissez-faire, and emotion coaching)
 - Review the five steps of emotion coaching (slide 58).
3. Use the example found on the Emotion Coaching Role Play to illustrate the four styles of parenting and how emotion coaching can be used. This could be done as a role play or be instructor led.
4. If there is time, have parents share examples of situations where emotion coaching could be helpful and solicit ideas for how to handle the situation using the five steps.
5. An excellent book to have as a resource to parents is “What Am I Feeling?” by John Gottman (2004, Talaris Research Institute, Seattle, WA: Parenting Press).

Background for Instructors

Parents sometimes have difficulty dealing with their child's emotions. A family change like divorce can certainly bring up a lot of emotions in children and adults alike. Emotion coaching is a tool that parents can use to talk to their children about their emotions in order to come up with appropriate and healthy ways of dealing with those feelings.

Unfortunately, not all parents were "emotion-coached" as children. Their tendency might be to respond to their children's feelings in a way that matches their own attitudes about emotions.

There are generally four styles of parenting that parents use in reacting to their children's emotions:

Dismissing

Some examples of this style of parenting include:

- ✓ Ignoring bad emotions.
- ✓ Thinking emotions are unimportant or simply not knowing what else to do.
- ✓ Viewing negative emotions as harmful or unnecessary.
- ✓ Want to "fix" the situation for the child.

Disapproving

A parent with a disapproving parenting style may be prone to:

- ✓ Punishing negative emotions.
- ✓ Viewing emotions as unacceptable and controllable.

Laissez-faire

Some examples of a laissez-faire parenting style include:

- ✓ Accepting emotions without guidance.
- ✓ Allowing total expression and non-interference.

Emotion Coaching

When a parent has an emotion coaching parenting style they are:

- ✓ Providing empathy and guidance.
- ✓ Teaching the child that emotions are okay.
- ✓ Helping the child learn to identify feelings.

- ✓ Helping the child determine appropriate behavior.

It is important for parents and children to know what they are feeling. Accepting feelings and having empathy for what the child is feeling by valuing and sharing a child's emotional experience of divorce or family transition are the best ways to nurture a child's emotional development.

The five steps of emotion coaching:

1. Be aware of the child's emotions.
2. Recognize emotions as an opportunity to connect.
3. Listen with empathy.
4. Help the child name emotions.
5. Set limits and find good solutions.

Source

Gottman, J. (2004). *What Am I Feeling?* Talaris Research Institute: Parenting Press. www.ParentingPress.com.

Gottman, J., and Declaire, J., (1997). *Raising and emotionally intelligent child*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Games Parents Play

Purpose

To help parents understand when they are “playing games” and the impact this has on their children.



Materials Needed

- ✓ “Games Parents Play” segment from the Parents Forever DVD
- ✓ DVD player and TV

Preparation

Read Background for Instructors. Review “Are You Working Against or With the Other Parent?” in the Parent Handbook (page 35). Preview the video “Games Parents Play.” Review slides 61-65 and the accompanying notes.

Estimated Time Needed

10 minutes

Instructions

1. Introduce the topic to parents. When we think about games, we usually think of happy, fun times with our families. Other “games” parents play lead to putting children in the middle and interfere with effective co-parenting.
2. With parents, view slides (61-62), “Are you working against or with other parent?” Have parents privately reflect on the two lists and answer the question, “Which of the following describe your relationship with the other parent?”.
3. Invite parents, while viewing “Games Parents Play,” to think about how games may interfere with their ability to act reasonably to assure that their children have access to both parents and a positive relationship. With participants, view the DVD segment “Games Parents Play” or read games list in the Parent Handbook. View slide (63) and notes: “Games Parents Play.”
4. Read questions to discuss after viewing the Parents Forever DVD or reading “What are the ‘Games’ Parents Play?”. Allow time for responses to these discussion questions:
 - Have you seen a parent or been a parent who played any of the games?
 - What impact does it have on the children?

- As tempting as it might be to “play games,” why is it important to avoid that kind of behavior with the other parent?
 - Point out that there are no winners in these games, least of all the children.
5. View slide 65, “Respect for the Other Parent Is a Gift You Give Your Children.” Review the main points using the slide/notes and the Parent Handbook (page 38).
 6. Read this summary: “Choosing to change behaviors to be respectful of the other parent is the key to a better future for parents and children”.

Background for Instructors

Some “games” seen in divorcing families and some ideas for avoiding them are shown in the video and in the list of “Games Parents Play.” Parents often see themselves in the scenarios.

What parents say, what they do, and the feelings they express about the other parent have important consequences for their children. Both parents will continue to be a parent for the rest of their lives. Negative comments, nasty remarks, and unnecessary information should not be shared with or in front of children. Kind words, maintaining one’s part in parenting agreements, and having a positive attitude will provide great rewards for children.

Learning how to recognize and avoid alienating children from the other parent and learning how to work with the other parent in a respectful way are valuable gifts parents can give their children.

Sources

Brumley, J. P. (2004). *Divorce without disaster: Collaborative law in Texas*. Dallas, Texas: PSC Books.

Emery, R. E. (2004). *The truth about children and divorce: Dealing with the emotions so you and your children can thrive*. New York, NY: Viking/Penguin.

Meyers, S., Allen, R., Tralle, M., Sheehan, T., Neil, N., Stoppa-Godoy, P., et al. (1997). Games parents play. *Video segment from Parents Forever and Padres para siempre DVD (item 08450)*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service.

Meyers, S., Allen, R., Tralle, M., Sheehan, T., Neil, N., Stoppa-Godoy, P., et al. (1997). *Parents forever: Education for families in divorce transition (EP-08451)*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service.

Abandonment

Purpose

To help parents understand the different kinds of child abandonment and children's perceptions that can stem from them.

Materials Needed

- ✓ Activity "Mr. Gray's Bunny" and/or "How Divorce Affected Me: A Reflection of a Ninety-year-old" from the Teaching Handouts

Preparation

Read Background for Instructors and the sections on "Abandonment Happens in Different Ways" and "What to Say to Your Child About Abandonment" in the Parent Handbook pages 39-40. Review slides 66-75 and the accompanying notes. Decide how to use the additional activities.

Estimated Time Needed

5 minutes

Instructions

1. Review slides 66-74 regarding "Abandonment Happens in Different Ways" and "What to Say to Your Child About Abandonment."
2. As an added out-of-class activity for parents who have children dealing with abandonment— slide 75.
3. Read the instructions and go through the activity "Mr. Gray's Bunny" and/or "How Divorce Affected Me: A Reflection of a Ninety-year-old" in the Teaching Handouts as additional resources for parents. These resources can be used by the parent with their children to help them realize which problems they can and cannot solve. It will also open the door to discussing better attitudes for those problems that cannot be solved immediately.

Background for Instructors

Each of these forms of abandonment may have nothing to do with the child, but that child cannot help but to take the abandonment personally. As a result the child may feel an overwhelming sense of rejection. The thought that the child may no longer feel loved by, wanted by or cared about by one of his or her parents may severely impact the child's sense of self-esteem. Children perceive their parents' love as unconditional and never-ending. They may think, "If my parent can't handle me, who can?"

It is recommended that children who experience abandonment seek counseling, especially those whose parent disappears and later resumes sporadic or unpredictable contact. These children often struggle with very mixed messages about the abandoning parent and what their behavior tells them about themselves.

Source

Neuman, M. G. (1998). *Helping your kids cope with divorce the sandcastles way*. New York : NY: Random House.

Are You Alienating Your Children from Their Other Parent?

Purpose

To help children benefit from a positive relationship with both parents following separation and divorce.

Preparation

Read the background summary on “The Alienated Child” in the Background for Instructors. Read pages 41-42 in Parent Handbook. Review slides 76-78 and the accompanying notes pages.

Estimated Time Needed

5 minutes

Instructions

1. Introduce the topic to parents using slides 76-78. In many cases parents are able to co-parent successfully and share the care of their children with the help of a parenting plan. However, when there is high conflict, some parents put their children in the difficult position of making them choose between their parents. This can cause children to become alienated from one of their parents.
2. Read each section in the parent handbook aloud, pausing after each group, then read the next section, pause for quiet reflection, repeat. Do the same for the remaining questions; read, pause, and as time permits end by asking if anyone wishes to share a comment or observation.

Background for Instructors

The term Parental Alienation Syndrome is used to describe high conflict cases and has led to confusion and misunderstanding. It is better understood from a family systems perspective where all parts of the problem are considered — the child, the aligned parent, the alienated parent, and the inter-relationships occurring in the divorce and separation process.

It is important to distinguish the alienated child (one who persistently refuses and rejects visitation because of unreasonable negative views and feelings) from other children who resist contact with a parent after separation but for a variety of normal, realistic, and/or developmentally expectable reasons.

There are multiple reasons that children resist visitation including normal developmental processes (separation anxiety), high conflict between parents, parenting styles (rigidity, anger or insensitivity to the child),

concern about the emotional stability of the residential parent (not wanting to leave them alone), and remarriage of the parent.

There is a continuum of child-parent relationships after separation and divorce:

- ✓ *Positive with both parents* — The majority of separated children who have a positive relationship with both parents want to spend almost equal time with each parent.
- ✓ *Affinity with one parent* — The children prefer to spend most of time with one parent, but desire contact with both parents, and may shift affinity over time; personality, interests, and gender may play a role.
- ✓ *Allied children* — There is consistent preference for one parent, and limited contact with the other; the child may express ambivalence, anger, sadness, or love as well as resistance to contact.
- ✓ *Estranged children* — The children are realistically estranged because of family violence, abuse, or neglect; the abusive parent often accuses the other parent of alienating the children against him or her.
- ✓ *Alienated children* — These children express rejection of one parent stridently and without apparent guilt or ambivalence, strongly resist or refuse contact, and display distorted and exaggerated reactions. They are responding to complex and frightening dynamics within the divorce process itself, to an array of parental behaviors, and also to their own vulnerabilities that make them susceptible to becoming alienated. The syndrome most often occurs in high conflict custody cases.

The following are some alienating processes:

- ✓ Children are used in the expression of marital conflict.
- ✓ One parent experiences the separation as humiliating (“He left us”).
- ✓ It is a highly conflicted divorce and litigation — children are made confidants, made to choose, are exposed to parental denigration, or polarization of the family.
- ✓ There are new partners, extended kin, and professionals involved — allegations accompany the proceedings.
- ✓ Behaviors of the aligned parent include negative views of the rejected parent and innuendos that the child isn’t safe or that the other parent is not needed in the child’s life, is not worthy, or doesn’t love the child.

- ✓ Behaviors of the rejected parent include passivity and withdrawal, and counter-rejection of the child; the rejected parent may have harsh and rigid parenting styles, be self-centered and immature, have other critical and demanding traits, or diminished empathy for the child.

Children's responses depend upon:

- ✓ The child's developmental stage and vulnerability.
- ✓ The child's age and cognitive capacity. (Alienation is unusual before age 7 or 8. It is most common at ages 9-15 and/ or when there is sibling influence.)
- ✓ Whether the child feels abandoned.
- ✓ The child's temperament and personality (anxious, fearful, passive, poor self-esteem).
- ✓ The child's cognitive limitations.

Some other parent-child relationship factors include:

- ✓ The child is dependent on the aligned parent.
- ✓ One parent has made threats.
- ✓ The child identifies more with the aligned parent.
- ✓ There is a desire to rescue the depressed, hurt parent.
- ✓ The family lacks external support.

Possible responses and behaviors of an alienated child include:

- ✓ There is extreme disproportion between the child's perception and beliefs about the rejected parent and the actual history of the rejected parent's behaviors and the parent-child relationship.
- ✓ The child gives trivial reasons to justify behavior.
- ✓ The child expresses strong resistance to visiting or absolutely refuses to see the parent.
- ✓ The alienated child presents his or her story very much as the alienating parent does.
- ✓ The child has been given permission to be powerful and to be hostile and rude toward the rejected parent.
- ✓ The child idealizes or speaks glowingly about the aligned parent.
- ✓ The syndrome impacts the child's relationships with peers and other family members.

In conclusion, there needs to be a full assessment made to understand the many factors and influences leading to the child's abrupt rejection of a previously acceptable and meaningful relationship. No one factor produces the alienated child.

Sources

Dalton, E., and Hickey, E. (1994). *Healing hearts*. Detroit, MI: Gold Leaf Press.

Kelly, J. B. and Johnston, J. R. (2001, July). The alienated child: A reformulation of Parental Alienation Syndrome. *Family Court Review*, 39(3), 249-266.

Meyers, S., Allen, R., Tralle, M., Sheehan, T., Neil, N., Stoppa-Godoy, P., et al. (1997). *Parents forever: Education for families in divorce transition (EP-08451)*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service.

Strengthening Your Communication Skills: “I” Messages

Purpose

To teach parents to communicate their feelings honestly while respecting the feelings of others.

Materials Needed

- ✓ Flipchart and markers
- ✓ “I” messages practice sheet from Parent Handbook page 44
- ✓ Copies of the “I Messages: Improving Communication” worksheet from Teaching Handouts

Preparation

Read the Parent Handbook pages 43-45. Preview video segment “Owning Your Feelings.” Make copies of “I” messages activity from Teaching Handouts. Review slides 79-84 and the accompanying notes pages.

Estimated Time Needed

15 minutes

Instructions

1. Refer parents to “Strengthening Your Communication Skills: ‘I’ Messages” in the Parent Handbook, pages 43-45.
2. Introduce the concept of “I” messages using slides 79-81.
3. Introduce the video: Ask parents to watch the reactions of the people in the video when the different kinds of messages are used. Ask them to think about their own style of communication when they speak, particularly to the other parent.
4. Show video, “Owning Your Feelings” (slide 82).
5. Ask: “Why are “I” messages often more effective than “You” messages? How do you see “I” messages being used in negative ways?”.



6. Let parents know that using “I” messages takes practice and that it is not a magic fix when the patterns of communication between parents are full of long-standing conflict. “I” messages are useful in improving most types of communication.
7. Discuss sample “I” messages from the Parent Handbook. As a group rewrite the “You” messages into “I” messages. Write them on the flipchart.
8. Discuss the concept of “Hidden You” messages using slide 83. We want to be sure that what we say is a genuine “I” message. Sometimes messages beginning with “I” can have an accusatory tone because they carry a “Hidden You” message. “Hidden You” statements begin with the words like “I feel,” “I am concerned,” but then are followed by a “You” message. For example:
 - “You” — “You don’t understand.”
 - “Hidden You” — “I feel that you don’t understand.”
 - “I” — “I don’t feel understood.”
9. Revisit your group-generated “I” message to make sure that there isn’t a “Hidden You” in it. If so rewrite it.
10. Use slide 84 to emphasize that non-verbal communication plays a large role in how the message is heard and understood.
11. If you will be meeting with the parents another time, ask parents to complete the “I” Messages: Improving Communication” worksheet as homework. Discuss the experiences that parents had with using “I” messages when they return for the next class.

Strengthening Your Communication Skills: Active Listening

Purpose

To help parents improve their listening skills.

Preparation

Read pages 45-46 of Parent Handbook. Review the “Active Listening” activity. Review slides 85-87 and the accompanying notes pages.

Estimated Time Needed

10 minutes

Instructions

1. Refer parents to “Improving Communication: Active Listening” in the Parent Handbook, page 45-46.
2. Conduct the “Active Listening” Activity (see below) and summarize the points of active listening.
3. Review active listening concepts using slides 85-87.



Active Listening Activity

Have participants pair off. For two minutes, one person shares the best thing that has happened to him or her recently. The second person “shows” the other that he is not listening. After two minutes, the second person communicates the best thing that has happened and the first person is the non-listener.

Ask:

- ✓ “What made you aware that the other person was not listening?”
- ✓ “How did you feel when you became aware that the other person was not listening?”

Now have the communicator share the worst thing that has happened recently. The second person now “shows” the other person that she or he is listening. After two minutes switch the communicator/listener roles and repeat the exercise.

Ask:

- ✓ “What made you aware that the other person was listening?”

- ✓ “How did you feel when you became aware that the other person was listening?”

Explain: We have just experienced observing body movements and actions of the listener when we were communicating with another adult. We also shared feelings we experienced when someone listened and when they did not listen. Children also experience these actions and feelings when they attempt to communicate with us.

Parents Forever

The Impact of Divorce on Children Educator's Guide

EDUCATION FOR FAMILIES IN DIVORCE TRANSITION

Part 2

Co-parenting Your Children

Overview

Objectives

In Part 2: Co-parenting Your Children parents will:

- ✓ Learn strategies for effective co-parenting.
- ✓ Understand how parenting style affects the parent-child relationship.
- ✓ Develop strategies for shared parenting.
- ✓ Understand the value of a parenting plan for co-parenting.

Topics and Timing

Topic	Estimated Time Needed	Page #
Introduction	5 minutes	66
Children's Rights and Parents' Responsibilities	5 minutes	67
Building Your Co-Parenting Relationship	10 minutes *	69
Four Approaches to Co-Parenting Relationships	10 minutes *	70
Parallel Parenting	10 minutes *	72
Co-Parenting is Your Business	10 minutes *	74
Parenting for Families in Transition Parenting Styles How Positive is Your Parenting Style?	15 minutes	76
Parenting Tools	10 minutes	78
Strategies for Shared Parenting	5 minutes *	83
Custody	10 minutes *	84
Parenting Time Through Your Child's Eyes	5 minutes	87
Parenting Plans	15 minutes *	88

*Items marked with a star are required by the Minimum Standards set by the Minnesota State Supreme Court. See "Parent Education: Mandatory Curriculum Topics" in the Appendix Section for more information.

Teaching Outline

Introduction

Purpose

To review the Objectives and Key Topics for The Impact of Divorce on Children Part 2.

Preparation

Review slides 1-4. Read the Background for Instructors information below.

Estimated Time Needed

5 minutes

Instructions

1. Discuss the importance of participants' roles as a parent and co-parent using some of the points from the background below (slide 2).
2. Introduce Part 2 by reviewing the Objectives (slide 3) and the Key Topics (slide 4).

Background for Instructors

Discuss these ideas with parents:

- ✓ You are a parent — the greatest possible asset children can have in their life.
- ✓ You are here because you are a parent. You can divorce each other but the parent-child relationship and parenting responsibilities are forever.
- ✓ Both you and the other parent can have a significant impact on your children's well-being as the family faces, and deals with the transition of divorce.
- ✓ Children who have two supportive parents — parents who are willing to address their children's needs and resolve the inevitable conflicts in healthy ways — have a much greater chance for positive overall adjustment to the transition.
- ✓ In preparing for the future, concentrate on what you can do rather than on what the other parent should do. You cannot control anyone's behavior but your own.
- ✓ It is indeed possible to begin to let go of the past and to concentrate on making plans for a different and better future for both you and your children.

Children's Rights and Parents' Responsibilities

Purpose

To help parents set an example for their children every day. During the process of family transition, separation or divorce it is important to set a good example by assuming adult responsibilities and attending to the needs and rights of the children. Children watch and learn from the adults in their lives.

Preparation

Read the Parent Handbook page 49 and Background for Instructor. Review slides 5-12 and become familiar with the animation used to talk, first about the rights of children in divorce and second about, the parents' responsibility.

Estimated Time Needed

5 minutes

Instructions

1. Use slides 5-12 to present the children's rights in a divorce and the parents' responsibilities. These are animated slides. Click first to see the children's rights and again for the parents responsibilities.
2. Allow for comment from instructor and/or participants. Understanding these rights and the corresponding responsibilities helps parents realize they have a valuable role, because their children are watching and learning.

Background for Instructors

The Children's Bill of Rights was adapted with permission from the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers obtained in 2008. The following is reproduced from the original document and may be used to guide discussion.

Children's Bill of Rights (*When Parents Are Not Together*)

Every kid has rights, particularly when mom and dad are splitting up. Below are some things parents shouldn't forget and kids shouldn't let them when the family is in the midst of a break-up.

(continued on the next page)

- You have the right to love both your parents.

You also have the right to be loved by both of them. That means you shouldn't feel guilty about wanting to see your dad or your mom at any time. It's important for you to have both parents in your life, particularly during difficult times such as a break-up of your parents.

- You do not have to choose one parent over the other.

If you have an opinion about which parent you want to live with, let it be known. But nobody can force you to make that choice. If your parents can't work it out, a judge may make the decision for them.

- You're entitled to all the feelings you're having.

Don't be embarrassed by what you're feeling. It is scary when your parents break up, and you're allowed to be scared. Or angry. Or sad. Or whatever.

- You have the right to be in a safe environment.

This means that nobody is allowed to put you in danger, either physically or emotionally. If one of your parents is hurting you, tell someone — either your other parent or a trusted adult like a teacher.

- You don't belong in the middle of your parents' break-up.

Sometimes your parents may get so caught up in their own problems that they forget that you're just a kid, and that you can't handle their adult worries. If they start putting you in the middle of their dispute, remind them that it's their fight, not yours.

- Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins are still part of your life.

Even if you're living with one parent, you can still see relatives on your other parent's side. You'll always be a part of their lives, even if your parents aren't together anymore.

- You have the right to be a child.

Kids shouldn't worry about adult problems. Concentrate on your school work, your friends, activities, etc. Your mom and dad just need your love. They can handle the rest.

- It is not your fault and don't blame yourself.

Source

American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (1998, March). Special Concerns of Children Committee.

Building Your Co-parenting Relationship

Purpose

To help parents understand the difference between their couple relationship and the relationship they need to create in order to effectively co-parent their children after divorce or separation.

Preparation

Read pages 51-53 in the Parent Handbook. Review slides 13-19 and the accompanying notes.

Estimated Time Needed

10 minutes

Instructions

1. Help parents understand what it means to effectively co-parent together by reviewing slides 13-19.
2. Ask parents to give some examples of effective co-parenting.
3. Mention that not all parents are able to effectively co-parent for a variety of reasons (abandonment, family violence, chemical dependency). Parents should take from this section appropriate recommendations for their situation.

Sources

Carlson, M. J., & McLanahan, S. S. (2006, June). Strengthening unmarried families: Could enhancing couple relationships also improve parenting? *Social Science Review*, 80(2), 297-321.

Grable, S., Crnic, K., & Belsky, J. (1994, October). Family processes and child and adolescent development. *Family Relations*, 43(4), 380-386.

McHale, J. P. & Kuersten-Hogan, R. (2004, July). Introduction: The dynamics of raising children together. *Journal of Adult Development*, 11(3), 163-164.

McHale, J. P., Kuersten-Hogan, R., & Rao, N. (2004, July). Growing points for co-parenting theory and research. *Journal of Adult Development*, 11(3), 221-234.

Four Approaches to Co-parenting Relationships

Purpose

To make participants aware of four ways that parents approach co-parenting relationships and the disadvantages and benefits each may have on their children's development.

Preparation

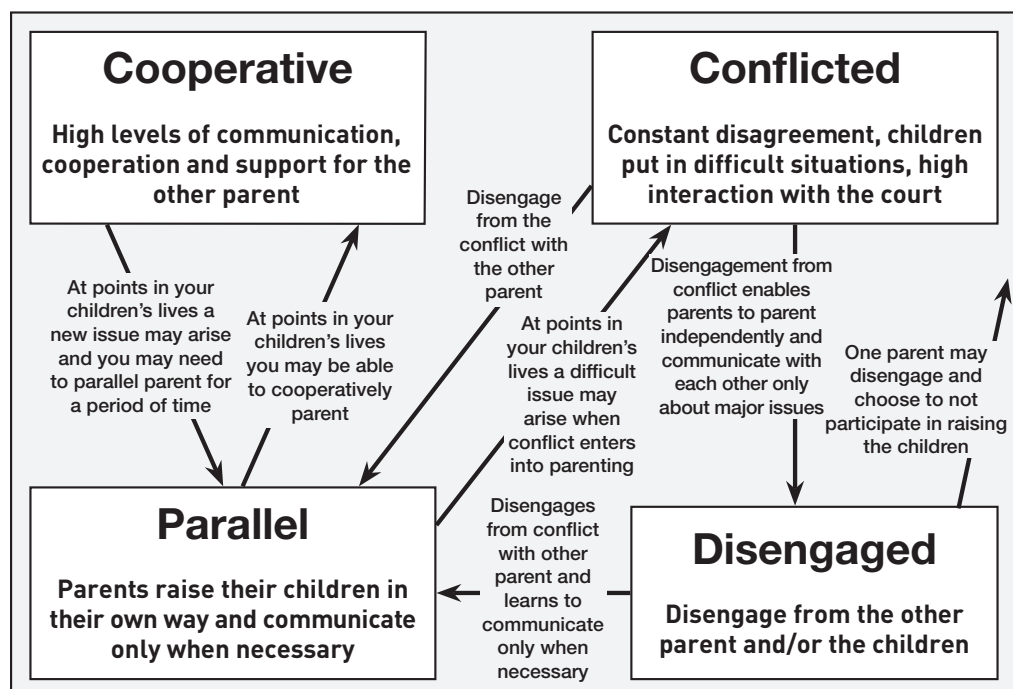
Read pages 54-57 in the Parent Handbook. Review slides 20-25 and accompanying notes. Spend time familiarizing yourself with each of the four approaches and the animation used in the slides.

Estimated Time Needed

10 minutes

Instructions

1. Review slides 20-25 regarding the four approaches to co-parenting relationships.
2. Help parents to see that while the desired approach is a cooperative relationship, a parallel parenting relationship can be a good alternative, preferably for the short-term. Disengagement from parental conflict can be a useful strategy to move to parallel parenting, but disengagement from the children can be very detrimental for the children. Conflictual approaches are hardest on the children.



3. Ask parents to reflect on their current approach, what their goal is, and how they might get there.

Sources

Ricci, I. (1997). *Mom's house, dad's house: Making two homes for your child*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Ricci, I. (2006). *Mom's house, dad's house for kids*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Stahl, P. M. (2007). *Parenting after divorce*. Atascadero, CA: Impact Publishers, Inc.

Parallel Parenting

Purpose

To teach both parents to be thoughtful about planning their parenting, so that children have a smooth transition.

Materials Needed

- ✓ DVD player and TV
- ✓ Parents Forever the DVD segment “Parallel Parenting”

Preparation

Read pages 56-57 of the Parent Handbook. Read through the instructions below and review slides 26-27. Preview the DVD segment “Parallel Parenting.”

Estimated Time Needed

10 minutes

Instructions

1. View the DVD segment “Parallel Parenting.”
2. Slide 27 Discussion: Ask what might happen to children if the car they are in is “splitting in half,”- in other words, the parents are not capable of caring for the child independently and in agreement with the arrangements of the parallel parenting agreement. You may want to have participants discuss this in small groups and if time permits, ask if any points made should be shared with the large group.
3. Reflection: Check the list from the Parent Handbook, “Parallel Parenting.” Ask participants to determine where they are as a parent. Are you a parent who has some success parallel parenting? Could the “ride for your children” use some work to make it smoother and happier?
4. Discussion: If you think of the two front tires as each of the parents and the back tires as step-parents or potential step-parents, they all influence how smooth the ride is for the children. You can think of ways they have to work for the same goal of raising the children to maturity. You may discuss this in a large group or in small groups. Share discussion points if time permits.

Background for Instructors

Remember that although one-quarter or more of divorcing or separating couples are cooperative parents, about half parallel parent. They have low conflict, low communication, and emotional disengagement. The majority of children fall within the average range of adjustment. Children thrive when parents provide nurturing care and appropriate discipline in both households.

The more cooperative two households are, the easier it is for children to move between them, and the more energy they will have for the important tasks of growing up.

Sources

Meyers, S., Allen, R., Tralle, M., Sheehan, T., Neil, N., Stoppa-Godoy, P., et al. (1997). *Parallel Parenting. Video segment from the Parents Forever and Padres para siempre DVD (item 08450)*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension.

Meyers, S., Allen, R., Tralle, M., Sheehan, T., Neil, N., Stoppa-Godoy, P., et al. (1997). *Parents forever: Education for families in divorce transition (EP-08451)*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service.

Co-parenting Is Your Business

Purpose

To help parents establish principles in developing and maintaining a business-like relationship with the other parent in caring for their children.

Preparation

Read through the Background for Instructors and the Parent Handbook pages 58-59 to understand the concepts to be taught in this section. Review slides 28-32.

Estimated Time Needed

10 minutes

Instructions

1. Explain to parents that they are redefining their relationship with the other parent. Some parents will expect to be “friends,” which may not be realistic. Reverting to a business-like relationship will help to remove some of the emotional intensity and set boundaries. Ultimately friendship may occur in some couples but not in all. Explain the differences between “business, friendship and intimacy” (found in Background for Instructors).
2. Ask parents: “What comes to mind when I say, business-like relationship?” Parents will respond with words like civil, respectful, less emotional, goal oriented, etc.
3. Ask: “What kinds of tools do we use in a business setting that could be helpful in co-parenting?” Answers may include memos, agendas, negotiation, email, etc.
4. Review guidelines for a business relationship using the PowerPoint slides 28-30.
5. Explain how a business approach benefits the children — slide 31.
6. Review the benefits and pitfalls of communicating through technology — slide 32.

Background for Instructors

The Parent Business Model

When parents divorce, one thing they need to do is to redefine their relationship from romantic partners to co-parents. The goal is a working relationship with the other parent that is focused on the needs of the children. One way to accomplish this is to look at the new co-parent

relationship as a “business relationship.” To understand these concepts, it helps to look at how relationships typically develop.

There are three levels of relating:

Business ————— Friendship ————— Intimacy

A business relationship is respectful and courteous, trust is earned, and there is relatively little emotional display. Business acquaintances follow policies and there is low personal disclosure. This is a relationship with the lowest investment and emotion.

Relationships develop as we become better acquainted and find that we enjoy each other’s company and have things in common. Friendship increases expectations, shared activities, trust, loyalty, and respect.

As the friendship continues and deepens, intimacy is the logical next step. Intimacy has the highest intensity and emotional investment. Typical romantic relationships move from business to friendship to intimacy. Intimacy can be positive or negative.

Positive intimacy is characterized by trust, respect, loyalty, support, expectations, and healthy interdependence. Negative intimacy, on the other hand, is characterized by distrust, disrespect, disloyalty, lack of support, unrealistic expectations, and unhealthy dependence.

Divorce happens when there is much more negative intimacy than positive intimacy or there is no intimacy at all.

Because of the negative intimacy, parents need to relate in a new way. This is often best approached by developing a business-like approach. Divorcing parents need to move from intimacy (most likely negative) to emotional detachment in the business relationship. A business-like approach will give parents a chance to rebuild the respect and trust to allow friendship to develop.

Sources

Meyers, S., Allen, R., Tralle, M., Sheehan, T., Neil, N., Stoppa-Godoy, P., et al. (1997). *Parents forever: Education for families in divorce transition (EP-08451)*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service.

Ricci, I. (1997). *Mom’s house, dad’s house: Making two homes for your child*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Ricci, I. (2006). *Mom’s house, dad’s house for kids*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Parenting for Families in Transition

Purpose

To help parents understand the importance of their role as parents and the fact that positive parenting can serve as a protective factor for their children. To help parents understand the difference in parenting styles that may lead to conflict between parents. To provide tools for parents to rely on as they parent.

Materials Needed

- ✓ Copies of worksheet “How Positive Is Your Parenting Style?” in Parent Handbook or Teaching Handouts
- ✓ Pencils
- ✓ Parents Forever DVD segment “Parenting Styles”
- ✓ DVD player and TV

Preparation

Read background information on the importance of parenting as a risk or protective factor for children experiencing the separation/divorce of their parents found in *The Impact of Divorce on Children: Part 1, “What Affects a Child’s Adjustment to Divorce?”*. Pay particular attention to the sections on “Weakened capacity to parent” and “And now for some good news about family transitions!” Read the section in the Parent Handbook on “Parenting for Families in Transition,” pages 60-63. Preview the DVD segment on “Parenting Styles.” Review slides 33-44 and the accompanying notes.

Estimated Time Needed

15 minutes

Instructions

1. Introduce the concept of parenting styles using slide 33-34.
2. Introduce the four parenting styles using slides 35-39.
3. Show the video “Parenting Styles” and discuss the different parenting styles. Point out that the video clip does not include a sample of the unengaged parenting style. You might ask parents what an unengaged style might look like in the scenario in the video.
4. Following the video, discuss the following questions (slide 40):
 - Which parenting style seems easiest for the parent?
 - Which parenting style seems easiest for the child?
 - Which style seems most effective?

- What are some of the things that make it hard to change parenting styles?
 - Do any of the styles in the video look like your style of parenting?
5. Slide 41 — Have parents complete the assessment “How Positive Is Your Parenting Style?” from the Parent Handbook (page 62) or, if desired and you have time, print copies of the parenting style assessment quiz (online at www.extension.umn.edu/parentsforever) and provide them for parents to complete. Once they have completed and scored the assessment, have them look at the results key.
 6. Discuss the importance of positive parenting as a protective factor for children using slide 42. Remind parents of the risk of weakened capacity to parent (discussed in Part 1) and emphasize how their kids need them to be their parents. Point out that research shows that the positive or authoritative style is the most effective. Ask parents to identify parenting practices that may be characteristic of a positive style of parenting. (Some suggestions are: provide warmth; give emotional support; do adequate monitoring; discipline authoritatively; and maintain age-appropriate expectations).
 7. Emphasize the points about agreeing on basic values of parenting and leaving the day-to-day parenting to the parent who currently has parenting time. See the section: “What happens when parents have different parenting styles or can’t agree on rules and discipline?” (slide 43).
 8. Summarize the key points of the discussion and encourage parents to consider their parenting style and decide if there are changes that they would like to make. Remind them that children raised with a positive or authoritative style tend to do better — they have fewer behavior problems, better mental health, do better in school, and have good social skills and confidence (slide 44).

Sources

Baumrind, D. (1991). The influence of parenting style on adolescent competence and substance use. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 11(1), 56-95.

University of Minnesota Extension Service (1995). *Positive parenting I: A parent education curriculum*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service.

University of Minnesota Extension Service (1997). *Positive parenting II: A video-based parent education curriculum*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service.

University of Minnesota Extension Service (1999). *Positive parenting of teens*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service.

Parenting Tools

Purpose

To teach parents about nurturance, respect and discipline tools at their disposal in their parenting toolbox.

Preparation

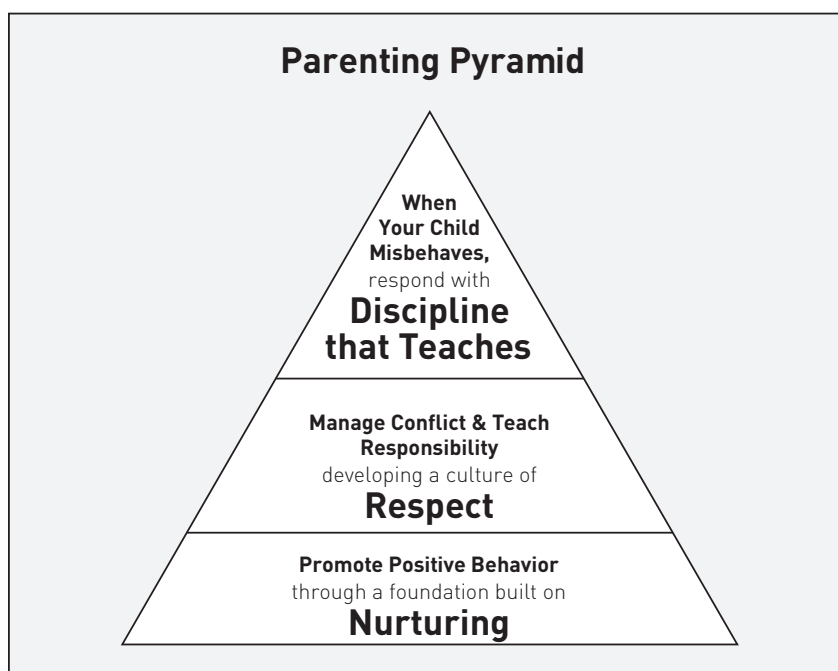
Review the parent materials on pages 64-66 in the Parent Handbook and the Background for Instructors. Review slides 45-51 and the accompanying notes.

Estimated Time Needed

10 minutes

Instructions

1. Introduce the concept of parenting tools using slide 45.
2. Using the slide with the pyramid (slide 46), explain to parents that the tools at the bottom of the pyramid are those they want to be using most of the time, promoting positive behavior and building a relationship with their child. The tools in the middle of the pyramid are those which help manage conflict and teach responsibility. Those at the top of the pyramid are strategies for addressing misbehavior by applying discipline that teaches.



3. Use the three scenarios to show examples of how the different tools can be used.
 - Scenario 1: “Ways to promote positive behavior” (slide 47)

“Whenever you are on the telephone, your child interrupts and becomes impatient when you don’t respond.” What nurturance tool could be used? (This is often a child’s way of getting you to pay attention to him or her. Spend time together and let the child know how to behave when you are on the phone.)

“Your child begs for candy or a toy whenever you shop together. When you say ‘No’ the child creates a scene. The only way to get him or her to stop is to give in.” What nurturance tool could be used here? (Children beg and throw tantrums because it helps them get what they want. Prepare your child for shopping trips by explaining what behavior you expect. When the child does not behave, you do not give in. You may have to leave the store. You want to reward the child for behaving the way you asked.)
 - Scenario 2: “Ways to manage conflict and teach responsibility” (slide 48)

“Your child doesn’t want to go to the other parent’s home for the weekend.” What guidance tool could you use? (This is an opportunity for parents to listen to their child’s concerns. A child who does not have a legitimate reason should be encouraged to spend time with the other parent. Listening and validating shows respect for your child’s feelings.)
 - Scenario 3: “Strategies for addressing misbehavior” (slide 49)

“Your child has not done the homework that is due today and wants to skip school.” What consequence tool could you use? (Children learn by experiencing the natural consequences of their actions. Allowing the child to experience the consequences of not getting homework completed helps the child learn to finish assignments on time.)
4. Emphasize that the more time parents spend on the bottom and middle areas of the pyramid, the less time you may need to spend correcting misbehaviors (slide 50).
5. Review “Parenting Through Family Transition” in the Parent Handbook page 66 and slide 51.
6. Ask for any questions, and provide parent education resources from the community.

Background for Instructors

If you were to do a job description for a parent, what would it say? How do we describe the many things a parent does to raise children? Let's look at this from three areas:

- ✓ Nurturance (love)
- ✓ Discipline (teaching)
- ✓ Respect (mutual)

Keep in mind that parenting is teaching and we teach best by the example we set. Children are always watching us and copying our behavior — what we say, do and how we treat others is often reflected in what our children do. Children take our actions seriously because we are their first and most important teachers.

Nurturance

Nurturance — love comes in many forms:

- ✓ Through touch, words, and deeds.
- ✓ Through the time we spend together and the undivided attention we give our children.

Parents show love in all sorts of ways, but the very best approach is giving of yourself and doing all you can to build a close and positive relationship with your child.

Discipline

Let's look at three specific areas of discipline:

- ✓ Supervision and monitoring
- ✓ Limit setting (rules)
- ✓ Limit enforcement

Supervision and monitoring — it's about safety and connection. When children are young, we know they need to be in the care of someone who is looking out for their physical and emotional safety at all times. It's a 24/7 job. But as children grow older, how much supervision they need and how to do it becomes less clear.

- ✓ When can a child stay home alone?
- ✓ How much do you need to know about the parents of their friends?

- ✓ How can you be sure they are really going where they say they are going?
- ✓ When and how are they using the internet?

Here are some basic guidelines: as parents you need to know where your child is going, how they will get there and back, what they will be doing and when they will return. Sure, kids will protest, but secretly they are glad you care enough to ask. Be consistent and they will learn that this is just how your family operates.

Limit setting

Rules are necessary at every age. Parents need to have rules to provide a standard for how to behave. Children need rules to know what is expected. When setting limits, expectations, rules, and consequences for breaking them, do you give your children a chance for input? This can be an extremely effective method to use with children of all ages. When children set their own consequences, it becomes their consequence and they typically will follow through. As a parent, they cannot blame you for their misbehavior because of the consequence they have set for themselves. This can lead to self-discipline in children of all ages.

There are two types of rules:

Firm rules are the rules that deal with the big stuff like morals (do not lie, steal), safety (running in the street, safe driving), health (do not smoke, wear proper gear for sports), and values (religious practice, family expectations).

Flexible rules are rules that you are willing to negotiate. They will be different for every family. Some examples include bedtime when there is a special event, when to do chores, hair styles, and many other issues where you might disagree, but the outcome can be win-win.

Limit enforcement

A rule isn't really a rule — unless it's enforced. The goal is to find a way to address misbehavior so your child will learn how to act in the future. Some examples include:

- ✓ Expect children to fix what they break, clean up the mess, apologize, and pay back. The child should do whatever it takes to correct what was done wrong.
- ✓ Use “time out” — this allows you and your child to cool down. When the time out is over, be sure to talk about the misbehavior and have the child do what needs to be done to correct the mistakes.

- ✓ Reprimands — children do want to please us. Sometimes all you need to do is to say “I don’t like what you are doing. It’s time to stop.” “No” is a very useful word.
- ✓ Take away a privilege.
- ✓ Let children safely experience the consequences of their behavior. There are two types of consequences:
 - Natural consequences happen when you don’t do something; for example, a child who refuses to put on a jacket in January will get very cold.
 - Logical consequences are responses you set up because the natural consequence would be unsafe or costly. For example, if you have a rule about only riding the bike on the sidewalk, and your child goes into the street, the logical consequence would be to take the bike away for a day.

Respect

Respect is best taught by example. Parents who treat other people respectfully with empathy, kindness, compassion, and caring have a positive effect on their children. Children’s behavior is often a reflection of what they have seen in parents and other significant adults. Teach and model respect as a way of living your life. Mutual respect creates family harmony.

Sources

University of Minnesota Extension Service (1995). *Positive parenting I: A parent education curriculum*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service.

University of Minnesota Extension Service (1997). *Positive parenting II: A video-based parent education curriculum*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service.

University of Minnesota Extension Service (1999). *Positive parenting of teens*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service.

Strategies for Shared Parenting

Purpose

To help parents develop skills to cooperate about caring for their child or children.

Preparation

Read the Parent Handbook pages 67-68. Review slides 52-55 and the accompanying notes pages.

Estimated Time Needed

5 minutes

Instructions

1. Review “Strategies for Shared Parenting” in the Parent Handbook pages 67-68 and slides 52-55.
2. Ask participants for examples of how they share parenting with the other parent — what has worked and what hasn’t worked.

Custody

Purpose

To help parents understand the choices they have regarding custody and to provide a child focused perspective on how they need to determine custody.

Materials Needed

- ✓ Teaching Handout: “Custody: Making Custody a Win-win Solution”
- ✓ Pencils

Preparation

Review the Background for Instructors and the Parent Handbook pages 69-71. Review slides 56-58 and accompanying notes. Make copies of the worksheet for parents to complete.

Estimated Time Needed

10 minutes

Instructions

1. Review slides 56-58.
2. Ask participants to complete the worksheet — “Custody: Making Custody a Win-win Solution.”
3. Ask if there are questions or comments.

Note: More about the legal aspects of custody will be covered in the Legal Issues section. This is to get parents thinking about what is best for their child.

Background for Instructors

Parents need to decide about two types of custody for their children:

- ✓ Legal — How will parents decide issues relating to a child’s health and welfare?
- ✓ Physical — Who will provide day to day care and residence for the child?

There are many options for parents as they determine the best custody arrangement for their child.

Sole Custody	
Sole legal custody	<p>Custodial Parent has responsibility for all legal rights, duties and powers as the parent and makes all decisions affecting the welfare of the child/children</p> <p>Noncustodial Parent has limited rights and powers, has access to child's medical and school records</p>
Sole physical custody	<p>Custodial Parent maintains the child's primary residence and is responsible for the day-to-day care of the child/children</p> <p>Noncustodial Parent is usually given parenting time</p>
Joint Custody	
Joint legal custody	Both parents have the right and power to make decisions regarding the child's health and welfare.
Joint physical custody	Both parents have the right and responsibility to provide day-to-day residential care. This may not be equal time, but is intended to give each parent substantial periods of parenting time.
Divided Custody	
Each parent provides care for a portion of the year or in alternating years. Each parent has legal rights for decision making when the child is in his or her care.	
Split Custody	
Each parent has sole legal and physical custody of one or more children. The noncustodial parent has parenting time rights for each child.	

Custody should be a win-win solution, that is:

- ✓ Beneficial to the children.
- ✓ Fair to the parents.

Contemporary ideas about custody:

- ✓ Courts use the Best Interests of the Child Standards where custody decisions are based on the needs of the child, not the gender or rights of the parent.
- ✓ Decisions are based less on traditional gender expectations of the mother and father, but on an increased understanding of the importance of father's involvement.

- ✓ Courts have moved from Freudian Theory that emphasized the importance of the mother, to Attachment Theory that understands children develop attachment with both parents.
- ✓ The concept of joint custody began in 1970s.
- ✓ Women working outside the home opened the door for shared care of the children.

What do the courts look for in determining custody? The Best Interests of the Child standard takes into account:

- ✓ The parent or parents' wishes regarding custody.
- ✓ The wishes of the children as to who will be their custodian.
- ✓ The interactions and relationship the child has with the parent or parents, siblings, and other significant people in the child's life.
- ✓ How much the child is adjusted to the school or community.
- ✓ The mental and physical health of the people involved in deciding and providing custody.

What influences custody decisions?

- ✓ Societal and cultural values and beliefs
- ✓ Parent beliefs, circumstances, and knowledge
- ✓ The child's age, personality, and special needs

Societal and cultural values include:

- ✓ The belief that children should be cared for by their mother, especially when they are young.
- ✓ Legal and judicial precedent about how custody is determined.
- ✓ The role of the extended family — for example, the expectation that the mother and children should live with her parents.
- ✓ Economics — does the family have the resources to afford a separate residence for both parents so the child has a second home?
- ✓ Geography — how far away from each other do the parents live?
- ✓ Research — what we know now about the impact of different custody arrangements on children and their parents.

Source

Kelly, J. B. (1994). The determination of child custody. In *Future of Children, Children and Divorce*, 4(1), 121-142.

Parenting Time — Through Your Child's Eyes

Purpose

To help parents understand their child's thoughts and feelings about parenting time.

Preparation

Read pages 72-73 in Parent Handbook. Review slides 59-60 and the accompanying notes.

Estimated Time Needed

5 minutes

Instructions

1. Introduce the topic by explaining that children may have a number of concerns when moving between households.
2. Show slides 59-60 and read through the possible thoughts going through this child's mind. Ask parents to respond. Refer to the actions in the chart on page 72-73 to give parents ideas for responses or actions they can take.



Parenting Plans

Purpose

To introduce parents to a tool they can adapt to plan for the care of their child when they parent in separate homes.

Materials Needed

- ✓ Sample copy of a parenting plan available online at www.parentsforever.umn.edu
- ✓ Self-stick notes
- ✓ Sample copy of “We Agree: Creating a Parenting Plan” available for purchase from the Extension Store at www.shop.extension.umn.edu or by calling 1-800-876-8636.
- ✓ Pencils

Preparation

Read pages 74-76 in Parent Handbook. Review slides 61-66 and the accompanying notes.

Estimated Time Needed

15 minutes

Instructions

1. Using slides 61-63, begin by describing a parenting plan.
2. Ask parents to list three things they think should be in a parenting plan — you can have them use self-stick notes.
3. Have the parents put their notes up on the wall — if there is already a note with the same issue, put theirs next to it.
4. Review slide 64, adding any issues that were not named by the parents.
5. Show parents the publication, “We Agree: Creating a Parenting Plan” and refer parents to the Parenting Agreement Worksheet available in the back of the publication or on the Parents Forever website (slide 65).
6. Conclude by showing the conclusion slide 66 and emphasizing the choices they have to make.

Source

Allen, R. M., and Tralle, M. (2004). *We agree: Creating a parenting plan (BU-08019)*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service.

Parents Forever

The Impact of Divorce on Children Educator's Guide

EDUCATION FOR FAMILIES IN DIVORCE TRANSITION

Teaching Handouts

Teaching Handouts

How Loss Affects My Child	89
What My Child Needs	90
Emotion Coaching Role Play	91
Mr. Gray’s Bunny	93
How Divorce Affected Me: A Reflection of a Ninety Year Old	95
“I” Messages: Improving Communication	96
How Positive Is My Parenting Style?	97
Custody: Making Custody a Win-win Solution	98
Important Information About Our Child	100

How Loss Affects My Child

Complete the following table for each of your children.

What has been lost in my child's life?	What stays the same in my child's life?	What are gains in my child's life?

What My Child Needs

Think about each of your children and complete the following worksheet for each child. This will give you and their other parent a good place to begin discussing your children's needs and how you will plan for them as you go through family transition.

Child's name:

Age:

Gender:

What does my child like to do?

What makes my child happy?

What makes my child sad or angry?

What comforts my child?

How does my child deal with change?

What are my child's strengths?

What worries me about my child?

What special considerations do I need to keep in mind about my child when we separate or divorce?

Emotion Coaching Role Play

Make two copies of the role play. Cut each of the “scripts” and give them to eight participants. Assign the roles of parent and child to them. Read the situation to the group. Have each pair read their statement. When all statements are read, ask how the child felt in each of the scenarios. Ask why the emotion coaching is a better strategy for parents to use.

The situation: Child is moping around the house, disinterested in the activities the parent has planned.

Dismissing Parent

Parent: What’s wrong with you today? You don’t seem interested in anything I had planned.

Child: Nothing.

Parent: It must be something!

Child: I miss mom, I’m sad when I’m not with her.

Parent: There’s no reason to feel sad. You’ll see her in 2 days. Let’s go buy ice cream and you’ll forget all about it.

Disapproving Parent

Parent: What’s wrong with you today? All you do is mope around the house.

Child: Nothing

Parent: Well, you are only here for the weekend and you are wasting all of our time being a grump. Go to your room until you can change that attitude.

Laissez-faire Parent

Parent: What's wrong? I'm sensing something is bothering you.

Child: Nothing (child begins to cry and the crying escalates). I miss mom, I want to go home.

Parent: I know it's hard to be away from mom. It's okay to be sad.

Child: (Continues to cry; not consolable.)

Parent: Okay, just stop crying and we'll go see mom at work.

Emotion Coaching Parent

Parent: You seem sad today, do you want to talk about it? (emotional awareness)

Child: No.

Parent: I sometimes feel sad and it helps me to talk about it? Are you missing your mom? (sharing your own feelings, labeling the emotion)

Child: I miss mom and I miss you being together and I wish you would get back together. Why can't things be the way they used to be?

Parent: I can understand how difficult this is for you. It is hard for me sometimes, too. Your mom and I have decided to divorce and that is not going to change. While it might not seem so right now, it will get easier as time goes on and the sadness will not feel as strong. Can we think of some ways that might help you not feel so sad when you aren't with mom? (listening, validating the feelings, and helping the child problem solve)

Child: Maybe I could call her, or send an email, or keep her picture in my room.

Parent: Mom's at work right now, so calling her might not be the best solution. How about sending her an email and next time you see her you could ask her for a picture to keep in your room?

Mr. Gray's Bunny

This activity is designed to help children in cases where one parent has abandoned the family or has infrequent or inconsistent contact with the child.

1. Create a man (if it is the father who is the absentee) out of craft materials, or just have your child draw him. Call him Mr. Gray.
2. Discuss his pretend strengths and weaknesses. Mr. Gray has a pet bunny rabbit that he loves (have your child name the rabbit; or it can be a snake or any animal your child particularly likes). He takes care of it, feeds it every day, gives it water, and even lets it out for walk and cuddles it.
3. But then Mr. Gray has to go away on a trip, and he forgets to leave enough food for his bunny. Who did the wrong thing? Does Mr. Gray not love the bunny anymore? Or could he just have made a big mistake? When he remembers the lack of food, instead of coming right back to feed the bunny, he calls Mrs. Gray to care for the bunny. Do you think the bunny still misses Mr. Gray, even though Mrs. Gray is taking great care of her?
4. Now you can develop the story to match what is going on in your child's personal life. If your child's father pops in from time to time, make the story work that way. Mr. Gray then decides he has to stay away (for his new job, if applicable) and will visit every so often, but he will never say when. How does the bunny feel? Do you think she misses Mr. Gray? I wonder if it is hard for her to see Mr. Gray when she knows he will leave and she will not see him for a long time. Would the bunny feel better if she knows exactly when she can expect Mr. Gray to come into town to visit?
5. Use the story to find out how this is affecting your child and ways to cope. Also use the story to discuss responsibility. Sometimes the bunny feels lonely, and she thinks, Maybe if I were fluffier and cuter, Mr. Gray would spend more time with me and call more often. Discuss who is at fault. Is Mr. Gray a bad man, or is he mixed up and not taking care of those around him? Why does he do that? Mr. Gray is exactly that — he's gray, far from black-and-white, neither all bad nor all good.
6. Take the story further and discuss how Mr. Gray bought a new bunny that lives with him (for stepsibling issues, when a father remarries and has a stepchild living with him). How does the first bunny feel? What would make the first bunny feel better? This helps the child problem-solve and consider what can and cannot be remedied.

Explanation

When one parent abandons or greatly limits contact with the child, it causes the youngster great pain. Often the child feels personally responsible for the rejection. It is difficult to explain to children why a parent will not continue contact with them. This must also be done carefully so as not to harm the child's own self-worth, for if the child is told his father or mother is bad and evil, the child will consider that some of that evil must be within himself because he comes from that parent. This activity helps broach the subject in a gentle way. It also helps the child to see he is not the reason for his parent's action.

The last part of this exercise helps give the child a voice and express the "weirdness" of his father's living with strange children while he sees his own child more infrequently. It further works to alleviate the child's personal sense of failure in being unable to "win" his parent's love back from the new children in his parent's life. Finally, it helps the child realize what he can and cannot solve and opens up the door to discussing better attitudes for those problems that cannot be solved immediately.

Source

Neuman, Gary (1998). *Helping your kids cope with divorce the sandcastles ways*. Used by permission of the author.

How Divorce Affected Me: A Reflection of a Ninety-Year-Old

This I remember: I was about four years old. The event was heart-breaking. My mother hugged me tight, kissing me, kissing me, kissing me as she sobbed. We sat on the back steps long after my father disappeared on his motorcycle. Not comprehending the impact of what had happened, I wiggled free and said, “No more kisses.” From that day forward my mother said, “Rosemond did not like to be kissed.” She had transferred her grief to me. After that I do not remember my mother hugging and kissing me.

My father had left before. I did not comprehend the significance of this departure. Only a few days before I had run down the steps, grabbed his arm and said, “You should have come yesterday. We had strawberries.” At which he had swung me over his head, laughed and tickled me. We were both laughing as we entered the house to greet my mother who was at the sewing machine. She jumped up. They embraced. I did not understand today. They were so happy yesterday.

As was his habit, my father had spent the winter in New Mexico “for his health.” This had left my mother to cope. That is why she was sewing for others to help support us. As time went by I do not know if I asked any questions. If I did, my mother must have answered in a way that was not upsetting to me. I never heard her say an unkind word about my father.

Life went on. As far as I can recall, my father was no longer a factor in my life. Until one day — when I was 50 years old — I was talking to a young male colleague at school, I heard myself say, “I do not trust any man.” Shocked at my words, I quickly kept talking to cover my blunder.

However, later, to myself, I analyzed my remark and realized that my relationships with men had been colored by the abandonment of my father! I did not trust men. I could not have a close relationship with a man. All the fellows I dated would say “you are in love with someone else.” Without thinking about it at the time I would agree. If I married, it would be someone I respected then loved. (Yes, my husband was someone I knew, respected and loved dearly. I realized now, I had not been close with him.) To some extent this was carried over to all relationships.

Does divorce affect children? In my case I will have to say prophetically (proverbially — sic).

“I” Messages: Improving Communication

1. Think of a “You” message you used recently with the other parent. Write the message below.

“You” message: _____

2. Now rewrite the “You” message in the form of an “I” message.

I feel _____

... when _____

... because _____

3. Practice saying this “I” message several times. Next time you need to talk about the same concern, use your “I” message. How did it work to use an “I” message?

4. What was the response to your “I” message?

5. Check all statements that apply to your practice with this activity:

I practiced or rehearsed using an “I” message this week.

I tried using an “I” message this week.

The “I” message really worked.

I plan to use “I” messages in the future.

I did not try using an “I” message this week.

How Positive Is Your Parenting Style?

Read the following statements. Check whether you “Usually,” “Sometimes,” or “Rarely” do the described behavior.

	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely
Your expectations for your child’s behavior are reasonable based on the child’s development.			
You encourage your children to express their opinions.			
You involve your children when you set limits, expectations, rules, and consequences for breaking the rules.			
You enforce your rules in a firm, consistent, and kind way.			
You praise your children when they do something well.			
You monitor your children and know who they are with, what they are doing, how and when they will return home, and their use of technology.			
You are there for your children and will seek outside help when you need it.			

More checks in the “Usually” column indicates that your style is a positive parenting style. Look at your checks in the “Rarely” column to determine which parenting practices you may need to work on.

Custody: Making Custody a Win-win Solution

There are two important things to keep in mind as you and the other parent determine what kind of custody arrangement you will have for your children:

- ✓ Your plan needs to be beneficial to the children.
- ✓ Both of you must feel you have made a fair arrangement that keeps you connected to the child.

What should you consider as you decide on the best custody arrangement for your child?

What custody arrangement do you want?

What custody arrangement does the other parent want?

What are the wishes of each child as to where and with whom they want to live?

How will this custody arrangement support the relationships your child has with other important people in their life – siblings, teachers, grandparents, other relatives, and friends?

Do you and the other parent live close enough that the child can get to school, friends, and community activities from both homes?

Will the child be living with a parent or parents who can provide an emotionally and physically safe home?

How old is your child? (Younger children need time with both parents, but not necessarily equal time.)

How well does your child understand time? (Children 3 and under as well as pre-school children do not have a well-developed sense of time; they need to see both parents more often.)

How well does your child make transitions?

Does your child currently relate to one parent more than to the other? This is typical, and can change – are you willing to be flexible when this happens?

How close is your child to each parent?

Is there supervision by the parent or child care provider when the child is with either of you?

Important Information About Our Child

Keep this in a safe place and update it annually.

Name	Date of Birth

Our children:

Medical Clinic	
Dentist	
Orthodontist	
Therapist	
School	
Child Care	
Church/Temple/Mosque	
Mom's Home, Work, Cell	
Stepmom's Home, Work, Cell	
Dad's Home, Work, Cell	
Stepdad's Home, Work, Cell	
Emergency Contact for Dad	
Emergency Contact for Mom	

Important phone numbers:

You can also download these forms from our website: www.extension.umn.edu/parentsforever/.

Parents Forever

The Impact of Divorce on Children Educator's Guide

EDUCATION FOR FAMILIES IN DIVORCE TRANSITION

Appendix

Appendix

Parent Education: Mandatory Curriculum Topics 103
Parents Forever Instructor Checklist 105
Parents Forever Session Evaluation: The Impact of Divorce on Children 107
Parents Forever Course Evaluation 110

Parent Education: Mandatory Curriculum Topics

The Minnesota Supreme Court adopted parent education minimum standards which are mandatory curriculum topics for court approved parent education classes for divorcing parents.

The Minnesota Supreme Court requires each of the following 25 topics to be addressed as part of the parent education classes for divorcing parents. The items with an “X” are addressed in The Impact of Divorce on Children.

1. ___ Resources in the community to obtain additional help or information.
2. ___ Overview of judicial process and proceedings (dissolution and paternity cases)
3. ___ Overview of legal issues (dissolution and paternity cases)
4. ___ Overview of the function of the court (dissolution and paternity cases)
5. ___ Alternatives for settling custody/visitation disputes (e.g., visitation expeditor, mediation)
6. ___ Legal phases of divorce/paternity proceeding
7. ___ Role of custody study
8. ___ Role of attorney
9. ___ Role of guardian ad litem
10. ___ Role of mediator/mediation
11. X Developmental needs/stages of children
12. ___ Impact of divorce/separation/conflict on adults
13. X Impact of divorce/separation/conflict on children
14. X Dynamics of domestic violence and sexual assault and impact on children
15. X Positive communication skills
16. X Co-parenting skills
17. X Conflict resolution skills
18. X Keeping children out of the middle of the conflict
19. ___ Cost of raising a child
20. ___ Emotional and financial responsibilities of parents

- 21.____ Coping with personal stress
- 22.____ Safety planning
- 23.____ Child support issues (obligations/services)
- 24. X Visitation issues (planning and problems)
- 25.____ Impact and realities of step families

Please use the 25 standards as a checklist in assuring that the classes meet Minnesota Supreme Court standards.

Parents Forever Instructor Checklist

The following instructor checklist is designed to facilitate the evaluation process. Please review this checklist before and after your presentation. This evaluation is a tool for the instructor and is not required to be shared with the Parents Forever staff or other instructors.

Prior to Teaching	Yes	No
I have reviewed my notes and am able to present the material without “reading” the notes. I use the notes as an outline and keep flexible (based on the participant group) to spend more or less time on any topic (within the time frame).		
I have considered the “main points” of my session to be sure that I cover them, keeping the presentation material as consistent from presenter to presenter as possible.		
I have thought-through relevant examples to use in class to make the presentation interesting and to add a “personal touch.”		
I am conscious of using both Male (Dad) and Female (Mom) examples in my presentation, not to bring bias to either during any topic of my teaching.		
I remember to use language that includes families at many points in their life transition, as well as to consider the different situations that may be represented (from separation to early in the divorce process or divorce finalized/divorce, separation, never-married).		
If there is a participant who is an acquaintance of mine, I allow that person to approach me first, giving them anonymity if they choose.		
When a question involves a specific situation I reply confidently with appropriate developmental information by validating the situation, asking if there are others in the group with a similar situation, and/or asking a question that enables them to think more about the situation.		
I watch the time while presenting, keeping my presentation within the designated timeframe (not too short/not too long).		
I arrive about 15 minutes prior to the time I start teaching.		

After Teaching	Yes	No
I feel that I “connected” with the class tonight.		
I covered the main points outlined for this session and presented without “reading” my notes while remaining flexible to be able to spend more time on topics of interest to the group.		
There were questions that I was unable to respond to or that I would like to research more information on to be better prepared to answer in the future? If yes, I get the information from:		
I used appropriate examples.		
I spoke loudly and clearly.		
I was able to start and end at the approximate time allotted.		
I used inclusive language (male/female, family transitions, etc.).		

If no was the answer to any statements above, why?

What can I improve and/or what are the goals for my next presentation?

Source

McCann, E (2010). University of Minnesota Extension.

Parents Forever Session Evaluation: The Impact of Divorce on Children

Please answer the following questions about the Parents Forever session you just completed.

1. The most important idea or skill I gained from this session was:

I intend to apply this in my family by:

2. One of the most important things I learned in this session was how children are affected by divorce and what I can do to help my children adjust to my divorce.

True False Not applicable

Before this session, my knowledge of this matter was:

(High) 5 4 3 2 1 (Low)

After this session, my knowledge of this matter was:

(High) 5 4 3 2 1 (Low)

I intend to apply this in my family by:

I will know this knowledge has made a difference when:

3. One of the most important things I learned in this session was to use “I” messages to express my feelings.

___ True ___ False ___ Not applicable

Before this session, my skill of this matter was:

(High) 5 4 3 2 1 (Low)

After this session, my skill of this matter was:

(High) 5 4 3 2 1 (Low)

I intend to apply this in my family by:

I will know this knowledge has made a difference when:

4. One of the most important things I learned in this session was how to keep my children “out of the middle” in my relations and disputes with the other parent.

___ True ___ False ___ Not applicable

Before this session, my knowledge of this matter was:

(High) 5 4 3 2 1 (Low)

After this session, my knowledge of this matter was:

(High) 5 4 3 2 1 (Low)

I intend to apply this in my family by:

I will know this knowledge has made a difference when:

5. One of the most important skills I learned in this session was how to make a parallel-parenting plan.

___ True ___ False ___ Not applicable

Before this session, my skill of this matter was:

(High) 5 4 3 2 1 (Low)

After this session, my skill of this matter was:

(High) 5 4 3 2 1 (Low)

I intend to apply this in my family by:

I will know this knowledge has made a difference when:

6. Another important thing I learned in this session was:

Before this session, my knowledge of this matter was:

(High) 5 4 3 2 1 (Low)

After this session, my knowledge of this matter was:

(High) 5 4 3 2 1 (Low)

I intend to apply this in my family by:

I will know this knowledge has made a difference when:

7. Other comments about this session:

Parents Forever Course Evaluation

Now that you have completed all Parents Forever sessions, please answer the following questions about this program.

1. What was the most important thing you learned or gained from the Parents Forever sessions you have been attending?

2. Several goals of the Parents Forever sessions have been emphasized over the past weeks, and are listed below. Please indicate any changes you have made related to these goals and the results you have noted.

Parents will put the best interests of their children first.

What have you done about this matter?

How would you describe your progress on this goal?

(Much) 5 4 3 2 1 0 (None)

If you put the best interests of your children first, what effects did you see on your children?

Parents will permit children access to both parents.

What have you done about this matter?

How would you describe your progress on this goal?

(Much) 5 4 3 2 1 0 (None)

If you permitted access to both parents, what effects did you see on your children?

Parents will avoid conflict in front of their children.

What have you done about this matter?

How would you describe your progress on this goal?

(Much) 5 4 3 2 1 0 (None)

If you avoided conflict, what effects did you see on your children?

Parents will avoid putting their children in the middle.

What have you done about this matter?

How would you describe your progress on this goal?

(Much) 5 4 3 2 1 0 (None)

If you avoided putting your children in the middle, what effects did you see?

3. Any other comments about this course?

Copyright Information

Parents Forever: The Impact of Divorce on Children Educator Guide

This is part of the educator guide series for the Parents Forever: Education for Families in Divorce Transition Curriculum. It is sold as part of the Parents Forever: The Impact of Divorce on Children Educator Package (item #08667) Visit www.extension.umn.edu/parentsforever/ for more information on this and other University of Minnesota Extension Center for Family Development materials and trainings.

© 2010, Regents of the University of Minnesota. All rights reserved. Send copyright permission inquiries to: Copyright Coordinator, University of Minnesota Extension, 405 Coffey Hall, 1420 Eckles Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55108-6068. Email to extcopy@umn.edu or fax to 612-625-3967.

This material is available in alternative formats upon request. Direct requests to 612-626-6602.

University of Minnesota Extension shall provide equal access to and opportunity in its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
EXTENSION