



# Working with Children of Divorce – Group and Individual Settings

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*Begin the healing, provide the hope and secure  
the future*



# Background of Program

- Curriculum was born out of Florida Ninth Circuit Court program for high-conflict divorced parents
- Saw the unmet needs of children – grant funded, no cost to family or school
- Core strategy – provide 7-week support group to help children understand and cope with the realities, stresses and emotions of divorce within the family

# Goals

- Increase protective coping skills for children who have experienced divorce or separation
- Improve children's appropriate expression of emotions about their family situation and resulting transition
- Foster positive self-esteem and resiliency in children
- Enhance parental ability to understand the needs of children and families experiencing divorce.

# Objectives

- Teach age-appropriate coping skills to children that relate to identified problems and stressors through the provision of a supportive group therapy cycle;
- Encourage, teach and normalize positive feeling expression to children that encompasses themes commonly reported in the literature as well as by the participants, i.e., self-blame, anger, grief, anxiety and rejection, through a supportive group therapy cycle.

# Objectives

- Teach age-appropriate skills to build self-esteem, foster self-confidence, and promote children's resiliency
- Provide each parent with a Parent Resource Packet containing reference material, support resources and educational literature related to divorce and family changes.

# How does this work?

- Children participate in age-appropriate activities such as discussion, role-playing, drawing pictures, storytelling, reading and playing games to express their emotions about the divorce. In a supportive environment, they can share experiences, establish common bonds and learn skills that will increase their ability to cope in the aftermath of divorce and family changes.

# Outcomes

- Evaluations to group members
- Pre- and post- evaluations surveys to parents/teachers
  - Aimed at determining change in child's behavior in the areas of coping skills, adjustment to changes, social skills, school functioning and negative feelings before and after the group cycle.

# Research on Children of Divorce

- Greater risk for developing unhealthy coping skills, not succeeding (or completing) in school, and fostering a negative sense of self.
- Research has repeatedly shown that it is not the divorce itself, but the co-parenting relationship and resolution of the divorce process that impacts the emotional health of the children.

# Impact of Divorce and Reactions for both Children and Adults

- Grief
- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression



# Group Formation

- Level 1 – Ages 6-8 or grades 1-2
- Level 2 – Ages 8-10 or grades 3-4
- Level 3 – Ages 10-12 or grade 5
- Appropriate lessons can be made for middle-school ages as well
- Separate siblings into separate groups
- Recommend services of mental health professional for purpose of consultation
- Groups comprised of 6-8 members

# Important Components

- Use of books and games
- Block of time – 45-60 min; location
- Forms:
  - Informed consent – both parents must agree
  - Group Progress Note – track weekly progress
  - Child Confidentiality Contract – assures trust between group members and leader
  - Parent pre- and post- evaluations
  - Child self-evaluation

# Group Rules

- 1. Arrive on time
- 2. Talk one at a time
- 3. Nobody is forced to talk – may just listen
- 4. Everybody's feelings will be respected
- 5. What is said in group is private
  - (this is followed up with explanation of mandatory disclosure for abuse or suicidal ideation)

# Session 1 - Universality

- Group cohesion
- Icebreakers
- Forms
- Group rules
- Emphasize confidentiality
- Promote safety and rapport

# Session 2 – Exploring Ideas and Family Situations

## – Activities

- *My Family after Divorce*
- *Before and After*
- *What I Think About Divorce*

## – Objectives

- Normalize incidence of divorce
- Demystify ideas about divorce
- Explore member's perspective of family after divorce



# Session 3 – Legal Aspects of Divorce

## – Activities

- *What do These Words Mean?*
- *Legal Matching/Find-a-Word*
- *So Many Changes*



## – Objectives

- Explain divorce process
- Clarify terms about divorce
- Normalize changes resulting from divorce

# Session 4 - Feelings

## – Activities

- *Feelings Rules*
- *My Feelings Balloon*
- *Feelings Charades*



## – Objectives

- Identification of various feelings
- Address and normalize feelings related to divorce
- Teach feelings rules

# Session 5 – Coping Skills

## – Activities

- *What to do with my feelings*
- *What's On My Mind, Take the Coping Challenge, Coping Chain*
- *“I” Messages*

## – Objectives

- Teach appropriate expression of feelings
- Teach positive coping skills
- Teach and reinforce “I” statements



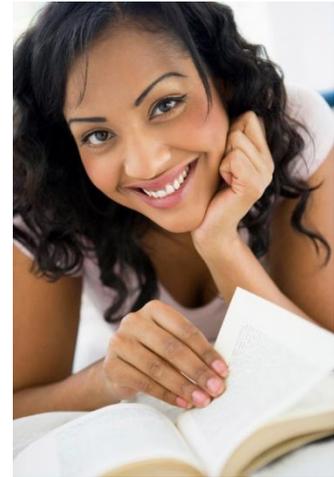
# Session 6 – Self-Esteem

## – Activities

- *Positive Word List – name game*
- *What I Like About Me*
- *Self-esteem bingo*

## – Objectives

- Increase sense of self-worth
- Encourage maintenance of high self-esteem
- Teach positive affirmations



# Session 7 – Stepfamilies and termination

## – Activities

- *Dear Mom and Dad...I Need*
- *Ideas About Stepfamilies*
- *Match-up Game*



## – Objectives

- Emphasize positive aspects of stepfamilies
- Encourage positive coping skills
- Teach and validate positive communication with parents and stepparents

# Final items for Group

- *Certificates of completion*
- *Party – snacks and games*
- *Process feelings of termination of group*



# Things to remember

- *If you are going through a divorce, first and foremost remember that it is a family process, not just an individual event.*
- *Children within the same family experience the divorce differently, i.e., siblings may take sides. Don't force children to ever take sides.*
- *Keep children's lives and daily activities as normal as possible with little or no disruption.*

# Things to remember, cont'd

- *Do not disparage the other parent – this disparages the child because he/she is part of both of you and the child internalizes that they must be bad if parent “is bad.”*
- *Do your best to show up at child’s plays, concerts, school meetings, and ideally, aligned with other parent. This will show child that together you both agree that they are most important.*

# Things to remember, cont'd

- *Work hard at keeping similar rules for both houses; when this is not possible, let child know they must respect both.*
- *Keep dating life separate from children. They do not benefit from having “revolving door” of new people in their lives. If a serious relationship evolves, allow time before introducing into child’s life.*

# Things to remember, cont'd

- *Divorce is not the only change children will experience – other changes may occur, e.g. changing schools, friends moving, illnesses*
- *Allow children to grieve the marriage at their own pace and in their own way.*
- *Remind children that divorce is never their fault – ever.*

# Most Important

- *Children will only be as healthy and well-functioning as their parents are.*
- *They watch what you do much more than what you say.*
- *Exhibit resiliency...*



# References

- *I have a separate attachment with references and a list of recommended books for those going through divorce. I can email that list if you wish.*
- *Send me an email at [Lrice@kaplan.edu](mailto:Lrice@kaplan.edu)*
- *THANK YOU!!!*