CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

A HANDBOOK TO HELP ADOLESCENTS COPE WITH DIVORCE

A graduate thesis project in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Science in Counseling,

Marriage and Family Therapy

By

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis project to my mother Connie. Thank you for all your encouraging words, not only with this project, but for every project that I have encountered in my life. You have instilled within me the faith in God and in myself to keep moving forward in my success. I wouldn't be here if you hadn't taught me the importance of furthering my education and becoming successful. Thanks Mom!

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ABSTRACT

HELPING ADOLESCENTS COPE WITH DIVORCE

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The purpose of this project was to create a handbook for group facilitators to use during group counseling with adolescents who are experiencing their parent's divorce. The group curriculum focuses on providing an understanding and safe environment for adolescents in the group to share personal experiences. The group experience will also reassure the adolescent that they are not alone in their experience and feelings related to divorce. The handbook provides group facilitators with positive coping mechanisms for an adolescent feeling angry, worried, anxious, sad, or any other overwhelming feeling. The group process will also focus on the adolescent finding a support system outside of group to continue the therapeutic process.

Chapter I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Divorce has increasingly become a common experience for many children and

adolescents in the United States (Summers, Forehand, Armistead, & Tannenbaum, 1998).

The United States Bureau of the Census (2005) estimated over 1 million children

experience parental divorce each year. Divorce affects children of all ages across the

lifespan. It can have negative effects on children's well-being (Kot & Shoemaker, 2008).

Children must deal with feelings of insecurity and abandonment, which if not properly

addressed can lead to problematic post-divorce adjustment for them (Kenny, 2000).

Children view their families as support systems, the sources where trust and bonds

develop. When the family unit breaks up, children lose the primary support system for

their healthy development and growth (Kenny, 2000). They lose the support of the

noncustodial parent, the parental unit and its sense of security, and they may lose their

home, their school, and their neighborhood friends (Kenny, 2000). Transitions related to

divorce and parental separation typically involve possible loss of contact or diminished

contact with one parent and the potential for reduced parental availability and

responsiveness, in addition to many other psychological and emotional stressors such as

moving between two households, adjusting to new family routines, and possibly dealing

with ongoing parental anger and inter-parental conflict (Kelly & Emery, 2003).

Children's reactions to divorce vary based on developmental level and age (Kelly,

2000). According to Erik Erikson, adolescence is a crucial time because adolescents are

forming their own identities. It is the time between childhood and adulthood and trying to

find oneself. Adolescents may ask themselves what their likes and dislikes are, what do they want to do in the future, and what qualities define them. It might be difficult for an adolescent to be experiencing a divorce and trying to figure out their purpose in life. During the process of a parent's divorce, adolescents may experience grief, sadness, anger, blame, anxiety, and fear and the emotional distress may interfere with their everyday life.

Statement of the Problem

An adolescent faces many issues during the aftermath of a divorce. Garvin and colleagues (1991) found that compared to children of martially intact parents, children of divorce had higher rates of depression, sexual acting out, substance abuse, conduct disorders, school problems, and delinquent behavior. Children of divorce have also been shown to be more depressed and exhibit higher levels of hostility and aggression (Spigelman & Spigelman, 1991). Rich and colleagues (2007) correlate parental divorce with children's adjustment difficulties. These include academic deterioration, antisocial and delinquent behaviors, anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression. Early promiscuity, relationship difficulties, and illicit drug use are also noted. According to Dr. Gregory Fritz, Professor of Psychiatry at Brown University, intense parental conflict before and after divorce is poison, which can seep into all aspects of family life and jeopardize children's ultimate psychological welfare (Rich & colleagues, 2007). Intervening at the time when the family system and its members are most vulnerable, therefore, is imperative (Fritz, 2000). The goal of this project is to intervene and provide an understanding environment to help adolescents cope with the divorce of their parents in a healthy way.

Purpose of Project

The purpose of the project is to describe interventions to be used during group work for middle school aged adolescents whose parents are divorced. Group counseling theory emphasizes the usefulness of helping children to feel less isolated, connect with and learn from others, receive peer validation and support, and normalize experiences (Gladding, 1991). The groups interventions will help adolescence cope with the reality of the divorce situation, the feelings that come with it, connect with others, and identify solutions to their problems. Children of divorce who have attended a group had higher levels of self-esteem, more realistic perceptions of the divorce, and better relationships with their mother than children of divorce who do not attend a support group (McConnell & Sim, 1998).

The group process will consist of eight sessions in which adolescents will explore their feelings about their parents' divorce. The group is both psycho-educational and involves counseling; some sessions may focus on the adolescent learning new skills and behaviors while other sessions will explore the adolescent's personal struggles related to the divorce. Each session has a different topic, for example, a session focuses on the worries and anxieties one might have during a divorce. Another session focuses on the definition of divorce and what it means. The handbook is broken up into sessions which will consist of an opening question at the beginning followed by an activity. The activity will pertain to what is being discussed during that session. At the end of the group, process questions will be asked in order to hear from the adolescents. These questions will explore what the adolescents thought of the activity, how they feel about what they

talked about, and if any new things have come up for them. The main purpose of the handbook is to help mental health providers create an understanding environment to support adolescents who are coping with divorce .The group process will provide a space for adolescents to share their feelings and tools handling their feelings effectively.

Terminology

The following terms will be used and have been defined below:

Adolescence: Adolescence constitutes a transition between childhood and adulthood whose onset includes pubertal maturation (Shirtcliff & Dahl, 2009).

Divorce: Divorce has the potential to influence children's behaviors, emotions, relationships with parents, and conduct (Fernando, Jayne, Lindo, Purswell, &Taylor, 2011). Divorce is not a single event but a process that unfolds over time. Divorce is often preceded by a period of overt conflict or mutual disengagement between spouses (Amato & Cheadle, 2008).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is an approach that links cognitions to feelings and behaviors (Squires & Caddick, 2012).

Grief: Grief is felt in the face of all types of loss and it always refers to a relationship (e.g., the end of a friendship or partnership, divorce, death of a loved person). The most irretrievable loss is associated with the death of a significant other (Jakoby, 2012).

Family System: A family is a unit that is intensely connected emotionally due to their interactions among each other (Bowen, 1978).

Psycho-educational: Goals for psycho-educational and counseling-oriented children-of-divorce groups focus on coping with the reality of the divorce situation as well as the feelings elicited by the divorce (DeLucia-Waack & Gerrity, 2001).

<u>Group work:</u> Group counseling theory emphasizes the usefulness of helping children to feel less isolated, connect with and learn from others, receive peer validation and support, and normalize experiences (Gladding, 1991).

Summary:

The disruptive period around the time of the divorce can shatter a child's entire living environment (Rich & colleagues, 2007). Divorce can be a time of confusion and grief especially for adolescents because they are at an age in their life where they are also questioning themselves. The adolescent period combined with divorce may increase these feelings of confusion and if not addressed may lead to unhealthy coping methods. Erickson describes this time as identity vs. role confusion. It is the transition between childhood and adulthood where consolidation of old and new identifications form into a new social and personal identity, wherein adolescents attain a sense of knowing who they are and where they are going (Moore & Boldero, 1991). Adolescence can be a very stressful time for an individual and the consequences of parental divorce on adolescent development vary. Amato and Keith 1991 state that adolescent s of divorce sometimes face difficulty in psychological adjustment, behavior and conduct, self-concept, educational attainment, and occupational quality. The purpose of this project is to develop a support group to help adolescents cope in a healthy way in the face of divorce.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Divorce is a pressing issue for mental health professionals working with children and families. Of the 299 million people living in the United States, approximately 10.6% are divorced and 2.2% are separated (Taylor, Purswell, Lindo, Jayne & Fernando, 2011). Children from divorced families are at a higher risk for a variety of emotional and behavioral concerns that can appear as early as 1 year before the divorce of their parents (Strohschein, 2005; Sun & Li, 2002). It is important that mental health professionals provide a supportive and understanding environment for families and children to work through their feelings related to divorce. Group counseling is effective in treating the psychological, social, and academic problems experienced by some children of divorce (DeLucia-Waack, 2011). In the context of this literature review, I will describe the negative effects divorce has on adolescent children and demonstrate that during this critical time in an adolescent's life providing extra support is important and group counseling would address the needs of an adolescent coping with parental divorce.

Adolescence

Adolescence is a stage in human development experienced closer to the teenage years, ages 12-18, usually termed the "growing up" stage because children transition into young adults (Forbes & Dahl, 2010). Adolescence entails significant change both psychologically and physically. Some adolescents may experience these changes more than others and there are major differences between male and female. The most common physical changes in females are developing breasts, pubic, armpit, and leg hair growth, beginning of menstrual periods, and growth in height. The most common physical

changes in males are hair growth throughout the whole body, voice change, and growth in height (Forbes & Dahl, 2010). These are just a few physical changes that adolescents experience; more detail will be given later.

Along with physical changes, adolescents also experience psychological changes. During this time, adolescents may experiment with drugs and alcohol, body image, depression, anxiety disorders, and sexual identity (Scherf, Behrman, & Dahl, 2012). Issues of self-identity seem to come to surface, handling new responsibilities at home and school, and conflicts with authoritative figures may become an issue (Scherf, Behrman & Dahl, 2012). Adolescence can be a difficult time to go through and without the proper information, care, support, and guidance; an adolescent can become stressed or overwhelmed (Scherf, Behrman & Dahl, 2012). It is vital that parents are aware of these changes and work with the adolescent to cope with these stressors. A supportive and understanding environment is important so that the adolescent does not feel alone and has the tools to become a successful adult.

Puberty

Puberty is the process of physical change a child experiences when heading into adulthood (Dahl & Forbes, 2010). In girls, this leads to ovarian secretion of estradiol, progesterone, and ovarian androgens, and eventually to the development of ovulatory menstrual cycles (Dahl & Forbes, 2010). In boys, LH pulses leads to testicular secretion of androgens (Dahl & Forbes, 2010). In other words, the human body is preparing for sexual reproduction to enable fertilization. During puberty, hormones stimulate growth and transformation of the brain, bones, muscle, skin, hair, breasts, and sexual organs (Forbes & Dahl, 2010). All of this hormonal stimulation leads to rapid growth in body

size, changes in distribution of body fat, and development of secondary sex characteristics (Dahl & Forbes, 2010). Hormones not only have an effect on the body's growth, but also the adolescents' behavior. Physical change for adolescents becomes noticeable to their classmates and friends (Pinto, 2007). This can be a very difficult time for a child who is changing rather quickly and also for those who have not experienced the change yet, they might become confused about their body changing or wonder why their body has not changed (Pinto, 2007). Bullying or teasing often takes place during adolescence which can make puberty even more difficult to cope with (Pinto, 2007). It is difficult for some adolescents to accept physical, emotional, and responsibility changes. Adolescents go through a time of drastic physical change both internally and externally (Pinto, 2007). The external change is harder to deal with during this time because it is on display for others to see. This is a time where girls develop breasts and start to get their menstrual cycle (Pinto, 2007). For boys, their voice deepens and facial hair beings to grow. It can also be a very emotional time, especially for girls, because their bodies and minds are changing. Hormones are fully stimulated for physical development (Pinto, 2007). This is why girls may be easily irritated or bothered by family members or friends; either by things they say or do. On top of physical and emotional change, adolescents are faced with more responsibilities at home and school (Pinto, 2007). They may be faced with pressure to grow up and take on new challenges. For example, more chores at home or difficulty in school work has increased. Most of the time, a child can gradually transition into adolescence rather smoothly, but the transition can come with confusion. The child may be confused about what their role is in their family, community, and school (Pinto, 2007).

Identity vs. Role Confusion

As difficult as it may be to accept the physical changes, it can be even more difficult for an adolescent to develop a sense of self and personal identity (Dunkel & Sefcek, 2009). Erik Erickson described the adolescent period of development as the Identity versus Role Confusion stage. During this stage adolescents need to develop a sense of self and personal identity (Dunkel & Sefcek, 2009). If an adolescent is successful, they usually feel good and stay true to themselves. If an adolescent is unsuccessful, they usually feel confused and develop a weak sense of self (Dunkel & Sefcek, 2009). The question adolescents may ask themselves is who am I?

During this identity versus role confusion, it is common for adolescents to explore in their friendships, sexual relationships, behaviors, roles, and activities in order to build their own unique sense of self. It is crucial during this stage for adults to provide adolescents with encouragement and reinforcement in order to give direction to in their life. If encouragement and reinforcement are not given, an adolescent can become unsure of who they are, what they like, what their beliefs and desires are which can slowly lead to an uncertain future (Dunkel & Sefcek, 2009).

It has been suggested that identity vs. role confusion stage is one of the most important stages of life development because it results in the psychosocial strength of fidelity, which is the next stage of development known as Intimacy versus Isolation (Dunkel & Sefcek, 2009). The stages build upon one another and the manner in which each task is resolved impacts the rest of an individual's development in a profound way (Dunkel & Sefcek, 2009). If an individual can successfully complete each stage of development it can result in a healthy personality and build upon their values and

strengths. These strengths that an individual builds upon can be used to face later crises in life (Dunkel & Sefcek, 2009). For example, if a toddler cannot learn healthy levels of trust and autonomy in the first stage of development than they may never be able to establish healthy, trustworthy relationships in the future. Each stage can be learned later if it is not successfully completed (Dunkel & Sefcek, 2009). The adolescent period is important because it comes with more responsibilities and choices without an authoritative figure, such as a parent, always being there to guide them.

Adolescents may encounter peer pressure and are likely to experiment with drugs and alcohol because they are impressionable (Herman, 1997). Adolescents may choose to experiment because they feel invincible and do not think anything can get in their way. This invincible attitude may lead to poor choices and irresponsible behavior (Herman, 1997). If an adolescent becomes involved with drugs and alcohol, there will be a change in personality, mood swings, poor judgment, depression, lack of interest, withdrawal from family, negative attitude, drop in grades, and decreased interest in school activities (Herman, 1997). The use of drugs and alcohol may also be a coping mechanism to deal with stress or trauma such as child abuse, sexual abuse, divorce, separation, and death of a family member or friend that has either occurred on a continuous basis or one single event (Herman, 1997). Extreme childhood stressors often damage relational life at the same time that they threaten the integrity of the self, especially when the nature of the trauma is a fracturing of social connections and trust through abuse or neglect (Herman, 1997). More generally, the consensus is that childhood stressors and severe adversity endanger the psyche, often permanently, and set the individual on a course toward pathology and disturbed social relations in adulthood (Terr, 1991). These stressors can

influence adolescents to resort to using drugs and alcohol to relieve their pain or stress. If

an adolescent is experiencing severe depression they may even resort to cutting or suicide

as a way out of their depression. In cases of extreme stress or trauma, it is vital parents

play an active role in their adolescents' life by providing a supportive, understanding

environment where the adolescent feels safe (Terr, 1991).

Defining Family and Family Systems

The family unit used to be defined as a group consisting of parents and their

children living in the same household (White & Klein, 2008). This definition of a family

seems too simple though, as the dynamics of a family have changed over the years.

Children are being raised by various caring adults: single parents, grandparents, kin-

networks, same-sex couples, and others (White & Klein, 2008). Even traditional

appearing families are often blended families of children from different biological

parents. Family is much more than just sharing the same genetics; it is the connection you

build with a special group of people (White & Klein, 2008). Whatever the case may be, a

family unit is important because it influences the development of an individual starting

from childhood all the way into adulthood. Family systems theorists suggest that each

individual in the family influences the whole, while the whole family also influences each

individual (White & Klein, 2008). In other words, the whole is greater than its sum of

parts (Ward & Zabriskie, 2011). A family systems perspective examines interactions

among relationships and individuals in the whole family unit, and focuses specifically on

behaviors and communication patterns that determine relationship structures and

interpersonal boundaries (Lindahl, Bregman, & Malik, 2012). The family unit consists of

a web of interconnected relationships, and from this perspective, individual adjustment

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can be seen as a resulting from the internal structure of families (i.e., roles people play, how subsystems operate) rather than being solely derived from traditionally defined dyadic parent– child relationships (Lindahl, Bregman, & Malik, 2012).

The web of relationships that extends across generations in Latino families provides a support network that is sustained by rules of mutual obligation. Rules of respect also play an important role in preserving this intergenerational network of close personal relationships. When the system works, that is, if sacrifices do not border on martyrdom, the support and emotional acceptances that are provided can be healthy and nurturing as well as reassuring and validating (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999). On the other hand, Latino families could be very judgmental and upset with a divorce since value the preservation of personal relationships and marriage. It could be difficult for both the parents and the children who are experiencing the divorce because in this culture it is frowned upon.

Family Interactions and Relationships

There are many relationships that take place within a family, the most important being the parent-child relationship Parent involvement is one of the strongest protective factors an adolescent can have related to maximizing his or her potential (Caldwell & Witt, 2005). Evidence supports that strong, positive parental influence contributes to preventing adolescent risky behaviors such as drug and alcohol use and promiscuity (Bahr & Hoffman, 2010). Positive interaction within the family clearly provides the context that can foster meaningful relationships, help develop skills and competencies, and influence all aspects of a youth's environment (Ward & Zabriskie, 2011). Families, specifically the parental unit, play an active role in a child's life. According to previous

studies on family involvement, the critical nature of family leisure as a context in which essential parenting, interaction, and bonding occur. In other words, it appears that parents, as invested adults, purposively or intentionally plan family leisure experiences to create and maintain meaningful relationships and provide supportive opportunities for their children to learn skills and develop behaviors that will both strengthen family life and contribute to their overall positive development (Ward & Zabriskie, 2011).

A family is considered a process because members are intensely connected emotionally meaning each family member has the ability to affect another member's thoughts, feelings, or actions (Bowen, 1978). The functioning of a family is dependent on the connectedness and reactivity among and between its members (Bowen, 1978). Family functioning is considered to be healthy when members can balance a sense of separateness from and togetherness with others and each can appropriately control their emotional lives with a developed intellect (Walsh & Harragan, 2003). Cox and Paley (2003) stated more recently that researchers have moved toward viewing individuals within the context of their larger family systems, considering the mutual influences among family subsystems, such as the marital relationship and the parent-child relationship. For example, unresolved stress between parents who are divorcing reverberates down through all family interrelations and normally results in coalitions, emotional parent-child alignments against the other parent, and perhaps coalitions against other children (Cox & Paley, 2003).

Family members interact with each other and throughout the life cycle of the family, members of the family also gains independence (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999). A teenager may feel more independent to make their own choices as they enter high school.

They may not turn to their parents as much for guidance as they did when they were younger. For example, adolescents joining a new sport or becoming a member of an organization on campus may come to rely more on teammates or other peers. A parent may feel more independent as her children grow older since she has more time for herself. The interaction between and among family members reflects cohesion, while the independence shows the independent level each family member has (Turnbull, 2005). All families differ in interaction styles. For example, in many Asian families the nuclear and extended families remain so close that sometimes three generations live in one household (Pang, 2010). Interaction styles depend on the families' background and usually appear more when change or transition such as a newborn baby, divorce, separation, death of a family member, financial problems, abuse, changing of schools is taking place. All of these changes or transitions can pose a threat to the family because it is taking them away from their original status or homeostasis. It is up to the family to communicate with each other and provide a supportive environment during these times in order for all members of the family to feel secure.

The make-up of a family system, especially interaction between spouses, affects these transition processes (Hoover, 2001). According to Cox and Paley (2003), problems in the parent-child relationships are often associated with marital distress. As a result, parent-child issues were difficult to resolve unless problems in the marriage had first been addressed. Cox and Paley (2003) have confirmed that marital and parent-child relationships are interrelated. That is, poor parent-child relationships often develop in the context of distressed marriages. This is a clear example that if certain family members are experiencing distress it affects the family as a whole (Cox & Paley, 2003).

Stages of Family Life Cycle

Family interactions are only one part of family systems, the other part is the family's capacity to reorganize in response to external factors. Families can adapt so that they can continue to function in the face of the new circumstances (Sameroff, 1993). The family life cycle represents the changes and transitions a family experiences over the years, such as changes in family characteristics, interaction, and function (Turnbull, 2005). According to Bowen (1978), the family life cycle consists of various stages a family goes through. Stage 1 is referred to as the Independent stage when single young adults leave home. Stage 2 is referred to the coupling or marrying stage, it is when two adults join in marriage and bring their two families together (Bowen, 1978). Stage 3 is referred to as parenting and this is when the couple has children. Stage 4 is referred to as parenting adult children; parents are preparing for their children to leave the nest. Stage 5 is referred to as families in later life or senior years (Bowen, 1978).

There are two types of changes/transitions that can occur at any of the previously mentioned life cycle stages, the expected and the unexpected (Turnbull, 2005). One expected change or transition is the transition of a child from kindergarten to elementary school. When a child reaches the school age, it is an expected transition and everybody in the family prepares for it financially and emotionally (Turnbull, 2005). On the other hand, the unexpected transition refers to some changes that a family does not plan or expect (Turnbull, 2005). Changes can arise at any level of the family system, and a change at any level can stimulate further change in individuals, relationships, and the whole family system (Cox & Paley, 2003).

The focus of this section was to explain the family systems theory and life cycle. A family can interact in various ways, as well as respond to changes and transitions in different ways. A family is also responsible for reorganizing during these changes and transitions. The next section will discuss the change and transition a family experiences when divorce occurs and what divorce entails.

Divorce and the Family System

The National Center for Health Statistics (2005) reported for every eight marriages, four end in divorce. Divorce has both immediate and long-term consequences for the divorcees, extended family, and children involved (Amato, 2000). It is the most traumatic situation, having the furthest reaching implications for all family members of all life events (Amato, 2000). Divorce has the potential to influence children's behaviors, emotions, relationships with parents, and conduct (Fernando, Jayne, Lindo, Purswell, &Taylor, 2011). Children with divorced parents are disadvantaged regarding various life outcomes, including likelihood of dropping out of high school, cognitive skills, psychosocial well-being, and social relations (Amato, 2001). Furthermore, divorce can have long-term effects that persist into adulthood, such as risk of increased internalizing problems, lower educational attainment, higher marital disagreements, and poorer parental relationships (Amato & Cheadle, 2005).

Children are not the only ones affected by the impact of divorce, the divorcees often experience deteriorated physical and psychological conditions for years following marital termination including guilt, depression, distress, and intimacy issues (Booth-Butterfield, Dillow, Frisby, Martin, & Weber, 2012). Those who experienced the loss of an intimate relationship, such as a marital relationship, could escalate into more serious

issues, including substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, or suicide attempts (Leary, Koch, & Hechenbleikner, 2001). Divorce is a pressing issue for mental health professionals working with children and families (Fernando, Jayne, Lindo, Purswell, &Taylor, 2011). The negative impact of divorce speaks to the importance of understanding ways to alleviate the detrimental psychological, emotional, and physiological consequences that a family may encounter when experiencing divorce (Booth-Butterfield, et al, 2012).

There is no doubt that throughout a divorce there is a lot of change for the family unit. Families may experience a decrease in financial resources, emotional well-being, and social relationships (Fernando, et al, 2011). These changes can make it even more difficult for children to adjust to a new family structure (Frank, 2007). Parenting after divorce, whether in sole or joint custody, differs significantly from parenting that occurs within an intact family. The immediate tasks that parents confront at divorce are formidable. They include the wrenching separation of their personal lives and the simultaneous building of two functioning households at the same time that they are faced with the clamor of anxious children (Lewis & Wallerstein, 2013.)

As a result of the shift in family dynamics, children of divorce may struggle with feelings of loneliness and abandonment (Angarne-Linberg, Wadsby, & Bertero, 2009). Furthermore, compounding children's difficulties are their parents' own struggles with the changes in the family system (Strohschein, 2005). Due to the heightened stress created by divorce, the parent-child relationship is often negatively affected. This may result in increased conflict and communication problems (Fernando, et al, 2011). Children may experience increased frustration towards their parents because of their lack of communication regarding the divorce (Angarne-Linberg, Wadsby, & Bertero, 2009).

Conflict between parents also tends to spill over and negatively affect the quality of parents' interactions with their children (Davies & Cummings 1994; Hetherington and Clingempeel 1992).

Divorce is not a single event but a process that unfolds over time. Divorce is often preceded by a period of overt conflict or mutual disengagement between spouses (Amato & Cheadle, 2008). In addition, divorce is often followed by a series of difficult circumstances for children, including reduced contact with the noncustodial parent, continuing rancor between parents, a decline in children's standard of living, and a move often to neighborhoods with fewer community resources (Amato, 2000). In addition, most parents find new partners following divorce, and many children find dealing with stepparents (whether married or cohabiting) challenging (Hetherington & Jodi, 1994). The creation of new parental unions also means that many children experience additional union dissolutions, which adds to the turmoil in their lives (Fomby & Cherlin, 2007).

During and after the marriage, parental conflicts can have a devastating impact on children. Besides representing a major obstacle to their adjustment, parental conflicts may lead to damaging lifelong effects on the children's emotional wellbeing such as trust issues and difficulties in future relationships (Cyr & Sarrazin, 2007). Twenty-four to 33% of the families who go through divorce continue to undergo significant conflicts lasting up to two years after the marital separation (Moskowitz, 1998). A child's adjustment does not appear to be linked to the type of custody put into place following the divorce, but rather to the quality of the relationships between the parents (Emery, 1982). Too often, a conflicting parental relationship degenerates and affects all members of the family. For the children, parental conflicts represent an important source of stress (Emery, 1988). In

fact, research has demonstrated that a child exposed to conflicts between his parents often shows increased cardiac rhythm, higher blood pressure; lower body temperature as well as frightened and anxious facial expressions (Cummings & Davies, 1994). Unfortunately, children are sometimes not merely the witnesses to their parents' conflicts: They also get trapped into a damaging dynamic in which they are forced to take sides or to bring some support to one parent to the detriment of the other. It is clear that such manipulations are harmful to the child, making him even more susceptible to psychological problems (Davis, Hops, Alpert & Sheeber, 1998). It is clear that children can easily become victims of parental conflicts. Without having a choice, they have to deal with the consequences of their parents' fighting (Cyr & Sarrazin, 2007).

The timeline of events that occurs before, during, and after a divorce can cause a child much distress.

Divorce among Latino families is very traumatic. The criticism and judgmental disappointment about the decision to divorce are most intense among first generation immigrant Mexican parents. Since marriage is thought to be for life, a divorce on the basis of marital incompatibility may be alien to cultural and religious beliefs (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999). There are also feelings of shame about the social stigma and what others in the extended networks will say about divorce (Wagner, 1988).

Divorce and Grief

Divorce for children is a significant loss and children may experience a grieving process. Significant research suggests that losing a parent through death does not confer the same degree of risk as parental separation (Amato, 2000; Pryor & Rodgers, 2001). Children experiencing divorce do face a number of challenges that distinguish the

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reaction from that resulting from the death of a parent or other significant person. These

challenges include fantasies of reunion, difficulties in mourning, pre-loss conflict, loyalty

conflicts, ongoing parent-child relationships, feeling responsible for the breakup, less

community support, struggles over finances, fears about the future, parental dating

behavior, and family restructuring (Worden, 1996). It is important that parents and

therapists help children cope with the loss experienced during a divorce, to deal with

anger, and to resolve any guilt and self-blame (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). The

primary goal of family work and therapy should be to foster a place where children can

discuss their anxieties and concerns about divorce and the feeling of loss that comes with

divorce (Kenny, 2000).

Grief is associated with physiological stress, poor health, and an increased risk of

mortality, depression, or drug consumption, which often implies a need for psychiatric

intervention or medical help (Archer, 1999). Grief is felt in the face of all types of loss,

for example, death, end of a relationship, moving, etc. It most often refers to a

relationship (e.g., the end of a friendship or partnership, divorce, death of a loved person).

The most irretrievable loss is associated with the death of a significant other (Jakoby,

2012). Grief is linked with a variety of other emotions; for example, guilt, aggression,

yearning, anxiety, or fear (Archer, 1999; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987). Grieving is the

process of separating oneself from losses for survival, to effect necessary changes in life,

and to foster new attachments and commitments (Floerchinger, 1991). As long as there

are social and intimate relationships, friendship, and love, there is grief (Jakoby, 2012).

Grief and loss are ubiquitous in the human experience, and the majority of counselors

will eventually work with clients facing these issues. In addition to issues related to death

and dying, grief and loss can encompasses countless facets of human experience, such as normative lifecycle transitions, divorce, substance abuse and recovery, illness, trauma, and career change (Horn, Crews, & Harrawood).

Stages of Grief

Kubler-Ross and Kessiler (2005) define grief and describe what the grieving process may look like for individuals who have experienced the loss of a loved one. They describe the process in five stages: stage one is denial. People believe that their loved one has died, but their denial is symbolic in that they cannot believe that their friend or family member will not, for example, be calling to say hello or returning from work at a certain time. Stage two is anger. A person's anger is directed at the person who died or at oneself for being unable to prevent his or her loved one's death. Stage three is bargaining. Kubler-Ross and Kessler talk about the "what if" and "if only" mind-set wherein individuals who are grieving believe that they may have been able to control and thus prevent the loss of their family member or friend. Stage four is depression. In this stage, the authors discuss the normalcy of feeling depressed and affirm the idea that such feelings are necessary for the healing process to begin. Stage five is acceptance. At this stage, individuals are at a point where they recognize the current state of their lives, without their loved one, as the reality and can live with that understanding (Bolden, 2007). Stage theorists seem to conclude that this process includes shock or numbness, anger that becomes guilt, bargaining, depression, and resolution. These affective reactions all tend to appear at one time or another, and the feelings may be quite obvious or subtle, depending on the person and the loss (Floerchinger, 1991).

The experience of parent loss among those under the age of 17, due to divorce, foster care placement, hospitalization, residential mobility, military service, deviant lifestyles, and death is considered statistically normal during childhood or adolescence (Anthony, 1976). The reactions to loss depend on the child's age and gender; boys react differently than girls. Younger children react differently than adolescent (Mishne, 1992). The reactions to loss will also depend on the preparations for loss, the circumstances of loss, the suddenness or unexpectedness of loss, the role of the parent in the life of the child, the child's capacity to substitute for the parent and the child's inner resources for coping with the divorce (Mishne, 1992). The child's reactions will also depend on outer resources available for comfort, compensation, surrogation, and abreaction. Some children and even some adolescents can cry out their loss (Mishne, 1992).

Supporting Children and Adolescents through Divorce

Most children of divorce are not in need of psychiatric treatment but can be helped to grieve dissolution of the family through support from friends, relatives, and primary care practitioners (Mishne, 1992). The child should feel at all times that he has someone to go to, to talk to, and feel with. The vulnerable child, on the other hand, needs to be treated very carefully during the whole process of divorce and after (Mishne, 1992). This requires dealing with the abreaction of feelings occasioned by the stress, the use of surrogation and transitional experiences during the process of change, the establishment of continuity between pre-divorce and post-divorce self-conception, the maintenance of good relationships with the absent parent, the stimulation of mourning processes and the working through the attendant guilt (Mishne, 1992).

Bowlby (1980) suggested that the manifest behaviors that encompass grieving and mourning are attempts on the part of the individual to reestablish a relationship with the lost object. This is because the abandoned person, in this regard the adolescent, does not accept that the attachment figure is lost forevermore, and therefore may spend his/her teenage as well as adult years seeking to retrieve, and in turn, recreate the lost object (Bowlby, 1980). Further consequences of this mourning process are developing a chameleon like ability to adapt, a real sense of confused identity and alienation (Freudenberger & Gallagher, 1995).

Freudenberger and Gallagher evaluated 24 parochial school children between the ages of 8 and 16 who experienced the death or loss of a parent during infancy, early childhood, or latency. Each was referred to Gallagher for psychological evaluation because of manifested school dysfunctions. Feelings of abandonment and depression were two major symptoms, either expressed or felt by the children evaluated. It appears that their initial loss is eventually accentuated by apathy or withdrawal which manifests itself in their lowered school grades and affective distancing from their peers. Another manifestation of apathy and withdrawal was found in this population's poor expressive language skills. This can be attributed to their diminished interest and involvement in interaction and communication. These children often maintain an active fantasy relationship with the lost parent. This silent relationship can inhibit the normative development and acquisition of language during childhood.

Depression, loss, and abandonment have become profound psychological manifestations for a significant number of adolescents. The feeling of abandonment that has taken place is a result of the loss, through death, of a parent. Adolescents may

experience depression during their parents' divorce because they may feel abandoned due to the loss of what their family used to be. They may also be grieving over what their relationship used to be with each parent especially if an adolescent does not see a parent as often as they used to. These dynamics impact the adolescent's ability to function in school and to retain knowledge and information. It is further manifested in their lifelong inability to make meaningful relationships (Freudenberger & Gallagher, 1995). The onset of depression generally occurs in adolescence or young adulthood which can adversely impact future functioning and has a 60–70% chance of continuing into adulthood. The prevalence of depression in young people: (i) is between 5% and 17% around the world; (ii) increases with age, with up to 1/5 expected to experience clinical depression before the end of high school; and (iii) has increased in recent years. However, whereas it is not true that every young person will develop depression, it is true that the physical, social and psychological changes they experience at this time act to heighten their vulnerability to depressive symptomatology. As a result, interventions that offer positive strategies that can help buffer the impact of perceived or actual negative experiences at this time can help lessen a young person's vulnerability to prevent the onset of depression (Venning, Kettler, Eliott, &Wilson, 2009).

Treatment for Adolescents of Divorce

Group Work

Group work may help alleviate some of these depressive symptoms adolescents may suffer during parental divorce. Early adolescents naturally orient toward peers for affirmation, information, and companionship; this orientation positions group counseling as particularly viable for this age group (Akos, Hamm, Mack, & Dunaway, 2007). Group

work creates an opportunity for peer support, invaluable in helping children cope with divorce and post-divorce related stresses (Sanders & Reister, 1996). Group counseling theory emphasizes the usefulness of helping children to feel less isolated, connect with and learn from others, receive peer validation and support, and normalize experiences (Gladding, 1991).

Groups provide a setting for children to learn appropriate social skills. The groups provide a sense of "safety through numbers" which individual approaches cannot achieve (Sanders & Reister, 1996). Within a group, children in later elementary school as well as upper grades are more likely to feel comfortable expressing ideas, questions, worries, and personal experiences than when seen in a one-to-one relationship with an adult (Kalter, 1985). Through sharing stories of traumatic events, children gain developmentally important peer validation of their emotional and cognitive reactions (Sanders & Riester, 1996). Children of divorce ages nine and older appear able, in short time, to become comfortable expressing inner concerns, to learn new coping strategies and to come to understand the normality of the family circumstances when a group format is used. Thus, later latency age children appear to benefit from group counseling in adjusting to the divorce (Sanders & Riester, 1996). Children of divorce who attended a group also had higher levels of self-esteem, more realistic perceptions of the divorce, and better relationships with their mother than children of divorce who do not attend a support group (McConnell & Sim, 1998).

Group work may be especially relevant for U.S. racial minority populations given their unique cultures, value systems, racial and ethnic identities, struggles with self esteem, confidence, empowerment, and having a shared socio-cultural history that is

characterized by stereotypes, oppression, prejudice, and discrimination (Stark-Rose, Livingston-Sacin, Merchant, & Finley, 2012). Group treatment has been found to reduce depressive symptoms and promote positive psychosocial health among African American women, lower re-arrest rates for Latino and African American young men on probation, reduce race-related stress with Pacific Island male Vietnam veterans diagnosed with PTSD, increase academic achievement, problem-focused coping, and social problem solving skills with pregnant and parenting Latina teens, and facilitate individual and community healing with culturally based education on the impact of historical trauma with Native American human service providers. It is important for counselors to have the knowledge and training specific to the various U.S. racial minority populations in order to lead multicultural groups (Stark-Rose, Livingston-Sacin, Merchant, & Finley, 2012).

Psycho-educational and Counseling Group

Psycho-educational and counseling groups are most applicable for children of divorce (DeLucia-Waack & Gerrity, 2001). Goals for psycho-educational and counseling-oriented children-of-divorce groups focus on coping with the reality of the divorce situation as well as the feelings elicited by it (DeLucia-Waack & Gerrity, 2001). Delucia-Waack and Gerrity (2001) state there are seven goals to help children of divorce. The first goal is to help children gain an accurate picture of the divorce process through discussion and information. The second goal focuses on normalizing the common experiences and feelings around divorce. Children need a safe place to talk about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences with others, both adults and children, who are not involved in the divorce or their family (DeLucia-Waack & Gerrity, 2001). It is important that children learn that their situation is not unique and that others also live with one

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parent (or other family members) and have parents who do not get along. Children also need to share their experiences related to divorce, such as how they found out about the divorce, what their visits are like with the noncustodial parents, and so on, in a nonjudgmental environment. Groups create a place where children can receive peer support and validation for what they experience and feel (DeLucia-Waack & Gerrity, 2001).

The third goal is to provide a safe and supportive place to talk about divorce-related concerns. The fourth goal is to help children label, understand, and express feelings about the divorce. Because the divorce or separation has significantly changed the constellation of their family, it may be beneficial for them to mourn the loss of their family of origin as it was or the way they would like it to be. They may also need help focusing on their feelings of guilt; children often feel responsible for the divorce in some way (DeLucia-Waack & Gerrity, 2001). The fifth goal is to assist children in developing new coping skills. Teaching and practicing of communication, problem-solving, anger management, and conflict resolution skills is essential. Communication and conflict resolution skills may be particularly useful around the issues of stepfamily problems, parental and sibling conflicts, and divided parental loyalty (DeLucia-Waack & Gerrity, 2001). The sixth goal emphasizes reality testing as an important focus of children-of-divorce groups. Young children particularly often have unrealistic fears and beliefs about what will happen as a result of the divorce. They may fear that both parents will stop loving them and abandon them. They may believe that they caused the divorce by wishful thinking or something they did. Some of the irrational fears and thoughts can be dispelled through group discussion (DeLucia-Waack & Gerrity, 2001). The last goal focuses on the

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future. Children benefit from the development of a realistic perspective of how relationships work and what to expect in a relationship. Children of divorce need hope for the future that things will be better (DeLucia-Waack & Gerrity, 2001).

Parental divorce is a significant issue for children of divorce. It is a lifelong adjustment that may be enhanced by psycho educational and counseling interventions at various points in their lives (DeLucia-Waack & Gerrity, 2001). It is essential that counselors be prepared to work with children of divorce. Groups provide elements of support, altruism, universality, and cooperation that individual counseling cannot provide (DeLucia-Waack & Gerrity, 2001).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is an approach that links cognitions to feelings and behaviors (Squires & Caddick, 2012). One of the principles of CBT is that faulty thinking can lead to strong feelings and to behaviors that are not appropriate for the context (Squires & Caddick, 2012). CBT encourages the client to reflect on their thinking and to consider the evidence for their beliefs and resulting feelings and behaviors (Squires & Caddick, 2012). Conceptualized in this way, externalizing behavioral problems stem from cognitive distortions held by the individual. The feelings and behaviors are not just triggered by environmental events, but by the way in which the individual perceives and interprets the event (Squires & Caddick, 2012). Some CBT protocols to treat adolescent depression include mood monitoring, cognitive restructuring, problem-solving training, and behavioral activation; however, treatments vary in the degree to which components are emphasized, sequenced, and supplemented with other components such as relaxation or social skills training (DePrince & Shirk,

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2013). CBT can be delivered either individually or as group therapy, and several CBT manuals for the treatment of depressed adolescents are available. CBT includes an acute treatment consisting of 12–15 hourly sessions, usually delivered on a weekly basis, followed by bi-weekly sessions for a 2-month consolidation phase and a gradual termination with monthly sessions (Vitiello, 2009).

Chapter III

Introduction

This project will be a handbook for a group facilitator working with adolescents of divorce. The handbook will consist of a curriculum for eight sessions in which adolescence explore their feelings about divorce. The group is both psycho-educational and therapeutic, so some sessions may target learning new skills and behaviors while others explore personal issues. The handbook will include a step by step process to work through each session. Each group session targets a different topic, for example, session 2 is a psycho-educational session where effects of divorce are explored and divorce itself is defined. Some sessions will be pure discussion while others will involve an activity that the adolescent is encouraged to take part in. Each session includes processing questions, encouraging adolescents to explore how they felt about the session and what they learned. The main purpose of the handbook is to help mental health providers create an understanding environment to support adolescents who are coping with divorce. The group process will provide a space for adolescents to share their feelings and offer them tools for handling their feelings effectively.

Development of Project

My parents divorced when I was 5 years old. Since I was so young it was difficult for me to understand what was going on and why so many things were changing in my life. One weekend I was with dad and the next I was with my mom and sisters. It was a complex idea for me to wrap my mind around, but all I knew was that my parents were apart and that I did not see my dad as much as I used to. I do not remember if my mother ever sat me down to explain, but as I got older I started to understand more. It was in

these adolescent years where the pain of not seeing my father as much really took a toll. I think it was because I was old enough to know what was going on and in control of my own choices and emotions. I came from a very open and supportive home, but I still did not feel like I was understood or heard. With divorce affecting so many families today, I thought about how all these children are being affected and I asked myself who is helping them? It would have been nice to be a part of group of children my age who were going through the same thing. This project was created in an effort to reach those adolescents who are confused about what is going on and need someone to talk to. It is to provide adolescents with coping techniques to get through the tough time of divorce and promote communication with their parents.

Intended Audience

The handbook is designed for a group of ten students, ages 10-15, who are experiencing their parent's divorce. Teachers, parents, and principals will be asked to refer students who are having a rough time coping with their parents' divorce. The group sessions will be 60 minutes long. The group will be a same sex group.

Personal Qualifications

My project is a handbook for group facilitators to help middle school aged adolescents experiencing divorce in their home. It can be a useful tool for group facilitators to use at schools or with families to help the adolescent explore their feelings and learn to cope with them. There are activities within the handbook so group facilitators must be comfortable using them and implementing them in the correct way. The handbook is intended to be used by individuals in the graduate level with a marriage and family therapy license or working under a marriage and family therapist. Individuals

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may also be school counselors as long as they have been trained to do group work. Individuals will need to have taken a class in group work in order to understand the dynamics of a group. Individuals must have prior knowledge in psychology, group work, and experience with adolescence. Prior experience will help individuals understand what the group needs as well as each adolescent. Individuals will also need to have previous experience using creative activities or be open to using activities during group time.

Environment and Equipment

The handbook can be used in school settings or at an internship site where groups for adolescent are held. A small classroom with chairs in a circle would work best for the group. If there is an art activity during a session a table may be needed for the group participants to sit around. Teachers and parents can refer the student, sixth through eighth graders, to the group facilitator in the group. The equipment necessary for the group is the handbook and the materials listed within the handbook for the activities.

Project Outline

The handbook is divided into eight sessions designed to help adolescents cope with divorce. Each session has a different goal and has been listed below.

Session 1: Introduction

Participants will be informed about group rules, process, activities, and confidentiality. Participants will also be introduced to each other and the group facilitator in order to build trust within the group.

Session 2: Definition of Divorce

Participants will be asked what divorce means to them and how it makes them feel. Participants will be asked to both verbally give a description and draw it.

Session 3: Identifying Feelings

Participants will be asked to identify any feelings they may have been experiencing throughout the divorce.

Session 4: What does my Family Look Like? Who is my Support?

Participants will be able to identify who their support system is and who they can trust talking to.

Session 5: Anxiety and Worry

Participants will be able to identify and verbalize feelings of anxiety and worry.

Participants will be able to cope with these worries and anxieties in a much more effect way.

Session 6: Identifying Coping Mechanisms

Participants will be asked to identify healthy coping mechanisms they can use when they are feeling overwhelmed with emotion.

Session 7: Focusing on the Future

Participants will be able to decrease their worry about the future and what's to come by highlighting positive memories and future goals.

Session 8: Last Session

Students will summarize what they have learned, express their feelings about how the group worked together, and discuss how they will use what they learned in their families and in other stressful situations.

Chapter IV

Summary

  The purpose of this project was to create a handbook for group facilitators to use during group counseling with adolescents who are experiencing their parent's divorce. The handbook focuses on providing an understanding and safe environment for adolescents to share personal experiences. The group process will also serve to reassure the adolescent that they are not alone in their experience and the feelings they may be experiencing are common. The group process will provide positive coping mechanisms an adolescent can use if they are feeling angry, worried, anxious, sad, or any other overwhelming feeling. The curriculum also highlights finding a support system outside of group to continue the therapeutic process.

Discussion

  As I began to write about my project various topics ran through my mind that I would want to cover in order to build a unique discussion. I knew that I wanted to cover the topic of divorce and how it affects the children in the household, but I was not sure what age range I wanted to focus on. There is a lot of focus on smaller children, but I didn't see too much focus on adolescent. I felt that this group goes unseen because families think they are old enough to understand divorce, but they deal with divorce in a different way than younger children. I thought it was important to do research on this specific group because they are going through a confusing time even outside of the divorce.

  Another idea that ran through my mind was to do family therapy instead of group therapy. As a mental health professional I would bring in the families to work with them

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on how they were coping with the divorce. This kind of therapy would include everyone in the family and help them to work together even though the parents are going through a divorce. I thought this might cause conflict especially if the parents have animosity with each other and didn't want to cause more harm to the adolescent. I thought it might be better to work with other adolescents who are also experiencing divorce so that they don't feel alone. The other side of this project would be to work with the parents on how to relay the message of divorce, provide security, and maintain communication during this difficult time. I think that a handbook should be made for the parents as well. Using both handbooks through the divorce may alleviate stress and create a supportive environment.

My project focuses on how divorce may affect the Latino community, but the truth is divorce affects people from every background. More research should be done on how divorce affects different cultural backgrounds.

Future Work

There are numerous studies that address the effects of divorce on younger children however it was difficult finding research on how divorce affects the adolescent years. Also, there is minimal research on how divorce affects Latino adolescent. I think more research should be done in order to help this community of people. Research may even go a step further and look into other stressful situations besides divorce that an adolescent may experience.

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A Handbook to help Adolescents Cope with Divorce
By Catrina Avila

Group Facilitator,

As you know, this is a group for adolescents experiencing their parents' divorce. As a group facilitator you want to provide an educational yet understanding environment for all group members. The curriculum helps you do just that with some sessions focusing on the definition of divorce and other sessions exploring the adolescents' feelings about the divorce. The curriculum is easy to follow and can be tailored to your needs and the needs of your group members.

Before the group is started, you will need to recruit participants. This can be done by word of mouth at the schools you are working in, through faculty and parents. Parents and adolescents should be made aware of the topic of the group. An informed consent should be distributed to parents and adolescents who are interested. The adolescent must sign the informed consent in order for the adolescent to be a part of group. Once all informed consents have been received from all participants, the group can start!

Group should be held once every week for a total of 8 weeks and each session should be about an hour long. This group is a closed group, meaning participants cannot be added throughout the 8 weeks. The group participants should come up with rules for the group. Some of them may include, taking turns to speak, maintaining confidentiality (which is not optional), or that a participant must stay in group for the full 8 weeks in order to build relationships and rapport. It will be up to the group facilitator to and group members to decide how many rules there are.

When working with adolescents in a group environment, some things to keep in mind and take into consideration are if a member is not playing an active role or if they no longer want to be a part of the group, it may be better for the group if the participant is removed. In a case like this, it is important to talk about the removal with the individual and with the group as a whole.

The curriculum is written by session with the activity to follow. Each session has goals, objectives, materials, and procedures in order for you to be prepared for the session. Make sure to review this before you start the session.

By following this curriculum, you will be providing adolescents with the tools necessary to cope with divorce effectively!

Session 1: Introduction

Goals:
1. Describe the group purpose and activities.
2. Introduce members to each other. Ice breaker will help members get to know each other and build trust within the group.
3. Discuss meaning of informed consent and confidentiality.
4. Discuss any fears or anxieties the members might have about group.
5. Outline rules for the group. Here is where the group can make their own rules. For example, respecting all members and taking turns to speak.
6. Homework: Define what divorce means to you?

Objectives:
1. Participants will understand how the group works.
2. Participants will gain trust in members and group facilitator.
3. Participants will understand informed consent and confidentiality.
4. Participants will be able to follow group rules.

Materials:
1. Informed Consent
2. Handout explaining Confidentiality
3. Paper and Pens
4. Popsicle Sticks with questions written on them

Procedures:
1. Once referral has been received from parents or teacher an informed consent should be signed by participant before the group session.
2. Popsicle sticks should all have different questions written on them in order for the participants to answer. Questions could be anything like, "What's your dream vacation?" "What kind of music do you listen to?" "What are your hobbies?"
3. Start group by introducing yourself, the topic of the group, and what the session is going to consist of.
4. The confidentiality sheet should be passed out to all participants and discussed if any participant has a question. Participants should be reminded about confidentiality every start of a session.
5. Introducing participants: Participants will be asked to introduce themselves and take a popsicle stick from the cup to answer. The group leader should participate in the popsicle stick question. Each week members should say their name and give an answer to a popsicle stick question.
6. Group Rules: the group leader should have group rules set up, but let the group know that it is their group and if they wanted to add any rules that's ok! Remind the group that the rules need to be followed every session. Group should also start up with a reminder of the rules.

7. Homework: Ask the group what divorce means to them and to have an answer in their head for the next session.
8. Close the session by reviewing what took place in this session, reminding them of homework, and what to expect in the next session.

Informed Consent

Counseling is a unique and special service offered by a group facilitator. You will get the opportunity to talk and share with a group facilitator who will provide you a safe space to explore your feelings and will provide support to become empowered. Counseling will take place in a group setting meaning there will be more than one member in the group. As a person receiving counseling services, you have certain rights that are important for you to know.

Confidentiality

You have the absolute right to the confidentiality of your counseling. Confidentiality means privacy. The counselor and other members of the group cannot and will not tell anyone else what you say in counseling without your permission with a few exceptions.

Exceptions

Some things cannot remain confidential. Your group facilitator will need to contact someone else to help if you say…..

-You are being abused, physically and/or sexually

-You share that someone you know (another child, dependent adult, or elder) is being abused.

-You are going to hurt/ kill yourself or someone else.

By signing you are stating that you understand the above information.

Print Name	Client Signature	Date

CONFIDENTIALITY HANDOUT

- CONFIDENTIALITY FOR OUR GROUP MEANS THAT WHATEVER EVERYONE SAYS IN GROUP STAYS HERE. WE DON'T TALK ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS IN GROUP OUTSIDE OF THE GROUP TIME WE HAVE SET ASIDE EACH WEEK.

- THERE A FEW TIMES WHEN I WOULD HAVE TO TALK ABOUT THINGS ONE OF YOU SAID IN GROUP, FOR EXAMPLE, IF SOMEONE TALKS ABOUT HARMING THEMSELVES OR OTHERS, IF SOMEONE TALKS ABOUT CHILD ABUSE, THE ABUSE OF A DEPENDENT ADULT, OR THE ABUSE OF AN ELDER, OR IF A JUDGE IN A COURT OF LAW ASKS ME. OTHERWISE, SPECIFIC THINGS THAT OTHER PEOPLE SAY STAY IN THIS ROOM UNTIL THE NEXT TIME WE MEET AND CAN TALK ABOUT THEM.

POPSICLE STICK QUESTIONS

- WHAT KIND OF MUSIC DO YOU LISTEN TO?
- WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES?
- WHAT IS YOUR DREAM VACATION?
- WHAT IS YOUR DREAM CAREER?
- IF YOU COULD BE A SUPER HERO, WHAT POWER WOULD YOU HAVE?
- WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE MEMORY?
- IF YOU COULD CHANGE SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR FAMILY, WHAT WOULD IT BE?
- IF YOU HAD 3 WISHES, WHAT WOULD THEY BE?
- WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE COLOR AND WHY?
- WHO HAS BEEN A ROLE MODEL IN YOUR LIFE?
- WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE MOVIE?
- WHAT FOOD CAN YOU NOT LIVE WITHOUT?
- WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE TV SHOW AND WHY?
- CHOOSE ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE YOU.
- CHOOSE ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE YOUR FAMILY.
- WHAT'S YOUR PETS NAME? IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, WHAT WOULD YOU NAME IT?
- WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE SUBJECT?
- IF YOU WROTE A BOOK, WHAT WOULD IT BE ABOUT?
- WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE SPORT TO WATCH?
- WHAT ARE YOU TALENTED AT?
- IF YOU COULD GIVE YOURSELF A NICKNAME WHAT WOULD IT BE?
- WHAT ARE QUALITIES YOU LOOK FOR IN A FRIEND?
- WHO DO YOU TALK TO FOR SUPPORT?
- WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE DESSERT?
- WHO IS YOUR FAVORITE MUSIC ARTIST?
- WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE SONG AND WHY?
- WHO IS A PART OF YOUR HOUSEHOLD?
- WHAT INVENTION DO YOU VALUE MOST?
- IF YOU COULD INVENT ANYTHING, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

GROUP RULES

1. PARTICIPANTS MUST ATTEND ALL 8 SESSIONS.
2. PARTICIPANTS MUST AGREE TO CONFIDENTIALITY.
3. PARTICIPANTS MUST PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN GROUP.
4. PARTICIPANTS MUST RESPECT ONE ANOTHER BY NOT SPEAKING OVER EACH OTHER.
5. (MORE RULES CAN BE ADDED DEPENDING ON WHAT THE GROUP FACILITATOR AND GROUP PARTICIPANTS THINK)

Session 2: Definition of Divorce

Goals:

1. Define what divorce means and other terms that might come up. For example, separation or custody.
2. Define what divorce looks like. Draw a picture or pick out images from a magazine.
3. Discuss each participant's current situation.

Objectives:
1. Participants will be able to define what divorce means to them.
2. Participants will see that other adolescents their age are going through a similar situation.
3. Participants will be provided with support to cope with the present challenges.
4. Participants will be able to reflect on what has happened and get in touch with their feelings.

Materials:
1. Paper
2. Markers
3. Magazines

Procedures:
1. Open up the group with a summary of what was done the week before and what will be taking place in the current session that day.
2. Ask members to go around the room and say their name and answer to the question on their popsicle stick.
3. Remind members about group rules and confidentiality.
4. Ask participants to share what divorce means to them and if they brought any other terms they were questioning. Group leader should do research beforehand to define these terms in a way that each participant is able to understand.
5. Ask participants what divorce may look like, give them the option to look through magazines to find images if they want. Participants' can glue or draw the images onto a piece of paper. What does the picture mean or signify? What is currently going on at home? What feelings are behind the picture? Give each participant an opportunity to share their experience with divorce.
6. Conclusion: summarize the session and inform participants of what will take place in the next session.

EXAMPLES OF DEFINTIONS TO DISCUSS

Divorce: the termination of a marital union, the canceling of the legal duties and responsibilities of marriage and the dissolving of the bonds of matrimony between a married couple.

(It should be stated that divorce and dissolution of marriage are the same thing just different names.)

Dissolution of Marriage: the termination of a marital union, the canceling of the legal duties and responsibilities of marriage and the dissolving of the bonds of matrimony between a married couple.

Separation: The first step to living separate lives and to get a taste of what it would be like to exist separately. Separation does not automatically lead to divorce. The couple might reconcile, in which case they do not have to do anything in order to continue their marriage. Separation can also occur even if parents were never legally married.

Child Custody: Legal term to describe the legal and practical relationship between a parent and child. In other words, it is the time spent with both parents separately after the divorce. For example, you may live with your mother during the week and spend time with your father on the weekends or vice versa. (You may want to ask the group if they are experiencing a situation like this and expand.)

Session 3: Identifying Feelings

Goals:
1. Identify what each member is currently feeling and what they felt when they found out about the divorce.
2. Describe what anger, sadness, etc physically feels like.
3. Use Feelings Menu to identify feelings.
4. Normalize experiences and feelings that surround divorce.
5. Help participants feel comfortable in sharing their story.

Objectives:
1. Participants will be able to identify what they are feeling.
2. Participants will be able to reduce inappropriate expressions of anger and replace with better ways to express.

Materials:
1. Paper
2. Magazines
3. Scissors
4. Glue
5. Markers/ Pens

Procedures:
1. Open up the group with a summary of what was done the week before and what will be taking place in the current session that day.
2. Ask members to go around the room and say their name and answer to the question on their popsicle stick.
3. Remind members about group rules and confidentiality.
4. Ask group participants to make a feelings menu. Each menu will be different and unique in their own way since everyone experiences different feelings. Describe to group participants that just like a menu they have options to how they feel. When they go to a restaurant and take a look at the menu they choose what they feel like having that day, but that choice may be different another day. Group participants will list their feelings in their menu accompanied by a picture that may represent that feeling.
5. Give group participants some time to flip through magazines to find pictures and paste them in their feelings menu. If a member is having difficulty identifying a feeling, open it up to the group to talk about it. The group leader could even have a feelings chart out for participants to take a look at. Once members are done with their feelings menus ask participants to volunteer to talk about their menu.

6. The group leader should facilitate the group conversation by asking when they may feel that way and pointing out similar feelings with other members.
7. Conclusion: the group should be closed by reviewing what took place during the session and participants are encouraged to add to the menu in the future. Participants should be informed of what will take place in the next session.
8. Homework: during the conclusion ask members to bring a small item from home (should fit in a shoe box) that signifies a past memory, a characteristic about themselves, something that describes their personality, something that may be valuable to them, etc. This will be a part of the next session.
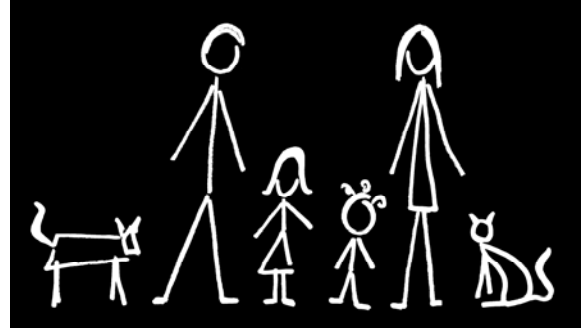
Adapted from Paris Goodyear-Brown

SAMPLE PROCESS QUESTIONS

1. **WHEN DO YOU HAVE THESE FEELINGS? IS IT ALL THE TIME, ONLY WHEN THINGS ARE STRESSFUL, WHEN ALL FAMILY MEMBERS ARE AROUND, ETC?**

2. **HOW DO YOU EXPERIENCE EACH FEELING PHYSICALLY? IN THE BODY, HEAD, HANDS? DO YOUR HANDS GET HOT AND SWEATY? DO YOU GET A HEADACHE?**

3. **WHAT HAPPENS DURING THESE INTENSE FEELINGS BESIDES YOUR PHYSICAL RESPONSE? DOES ANYTHING GO ON AROUND YOU? WHAT ARE YOU THINKING DURING THESE TIMES?**

4. **WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE THE FEELINGS YOU HAVE LISTED? ARE THEY FEELINGS THAT HAPPEN A LOT?**

uncomfortable
overwhelmed
JEALOUS
ignored
embarassed
glad
eager
concerned
sympathy
EXCITED
confused
confident
cheerful
CAPABLE
happy
satisfied
inspired
sad
worried
HOPEFUL
LOVE
frustrated
contented
guilty
TIRED
empathy
peaceful
grateful
anxious
disgusted
playful
wasteful
annoyed
indifferent
SCARED
doubtful
JUMPY
envy
CAUTIOUS

Session 4: What does my family look like? Who is my support system?

Goals:
1. Help the participant identify a support system.
2. Ask the participant what a support system should consist of.
3. Help the participant identify key members in the family and their role.
4. Help the client identify their role in the family.

Objectives:
1. Participants will be able to identify their current support system.
2. Participants will be able to cope with the divorce better.
3. Participants will be able to identify their strengths.

Materials:
1. Pens
2. Markers
3. Shoe Boxes
4. Tape
5. Stickers

Procedures:

1. Open up the group with a summary of what was done the week before and what will be taking place in the current session that day.
2. Ask members to go around the room and say their name and answer to the question on their popsicle stick.
3. Remind members about group rules and confidentiality.
4. Let the group know that they will be making a time capsule that will be filled with memories, drawings, reminders, or other special treasures. Pass out a list of questions the participant should keep in mind while making their time capsule. The time capsule can be a tissue box, shoe box, or envelope, that will be able to hold the item.

Time capsule questions

- Who are your friends?
- Who is part of your family now? What are their roles? What is your role?
- Who will be part of your family in the future?
- Where will you be living in one year? Five years?
- What kinds of things do you like to do?
- What would you like to learn how to do in the future?
- What do you want to be when you grow up?

5. Ask them to continue to add things to the time capsule as time goes on. Once the group has finished, go around and ask what each drawing, story, or item means. Make sure to highlight their support system and what makes up a support system.

Time capsule questions handout

- Who are your friends?
- Who is part of your family now? What are their roles? What is your role?
- Who will be part of your family in the future?
- Where will you be living in one year? Five years?
- What kinds of things do you like to do?
- What would you like to learn how to do in the future?
- What do you want to be when you grow up?

SAMPLE PROCESS QUESTIONS

1. **WHY IS THE ITEM IMPORTANT TO YOU? WHY IS THE STORY IMPORTANT TO YOU?**

2. **WHAT DOES THE ITEM SAY ABOUT YOU, YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS?**

3. **WHAT DOES A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT LOOK LIKE?**

4. **WHO SUPPORTS YOU?**

5. **WHAT DO THE DRAWINGS SIGNIFY?**

6. **IS THERE ANYTHING MISSING FROM YOUR SUPPORT GROUP?**

Session 5: Anxiety and Worry

Goals:
1. Identify and verbalize feelings of anxiety or worry
2. Identify coping strategies that target a decrease in frequency and intensity of anxiety reactions
3. Decrease the frequency, intensity, and number of worries experienced by the client.

Objectives:
1. Participant will be able to identify their own worries about divorce.
2. Participants will be able to decrease their anxiety about divorce.

Materials:
1. Ball of Yarn
2. Scissors
3. Paper
4. Markers
5. Glue

Procedures:
1. Open up the group with a summary of what was done the week before and what will be taking place in the current session that day.
2. Ask members to go around the room and say their name and answer to the question on their popsicle stick.
3. Remind members about group rules and confidentiality.
4. Open up the group to a discussion about worries and anxieties. Explain that many people have worries and anxieties about various things in life.
5. Ask the participants what their worries and anxieties are. Have their worries and anxieties changed since the divorce, if so, what has changed?
6. Once the conversation on worries and anxieties has started, introduce the activity for the session.
7. Explain to the group that the activity will help them untangle some of those worries before they become overwhelming and too big. Pass around a ball of yarn and ask each participant to pull out one thread that will signify a worry they may have. The length of the yarn will signify if it is a very small or large worry. For example, the longer the yarn the bigger the worry.
8. As each participant cuts a piece of yarn ask them what worry that piece signifies. Once each participant has about 4-5 pieces ask them to build a web by tying the pieces of yarn together. Group leader may use the room to tie the pieces of yarn together in order to make a spider web-like area or ask participants to glue the web onto a piece of paper.

9. Once this has been done, describe to the group how the web can trap them if they don't identify ways to handle their worries and anxieties. Open up the group to discuss strategies for dealing with worry and anxiety.
10. Conclusion: close the group with a summary of the session and ask them to continue to think about more coping mechanisms.

ANXIETY AND WORRY HANDOUT

ANXIETY – NORMAL REACTION TO STRESS.

WORRY: TO FEEL UNEASY OR CONCERNED ABOUT SOMEONE OR SOMETHING.

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY:

- Trembling, twitching, or shaking
- Feeling a fullness in the throat or chest
- Having difficulty catching your breath
- Feeling like your heart is pounding
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Sweating or cold, clammy hands
- Feeling jumpy
- Having aches, tense muscles, or soreness
- Feeling extremely tired
- Having trouble falling asleep or getting a good night's rest

SYMPTOMS THAT AFFECT THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, AND BEHAVIOR:

- Feeling restless
- Feeling on edge or keyed up
- Being angry or irritable
- Worrying about everyday decisions for several days in a row
- Fearing that something bad is going to happen
- Feeling doomed
- Becoming easily distracted
- Having difficulty concentrating
- Feeling like your mind goes blank
- Finding it hard to do your work or normal activities

HANDLING ANXIETY AND WORRY – HOW TO COPE

1. **TALK TO SOMEONE. EXPRESS HOW YOUR FEELING TO A FAMILY MEMBER, FRIEND, TEACHER, COACH, ETC. GETTING STUFF OFF YOUR CHEST ALLEVIATES THE ANXIETY AND WORRY THAT COME WITH THE ISSUE.**
2. **CREATE A WORRY PERIOD. RATHER THAN TRYING TO STOP OR GET RID OF AN ANXIOUS THOUGHT, GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO HAVE IT, BUT PUT OFF THINKING ANY MORE ABOUT IT UNTIL LATER.**
3. **BE AWARE OF HOW OTHERS AFFECT YOU.**
4. **PRACTICE MINDFULNESS. ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR ANXIOUS THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS, STAY FOCUSED ON THE PRESENT, AND LET YOUR WORRIES GO.**
5. **RELAXATION TECHNIQUES. CLOSE YOUR EYES AND LISTEN TO YOUR BREATHING. STAY CALM AND FOCUS ON SLOWING YOU'RE BREATHING DOWN. YOU CAN LISTEN TO MUSIC WHILE YOU DO THIS.**

Session 6: Identifying Coping Mechanisms

Goals:
1. Help participants identify different coping mechanisms.
2. Improve problem solving.
3. Provide participants with good life long skills.
4. Empower participants.
5. Improve participants' independence.

Objectives:
1. Participants will be able to identify more than 1 coping mechanism.
2. Participants will be able to cope in a positive, healthy way.
3. Participants will be able to problem solve.

Materials:
1. Markers
2. Poster Boards

Procedures:
1. Open up the group with a summary of what was done the week before and what will be taking place in the current session that day.
2. Ask members to go around the room and say their name and answer to the question on their popsicle stick.
3. Remind members about group rules and confidentiality.
4. Begin group with a discussion on coping mechanisms, what they are, when to use them, and what have participants used in the past. Ask the group if they want to add any to the existing list.
5. Pass out a list of coping mechanisms to get them thinking about what mechanisms would fit them best. Once they have familiarized themselves with coping mechanisms ask the group to use one during the session. For example, ask them to journal something about their day, how it might be going, how they think group is going, how is the current situation with their parents going? Once they have journaled, ask the group what they thought of it. Is it effective? Would they do it again? When would be a time they would do it?
6. Ask for feedback from the group, which coping mechanism did they like best? Which one wouldn't they choose and why? Was there a coping mechanism not listed?
7. Conclusion: summarize the session and have the group go home and use the coping mechanism at home when they are feeling overwhelmed. Remind group members that there are only 2 groups left in preparations termination. See process questions under session 8 to get them thinking about termination.

Coping Mechanism Handout

Write in a Journal

Listen to Music

Take deep breaths

Play Sports

Go Running

Take a walk

Read a book

Watch Television

Talk to a trusted adult

Clean

Go to a quiet place

Play video games

Session 7: Focusing on the Future

Goals:
1. Help clients decrease worry about the future.
2. Help clients to see that they have had happy moments in the past and they will continue to have these moments in the future even if their parents are divorced.
3. Create goals for their future

Objectives:
1. Participants will be able to decrease their worry about the future.
2. Participants will be able to create goals for their future.

Materials:
1. Markers
2. Paper
3. Stickers

Procedures:
1. Open up the group with a summary of what was done the week before and what will be taking place in the current session that day.
2. Ask members to go around the room and say their name and answer to the question on their popsicle stick.
3. Remind members about group rules and confidentiality.
4. Explain to participants that during this session they will be working on a personal timeline. Ask participants to draw a horizontal line on a piece of paper. The line will start with the day of the participants' birth, continue up until the present, and end with the future.
5. Mark any significant events that have occurred, for example, the birth of a sibling, receiving an award, going onto another grade, divorce, remarriage, death of a family member, etc.
6. Mark events that the participant wants to happen in the future.
7. The timeline will help the participants put the current events of their life into perspective and help them see the challenges they have overcome and the achievements they have obtained. Discuss the timeline with the group and what they look forward to.
8. Conclusion: summarize the session and inform participants that the next session will be the last session. Ask them if they have any questions about termination or the last session. See process questions under session 8 for examples of what they should be thinking about.

SAMPLE PROCESS QUESTIONS

1. WHAT'S INCLUDED IN YOUR TIMELINE?

2. WHAT DOES EACH MOMENT MEAN TO YOU?

3. WHAT DO YOU LOOK FORWARD TO?

4. WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU WILL BE IN 5 YEARS? 10 YEARS? 15 YEARS?

5. WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR FAMILY TO BE IN THOSE YEARS?

6. IS THERE ANYTHING SPECIFIC YOU WOULD LIKE TO HAPPEN BETWEEN NOW AND A YEAR?

Session 8: Conclusion

Goals:
1. Provide positive experience of closure and the termination of a relationship.
2. Review therapeutic gains.
3. Discuss the feelings that come with termination.
4. Honor each participant's progress in therapy.
5. Leave with a positive group experience.

Objectives:
1. Participants will summarize what they have learned.
2. Participants will express their feelings about how the group worked together.
3. Participants will discuss how they will use what they learned in their families and in other stressful situations.
4. Participants will identify strengths within their family system.

Materials:
1. Markers
2. Paper
3. Stickers
4. Paint
5. Small Wooden Stars (can be purchased at any craft store)

Procedures:

1. Open up the group with a summary of what was done the week before and what will be taking place in the current session that day.
2. Ask members to go around the room and say their name and answer to the question on their popsicle stick.
3. Remind members about group rules and confidentiality.
4. Let the group know that this will be the last session and the activity is called 'My Wish for you.' Each group member is asked to write or paint the words 'My Wish for You' on the front of the star and then decorate the wooden star uses the art supplies provided. Once, decorated each participant is than asked to turn the star over and write a wish or hope they have for the person sitting to their left. Additional time may be provided if participants want to decorate the back as well. When completed, participants are asked to give their star to the person on their left. The wishes for each participant are then read out loud to the group. Next, everyone in the group discuss what it was like to make the star and make a wish for another group participant. Process questions include, What emotions were evoked, what was it like to receive the star and its message, will the star be a reminder for you, what will they remember about the group and their experiences within the group?

5. If time permits: Ask each participant to draw a before and after picture. The before picture will be of how they felt or what was going on before they started the group process and the after picture will be of what they feel like in the present.
6. The group leader should point out growth and any therapeutic gains.
7. Ask participants what they have learned and how they can use it in the future with their family.
8. End the group with positive feedback about how successful the group was and thanking them for being a part of it.

My Wish for you adapted from Abby Flinner.

SAMPLE PROCESS QUESTIONS

1. WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED IN GROUP?
2. WHAT DID YOU THINK OF THE GROUP? HOW DID IT WORK TOGETHER?
3. WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE ABOUT GROUP?
4. IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD ADD TO GROUP? TAKE AWAY?
5. WHAT CHANGES DO YOU SEE IN YOURSELF? BEFORE YOU STARTED THE GROUP? NOW THAT IT IS ENDING?
6. WHAT EMOTIONS WERE EVOKED THROUGHOUT THE GROUP PROCESS?

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