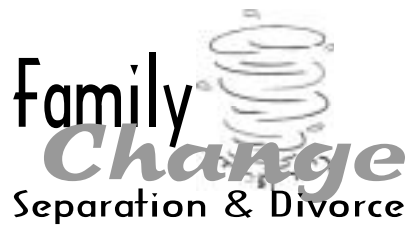


A Leader's Manual

Family *Change* Separation & Divorce

Kansas State University
Agricultural Experiment Station
and
Cooperative Extension Service



A Leader's Manual

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Outdated publication, for historical use.
CAUTION: Recommendations in this publication may be obsolete.

Introduction

Divorce is not just an occurrence with a beginning and an end – it is a process that has implications for the lives of the family members involved. Divorce has the possibility of creating upheaval, turmoil, and considerable stress. However, divorce affects individuals within a family differently.

For parents these stressors are influenced by custody issues, levels of parenting responsibility, loss of emotional support, conflict with the other parent, level of finances after divorce, and other stressful events related to the divorce.

For the children, it might be loss of contact and support by one parent, ongoing conflict between parents, less money in the household, and numerous other events. Children also can be affected by the pressures of loyalty and how the parents work with each other in their coparenting roles (Amato, 2000). The Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) describes behaviors in which one parent unceasingly works to denigrate the other, alienating the child from having a healthy relationship with him or her (Ward & Harvey, 1993).

What does the research say about educational divorce interventions to address these issues? Divorce programs vary widely, depending on the intended goals and potential outcomes, as well as resources available to conduct the programs. The goals determine the level of parental involvement during the workshops and, thus, the knowledge, skills, and abilities required of the trainers. Kirby (1998) concludes that:

- Coparental behaviors are more likely to be impacted than well-being of parents or children.
- More positive changes have resulted with high conflictual families than with low conflictual families.
- Types of behaviors most likely to change are: put-down of other parent in front of children, child used as a messenger, and fighting in front of children.
- Knowledge and behavioral change are more probable when interactive teaching strategies are used, such as role-playing, skill practice, and self-awareness activities.
- Trained facilitators are essential for better outcomes. Attention to the process is crucial.
- Handouts are used by participants, often months or even years later.
- Resource options allow the facilitator to tailor the programming to the specific needs of the audience.

Family Change: Separation and Divorce offers the community educator a resource with research-based information and basic recommendations to share with the audience. The workshop format allows participants to be engaged in discussion, but not necessarily at high self-disclosure levels. Suggested teaching strategies provide limited opportunities for participants to practice communication skills. The educator needs to be skilled in communicating information, engaging the group in discussion and the learning process, and facilitating group dynamics.

Family
Change
Separation & Divorce





Program Information

Q. What are the program goals ?

A. The goals of *Family Change: Separation and Divorce* are:

- 1) To inform parents about potential adjustment, legal, and financial issues surrounding divorce.
- 2) To nurture in parents the capacity to engage in thoughtful decision making that will reduce stressors for the children and themselves.
- 3) To improve each parent's capacity for using communication skills that have the potential to reduce ongoing parental conflict.

Q. What are the assumptions of this program?

Note: These assumptions are adapted from the *Basic Parenting* program from K-State Research and Extension (Smith, 1999).

A. Participants are dealing with many stresses during and after divorce. It generally is not a pleasant time for the family, and stress levels for the parents and the children are high. Many changes are happening in the family.

Participants love their children.

Regardless of the divorce situation, we have to assume that parents love their children. If we can see past the problems and much of the behavior, we can recognize and build on the love they feel.

Participants are smart. Regardless of their education or reading level, we should realize that the parents in this group are smart. They may have been employing many creative and intelligent strategies to cope as best they can. After gathering information, they are able to make their own decisions about incorporating what they learn into their situation. Closely related to the idea that parents are intelligent people capable of making their own

decisions is the belief that there is no one right way of dealing with divorce. There are multiple paths to gaining family stability after a divorce. This program is to give participants information. They have to make their own decisions.

Participants have the right to have their feelings. Parents who arrive at this workshop have the right to feel angry, sad, guilty, or frightened. They most likely are going through very traumatic times. If we confirm and accept (which does not mean endorse) those feelings, we build a relationship and setting that conveys trust and encouragement.

Q. What are the program resources?

A. *A Manual for Parents* can be given to an individual who walks into your office; however, the program goals will be reached more readily if participants attend a workshop with the manual used as a handout. It is written in question and answer format about adjustment, legal, and financial issues.

A bookmark that gives a brief explanation of the program can be used as a marketing tool in your community. Space is available on the front of the bookmark for attaching a label with workshop information.

The *Leader's Manual* gives general information about the program and a format for conducting a two-hour workshop for divorcing parents. However, the presenter may want to revise the suggested time lines to deliver a longer workshop, or to break it into multiple sessions. The focus of the workshop is on the emotional and adjustment needs of the parents and their children. Legal and financial issues are touched upon, but more detail is available in the parent's manual. The optimal size of a workshop group is six to 18 participants. A

smaller group can evolve into a counseling-type session, which might lead to difficult situations for the group leader. This information is intended to be presented in an educational format only. Having a group with more than 18 participants has a tendency to limit group discussion opportunities.

Q. What are some ideas for recruiting participants for this workshop?

A. Establishing a community collaboration to deliver this program helps to recruit participants and is more sustainable over time. Collaboration building can take time, as long as six months if no group exists that has a comparable mission. Recommended steps for building a community collaboration follow:

- Do your research to determine the need for such a program. You need to be aware of existing community programs for divorcing parents, including the intended purpose and evaluation outcomes, before you begin to engage others in the planning process.
- Determine possible collaborative partners who could become a core group to develop this type of program. Initiate a meeting for this group to collaboratively decide on the vision and goals.
- After the core group has clearly defined a vision and specific goals, bring a cross-section of professionals together, including the legal community, to focus on the program benefits for divorcing families and the community in general. Consider engaging the interest and support of family law judges, attorneys, and other court personnel prior to this larger meeting.

Begin the meeting by stating the vision and goals that the initial group

established. Other leadership tips for conducting this meeting are to begin and end on time, arrange for someone to take minutes, establish ground rules, leave time to review what was accomplished or not accomplished at the end of the meeting, review task assignments and the action agenda, and thank everyone for their participation and contributions.

- Manage and sustain the program by having the community group define roles and responsibilities and develop work teams if appropriate. Guide the group through difficulties by keeping everyone informed of the group's progress by keeping thorough documentation of meetings and action steps, obtaining letters of commitment from each member or agency, discussing how decisions will be made, addressing conflict with a defined process of conflict resolution, and making sure that everyone is heard. Other management issues may include, but are not limited to:
 - ✓ securing financial resources as needed;
 - ✓ deciding if each participant must pay a fee and how it will be collected;
 - ✓ making necessary arrangements if child care will be available;
 - ✓ organizing marketing efforts, which include the group's consensus on whether or not parents from the same family be encouraged to register for separate workshops;
 - ✓ deciding on who is responsible for registration;
 - ✓ securing the meeting place with necessary equipment;
 - ✓ arranging for security personnel;





- ✓ providing workshop refreshments if the group decides to do so;
- ✓ recognizing the efforts of individual group members; and
- ✓ reviewing progress continually, using multiple sources of feedback (eg. participant surveys, collaborator feedback, community reactions, etc.) to improve upon the program's effectiveness (University of Minnesota Extension Service, 1997).

Q. How can a person prepare to lead a workshop?

A. First, if a community collaboration is working together to deliver this program, the group should be in consensus on how the program will be marketed and who will be responsible for conducting the workshop. Team teaching can be an asset if the skills and experiences of the team leaders complement each other. Regardless of who leads the workshop, following are some ideas for preparation.

- Carefully review the leader's guide and the parent manual.
- Read other resources, especially those listed in the parent manual.
- Prepare yourself mentally by thinking about the workshop agenda, the participant reactions, and how you will respond.
- Consider collecting cartoons that are pertinent to this workshop, but are nondiscriminatory in nature and also sensitive to the many feelings that participants might have. Carefully chosen cartoons that are used at the right moment might bring a much needed dose of humor to the workshop.
- Be confident in your skills for guiding group discussion and facilitating group dynamics.

Recognize that some parents may resent having to attend the workshop, especially if court ordered. Their feelings must be respected, but they cannot disrupt the session for other parents. A parent who continually disrupts can be asked to save that issue to discuss privately with the workshop leader(s) when the session is over. Having team leaders is valuable in this case because one team leader may need to deal with the situation immediately in an adjoining room while the workshop continues. If the disruption continues, the workshop leader(s) may ask the parent to leave.

- Prepare the room so participants can easily see you and each other. Participants might be more comfortable and secure sitting around a table rather than sitting in a circle.
- If you are the sole presenter, make sure that you are meeting in a location where other people are present and can be reached if a crisis occurs. The visible presence of security services is advised.
- Assemble supplies if needed.
- Make overheads from the masters in the back of this manual.
- Make copies of the certificates of attendance that participants can show the court if necessary. Copy evaluation forms for each participant.
- If you are team teaching, have a plan on who will present and lead discussion. Decide in advance if you are comfortable with the other person adding to the information or discussion when not presenting.
- Be prepared to repeat instructions and information more than once during the workshop.

- You might be interested in using a discussion technique called Turn To Your Partner (TTYTP). After a question or situation is presented, each person is asked to think of a response and possibly write it down. Each participant is then asked to identify another participant to share responses. Give one to two minutes for one person to share, emphasizing that the other is to listen carefully. Ask them to switch and give another minute or two for sharing. Indicate to the group that you may ask anyone in the group to share these responses. You may consider going around the room and have one partner share and then ask the other partner if there is anything to add. The next step is to ask the group to think about the group responses and to decide if there are any deeper meanings or common themes (Iowa State University, 2001).

In summary, effective leaders will approach this workshop both as a teacher and a learner. Smith (1999) indicates that a teacher provides quality information, but also learns from the participants. The teacher continually asks: What do the participants know? How have they used this knowledge? What other concepts are they identifying?

Smith (1999) in *Basic Parenting* also talks about process versus content:

Program resources provide content. However, the process – the discussion that occurs, the listening and encouragement, responding to questions, laughing, and taking chances – are important, too. How the session is organized and how it evolves are extremely important in the educational experience. A content-rich program that is lifeless and rigid will not be very successful (p. 19).

Situations Beyond the Scope of the Workshop

This program is not the same as counseling. It is NOT a replacement for families who need therapeutic intervention to deal with their problems. Workshop personnel should be aware of community resources to whom they can refer participants for counseling if necessary. Furthermore, the program is not a substitute for those seeking legal counsel.

If the family has been involved in, or has lived with the threat of domestic assault and abuse, this workshop may not be appropriate. If the partners choose to attend, they should be registered in separate workshops. Domestic abuse agencies are available for both parents in most areas of the state. Be aware of local hotlines and resources in your area.

Suggested Workshop Format

Warm-up (approximately 10 minutes)

Purpose: To help participants feel comfortable.

Supplies: Name tags (optional) and markers – first name only

Participants may be apprehensive when walking into the workshop, especially if they have been court-ordered to attend. Greet and welcome parents and create as comfortable an environment as possible. Instead of asking them to give their names, ask each participant to give the ages of his or her children. Start with yourself. This information does not compel participants to focus on themselves and may begin to put them at ease. After the introductions, give a quick overview of the program's objectives and the workshop agenda. The introductory paragraph in the leader's guide can be used for beginning





remarks. Let participants know that the workshop is to provide education and is not a therapy group. The workshop will focus on emotional adjustments and behaviors – information related to legal and financial issues can be found in the parent manual that participants will take with them.

Establishing Ground Rules (approximately 5 minutes)

Purpose: To determine group expectations regarding behaviors that foster comfortable and positive social interaction.

Supplies: Flip chart and marker

Ground-rule setting is more successful after the participants become comfortable with the group. The intent of the warm-up activity is to increase their willingness to participate in an activity such as this. To begin the exercise, list some basic rules such as: one person talks at a time, no put-downs, voluntary participation, etc. Ask the group to suggest other ground rules. Address the issue of confidentiality by suggesting that participants refrain from revealing workshop discussion outside of the meeting. However, let the participants know that the program sponsors cannot guarantee confidentiality. Post the ground rules so they are visible throughout the workshop.

Understanding the Divorce Experience for Parents (approximately 20 minutes)

Purpose: To recognize the natural reaction to divorce (grieving a loss).

Supplies: Clear transparencies and overhead projector or flip chart and markers to list responses (optional)

- Blank 3"x5" note cards
- Paper and pencils or pens for each participant

Overheads:

- *Facts about Anger*
- *Psychological Tasks For Adults Going Through Divorce*

This part of the workshop is to help participants recognize the necessity of understanding what parents typically experience in the process, before they can address the needs of their children. Emphasize that divorce is an ending of a marriage, and thus represents a major loss. Feeling a loss occurs to both partners, regardless of who was the initiator of the divorce or who was the unwilling partner and whether the divorce was friendly or hostile.

Discussion Question: What do adults lose when they divorce? Note: Consider using the TTYP procedure explained on page 9.

- Responses might include: companion, friend, confidant, cook, parenting partner, mechanic, wage earner, sex partner, feeling of being sexually desirable, dream of living happily ever after, problem solver, mutual friend, an extended family, cheerleader, family book-keeper, housekeeper, married identity, feeling of being safe.

Continue the discussion by talking about reactions to divorce and mourning loss. Being the initiator of divorce, or being the unwilling partner, profoundly affects how a person mourns and reacts to divorce. Other factors might be a person's age and stage of life; children's ages; prior life experiences (eg. divorced parents); presence of alcohol, drugs, and/or domestic abuse; and typical ways of reacting to stressful events.

Divorcing people have reported similar steps to someone who is grieving the death of someone close to them, although the steps may not be as distinct.

- **Shock and denial** – Things will get better. We'll get back together. This is not happening.
- **Anger** – It's his/her fault. This is not right. He/she was no good.
- **Depression and detachment** – I want to be left alone. Let me stay in bed today.
- **Bargaining** – Let's go to counseling. I will work less and things will improve.
- **Acceptance** – This is the way it is and I will have to make the best of it. However, special family events sure throw me back into an earlier stage (Kubler-Ross, 1969; University of Minnesota, 1997).

Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1996), who have followed divorced families over the years, suggest the following:

Each ex-partner must first acknowledge the loss and mourn the dreams and hopes that were never fully realized and never will be realized. It is important to cry. Crying reduces anger to human size. And only by mourning can a person regain or maintain perspective on what was lost (p. 279).

Share with participants this letter written by a woman four months after separation from her husband of 20 years and think about the stage she is stuck in:

Life just plain hurts and hurts and hurts. There are so many profound doubts when one does this. I can't tell you how the past haunts me and all my mistakes and how much wiser I am now about how one builds a healthy relationship. I would give my left arm if John would work on his end to build that and to learn to forgive. But I think he is just entrenched in anger, anger, anger, and I do know that I can't live with constant anger and neither can the children. So the

children and I have some good times and some lonely times and there are moments I think "please wake me when it is over." How do this many people do this? Patrick just returned from camp – he had a ball and Anna and I were so sad all week. We missed him enormously and I never expected it to feel that awful. Somehow, our family had just dwindled too quickly. I wish I could feel my wings, but this does not feel good to me – people tell me it will someday, and I have trouble believing that. So – for now I am as sad as I've been and hope it will lift. (University of Minnesota Extension Service, 1997).

Each person reacts differently and has to find the personal strategies that work best. It is often difficult to think of oneself as an unmarried person, especially if the marriage has been a long one. A parent may have to reach back to premarital days and think of images of independence and how he/she thrived as a single person. Even if the ex-partner made him or her feel belittled and a failure, the newly divorced person needs to leave these thoughts behind, not carrying them into future relationships (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996).

One of the biggest tasks, though, for many parents going through divorce is letting go of anger. Resolving or containing the bitter passions is necessary if the person is not to be destroyed and traumatized by the divorce. Professional counseling or therapy may be necessary.

Here are some facts about anger (University of Minnesota Extension Service, 1997):

- Anger is a choice.
- Anger can have payoffs.
- Anger can be a positive choice by moving you to take action in a positive direction.





- Anger can be triggered by other emotions, too.
- Anger can overcome us so that we react in anger to everything.

Ask the group to talk about the last point.

Discussion: How do we deal with anger when we get stuck and have a hard time, thinking only angry thoughts? What do you do?

Note: Encourage active participation in this discussion to help participants deal with the stress and tension in their lives.

- **Possible responses and suggestions:** write in a journal; write (but don't send) a letter; do things to release the tension – walk, jog, exercise; talk with friends; clean the house or garage; eat healthy; work on a hobby; get a massage; slow down to think about the problem before striking out; mow the lawn; read a book; cry; yell; seek close comfort of family and friends; talk to someone with the same spiritual beliefs; try healthy humor (not sarcastic humor that makes fun of the other parent).

Hand out an index card and have participants write three things they plan to do when their thoughts are flooded with anger. Examples could be: stop and think about the specific problem that triggered the anger; go for a walk to cool off; decide not to continue to think only about the source of anger; etc. Remind participants to refer to this card to help cope with their anger.

Show overhead *Psychological Tasks for Adults Going Through Divorce*, and explain that we have been talking about the first four tasks:

- Ending the marriage
- Mourning the loss

- Reclaiming oneself
- Resolving or containing passions, especially anger

The next two tasks are *venturing forth again* and *rebuilding*, which take courage. Venturing forth requires trying new things, developing new relationships, and working at different solutions to old problems. For instance, it might even mean that a person tries to solve conflict at work in different ways, tries to be more patient with others, tries a new hobby, or joins a club or interest group. Discouragement can block these phases, but it is about moving out of the shadow of divorce. Rebuilding can lead to sustained new relationships that are not hampered with the baggage of divorce.

Remind participants that divorced parents have personal work to do at the same time they need to be thinking about their children. The more they intentionally work at the psychological tasks shown on the overhead, the better they will be able to help their children. Refer them to the parent manual to find resources on how to deal with being a single parent and being an unmarried person.

Understanding the Divorce Experience for Children
(approximately 15 minutes)

Purpose: To help parents understand what children are experiencing when their parents divorce.

Supplies: *A Manual for Parents*

Overheads:

- *Psychological Tasks for Children Experiencing Divorce*
- *Ways to Slow Down Children's Adjustment to Divorce*

Just as parents experience loss, children likely are experiencing two very profound losses: loss of an intact family and loss of both parents being in their daily lives. They can go through the same grieving process as adults when dealing with this loss.

Accepting the permanence of the divorce can be tough. Adults have reported that they still fantasize about their parents getting back together again, even though the divorce occurred years ago. Children often deal with guilt, thinking they caused the divorce. Parents have to reinforce – sometimes repeatedly – that the divorce is final and the children are not to blame. The parent manual gives typical children's age-specific responses to divorce, and what parents can do to help their children through these difficult times (pages 7-8).

Discussion: What actions of parents may delay a child's successful adjustment to divorce?

After the discussion has come to a conclusion, show the overhead *Ways to Slow Down Children's Adjustment to Divorce*.

- Arguing in front of the children.
- Sending messages through the children.
- Pumping the children for information about the other parent.
- Asking the children to keep a secret from the other parent.
- Criticizing the other parent in front of the children.
- Using custody, visitation, and money issues to harm the child's relationship with the other parent.

Discussion: What are some things parents say about the divorce that can confuse and cause turmoil in a child's life?

As you generate discussion, add some of the following comments:

- *"If you only knew how bad your mother (father) was, you would understand."*
- *"If you don't like it here, you can go live with your father (mother)."*
- *"Tell your mom (dad) the money I send is to be used only for you."*
- *"You have to accept my new partner."*
- *"Your dad (mom) left me and I wanted to keep our family together."*
- *"We would not have divorced if you had not been so hard to deal with since you got in high school."*
- *"I am not going to let you go to your mom's (dad's) unless it is convenient for me."*
- *"Who is your dad (mom) dating? What are they doing when you are around?"*
- *"Your mom (dad) doesn't really care what happens to you – she (he) is only taking you on weekends because the judge says so."*
- *"I cannot come again today like I promised. Something has come up."*
- *"You don't know how bad I feel when I see you leave with your dad (mom)."*
- *"Your mom (dad) really makes bad choices."*
- *"Dad (Mom) needs to pay for camp because I am paying for your sports uniform."*
- *"You don't have to have any rules when you stay with me. And we will go shopping this weekend and buy anything you want."*
- *"We will get back together. Your dad (mom) just needs time."*





Why are these words so hurtful to the child?

- Children can be in a loyalty bind between the parents. They may feel that it will be difficult to show affection and love to both parents.
- Both parents are part of the children, so if one parent is criticized, the children may feel that something is wrong with them. Children need to know they have two nurturing parents.
- Children are having mixed emotions anyway and when a parent does not accept reality, a child's own readjustment is slowed down.
- If custody, visitation, and money issues are used as leverage between the parents, children may feel that these issues are more important than they are.
- Children may not feel loved if they repeatedly hear some of these comments.

We know from research that children and youth are more likely to have problems when both parents are not involved in a their life, or when parents continue to have conflict in learning to coparent. In numerous research studies, children with divorced parents have scored lower on measures of psychological adjustment, social competence, and academic success than children with continuously married parents (Amato 2000).

Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1996) have observed that children also go through a set of psychological tasks in order to accept the divorce and move on with life. They are (show overhead):

- Understanding the divorce in terms they can understand. Children want to understand how

their lives will be affected. They want concrete information. Only later can they evaluate their parents' choices and learn from those behaviors.

- Strategic withdrawal by emotionally removing the divorce from the center of their lives.
- Dealing with loss, which is probably the hardest task. It requires the child to overcome the feelings of rejection, self-blame, humiliation, and vulnerability.
- Dealing with anger at their parents during the same time they are feeling guilty at being so angry with persons they love.
- Working out guilt that they, in some way, are to blame for the divorce.
- Accepting the permanence of the divorce after going through a phase of denial.
- Taking a chance on love as they become adolescents and young adults.

Taking A Break

(approximately 10 minutes)

Purpose: To help participants informally visit with each other

Supplies: Paper and pencils or pens for each participant
Refreshments (optional)

Introduce this activity before the group gets up to take a break. Ask participants to write down one enjoyable activity they do with their child(ren) that costs very little or no money (eg. walk around the block after evening meal, read a book before bedtime, etc.). Encourage parents to share tips for staying connected long-distance. During the break, ask them to walk around and visit with other participants to com-

pare their activities. By the end of the break, they are to have written down at least two additional activities that other participants have shared with them. When the break is over, ask the group to share some of the ideas from their lists. If you think participants are uncomfortable with their writing skills, they can do this activity by just talking to each other.

If parents seem enthusiastic about sharing parenting ideas, continue the discussion and decrease the time you spend on General Communication Skills, which start on page 19. If it seems appropriate, ask them to look at the chart on page 7 of *A Manual for Parents* to talk about parenting ideas for different age groups.

Developing A Coparental Relationship

(approximately 15 minutes)

Purpose: To create an atmosphere in which the children are nurtured by both parents in a way that helps the children adjust to the new family structure.

Overheads:

- *Pain Games*
- *Psychological Tasks for Children Experiencing Divorce*

There are numerous ways in which parents can help children adjust to the various losses and changes that are occurring in their lives, including the need to work through the psychological tasks that they face. Let's talk about the way the children are told about the divorce. Here are two examples of parents telling their children about a divorce.

Example 1

Monica shuts off the TV and tells the children that she and their dad are getting a divorce. She continues

telling them how mean he has been to her, and that she wishes bad things to happen to him. The more she talks, the angrier she becomes.

Example 2

Monica and Derek ask their children to sit down with them. They share the conversation and tell the children they are planning to get a divorce. It is not easy for them, as Monica is tempted to tell the children their dad has found a new partner. Derek has to work hard at not getting angry at Monica when she talks. They decided beforehand that there were several things they needed to let the children know: the divorce is not the fault of the children, and they share some non-blaming ways on how they are no longer getting along; they will not be getting back together again; they both still love the children deeply; and the children will continue to live in the house with Monica during the week and with Derek on weekends.

Discussion: What are some things in the second example that make it better for the children? Consider using the TYP procedure explained on page 9 for this discussion. After the group has shared responses, use the following to summarize the discussion:

- The parents refrain from fighting in front of the children. Parental fighting can often spin out of control in these situations. Loyalty dilemmas escalate as children witness the confrontation, and the situation could model a poor way to resolve conflict.
- The parents stop themselves from putting down the other parent in front of the children – although it takes self-restraint. Since children are part of both parents, they can feel as though something is wrong with them.





- Children are not made to feel guilty about the divorce. They are made to understand it is the parents' problem in getting along with each other.
- They know that their parents still love them.
- They are not given false hopes that the parents will reunite.
- They still have structure in their lives and know what to expect.

Coparenting in the best interest of the child avoids unhealthy games that divorced parents often play. Parents may not recognize that they are attempting to transfer their own pain to the children when playing these games. Some of the more common games are (show overhead):

"Don't worry. It will be OK." Parents may be in so much pain that they do not make themselves help the children learn how to manage their own feelings.

"The Messenger." Parents use the children to carry messages back and forth rather than learning to resolve their problems directly.

"Disneyland Parent." Parents set few discipline rules and buy the children whatever they want to encourage the children to like them better. Family relationships even in divorced situations need to show that interactions require give and take.

"Cut Down." Parents demean each other in front of the children, rather than recognizing that the children need to view each parent as worthwhile. Children are a product of both parents and can feel demeaned as well.

"I Spy." Parent questions the children about the other parent's life, thus, creating a loyalty battle. Children need to feel close to both parents.

"Get Us Back Together." A parent is fantasizing just as much as the child, and is refusing to focus on the future. This helps neither child nor parent.

"Tug of War." A parent tries to force a child to make choices that reject the other parent's visitation schedule or family plans. Custody and visitation issues need to be settled between the parents so that the child does not feel loyalty pressures.

"Try to Get the Money." A parent threatens visitation times to get child support or other resources for the child. Child support and visitation are two separate issues that should be settled between the parents.

"Guilt Trip." A parent blames a child for the divorce, ignoring the fact that the parents could not get along.

"Take Care of Me." A parent forces a child into a partner role by sharing inappropriate information (eg. about dating life) and expects the child to take on adult responsibilities at too young an age.

Have parents think back to the child's psychological tasks to realize how the pain games hinder getting through these tasks.

Kansas legislation requires a parenting plan to be filed in court to help decrease problems that have arisen in the past. Research consistently shows that parents who cooperatively coparent make it better for the children.

In the parent manual on pages 17-18, more details are given about information that needs to be included. Common problems such as custody, visitation, and financial issues can be avoided by giving serious attention to creating a workable parenting plan. On visitation issues, older adolescent children may need to be more involved in the decision making since

a normal adolescent developmental task is to seek more independence from the family.

Solving Problems

(approximately 35 minutes)

Purpose: To help parents understand how they can deal with difficult issues in the best interests of the children.

Supplies: Note cards to use in activity (optional)

Overheads:

- *"I" Message has 3 parts*
- *Ways to Slow Down Children's Adjustment to Divorce*

This section continues with information about working with the other parent. Participants may share with you that there is no way they can get along with the ex-partner. Emphasize that children who do not feel caught in the middle adjust more readily to divorce than children who feel they are being forced to take sides. Also, children who have two parents in their lives have a greater likelihood of not engaging in risky behaviors. Remind them of behaviors that help to keep children out of the middle by looking at this overhead again.

Ways to Slow Down Children's Adjustment to Divorce.

- Arguing in front of the children.
- Sending messages through the children.
- Pumping the children for information about the other parent.
- Asking the children to keep a secret from the other parent.
- Openly criticizing the other parent.
- Using custody, visitation, and money issues to harm the child's relationship with the other parent.

It is important to continue communicating with the other parent to ensure that good decisions are made for the children. This is especially important since we know that children do better when they have two caring parents in their lives. Emphasize this point.

The program leader should acknowledge that there may be situations in which the health and well-being of the former spouse and children could be jeopardized if the other parent has a history of violent and destructive behaviors. Encourage parents to seek additional assistance from the court system, mental health systems, or other support agencies to deal with such situations.

In most divorce situations, both parents want their views heard. The following techniques can help keep conversations between parents constructive and productive.

- Remind yourself the conversation is in your children's best interest. This is not an opportunity to seek revenge.
- Understand the issue and what you feel is the best solution.
- Focus on the specific issue without bringing up the past.
- Stay in control of your emotions.
- Approach the conversation as if it were a business situation.
- Think about what is negotiable and what is not.
- Ask if it is a convenient time to talk. If not, come to an agreement on a time that works for both of you.
- If you need to talk in person, choose a neutral place, rather than one of your homes.





Discussion: Ask the group about the task to be accomplished and suggest conversation starters that would help the parents communicate. The task is followed with a suggestion to help guide discussion. Another approach is to hand out small cards with each task, and have them work in pairs to come up with suggestions.

- Approach the other parent on finding a neutral location to discuss an issue.

“Sally, I’d like to meet at Friendly’s Café on Thursday at 7 p.m. to talk about Thomas. Is that OK with you?”

- Approach the other parent to pick a time to have a phone conversation convenient for both of you and when your children cannot overhear.

“John, I need to talk with you about Marie. I know she’s at school now. Is this is a good time to talk?”

- Use common courtesy.

“Thanks for agreeing to meet with me on such short notice.”

- Set a goal to introduce the topic.

“I’d like to talk with you about Lynn’s summer plans.”

- Start with neutral facts.

“Lynn’s school vacation is June 29th until August 25th.”

- Share the child’s views with the other parent, if appropriate.

“Lynn says she’d like to go to 4-H camp this summer.”

- State your opinion or feelings about the issue.

“I think it’s a good idea.”

- Ask whether the other parent needs more information or time to consider the issue.

“I’d like to know what you think. Would you like to look at the camp brochure and take some time to think about it?”

- Identify areas of agreement and areas of potential conflict.

“I’m glad you agree camp would be good for Lynn, but we need to discuss who will pay for it.”

- Prepare to negotiate.

“Lynn can contribute some of her lawn-mowing money, and I can afford half of the remaining fee. Can you pay the other half?”

- Stick to the topic and try to avoid other unresolved issues.

“I know you’re still angry about our credit card bills last year, but that has nothing to do with Lynn’s summer plans. Let’s try to stick to this subject.”

- Take a break if you feel an argument beginning. Schedule another meeting to conclude the discussion.

“We seem to be getting angry about the money issue. Let’s take a break now, think things over, and discuss the matter again on Friday. Is that OK with you?”

General Communication Skills

Ask the participants to consider ways people communicate that are successful and unsuccessful. The following listening and speaking activities for practicing effective communication skills have been adapted from Teen Leader College, (McFarland, 1989), *Moving Ahead: Preparing the Youth Development Professional* (McFarland, M., et al., 1999), and *Basic Family Communication* (Olsen, 2001). If you choose not to do these communication activities, the major discussion

points to make about effective communication in difficult times are as follows:

- Understand that body language sends powerful nonverbal messages. Work at sending nonverbal messages that show respect and an interest in reducing conflict.
- It is important to listen without interrupting even if you do not agree.
- Refrain from using “you” messages when talking to the ex-partner. “You” messages create defensiveness and shut down communication.
- Use “I” messages when bringing up an issue to slow down conflict. It shows the other person that you are taking responsibility for your feelings.

Ask the group to stand up and walk around without acknowledging or smiling at each other as they meet. Next tell them to continue walking and look and smile or whatever they want. Ask them how it felt to not acknowledge each other. Ask them to pair off, get about six feet apart and try to talk. Then ask them to get nose to nose. Now tell them to get comfortable. What is the generalization from this experience? Nonverbals are powerful communication skills. Talk about facial expression, body postures and actions, body space boundaries, and appropriate eye contact, and how the nonverbal cues are important in knowing if someone is listening.

Ask pairs to sit facing each other. Decide which one will be the speaker and the listener. Ask the listener to use active listening skills until you clap your hands. At that time, the listener is to look away, yawn, lean back, and pay no attention. Have the speaker

talk about something exciting that happened last weekend. Have them reverse roles.

Follow-up Questions:

- How did the speaker feel when the listener looked away?
- How did the listener feel when looking away?
- Why do you think you had these feelings?
- What would you like most when your ex-partner listens to you?

Indicate that the group will be working on verbal feedback while listening. Explain that ineffective communication occurs when the listener interprets the message differently than the speaker intended. The listener can paraphrase back to the speaker, not the exact words, but what the listener interpreted the speaker's message to be. This skill is more effective when the listener attempts to identify the feelings the speaker has about the issue.

Ask the group to return to their partners. The speaker is to talk about a favorite leisure activity. The listener is to paraphrase, including his or her perception of the speaker's feelings. The speaker is to indicate whether or not the listener has interpreted the message correctly. If not, the listener is to paraphrase again until the speaker is satisfied. Then listener and speaker reverse roles.

Follow-up Questions:

- How did it feel to be paraphrased?
- How did it feel to do the paraphrasing?
- How does clear feedback in conversation promote more effective communication?





Points to Emphasize:

- Nonverbal behaviors are powerful.
- Failures in communication happen when the message is interpreted incorrectly.
- The listener does not have to agree with the speaker, but must refrain from interrupting or denying the speaker's feelings.
- Paraphrasing is not needed for every communication interchange.
- These listening skills help slow down a conflict by allowing each person to get a turn to voice an opinion, with the listener paraphrasing for the correct message.

Ask for participant reactions to the following messages:

- *"You NEVER do your part in taking care of the children. YOU never have to think about the children's laundry, doctor appointments, and all that. YOU always are griping about child support, but you just don't know what I have to do. YOU really make me feel lousy."*
- *"When there are so many things that have to get done for the children, and you think that the child support payments take care of it, I feel really frustrated and alone as a parent because it is so overwhelming regardless of the money."*

Follow-up Questions:

- How did you feel when the first message was read?
- Did you feel differently with the second message?
- What was the difference in the feelings?
- What was the difference in the words?

Points to Emphasize: "YOU" messages escalate conflict because the other person feels put down, blamed, accused, or guilty. The immediate reaction is to become defensive or to shut down and not communicate at all. People who use "I" messages are taking responsibility for their feelings and behavior. They express the effect of the other person's behavior in a way that is not offensive.

Show the "I" message overhead.

"I" message has three parts:

"When...."

(state the unacceptable behavior)

"I feel..."

(express feeling about the behavior)

"Because..."

(describe the effect of the behavior)

Have the pairs take turns and practice sending "I" messages using the following scenario:

Joe and Leisha, recently divorced, continually have disagreements on how to coparent. She thinks his discipline while the children are with him on weekends is too lax. He thinks she tries to sabotage his visitation time by planning special events that she wants the children to attend.

Follow-up Questions:

- How did this activity feel?
- Do "I" messages seem artificial?
- What issues emerged that you did not expect?
- How do "I" messages promote effective parent communication?
- Can you think of situations where "I" messages could reduce conflict?

Points to Emphasize: "I" messages give you a way to share what is on your mind without blaming or judging other family members. Talking in this

manner can often surprise the other parent, especially if “YOU” messages have been the usual way to communicate. Your ex-partner may be astounded to learn how you really feel. “I” statements help to reduce conflict that can spiral out of control. “I” messages also can be used to express feelings of appreciation. Example: “When you take the children to the doctor appointments, I feel relieved because it gives me more time to take care of things around the house.”

Closing

(approximately 10 minutes)

- Purpose:
- To bring the workshop to closure.
 - To review information found in the parent manual
 - To complete workshop evaluation survey.
 - To honor participants’ workshop attendance.

- Supplies:
- Evaluation surveys
 - Certificates of Completion
 - *A Manual For Parents*

The following can be used as closing comments for the workshop.

Time and experience often ease the tension as parents learn to coparent without living together. When tough issues continue to exist, parents who get along help children adjust to the changes in their family life.

When thinking about issues related to custody, visitation, child support,

and maintenance, the court is involved in the final decisions. Two sections of the parent manual focus on legal issues and financial matters. Page 18 explains the different types of custody orders that a judge can make. Child support information starts on page 14. Information is also available in the section on procedures for changing the original orders. Other financial information starts on page 21.

You may be hearing the term mediation more and more. It is a process that enables people who disagree on issues such as parenting time or custody to come together in a confidential setting and create an agreeable solution for both sides. The mediator is a neutral third party and has no decision-making power.

Mediation is a process that involves the parents more in the decision making, rather than allowing the courts to make the decisions for the family. In court, the judge decides who is right and wrong, who gets the custody, or how parenting time issues are ordered. With mediation, the parents meet a mediator to constructively develop a decision together. The focus of mediation is finding a way to coparent in the most effective, peaceful, and positive manner possible. Read more about mediation in the parent’s manual on page 19.

Please fill out the workshop evaluation survey so that we might have information to improve future sessions. Thank you for coming.





Anger . . .

- is a choice.
- can get you what you want.
- can help you take positive action.
- can be triggered by other emotions.
- can control your life.

Source: University of Minnesota Extension Service (1997)



Psychological Tasks for Adults Experiencing Divorce:

- Ending the divorce
- Mourning the loss
- Reclaiming oneself
- Resolving or containing passions – especially anger
- Venturing forth again
- Rebuilding
- Helping the children

Source: Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1996)



Psychological Tasks for Children of Divorce:

- Understanding the divorce
- Strategically withdrawing
- Dealing with loss
- Dealing with anger
- Working out guilt
- Taking a chance on love

Source: Wallerstein & Blakeslee (1996)



Ways to Slow Down Children's Adjustment to Divorce:

- Arguing in front of the children.
- Sending messages through the children.
- Pumping the children for information about the other parent.
- Asking the children to keep a secret from the other parent.
- Criticizing the other parent in front of the children.
- Using custody, visitation, and money issues to harm the child's relationship with the other parent.



Pain Games

Don't worry. It will be OK.

The Messenger

Disneyland Parent

Cut Down

I Spy

Get Us Back Together

Tug of War

Try to Get the Money

Guilt Trip

Take Care of Me

Adapted from Pawnee Mental Health Services (2001)



"I" message has 3 parts

"When...."

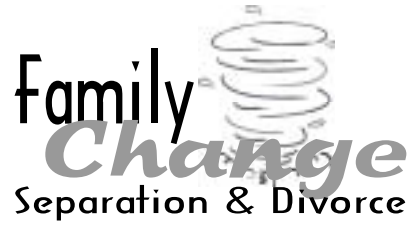
(state the unacceptable behavior)

"I feel..."

(express feeling about the behavior)

"Because..."

(the effect of the behavior)



Family Change: Separation and Divorce

Certificate of Completion

has completed a workshop on parent/child adjustment to divorce

Total hours of participation _____

Date

Instructor

Workshop Sponsor

Please take a few minutes to respond to the following questions after the workshop is completed. Your responses will be kept confidential. The information is used to help us improve the program. Please understand that your completion of this survey is strictly voluntary. If you decide not to answer any of the questions, you will not be penalized in any way.

1. What is your gender? (Please check one) Male Female
2. Age _____
3. Ethnic background (circle one): African-American Asian White Hispanic Native American Other_____

4. Please list the age and gender of your children

Age	Gender
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____

5. How many years were you married? _____
(If not married, how long were you with your partner? _____)

6. I am attending this workshop because: (Please check one)

- I have to
 I want to
 Both
 Other (Please specify) _____

7. Who filed the divorce, custody, or visitation action?

- Me
 My ex-partner
 Other (Please specify) _____

8. Please mark the statement that applies to you:

- I wanted the divorce
 I was unsure about wanting a divorce
 I did NOT want a divorce

Please indicate your opinion about the following statements. Circle the answer that best describes what you thought before you came to the workshop, and what you think now, after the workshop. Use the scale below to respond.

SA = Strongly Agree	D = Disagree
A = Agree	SD = Strongly Disagree
U = Unsure	

1. I understand the needs and problems of families going through divorce.
2. I understand the psychological tasks that **parents** need to accomplish during the divorce.
3. I understand the psychological tasks that **children** need to accomplish during the divorce.
4. I am doing positive things that will help me deal with the divorce.
5. I am doing positive things that will help my child(ren) deal with the divorce.
6. I am confident that I know how to talk to my child(ren) about the divorce.
7. It is important for the other parent to be a part of my child(ren)'s life.
8. I know how to separate my anger at my former partner from my relationship with my child(ren).
9. I am able to think of positive ways to work through conflicts with my former partner.
10. I am able to communicate about our family situation without putting my children in the middle.

Before the Workshop	After the Workshop
SA A U D SD	SA A U D SD
SA A U D SD	SA A U D SD
SA A U D SD	SA A U D SD
SA A U D SD	SA A U D SD
SA A U D SD	SA A U D SD
SA A U D SD	SA A U D SD
SA A U D SD	SA A U D SD
SA A U D SD	SA A U D SD
SA A U D SD	SA A U D SD
SA A U D SD	SA A U D SD

Please respond to the following statements using the scale below.

SA = Strongly Agree	D = Disagree
A = Agree	SD = Strongly Disagree
U = Unsure	

11. The program allowed the opportunity for me to participate and ask questions.

SA A U D SD

12. The presenters for the program were well organized and easy to understand.

SA A U D SD

13. The presenters understood the needs and problems of families going through divorce.

SA A U D SD

14. Overall the program was worthwhile.

SA A U D SD

15. What I liked most about the program: _____

16. What I liked least about the program: _____

17. What I would like to see added/changed: _____

Workshop Leader is asked to send completed evaluations to:

Charlotte Shoup Olsen
School of Family Studies & Human Services
343 Justin Hall
Kansas State University
Manhattan, KS 66505-1423

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Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

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