

# Effective Co-Parenting: *Putting Kids First*



## Participant Guide

Developed and Facilitated by:  
Elaine Bucknum & Sandy Shuler

Participant's Name

Note: This back of front cover will fit into binder pocket and will be blank.

# Effective Co-Parenting: *Putting Kids First*



Participant Guide

# Forward



Jewish Family Service Calgary (JFSC) is proud to present the manuals “Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First” for facilitators and participants. These manuals are the culmination of five years of delivering workshops to parents experiencing separation/divorce by co-facilitators, Sandy Shuler and Elaine Bucknum, who designed and developed the program for the Calgary and area community.

This psycho-educational program is unique to Calgary and was designed to address the needs of children who were part of families experiencing separation and divorce. The vision of the program was to have parents learn effective co-parenting skills in order for children to maintain accessibility to both parents and extended families despite these life changes.

The program “Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First” is not therapy based, but rather, offers skills, strategies, resources and support for participants who are moving through the process of separation/divorce. The participants are from a variety of backgrounds, ages, religions and stages in the process. The six week program has received excellent participant evaluations and has been supported by The Calgary foundation, The United Way of Calgary and Area, Telus, RBC Foundation, the Downtown Rotary Club, the Rockyview Child and Family Service and the Rosslyn Steinberg Family Life Education Fund at JFSC. We are grateful to these sponsors and to private donors who have enabled the program to flourish over the last five years.

Jewish Family Service Calgary is proud to have been a part of this project and we encourage facilitators and participants to take full advantage of these manuals and the workshops to help children develop resiliency in the face of life’s difficulties.

Bev Sheckter  
Executive Director

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Agnes Elaine Bucknum  
Sandy Shuler  
registration number 1064055

## Authors:

Agnes Elaine Bucknum  
Sandy Shuler  
bucknum-nixon@shaw.ca  
sshuler@shaw.ca

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Disclaimer: This guide and the contents of same is to be used for participants to accompany “*The Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First*” program. It is not intended to replace any therapeutic, professional legal intervention that may be required in addition to this program.



# Acknowledgements

The “*Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First*” program has been developed and delivered over the past number of years thanks to the many individuals and families who have articulated the needs of children through the process of separation and divorce.

This program would not have been possible without the support of the following community partners:

- JEWISH FAMILY SERVICE CALGARY
- Calgary Rockyview Child and Family Services
- The Downtown Rotary Club of Calgary
- The Calgary Foundation
- The United Way of Calgary and Area
- RBC Financial Group through the RBC Foundation
- Telus
- The Sam and Betty Switzer Family
- The Rosslyn Steinberg Family Life Education Fund
- The Harry and Martha Cohen Foundation
- The Jewish Community Foundation of Calgary
- Dr. Dan and Jodi Goldstein
- Dunphy, Best, Blocksom Law Firm
- The many other individual community donors



## Letter to Participants... About this Resource

### Dear Parent:

Welcome to *“Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First”*, a program that supports children and families through the process of separation/divorce. This workbook has been developed to guide you through this program, to offer important information, to provide useful skills and strategies and to assist you in developing a respectful, cooperative relationship with your parenting partner.

The long process of separation/divorce is life changing for adults, children and families, requiring many adjustments, adaptations and redefinitions for all involved. Many of these challenges began long before the separation when it became evident that the adult partnership/marriage was problematic. Each individual and family responds in a unique manner as each circumstance is different. There are no “standard rules” for “getting through it.” Time, patience and strength is required to move through this challenging time towards a place of comfort and acceptance.



As a parent, you are in a position to be influential in guiding and nurturing your child(ren) through the process. How you manage the separation/divorce and particularly the conflict between parenting partners, is one of the most important variables in how a child adjusts to the situation. Research shows that children do best when two caring, concerned, involved parents are active in their lives. One of the most important questions we encourage you to ask yourself is, “what kind of a separation/divorce-atmosphere do I want to create for my child(ren)?” We hope that the answer to this question is that of a collaborative co-parenting relationship, for the benefit of the child(ren) and family.

In an ideal world, both co-parents understand the need and make efforts for shared, collaborative parenting. In reality, this is not always the case. Yet, each parent can singularly make a choice and a commitment to do the best they can do within their sphere of influence, to minimize conflict and encourage their child(ren)’s access to both parents. There may be exceptions to successful co-parenting, such as family violence, substance abuse and factors that pre-clude this. In these cases, therapeutic intervention may be indicated which is beyond the scope of this program.

This guide has been designed for you. Take full advantage of it. There are blank pages for you to make notes and to journal your personal thoughts. A binder format allows you to add handouts and additional relevant information. We suggest that you re-read course materials and practice skills that are introduced in order to fully understand the information and internalize the learning. Homework is a valuable opportunity for personal reflection and will be used to promote discussion and offer varied perspectives amongst group participants. These are all pieces to the co-parenting puzzle that will assist you and your child(ren) through the process of separation and divorce.



As you begin the *“Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First”* program, we are confident that you will take away knowledge and strategies that will help you in facilitating the building of a respectful co-parenting relationship for the sake of your child(ren) and your family. We look forward to working together with you on this journey.

Sincerely,  
Elaine Bucknum and Sandy Shuler  
Authors, developers, co-facilitators

“For concerned parents, perhaps the most important thing to know is that you can do much to promote your children’s resilience. In fact, how you parent and work with your child’s other parent basically is going to determine whether your children are resilient – or end up as a statistic.”

– Robert E. Emery, *“The Truth About Children and Divorce”*  
([www.emeryondivorce.com](http://www.emeryondivorce.com))

# Acknowledgements

## We would like to thank:

- **The Jewish Family Service Calgary** team for their support and encouragement in the development and delivery of the *“Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First”* program and accompanying program participant and facilitator guides.
- **The Calgary Foundation** for their financial partnership and endorsement of the *“Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First”* program and their support in the creation and development of the program participant and facilitator guides.
- The **parents** and **families** who have shared their personal journey through separation/divorce and in this way have assisted others to learn effective co-parenting strategies.
- The **advisory committee** who have assisted in the editing of the program participant and facilitator guides.
- Our **families, friends, and mentors** who have encouraged us in the creation of the *“Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First”* Program and the development of the participant and facilitator guides.
- **Sue Krawchuk**, our graphic artist for her time and expertise in the production of the program participant and facilitator guides. (sue.krawchuk@mac.com)
- Our **life experiences**, (particularly our personal losses and challenges) from which we have learned and grown, and without which this program would not have been created.



*E. Bucknum*      *Sandy Shuler*



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## About this Program

### Information about this Program:

This program, unique to the Calgary and area community, was designed and developed by Elaine Bucknum and Sandy Shuler in 2002, for separated and divorced families through Jewish Family Service Calgary. Since that time, they have been co-facilitators of this established and recognized program.

In developing this psycho-educational program, Elaine and Sandy were seeking to address the needs of children who were a part of families experiencing separation and divorce. Their vision is for adults to learn to effectively co-parent through separation/divorce for the benefit of the children involved. For children to build resiliency to separation/divorce as a result of their parents co-parenting more effectively and for children to maintain access to both of their parents and extended families in spite of these life changes.



The original program, open to the entire Calgary community and area, was piloted in 2003 through the support of The Downtown Rotary Club and Rockyview Child and Family Service. The pilot group evaluated the program very highly, and since that time, it has been operating with the generous support of numerous community partners including The Calgary Foundation, The United Way of Calgary and Area, Telus, RBC Foundation, The Rosslyn Steinberg Family Life Education Fund and private donors.

***“Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First”*** is delivered one evening per week for six consecutive weeks. A maximum of sixteen participants attend the program in diverse groups comprised of both biological parents, single moms and single dads, and blended family parents. All ages, backgrounds, religions and stages in the separation/divorce process attend. Participants are pre-screened prior to being accepted to the program to ensure group balance and appropriateness. Participants attend the program by professional referral and self-referral. There is a subsidy process in place to ensure accessibility for all. Each week of the program has a specific course content that is supported by written handouts and materials for participants. A variety of program methods include a video tape, group discussion and exercises, personal reflection and homework and facilitator presentations. The course is not therapy based but, rather, offers skills, strategies, resources and support for participants who are moving through the process of separation/divorce. Where necessary, community referrals for counseling are recommended.

# Key Parameters For This Program

## Vision:

- To ensure the maximum positive adjustment of children who are part of families experiencing separation/divorce.



## Goals:

- Increasing children's resilience to separation/divorce by keeping family relationships intact through the inclusion of two caring parents in the child's life.
- Encouraging separated/divorced parents with children to build an environment of collaborative, cooperative, respectful parenting in which children's needs are a priority.



## Objectives:

- **Co-Parenting:** To encourage and facilitate both parents continued involvement in the day to day parenting issues of their children.
- **Knowledge:** To impart information to parents and foster understanding about issues children encounter including: loss/grief, age/stage development, divided loyalties.
- **Skill development:** To enhance skills and offer strategies for parents in communication, negotiation, problem-solving, conflict resolution and day to day issue management.
- **Support:** To normalize the experience of separation/divorce and assist parents to access informal and formal resources in their networks using the strengths they bring.



## About Parent Education

### About Parent Education and “Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First”:

It is our belief and philosophy based on knowledge and experience, that a six week parent education group format provides parents with information and learning experiences that facilitate their competency in parenting, healthy child development and improved family functioning.



“There is now a considerable body of research connecting parenting behaviors to child outcomes.” – Betsy Mann, “*Working With Parent Groups: A Handbook for Facilitators*”

“Effective parenting skills can be taught, and an impressive body of evidence shows that supportive education programs, run by effective instructors, and customized to parent’s needs, can change adverse patterns of parent-child interactions”. – Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare: [www.cecw-cepb.ca](http://www.cecw-cepb.ca), 2006, 36 E, page 2

“Studies of parents who have taken workshops in parenting indicate that the support they receive has higher value than the information they hear...support implies shared experience, understanding, empathy and help.” – Dolores Curran “*Working With Parents*”

### About the Program Developers and Authors:

**Elaine Bucknum**, M.S.W.; R.S.W.; A.F.R.M.; is a registered family mediator, family therapist and a registered clinical social worker in private practice, and private contractor to a variety of organizations. Her specialty is working with individuals and families on relationship issues, some of whom are in the stages of separation/divorce. She is the parent and step parent to six children.

**Sandy Shuler**, B.S.W.; R.S.W.; C.C.F.E.; is a registered social worker and a Certified Canadian Family Educator whose specialty is in the area of parent and family life education. She is a private contractor/consultant in the Calgary community. She has experienced divorce personally, and is remarried in a blended family with five young adults.

## Testimonials About this Program

“As co-parents, we couldn’t work together at the start of the course and after three weeks we were driving together and having joint family meetings.”

“It was a great program; I wish I’d taken it earlier in the divorce process.”

“In this course I’ve learned the most about myself and how I have a choice in how to handle my behavior and setting of boundaries. I am not alone in dealing with separation/divorce; I have the confidence and tools to deal with situations as they arise.”

“The insights and obvious breadth of perspectives gained from this experience has kept me attentive in each class.”

“Awesome program. I hope for the children’s sake this program is able to be continued to be offered to anyone that needs it.”

“This would be great if it were mandated to divorcing parents.”

“Great learning; keep up the good work; thanks for your dedication to the future – our kids.”

“I am pleased to provide strong support for the continued funding of this course. I am convinced that your programs are of huge value to the Calgary and area communities.”

“Thankyou so much for all of the helpful coaching and an overall excellent workshop series. I believe all of us have been left with a much clearer understanding of the divorce process.”



“I have received some very positive feedback from my clients about your course. Keep up the great work.”

– Registered Alberta  
Family Mediator

# About Jewish Family Services Calgary

JFSC is an accredited, non-denominational social service agency established in 1961 serving the Calgary and area community. Program areas include: individual, couple and family counseling, family life education, services to seniors and seniors outreach, vocational support, resettlement and integration services, volunteer services. JFSC strengthens the community by helping people in the spirit of Jewish tradition and values.

## ***Guiding Principles:***

- We respect the uniqueness and dignity of each individual.
- Jewish values and beliefs and the principles of social justice are the guiding principles of our treatment of others and each other.
- We must work together to strengthen our community, recognizing the value of participation and collaboration.
- We strive to be barrier free, accessible to all and inclusive of everyone.
- We are accountable to our clients and the community.
- We must adapt to the changing needs of the community and continually search for the best ways to meet those needs.



The “***Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First***” program is a service provided through the Family Life Education (FLE) Program of the agency. The FLE department has received several leadership nominations and awards for the services they have been providing to families in the Calgary and area community.

## Client Rights And Service Information:

Jewish Family Service Calgary is a non-profit, accredited, multi-service family agency, open to anyone in Calgary and area. Staff members that you work with are registered with a professional association. The agency reserves the right to refuse services to any client who harasses or threatens staff or the welfare of the agency.

### You have the right to:

- Be assured of confidentiality, which is protected by both ethical practice and by Alberta laws. There are however important exceptions to confidentiality that are legally mandated. In general terms, these limitations include that Jewish Family Service Calgary has:
  - a duty to warn if we judge that a client has intention to harm another individual or themselves
  - a legal obligation to report any incidence of suspected child abuse, neglect or molestation
  - a legal obligation to submit case records and/or to testify if subpoenaed by the court.
- Be informed as to the professional's qualifications, counselling orientation (e.g., thinking, feeling, behavior), areas of specialization and limitation, and the code of ethics which they follow
- Know that records are kept with respect to service delivery and that you may review these
- Be treated with respect, dignity and without discrimination regardless of your age, gender, mental and physical status, sexual or affectional preference, race, belief system or ethnic background
- Be asked for your written consent to authorize the release of information to other professionals as well as the audio/video taping of any sessions
- Ask for information about the agency policies and procedures
- Be advised of the programs/services fee schedule and methods of payment
- Be informed of the Agency's grievance procedures

### It is your responsibility to:

- Provide notice of your absence from workshop sessions
- Pay chargeable fees for "Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First" program



# Course Outline

## ***“EFFECTIVE CO-PARENTING: PUTTING KIDS FIRST”***

A program for parents who are separated/divorced that fosters resilience in children

### **Week #1**

#### Understanding The Impact of Separation/Divorce on Children

- Introduction, objectives, ground rules, getting acquainted
- Facts, statistics, research review
- Video Tape: ***“Let’s Talk About Divorce”***
- Introduction: Implementing effective management strategies

### **Week #2**

#### What Children Need: Encouraging Access to Both Parents

- Typical ages/stages of development
- The importance of both parents
- Typical behavior reactions at different ages/stages
- Continuing to implement management strategies

### **Week #3**

#### The Effects of Diminished Parenting and the Impact of Loss

- Barriers to effective parenting
- Losses in separation/divorce: grief cycle
- The “circle of influence”: letting go
- Continuing implementation of management strategies



**Week #4**

Choosing A Better Way To Communicate

- Acknowledging children's feelings
- Developing a business relationship with your co-parent
- "Do's and Don'ts" of effective communication
- Continuing implementation of management strategies

**Week #5**

Handling My Own Anger/Managing Conflict

- About conflict in separation/divorce
- The "Anger Cycle", The "Worry Stopper" tool
- Skills for dealing with anger and conflict
- Continuing implementation of management strategies

**Week #6**

Co-Parenting Into The Future

- Transitioning between two households
- Managing diverse households and lifestyles
- Celebratory times and rituals
- Dating/re-marriage/blending
- Closing and evaluation

# Program Evaluation Process

We have designed an evaluation process for this program with the intent of having participant feedback so that the program will be continually reviewed and improved.

The evaluation process ensures that the outcomes of the program meet the goals and objectives of the program. This gives information to program funders that clients benefit from the service being delivered. It is very important that program participants are satisfied with the information and experience of ***“Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First.”***

The evaluation process begins with a demographic form completed by participants which gathers background information to help us understand who participates in this program.

A “pre/post survey” is completed in an attempt to assess the knowledge and skills gained during the six weeks of the program. In week number three, mid-way into the program, a brief evaluation is completed to determine any benefits that participants are gaining from the program. Upon completion of the program, at week six, a formal evaluation is completed by participants using a qualitative and quantitative approach. Throughout the workshop, informal feedback is encouraged and solicited. One year after the program’s completion, a follow-up evaluation is mailed to determine the impact of the program on the participants one year later.





***“EFFECTIVE CO-PARENTING: PUTTING KIDS FIRST”***

***Consent for Service***

I, (please print) \_\_\_\_\_  
 give permission to receive the following service with co-facilitators of  
 the ***“Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First”***: a six week psycho-  
 educational program.

***Consent for Evaluation***

I, (please print) \_\_\_\_\_  
 give permission to \_\_\_\_\_  
*(name of organization)*

to use the evaluation information that I complete in the above-noted  
 course for quality control and course development.

I understand that professional standards and guidelines shall apply to  
 these services, and that special agreements concerning confidentiality as  
 discussed, will be maintained.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Witness: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# Demographics Survey

## Group Demographics

**Gender:**      Female      Male

**Age:**          20 – 30      31 – 40      41 – 50      51 – 60      over 60

**Citizenship Status:**      Canadian                      Landed Immigrant  
    Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Languages Spoken:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Income:**      up to \$20,000                      21,000 – 40,000                      41,000 – 60,000  
    61,000 – 80,000                      over 80,000

**Number of Children:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Age(s) of Child(ren):</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
0 – 2 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 – 5 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 – 8 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 – 12 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12 – 18 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
over 18	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



**Where did you learn of this group?**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Calgary Herald | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Advertisement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lawyer         | <input type="checkbox"/> Therapist or Counsellor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friend         | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____            |

**I am attending this course as:**

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	<input type="checkbox"/> Separated Couple
<input type="checkbox"/> Married Couple	<input type="checkbox"/> Divorced Couple
<input type="checkbox"/> Newly Blended Couple	

*Thank you for your participation. All answers are kept confidential*

## Participant Survey

We thank you for completing these questions. It will gather data to ensure that this is an effective program for both participants and program funders.

Please Check Only One Answer that Best Applies

### In the role of co-parent, I feel:

- Totally overwhelmed
- Often overwhelmed
- Less able to manage most situations
- Able to manage most situations
- Confident in my co-parenting



### When I communicate with my co-parent, I:

- Usually stay calm and in control
- Feel unable to resolve problems
- Am able to focus specifically on the children's issues most of the time
- Am able to negotiate and if required, come to a compromise
- Find it hard to remain focused and calm on different children's issues

### A child's reaction to parental conflict in separation and divorce is demonstrated by:

- Withdrawal
- Angry and acting out behavior
- Fearing new people and new situations
- Regression to an earlier age/stage of development
- Reconciliation fantasies
- Confusion and disorganization

## Participant Survey (continued)

### Once I have a co-parenting plan in place it:

- Never needs to be changed
- Needs to be reviewed annually
- Will be suitable until the children are 18 years of age
- Will need to be reviewed at developmental milestones
- Will need to be reviewed as various issues arise



### I am in touch with my co-parent about our child(ren)'s issues (emotional, medical, care-giving, school, scheduling, needs):

- 0 times per month
- 2 times per month
- 4 times per month
- more than 4 times per month

Please Circle One of the Numbers

### I rate my knowledge of child development:

LOW    1    2    3    4    5    HIGH

### I rate my skills in dealing with my co-parent:

LOW    1    2    3    4    5    HIGH

### I rate my skills in dealing with my child(ren's) reaction to our separation/divorce:

LOW    1    2    3    4    5    HIGH

# Ground Rules

## Workshop Ground Rules For Participants And Leaders:

People feel most comfortable when they “know the rules of the game”, therefore group ground rules help establish the expectations, format and guidelines of the group.

- Confidentiality within the group is a must; all information from within the group stays within the group.
- Tolerance and respect of each participant’s right to be unique and have different experiences, perceptions, feelings.
- Participation is comfortable, with “the right to pass”.
- Sharing own experiences, thoughts, feelings so others may learn but sharing the “air time” without monopolizing.
- Responsibility for personal learning needs. The program will be more meaningful by participating in reading, discussions, exercises and homework. If learning needs are not being met, consult with the program facilitators.
- Timing is important: begin promptly, end promptly; and notify leaders if possible that you will be away.
- Any other personal ground rules:

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# Certificate of Attendance

Sample Certificate

## Certificate Of Attendance

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*(Name of participant)*

Attended the program:

***“Effective Co-parenting:  
Putting Kids First”***

Presented by:

Elaine Bucknum, M.S.W., R.S.W., R.F.M.  
Sandy Shuler, B.S.W., R.S.W., C.C.F.E.

Dates

MINIMUM 9 HOURS OF COMMITMENT

The program:

- Provided information about the needs of children and families coping with separation and divorce
- Provided skills and strategies for improving communication, resolving conflict and managing issues of children and co-parents

---

*Facilitator*

---

*Facilitator*



# Getting the Most from your Parenting Group

## BEING PART OF THE GROUP

This is your group. Its purpose is to help you improve your family life. You can help to make this group effective by:

1. Attending as regularly as possible.
2. Sharing your thoughts and feelings.
3. Staying on the topic.
4. Helping everyone to participate in the discussion.
5. Giving encouragement.
6. Being willing to change your attitudes and beliefs.
7. Being willing to change your behaviour and try new approaches.
8. Focusing on improving your relationship with your child/children.
9. Reading handouts and/or books on democratic parenting.
10. Keeping personal information shared in this group confidential.

The only behaviour you can change is your own.

## LEADERS

Your leaders are not experts. They are people who have some training and experience in ways to improve family relationships. Their job is to explain the principles of democratic family life, present ideas and guide discussion. No one else can solve your problems for you, but leaders and other group members can make suggestions and direct you toward approaches you may find effective.

## PITFALLS TO AVOID

1. Don't expect instant success.
2. Don't try to change everything at once.
3. Don't expect perfection in yourself or your children.
4. Don't use new methods as a gimmick to make children mind.
5. Don't worry about what other people think.
6. Don't insist that your partner use your new techniques.

If we focus on what we can do, instead of trying to change someone else, it frees that person to think what he/she can do to improve the situation.

Beth Johnson, 95/06/20

Permission to copy granted by Saskatoon Adlerian Society, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan



## Week #1

# Understanding the Impact of Separation/Divorce on Children

“I am only one; but still I am one.  
I cannot do everything, but still I can do  
something. I will not refuse to do  
the something I can do.”

– Helen Keller



*“Each co-parent can choose to make some  
difference in their co-parenting  
relationship which will make a difference  
in their child’s life.”*

– Elaine and Sandy

# Week One

## Goals

- ✓ To help participants become informed about the impact of separation/divorce on children.
- ✓ To sensitize parents to the specific needs children have through the process of separation/divorce.
- ✓ To assist parents in making the connection between the behavior of children and their feeling and thoughts.
- ✓ To offer participants strategies for observation and management of their own children's needs during the process of separation/divorce.
- ✓ Personal Goals: \_\_\_\_\_



## Agenda

- ✓ Welcome: course description, philosophy, format, evaluation process.
- ✓ Introduction:
  - “Myths & Beliefs” learning exercise.
  - “Getting Acquainted” exercise.
- ✓ Topic: “Understanding The Impact of Separation/Divorce”.
- ✓ Video: “Children of Divorce”.
- ✓ Group Learning Exercises.
- Handouts and Homework.
- ✓ Group closing.



# Assignment

**Learning Objective:** The learning exercises completed in week #1 are designed to have participants become more observant of their children’s behavior and reflect on the issues that their children may be dealing with as a result of separation/divorce.

## Week #1

### Learning Exercise #1

Participants will be divided into two groups and will be asked to complete the handout **“Myths and Beliefs Exercise about Separation/Divorce”** exercise. The information discussed in the small groups will be shared in the large group.

## Week #1

### Learning Exercise #2

Participants will view **“Let’s Talk About Divorce”**, a video tape about children’s response to their parent’s separation/divorce, produced by The Calgary Counselling Centre. Following this, the group will share their reactions and comments.

## Week #1

### Learning Exercise #3

Participants will break into two groups and will be requested to address the following questions:

1. What do you think happens for kids as a result of separation/divorce?
2. What do you think happens for adults/parents as a result of separation/divorce?

Groups will be asked to record their thoughts on the above-noted questions on flip chart paper and bring back their responses to be discussed in the large group.



Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Myths and Beliefs Exercise About Separation/Divorce

The following are some common thoughts about separation/divorce. In your group, please:

## Fill in the Blanks or Check True or False

- Adults separate and divorce in order to have a happier, more satisfying life. Therefore children will feel \_\_\_\_\_ as a result.
- If there has been a great deal of fighting and conflict in the original family home, children will be relieved when their parents separate.     TRUE         FALSE
- If children are distressed by separation/divorce, the crisis will be transient because children are considered to be resilient and resourceful and will soon recover on their own.         TRUE         FALSE
- When adults are rational and have appropriate professional and legal support and information, most issues arising from a separation/divorce will be \_\_\_\_\_.
- Once a parenting plan is in place following a separation/divorce, children's needs and lifestyle will be taken care of.         TRUE         FALSE
- Life with my "ex" has been challenging, and now that I am separated/divorced, I do not have to pursue many of these past challenges.         TRUE         FALSE



Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Getting Acquainted Exercise

Please complete this worksheet with your partner, and be prepared to introduce your partner to the group:



Partner's name \_\_\_\_\_

Partner's children gender and ages

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How long have you been separated/divorced?

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How did you hear about this program?

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What do you hope to take away from attending this workshop?

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## Important Statistics, Facts, Research:

- Only 34% of all children born in North America will reach the age of 18 living with both of their biological parents. Approximately two-thirds of all children will live in another family configuration. (*Kyle Pruett, 2001. "Divorce: Challenge to Fatherhood"*)
- The divorce rate has risen throughout recent years.
  - In 1995, there were more than 50,000 divorces in Canada where children were involved.
  - In 1997, there were 67,408 divorces in Canada
  - In 2001, there were 71,783 divorces in Canada (*Stats Can.*)
- More than four out of every ten marriages in Alberta are likely to end up in divorce before a thirtieth wedding anniversary. The average duration of marriages for those who divorced in 2002 was 14.2 years. \*\*
- Joint custody orders have risen from 1988 when 76% of all custody orders went to mothers only. In 2002, about 42% of all custody orders were made to both fathers and mothers jointly, and this continues a sixteen year trend in joint custody arrangements. In Alberta, in 2002, the courts awarded custody to the wife 28.4%, to the husband 3.1%, and to both jointly 68.4%. \*\*
- In the year 2000-2001, there were 2956 divorces in Calgary. Calgary courts see 1500 custody applications involving children in one year. Joint custody was more likely in Manitoba and Alberta (39% and 38%) than elsewhere in the country
- The mediation department of the Alberta Family Court receives 600 referrals per year which involves mediating disputes between couples over issues about children. This is in addition to those disputes where private mediators and/or lawyers are used.



"In order to lessen the burden of divorce on children, lawyers, mediators, the courts, legislators and parents themselves increasingly recognize the important roles of both parents in the lives of their children even after they are no longer married to each other."

– National Post 2001

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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\*\* "Profiling Canada's Families": The Vanier Institute of the Family/Statistics Canada



## Important Statistics, Facts, Research (continued)

- The “current” trend in family law is “collaborative divorce”. Collaborative family law practices are emerging all over the country in attempts to arbitrate and mediate child custody issues instead of resorting to court and adversarial processes.
- In 2001, twenty of twenty one divorce lawyers in Medicine Hat, Alberta joined the “kinder, gentler” divorce movement that is sweeping Canada from West to East. There is virtually no family law in this city that is done in the courts. (*National Post 2001*)
- The top five reasons why couples divorced in Canada: different values and interests; physical and emotional abuse; substance issues; infidelity; career related conflict. \*\*
- In order to lessen the burden of divorce on children, lawyers, mediators, the courts, legislators and parents themselves increasingly recognize the important roles of both parents in the lives of their children even after they are no longer married to each other. (*National Post, 2001*)
- In 2001, The Calgary Counselling Centre released public video tapes from years of working with parents and children of divorce which substantiate the want and need of children to have parents, collaborating, cooperating and co-parenting for the health of themselves and the health of families.
- “Parents are willing to sacrifice a great deal for the welfare of their children. It’s what parents do. That willingness to sacrifice for our children should not end when the marriage dies...what children need most of all, if they are to survive the divorce without major trauma, is two parents who continue to be involved in their lives as supportive, nurturing, accessible, interested, guiding figures. They don’t absolutely have to have two parents who live together to have that.” – Rabbi Netter, “*Divorce is a Mitzvah*”



\*\* “*Profiling Canada’s Families*”: The Vanier Institute of the Family/Statistics Canada

“ While research is important to understanding the issues for children of separation/divorce, it is also important to understand that it has limitations and can only offer guidance not hard and fast rules. Generally, one difficulty is that research has not been able to evaluate the pre-separation/divorce state of the family unit.”

– Sandy and Elaine

## Important Statistics, Facts, Research (continued)

- In 1967, two researchers, Holmes and Rahe, devised a scale of stressful life events called “The Social Readjustment Rating Scale”, updated in 1997 by Miller and Rahe. On that scale, divorce ranked almost at the top, closely to the death of a spouse or close family member. “One recent study showed that 75% of divorced parents experienced serious levels of stress.” (*Calgary Counselling Centre*) Stress puts us at risk for poor health, well being and can make it hard for parents to cope and function.
- Multiple variables indicate the outcome of separation/divorce and these include the child’s internal resources and individual uniqueness, each of the parent’s emotional well-being and their relationship as co-parents, pre-divorce family factors and the interparental relationship after divorce (amount of conflict, amount of emotional and financial support, amount of communication); the most stressful changes/transitions for the children which happen in the shortest space of time, create the most risk for children” (*C. Ahrons – “Pathways To A Good Divorce: The Children’s Perspective”*)
- “Research shows that children, unlike adults, do not always see separation as a way of improving their lives. Children see things differently than adults about separation/divorce.” (*Wallerstein & Kelly 1980*)
- “Separation/divorce results in life changes which also results in changes to our parenting and how we manage our children. Research (*Hetherington et al.1978*) shows that right after separating, parents are less competent with their children than they were before. This is supported by Wallerstein & Kelly 1980, who show that in the first two years after divorce, children suffer from reduced parental care. Parents may be more withdrawn emotionally, less tuned into their children, more permissive, more demanding. These are often temporary deteriorations and usually disappear when parents regain their equilibrium.”
- “Research shows that it is not the divorce but the fighting, and the ways parents use their children in that fighting, that harms children. (*Johnson et al. 1987; Wallerstein & Kelly 1980; Hetherington et al. 1982; Kelly 1983*) “Conflict is one of the most important variables determining a child’s post divorce adjustment (*Amato & Keith 1991*) and is something over which {parents} have total control.”



“Research shows that children, unlike adults, do not always see separation as a way of improving their lives. Children see things differently than adults about separation/divorce.

– Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980

## Important Statistics, Facts, Research (continued)

- “The term “good divorce” was popularized by Connie Ahrons in her book by that title (1994) referring to a divorce in which family bonds are maintained and children’s needs are met. Partners have achieved a good divorce when they are able to stop fighting and become a cooperative team for the sake of the children.” (pg. 46)
- Research (Kyle Pruett – *“Fatherneed: Why Father Care is as Essential as Mother Care For Your Child”*) demonstrates that parents and professionals believe that co-parenting is most important to children. Children need both their mother’s and father’s style of parenting in every stage of development, but particularly in the early formative years of life. Clinical counselling proves that in separated parents, mothers often feel alone and uncertain, and fathers often feel excluded and relegated to the margins of their children’s lives. Pruett states that in the toddler years fathers play “one of the most critical roles they ever play in the life of the child”- that is to hold the child safely and securely separate from the intense maternal dependency of infancy. He further indicates that “divorce has become the single greatest challenge to fulfilling fatherhood.”
- Research (John Snarey – *“How Fathers Care for the Next Generation: A Four Decade Study”*) shows that fathers who supported their daughters and sons by encouraging athletic competence and achievement in school, had daughters who were more successful in school and work, and had sons who eventually achieved more academically and in their careers. This implies the essential role fathers play in the overall well-being and life-long functioning of their children from birth onward.
- Research (Edward Kruk – *professor of social work and family studies at the University of British Columbia*) says “so much terrible damage can be done to children by depriving them of the other parent...the organizational headaches are nothing compared to the emotional repercussions.”



“... so much terrible damage can be done to children by depriving them of the other parent..”  
– Edward Kruk

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## Important Statistics, Facts, Research (continued)

- Research (Marsha Klein-Pruett, *“Only God Decides: Young Children’s Perceptions of Custody and Divorce”*) supports the child’s need for parents “to be friends enough”, as one child puts it, so that “they let each other love us the way we need loving.” Often the adversarial and litigation process make it difficult for parents to be “friends enough” and does not give parents the reassurance or the skills to maintain a full presence in their child’s life.
- Research (James Guidabaldi, *“The Role of Selected Family Environment Factors in Children’s Post-Divorce Adjustment.”*) found that in a follow-up study two years after divorce, one’s math and spelling grades are predicted by the quality of the child’s post divorce relationship with the non-custodial father. The better the relationship, the better the grades were for the boys. These skills were also affected in girls by the father-daughter connection. Social skills and emotionality were also affected. (*Family Relations, 35, 141-151*)
- Research (Shirley Hanson, *“Dimensions of Fatherhood”*) found boys often experienced reactive depressions, social incompetency and acting out behaviors after divorce. These effects are often ameliorated if a good joint custody arrangement allows a boy ample time in a good quality connection with his father.
- “Research (Judith Wallerstein, *“The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce”*) indicates that national studies show that children from divorced and remarried families are more aggressive towards their parents and teachers. They experience more depression, have more learning difficulties and suffer from more problems with peers than children from intact families. From the viewpoint of the children, and counter to what happens to their parents, divorce is a cumulative experience. It’s impact increases over time and rises to a crescendo in adulthood. It affects personality, the ability to trust, expectations about relationships, and ability to cope with change. What influences the child are the long term circumstances of life during the post divorce years.”
- Findings from longitudinal studies indicate that the normal stresses of family change that accompany divorce result in the potential to put children at risk for both short and long term distress; however most children grow up to become healthy, well functioning adults leading reasonably healthy lives twenty years later; but it should be noted that 20-25% of children do poorly after divorce and this is significant requiring attention because of the long term repercussions for families.” (*C. Ahrons – “Pathways To A Good Divorce: The Children’s Perspective”*)



“... the child’s need for parents “to be friends enough” as one child puts it, so that “they let each other love us the way we need loving.”

– Marsha Klein- Pruett

Much has been written and researched on the impact of divorce. Many reputable studies are in agreement and others offer a different perspective. As families experience the process of separation/divorce uniquely, not all information and research is applicable to each situation.

- Close to 40% of all Alberta marriages end in divorce, with a higher percentage if common-law couples are included; repeat divorces are accounting for an increase in proportion of all divorces in Canada, having tripled from 1973 to 2003; custody of dependants (children under 18 years) in Canada was granted by the courts in 2003 in 27% of cases – more families are making their own decisions about parenting arrangements than ever before. (*Statistics Canada*)
- Various accounts of the rates of divorce in North America indicate that between 40-48% of the population (including common law relationships) will end in divorce; even higher rates of second and third marriages dissolve (as high as 75%) leaving large numbers of children under the age of 18 living in family configurations other than with two biological parents. (*National Vital Statistics USA/Statistics Canada*)  
“Over one million kids a year are affected by divorce.” (*Pruett, Kyle; Yale Child Study Centre. 2001. “Divorce: Challenge to Fatherhood”*)
- Research recognizes a relationship between parenting practices and outcomes for children; parent education can impact parenting practices  
“Research in Canada and The United States has consistently shown that parenting practices influence a range of childhood outcomes such as aggressive behavior, pro-social behavior, academic achievement and high school completion.” (*The Well-Being of Canada’s Young Children: Government of Canada report 2003: [http://socialunion.gc.ca/ecd/2003/report2\\_e/chapter03\\_e.html](http://socialunion.gc.ca/ecd/2003/report2_e/chapter03_e.html)*)  
“Effective parenting skills can be taught, and an impressive body of evidence shows that supportive education programs, run by effective instructors, and customized to parent’s needs, can change adverse patterns of parent-child interactions.” (*Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare: [www.cecw-cepb.ca](http://www.cecw-cepb.ca), 2006. 36E, pg. 2*)
- Cooperative co-parenting is recognized as an important factor in helping children adjust to the issues of separation/divorce  
“The two most salient factors associated with positive outcomes of divorce for children and parents are the maintenance of meaningful, active and ongoing relationships between children and both of their parents, and the parent’s ability to minimize conflict and cooperate with each other in regard to parenting and decision-making...” (*Kruk, E. ;1997. “Parenting disputes in divorce: Facilitating the development of parenting plans through parent education and therapeutic family mediation”. In E. Kruk (Ed.), Mediation and conflict resolution in social work and the human services. Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall, 55 – 79*)

## Important Statistics, Facts, Research (updated)

- “Parental Alienation Syndrome” (PAS) is a term first used by Dr. Richard Gardner to describe a child’s persistent rejection of one parent due to: the conflict/hostility imposed by the other parent unjustifiably as well as the child’s own negative behavior towards that one parent. This estrangement and abandonment from the parent can be emotionally harmful to children. (this only applies if there is truly no neglect/abuse from parents)  
“...work must continue to sensitize the judiciary, lawyers and mental health professionals about PAS...it should be understood that although divorce between spouses is a sad reality in our modern society, it does not imply that children should be divorced from their parents.” (*G. F. Cartwright; McGill University; 2002. Parliamentary Rpt “For The Sake Of The Children”; Ottawa, Canada*)
- Research has demonstrated that in most cases, co-parenting is important to children as they benefit from both a mother’s and father’s style of parenting in every stage of development, but particularly in the early formative years of life. (*Kyle Pruett; “Fatherneed: Why Father care is as Essential as Mother Care For Your Child”*)

The importance of father engagement is well illustrated:

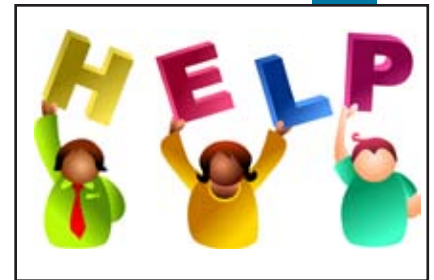
“Father’s involvement has been shown in research to have the potential to impact child development, child survival and health, and the child’s emerging capacity to become an effective parent for the next generation” (*Fathers’ Contributions to Children’s Well-Being – Ball, Moselle, 2007 – Father Involvement Initiative, Ontario Network*)

“Mothers and fathers are important resources for children...good parenting by non-custodial parents matters. The amount of contact between the nonresidential father and their children is not the determining factor; it is the quality of the father-child relationship that matters. (*Robert Hughes Jr.; University of Illinois Extension; 2005. “The Effects of Divorce on Children”*)

- In 1967, two researchers Holmes and Rahe, devised a scale of stressful life events called “The Social Readjustment Rating Scale” (*updated in 1997 by Miller and Rahe*); divorce ranked almost at the top, closely to the death of a spouse or close family member; it is recognized that stress poses risks for health and well-being by individual responses and management; children as adults may experience stress as a result of the changes experienced through separation/ divorce  
“To a greater degree than most of us realize, it really is up to us to protect ourselves and our families from the fallout of unmanaged stress.” (*M. Gary Neuman; 1998. “Helping Your Kids Cope With Divorce The Sandcastles Way”*)
- Parenting plans are written agreements developed between co-parents that outline a: “blueprint” for the living arrangements and day to day life schedules of the children and co-parenting responsibilities and duties of managing children through separation/divorce; professionals can make significant contributions to the design of these documents to ensure that they offer flexibility and mechanisms for conflict management and regular review. (*Joan Kelly and Robert Emery are noted resources for their research in this area*)

## For Children of Separation/Divorce: Help for all Ages

- “There are no hard and fast rules about joint parenting; various configurations work- it all depends on multiple factors such as the child’s age/stage, the parent’s communication, varied individual circumstances, external resources such as extended family, community involvement, time available for the children; the most important issue is that the children need to be connected with both parents.” (C. Ahrons – *“Pathways To A Good Divorce: The Children’s Perspective”*)
- Reassure your child often that the separation/divorce is not their fault. Reassure them that both parents still love them, even when living apart. Be frank and honest about the divorce, through using age appropriate discussions.
- Don’t talk negatively with anger about your co-parent. If you can’t talk positively, limit what you say. It is all right to acknowledge your disagreement and frustration with the other parent, as long as the child knows that they can feel/think differently.
- Parents should avoid arguing in front of the children, so they won’t learn that differences are resolved by yelling and fighting. Silence and retreat can be a form of anger that may be unhelpful and unproductive. Strive for a low conflict separation/divorce.
- Make special time and efforts to maintain individual relationships with each child.
- Assure your child that it is all right to love each parent. Don’t put your child in a position of divided loyalties or having to choose sides.
- Do not compare your child to your “ex” in anger or with put-downs.
- Do not blame your child’s anxieties, fears or problems on the distant/absent parent. Help your child express their feelings about the separation/divorce.
- Help your children to not feel shame/blame about the divorce. A divorced home does not make you, them or your family a failure.
- Do not make your child a messenger between you and your co-parent. Don’t ask your child to play “spy games” about the other household.



“Reassure your child that it is all right to love each parent. Don’t put your child in a position of divided loyalties or having to choose sides.”

– Elaine and Sandy

## Best Help for Any Age (continued)

- Do let your child's teachers know about the separation/divorce so they can be aware of your child's feelings and behaviors and are able to deal with issues as they arise.
- Make as few changes as possible in your child's life and routines. Strive for consistency and predictability.
- Allocate family chores in such a way as not to overburden each child. Children should not be asked to compensate for a distant/absent parent.
- Encourage your child to resume their normal activities/lifestyle whenever possible.
- Acknowledge your child's feelings about separation/divorce including their fantasy wishes for a reunited family, but don't offer false hope or angry denials.
- Try to maintain as much emotional control as you can. The more stable the custodial parent is, the better adjusted the children will be.
- Don't turn your children into "adult confidantes". Keep boundaries between parent and child roles clear so children do not "caretake" for parents.
- Treat your "ex" as a new business partner. Keep the emotionality out and stick to dealing with facts and logistics.
- Provide regular contact/access for children to both parents and both parent's homes.
- Ensure you have support for yourself in a variety of ways. Self care will help your children!



"It is important to acknowledge your child's feelings about separation/divorce."

– Elaine and Sandy

### The Importance of Resilient Children

"Resilience is not what happens to children, but how they respond to what happens to them that is important; this includes their ability to adapt to changes, apply their reserves to overcome obstacles and seek out other avenues and adults for support. To build resilience, give children skills, support, ask what they need and give them hope."

– C. Ahrons – *"Pathways To A Good Divorce: The Children's Perspective"*



## Helping Kids Through Separation/Divorce (updated)

- The way in which parents manage their separation/divorce impacts their children; each individual can make a difference by their OWN choice of behaviors
- In separation/divorce, co-parents need to shift their former intimate relationship to that of neutral business associates linked for the long-term in the “business of co-parenting”
- Children’s needs and feelings should be a priority; they require reassurance that they are loved by both parents and belong to both parents and extended families
- Giving kids permission and opportunities to be attached and to maintain relationships with both parents/families is important to their well being and growth/development (*\*some exceptions: family violence, substance abuse, profound mental health issues*)
- Conflict is typically a part of separation/divorce; how it is managed has an impact on outcomes for children; kids need to be kept out of “adult issues” including parent conflict and encouraged to regain and resume their own life pursuits to meet their developmental ages/stages
- Most often children view separation/divorce differently than the adults involved as they do not always see it as a way of improving their life; parents can be sensitive to this difference in perspective
- Children need understanding and guidance to manage and communicate their unique feelings and behaviors through the process of separation/divorce
- Shame, blame and embarrassment are feelings that children may express; they need reassurance and age appropriate explanations that separation/divorce is not their fault
- Attention to the variety of loss/grief reactions of both adults and kids is important through separation/divorce; Examples: sadness, anxiety, fear, anger and feeling physically unwell
- Parents may be less available for their children particularly in the first year of separation/divorce (*“diminished parenting”*); this may negatively impact kids outcomes as they need their parents most at this time of change and transitions
- When possible, minimizing and “pacing” the multiple changes in their lives as a result of the separation/divorce is helpful for kids; strive for predictability and routines
- Transitioning between two households can be difficult for some children; each parent can help their children to manage this challenge with sensitivity, organization and support
- A Parenting Plan is an essential working document that helps provide a framework for adults and children to manage the separation/divorce; a detailed plan that is reviewed regularly helps address the family’s changing needs
- An individual’s influence and/or control with their co-parent is typically limited; their focus and energy is better placed on developing a consistent life with their children in their own home

## Telling Children About Separation/Divorce: Recommended Guidelines For Parents (updated)

The configuration of your family is changing with plans for a separation/divorce. To help children's adjustment, it is best if parents give carefully planned information. General explanations of what is happening, information of what changes are to come and how they will be impacted, and opportunities to ask questions and express their feelings are all important details. Even though this may be a stressful conversation for adults and children, how parents communicate at this time is helpful in setting a tone for the future. In some situations, the services of a counselor, clergy, trusted but impartial third party may be considered.

- Once parents have made their decision to separate, they need to take time to consider how, when and where to tell their children; it is ideal if the news can be shared prior to a physical separation, but not too far prior to a move; it is best if parents prepare their conversation in advance, and agree to tell the children together with an understanding to put aside their feelings of anger in order to be sensitive first and foremost to the children and their needs
- The setting should be in a private place, often at home, where children can feel most comfortable with minimum interruptions; siblings should be gathered together to encourage a feeling of "family" with parents using "we" when making explanations about decisions that were made; in the case of children of different ages/stages, parents may need to plan for follow up conversations to offer more pertinent details and opportunities for discussion with older children
- It is very important for parents to use a calm tone without angry accusations, never undermining each parent's love/ relationship with the children; it is helpful for children to know that the decision has been carefully considered and that the parents understand that the children may feel hurt/sad with the news; time should be planned to allow for children's reactions, to encourage questions and for sharing feelings
- Children need simple explanations about the decision to separate/divorce, as too much information can be overwhelming; personal adult issues and details should not be included; young children need simple and concrete concepts; explanation examples: "we are angry with each other/often fighting and because this is not a good way for adults or children to live, we are choosing to live apart"; "we are not happy and don't love each other anymore and can't make it better, so we are making this decision"
- Reassuring children that they are always and will continued to be loved by both parents is critical; children need to know that separation/divorce is a "grown-up" issue between adults, and that they are not to blame or responsible in any way; it is important to give permission for children to love, connect and interact with both parents and/or extended family into the future (unless family violence, substance abuse, mental health issues which require professional intervention and direction)
- Telling children what the separation/divorce means to them in concrete terms is important; offering details about what will change and what will not change in the family routines, schedules etc. helps children begin to acknowledge the reality of the situation; depending on age, providing too many details at one time may be too difficult to absorb and therefore on-going discussions are essential
- Allowing children's questions and expression of feelings is vital to their adjustment to the process of separation/divorce (even though this may be uncomfortable for parents); giving them permission to ask more questions and encouraging discussion into the future helps to create open communication within the family; it is important to let children know that adjusting to this news takes time, that the conversations will continue and that both parents will be there to help them through the challenges

## ***Bill Of Rights For Children Whose Parents Are Divorced***

### **Children have the right to:**

- Know the truth about your divorce, with simple explanations
- Be protected from the parental warfare
- Develop and maintain an independent relationship with each parent
- Be free from having to take sides with, defend, or denigrate either parent
- Be free of responsibility for having caused the divorce
- Be reassured that they are not to blame
- Be free from having to take over parental responsibilities! A child can't become the "man of the house" or "the little mother"
- Expect that both parents will follow through with the parenting plan and honor specific commitments for scheduled time with their child
- Receive love, guidance, patience, understanding, and limits from their parents
- Spend time with each parent, regardless of financial support
- Be financially supported by both parents regardless of how much time is spent with either parent
- Maintain privacy when talking to either parent on the telephone
- Have a personal sleeping area and space for possessions in each parent's home
- Participate in age-appropriate activities so long as those activities do not significantly impair their relationship with either parent
- Avoid being told the painful details of their parent's legal proceedings
- Avoid being made to feel guilty for loving both parents
- Avoid making the custody/visitation decisions
- Avoid being cross-examined by one parent after spending time with the other parent
- Not to be used as a messenger or spy between the parents
- Not to be asked to keep secrets from the other parent

*Stahl, Philip Michael, Parenting After Divorce: A Guide to Resolving Conflicts and Meeting Your Children's Needs. Page 12.*

### ***My Decision for Effective Co-Parenting: Maintaining Boundaries***

To ensure the best possible adjustment of children to separation/divorce, parents must recognize that they have a changed role with their co-parent which is focused solely on their children and their shared co-parenting. They must let go of their previous “marital/partner” role and their past relationship. The goal is for co-parents to regard one another as “separate caring parents” of their children, engaged in the business of shared parenting.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, mother/father of \_\_\_\_\_, have decided to make my children a priority in this separation/divorce, and thereby commit to:

Doing whatever I can do, to reduce anger/conflict with my co-parent and learn new skills to manage problems and situations as they arise.

Develop a business relationship with the other parent: working cooperatively to co-parent, even though we may not always agree and recognizing that the only areas of influence are on important issues to do with the children.

I will honor and encourage my children to have a relationship with their other parent, and their extended families.

I will undertake to develop self-care strategies and healthy support systems that increase my own sense of well-being in order to meet the challenges of my present situation.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

# Homework

## Week #1

### Homework

Please Think About And Answer The Following Questions:

1. What do your kids “say” about their feelings/thoughts about your separation/divorce?

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2. What do you notice about their “behavior” that may say what they feel/think about your separation/divorce?

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3. Complete the exercise: “My Decision For Effective Co-Parenting: Maintaining Boundaries”

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Reflections, comments, questions

1. What was the most valuable information you received this week?

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2. From this week's learnings what do I need to change in order to support my children?

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## Week #2

# What Children Need: Encouraging Access to Both Parents

“It is a wise father that  
knows his own child.”

– William Shakespeare



*“Learning and understanding what your  
child’s needs are at each age/stage of  
development will allow you to help them  
cope with separation/divorce”.*

– Elaine and Sandy

## Week Two

### Goals

- ✓ To inform participants about the typical ages/stages of child development through separation/divorce.
- ✓ To sensitize parents to what children need by their age/stage of development during the process of separation/divorce.
- ✓ To assist parents to identify and understand the age/stage of their own children.
- ✓ To continue to offer participants strategies for observation and management of their own children's needs through separation/divorce.
- ✓ Personal Goals: \_\_\_\_\_



### Agenda

- ✓ Welcome: goals, agenda for week #2.
- ✓ Homework review from week #1 - group discussion.
- ✓ Topic: Ages/stages of children's development through separation/divorce.
- ✓ Learning Exercise:
  - What children need at different ages/stages.
  - How children respond at different ages/stages.
- ✓ Topic: Developmental tasks for children to complete through process of separation/divorce.
- ✓ Handouts and Homework.
- ✓ Group Closing.





# Assignment

**Learning Objective:** The learning exercises completed in Week #2 are designed to help participants become more knowledgeable about the developmental ages/stages of children as they move through separation/divorce, to identify where their children may be in this process and how best to support their needs.

## Week #2

### Learning Exercise #1

In the large group, participants will be asked to share their responses to the homework questions assigned from Week #1:

1. What do your kids “say” about their feelings/thoughts about your separation/divorce?
2. What do you notice about their “behavior” that may say what they feel/think about your separation/divorce?
3. As a result of the first session, what might you do differently to help your child better manage the process of your separation/divorce?

The facilitators will guide the discussion.

## Week #2

### Learning Exercise #2

Participants will be put into three groups according to ages of children.  
0-5 years, 6-12 years and 12 years and older

Each group will be asked to identify possible stress reactions children may typically experience in this age group as a result of separation/divorce.

Groups will be asked to record their thoughts on the above-noted questions on flip chart paper and bring back their responses to be discussed in the large group.



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# Age Specific Reactions To Parents' Separation/divorce

*Note: All of the ages/stages are guidelines only; some children may or may not experience these behaviors and reactions;*

## Infants and Toddlers:

0 – 2  
years old

### **Sensitive to feeling tones from caregivers**

- least able to understand what is wrong or is happening e.g. if the parent is angry/hurt, the child senses that and will react to the parent's feeling.

### **Changes in eating and behavior**

- food refusal, digestive upsets, toileting and sleep patterns may change.

### **Confusion/uncertainty**

- behavior becomes erratic; clinging behavior.

### **Fear/upset**

- aggressiveness towards playmates, toys or caregiver, temper tantrums may increase.

### **Anxiety**

- increase in crying, whining, afraid to be left (increased separation anxiety); detachment and less response to parents overtures.

- Need:**
- Consistent routines and daily rituals in each parents' home.
  - Reliable attention and demonstrations of love.
  - Frequent contact with non-custodial parent to maintain attachment.
  - Consistency of care with the primary caretaker.
  - Sensitivity to transition times.
  - Symbols of comfort.

## Three to Five Years:

3 – 5  
years old

### **Confusion**

- lack of understanding of the events around them.
- may be first traumatic event to experience.
- difficulty distinguishing reality/fantasy.
- dependability of human relationships shaken.

### **Fear**

- parents may leave, not return (abandonment).
- parents may not care for them.
- reaction to separations from custodial parent i.e. clinging, tantrums.

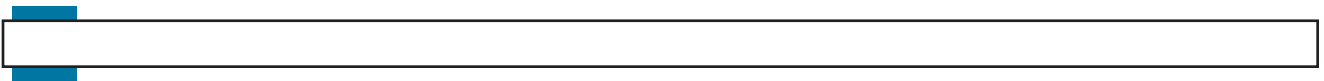
### **Guilt**

- egocentric view of world leads to self-blame and feelings of responsibility, may lead to attempts to control whatever they believe they can control i.e. food/toileting.

# Understanding Children's Behavior Through Separation/Divorce (updated)

“At one time or another, every parent becomes concerned about a child’s behavior... For parents who divorce, the line between normal, typical behaviors and those that are extreme, abnormal, or cause for concern can blur. No wonder single, divorced parents tend to swing between two extremes: either attributing every problem to “the divorce” or dismissing every problem and chalking it up to their child’s current phase {of development}. Unfortunately children’s developmental changes and phases do not go on hold while they try to sort out their divorce experience.” (Neuman, M. Gary. “*Helping Your Kids Cope With Divorce: the Sandcastles Way*”, pg. 41)

- Children’s behavior is a method of communication; their behavior offers clues as to how they are managing the typical developmental tasks of growing up and how they are coping with their unique issues of separation/divorce
- When language and thinking skills are not fully developed or when children are unaware or unable to express what they are thinking or feeling, their behavior sends a message about who and how they are, or if they are in distress
- No two children are the same, each child is unique; child development varies based on a child’s own temperament/personality, parent and environmental influence, health and physical uniqueness, daily experiences as examples; each child develops at their own pace so there can be a wide range of differences in developmental behaviors
- As with typical child development there are differences in children’s behavioral reactions to separation/divorce; many variables impact how a child will respond including their temperament, age/stage of typical development, mother and father’s co-parenting style, family conflict, support and protective factors for the child, to list some examples
- Children may react through their behavior to the variety of changes in their lives and to the loss and stress that accompany separation/divorce; many of these responses can be expected and are typical when dealing with this time of transition, disorder and hurt
- Parents are in a very important position to observe carefully signs and signals from their children that may indicate stress reactions during the process of separation/divorce; becoming familiar with typical reactions of most children will help parents to better understand their own children and then seek outside intervention, support, help as needed
- When parents are attentive to their children’s behavior, they are in a position to carefully determine what is age/stage appropriate, what may be typical for their child’s own temperament and personality and what is a predicted response for children who experience separation/divorce
- Often pronounced changes in a child’s typical behavior may be indicative of their difficulty in coping with separation/divorce; changes in the following areas of a child’s life should be carefully considered by parents when assessing the impact of separation/divorce on their children: eating, sleeping, toileting, health, attentiveness, activities/interests, school behavior and performance, relationships (with family, friends, caregivers, school) general attitude and behavior (passive, aggressive, withdrawn)



## Age Specific Reactions To Parents' Separation/divorce (continued)

### **Fantasy**

- macabre fantasies, e.g. Daddy eaten by bears.
- denial fantasies, e.g. Mommy's gone to work and will be back.
- we will all live happily ever after.

### **Aggression**

- may show increase or may be avoided in order to be “very good” and not cause further problems.

### **Play**

- often play out themes of family togetherness, or may temporarily lose ability to sustain play, or to play with enjoyment, may have issues of play with peers.

### **Regression**

- child's established behaviors may regress i.e. sleep, food, toileting.

### **Need:**

- Explanations suited to age.
- Reassurance about daily routines, and the permanence of the parent-child relationship.
- Extra comfort and frequent one-to-one time with each parent.
- Explanation to child of what will change/won't change in their environment.
- Visual aids to keep planning/visitation organized.
- Sensitivity to transition times.

## Six – Eight Years:

### **Grief**

- sadness, feel empty inside, a better understanding of their world leads to more concern/worry.

### **Fear**

- behavior may be more disorganized; unrealistic fantasies of being left alone/sent away; fear of no place to sleep-no food; fear of losing parents.

### **Anger**

- often displaced to siblings, peers, objects; may demonstrate impulsive behaviors and/or aggression which may not be expressed to parents for fear of abandonment, blaming parent/situation for their difficulties in school/sports.

### **Fantasy**

- strong reconciliation wish and can believe and tell stories to others that the family is intact.

### **Guilt**

- self blame; over-responsibility for the parent's separation.

### **Loyalty Conflicts**

- who's right, who's telling the truth; feeling caught in the middle.

6 – 8  
years old

## Age Specific Reactions To Parents Separation/divorce (continued)

### **Yearning for Non-custodial parent**

- idealizing absent/distant parent.
- attempt to replace absent parent, i.e. want new parent, try to be missing parent.

- Need:**
- Explanations, reassurance, comfort.
  - Role models.
  - Demonstrations of love plus time rather than excess toys, or food to fill the emptiness.
  - Permission to be angry and to want both parents.
  - Frequent contact with both parents.

## Nine to Twelve Years:

### **Defended**

- outwardly calm, denial, decision not to think about family separation, constant motion - busyness.

### **Resourceful**

- involvement in age-related activities, school, sports.
- may work harder to counteract powerlessness.
- reach outside family for help to peers/teachers/coach.

### **Embarrassment**

- don't want to be different and may avoid real situation.
- self conscious about what their friends think.

### **Anger**

- more acceptable to demonstrate, than sadness.
- moral indignation as explanation for separation.
- may blame one parent for separation.

### **Alignment with one parent**

- respond to perception of parent's vulnerability.
- loyalty is an important issue in relationship at this age, therefore may choose one parent/side of the family in which to align.

### **Somatic Symptoms**

- headaches, stomach aches, back aches.

### **Shaken Identity**

- self as part of family is gone; question of place and sense of belonging in the family and outer world, self esteem issues.

- Need:**
- Opportunities and permission to express range of feelings, stories, dreams.
  - Activities to invest in to ensure competency.
  - Normal routines and chores.
  - Clear discipline limits.
  - Frequent contact with both parents.
  - Attempting consistency between households.

9 – 12  
years old

## Twelve – Eighteen years:

### **Mourning**

- profound sense of loss of parent/family/childhood.
- emptiness, tearfulness, sadness, grief.
- difficulty concentrating, chronic fatigue, troublesome dreams.
- anxiety about the future; inability to concentrate on own life needs.

### **Anger**

- demonstrating good/bad behavior in different situations – can't maintain consistent demeanor.
- berate/blaming parents for failure.
- cynical about ability of adults to solve problems.
- realization of flaws in parents.

### **Loyalty Conflicts**

- feeling caught in the middle may be very intense.
- may assume burdens of supporting one or other parent.

### **Premature Growing up**

- reverses normal separation process of child leaving parents.
- may take on extra responsibility in a helpful way.
- may make life decisions which can effect them for years i.e. career and school decisions.
- sexual feelings may be stimulated as a result of parents engaging in new relationship.

### **Acting Out**

- may react to parental controls resulting in greater aggression.
- may react to anxiety/instability of situation through acting out.

- Need:**
- Normal routines and chores.
  - Clear limits and consistent discipline.
  - Someone to listen.
  - Open communication with parents.
  - Independence through own life pursuits.
  - Involvement in visitation decisions.

## Over Eighteen years:

- At life cycle events, many of the typical reactions can be triggered: e.g. a wedding or graduation may bring feelings of sadness and yearning for the intact family.
- Young adults may be more cautious about committed relationships; having experienced separation/divorce can make them more aware of the realities and difficulties in family life.
- Even though young adults may be independent, they may continue to be drawn into the parental conflict and loyalty issues; they may experience a greater sense of responsibility for their parents/family.

12 – 18  
years old

18 +  
years old

# Developmental Tasks Of The Child Of Divorce

## I. Acknowledgement of the Reality of Divorce:

The child must understand the family and household changes in reality - who lives where and when. The major obstacle to this task is the child's fear of abandonment, which can be triggered by:

- Parental conflict
- Departure/distance of one parent
- Behavior of parents (perhaps inconsistent with child's previous experience)
- Insecurity of child as to what he/she can count on



### Considerations:

1. The child's own sense of identity can be shaken as identity can be tied to family structure, and dependence on parental presence.
2. The child must adapt to repeated departures, which can rekindle abandonment fears each time he/she leaves one parent to visit another.
3. The child may be aware of the fragility of the relationship with the visiting parent, and may shape his/her behavior to avoid distressing or offending this parent.
4. The child may have concerns for the emotional stability of one or both of his/her parents and their ability to care for him/her as he/she witnesses their grief. He/she can worry, "what if Mommy/Daddy dies, or leaves too?"
5. New parental relationships can intensify the child's fear of losing the parent to another adult.
6. Intense feelings of sorrow, anger and rejection can threaten to overwhelm him/her. The child may need to deny the reality of divorce for a time, until some stability returns to the family. Then he/she may begin to grieve.

"What matters most to kids about their parents through the separation/divorce is parent's reliability (calls, visits, cards), consistency and interest in the child's life (attending school, leisure, sport activities)."

– C. Ahrons – "Pathways To A Good Divorce: The Children's Perspective"





## II. Disengagement from Parental Conflict and Distress and Resuming Customary Pursuits

The child must eventually master his/her anxiety and depression and remove the family crisis from its commanding position in his/her inner world, and make his/her way back to the world of the child. The major obstacle to the resolution of this task is continued parental distress and conflict, usually demonstrated in support and visitation battles.

### Considerations:

1. Continued dispute undermines the return to stability, and may absorb the energy he/she needs for the usual tasks of childhood (e.g. play, friends, school)
2. If the child perceives divorce as a battleground, the child may be paralyzed by conflicting loyalties. Support of one parent may generate in his/her, feelings of guilt and betrayal. The child then can refrain from choosing one parent over another, or can try to not show "love" to one parent over another, and may become lonely and isolated. His/her feelings of powerlessness may increase.
3. Some children become very involved in the marital conflict, reporting stories and misdemeanors from one household to the other. This keeps the marital battle alive.
4. Some children can become overly responsible for their own or siblings upbringing. This can tax him/her beyond his/her capacities, or cause him/her to miss important childhood developmental tasks.

"Emotional highs and lows, divided loyalties, feelings of rejection and powerlessness, and a need to assert some autonomous control over events, all feature in children's accounts of what it is like when parents split up."

– Butler, Scanlan, Robinson, Douglas, Murch, "Divorcing Children"

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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### III. Resolution of Loss

The task of absorbing loss is the most difficult. The child experiences multiple losses:

- one parent gone from the family home.
- familiar daily routines changed.
- traditions and rituals changed.
- security – financial losses.
- continuity of an intact family, and beliefs and dreams associated with it.
- protective physical presence of two parents.
- may be a loss of home, school, neighborhood, friends, relatives.



#### Considerations:

1. Mourning losses can help the child overcome a sense of rejection, feeling loved and powerless. This may involve resolving denial, anger, guilt, and depression, and is an important process to complete.
2. Even if the departed parent had poor or infrequent contact with the child, the parting or the fantasy the child holds, will be mourned by the child.
3. Children may hold reconciliation fantasies for years – often even after parents remarry.

### IV. Resolving Anger and Self-Blame

Children know divorce is voluntary. They must come to terms with blaming one or both parents or themselves. An obstacle to this phase, is the inability of parents to appropriately allow, or deal with, their child's anger and pain.

#### Considerations:

1. Children age eight and over can often experience intense and long lasting anger, as they disapprove of the conduct of one or both parents. They are often very rigidly moralistic at this age.
2. Anger can be directed toward one or both parents because of the child's perception that the parent is doing what they want, and not being responsive to the wishes of the child for an intact family.
3. Anger can be turned inwards for believing they somehow caused or contributed to the divorce, or because they have failed to reconcile their parents.

## Developmental Tasks Of The Child Of Divorce (continued)

4. Anger can be held by the child until they are older and able to understand some of the reasons for the separation/divorce and to develop the ability to see differences between their parents.
5. Some children become increasingly compliant as they are fearful of upsetting or losing already stressed parents. They need to be helped to recognize and deal with their own losses and resentments.

### V. Accepting the Permanence of Divorce

In the child, the reconciliation fantasy may be significant and lasting. It is often not until adolescence, when the separation between parent and child naturally occurs, that the child accepts the finality of divorce.

#### Considerations:

1. Reconciliation fantasies help to ward off painful feelings of sadness and loss. Children need to be helped by first, letting them know it is all right to be sad.
2. Children must establish adaptive relationships with parents' new partners. They will often compete with new partners for a secure relationship with the parent, or reject them out of loyalty to the other parent.



### VI. Moving Forward in their Own Relationships

Children need to come to terms with their feelings of anxiety, cynicism, fear about personal relationships in the future.

#### Considerations:

1. Children may be doubtful about the possibility of permanence in relationships because of their experience with the way adults handled conflict in separation/divorce.

*(Adapted: S.Shuler, E.Bucknum; Jewish Family Service Calgary 2002)*

## Common Feelings And Reactions Expressed By Children Of All Ages

- Kids fear abandonment and loss and are concerned about who will care for them.
- Kids fantasize about a re-united family and often have difficulty accepting that this won't happen for them.
- In spite of reassurances, kids often believe they are the cause of the divorce and if they had been "better", it may not have happened.
- Children have a range of feelings and behaviors about not being listened to.
- Kids fear and have a hard time coping with anger between parents.
- Kids will demonstrate different behaviors including sacrificing their own needs to please and gain parental approval to support parent's emotional needs.
- Kids feel uncomfortable about being placed in the role of messenger or being caught in between both parents.
- At various times, kids struggle with moving and transitioning between two homes.
- Children of divorced households may worry about being different from peers from intact families.



### POINTS TO CONSIDER:

- Even though the child may not verbalize it, it doesn't mean the thought/feeling isn't there.
- Some fears are uncomfortable; verbalizing them may make it more threatening.
- Through life we all experience a range of feelings as a response to situations such as loss, anger, frustration. Parents shouldn't try to make these feelings disappear, but rather give permission for these feelings to be expressed, explored and discussed.
- It is important to normalize the process of divorce for kids, so they understand their feelings, thoughts, reactions, and know they are typical of all kids in similar situations.
- Having siblings can help "buffer" the effects of coping with issues of divorce as though there is a shared alliance; caution –over responsibility of one child caring for others where they become the adult/leader.
- Your child's own resiliency and temperament are factors in reactions to divorce. Some kids are simply more resilient and less reactive than others.
- Extended family who are willing to be supportive in the divorce can play a large role in helping "fill in the gaps" for children coping with this situation.

"Give children permission to express, explore and discuss their range of feelings."  
– Elaine and Sandy

# Creating a Legacy of Love

For Your Child in the Midst of Change brought about by Divorce

## Meeting your child's need for love and attention

By Dr. Beth Hedva, *"The Journey From Betrayal to Trust"* excerpt copyright 1995.

During the time of divorce and separation, children's need for love and attention increases. At the same time, it may be more difficult for you to provide this for your child. Children benefit when parents provide them with regular scheduled "special time". For example, scheduling 30 minutes with your child three times a week will provide your child with a predictable time that he/she can spend time with you. The following ground rules will help you to use the time in a way that will benefit your child.



1. Spend time in a place where you will not be interrupted. Do not answer the phone or turn on the television during this special time. Instead, read a favorite story together or play a game of the child's choosing. The idea is for the parent to give the child undivided attention and follow the child's wishes and interests as much as possible.
2. During the special time, parents should tell children they love them and how much they enjoy being with them. For example, "I am really glad we have this time when just you and I can be together. I like it when we can be close and have fun together like this. Do you know how much I miss you when I am away at work?"
3. The parent must praise the child for at least one thing he or she has done recently that the child appreciated or took pride in. For example, "I was really proud of you helping your brother with his homework last night". Even if you are thinking about the six things your child has just done that you didn't like, use this time to acknowledge what you have appreciated.
4. Save discussion of discipline problems or other causes of parental unhappiness for another time. This period is a time for affection, sharing and play.
5. Ensure that you meet your child's needs for physical affection during this time as well.

# Relationship FAQ

## How can we help our children adjust to separation or divorce?

### How conflict affects your kids

Separation and divorce are marriage transitions in the history of a family. Parents always want to know if it will damage their children emotionally. The honest answer is – it depends. We know for sure that kids are resilient. They can adjust to all kinds of changes in their living conditions. However, the one thing that severely damages them is ongoing conflict.

Too often, separation and divorce can make the parents fight even more than before. Now, on top of everything else they used to fight about, parents might argue about things like custody, visitation schedules, support cheques, how late the kids stayed up, and who is going to pay the dentist.

This puts the kids right in the centre of the war. They may think their parents' problems are their fault. This is an unbearable weight for them to carry. Ongoing conflict is very destructive to them.

### What parents can do

Here are some ways you can make the transition easier on your child:

1. Resolve to put the children's needs first.
2. Separate your partner's role as a spouse from their role as a parent.  
If you can't get along when you're together, make it businesslike:
  - Be polite, not emotional.
  - Set meetings with specific agendas.
  - Agree on clear contracts about who does what, when.
3. Attend a course for separated and divorced parents. Go separately, if necessary.
4. Remember that the children love and need both parents in their lives.  
Criticizing the other parent hurts the children, not the other parent. Encourage their relationship with the other parent.
5. Be patient.  
It takes time for children to adjust to all the changes. They may need to cope with:
  - new living arrangements
  - losing the daily contact with their other parent
  - moving to a new home
  - making new friends
  - living with different people.
6. Help your children understand that emotions they feel about what is happening are normal.  
For example, they may act out their emotions by being aggressive. This is not okay, but the emotions behind it are real and normal. Help them find healthy ways to express their feelings. They might want to try:
  - running
  - dancing
  - drawing
  - writing in a journal
  - talking to a counsellor.

### Additional sources of information

#### Print Resources:

Parenting through separation and divorce (BC Council for Families)

Parenting after separation and divorce (BC Council for Families)

Helping children cope with divorce by Edward Teyber.

#### Web Resources:

The Ark: children of loss: separation, divorce & death <http://modena.intergate.ca/business/theark/>

Children and separation: a guide for parents [http://www.familycourt.gov.au/html/parent\\_guide.html](http://www.familycourt.gov.au/html/parent_guide.html)

Focus on kids: the effects of divorce on children <http://www.npin.org/library/2001/n00546/n00546.html>

Single & custodial father's network <http://www.scfn.org/>

Supportive ideas for raising your child in separate homes [http://www.cfc-efc.ca/docs/fscan/00001\\_en.htm](http://www.cfc-efc.ca/docs/fscan/00001_en.htm)

This FAQ is one of a series prepared in association with the Canadian Health Network to address frequently asked questions about relationships. For a complete list of available FAQs and other resources, please contact us for a free publications catalogue.

**BC Council for Families** 204-2590 Granville Street, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6H 3H1  
604-660-0675 or 1-800-663-5638 (in Canada/USA) E-mail: [bccf@bccf.bc.ca](mailto:bccf@bccf.bc.ca) [www.bccf.bc.ca](http://www.bccf.bc.ca)

# Homework

## Week #2

### Homework

**Please Think About And Answer The Following Questions:**

1. Where do you see your child(ren) in the various ages/stages?

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2. What responses (behaviors, feelings) do you notice in your child(ren) as a result of separation/divorce?

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3. What do you think your child(ren) may need to assist them through the process of separation/divorce?

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4. As a result of the first two weeks of this program, what might you be doing differently to help your child(ren)?

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Reflections, comments, questions

1. What was the most valuable information you received this week?

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2. From this week's learnings what do I need to change in order to support my children?

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## Week #3

# The Effects of Diminished Parenting and the Impact of Loss

“You must be the change  
you wish to see in the world.”

– Mahatma Gandhi



*“Each co-parent has the power to make  
changes in their own household that  
impact their child’s adjustment to  
separation/divorce.”*

– Elaine and Sandy

## Week Three

### Goals

- ✓ To provide information on factors that contribute to diminished parenting.
- ✓ To assist participants to understand the grief/loss cycle as it applies to separation/loss.
- ✓ To create awareness for participants as to where they and their children may be in the process.
- ✓ To help participants develop methods of self-care and self-nurturing.
- ✓ To continue to offer participants strategies for assisting and supporting their children through separation/divorce.
- ✓ Personal Goals: \_\_\_\_\_



### Agenda

- ✓ Welcome: goals, agenda for week #3.
- ✓ Homework review from week #2 - group discussion.
- ✓ Topic: “Diminished Parenting During Separation/divorce”.
- ✓ Learning Exercise: Factors/barriers that prevent adults from meeting children’s needs.
- ✓ Topic: “The Loss/Grief Cycle”.
- ✓ Learning Exercise: Coping strategies for the loss and grief process.
- ✓ Handouts and Homework.
- ✓ Group Closing.



# Assignment

**Learning Objective:** The learning exercises completed by participants in Week #3 are designed to inform participants about what factors including loss/grief, impact children through separation/divorce and what self-care strategies may be implemented to assist families.

## Week #3

### Learning Exercise #1

In the large group, participants will be asked to share their responses to the homework questions assigned from Week #2:

1. Where do you see your child(ren) in the various ages/stages?
2. What responses (behaviors, feelings) do you notice your child(ren) may be having as a result of separation/divorce?
3. What do you think your child(ren) may need to assist them through the process of separation/divorce?
4. As a result of the first two weeks of this program, what might you be doing differently to help your child(ren)?



The facilitators will guide the discussion.

## Week #3

### Learning Exercise #2

Participants will be divided into two groups and will be asked to develop a list of factors and barriers that may prevent parents/adults from meeting and addressing their children's needs during the process of separation/divorce.

Groups will be asked to record their thoughts on flip chart paper and bring back their responses to be discussed in the large group.

## Week #3

### Learning Exercise #3

In the large group, the facilitators will ask the participants to identify some strategies that parents/adults may use to support their coping with diminished parenting and issues of loss/grief.

# Diminished Parenting During Separation/divorce

Separation/divorce brings life changes with consequences that may be short-term, life-long or anywhere in between. For some, it can be a welcome calm in the face of stormy years. For many it brings a whirlwind of immediate changes and adaptations often on a bumpy road en-route to a new way of life.

The disruption and turmoil, and the variety and intensity of emotions that must be dealt with as a result of separation/divorce, has a direct and specific impact not only on the children, but on the adult's ability to parent. A parent's preoccupation with their own needs, distresses and survival issues can often blunt their sensitivity to their child's needs, and reduce the amount of energy available for children. This is a transition, and often these changes are not permanent and can be minimized to ensure the parent/child relationship is not compromised and that the child's ability to cope through separation/divorce is supported and enhanced.



Research informs us that secure attachment is associated with a more positive sense of self and the building of trust through the development of a secure base. The presence of an attachment figure (parent, parents) provides comfort and security allowing children to build throughout their life. Significant diminished parenting over time may impact this feeling of attachment and affect children's ability to manage their lives.

## Examples Of Diminished Parenting that may be experienced during separation/divorce:

1. Decreased "availability" of parent (emotionally and/or physically) – less play, less talk, fewer shared pleasures and leisure time.
2. Greater difficulty attending to child's needs and emotions (feelings of guilt, pain and inadequacy in dealing with children's feelings, may cause the parent to avoid the child or deny the impact of the separation/divorce on the child.)
3. Increased dependence on child by adult to fulfill a wide range of adult/parental needs – both emotional and physical.
4. Decrease or increase in consistent, predictable forms of discipline.
5. Increase in expressions of anger and other heightened emotions sometimes inappropriately.

"A parent's preoccupation with their own needs can often blunt their sensitivity to their child's needs."

– Elaine and Sandy

## Diminished Parenting During Separation/divorce (continued)

6. Ambivalence towards the child – though the child is loved, he/she may be viewed as an economic, social, psychological burden or a reminder of a “faulty” marriage.
7. A state of disorganization/imbalance may affect the family, and a change in the parents behaviors or changed routines may upset the child.
8. Persistent couple conflict contributes to an environment of instability and turmoil for the child which may compromise their sense of safety and equilibrium.
9. A loss of financial status may contribute to a change in the family’s accustomed lifestyle.
10. A change in home environments/neighborhoods/ community may contribute to a child feeling less safe and familiar in day to day life.
11. A parent’s change in work and routine due to financial needs may impact a child’s adjustment.
12. A parent’s new “single parent” status may bring implications to the family with diminished support systems and resources for everyday life.



Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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“Persistent conflict creates an environment of instability for the child, compromising their sense of equilibrium.”  
– Elaine and Sandy

# The Loss/ Grief Cycle: Separation/divorce

- Separation/divorce is not a single event, but rather part of a process that has taken place over time.
- The process evolves over a period of disillusionment to a point of separation, divorce and adjustment to a new family configuration.
- In most cases, there is a profound feeling of loss for the marriage. But this loss is not just about the intact family, it is also about the loss of dreams, hopes and aspirations associated with the couple and the family.
- Other losses may be experienced, for example, diminished finances, changes in relationships with extended families and friends, changes in residence/geographic locale, changes in social status, changes in shared parenting responsibilities.



Stages in the loss cycle and associated adult reactions may include:

1. **Pre-divorce and separation stage:** disillusionment, ambivalence, decreased self-esteem, feelings of alienation, inadequacy, increased anxiety, hurt and fear.
2. **During divorce/mediation/litigation/negotiation stage:** depression, confusion, feelings of love-hate, anger, loneliness, helplessness, guilt, blame/vengeance, betrayal, fear of the unknown, worry about survival issues, loss of power and control.
3. **Post-divorce and stabilization stage:** relief, optimism, some regret, autonomy/regained control, resignation, acceptance, hope.

- The stages of disengagement include (1) shock and disbelief, (2) initial adjustment, (3) active re-organization, and (4) life re-formation (Rich, 1999). The process is not linear and as the children grow and develop, their needs may reactivate the stages. One's reaction to loss/grief is a unique, individual response and reaction.

- There is no specific order to the stages in the grief cycle, and a person may often return to a previous stage or go through the cycle several times.
- The loss/grief cycle is similar to Elizabeth Kubler-Ross stages identified in "death/dying" as: Denial; Bargaining; Anger; Depression; Acceptance.

"There are many losses that are experienced through the process of separation/divorce."

– Elaine and Sandy

## The Loss/ Grief Cycle: Separation/divorce (continued)

### The Loss/grief Cycle: Separation/divorce

The cycle of loss and grief is depicted as a cycle because loss is a process, not a straight line from one point to the next, and the “process” may come each time an event triggers the feelings. As time goes by, the cycle usually is of shorter duration and with not as much emotional intensity

The following reactions may be experienced:

#### Shock:

- often physically seen as slowed motor responses e.g. walk, talk slower often emotionally demonstrated as denial, a person not acknowledging or perhaps minimizing the expected changes that come with separation/divorce.

#### Anguish:

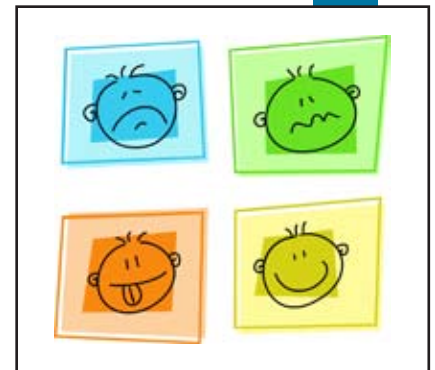
- often physically seen as the person being immobilized e.g. knows what to do, but can not do it.
- often emotionally demonstrated as anger, deep hurt, fear, guilt and possible depression.

#### Detachment:

- often physically seen as not participating in decisions, may not remember details, not be punctual, or inability to follow through on agreements.
- often emotionally demonstrated as emotionally numb, hopeless, or “not having any feelings”.
- depression is often a factor in this stage.

#### Re-engagement:

- often physically seen as energized, wants to get things settled and participate in their own and children’s lives and may want to re-visit previously settled agreements re: access, education etc. often emotionally demonstrated as articulate with feelings of anger, guilt and deep hurt; takes issue with current co-parenting arrangements.



“One’s reaction to loss and grief is a unique and individual response.”

– Elaine and Sandy

## The Loss/ Grief Cycle: Separation/divorce (continued)

### The tasks for adults to heal from the experience of separation/divorce include:

1. To let go of the past including the dreams, hopes, aspirations.
2. To understand/accept that one's co- parent may not be in one's influence and control.
3. To make peace with one's own new reality of life.
4. To make positive changes and focus on one's own life.
5. To work through issues regarding the children as they present, into the future.
6. To have hope and a plan for one's own future.



Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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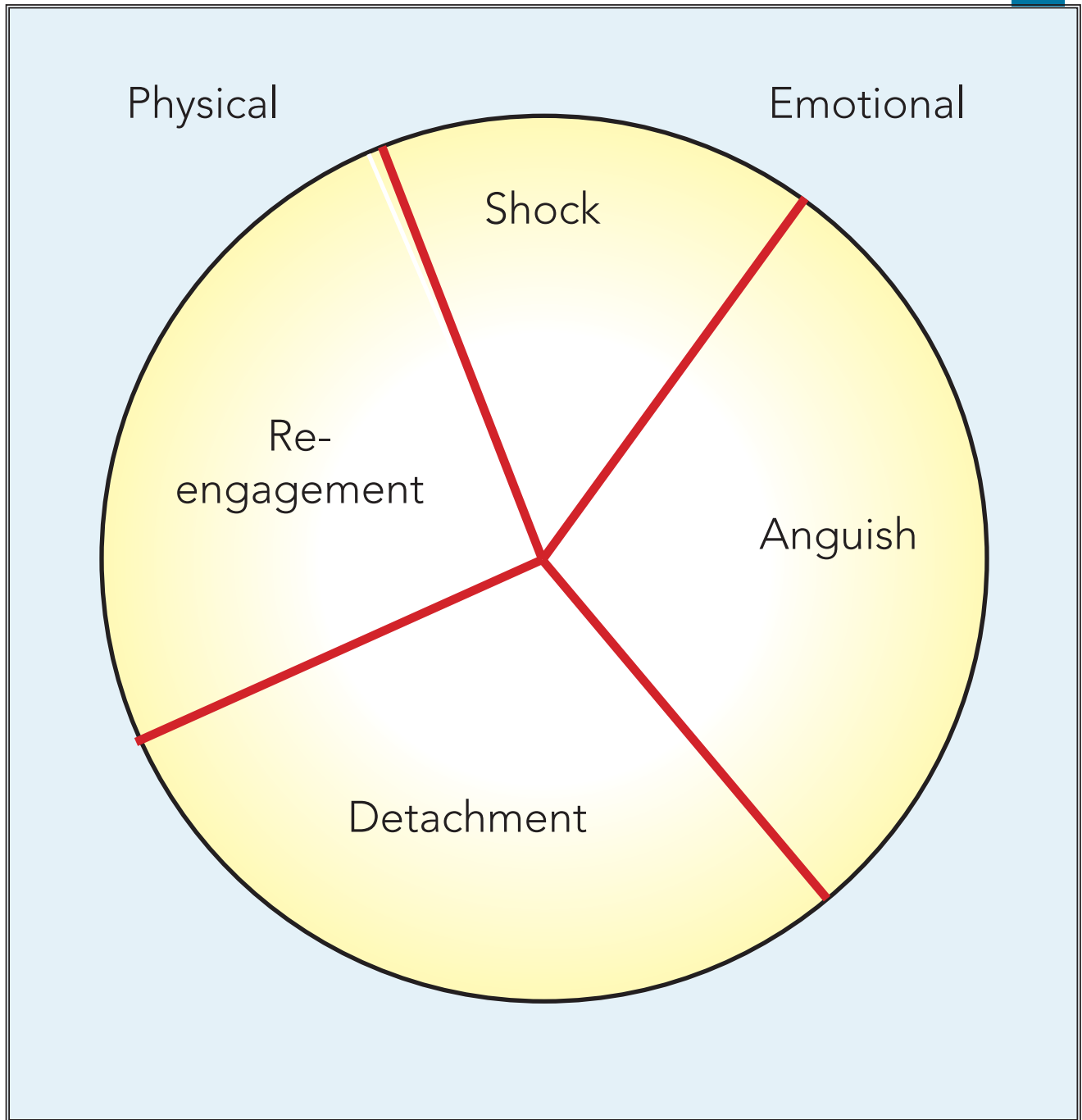
“The variety and intensity of emotions that must be dealt with has a direct impact on the children and on the adult’s ability to parent.”

– Elaine and Sandy



## Phases of Loss/Grief

This is the typical format of the phases of loss/grief. All variations are possible.



Adapted by Sandy Shuler and Elaine Bucknum, source unknown.

# Homework

## Week #3

### Homework

Please Think About And Answer The Following Questions:

1. Identify what factors may diminish YOUR ability to parent your children.

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2. Note where you are or may be, in the loss/grief cycle.

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3. Note where your child(ren) may be in the loss/grief cycle.

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4. List what strategies you are presently using, or could be implementing for self-care.

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EVALUATION

*“Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First”*

I learned ... \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



It was ok, But next time I would suggest ... \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Other Comments ... \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_





## Thoughts to consider....

“Everyone finds endings difficult, so your own style is not a sign that you have some “problem” that others don’t have ... Endings are the first phase of transition. The second phase is a time of lostness and emptiness before “life” resumes an intelligible pattern and direction, while the third phase is that of beginning anew.” (*Making Sense of Life’s Transitions, by William Bridges*)

“Too often marriages stay together just because of the children. If these children were asked, as adults, whether they had wished for a divorce, many would answer yes – that they had hated the yelling, hated the bickering. Children always know when parents aren’t happy. Some have school problems; others revert to childish behaviors such as bedwetting, thumbsucking or whining. They get headaches and stomachaches. It’s a difficult decision to leave a marriage but even harder when there are children involved. Some of the joys and, of course, the sorrows as well, are missed by the parent who moves out. Leaving children is one of the most heart-wrenching aspects of a divorce ... I am divorcing my spouse, not my children. I vow never to leave my children.” (*Surviving Divorce: Daily Affirmations by Sefra Kobrin Pitzele*)

“Life brings with it one separation after another, each with its load of pain ... Loss and grief teach us the finiteness of life and the importance of time, press us to put every moment to worthwhile use, to enjoy and appreciate life to its fullest, to make the most of every relationship, every beauty, every value, even to spur us on to contribute the very most we ourselves can while we still can, to this world and to the people in it.” (*Living Through Grief and Growing With It, by Dr. Arthur Freese*)

Reflections, comments, questions

1. What was the most valuable information you received this week?

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2. From this week's learnings what do I need to change in order to support my children?

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## Choosing A Better Way To Communicate

“It’s better to keeps one’s mouth shut  
and be thought a fool than to open it and  
resolve all doubt.”

– Abraham Lincoln



*“With determination and strategies,  
you can take more control of your  
communication with your co-parent.”*

– Elaine and Sandy

## Week Four

### Goals

- ✓ To provide information and learn skills to communicate with children about the issues of separation/divorce.
- ✓ To provide information and learn skills to communicate with co-parents about the issues of shared parenting.
- ✓ To reflect upon, practice and discuss new strategies to be used in communicating in your family.
- ✓ To continue to offer participants strategies for assisting and supporting their children through separation/divorce.
- ✓ Personal Goals: \_\_\_\_\_



### Agenda

- ✓ Welcome: goals, agenda for week #4.
- ✓ Homework review from week #3 - group discussion.
- ✓ Topic: “Communication with children and co-parent”.
- ✓ Learning Exercises: Identifying effective values, qualities and skills for communication with children and co-parents.
- ✓ Topic: “ Problem solving strategies to assist communication”.
- ✓ Learning Exercise: Practical application of tools using practice scenarios.
- ✓ Handouts and Homework.
- ✓ Group Closing.





# Assignment

**Learning Objective:** The learning exercises completed by participants in Week #4 are designed to improve and practice communication skills with both co-parents and children.

## Week #4

### Learning Exercise #1

In the large group, participants will be asked to share their responses to the homework questions assigned from Week #3:

1. Identify what factors may diminish YOUR ability to parent your children.
2. Note where you are or may be in the loss/grief cycle.
3. Note where your child(ren) may be in the loss/grief cycle.
4. List what strategies you are presently using, or could be implementing for self-care.

The facilitators will guide the discussion.



## Week #4

### Learning Exercise #2

In the large group participants will be asked to identify what values/qualities need to be in place in order for effective communication to take place. Facilitators will record the information on the group flip chart. Specific differences will be noted for effective communication with children and/or co-parents.

## Week #4

### Learning Exercise #3

Participants will be divided into two groups. One group will identify effective strategies to be used when communicating with their children about the issues of separation/divorce. The other group will identify effective strategies to be used when communicating with their co-parent around shared parenting issues.

Groups will be asked to record their thoughts on flip chart paper and bring back their responses to be discussed in the large group.



## Communicate More Effectively With Your Child:

- **Parenting styles are significant factors** in the relationship between parents and child and can influence communication greatly. Three typical styles of parenting are: authoritarian, permissive/laissez-fair and authoritative. Generally, a combination of the styles is present depending on the situation. An authoritarian parent imposes their rules without regard for the child; a permissive parent allows the child to make the rules and an authoritative parent leads by shared decision-making.
- **Acknowledging a child's feelings** is extremely important in order for them to feel understood, cared about and heard. This is an important first step.
- **Don't assume** that just because you are ready to communicate with your child, that they are ready. Be aware of their needs, activity, when you want to get their attention.
- **Get your child's attention** by calling his/her name, touching them, prompting and warning them that you have a message to send, and you require their attention.
- **Check the environment** in which you are sending your child a message. Too many outside distractions/noise will impact upon the message your child receives.
- **Use communication strategies** that enhance communication: good eye contact, coming down to the child's level, "I" messages, proper tone, undivided attention.
- **Be consistent** in the message you are sending. Your non-verbal communication should match the words that you use.
- **Identify the feelings** behind the words. Name the feeling, acknowledge it and accept it without judgements or criticism.
- **Paraphrasing a child's message** will help clarify the message sent. Offering solutions may or may not be a part of the exchange.

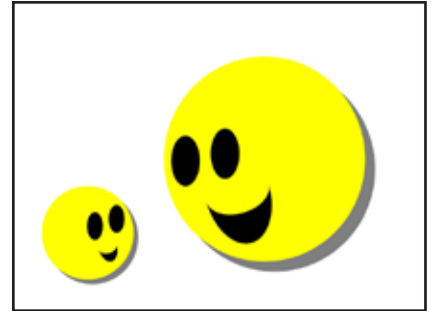


“Acknowledging a child's feelings is an important first step towards the child feeling understood.”

– Elaine and Sandy

## Communicate More Effectively With Your Child: (continued)

- **Focus on one message at a time** especially for younger children. As children grow, the complexity of message and number of requests may increase.
- **Children need to know what is being asked of them**, what is expected of them, so be clear and to the point, breaking larger requests/tasks into smaller ones.
- Ask your child to **repeat the message** you sent so you may determine if they understand what you have said or requested.
- When making requests, **frame the message in positive terms** rather than saying “don’t”.
- When making requests, **state your need using an “I” message** and offer a choice to the child: “I need you to help set the table for dinner – you may do it now, or in ten minutes when your TV show is over”.
- It may be appropriate to **offer some explanations** to your child about your message:  
**If you are feeling angry, explain what your feelings are about.**
- **Use messages of encouragement** when you are communicating with your child; courtesy, praise, noticing what they have done right, focusing on their strengths, appreciating their help and generally valuing them.
- **Model effective and respectful communication** and work towards building a positive relationship with your child, where expressions of feelings are welcome.
- **Build a climate of communication** that enhances and gives permission for children to share their positive and negative thoughts and feelings.



“Building a positive climate of communication encourages your child to share their feelings.”

– Elaine and Sandy

# Becoming an Encouraging Parent

*There are no "good" or "bad" children; only "encouraged" or "discouraged" children whose behavior is more or less useful.*

## CHILDREN ARE ENCOURAGED WHEN:

### THEY KNOW THAT THEY ARE LOVED

- Give lots of hugs (appropriate touching is nonsexual).
- Give lots of friendly, loving eye contact.
- Spend focused time with child - playing, working and sharing conversation.

### THEY FEEL CAPABLE

- Take time to train child in appropriate behavior.
- Teach skills.
- Avoid criticism, and treat mistakes as opportunities to learn.
- Encourage child to do things for her/him self.
- Express interest in child's knowledge.
- Remind child of past accomplishments.

### THEY FEEL THAT THEY BELONG AND CAN CONTRIBUTE

- Treat child with respect and expect him/her to show respect to you.
- Accept child's offers of help (even if you can do it faster and better).
- Appreciate effort; don't wait for finished product.
- Give responsibility.
- Ask for child's suggestions and consider her/his opinions seriously.
- Enjoy child's sense of humor.

*"A misbehaving child is a discouraged child."*

*Rudolf Dreikurs*

## DISCOURAGE

1. Focus on mistakes (criticize)
2. Set negative expectations
3. Demand perfection
4. Overprotect
5. Compare, & promote competition
6. Use labels (good, bad, lazy, bully, etc.)

## ENCOURAGE

1. Build on strengths
2. Show confidence
3. Appreciate efforts
4. Stimulate independence
5. See performance through child's eyes
6. De-emphasize roles

Beth Johnson, 92/02/24

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# Communication Skills For Co-parenting

“Communication is the heart of human interchange and how we do it matters. What matters most is how you communicate with your co-parent. The goal is to make your best effort to cooperate with your co-parent for the sake of your kids. You don’t have to resolve your feelings or understand your co-parent’s motivation in communication in order to effectively co-parent.”

– M. Hannibal, *“Good Parenting Through Your Divorce”*

- **Effective listening skills** includes using brief silences, encouragers (“oh”, “uh huh”, nods, gestures), door openers (“tell me about that”, “please explain”, “I’d like to hear more about your perspective”), questions, and paraphrasing:
  1. Paraphrasing means to state in your own words what the other person’s remarks mean to you: “so what you are saying is.....is that right?”
- As much as 80-90% of all communication is non-verbal, therefore it is important that we use **good attending**. This is how we demonstrate attention, interest and courtesy in responding to messages. Examples include good eye contact (looking directly at the other person when communicating), open body position (positioning your body to accept messages), use of appropriate gestures to add emphasis, ensuring that facial expression are congruent with the verbal message sent, and their voice tone/volume/inflection is appropriate.
- Use of **“I” messages** involves taking responsibility for yourself in your communication and helps to reduce feeling blamed or defensive. Examples include taking responsibility for one’s own thoughts (“I believe”; “My opinion is”), describing one’s own feelings (“I’m feeling really upset”), stating one’s intentions (“I would like”, “I will be...”) and describing specific facts or observable situations without judgement (“I hear that your voice is getting louder”; “I can see that you are feeling upset”); “You” messages imply blame and may result in conflict.



## Communication Skills For Co-parenting (continued)

- The use of **broken record skill** is useful in conflict/anger situations for self-protection. It helps to refuse an unreasonable request, prevents being side-tracked, helps to say “no”, without explanation, and prevents feeling manipulated.
  1. Identify your goal or need with a clear statement.  
“I can’t change our visitation schedule this week”.
  2. Repeat the message as many times as necessary in a variety of ways, acting as though you are a broken record: “I don’t think you heard me, but I can’t change our visitation schedule this week”, or “I guess that I am not making myself clear, but I’m not able to change our visitation schedule for the week”.



Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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“Skills and strategies need to be developed in order to communicate about your children in a business-like manner.”  
– Elaine and Sandy



# Checklist For Communication With Your Co-parent

- **Develop A Business-like Relationship With Your Co-parent.**

Accept co-parenting differences. Try to minimize personal feelings. Learn the principles of negotiating and problem-solving. Side-step obvious parenting style differences to keep the focus on the best interests of the child.

- **Keep Your Focus On The Goal.** Expect difficult conversations with your co-parent on some issues. Remember the big picture – this is in the best interest of your child.

- **Develop A Deaf Ear.** If your co-parent is in the habit of goading you, don't take the bait. Work to stay out of your old conflicts and dynamics. Use broken record skill.

- **Use Active Listening.** Acknowledge what you hear from your co-parent. You don't need to agree. You have a better chance of resolving issues if your co-parent feels heard.

- **Use A Neutral Tone Of Voice** and open body language.

- **Cool Off** before picking up the telephone to discuss issues.

- **Stay Out Of The Dance.** Change the subject rather than respond to criticism. Know your role in the dance, and work on detachment.

- **Double Check Your Actions.** Are you giving a knee-jerk emotional response?

- **You Can't Control The Other Parent.** Don't try to control the other person's response. Keep focused on the issue and take a time-out if necessary.

- **If You Can't Speak With Civility,** communicate essential details by fax or e-mail. Use notes, written checklists.



“Communication is key in any relationship, but it is vital when you're co-parenting.”

– Melinda Blau,  
“*Families Apart:  
10 Keys to Success  
in Co-Parenting*”

## Checklist For Communication With Your Co-parent (continued)

- **Expect Ten Defensive Answers** before solutions, when in a challenging situation.
- **Remember Your Children Are Listening.** Try to show courtesy and civility to your co-parent.
- **Work To Solve Problems And Have Agreed Upon Solutions.** You may not always be able to resolve conflicts. Solutions have to include you, your co-parent and your child. You have to be prepared to give some ground and negotiate.
- **Keep Your Co-parent Informed.** Set aside specific times for co-parent discussions. Don't ask your children to be the messengers of information. Develop a mutually agreed upon chart or form letter to track schedules, appointments, events and needs.
- **Stay Out Of The Loyalty Triangle.** When kids complain about the other parent, encourage children's feelings, but don't support polarization of each parent and work to help the child resolve their own issues.

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# The ABC's of a Business Relationship For Co-parents

With the process of separation/divorce, parents must form a new relationship based on the goal of successful “co-parenting” using the skills from business relationships.

A framework should be established that allows for parents to communicate about their child's welfare and solve problems and negotiate solutions in regards to their child(ren).

- Co-parents are dedicated to the common goal of raising an emotionally and physically healthy child. Their relationship exists to meet this goal.
- Co-parents must work together for the child's lifetime and therefore should commit themselves to establishing a “win-win” relationship that supports their co-parenting, rather than undermines it at the child's expense.
- Co-parents need to adopt a relationship of flexibility in order to accommodate the changing needs of their children's circumstances.
- The co-parenting relationship is limited to specific topics and objectives which focus on child-rearing.
- Co-parents observe common courtesies such as calling to arrange appointments, notifying the other of changes in scheduling and keeping the other parent current on issues of the children. Requests are made with appropriate voice tone/inflection.
- Co-parents communicate with facts, not feelings, understanding that emotional acceptance is no longer a part of their communication. Problems that arise need to be handled in a factual, business-like manner.





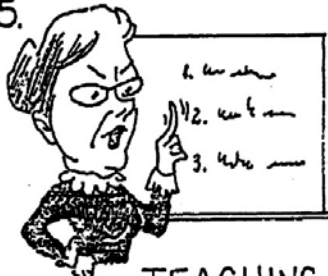









“Co-parents have a common goal of raising their child and their relationship exists to meet this goal.”

– Elaine and Sandy

Adapted from “*Cooperative Parenting and Divorce*” by Susan Blyth Boyan and Ann Marie Termini

# Dirty "Baker's" Dozen

<p>1.</p>  <p>ORDERING</p> <p>DIRECTING COMMANDING</p>	<p>2.</p>  <p>WARNING THREATENING PROMISING</p>	<p>3.</p>  <p>SHOULD &amp; OUGHTS</p> <p>MORALIZING PREACHING</p>
<p>4.</p>  <p>ADVISING</p> <p>GIVING SOLUTIONS OR SUGGESTIONS</p>	<p>5.</p>  <p>TEACHING LECTURING</p>	<p>6.</p>  <p>JUDGING CRITICIZING DISAGREEING BLAMING ACCUSING</p>
<p>7.</p>  <p>PRAISING AGREEING</p>	<p>8.</p>  <p>NAME CALLING LABELING</p>	<p>9.</p>  <p>INTERPRETING ANALYSING</p>
<p>10.</p>  <p>SUPPORTING CONSOLING</p> <p>REASSURING SYMPATHIZING</p>	<p>11.</p>  <p>PROBING QUESTIONING INTEROGATING</p>	<p>12.</p>  <p>SARCASM</p> <p>WITHDRAWING DISTRACTING HUMOURING</p>
<p>13. <b>"ME-TOO-ISM"</b></p>		<p>Author unknown - adapted S. Shuler 1999</p>

## Communication Practice Scenarios

1. Everytime my “ex” breaks up with a new partner, she gets angry with MY son and withdraws from the child. This leaves MY five year old son virtually unattended. He doesn’t get outside to play, misses school functions and just lies around the house just watching television because of this person’s SICK BEHAVIOR.
2. MY twelve year old daughter thinks her Dad can do no wrong. But my “ex” lies to us all the time. He says he can’t pick her up on Saturday morning because he has to work. When I call his office to offer to drop MY daughter at the office, he is not there. It drives me CRAZY that he lies and she still idolizes him.
3. My “ex” thinks that it is perfectly safe to leave our two children alone. Our children are eleven and eight years of age. She/he leaves them alone in the apartment, in stores, in the car – everywhere! I just go nuts when I think of the danger involved.
4. When the children go to visit their father for the weekend, it is party time. He feeds them junk, let’s them stay up all night to watch “R” rated movies and has no regard for their personal hygiene. Late Sunday night he returns them and they feel sick, tired, hungry and are dirty. I have a TERRIBLE time getting them up for school on Monday.
5. My “ex” is constantly asking for extra financial help for a variety of activities, sporting equipment and clothes that she thinks our son should have. I RESENT this since we have an agreement as to the child’s support and in the agreement we each get to choose one activity and each pay for the associated expenses. The next request I will get is to have to pay for a horse and riding lessons!!!
6. This summer I planned to take my daughter to the beach for two weeks in August. My “ex” found out about this and took her for the same kind of holiday on his time in July. By the time August came, my daughter said that she was tired of the beach and didn’t want to go again. He did the same thing when I planned a trip to the mountains. I could KILL my “ex” for undermining my plans.
7. My “ex” is chronically late. When my “ex – wife” is required to pick up our children, we end up waiting at least one half an hour for her arrival. Plans constantly have to be re-arranged and often events are missed or attended very late. I’m tired of feeling CONTROLLED BY HER SCHEDULE AND LACK OF CONSIDERATION.

# A Problem-Solving Model For Co-parents

- **Analyze the problem - reflect and assess prior to proceeding:**

1. Define the problem.
2. How often does the problem occur?
3. Who owns the problem? Who has the upset feelings? Who brought up the issue? Who is responsible for implementing the solution?
4. What is the most intense feeling that arises?
5. Is this issue rooted historically with your co-parent?
6. Is it in your influence to impact this? Is this a life-threatening issue or can you compensate or make adjustments?
7. Is it worth your time and energy to invest in trying to change this issue?



- **To proceed with problem-solving:**

1. If you have decided to discuss the issue with your co-parent, know what your goal is. Is it to gain or give information? Is it to work towards achieving a solution? Is it to model effective negotiation/problem-solving for your children? Is it to improve quality of life?
2. Implement the formula:
  1. When this happens (describe factually)
  2. I feel
  3. Because
  4. I would like you to

(Research indicates that the order of speaking to different genders can sometimes make a difference in the response to communication. When speaking to a male using this formula, begin with #4, 3, 2, 1; when speaking to a female using this formula, begin with #1,2,3,4.)

# Homework

## Week #4

### Homework

Please Think About And Answer The Following Questions:



- 1. Identify communication strategies that you use with your co-parent that are both:

Helpful	Not Helpful

- 2. Identify communication strategies that you use with your child that are both:

Helpful	Not Helpful

- 3. Practice one strategy that was introduced this week with both your child and your co-parent. Note what works for you and what was more difficult.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- 4. Other \_\_\_\_\_

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Reflections, comments, questions

1. What was the most valuable information you received this week?

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2. From this week's learnings what do I need to change in order to support my children?

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## Handling My Own Anger/Managing Conflict

“When anger rises,  
think of the consequences”

– Confucius



*“Work hard to keep your cool.  
This will help you and your  
child manage conflict.”*

– Elaine and Sandy

## Week Five

### Goals

- ✓ To provide information about the effects of anger/conflict on children.
- ✓ To reflect upon the underlying reasons/factors for anger/conflict between co-parents.
- ✓ To offer skills, strategies for managing anger/conflict.
- ✓ To continue to offer participants strategies for assisting and supporting their children through separation/divorce.
- ✓ Personal Goals:



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### Agenda

- ✓ Welcome: goals, agenda for week #5.
- ✓ Homework review from week #4 - group discussion.
- ✓ Topic: “Recognizing and Managing Anger/Conflict”.
- ✓ Learning Exercises: Effects of anger on children and strategies for management .
- ✓ Topic: “Anger Cycle”.
- ✓ Learning Exercise: Practical skills to address problem-solving with co-parents.
- ✓ Handouts and Homework.
- ✓ Group Closing.



# Assignment

**Learning Objective:** The learning exercises completed by participants in Week #5 are designed to help participants learn new skills for conflict management and identify where they have influence/control with their co-parent over their children's issues.

## Week #5

### Learning Exercise #1

In the large group, participants will be asked to share their responses to the homework questions assigned from Week #4:

1. Identify communication strategies that you used with your co-parent that were helpful and not helpful.
2. Identify communication strategies that you used with your child that were helpful and not helpful.
3. Identify one strategy that was introduced last week that you used with both your child and your co-parent. Note what worked for you and what was more difficult.



The facilitators will guide the discussion.

## Week #5

### Learning Exercise #2

In the large group participants will be asked to answer the following question:

1. Do you think that anger/conflict is negative-harmful for children experiencing separation/divorce? Why? Why not?

The facilitators will guide the discussion.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Assignment (continued)

**Week #5**

Learning Exercise #3

Participants will be divided into two groups and each group will be asked to make a list of strategies for reducing and minimizing anger/conflict with their co-parent.

Each group will be asked to record their thoughts on flip chart paper and bring back their responses to be discussed in the large group.

**Week #5**

Learning Exercise #4

In the large group, participants are asked to use “The Worry Stopper” handout as a tool for working through an example of a challenging issue for problem-solving with their co-parent. The facilitators record the group feedback in the appropriate sections of the handout, guiding the discussion towards effective conflict resolution.

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## About Conflict In Divorce....

- Research indicates that 15% to 20% of couples have low conflict in separation/divorce; 60% experience a moderate degree of conflict and 15% to 20% have a high degree of conflict. Further, it is suggested that those children who are in the middle of the highest level of conflict have the hardest time adjusting to the divorce.
- Most families in divorce experience some level of conflict – this is to be expected. It arises in many areas of co-parenting such as attitudes/values, schedules, extra-curricular activities, communication styles, new partners and families, school issues, parenting styles, clothing, children’s personal effects.
- General categories have been identified (*C.Ahrons, PHD – “The Good Divorce”, 1994*) that describe couple dynamics after separation/divorce. They include: “cooperative colleagues”, “perfect pals”, “angry associates”, “fiery foes” and “dissolved and detached duos”. These typologies are not rigid, and are often changing given external circumstances, factors and relationships that change over time. Their names are a reflection of the way in which conflict and anger is managed.
- Research indicates that children who feel caught in loyalty issues of parental conflict, are more likely to experience longer lasting symptoms of separation and divorce. Among the most common symptoms of distress for “children in the middle” include loss of concentration and attention, declining grades and behavioral issues at school, withdrawal from friends, anger with one or both parents, delinquency, substance abuse, emotional issues, health problems and such. They have been known to demonstrate less self-confidence, increased insecurity, and general vulnerability. Children who are caught in the middle often feel the effects of “parental alienation” where they are alienated from one parent due to the other parent’s overt and/or covert influence to “have them on their side”. Children who experience long-standing conflict between their parents often have difficulty in adult years with partner relationships.



“Research indicates that children who feel caught in loyalty issues of parental conflict, are more likely to experience detrimental symptoms of separation and divorce.”

– Elaine and Sandy

## About Conflict In Divorce.... (continued)

- “Children’s adjustment is more disturbed in divorcing families who fight for custody of their children and where domestic violence is severe and repetitive. Family problems are cited as the most common factor contributing to suicidal behavior in children from divorced homes.” (*Calgary Counselling Centre*)
- It is extremely important for parents to assess their own level of conflict with their co-parent in order to understand how it can best be managed. In most cases, both parents have a role to play in the dynamic of anger/conflict, but there are always exceptions to this especially in the case of domestic violence.
- Some relief from the conflict can be had by investing in what is within one’s control and influence: oneself, one’s own behavior, one’s own life, even if the perception is that the other parent is at fault.

“There is no way to talk about divorce without talking about anger. It is a universal reaction and it is inevitable. But that doesn’t mean you should feel free to express your anger without restraint.”

– C. Ahrons, *“The Good Divorce”*

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## About Conflict In Divorce.... (continued)

### Why Some Couples Continue in Conflict:

- A feeling of failure about the break-up of the marriage.
- A separation as a result of an emotionally traumatic event.
- A destructive marriage where there may have been a previous history of family violence/abuse, addiction.
- Concerns and differences about the other parent's parenting.
- The parent's self-esteem.
- Seeing the other parent as all bad.
- The parent's over attachment, protectiveness and sole focus on the children.
- A parent's own childhood trauma, which carries forward to the present.
- The legal system and/or mental health system which may contribute to a position of opposition and inflexibility.
- Conflict may provide some kind of attachment (negative) with the co-parent.
- Conflict may postpone the grieving that needs to take place as a result of the separation/divorce, and replace it with other problems.



“On-going conflict takes energy that could be used to develop other life pursuits.”

– Elaine and Sandy

## About Conflict In Divorce.... (continued)

### Conflict in separation/divorce is detrimental to children because:

- It interferes with the tasks children need to complete in their own stages of growth and development.
- The parent's role as leader of the family becomes compromised in the eyes of the children. With tensions and fighting, children question whether parents have the ability to care for them adequately when they can't seem to manage their own life issues.
- Children feel powerless and unable to influence and impact the situation. They question how they have contributed to the problem and may feel guilty, sad, hopeless and self-blaming.
- On-going conflict and hostility between parents prevents the child from being able to freely love each parent and form long-standing attachments. This can be carried forward into the child's future relationships.



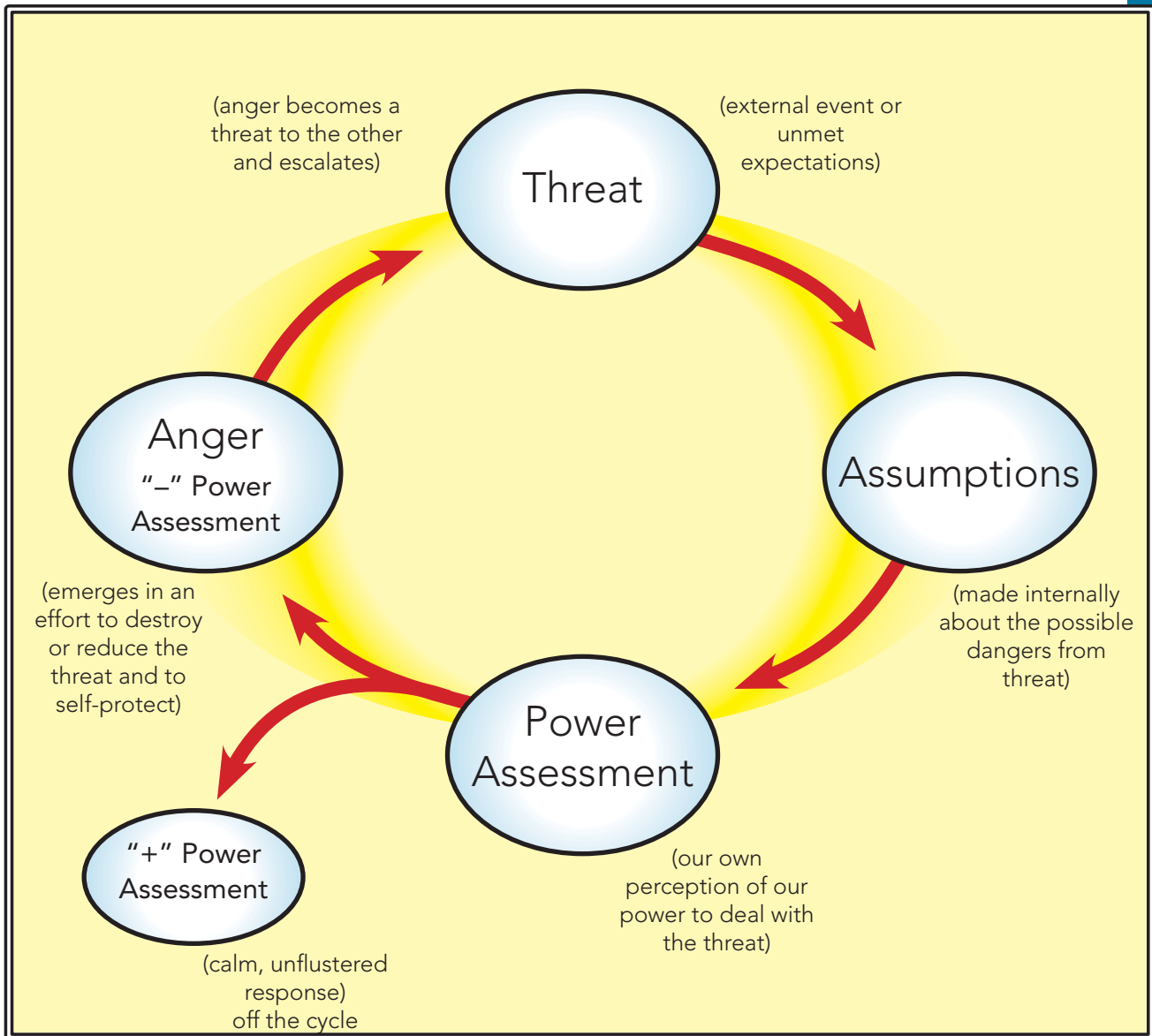
"The primary reason for co-parents to cooperate and collaborate with minimal anger/conflict is that it is the best way to achieve maximum health, well-being and adjustment of the child."

– Elaine and Sandy

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# The Anger Cycle



Adapted from the "1976 Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators," not for further reproduction.

## Worry Stopper Exercise

Important / Can Control

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Important / Can't Control

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Not Important / Can Control

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Not Important / Can't Control

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### Specific issues of conflict and or stress in your life:

1. Co-parent
2. Children
3. Family
4. Friends
5. Work/school/avocation
6. Leisure time
7. Health
8. Finances
9. \_\_\_\_\_

Adapted by Sandy Shuler and Elaine Bucknum, source unknown.

## Strategies for Handling Anger/Conflict with Challenging People

- ❑ Anger can sometimes be diffused and reduced so problem-solving can take place A when one person takes it upon themselves to acknowledge and identify clearly that there are feelings of anger present and that they have a place for discussion with courtesy and mutual sharing of perspectives
- ❑ Give the angry person "a little air time" to vent, and then recover composure
- ❑ Get their attention in some way~ by sitting, standing, calling their name
- ❑ Maintain eye contact in face to face interactions and be attentive to what is presented, even if you think it is irrelevant and not your point of view
- ❑ Don't be influenced by their perspective of the problem~ know your own views, opinions and Perceptions
- ❑ Try to be courteous and business-like
- ❑ State and acknowledge facts without emotional engagement
- ❑ Try to move to a problem solving mode by asking specific factual questions: i.e. asking how often the particular problem occurs
- ❑ Agree upon sharing fact-finding tasks and ensure you have complete information required
- ❑ Have in mind a goal as to how you want the interaction to end, and in heated conflict, verbalize this with the other party, including booking another time for discussion
- ❑ Use effective communication skills such as,,paraphrasing, broken record and such
- ❑ Don't fuel the conflict by engaging in emotional dynamics; rather stay focused on task and issue at hand
- ❑ When dealing with passive or silent anger/conflict, state the problem, ask open-ended questions, don't be quick to offer your opinion, don't rush in to fill silences
- ❑ In silent, unresolved issues, give choices about how you will end the dialogue and resolve the problem including time lines -
- ❑ Never accept emotional, verbal or physical abuse; know your own boundaries and respect your own rights
- ❑ Practice assertiveness skills and get comfortable with your own words and "no"
- ❑ Enlist support of others for practicing responses and obtaining objective suggestions
- ❑ Make sure you thoroughly are prepared (including emotionally) for dialoguing about the issue at hand; use notes and keep records
- ❑ Delay decision-making so you can contemplate your position; take a time-out from the discussion as required
- ❑ Understand what is underneath the anger, so you can identify what threatens you in the situation
- ❑ In cases of high conflict, seek professional help including: spiritual leader, mediator, therapist, legal advisor, court

(S.Shuler, E. Bucknum, Jewish Family Service Calgary; 2002. Reproduction by permission.)

## **Techniques for Separating the People from the Problem**

- **Listen more than you talk.**
- **"Walk a mile in their shoes."**
- **Don't blame.**
- **Let them get involved.**
- **Recognize and deal with emotions.**
- **Don't react to "management by tantrum."**
- **Behave the way you want them to.**
- **Help them save face.**
- **Speak about yourself, not them.**

# Moving Forward With Conflict/Anger:

## A Personal Action Plan

1. Identify potential sources of anger/conflict with your co-parent:

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2. Identify which issues you have some influence/control over and which you do not:

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3. What does your co-parent do and say that triggers your emotional response?

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4. How does this affect you?

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5. List one or two strategies that you will try in dealing with this person differently:

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# Homework

## Week #5

### Homework

**Please Think About And Answer The Following Questions:**

1. Using the “Worry Stopper Exercise”, fill in the issues that are important and not as important to you as well as the ones that you can control and can’t control.

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2. Then use the “Moving Forward: Personal Action Plan” to help you strategize about ways of handling the issues in the “important” box from the “Worry Stopper Exercise.”

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3. Take some time this week to focus on your children’s needs/issues that may be arising due to the separation/divorce.

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4. Other \_\_\_\_\_

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# Local Resources



## Calgary Resources: Separation/Divorce (updated)

### **Alberta Divorce Finances**

403- 703-7176

Financial consulting for divorce;  
Private company

### **Alberta Family Mediation Society**

233 - 0143

List of practicing mediators  
Fee for service

### **Alberta Justice Family Mediation Services**

297 - 6981

Applications for custody  
Information for court process

### **Alberta Justice Family Law Info Centre**

297-6600

**“Parenting After Separation”** Program  
Free mediation if qualify

### **Chinook Learning Services (CBE)**

777 - 7200

Occasional workshops for adults on  
issues of Separation/Divorce

### **Calgary Co-Parenting Centre**

238-6063

Parenting Coordination, mediation

### **Calgary Counselling Centre**

265 – 4980

Individual, family counseling; program:  
**“Children of Divorce”**

### **Calgary Family Services**

269 - 9888

Individual, family counseling; program:  
**“Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids  
First”**

### **Calgary Immigrant Women’s Assoc.**

263 – 4414

Legal referral, translation services

### **Calgary Legal Guidance**

234 – 9266

Free legal service if qualify

### **Catholic Family Service**

233 – 2360

Individual, family counseling

### **Children’s Legal & Educational Resource Centre(CLERC)**

207 – 9029

Legal advice, information for children  
and youth

### **Cornerstone of Hope**

289-8555

Divorce Care Support Group  
**“Rainbows”** Grief Group for children

### **Divorce Calgary**

668 – 0397

Variety of support for divorce

### **Families First Support Services**

456 - 7597

Supervised visitation services; monitored  
exchange services; private company

### **Family Maintenance**

297 - 6060

Assistance for family court  
documents for child/spousal support

### **Families Matter**

205-5178

Parent/Family education programs

### **Fairway Divorce Solutions**

269-9700

Divorce resolution, asset and parenting  
consultation; private company

### **Grace Women’s Health Resources**

Alberta Health Services

Reading room, educational courses

670 – 2270

**“Feelings and Healings: Finding Strength  
Through Separation/Divorce”**



## Calgary Resources: Separation/Divorce (updated)

### **Jewish Family Service Calgary**

287 - 3510

Individual, family counseling

### **Lawyer Referral Service**

228 - 1722

Names for free legal advice; lawyers who speak same language

### **The Law Society of Alberta**

229 - 4700

Information, referral service

### **Legal Aid Society of Alberta**

297 - 2260

Legal assistance to those who qualify

### **Rainbows**

253 - 7136 / 289 - 8555

Peer support groups for children experiencing transition, loss, grief through death, divorce

### **Rebuilding Seminars**

240 - 0045

Workshops for adults whose relationships end; private company

### **Sherriff King**

266 - 4111

Community Safe Visitation Program

### **Life and Family Resource Centre**

RC Diocese

218 - 5504

“*Transitions*” program; “*Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First*” program;  
Non-denominational; open to all

### **The Step Family Foundation of Alberta**

245 - 5744

Information for step-families; private company

### **The Women’s Centre**

264 - 1155

Support, information, resources

- Local resources listed are non-profit, for-profit including private companies and government organizations
- There are a variety of faith-based/religious/pastoral care services within the community, as well as a variety of private therapists, counselors and mediators who offer counseling and mediation services on a subsidized, sliding fee scale and user-pay basis – consumers should retain services after careful recommendations
- **Family Life Works Inc.**, The “*Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First*” program and Calgary Family Services assumes no responsibility for the service delivery provided through these community resources (*including private companies*) and does not necessarily endorse these organizations or offer any recommendations for the services provided; consumers should use their own discretion when obtaining these services

Family Life Works Inc: [www.familylifeworks.ca](http://www.familylifeworks.ca)

*Last updated March 2010*

Reflections, comments, questions

1. What was the most valuable information you received this week?

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2. From this week's learnings what do I need to change in order to support my children?

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## Co-Parenting Into The Future

“The wonderful thing is that vision is greater than baggage. This means that a sense of what you can envision for the future – a better situation, a better state of being – is more powerful than whatever ugliness has accumulated in the past or whatever situation you are confronting in the present.”

– Stephen Covey



*“You have acquired skills that will help you make a plan for a better future for you and your children.”*

– Elaine and Sandy

## Week Six

### Goals

- ✓ To provide information about common issues facing children and families through separation/divorce: transitions, celebrations/rituals, dating/new relationships.
- ✓ To offer skills and strategies to manage these challenges.
- ✓ To offer community resources for further information and support.
- ✓ To provide group closure for participants and establish goals for the future.
- ✓ Personal Goals:



### Agenda

- ✓ Welcome: goals, agenda for week #6.
- ✓ Homework review from week #5 - group discussion.
- ✓ Topics: “Easing Transition Between Two Homes”.
- ✓ “Establishing New Rituals and Celebratory Times”.
- ✓ “Moving Into New Relationships”.
- ✓ Learning Exercise: Strategies for managing the challenges of transitions, celebrations, dating.
- ✓ Handouts and community resources for further information/support.
- ✓ Learning Exercise: Goals for the future.
- ✓ Group Closing.
- ✓ Evaluations.



# Assignment

**Learning Objective:** The learning exercises completed by participants in Week #6 are designed to offer information about a variety of typical issues that children face in families who are separated/divorced, and to set goals and use skills which will assist their children into the future.

## Week #6

### Learning Exercise #1

In the large group, participants will be asked to share their responses to the homework questions assigned from Week #5:

1. Using the “Worry Stopper Exercise”, fill in the issues that are important and not as important to you as well as the ones that you can control and can’t control.
2. Then use the “Moving Forward: Personal Action Plan” to help you strategize about ways of handling the issues in the “important” box from the “Worry Stopper Exercise.”
3. Take some time this week to focus on your children’s needs/ issues that may be arising due to the separation/divorce.



The facilitators will guide the discussion.

## Week #6

### Learning Exercise #2

Participants will be divided into two groups and each group will be asked to make a list of issues and strategies for helping children manage:

1. Transitions between two homes.
2. New rituals and dealing with celebrations.

Groups will be asked to record their thoughts on flip chart paper and bring back their responses to be discussed in the large group.

The leaders will present information and strategies to the group to assist children in coping with parents dating and new relationships.

Assignment (continued)

**Week #6**

Learning Exercise #3

Participants will be given a blank envelope and the handout “Goals For My Future”, to be completed, sealed and self-addressed. Group leaders will mail the envelope to participants in three months following the end of the program.

Groups will be asked to record their thoughts on flip chart paper and bring back their responses to be discussed in the large group.

**Week #6**

Learning Exercise #4

In the large group, participants will be asked to share one learning/benefit gained from attending the program.

In closing, the leaders will share their observations of the group’s changes and accomplishments, and their learning/benefits through the duration of the program.

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## Easing Transition Times Between Two Homes

“Research supports the idea that children can function relatively well in two households after a divorce...If children experience an attitude of sharing and cooperation [between parents] they can relax as they move back and forth between homes on a schedule that flows with the routines of [each] family”

– P. Stahl, “Parenting After Divorce”

- To ease transition times, parents can demonstrate an attitude of acceptance and permission that children need time and relationships with each parent and extended family if appropriate.
- If possible, attempt to be consistent with the place and time of the transfer. It is best if the child can leave from the home in which they reside, in order to organize and pack belongings. Regardless, parents need to assist children in organizing belongings to take for visits.
- Saying “good-byes” is important and may need to be done in advance of the transfer.
- Some children require more time than others to prepare for the change/transition.
- Transfer time to communicate on important co-parenting issues is not the appropriate time for “adult talk” – another time should be scheduled.
- In cases of significant conflict, a neutral third party or public location such as school/daycare/restaurant/friend’s home etc. can be used to avoid interaction between co-parents.
- A prior agreement as to how to handle children’s belongings will help ease transitions. Parents need to be prepared for forgotten belongings. Adults need to compensate and keep track of extracurricular items, school projects, clothing items, medications etc.. Some children need “comfort items” (clothes, blankets, cuddly toys etc.) to take between each home – both parents should provide and accommodate this need.



## Easing Transition Times Between Two Homes (continued)

- Schools and daycare settings can be helpful with duplicate books etc. if they are informed and involved in what the transition and co-parenting arrangement is.
- Preparing children in advance of the transition is helpful. Calendars, warnings, and prompts prior to departure from one home to the next can alert the child for the change in environment. Packing important items in advance including sending pictures, can assist. Reviewing upcoming activities, events and schedules all help the child feel some sense of power/control over their environment.
- Co-parents who communicate with each other prior to visitation or household transfers about scheduling needs of the children can alleviate last minute potential conflict when the children are present. Using fax, e-mail, voice message and a weekly communication book between adults can assist.
- “Re-entry” or reconnection time when a child returns to their primary home can be unsettling. Allow your child time to get used to the environment once again. Don’t ask too many questions at once about the child’s away time. Don’t quiz your child on details of the other parent’s home/life. Encourage sharing of information, but be sensitive to issues that may cause stress or loyalty conflicts about the other parent. Offer information to the child about what you did while they were away as a means of re-connecting them with life in that home.
- With older children, seek their input into what “the transition process” is like for them and work to problem solve if there are difficulties.
- If can be helpful, depending on the child’s nature and ability to separate, to encourage the use of phone calls and emails between the child and the non-custodial parent when they are apart as a means for consistent connection.
- Changes of environments need to be eased into gently, and often a regular ritual or tradition for the child is helpful to associate the shift from one home to the next.
- Understand that beginnings and endings of visits may bring up issues of loss for children arising from the separation/divorce. Children may react in a variety of ways during these times (crying, whining, sadness, distance, anger etc.). Look for common themes from your children to understand their unique style of transition. Work to communicate with them about their feelings. Accept different ways of children saying “hello and goodbye” with different parents. Some need hugs and kisses with one parent, and not with the other.





## Easing Transition Times Between Two Homes (continued)

- For adults, the change in households can bring many feelings as a result of the separation/divorce. Develop rituals of self-care and nurturing. Use the solitude time to your own advantage.
- As a non-custodial parent, try to keep visitation times with children as “normal and typical” as possible. Buying children expensive gifts, consistently treating them to expensive activities and outings in attempts to make every moment together count and be special only sets up “a fairy tale” home and parent at the expense of the other home and parent.
- As a non-custodial parent, try to maintain ongoing connection and communication with your child by phone, fax, email and pictures. This helps to ease into irregular visitation and provide for the gaps in contact. Be prepared for emotional exchanges for both adults and children in cases of long-distance parenting.
- Co-parents need to be courteous and respectful of each other’s schedules to avoid mix-ups and delays for the other. If conflicts arise at the time, don’t discuss criticisms in front of the child.
- Common sense goes a long way with transitioning children. If children are going to be eating out with the other parent, don’t feed them before they leave. If children are going to be delayed in mealtime, give them a snack.

“Journeying back and forth from one parent to another can be inconvenient, cumbersome, and for some kids, downright uncomfortable. It can intensify divided loyalties, feelings of loss and fear of abandonment.”

– M. Blau, *Families Apart: 10 Keys To Successful Co-Parenting*”

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## Dealing With Celebratory And Holiday Times

“Children need and deserve to have their parents attend the important events of their lives....Although working through your resentments can be a healthy experience, you need not be “over the divorce” for you to share your child’s special occasions with his or her other parent.... The focus of the celebration should be on the child.”

– K. Kline and S. Pew, *“For the Sake of the Children”*

- Celebrations and holidays can bring up emotional issues for families at the best of times, and so can be even more difficult for those who are separated/divorced. There are no typical or suggested schedules, as each family unit is very unique and chooses rituals that are specific to their own needs.
- Some families agree on holiday schedules from the early part of their separation, and stay with the plan over the long term. Other families renegotiate as families expand, move, and children age and needs change. A minority of co-parents choose to celebrate some events together with their shared children.
- Most often celebrations such as birthdays and holiday times are negotiated between the parents for sharing and splitting the time so children can have access to both parents and families at this time. In cases of children being young when the separation/divorce takes place, the pattern can be more easily set and maintained. There is no perfect or ideal solution - adults and children alike need to remain open and flexible.
- Holiday times can be stressful because they may bring up a painful history, or rituals of the past, but they can also be healing with the opportunity to develop new and creative rituals. Lowering expectations about what the celebration means will be a way of “letting go” of hopes/dreams from the past and opens the door to a new way for the future. Maintaining traditions needs to be balanced with creating new rituals that are meaningful for the new family form. In spite of the challenges that may arise with celebrations and holidays, it is important to keep that continuity intact for children and to use the opportunity for family connection, rather than avoiding them.



## Dealing With Celebratory And Holiday Times (continued)

- To help prevent added stress of holidays and celebrations, planning and communication between parents needs to be done well in advance, avoiding last minute changes and scheduling conflicts. When extended families need to be taken into account, planning needs to be done even further ahead.
- To ease the discomfort for children, especially for first time celebrations after separation/divorce, a greater focus for the holiday should be placed on the needs of the children. While these times may bring up painful memories of loss for adults, it is also true for children, so sensitivity and communication needs to be modeled. Both parents should encourage children to voice their feelings and offer consolation about missing the other parent. Encouraging children to call their other parent and extended family allows the child the connection that may be missing.
- For handling children's birthdays, with conflict between co-parents, the child's needs should be kept as the priority. In some situations, both parents can be present and share the role of hosts. Other times, rituals can be arranged such as having one party with children at one parent's home and another party with family at the other parent's home. Other families choose to alternate birthday years for hosting birthday parties.
- For some parents, holiday times can be a lonely time especially if children are with the other parent. The adult needs to address their feelings and make a plan for coping, so that children do not feel burdened or diminished by the celebrations they deserve.

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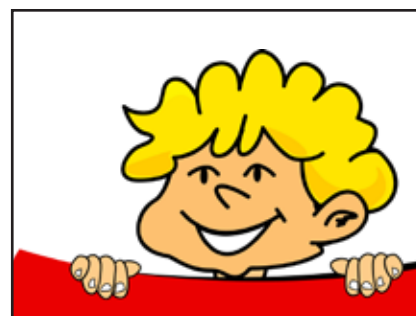
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“The child's needs should always be considered when making plans for a holiday or a celebration.”

– Elaine and Sandy

## Dealing With Celebratory And Holiday Times (continued)

- In most cases, children should not be asked to choose between events, holidays or celebrations at their respective parent's homes as this creates loyalty issues. For cases of older children, their input should be taken into account, but parents need to have the final say.
- Co-parents need to be flexible and cooperative with each other. If Mother's Day or Father's Day happens to fall at a time when they are with the alternate parent, consideration needs to be offered to switch visitation schedules. It is best for children to be advised of changes in advance, and it is to their advantage to have their parents demonstrate problem-solving and negotiation in working through changes in plans.
- When children come back from celebrations from one parent and family, it is helpful for the other parent to encourage the children to share their joy and happiness from the event (without asking personal questions that cause divided loyalties).
- Gift-giving needs to be handled with tolerance especially in cases where the financial means of each parent and family differs. Parents should take great care in not trying to "one-up" the other parent by lavishing the child with expensive gifts. On the other hand, when one parent has the means that the other parent does not, the child should not be deprived of the advantages of receiving these special gifts.



"Did you know that research has found that doing simple rituals enhances feelings of togetherness and family belonging by almost 20%? What's more, those home traditions and customs also increase our kid's social skills and development."

– Dr. Michele Borba, ([www.micheleborba.com](http://www.micheleborba.com))  
"12 Simple Secrets Real Moms Know"



## Root Your Family in Rituals



One father was asked if his family had any rituals. "No," he answered, "not really." What about those two lullabies sung for his daughter every night? His reply was, "Oh, it's just something we always do." And that's exactly what rituals are: patterns of behaviour, usually with some symbolic meaning, that are repeated over and over.

### Why Rituals?

Rituals can be elaborate or simple. They may be connected to

- special life events, like weddings or graduations;
- annual happenings, like birthdays or religious holidays;
- daily occurrences, like saying good-bye in the morning at day-care;
- certain locations, like Grandma's house where we always play cards.

In all these cases, the meaning of rituals goes beyond their surface details. Those songs sung at bedtime are a private code for the bond between father and daughter. When a family gets together for traditional celebrations, they are also celebrating the ties that bind their lives together, spanning generations and linking them to a larger community.

It is through rituals that we build a sense of the rhythms of life. Will Glennon, author of *Fathering: Strengthening Connection with Your Children No Matter Where You Are*, writes, "Rituals are the markers we use to carve out a brief time of significance from the nonstop flow of daily life."

### Roots and Resilience

Parents are called on to provide their children with both roots (for stability) and wings (for growth). Rituals and tradition form a large part of the roots. They create a sense of predictability and stability, helping the child to define his or her identity both inside the family and in relation to society.

The feeling of belonging strengthens both the family and the individuals in it, contributing to what is called "resilience". This is the ability to thrive in spite of experiencing difficult circumstances. For instance, studies done with alcoholic families find that the children whose families maintain some rituals — family dinners, regular bedtime routines, annual celebrations — are less likely to become alcoholics themselves.

In modern western culture, tradition and rituals seem to have gone out of fashion. New is better and speed is valued. The pressures of work often leave little time for families to share traditions. Many parents are relieved when the day care looks after holiday preparations like carving the Hallowe'en pumpkin; it's one less thing to worry about. Moreover, in single parent or reconstituted families, or families with mixed backgrounds, keeping up the traditions of past generations can prove impossible.

### Making Room for Rituals

So if, for instance, you don't have time to cook all the fancy dishes associated with an idealized celebration, what can you do? How can you create traditions you can live with?

- Be flexible and work with what fits your own lifestyle. This may mean scaling down your expectations: maybe just one batch of cookies made special because everyone helps decorate them.
- Acknowledge the new rituals that your family has created and appreciate their underlying meaning. Once you realize the importance of little gestures, like those lullabies, you can reinforce them.
- Recognize that day care provides opportunities for building rituals too. For example, one caregiver has a special plate which she saves to bring out ceremoniously for a child on his or her birthday.
- Concentrate on the essentials by looking back at what stands out in your own memories of childhood. One mother recalls, "I couldn't tell you any of the gifts I got, but I remember the special days and the celebrations. The feelings, the songs, the family stories, even the smells come back." Spending time together, not buying bigger presents and making elaborate decorations, is how parents give their children a rich heritage of memories. The gift of shared moments marked out and made memorable through rituals, these are the lasting roots parents can give all year round.

by Betsy Mann

Sources: Clarke, J. I. et al., *Help! for Kids and Parents About Drugs*, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993. Glennon, W. *Fathering: Strengthening Connection with Your Children No Matter Where You Are*, Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 1995.

FRP Canada 707 - 331, rue Cooper, Ottawa ON K2P 0G5 (613) 237-7667 [www.frp.ca](http://www.frp.ca)

# Incorporating New Relationships

## Dating

- Give yourself, your children and family time to adjust to the separation and divorce, before you consider dating.
- Until a serious relationship develops, restrict your dating to times that don't involve your children.
- Allow your children to talk about their feelings about your dating. Explain to your children your needs to socialize and have adult company. (Remember dating challenges their belief that you and their other parent will get back together, and may bring feelings of insecurity).
- Continue family rituals that have already been established and don't prioritize dating at the expense of your children's needs.
- "It's common for newly divorced people to look at remarriage as the solution to their problems. It isn't. The divorce rate is higher for second and third marriages than for first marriages." (McKay et.al. *The Divorce Book*, 1999, page 313)



"The hunger for love is much more difficult to remove than ones hunger for bread."

– Mother Teresa

## New Partners, Living Together, Remarriage

- "Early remarriage/blending before the child has had a chance to cope with living in a dual household system, puts the child at most risk." (C. Ahrons – "Pathways To A Good Divorce: The Children's Perspective")
- Clarify roles, responsibilities, expectations of partners and children in the new family configuration.
- Discuss how decisions will be made including finances, chores, discipline.
- Involve your children in your "new life", wedding ceremony, etc.
- Model good relationship skills with your new partner including use of compliments and showing appreciation to one another.
- Focus on communication between partners and with all members of the newly created family.
- Establish new family rituals and traditions that fit with your new family configuration, some of which may be old established ones.

"No one can invest the energy and commitment needed to make a remarriage work if he or she is stuck in the past or still emotionally wounded."

– Genevieve Clapp,  
"Divorce and  
New Beginnings"

### Best Practices To Support Children In Step-Families

- Building caring relationship between children and their new step-parent/ family is a process that requires time and patience
- Children manage best in combined families when both parents firmly unite in efforts to build a strong foundation for all
- The new family usually comes about through change and loss -(separation/ divorce); children need time to resolve emotions
- Children belong to two households/families; they need guidance to adjust to different sets of rules, expectations and systems
- Recognizing the combined family unit and respecting the bonds of the existing “parent/child family” unit is a balancing act
- Allowing children to maintain contact with their other parent and extended family, helps them to adjust in the new step- family
- Children need reassurance that they are loved and are still a priority of their biological parent as loyalty issues can arise
- Nurturing family relationships is vital for sustaining a blended family; sharing activities helps children bond and build trust
- Establishing new family patterns, rituals and traditions help children feel a sense of belonging and shared memories
- Children do best with predictability and structure; discipline, roles, responsibilities and courtesies should be established
- Addressing challenges and conflicts in the step- family is an important step in developing trust and strengthening family ties
- Creating opportunities for family discussions, for problem-solving and negotiation helps children manage day to day issues
- Parenting and family life can be challenging for all families; step-families have even more complex issues and dynamics; to help combined families succeed, management strategies, realistic expectations and a strong commitment by the parents is required

### Best Practices For Adults To Support Step-Families

- Recognizing that a step-family is a different family configuration than a traditional family, with unique needs, dynamics and functioning helps in meeting challenges that arise
- Step-family members come together with different outlooks and ways of behaving in the world; time, patience and reasonable expectations help in adjusting to varied histories / perspectives
- The couple's relationship within the combined is key to sustainability; both partners working as committed leaders of a team, promotes a united and cohesive household
- Clarifying roles, responsibilities and expectations in the blended family serves as a "road map" with strategies for building relationships and a solid framework for the family unit
- Step-families are in a process of learning to live together with new guidelines; Adults are in a position to demonstrate, model and expect polite and respectful courtesies and etiquette
- Parenting styles often differ in traditional family models; in step-families, understanding and communication on issues of styles, child management, discipline, divided loyalties are vital
- Establishing relationships within a blended family requires effort; adults can encourage this through planning distinct activities/ interactions with individuals as well as the family unit
- Attaining a meaningful sense of belonging and bonding within the step-family takes time to develop; to strive for this, the building of trust through purposeful interactions is necessary
- Conflict is a part of all families; combined families have more complex and diverse needs and emotions in dealing with conflict; a solid conflict resolution model helps to address these issues
- accommodating children's other parent(s) /extended family into the structure of the step-family is important; being prepared and flexible in planning assists on-going contact and visitation
- When challenges arise within the step-family, reassurance, consolation and support (often by professionals), can help to remind adults that the execution of all satisfying step-families is typically an immense undertaking



### Step-parenting

- Encourage your children to have a relationship with their step-parent.
- The adult should take responsibility in being proactive in developing a positive relationship with step-children.
- The step-parent should not try to take the place of the other parent.
- Be realistic in expectations with step-families, which are different from birth families.
- Biological parents should take the lead initially in discipline.
- Discuss with your new partner all parenting issues including finances, chores, discipline.
- Plan activities for the whole family, as well as for each individual child.
- Give encouragement to both your children and step-children. Be positive in your comments to and about them.
- Discuss privacy issues and new family boundaries with family members, parents and children.
- Each partner needs to discuss with their own extended family their role with the new family configuration and step-children.



“Step families have their own special problems and rewards... don’t expect that your step family will be a replica of your pre-divorce family.”

– D. Wayburne, *“What to Tell the Kids About Your Divorce”*

# Positive Coping Strategies To Respond to Separation/Divorce

## Taking Care Of Yourself

- Take care of yourself so that you can take care of your children. Find time to do something for yourself every day.
- Work on reducing your stress.
- Try and focus on positive moments in your life. Do daily affirmations.
- Work on building your self-esteem.
- Set realistic goals and expectations for the future.
- Choose friends and support systems which impact you positively.
- Know that you need adult time for socializing.



Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

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“It is more important now than ever before for me to take good care of myself.”

– S. Pitzele,  
*“Surviving Divorce: Daily Affirmations”*

# Positive Coping Strategies To Respond to Separation/Divorce

By Beth Hedva, Ph.D., Author of “The Journey From Betrayal To Trust” (*reprinted with permission*)

## 1. While Making The Decision: Accept Loss

- Expect to be on an emotional roller-coaster for a while and don't fight “what is”
- Recognize and accept disappointment
- Acknowledge your needs and fears
- When possible or appropriate, communicate directly to a support person what your fears, disappointments and needs are
- Accept your co-parenting relationship for what it is – and what it is not

## 2. Short Term Self-care: Reduce Stress

- Reduce the amount of input-decisions; set priorities, handle one thing at a time
- Extra attention to: diet, exercise, rest & relaxation, entertainment, fun, activity
- Nurture yourself: create a “relaxation ritual” and relax a little every day

Note: Extraverts recharge through contact with others – e.g. go out and see friends  
Introverts recharge through solitude – e.g. write in a journal, meditate, pray

## 3. Longer Term Self-care: Expand Your Support Systems

- Speak with objective, detached, non-judgmental support person: counselor, minister, coach, support group, 12 step group, financial planner, accountant, real estate agent, insurance agent, mediator, lawyer, etc.
- Use community supports: books and resources; social service supports; groups for single and divorced parents
- Reach out to friends, family, co-parent, child-care providers for help and support
- Explore activity, hobbies, classes and bring more fun and joy into your life

## 4. On-going: Look To The Future

- Focus not only on what you are letting go of, but also what you are gaining
- Expand creativity
- Focus on personal growth, rewards and new beginnings
- Rebuild T-R-U-S-T

# Do I Need A Therapist?

There is no sure way to answer this question. The answers to the following questions are indicators for the need for professional services.

1. Am I thinking about hurting myself?
2. Am I using alcohol, drugs or other addictions to numb my feelings?
3. Have friends or family members suggested that I seek counselling because they are worried about me?
4. Do I feel stuck and trying to deal with the same old problems with no defined plan or solutions?
5. Do I feel worried and anxious more days than not?
6. Has my worry interfered with my ability to do my job, affected my relationships with friends or family or my ability to parent?
7. Is my self-esteem compromised? Am I comparing myself to others and feeling less than adequate? Do I see myself as a failure and that no one will like/love me?
8. Do I feel depressed, sad, empty and feel like I can't face the day? Do I find it difficult to make everyday decisions and plans for the future? Have I lost interest in activities that I normally enjoy?
9. Have there recently been changes in my sleeping/eating patterns? Have I lost or gained weight? Do I have trouble sleeping or am I sleeping more excessively?
10. Do I bury myself in my work or avoid spending time with friends and leisure activities that I used to enjoy, thereby isolating myself?

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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# Does My Child Need A Therapist?

There is no sure way to answer this question. The answers to the following questions are indicators for the need for professional services.

1. Do I think my child is going to self-harm or talk about wanting to die?
2. Is my child engaging in delinquent activities (stealing, skipping school, cruelty to animals, using substances)?
3. Do I suspect that my child may be physically or sexually abused?
4. Has my child's eating habits changed? (excessive or dieting/fasting/binging).
5. Have friends, family, teachers suggested that I seek counselling for my child because they are worried about them?
6. Does my child appear depressed, lethargic, tired, unmotivated, irritable?
7. Does my child appear anxious and worried? Has my child's behavior regressed (toileting, stuttering, repetitive nervous habits, intense nightmares)? Is my child's physical health changing (aches and pains)?
8. Does my child frequently lose his/her temper (name-calling, biting, throwing things, punching)?
9. Is my child frequently resisting parental/school authority?
10. Does my child demonstrate poor self-esteem (put-downs, feels isolated, lacks friends, fearful of engaging)?
11. Does my child have difficulty expressing or receiving affection or is my child demanding excessive attention/affection and having difficulty separating?

Adapted from *"What To Tell The Kids about Your Divorce"* by Darlene Weyburne.

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Useful Forms For Co-parents:

### 1. Child Information Memo for Co-Parent: ( Dated and Signed)

#### Medical Information:

- Emergency phone numbers (work, home, cell, friends)
- Dr./Dentist phone numbers
- Medications and dosage
- Scheduled appointments

#### Friends/Activities:

- Regular plans
- Special plans
- Dates/times
- Friend's names/addresses/phones
- Parent's names/addresses/phones

#### School Information:

- Homework
- School projects/assignments
- Subject
- Teacher contact
- Date due
- Parent/teacher interviews
- Report card
- Special activities

#### Co-parent's Communication:

- Date
- My concern:
- Children's concern:
- My request:
- Children's request:
- Suggested alternate plans:
- Date/time for parental discussion:

### 2. Medical Action Plan:

In case of \_\_\_\_\_'s illness or accident (allergies/asthma etc.) or in order to treat \_\_\_\_\_ the following procedure is to be followed by parents, teacher or care provider:

1. Treatment/medication consisting of \_\_\_\_\_ to be administered \_\_\_\_\_. (frequency)
2. Doctor \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ (phone) shall be contacted immediately.
3. In emergency, child to be taken to nearest hospital.
4. Other parent to be contacted by phone as soon as possible.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

Useful Forms For Co-parents (continued):

3. Travel Form: (To Be Notarized)

To Whom It May Concern:

I, \_\_\_\_\_ mother/father of \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_(date of birth), give my permission for him/her to travel  
with: \_\_\_\_\_, to \_\_\_\_\_ for the period of  
\_\_\_\_\_ through to \_\_\_\_\_.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

Notary: (signed) \_\_\_\_\_

4. Travel Itinerary:

**This information to be provided to the other co-parent prior to departure.**

Date of <b>Departure</b> :	_____	Date of <b>Return</b> :	_____
Method of travel:	_____	Method of travel:	_____
Flight numbers:	_____	Flight numbers:	_____
Leaving From:	_____	Leaving From:	_____
Departure Time:	_____	Departure Time:	_____
Destination:	_____	Destination:	_____
Arrival Time:	_____	Arrival Time:	_____

Duration (of travel): \_\_\_\_\_ Principal location (of travel): \_\_\_\_\_

Other possible locations (of travel): \_\_\_\_\_ Emerg. Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Method and times for parent/child communication: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Useful Forms For Co-parents (continued):

5. Reminder Notice:

Memo: To: \_\_\_\_\_ From: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Our Child \_\_\_\_\_ has the following activity: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Day: \_\_\_\_\_ Place:: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

The following is required for this activity: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Location Notification:

I will be unavailable on: \_\_\_\_\_ while the children are with you.

**In case of emergency,**

a. I can be reached at: \_\_\_\_\_ OR,

b. Please call: \_\_\_\_\_ to get a message to me.

7. Request for time change:

I would like to request the following change of time with our children:

Original date/time: \_\_\_\_\_

Requested date/time: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason why: \_\_\_\_\_

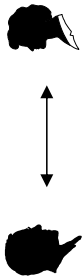
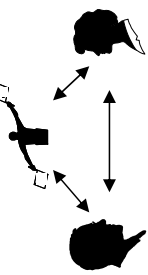
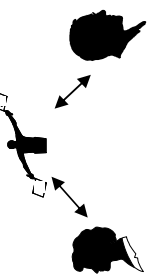
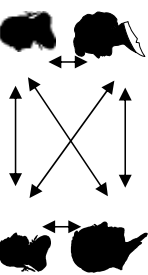
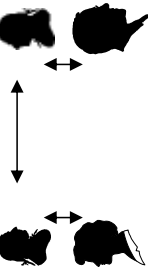








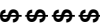


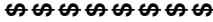



Please consider this request and respond by: \_\_\_\_\_

to: \_\_\_\_\_



# Process Choices

## Negotiating Your Separation and Divorce Process Choices

Kitchen Table	Joint Mediation	Shuttle Mediation	Collaborative Law	Traditional Law
 <p>The parties work it out together getting information as necessary from books or by consulting experts.</p> <p><b>Final decisions are made by the couple</b></p>	 <p>The parties engage a mediator to help ensure focused, calm, informed communication occurs and that all necessary decisions and issues are addressed. The focus is on getting a fair and reasonable solution for all parties.</p> <p><b>Final decisions are made by the couple</b></p>	 <p>Similar to Joint Mediation except that the mediator meets with each couple separately attempting to "broker a deal between the parties who are unable to negotiate face to face.</p> <p><b>Final decisions are made by the couple</b></p>	 <p>Each party hires their own lawyer who acts as their advocate. All parties sign agreements stating that they will not engage in the litigation process. Much time is spent in 4 way meetings with a focus on getting a fair and reasonable solution for all parties.</p> <p><b>Final decisions are made by the couple</b></p>	 <p>Each party hires their own lawyer who acts as their advocate. The lawyers negotiate on behalf of the parties, aiming to get the best possible outcome for their client alone. Eventually the case may end up in court.</p> <p><b>Final decisions may be made by the couple, or by a judge or arbitrator.</b></p>
  	  	  	  	  

N.B. In all cases two independent lawyers are required to review and sign your Separation Agreement in order for your agreement to be legally binding

**Legend:**  How much elapsed time does this process take  The process is appropriate for couples at this level of conflict  What is the relative cost of using the process

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## Useful Parenting Plan Information:

- The Parenting Plan is a contract that is specific, unique, detailed and should be customized to each families needs; it is designed to handle the typical issues that arise in families in general, and address the most specific needs for individual families
- It should allow for: deletions, additions and modifications as required as the family grows and develops
- It is based on thorough, comprehensive questions and discussions with each parent about the needs of their children and family
- It is written in clear, “user-friendly” terminology with detailed information and a future focus orientation
- The Parenting Plan is best finalized in consultation with a mediator, lawyer and any other professional that is involved with the family
- It is advised to have a mechanism built in for dispute resolution, and on-going review

The following pages are topics that need to be discussed in preparing for this document and are reproduced with permission from the following authors:

Alan E. Freed, J.D. and Rebecca T. Magruder, M.S.W., J.D.

[afreed@pcblawfirm.com](mailto:afreed@pcblawfirm.com);

[RTMmediate@sbcglobal.net](mailto:RTMmediate@sbcglobal.net)

Other applicable parenting plan resources:

[www.yoursocialworker.com](http://www.yoursocialworker.com)

[www.extension.umn.edu-searchparentingplan](http://www.extension.umn.edu-searchparentingplan)

[www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/components/8019\\_works](http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/components/8019_works)

[www.courtinfo.ca.gov/selfhelp/family/custody/focus.htm](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/selfhelp/family/custody/focus.htm)

[www.relationships.com.au/managing\\_sep/pplanchk.pdf](http://www.relationships.com.au/managing_sep/pplanchk.pdf)

<http://emeryondivorce.com/about/php>

## Information guidelines for parenting plans:

The following topics to be discussed with parents when drafting parenting plans:

### 1. Time arrangements for children

- a. Weekdays and weekends during the school year
- b. Holidays that are important to the parents
  - 1) Standard Holidays:
    - Martin Luther King Day
    - Family Day
    - Spring Break
    - Father's Day
    - Labor Day
    - Thanksgiving
    - Christmas
    - New Year's Eve and Day
    - Parent's Birthdays
    - President's Day
    - Easter
    - Mother's Day
    - Independence Day
    - Columbus Day
    - Halloween
    - Winter Break
    - Children's Birthdays
  - 2) Other Holidays such as Jewish, religious or ethnic celebrations; special family celebrations such as reunions; minor holidays such as Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day
- c. Summer and cycle breaks
- d. Vacations
  - 1) Length of time
  - 2) Notice to other parent
  - 3) Conflict resolution mechanism
- e. Prioritizing the schedule
  - 1) Generally holidays prevail over vacations which prevail over the regular schedule
  - 2) Plan for regular time being preempted by holiday time
  - 3) Changes to the schedule
    - a) Notice to other parent
    - b) Responsibility for costs, if any
- f. Transportation
  - 1) Who transports the children for exchanges
  - 2) Where and at what times are the children exchanged
- g. Legal designation
  - 1) Joint physical custody
  - 2) Sole physical custody
  - 3) Primary physical custody

### 2. Decision Making for the children

- a. Health Care Decisions

## Information guidelines for parenting plans:

- 1) How are decisions made
  - 2) How are the health care appointments made and who attends appointments
  - 3) Access to records and information
  - b. Educational Decisions
    - 1) Where the children attend school
    - 2) Special educational needs
    - 3) Access to children's records and information
    - 4) Notice of school events
  - c. Extracurricular activities and special events
    - 1) How are the activities selected
    - 2) How does the selection of any activity affect each parent's time with the kids
  - d. Other activities of the children
    - 1) Driving and purchasing a car
    - 2) Litigation involving the child
    - 3) Travel by the child without the parents
  - e. Religion
    - 1) Religious training
    - 2) Adherence to a particular religion
    - 3) Attendance at a particular church/synagogue/mosque
  - f. Relationships with extended family and friends
  - g. Guardianship if both parents die
  - h. Selecting childcare providers
  - i. Communication between parents
    - 1) Keeping each other apprised of contact information
    - 2) Relocation of residences
    - 3) Leaving town with or without the children
    - 4) Keeping each other apprised of child's whereabouts
    - 5) Language about respectful behavior between parents
  - j. Telephone contact between off-duty parent and children
  - k. Legal designation
    - 1) Joint legal custody: Both parents share in the major decision for the child, or:  
Variations
    - 2) Sole legal custody: One parent confers with the other and if they can't reach a joint decision, makes the decision and informs the other parent, or:  
Variations
- 3. Miscellaneous information**
- a. Dispute resolution mechanism for future conflicts
  - b. Request for review of parenting plan
  - c. Children's address for mailing and educational purposes

## Useful Parenting Plan Information (updated)

- The Parenting Plan is an agreement/document designed to act as a framework that outlines how parenting is shared through separation/divorce; it provides a structure for how children are to be cared for by their parents, describes how parenting decisions are made, how parenting responsibilities are to be mutually carried out and how communication about the children is to be handled
- Parenting Plans are developed to ensure that the children's needs and best interest is the focus and priority; it is a child-centered guideline that is best created by the parents for the children; in the case of teens, their opinion may be invited, as long as they are not placed in a position of having to choose between their parents; adults should make the final decisions about what is best for children
- It is a document that is specific, unique and customized to address the needs and issues of each individual family situation and may make reference to each individual child's needs
- It is written in clear, "user-friendly" terminology with explicit information and precise language to avoid ambiguity; the more conflict and poor communication between parents- the more specific and detailed the parenting plan needs to be
- It should provide a mechanism/review to allow for: deletions, additions and modifications with some flexibility built in to accommodate changes in the family structure, in the children's developmental ages/stages and contemplation for the future
- Parenting plans should include guidelines for: dispute resolution, on-going/periodic review, a clause for "first right of refusal" offering each parent the opportunity to parent if the other is unavailable and use of "third party professionals" as resources to support the children and family through divorce
- Various configurations of shared parenting can be explored to meet the specific needs of the family; one will be outlined in the parenting plan; examples include primary residence with one parent/ visits on weekends with the other parent; alternating weeks on with each parent; split weeks with each parent
- A parenting plan can be drafted by the parents providing a time to consider one's parenting philosophy and commitment to their child; it should be finalized in consultation with a mediator, lawyer, divorce consultant or other trained professional who is working with the family in this area
- Electronic calendars/communication tools that can be used to support and accompany the parenting plan for more effective co-parenting can be reviewed at:

[www.womansdivorce.com/parenting-plan-calendar.html](http://www.womansdivorce.com/parenting-plan-calendar.html) ; [www.ourfamilywizard.com](http://www.ourfamilywizard.com) ;  
[www.sharekids.com](http://www.sharekids.com) ; [www.google.com/calendar](http://www.google.com/calendar) ; [www.sharedgroundonline.com](http://www.sharedgroundonline.com)



# Information/Guidelines For Parenting Plans (updated)

The following offers suggested topics for discussion in preparing for a parenting plan document and is reproduced and adapted, with permission from the following authors:

Alan E. Freed, J.D. [afreed@pcbllawfirm.com](mailto:afreed@pcbllawfirm.com) & Rebecca T. Magruder, M.S.W., J.D. [RTMmediate@sbcglobal.net](mailto:RTMmediate@sbcglobal.net)

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    - Parent's Birthdays
    - President's Day
    - Easter
    - Mother's Day
    - Independence Day
    - Columbus Day
    - Halloween
    - Winter Break
    - Children's Birthdays
  - ii. Other Holidays such as Jewish, religious or ethnic celebrations; special Family celebrations such as family reunions; minor holidays such as Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day
- c. Summer and Cycle Breaks
- d. Vacations
  - i. Length of time
  - ii. Planning and notice to other parent
  - iii. Conflict resolution/negotiation mechanism
- e. Prioritizing the schedule
  - i. Generally holidays prevail over vacations which prevail over regular schedule
  - ii. Planning for regular time being preempted by holiday time
  - iii. Changes to the schedule
    - Notice to other parent/how/first right of refusal to step in
    - Responsibility for costs, if any or reciprocity due to other parent
- f. Transportation/transitions
  - i. Who transports the children for exchanges/ other persons permitted
  - ii. How, where, what times are children exchanged/parental behavior
  - iii. Possessions/materials to be exchanged: responsibility for
- g. Legal designation
  - i. Joint physical custody
  - ii. Sole physical custody
  - iii. Primary physical custody
  - iv. Other



## 2. Decision Making for the children

- a. Health care decisions
  - I. How are decisions made: health care providers/coverage
  - II. Appointments made; who attends; routine practice/care
  - III. Access to and storage of records and information
  - IV. Emergency care protocols
- b. Educational decisions
  - I. Where the children attend school
  - II. Special educational needs/ consents for special needs
  - III. Access to/storage of and completion of records and information
  - IV. Notice of school events and appointments
- c. Extracurricular activities and special events
  - I. How are the activities selected/ child's input
  - II. How is transportation arranged during parenting time
  - III. How does the selection of the activity affect parenting time
  - IV. Special considerations such as fund-raising/volunteer time involved
  - V. Peer contacts and role of/ birthday party protocols
- d. Other activities of the children
  - I. Driving lessons and purchase of a car
  - II. Litigation involving the child
  - III. Travel by the child: by themselves and/or with other parent
    - Passports/notarized letters of permission for travel/itinerary
    - Storage of children's information/documentation
    - Communication with non-traveling parent/contact information
- e. Religion
  - I. Religious training/lessons/affiliations
  - II. Adherence/practice of a particular religion
  - III. Attendance at church/synagogue/mosque
- f. Relationships with extended family and friends
  - I. Special family events/visiting schedule
- g. Guardianship if both parents die
- h. Selection of alternate child care providers/ child's age for self-care
- i. Communication between parents
  - I. Keeping each other apprised of contact information
  - II. Moving/relocation of residences
  - III. Leaving town with or without children
  - IV. Keeping each other apprised of children's whereabouts
  - V. Language about respectful behavior between parents
  - VI. Methods/practice/frequency of specific communication tools

## Information/Guidelines For Parenting Plans (updated)

- j. Telephone and general contact between “off duty” parent and children
- k. Legal designation
  - i. Joint legal custody: both parents share in the major decisions for children, Or variations
  - ii. Sole legal custody: one parent confers with the other and if they can’t reach a joint decision, makes the decision and informs the other parent, Or variations

### 3. Miscellaneous information

- a. Dispute resolution for future conflicts
- b. Requests and on-going review of parenting plan
- c. Children’s addresses/names/listings for mailing and educational purposes
- d. Other professional consultation for children: permission/ protocols
- e. Response time/mechanism for communication/decision making between parents
- f. Emergency contacts listing and notification to parents in emergency
- g. Introduction of new partners: when/how/role of



### Applicable parenting plan resources:

[www.yoursocialworker.com/s-articles/ppw.htm](http://www.yoursocialworker.com/s-articles/ppw.htm)

[www.extension.umn.edu/parentsforever/components/parenting\\_plan.html](http://www.extension.umn.edu/parentsforever/components/parenting_plan.html)

[www.stepfamily.ca/parenting\\_plans.htm](http://www.stepfamily.ca/parenting_plans.htm)

[www.sharedparentingworks.org/parentingplans.html](http://www.sharedparentingworks.org/parentingplans.html)

\*\*\*[www.coloradodivorcemediation.com/family/parent\\_plans.asp](http://www.coloradodivorcemediation.com/family/parent_plans.asp) Recommended Review

\*\*\*<http://www.albertacourts.ab.ca/familylaw/parentingplanissues.pdf> Recommended Review

\*\*\*[http://emeryondivorce.com/parenting\\_plans.php](http://emeryondivorce.com/parenting_plans.php); Recommended Review

Garber, B.D. Keeping Kids Out of The Middle. 2008. Chapter 12: “The Anatomy of a Parenting Plan”

Gold, Lois. The Healthy Divorce. 2009. Chapter 7: “Parenting Plans”



## Reading List – Separation/Divorce

- Ahrons, Constance, *The Good Divorce* – Harper Collins, 1994
- Brott, Armin, *The Single Father* – Abbeville Publishing Group, 1999
- Blau, Melinda, *Families - Ten Keys to Successful Co-Parenting* – G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1993
- Butler, Ian et.al., *Divorcing Children* – Jessica Kingsley Publications, 2003
- Block, Joel & Bartell, Susan, *Mommy or Daddy: Who's Side Am I On?* – Adams Media, 2002
- Clapp, Genevive, *Divorce and New Beginnings* – John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2000
- Cochrane, Michael, *Surviving Divorce: A Guide to Canadian Family Law* – Prentice Hall Canada Inc, 1996
- Darnall D., *Divorce Casualties: Protecting Your Children From Parental Alienation* – Taylor Publishing Co., 1998
- Ellison, S., *The Courage To Be a single Mother: Becoming Whole Again After Divorce* – Harper Collins, 2000
- Emery, R., *The Truth About Children and Divorce*
- Fisher, Dr. Bruce, *Rebuilding: When Your Relationship Ends* – 1999
- Hannibal, Mary Ellen, *Good Parenting Through Your Divorce* – Marlowe & Co., 2002
- Johnston, Janet et.al., *Through The Eyes of Children - Healing Stories For Children of Divorce* – The Free Press, 1997
- Kline, Kris & Pew, Stephen *For the Sake Of The Children - How To Share Your Children With Your Ex- Spouse In Spite Of Your Anger* – Prima Publishing, 1992
- Marquardt, Elizabeth *Between Two Worlds* – 2005
- McBean, Jean *Alberta: Marriage, Separation and Divorce* – Self-Counsel Press, 2004
- McDonough, Hanna & Bartha, Christina *Putting Children First - A Guide For Parents Breaking Up* – University of Toronto Press, 1999
- McKay, Mathew et.al., *The Divorce Book* – New Harbinger Publications, 1999
- Newman, Gary, *Helping Your Kids Cope With divorce* – The Sandcastles Way
- Ross, Julie and Corcoran, *Joint Custody With a Jerk - Raising A Child With An Uncooperative Ex* – St. Martins Press, 1996
- Stahl, Phillip, *Parenting After Divorce: A Guide To Resolving Conflicts and Meeting Your Children's Needs* – Impact Publishers, 2000
- Trozzi, M. & Kassimini, K., *Talking With Children About Loss: Words, Strategies and Wisdom To Cope With Death, Divorce, and Other Difficult Times* – Berkely, 1999
- Warshak, Richard, *Divorce Poison* – Regan Books, 2003
- Wallerstein, J.S. & Lewis, J. et.al., *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce* – Hyperion Press, 2001

# Reading List – Separation/Divorce

- Wallerstein, J.S. & Lewis, J. et.al., *What About The Kids?* – Hyperion Press, 2003  
Weyburne, D., *What to Tell The Kids About Your Divorce* – New Harbinger Publications, 1999  
Vaughan, D., *Uncoupling* – Vintage Books Edition, 1990

## Children's Resources

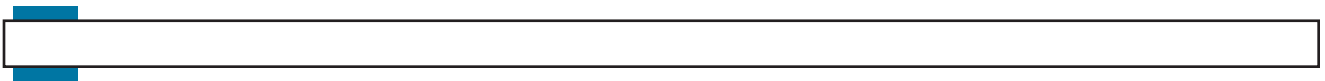
- Adams, Eric & Adams, Kathleen, *On The Day His Daddy Left - 2000* – Young children  
Blume, Judy, *It's Not The End Of The World* - 1972 – Preteen  
Brown, Laurence & Brown, Marc, *Dinosaurs Divorce* - 1986 – Young children  
Clarke, Laurie, *My Favorite things: A Children's Book About Divorce*  
Evan, Zoe & Stern, Ellen Sue, *Divorce is Not The End Of The World* - 1997 – Preteen  
Ford, Steven et.al., *My Parents Are Divorced Too*  
Gardner, Richard, *The Boys & Girls Book About Divorce* – Teen  
Kremetz, Jill, *How It Feels When Parents Divorce* - 1984 – Preteen and teen  
Heegaard, Marge, *When Something Terrible Happens: Children Can Learn To Cope With Grief* - 1991  
Lansky, Vicky, *It's Not Your Fault Ko-Ko Bear*  
Le Shan, Edna *What's Going To Happen To Me?* - 1978 – Preteen  
Levins, Sandra *Was It The Chocolate Pudding?; a store for little kids about divorce* - 2005 – Young children  
Moore-Mallinos, Jennifer, *When My Parents forgot How To Be Friends* - 2005 – Young children  
Rofes, Eric (editor), *The Kids Book Of Divorce* – Teen  
Rogers, Fred, *Let's Talk About It: Divorce*  
Sinberg, Janet, *Divorce is a Grown-up Problem* - 1978 – Young children  
Sklansky, Amy, *My Daddy And Me* - 2005 – Young children  
Stinson & Reynolds, *Mom and Dad Don't Live Together Anymore*  
Thomas, Pat, *My Family's Changing*

## Videos:

- Divorce Can Happen to the Nicest People*  
*When Mom and Dad Break Up* - Alan Thicke  
*Children of Divorce* - The Calgary Counselling Centre  
*One Divided By Two: Kids and Divorce* - National Film Board of Canada

## Reading List – Separation/Divorce: Additions (updated)

- Brownstone, Justice Harvey, *Tug Of War – Canada Council For The Arts*, 2009
- Calgary Counselling Centre: *Let's Talk About Divorce Handbook* - 2001
- Garber, Benjamin, *Keeping Kids Out Of The Middle* – Health Communications Inc., 2008
- Gold, Lois, *The Healthy Divorce* – Sphinx Publishing, 2009
- Lofas, Jeannette, *Step Parenting: Everything You Need To Know To Make It Work* – Citadel Press, 2004
- Marquardt, Elizabeth, *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce* – Crown Publishers, 2005
- Moskovitch, Deborah, *The Smart Divorce* – Chicago Review Press, 2007
- Netter, Rabbi Perry, *Divorce Is A Mitzvah* – Jewish Lights Publishing, 2002
- Nowinski, Joseph, *The Divorced Child* – Palgrave Macmillan, 2010
- Ragusa, Moreah, *The New Divorce Paradigm Journal* – 2006
- Sell, Colleen, Editor, *A Cup of Comfort For Divorced Women* - 2009
- Stewart, Karen, *Clean Break: How To Divorce With Dignity and Move On With Your Life* – John Wiley and Sons, Canada Ltd., 2008
- Thayer, Elizabeth & Zimmerman, J., *The Co-Parenting Survival Guide* – New Harbinger Publications Inc., 2001
- Wolfelt, Allan D, *Transcending Divorce: 10 Essential Touchstones For Finding Hope and Healing; The Wilderness of Divorce: Finding Your Way* – 2008, 2009
- Professional: *“Journal of Divorce and Remarriage”*- The Haworth Press



# Professional Book Resources

- Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development. (1995) *Group Works: Facilitating Small Group Learning; A Career Practitioner's Resources Guide*.
- Barlow, Constance. (1999) *A Handbook of Interactive Exercises for Groups*.
- Boyan, Susan Blyth. (1997) *Cooperative Parenting and Divorce*.
- Clarke, Jean Illsley. (1998) *Who, Me Lead a Group?*
- Cross, K.P. (1981) *Adults as Learners*.
- Curran, Dolores. (1989) *Working With Parents*.
- Doherty, William. (2003) *Family Life Education: Integrating Theory and Practice*.
- Johnson, D.W. (1994) *Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills*.
- Lawson, Leslie Griffin. (1982) *Lead On: The Complete Handbook for Group Leaders*.
- Margolin, Sylvia. (1996) *Complete Group Counselling Program for Children of Divorce*.
- Mallory, Lucretia. (1984) *Leading Self-Help Groups*.
- Merriam, S.B. (1999) *Learning In Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*.
- Pratt, D.D. (1991) *The Dynamics of Continuing Education Learning Groups Course Guide*.
- Prochaska, J. (2002). *Stages of Change*
- Saskatoon Adlerian Society. (1995) *Respectful Responsible Parenting: A Facilitator's Guide*.
- Toseland, Ronald. (2002) *An Introduction to Group Work Practice*.
- Vanier Institute of the Family. (1994, 2000, 2004) *Profiling Canada's Families, I, II, III*.
- Williamson, David. (1982). *Group Power: How To Develop, Lead and Help Groups Achieve Goals*.

- *Mann, Betsy. (2004) Working With Parent Groups: A Handbook for Facilitators. Note: Pages 94-95 Comprehensive Book List for Professionals Working with Groups of Parents*

## Web-Based Resources – Separation/Divorce

<a href="http://www.bccf.bc.ca">www.bccf.bc.ca</a>	BC Council for Families
<a href="http://www.familieschange.ca">www.familieschange.ca</a>	BC Ministry of Attorney General
<a href="http://www.frp.ca">www.frp.ca</a> ; <a href="http://www.parentsmatter.ca">www.parentsmatter.ca</a>	Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs
<a href="http://www.cecw-cepb.ca">www.cecw-cepb.ca</a>	Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare
<a href="http://www.cpe.unt.edu">www.cpe.unt.edu</a>	Centre for Parent Education and Family Support – University of North Texas
<a href="http://familyinfoserv.com">http://familyinfoserv.com</a>	Family Information Services
<a href="http://www.cfi.ca">http://www.cfi.ca</a>	Father Involvement Initiative Canada
<a href="http://www.growinghealthykids.com">www.growinghealthykids.com</a>	Growing Healthy Canadians – Health Canada
<a href="http://www.nald.ca/adultlearningcourse/resource.htm">www.nald.ca/adultlearningcourse/resource.htm</a>	
<a href="http://www.investinkids.ca">www.investinkids.ca</a>	Invest in Kids Foundation Canada
<a href="http://www.kidsturn.org">www.kidsturn.org</a>	Kids Turn Foundation
<a href="http://www.ncfr.org">www.ncfr.org</a>	National Council on Family Relations
<a href="http://npn.org">http://npn.org</a>	National Parenting Education Network (NPEN)
<a href="http://www.parenteducationsask.ca">www.parenteducationsask.ca</a>	Parent Education Saskatchewan
<a href="http://www.rainbows.ca">www.rainbows.ca</a>	Rainbows Canada
<a href="http://www.psychologyfoundation.org">www.psychologyfoundation.org</a>	The Psychology Foundation of Canada
<a href="http://www.vifamily.ca">www.vifamily.ca</a>	Vanier Institute of the Family

*Prepared handouts are available from a variety of web-based sources;*

*Please respect the use of copyright rules and regulations when accessing materials*

Reflections, comments, questions

1. What was the most valuable information you received this week?

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2. From this week's learnings what do I need to change in order to support my children?

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# Goals for my Future

*I have invested much time and energy in this six week workshop.*

*To continue my commitment to my children through the process of separation/divorce, I will work on the following goals in going forward:*

1. One goal/skill that I will work on with my co-parent:

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2. One goal/skill that I will work on with my child(ren):

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## Participant Survey

We thank you for completing these questions. It will gather data to ensure that this is an effective program for both participants and program funders.

Please Check Only One Answer that Best Applies

### In the role of co-parent, I feel:

- Totally overwhelmed
- Often overwhelmed
- Less able to manage most situations
- Able to manage most situations
- Confident in my co-parenting



### When I communicate with my co-parent, I:

- Usually stay calm and in control
- Feel unable to resolve problems
- Am able to focus specifically on the children's issues most of the time
- Am able to negotiate and if required, come to a compromise
- Find it hard to remain focused and calm on different children's issues

### A child's reaction to parental conflict in separation and divorce is demonstrated by:

- Withdrawal
- Angry and acting out behavior
- Fearing new people and new situations
- Regression to an earlier age/stage of development
- Reconciliation fantasies
- Confusion and disorganization

## Participant Survey (continued)

### Once I have a co-parenting plan in place it:

- Never needs to be changed
- Needs to be reviewed annually
- Will be suitable until the children are 18 years of age
- Will need to be reviewed at developmental milestones
- Will need to be reviewed as various issues arise



### I am in touch with my co-parent about our child(ren)'s issues (emotional, medical, care-giving, school, scheduling, needs):

- 0 times per month
- 2 times per month
- 4 times per month
- more than 4 times per month

Please Circle One of the Numbers

### I rate my knowledge of child development:

LOW    1    2    3    4    5    HIGH

### I rate my skills in dealing with my co-parent:

LOW    1    2    3    4    5    HIGH

### I rate my skills in dealing with my child(ren's) reaction to our sep/divorce:

LOW    1    2    3    4    5    HIGH

## FINAL EVALUATION

### “Effective Co-Parenting: *Putting Kids First*”

Thank you for completing this evaluation. Your comments will help when planning future programs.

1. Please rate the following:	Very Poor	Poor	Good	Very good	Excellent
Workshop leaders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Content	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Usefulness of Information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Location/facility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Workshop Overall	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. What was the MOST helpful information you received? (*impact of sep./divorce on kids; ages/stages and typical reactions of kids; grief/loss through sep./divorce; communicating with co-parent and children; managing anger/conflict; specific issues/best practices*)

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3. What was the LEAST helpful information you received?

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*Continued on back*

## Final Evaluation (continued)

4. What new awareness/learnings are you taking away from this workshop?

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5. Did the leaders help you learn from this program? If yes, how? What suggestions do you have for the leaders?

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6. What recommendations would you make in presenting this program in the future?

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# Certificate of Attendance

Sample Certificate

## Certificate Of Attendance

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*(Name of participant)*

Attended the program:

***“Effective Co-parenting:  
Putting Kids First”***

Presented by:

Elaine Bucknum, M.S.W., R.S.W., R.F.M.  
Sandy Shuler, B.S.W., R.S.W., C.C.F.E.

Dates

MINIMUM 9 HOURS OF COMMITMENT

The program:

- Provided information about the needs of children and families coping with separation and divorce
- Provided skills and strategies for improving communication, resolving conflict and managing issues of children and co-parents

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*Facilitator*

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*Facilitator*

