

# Focus on Children

## I. Overview

### 1. Orientation:

- a) Introduce myself and my qualifications
- b) Bathrooms, if need a break let me know, feel free to ask questions
- c) Confidentially – ask members to agree to not share personal information they have learned about other members outside of this group
- d) Individuals introduce themselves – share as much or little as you want (length of marriage, separation, number of children and ages)

### 2. Program Goals:

- a) To help participants recognize they can create a successful divorce and rebuild a new life.
- b) To help the participants identify their feelings
- c) To teach the SOLVE model for conflict resolution
- d) To help participants understand their children's needs, reactions to divorce, and the ingredients to success.

### 3. Statistics:

- 60 percent of 1<sup>st</sup> marriages end in divorce
- 70 percent of 2<sup>nd</sup> marriages end in divorce
- 87 percent of 3<sup>rd</sup> marriages end in divorce
- 96 percent of 4<sup>th</sup> marriages end in divorce
- Over 1 million children experience their parents divorce
- **THERE IS A DIRECT CORRELATION BETWEEN LENGTH AND DEGREE OF LITIGATION AND PARENTAL CONFLICT AND THE DETERIORATION OF DIVORCING CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AND HOW THEY DO LONG TERM!!!**

### 4. Statistics without parent education program and resource:

- 25 percent will be high school drop outs
- 40 percent will receive psychological help
- 65% never build a good positive relationship with their father
- 30% never build a good positive relationship with their mom

- 59 percent are more likely to have problems in their own marriages
5. Statistics/Information with parent education program and resources:
- Parents who learn how to handle their divorce experience go to court much less often over custody and time arrangement situations (less modifications)
  - Over 60 percent of parents who learn about dealing with divorce say that the information will help them to understand their children and will influence their behavior in the future.
  - Parents report substantial reduction in tension and conflict with the other parents after conflict resolution training.
  - When parents disentangle themselves from past problems they are free to build a successful new life.

II. Self – Coping with emotions of divorce – the process of rebuilding your life will last from a few months to three years or more. The amount of time involved is directly related to the way in which you cope with your feelings in the aftermath of divorce. There are five emotional states that you will experience.

- A. **SHOCK/DENIAL** – I can't believe this is happening to me. Our problems are not serious enough to lead to divorce. I'm feeling weak and drained of energy. I'm having trouble with my eating and sleeping patterns. I keep expecting my spouse to come back. I'm so overwhelmed, I'm unable to perform routine tasks. My spouse does not mean what he is saying.
- B. **ANGER** – This divorce is not my fault. There's nothing good to say about my ex. This should not have happened to me. All of my problems have been caused by my ex. My ex is doing this to me because they are a sick person. I hate my ex for hurting me and the children. I hope my ex gets hit by a truck.
- C. **BARGAINING** – I'll try almost anything to make the pain go away. I find myself drinking alcohol more than I used to. I have starting taking drugs (prescription or otherwise). I am in another relationship within a few months of my separation. I will agree to almost any settlement just to get

the papers signed. I'd be willing to try a reconciliation right now. Maybe if I try to be nicer my ex will change their mind.

D. **DEPRESSION** – I'll never be loved again. I'm powerless to change my situation. I haven't had any fun for weeks now. I'll never be happy. At times I think I'd be better off dead. I can't trust anyone anymore. I've stopped taking very good care of myself. I feel so alone. I don't even want to face the day.

E. **ACCEPTANCE/RESOLUTION** – I can talk to my ex without getting hooked into negative reactions. I recognize that I contributed to the problems in my marriage. I have some ideas about what would make my life happier. I actually do some good things for myself everyday. I can accept my children loving both of us.

### III. CO-PARENTING/ SOLVE MODEL AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

#### 1. SOLVE Model

- a) S = Schedule a time to discuss the issue. Stop and schedule another time if conversation erupts.
- b) O = Outcome – what each parent thinks the solution will look like. What you **DO** want not what you **DON'T** want.
- c) L = Listening – each person listens to the others so they can understand what the other needs to arrive to an agreement.
- d) V = Verbalize solutions – find a solution that meets the needs of both. Make several proposals. Something you both can live with. Not all of what you wanted but some of what both of you wanted.
- e) E = Evaluate how things worked and what changes you might make. Schedule a time to review how things worked and if any adjustments need to be made.

#### 2. Points to remember

- a) don't let the children choose – it is your job as the parent to PARENT and make decisions
- b) **THERE IS A DIRECT CORRELATION BETWEEN LENGTH AND DEGREE OF LITIGATION AND PARENTAL CONFLICT AND THE DETERIORATION OF DIVORCING CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH AND HOW THEY DO LONG TERM!!!**

- c) You will have a life long relationship with your children's other parent – so reducing conflict and tension will benefit you all

IV. The children – by becoming aware of the danger signs you can identify when your child is not coping well with the divorce. More importantly, you'll learn what to do if your child is experiencing problems. With your help your children can successfully adjust to the divorce so that they can go on to have a happy life.

1. The following formula will make it easy for you to remember the important elements of what you can do to help your child be happy:

- a) **H**elp create security
- b) **A**ctively listen to your child
- c) **P**rotect your child from the painful conflicts
- d) **P**rovide rules and consistency
- e) **Y**ou commit to a better life

2. Key areas of concern for children

- a) living arrangements
- b) activities they participate in
- c) friendships
- d) money issues
- e) relationships with parents

3. How children react to divorce

- a) Anger/Hostility
  - blaming one parent for leaving the other
  - fighting with peers
  - acting out at school, home – verbally and/or physically
  - running away from home
- b) Eating Problems
  - increased appetite or loss of appetite
  - demands for treats and “goodies” as a sign of love
  - digestive disorders/more stomach aches
- c) Loss of Interests
  - drops out of activities, lack of energy
  - more self-conscious around other people
- d) Lying and Fabrications
  - telling stories about one parent or the other
  - making up fantasies about how life will be
  - manipulating the parents for attention

e) Poor Sleep Habits

- increased use of sleep as an escape
- anxious and disrupted sleep (insomnia) – nightmares
- possible bed wetting or need to sleep with the parent

f) Quiet and Withdrawn

- spends more time alone
- refuses to acknowledge that anything has changed
- won't let friends know about the divorce
- has the child stopped talking to you?

g) School problems

- poor performance, forgetting assignments, lack of interest
- difficulty concentrating
- trouble with teachers/authority figures
- decrease in grades
- fights with peers/ need for attention

\*\*\* Don't ignore the distress signals/More than 1/3 of children feel they caused the divorce. Some changes in behavior can be expected when children are faced with their parents' divorce. However, parents should be aware of the danger signs from the above list. Counseling for your children may be necessary to assist them in their adjustment to the divorce. Helping children at an early age to express and deal with their feelings will enable them to enjoy healthy and mature relationships in the future.