

Children 1st

A Class for Divorcing Parents and their Children

Parent's Handbook

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Children 1st

A Class for Divorcing Parents and their Children

FOR THE CHILDREN

Age appropriate games, art and discussion are all a part of the children's class to help them understand their feelings about the divorce/separation. Each child will receive a packet with handouts and any art they completed.

Topics covered in 1st Class: (1.5 hours)

- What happens and who causes divorce/separation?
- Children are not responsible for divorce.
- Understanding the reactions and feelings that go with divorce/separation.
- Understanding divorce terms (words).
- Who takes care of me?
- What happens when parents argue and feel sad?
- Children are not responsible for making parents feel better.

Topics covered in 2nd Class (1 hour – 1 month after 1st class)

- Check in – how are things going?
- Follow up on 1st Class:
 - a. Feelings about the divorce/separation.
 - b. What has changed since last class?
- Evaluation of class.

FOR THE PARENTS

Prior to the 1st Class, each parent will be required to have watched the film, *Split* by Ellen Bruno. Each Parent will need to go to the website: <http://www.splitfilm.org/> stream the film and view it in its entirety prior to class. A receipt will need to be presented to Harmony At Home as proof that the film has been viewed prior to class. Each parent will receive a binder with all the information discussed in class and additional information regarding mediation, co-parenting, reading lists and community resources. In order for parents to receive a certificate of completion, they will need to pay the fee in full, watch the required video, attend both classes and fill out an evaluation.

Topics covered in 1st Class: (1.5 hours)

- Impact of conflict.
- The impact of divorce on the different stages of development.
- Effective communication with the children.
- Negotiating with the other parent.
- Problem solving in the new families.
- Children are not responsible for divorce.
- Understanding the reactions and feelings that go with divorce/separation.
- Children are not responsible for making parents feel better.

Topics covered in 2nd Class (1 hour – 1 month after 1st class)

- Check in – how are things going?
- Follow up on 1st Class:
 - a. What has changed in your behavior since last class?
 - b. How have your children responded to the changes?
- Evaluation of class

What is a psychic divorce? A l o n g Process

It's a journey of Self-transformation, self-realization, self-actualization... Sounds spiritual... It is and it's gut-wrenching, but it can be beautiful. It's up to you...

Remember when you had hopes, goals and dreams of your own?

Then you became two. You had new dreams in common.

Common goals are shattered when relationships change.

What were those original goals, dreams strengths? What do you like about your inner self - your natural gifts, your nature? What would you love to do? It's time to do the work. Then create a vision for your journey, your life.

Make a list of your dreams/goals.



Generate ideas about new goals and write them down.

Keeping their family a family means when separated, 2 homes for the kids and that they can help kids feel okay about this change by talking with them about it in a positive light, trying to make it special for them at both places so they will be happy instead of traumatized. Help them transform their new situation. (Minimizing negative effects).

Healing your heart

Who is part of your support group?

- ❖ Friends or Family
- ❖ Church - Pastor, small study group
- ❖ Coworkers
- ❖ Counselor
- ❖ Mentor
- ❖ Support group i.e men's/women's support groups

Write down who is a part of your support system - Generate ideas and share

❖

❖

❖

Support Group Ideas

- ❖ Bible study
- ❖ Hiking or other interest groups
- ❖ One or two close friends
- ❖ Family (parents/siblings)
- ❖ Counselor
- ❖ Mentor

Importance of Self-Care

This may be a challenging time in your life. Consider your needs so that you are physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally strong and healthy so that you do not fall apart and as a parent can be loving and attentive so you can create a comfortable and enjoyable life for yourself and your family.

Generate a list of what this would look like for you on a daily basis and also looking at it on a larger scale that stretches into the week, month, and long-term future.

Discover how to make yourself feel whole and nurtured... self-love so that you feel loved, whole, and worthy. Then your children will in turn reap the benefits of feeling loved, whole, and worthy.

THE STAGES OF THE PSYCHIC DIVORCE

- The process of the psychic divorce is unavoidable.
- Successful resolution is not always the outcome; the process can fail to complete.
- The worst examples of post-divorce legal battles, bitterness, and general mayhem may be most often ascribed to a failure of psychic divorce.

Pre-divorce Decision Period:

1. Increasing marital tension.
2. Attempted reconciliation.
3. Decline in marital intimacy.
4. A break in the facade of marital solidarity.

This stage can last for weeks, months, years. Often the relationship stays at this unresolved level for a long period of time.

Decision Period Proper:

1. A firm decision is made by at least one partner. Relief, exhilaration.
2. Anxiety and panic set in, "Can I survive alone?"
3. Renewed marital intimacy - clinging and unwillingness to face underlying rupture.
4. Renewed fighting – push and oppose until acceptance.
5. Renewed anger – often plays out in conflict over settlement.

Period of Mourning:

1. Feelings of guilt, self-reproach. Acute sense of failure and diminished self-worth. Loneliness and depression are common.
2. The pressure of societal assumptions that divorce ends family, divorce ruins children, and that divorce is abnormal.
3. Anger at this point often signifies a return to psychological equilibrium.
4. Acceptance of both the positives and negatives in the marriage, realistic sadness.

Period of Re-equilibration:

1. Keep your family a family
2. Minimizing the negative effects on your children
3. Heightened personal growth, diminished dwelling on the marriage.
4. If mourning is successfully completed, there is good potential to move through a "constructive divorce".

Throughout the difficult process, both partners seem buffeted by strong emotional forces over which they have little control. Partners are often unpredictable, and they may act in ways that do not represent their genuine feelings. Prior to moving through these stages, individuals are often unable to plan constructively for their own needs or the needs of their children.

Understanding this transition enables the parties to assess where they are in the process, and to move forward consciously and responsibly.

THE STAGES OF GRIEF

Divorce has often been compared to a “death”. When we’ve lost something important in our lives there is often a grieving process.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross developed a model for grieving which is described in her classic book *On Death and Dying* in 1969.

The stages have been abbreviated as DABDA and stand for:

- D - Denial
- A - Anger
- B - Bargaining
- D - Depression
- A - Acceptance



The five stages of the Kübler-Ross model are the best-known description of the emotional and psychological responses that many people experience when faced with a significant loss.

These stages don't only apply to loss as a result of death but may also occur in someone who experiences a different life-changing event such as a divorce or loss of a job.

These stages are not meant to be complete or chronological. Not everyone who experiences a life-threatening or life-changing event feels all five of the responses nor will everyone who does experience them do so in the order that is written. Reactions to illness, death, and loss are as unique as the person experiencing them.

It's important to remember that some people will experience all the stages, some in order and some not, and other people may only experience a few of the stages or even get stuck in one.

Denial - Stage 1

Some people are relieved that divorce/separation is occurring but some people may not want to believe that it is happening. Some people try to rekindle their relationships because they can't face that it is actually a reality. Usually, unless a couple gets counseling or some type of support to help them make changes in the relationship, this attempt likely, will not work. The stage of denial is different for everyone; sometimes it doesn't even occur, sometimes it is very brief and for some it can last for years.

Anger - Stage 2

The realization that all of one's hopes, dreams, and well-laid plans aren't going to come about can bring anger and frustration. Unfortunately, this anger is often directed out at the world and at random. Often the anger is directed toward the other parent and sometimes at the children.

It's important to understand where this anger is coming from. It usually is covering for hurt and pain and it is crucial that one can manage their anger and get help if it is overwhelming.

Bargaining - Stage 3

This stage may or may not be present in the divorce/separation process. One may try to bargain with the other parent about how they can make this work. If one parent is already final in their decision this will likely not be successful. Even if both parties are in this stage, unless they get help to address the underlying issues in the relationship, bargaining will not have a positive outcome.

Depression - Stage 4

When it becomes clear that the divorce/separation is final, many people experience depression.

Kubler-Ross explains that there are really two types of depression in this stage. The first depression, which she called "reactive depression," occurs as a reaction to current and past losses.

The second type of depression is dubbed "preparatory depression." This is the stage where one has to deal with the impending future loss of many events and people they love. For example, the loss of holidays with extended family that may not be able to happen anymore or future family vacations that everyone used to look forward to.

This stage of depression is an important one to go through. If he/she can grieve fully and move through depression, the stage of acceptance will follow.

Acceptance - Stage 5

The stage of acceptance is a relief. It is a time when healing can occur and the co-parenting relationship will be healthy. Once parents have accepted the finality of the divorce/separation, they will be able to make the best decisions regarding the wellbeing of their children.

PREPARATION FOR MEDIATION

Mediation is a process where the two parents, who are in dispute, meet with a neutral professional in an attempt to resolve their disagreement. In California, all disputing parents are required to engage in mediation before a court will hear the case. Parents may work with a private mediator or may use the mediation services offered by the court.

The goals of mediation are to reduce the acrimony between the parents and to produce a mutually acceptable parenting plan for the children. The mediator's job is to manage the communication process so that it remains, or becomes, productive and to give the parents information on the psychological needs of their children - as well as common practices in the community. Decisions about children are made either by the parents, when they're able to come up with something that they both feel is good for the children and workable for them, or by the Judge.

If you attend mediation with the court, you will receive a blue brochure with your appointment letter that explains their services. Parents should enter mediation with some ideas about the living arrangement for the children as well as how the children would spend time with each parent (usually a schedule). Think about alternatives, areas that are negotiable, and what issues, if any, are not negotiable for you. Be prepared for some give and take discussion.

In most cases, an agreement negotiated by the parents is preferable to one mandated by the court. You know your children better than anyone else.

Parents will notice that mediators do not use the same terminology that lawyers do. Mediators talk about living arrangements for the child and time-sharing schedules. Schedules for children should be built on the needs of the children and the skills and availability of parents – not on some notion of full custody, visitation, or percentages of time. An appropriate child-centered plan can be labeled at a later time either by mutual agreement or litigation. What children need is stable, healthy regular contact with each parent.

The only other important thing to remember is please do not bring beepers or phones to mediation. This is a time to give your focused attention to planning for your child.

TIPS ON THE MEDIATION PROCESS

1. The initial mediation service offered by Monterey County consists of two hours at no charge. That is not much time, use it wisely.
2. Children are not brought into the mediation sessions, nor are attorneys.
3. Know your bottom line, where you are flexible, and what's most important to you. Be clear about what it is you want in terms of schedule, always keeping the child's well-being central.
4. You are not going to change the other parent's lifestyle.
5. The mediator is not going to listen to stories about the other parent; they have no way of assessing who is telling the truth. If concerns are brought to the mediation involving safety of the child, the case will go through a separate evaluative procedure during which proof can be offered.
6. You can ask for a break during the mediation if you are finding it difficult.
7. Remain civil.
8. If an agreement is not reached during mediation, you will spend a great deal of money to have someone else make the decisions regarding your children.
9. Make your goal reaching an agreement, not winning.
10. Look at each issue from the other parent's perspective.
11. Always, always keep the child's interest in mind.
12. If you are undecided at the close of the mediation, say so. When agreements are made and then undone, it only increases the mistrust between the parties.

STAGES OF NEGOTIATION

1. Define the problem.

2. How important is it to you (Scale 1-10)

Person 1 _____

Person 2 _____

3. Generate possible options (don't evaluate them until after generating a list)

4. Solution is _____

5. Who will do what, and when?

6. Evaluate when

CONSEQUENCES OF CONFLICT

- Difficulty in communicating about cooperating over child care two or three years after the divorce.
- Difficulty focusing on the children's needs as separate from anger or from ongoing disputes with each other.
- Cannot protect the children from their own emotional distress and anger, or from ongoing disputes with each other.
- Tribal warfare, taking sides, attorneys, families, and mental health professionals.

INTERACTIONAL COMPONENTS OF THE HIGH CONFLICT DIVORCE

- High degree of anger, physical aggression, alleged sexual abuse and/or verbal abuse often leads to a high rate of litigation.
- Traumatic separation and negative images.

INTERNAL COMPONENTS OF THE HIGH CONFLICT DIVORCE

- Divorce as loss
- Divorce as humiliation
- Divorce as betrayal
- Divorce as solution (i.e. in the case of abuse)
- Disillusionment
- Shame
- Inability to look at children's needs

THE IMPACT OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES

INFANTS TO AGE TWO

Cognitive/Emotional Development Issues

For babies, the developmental task is trust. Infants rely on one or two bonded, attached people in their lives for basic physiological and emotional needs. When one of those people disappears, the child can develop attachment disorders leading to fear and distrust of adults and the world in general.

The effect of separation on an infant and young toddler is greatly influenced by the degree of upset on the part of the parents. Due to the close bond and attachment, and because at this stage the child's survival is dependent on their ability to read the cues transmitted by the caretaker, the infant is highly attuned to the anxiety and tension that the parent may be experiencing.

Because of developmentally based limitations of cognition and memory, these babies need frequent (at least 3-4 X per week) contact with the non-custodial parent and a secure, familiar, and consistent home base. As the child grows towards toddler and preschool age, they are more capable of adapting to separate home and caretaker environments.

Each child, from birth, carries within them a different temperament and capacity for adapting to change. This is an especially important factor to consider when attending to the differing needs of the infant or young toddler affected by divorce. Disruptions in routine or lapses in care can impact a child this age to a great degree.

Possible Reactions of Children

Infants will exhibit their distress with fretful behavior and/or eating and digestive problems.

Changes in sleep patterns.

Young toddlers may exhibit irritability and aggression.

Temper tantrums, regressed behaviors, clinging and whining (young toddler age).

Fear-based behaviors.

Ways to Help Your Child

Establish a calm, stable environment for babies.

Frequent contact with other parents within a familiar, safe environment.

Make transitions from one parent to another as nurturing as possible.

Stay out of intense conflict in the presence of a child.

If communication with another parent is difficult or conflicting, keep a diary of the child's needs and behaviors that is passed along at the time of transition between parents.

Remember that safety issues absolutely demand communication of some kind between the parents, particularly at this vulnerable age.

The emotional climate for the child is so influential. Be aware of your own needs, stressors. Parents who involve themselves in conflict are less available to the baby's needs.

Consistency is very important.

Create a strong support system for yourself as a parent.

PRESCHOOL-AGES THREE TO FIVE YEARS

Cognitive / Emotional Development Issues

These children are in the process of developing higher level thinking skills. They appear verbally sophisticated, but still confuse reality and fantasy. They have an exaggerated belief in their own power, so they may believe themselves responsible for the divorce or responsible for trying to put their parent's relationship back together.

Children this age look to external sources for their stability. Their inner security depends on the stability of the environment and the people in their lives. They may not understand that the present disruption is temporary, or that the distress in the family will pass and those who love and support them will be available.

These children view their parents as a single unit, so that when one leaves they live with fear that the other one will too.

Possible Reactions of Children

Children this age often exhibit the most dramatic changes in behavior.

Each child's adjustment will differ based on their inherent ability to cope with change.

Unable to understand the concept of divorce.

Unable to fully comprehend the concepts of time, or of cause and effect.

Do not want to separate from parents.

Persist in wishful thinking that the divorce is happening.

Expresses fear that one or both parents will not return.

Possible regression to earlier behaviors such as tantrums, thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, security blankets, old toys, (regressions are generally transient and last only up to a few months).

Overwhelmed with anxiety expressed through irritability, clinging, whining, increased aggression, and temper tantrums.

Attempts to control the environment and/or others as a way to create security.

May express fears which appear unrelated to the divorce.

May react dramatically to routine separation and bedtimes due to the anticipation of loss.

Ways to Help Your Child

How parents and other significant people in the children's lives handle the divorce will affect how the children will adjust.

Children will feel secure if their world is stable and predictable. As few changes as possible should be made in the child's world during a divorce. Necessary changes should be introduced gradually.

Offer verbal and physical assurances of love and protection.

Offer, repeatedly, that parent will return.

Read age-appropriate books on divorce with your child.

Provide age-appropriate information and simple explanations as often as needed or requested.

Help children to verbalize feelings such as fear, sadness, and anger.

Help children to talk about nightmares and other frightening experiences.

Encourage relationships with other parent. Schedule to see other parent regularly and frequently.

Explain that parents don't divorce their children, the children are not responsible.

Provide details about the future, encourage discussion on an ongoing basis (talk about how another child might feel with the same set of circumstances).

Create outside activities and auxiliary support systems for your child.

Stabilize the present family.

As a parent, get outside help and support for your own issues.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL- AGES SIX TO TWELVE YEARS

Cognitive/ Emotional Development Issues

These children are most concerned about issues relating to their family. They use family stability as an “anchor” from which to go out and explore the world. It is very difficult for a child to accept the fact of a divorce that occurs at this time in their lives. The primary fantasy that the parents will reunite is especially strong for children in this age range.

Elementary school-aged children are working at the task of developing social and academic competence; having a dependable family from which to explore the world helps in this process. When a divorce occurs, the child feels the loss of that secure foundation. A child of this age does not understand the potential for rebuilding, and may experience and express a deep and profound sense of loss. Those children ages six to eight are the most openly grief-stricken in their behavior. They believe that the family is vital to their survival in the world. They are also at the age of serious inquiry about their origins, who they are and their value in belonging within the family.

No matter how much the child knows that the parents will not come back together, it is very difficult for them to accept that any reason would be justification enough for the parent's divorce. In their desire for reunification, the children may attempt to get the parents to interact with each other (positively or negatively). From the child's perspective, fighting between the parents is even preferable to no contact. At the same time, especially for the younger children (6-8), the experience of parental conflict is very painful. Issues of equal loyalty comes into play,

and the child, wanting to show loyalty equally to both parents, feels pulled apart within himself.

Children that have a healthy bond with their parents will experience a fear of being abandoned by them. This is part of normal development and indicates a strong positive attachment. Six to eight-year-olds are particularly susceptible to feelings of abandonment, rejection, and worry about replacement. Many of their behaviors at this time are attempts to ensure that the parents still want them and are not planning to leave them. The child might also appear to reject the parent out of fear of being rejected, and announce that they want a divorce from the parent.

Children at this age are aware of what is happening in the family, but do not have any ability to control it. They may have a difficult time accepting that things are not the way they used to be, and they may blame the parent that they think is responsible for the divorce.

Possible Reactions of Children

Preoccupation with feelings of anger, loss, guilt, rejection, sadness, and loneliness.

Worry about never seeing one parent or the other.

Feelings of being responsible for the divorce.

Believe one parent doesn't love them anymore.

Anger with one parent for making the other one leave.

Fantasize reconciliation of parents.

Anxious when the schedule of contact with other parent is unpredictable.

Uncooperative.

Poor concentration.

Experience intense longing for the absent parent.

Take on adult roles, feel protective of parents.

Feel deprived, are consequently more demanding.

Difficulty sharing time and possessions.

Maintain wish for parent's reconciliation.

Try to control other people, situations.

In nine to twelve-year-olds: stress - often expressed in a variety of physical complaints.

A significant percentage of older (nine to twelve) children report directing intense anger at one or both parents, whichever they blame for the divorce.

Older (nine to twelve) children are more easily drawn into an alliance with one parent. These children report that they later felt regret and tremendous guilt about the role they played.

Ways to Help Your Child

Try to maintain a sense of family throughout the divorce, providing a sense of belonging for the child within each household.

Remind the children that parents cannot divorce the children, even though they're leaving each other.

Ongoing reassurance to the children, that they will not be abandoned.

Accept and encourage the child's feeling.

Allow the child time to handle his/her feelings.

Use play activities to encourage expression of feelings.

Assist and model for the child appropriate expression of angry feelings.

Set structure and routine, be consistent.

Avoid power struggles.

Develop a predictable visitation schedule.

Support a child's relationship with another parent.

Be available, and give permission to talk about what is happening.

Do not offer false hopes of reconciliation.

Children 1st Co-Parenting Program Harmony At Home 2020

PROVIDING EMOTIONAL SUPPORT TO CHILDREN

TAKE TIME OUT



Schedule special uninterrupted times to be with your child. Only work when both of you are alert. Short meetings of less than an hour are best.

LISTEN CAREFULLY



All of your child's feelings are valid and need to be expressed. You don't have to agree; just let the child know that you hear them.



AGE-APPROPRIATE

Use words and concepts that are right for the age and development of your child.



NON-LOGICAL/ IRRATIONAL

Emotions involve feelings rather than logic. Don't be surprised if your "sensible" suggestions are rejected.



FLEXIBILITY

Let your child guide you. The resulting discussion may be different from what you had in mind.

UPGRADE PARENTING SKILLS



Attend parent training programs and participate in school activities.



PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Meet with your child's counselor or psychologist. He or she can provide valuable support.

Give permission for a child to love both parents.

This is a difficult time. As a parent you should stay *in the picture*, create a personal support system for yourself, and make room for feelings.

ADOLESCENTS-AGES THIRTEEN TO SEVENTEEN

Cognitive / Emotional Development Issues

The adolescent stage of development involves the tasks of independence and developing a sense of personal identity. The complexity of these normal challenges are, in themselves, demanding physical changes, changes in social environments and relationships, and the responsibilities of growing independence. More than ever, adolescents need love, firm guidance, and emotional support in order to move through this stage. When a divorce occurs at this time, the teen is faced with an additional set of very significant challenges. Although they appear independent, teens very much need the stability of family from which to venture out into the world.

Adolescents generally experience a deep sense of loss in response to the divorce. The younger the teen, the more they may feel it as abandonment. Adolescents seem to respond in five major patterns; Regression, parentification, mature adjustment, distancing from family, or acting out sexually, delinquency, and with drugs and alcohol.

Possible Reactions of Teen

Behaviors manifesting feelings of loss, grief, anger, and emptiness.

Difficulty concentrating.

Chronic fatigue.

Acute concerns about our own future.

Strong tendency to judge one or both parents harshly.

Regressed behavior.

Parentified “caretaking” behavior.

Withdrawal from family and friends.

Acting out sexually, drugs and alcohol, or delinquent behavior.

Distancing self from the family, seeking support outside.

Ways to Help Your Teen

Provide as stable and consistent a home base as possible, even though the teen appears to reject it at the time.

Avoid exposing adolescents to bitter, angry feelings. This reduces the potential for extreme judgment of the parent on the part of the child.

Keep fighting out of the presence of your teenager.

Do not handle personal guilt by being extremely permissive.

Establish a democratic level of control within the household.

Minimize teen's exposure to parent's sexuality in regard to new relationships.

Reassure your adolescent that they are not doomed to repeat the mistakes of their parents.

Continue to keep clear parent/child boundaries.

Be available to your teen.

I” MESSAGES VS “YOU” MESSAGES

“I” messages are used to express how your child’s behavior makes you, the parent, feel or how it interferes with you. It is simply a report of how you feel, without assigning blame to the child.

“You” messages, on the other hand, are ones that blame and/or criticize the child. It tells a child she is at fault, and often is a verbal attack on the personality of the child. It creates defensiveness and may provoke a counter-attack from the child.

How to Construct an “I” Message

1. State your feelings about the behavior.
“I wonder if you are sad about dad and I separating...”
2. Describe the behavior which is interfering with you.
“and you hide your sadness by saying mean things to me...”
3. State the consequence of that behavior.
“because it’s not okay to hurt others when you’re hurting.”

or more simply:

1. I feel...
2. when you...
3. because...

Examples of “I” Messages

1. “I feel hurt when you come home from dad’s and go straight to your room without saying hi and slam the door.”
2. “I can’t have a conversation with you when you won’t take your ear buds out or look up from your phone because I don’t think you hear me.”
3. “I feel disappointed when you pretend that you don’t hear me call you for supper.”

THE PRINCIPLE OF REFLECTIVE LISTENING

Reflective listening is a way of responding to a child so that he knows we understand and recognize the feeling behind what is being said, or not said. It is a way to help a child clarify his feelings and understand what the real problem and/or feeling is. Reflective listening encourages a child to share, and continue to share, his thoughts and feelings in order to solve his problem.

Here is an example of reflective listening:

CHILD: I hate going to mom's! She always asks me what we did while we were at your house.

PARENT: It sounds like you're feeling angry and frustrated.

Reflective listening is simply trying to grasp what the child feels and means, and stating that feeling back to the child so that he feels understood. He knows you have listened and heard what he was trying to say.

Reflective listening also involves non-verbal means of communication. Nodding of the head, a smile, a pat on the back, looking directly at a child, all indicate that a parent is listening and responding to what is being said.

Reflective listening uses open responses instead of closed responses. Open responses acknowledge the child's feelings with acceptance and concern. These responses are non-judgmental and encourage the child to continue talking. Closed responses, on the other hand, cut off communication, tell the child that what he feels is not important, discourages him from talking, and expresses a judgment.

Example -- Open Response

"It seems as if no one cares and you're feeling left out."

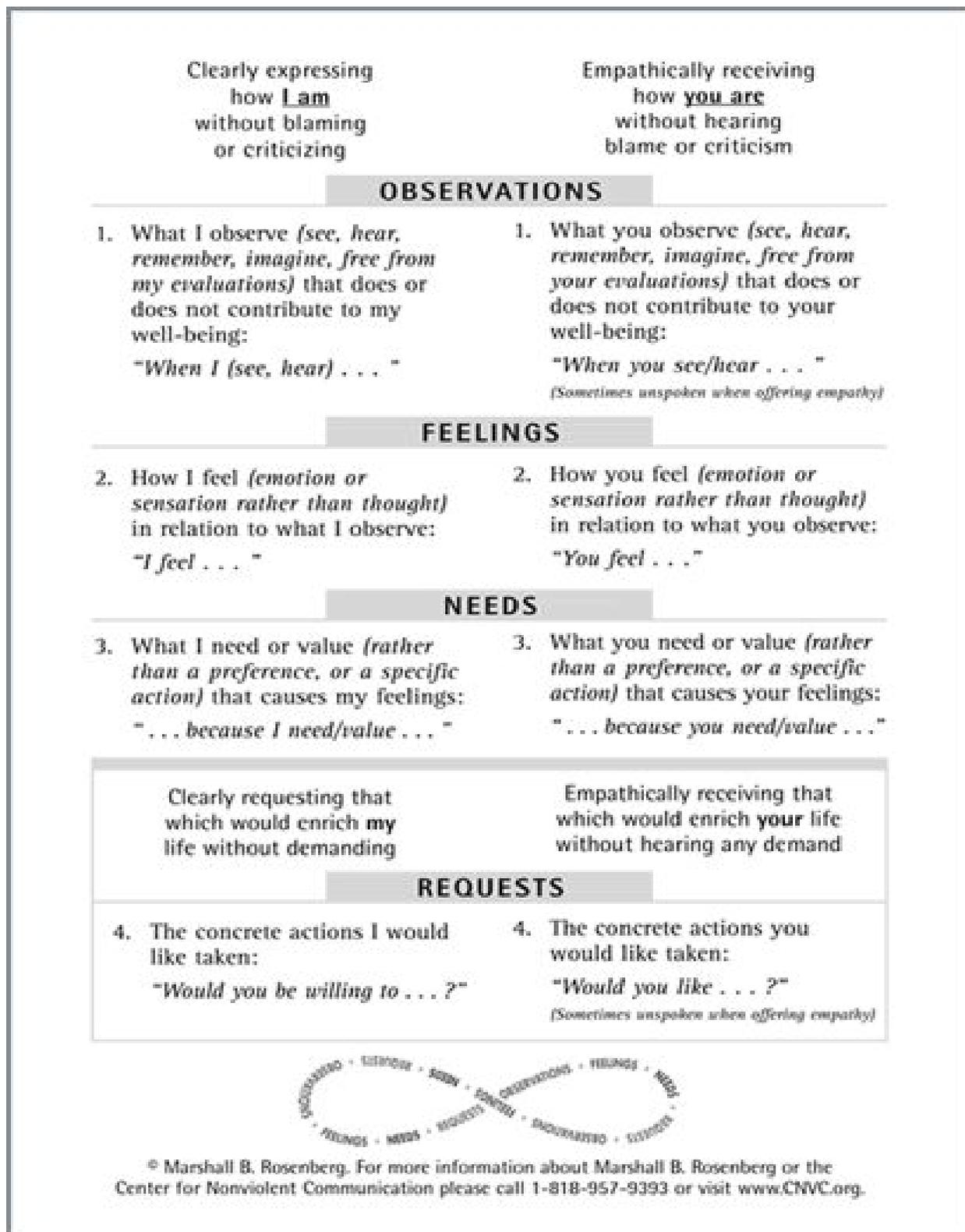
"I'm wondering if ..."

"It sounds like..."

Example -- Closed Response

Well, that's life. Things don't always happen the way we want."

Marshall B. Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication Model (NVC)



FEELING WORDS TO REFLECT “UPSET” FEELINGS

| | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| Angry | Hurt |
| Anxious | Inadequate |
| Bored | Left out |
| Disappointed | Miserable |
| Defeated | Put down |
| Difficult | Rejected |
| Discouraged | Sad |
| Doubt | Stupid |
| Embarrassed | Unfair |
| Feel like giving up | Unhappy |
| Frightened | Unloved |
| Guilty | Worried |
| Hate | Worthless |
| Hopeless | Want to get even |

FEELING WORDS TO REFLECT “HAPPY” FEELINGS

| | |
|-------------|------------|
| Accepted | Good |
| Appreciated | Glad |
| Better | Great |
| Capable | Happy |
| Comfortable | Loved |
| Confident | Pleased |
| Encouraged | Proud |
| Enjoy | Relieved |
| Excited | Respected |
| Glad | Satisfied |
| Important | Worthwhile |
| Special | Thrilled |

Possible experiences for a child whose family is changing through divorce

You are not to blame for your parent's divorce.

Some parents have noisy, violent battles. Others fight silently by not talking to each other.

Parents sometimes fight with you when they are actually angry with the other parent.

Sometimes parents behave in ways that hurt the family, or they try to numb their feelings with the use of drugs or alcohol.

Feelings that may come up for you are: sad, angry, ashamed, guilty, afraid, confused, relieved, or worried about where you will live and/or who will take care of you.

It is ok to express these feelings. In fact, it can be damaging to hold them in. Just be sure you are not hurting others when you show your anger and other feelings.

It is ok to ask questions of your parents.

Sometimes it is necessary to use a counselor to make sure everyone in the family gets a chance to listen to each other.

Some parents can make their own agreements about how to arrange your new situation.

Sometimes parents cannot agree and need to have a judge decide. Try to be honest if you are asked questions by a judge or lawyer.

You may hope your parents will marry each other again, but divorce is final and most parents do not get back together.

You can still love both of your parents. That does not change after the divorce.

Sometimes it is a relief when parents separate and divorce because they may feel calmer and, because they are not so concerned about each other, you may actually get to know them better.

You do not have to listen when one parent says bad things about the other. You can tell them so, as many times as your parent needs to understand that you do not want to hear bad things about your other parent.

Divorce is new for your parents too, so they may make some mistakes.

You may have to move and say good-bye to old friends.

You may need to pitch in and help a bit more than before the divorce because you will only have one parent at a time to do all of the household chores.

You may wish you could turn into an adult overnight, but that is not your job.

There may be other times when you feel younger than you are and want more attention. Instead, try to ask for some love and affection.

Living with one parent almost always means there will be less money. So you need to be prepared to give up some things.

There will be times when you miss the other parent.

The changes may feel uncomfortable at first, but you will get used to it.

The parent you are with the least will need to hear you tell them more about school and your other activities, since they will not be directly a part of many of the things you do now.

Some parents may act like Santa Claus and shower you with fun and gifts. This may be, in part, because they are trying to make up for lost time with you.

Remember the time spent with them is the important thing, not whether lots of money is spent.

Sometimes parents feel too guilty or unhappy to visit with you. You can keep in touch by calling or writing. If not, try to spend time with other grownups you like and trust.

It may feel strange to show love for one parent in front of the other. Remember it is ok to love both parents.

Spending time in two different homes may be confusing. You may feel lost or out of place. Try to find favorite things you can do with each parent.

Keep a schedule of when you are where, to minimize unpleasant surprises or glitches.

Rules in each house may be different. Respect them both. Also, telling one parent that you have permission to do something when you don't can get you into trouble.

Divorce may mean twice as much celebrating during holidays. Also, holidays may be celebrated differently in different households.

It is important to remember both your parents on holidays.

Sometimes it helps to remember that you are not the only child of divorced parents.

It is sometimes good to talk to close friends about your feelings over the divorce. Also, spending time with friends can help you to feel less lonely.

Your parents may go out on dates and you may have a babysitter, etc. You also may resent your parents going out and want to have them to yourself.

Your parents may decide to marry again.

Step-parents are just people too, not necessarily like some fairytale stories would have you believe.

It is important to remember that step-parents are not your parents, and to pick a name for a step-parent that makes it clear they are not your actual mom or dad.

If you do love your step-parent, don't worry. You will still love your own parents.

There can also be step-brothers and sisters. You may feel invaded if you have to share a room. It can help to agree on spaces that can be private for all of you.

Learning to live with someone new may take time. Don't be surprised if there are arguments at first.

It may be good to talk to step-brothers and sisters because they may have been through divorce for longer and know some things about it.

Finding a quiet place may take more work with a bigger family.

Divorce may bring many changes, but one thing that does not change is your parents' love for you.

The Honorable Michael J. Haas, Cass County, Minnesota:

“Your children have come into this world because of the two of you. Perhaps you two made lousy choices as to whom you decided to be the other parent. If so, that is your problem and your fault.

“No matter what you think of the other party – or what your family thinks of the other party – these children are one half of each of you.

“Remember that – because every time you tell your child what an ‘idiot’ his father is, or what a ‘fool’ his mother is, or how bad the absent parent is, or what terrible things that person has done, you are telling the child that half of him is bad.

“That is an unforgivable thing to do to a child. That is not love. That is possession. If you do that to your children, you will destroy them as surely as if you had cut them into pieces, because that is what you are doing to their emotions.

“I sincerely hope that you do not do that to your children. Think more about your children and less about yourselves. And make yours a selfless kind of love, not foolish or selfish, or your children will suffer.



Journal Moment

When I am helping my children prepare for a transition to their other home, how can I best support a successful transition—both physically (getting their belongings collected and moved) and emotionally (working through the letting go of one parent and taking hold of the other)?

When I am receiving our children as they make the transition from their other parent (or school or daycare), what will I do to help them create a sense of "arriving" and settling into their residential time with me—both physically (organizing their belongings), and emotionally (reconnecting)?

CHILDREN'S BILL OF RIGHTS IN DIVORCE*

1. The right to love each parent, without feeling disloyal or guilty.
2. The right not to have to choose one parent over the other.
3. The right to get emotional support from both parents.
4. The right to express feelings about the divorce, and have both parents listen.
5. The right to the best financial support that can be provided by both parents.
6. The right to spend time with each parent.
7. The right to be kept out of the middle of his/her parents' conflict, including the right not to pick sides, carry messages, or hear complaints about the other parent.
8. The right to know well in advance about important changes that will affect his/her life.
9. The right to know that they did not cause the divorce.
10. The right to remain a child.

*Adapted from a decision of the Wisconsin Supreme Court and The Truth About Children and Divorce by Robert E. Emery

Details of a Parenting Plan Checklist

- ✓ Am I treating the other parent respectfully?
- ✓ How will communication be handled? (e.g., mail, phone, meetings)
- ✓ What decisions will be shared? How will they be made?
- ✓ Will you both agree to the other parent's autonomy when children are with that parent?
- ✓ When will the children be with each of you?
- ✓ What will be the logistics of transferring children? Be specific. What time? Who will transport? Will children have eaten first? Who will oversee homework? What things are expected to return with them?
- ✓ What will be done if a scheduled visit cannot take place? Be specific about times.
- ✓ When will the child and nonresident parent talk on the phone?
- ✓ How long can each parent take children away on vacation? How much notice should be given to the other parent? Should the vacationing parent provide an itinerary and emergency phone numbers?
- ✓ Try to agree on some basic rules for both homes (for example, about discipline, bedtimes, homework, and television).
- ✓ How will children continue their relationships with the non-custodial parent's family?
- ✓ Who will go to teacher conferences, and how will information about school progress be shared?
- ✓ What activities will children continue (e.g., lessons, summer camp)? How will they be paid for?
- ✓ How will the children be supported?
- ✓ How will medical, dental, child care, and college bills be paid?
- ✓ How will future disputes be resolved?



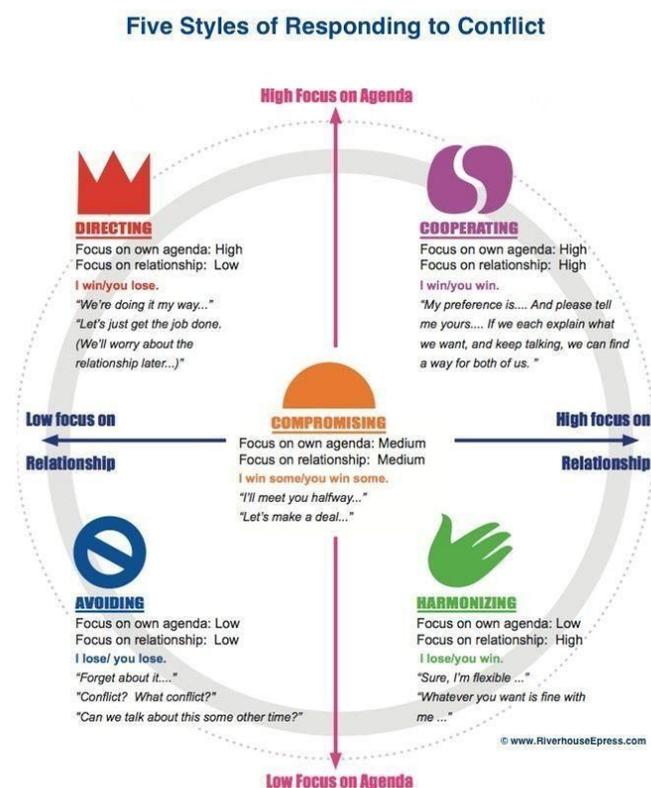
TIPS FOR HEALTHY CO-PARENTING

Checklist for a Stable Home Environment:

- ✓ Spend time with each child individually each day.
- ✓ Be nurturing, supportive, and available.
- ✓ Create routines and schedules.
- ✓ Provide clear rules and limits and use consistent discipline.
- ✓ Settle custody as quickly and as amicably as you can; try mediation if you cannot agree.
- ✓ Develop a firm parenting schedule quickly that provides frequent, regular, and reliable contact with the non-resident parent.
- ✓ Avoid very frequent changeovers between homes if custody is joint.
- ✓ Take children's developmental needs into account when determining a parenting schedule.

Children's Self-Esteem:

- ✓ Show your child respect.
- ✓ Offer praise, encouragement, and appreciation liberally.
- ✓ Avoid criticisms and put-downs.
- ✓ Accentuate your child's positives, not the negatives.
- ✓ Make a child feel special with your interest and time.
- ✓ Provide opportunities to do things your child does well.
- ✓ Encourage learning a new skill in which your child can take pride.
- ✓ Help your child set realistic goals.
- ✓ Increase challenges in small, achievable steps.
- ✓ Avoid taking over when your child is trying something on his or her own.
- ✓ Assign age-appropriate chores and show appreciation for your child's contribution to the family.
- ✓ Involve your child in helping someone else.
- ✓ Distinguish between a child and his behavior; the behavior is unacceptable, not the child.
- ✓ Examine whether your expectations are *realistic*.



Children's Behavioral Problems:

- ✓ Help children talk about their feelings, accept them and be understanding.
- ✓ Can you relieve some of their anger at its source?
- ✓ Help them to see *why* they are behaving as they are.
- ✓ Distinguish between having feelings (ok) and acting out feelings in destructive behavior (not ok).
- ✓ Set clearly defined rules and limits for behavior.
- ✓ Consistently enforce consequences if rules are broken (do not use physical punishment).
- ✓ Teach children to remove themselves from the situation when losing control.
- ✓ Help them find acceptable outlets for their anger.
- ✓ End conflict with your spouse in your child's presence.
- ✓ Be supportive; reassure children of your love and work on building their self-esteem.
- ✓ Realize that behavioral problems are symptoms of children's pain and distress.

Your Children's Long-Term Divorce Adjustment:

- ✓ Am I building *good* relationships with my children?
- ✓ Am I clear with my child that the divorce has ended?
- ✓ Am I supporting my child's relationship with my ex-spouse?
- ✓ Have we stopped our conflict when our child is within earshot?
- ✓ Am I refraining from:
 - Bad-mouthing my children's other parent?
 - Putting my children in the middle?
 - Pumping them for information about their other parent?
 - Subtly pressuring them to side with me?
- ✓ Am I returning stability to our home and following routines?
- ✓ Am I being warm, supportive, and available?
- ✓ Do my children and I communicate openly?
- ✓ Am I providing clear rules and consistent discipline?
- ✓ Am I keeping as many details of their lives the same as I can?
- ✓ Do I avoid burdening them with adult responsibilities, roles, and worries?
- ✓ Do I avoid making our reduced financial resources an issue of bitterness and resentment?
- ✓ Am I making my child support payments to minimize financial problems for my children (for non-custodial parents)?
- ✓ Am I seeking out sources of social support for my children?

Key Steps in Healthy Co-Parenting

- ✓ Create clear boundaries for the new relationship.
 - Disengage in *all* areas except parenting.
 - Formalize parenting roles and responsibilities and stick to a firm parenting schedule.
- ✓ Communicate as business associates would.
- ✓ Redefine the relationship in your own thinking.
 - Quit using negative labels.
 - Think of your ex in terms of a business partner.
- ✓ Focus on the present, not the past.
- ✓ Work on building a new independent life.
- ✓ Reconnect later on a new basis.

Preparation Strategies

- ✓ Make your goal reaching an agreement, not winning.
- ✓ Keep calm; use anger control and deep relaxation techniques.

Face-to-Face Strategies

- ✓ Use symbolic gestures to set the tone.
- ✓ Suggest ground rules.
- ✓ Use “I” statements; avoid blaming, criticism, and “shoulds.”
- ✓ Coach yourself throughout the meeting with self-talk.
- ✓ Begin with the simplest problem first.
- ✓ Offer proposals calmly and clearly; be prepared to compromise.
- ✓ Avoid taking positions; focus on interests.
- ✓ Separate your spouse’s proposals from their source.
- ✓ Look at each issue from your spouse’s perspective.
- ✓ Look for face-saving retreats for a stubborn spouse.
- ✓ Don’t yell back. Use calming and disarming techniques.
- ✓ Try some joint problem solving.
- ✓ Keep focused on the issues by keeping your goal in mind.
- ✓ Suggest trying out decisions before casting them in concrete.
- ✓ Don’t try to deal with too many problems during one meeting.
- ✓ Congratulate yourself for *small* accomplishments.

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For more resources go to www.kidsturn.org

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Not the end, but the beginning

This may be the end of our class, but this is the beginning of your future. Decide to be happy, to make the best of each moment, and to love unconditionally. Make it your quest to follow your bliss and to work for the highest good. There is always a lesson, a space created for something new. Treading on the path of the unknown is uncomfortable and scary, but it is also an adventure that you have the power to create.

References and referrals

Check page 38 of your handbook for a list of psychotherapists that also specialize in legal matters with the court if you have a need. We also provide on-site counseling services in Salinas and Carmel for individuals, couples, families, and for children and teens at Harmony at Home

Harmony at Home 831-272-6644, or 831-625-5160.

Counseling is also provided by:

- ❖ YWCA 831-422-8602
- ❖ Community Human Services 831-757-7915
- ❖ Kinship Center 831-422-7811
- ❖ Suicide Prevention 800-273-8255, 877-663-5433

Most of these providers have bilingual counselors. YWCA has counseling for victims of domestic violence, equine therapy, and more.