

Keeping Kids In Mind

Post-Separation Parenting Course



Developed by:



CatholicCare Sydney | Centacare Broken Bay | CatholicCare Parramatta | CatholicCare Wollongong

SESSION 1

Grief and Loss After Separation

- Understanding the impact of loss and grief
- Moving forward towards change
- Coping strategies

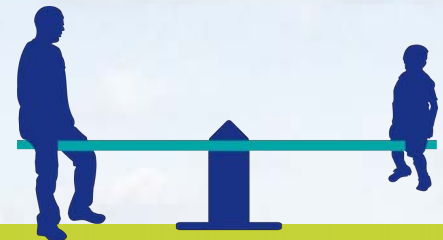




SESSION 2

The Hidden World of Children

- Understanding attachment
- Building parenting capacity
- Parenting dilemma
- The effect of age on children's responses to separation





TRUST

Trust is what happens when parents provide a secure base their children can attach to and move in and out from with confidence.



MAINTAINING A SECURE ATTACHMENT

Attachment research underlines:

“the importance of the parent-child relationship in shaping children’s interactions with other children, their sense of security about exploring the world, their resilience to stress, their ability to balance their emotions, their capacity to have a coherent story that makes sense of their lives, and their ability to create meaningful interpersonal relationships in the future.”

Daniel Siegel & Mary Hartzell, Parenting from the Inside Out, 2003.



WMD Negative behaviours (WMD) used by parents against each other

VERBAL

- Use an angry or threatening tone of voice with the other parent
- Shout and/or scream at the other parent
- Use sarcasm to belittle them
- Use 'put downs' about your child's other parent, especially around their parenting skills
- Use 'put downs' disguised as humour directed at the other parent
- Call your child's other parent names, e.g. bitch, bastard, lousy father/mother
- Be critical of your child's other parent
- Saying something negative about the other parent to your child and expecting them to agree with you
- Ignore the other parent eg act as if they aren't present during changeover
- Tell lies
- Make veiled threats
- Threaten to harm yourself or suicide, if your child/ren or the other parent doesn't agree to something you want
- Having a negative emotional reaction, in front of the children, in response to the news about the other parent's significant life changes such as a new partner or a new baby



WMD Negative behaviours (WMD) used by parents against each other
NON-VERBAL

- Use intimidating body language, eg give your child's other parent 'the finger'
- Use threatening looks eg give your child's other parent 'dirty' or 'black' looks
- Feeling really angry or betrayed by the other parent and expecting your child to feel the same way



WMD Negative behaviours (WMD) used by parents against each other
BEHAVIOURAL *(likely to have verbal and non-verbal elements too)*

- Create a scene at changeover
- Be scary in your behaviour to your child/ren or to the other parent, e.g. hit something, roughly push one of them
- Drive off recklessly after picking up child/ren.
- Refuse to agree to things that your child/ren want to do as a way to get back at the other parent
- “Hide” your money so that you can minimise the amount of child support you pay
- Give up work or take a lower paying job to minimise the amount of child support you pay
- Be late in making payments you agreed to make
- Complain to your child that the other parent isn’t giving you enough money
- Omit to tell your child/ren’s other parent that you didn’t pay for a course or sports fees
- Letting your child/ren witness any emotional reaction to the discovery of non payment on the day



WMD Negative behaviours (WMD) used by parents against each other
BEHAVIOURAL Cont... *(likely to have verbal and non-verbal elements too)*

- Be late picking up your child/ren
- Be late dropping your child/ren home
- Send your child/ren home after mealtime without feeding them first
- Change child/ren's contact arrangements at the last minute leaving little or no time for your child/ren's other parent to reorganize their plans
- Make agreements about your child/ren then don't follow them
- Forget (on a regular basis) to return clothes or school uniform when your child/ren go to their other parent's place
- Text at inappropriate times, e.g. 3.00am
- Allowing your children to see emails/texts/affidavits etc regarding/to/from their other parent
- Allowing your children to find out information regarding life changes accidentally eg new partner, new baby, change of contact arrangements, moving house
- Don't return phone calls that relate to your child/ren's matters
- Refuse to agree on parenting matters so that issues are constantly being taken to court
- Refuse to go to mediation or to cooperate in mediation for no good reason other than to make things difficult



WMD When children witness their parents engage in “WMDs” they may:

- Develop their own independent beliefs about that parent, e.g. they conclude how unfair and unreasonable that parent is.
- Feel very hurt, angry, sad, confused, distressed and dismayed by their parent’s behaviour.
- Learn the behaviours and apply them later in their own relationships



EMOTIONS

Emotions are neither right nor wrong in themselves: they just are.

Emotions tell us *how* we are experiencing an event, not what to do or how to act.



HIGH ROAD/LOW ROAD THINKING

HIGH ROAD THINKING

- involves rational, reflective processes of the mind

LOW ROAD THINKING

- is flooded by feelings such as fear, sadness, rage and impacts on your capacity to deal effectively with your child



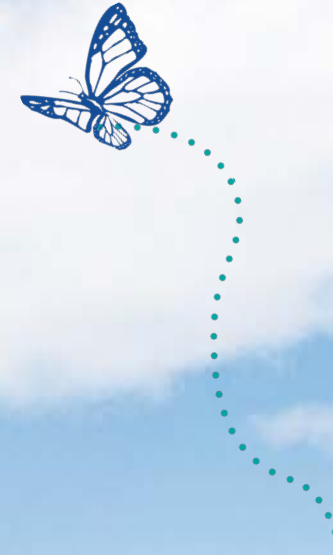
EMOTION COACHING

5 STEPS TO EMOTION COACHING

1. Be aware of your own reaction to your child's emotion first
2. Recognise your child's emotion as an opportunity for intimacy and teaching
3. Listen empathetically, validating the child's feelings
4. Help the child find words to label the emotion he/she is having
5. Set limits while exploring strategies to solve the problem at hand

John Gottman & J DeClaire

The Heart of Parenting: Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child, 1997.



PARENTING DILEMMA

SCENARIO | Boy (7 Years old), Girl (10 years old)

“Dad told us he’s getting married and asked us to be bridesmaid and page boy. We told mum and she burst into tears. Now we don’t know whether we should go to the wedding or not.”

IN SMALL GROUPS DISCUSS:

What emotions might the children be experiencing?

How are they different from the mother’s emotions?

How might the mother show she understands and accepts her children’s feelings?

How might she help her children give a name to what they’re feeling?

Once she has emotion coached her children, how can she move into repairing the relationship?

What can the mother say to let her children know they can approach her about the wedding in the future?

SESSION 3

Rebuilding Resilience

- What is Resilience?
- The Resilience Wheel
- Six Factors for Building Resilience
- Resilience Exercises





DEVELOPMENTAL FORECAST FOR CHILDREN WITNESSING ONGOING CONFLICT

Dr Jennifer McIntosh, an Australian child psychologist, professor and researcher says:

“For children to adjust well to parental separation...What matters, unequivocally, is for parents to restore a parental alliance that is secure enough to support the weight of their developing child”

*Dr Jennifer McIntosh
Attachment: Growth, Shapes and Functions,
in Intact & Separated Families, Presentation, 2007.*



DEVELOPMENTAL FORECAST FOR CHILDREN WITNESSING ONGOING CONFLICT

Dr Jennifer McIntosh, an Australian child psychologist, professor and researcher says:

“Psychological adjustment long term is compromised in about 25% of divorced children (12% in not-divorced children)”

*Dr Jennifer McIntosh
Attachment: Growth, Shapes and Functions,
in Intact & Separated Families, Presentation, 2007.*



WAYS CONFLICT CAN IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

- They lose their ability to trust
- They make poor attachments to their parents
- They don't believe in themselves
- They get over-whelmed by their feelings
- They show their distress in bad behaviour
- They have trouble making and keeping friends
- They aren't confident
- They don't perform as well at school
- They have trouble making healthy adult relationships

Dr Jennifer McIntosh

Because it's for the kids: Building a secure parenting base after separation, 2006.



ANOTHER WAY OF PUTTING THIS

“Children can twist themselves into strange shapes inside, in order to cope with conflict between the people they love most.”

Dr Jennifer McIntosh

Because it's for the kids: Building a secure parenting base after separation, 2006.



TYPES OF CONFLICT BETWEEN PARENTS THAT DAMAGES CHILDREN

- Remain very angry
- Distrust each other
- Become verbally abusive
- Avoid each other unnecessarily
- Argue or interfere
- Go to court a lot
- Threaten, intimidate or try to control their child's other parent
- Are aggressive or violent
- Have trouble communicating about the children
- Criticise each other's parenting

Dr Jennifer McIntosh

Because it's for the kids: Building a secure parenting base after separation, 2006.



And additionally...

Get in the way of the other parent seeing the children



RESILIENCE

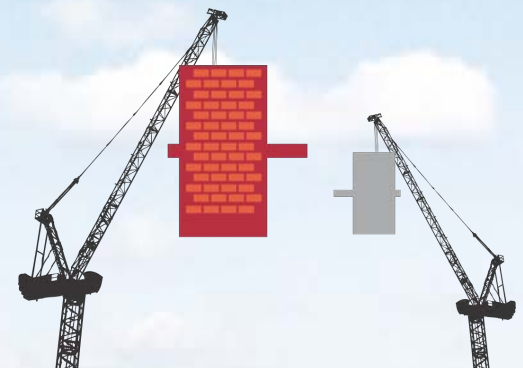
“Resilience is the ability to bungee jump through life. It’s not that you avoid the pitfalls and difficult times... It is as if you have an elasticised rope around your middle that helps you to bounce back from hard times”

*Fuller, A (2000) Raising Real People: creating a resilient family. ACER Press.
Melbourne, VIC <http://www.acerpress.com.au>*

SESSION 4

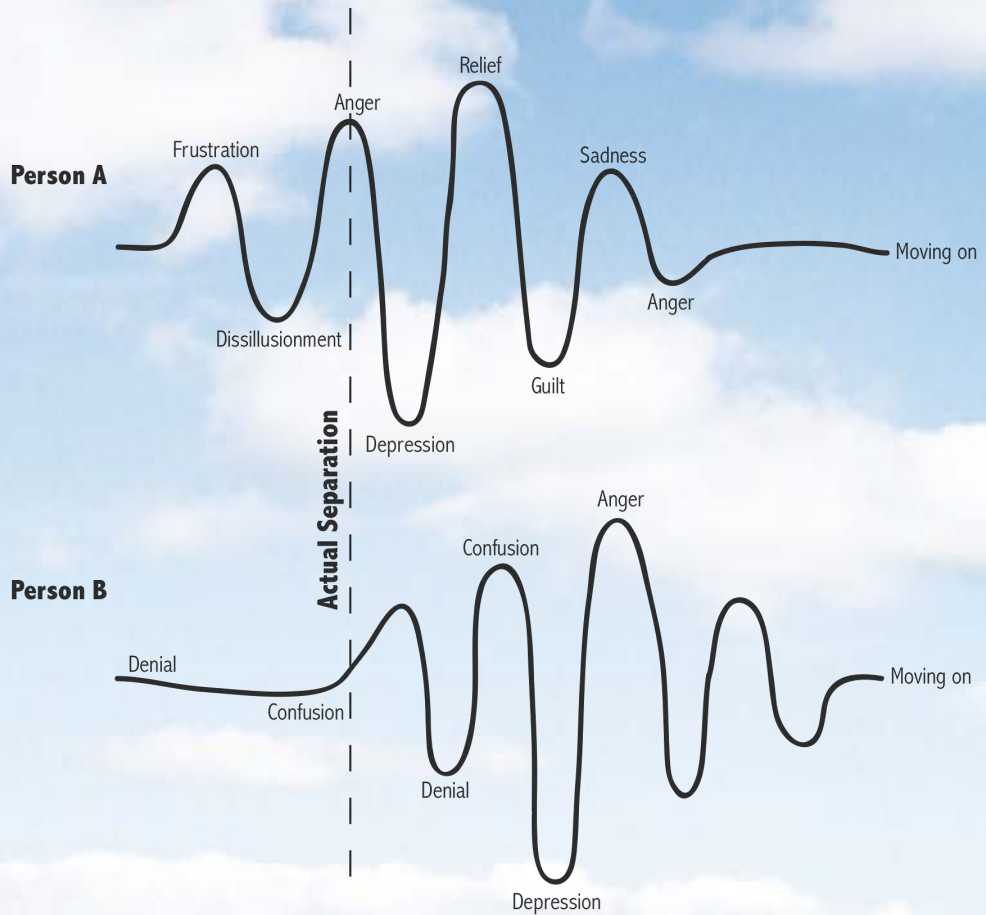
Bridging the Gap

- The Separation Graph
- Listening Exercise
- Communication Model
- Conflict Resolution
- The Awful Scale
- The Team Meeting
- The Communication Dance
- Group Exercise





SEPARATION GRAPH





EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

- State clearly what they mean
- Ensures that the other person understands what is being said
- Ensures that the other person understands why the issue is important
- Arouses as little negative emotion in the other as possible without sacrificing your point



During the conversation both parties will be checking:

- The facts of the situation

- Why the facts are important to that person

- What the other person expects to come from that conversation

Note:

Communication is achieved by both talking *and* listening skills.



COMMUNICATION FILTER

Do you think the other parent's feelings would be similar or different from yours?

How do you think your particular situation influences the way you hear/filter the other parent?



CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLES

Style	Characteristic Behaviour	User Justification
Avoidance	Non-confrontational. Ignores or passes over issues. Denies issues are a problem	Differences too minor or too great to resolve. Attempts might damage relationships or create even greater problems. Hate conflict.
Accommodating	Agreeable, non- assertive behaviour. Co-operative at the expense of personal goals.	Not worth risking damage to relationships or general disharmony. Fear damaging relationships.
Win/Lose	Confrontational, and aggressive. Must win at any cost despite the impact on the co-parenting relationship.	Survival of the fittest. Must prove superiority. You don't consider my perspective so why should I consider you.
Compromising	It's important that all parties achieve basic goals and maintain good relationships. Assertive but co-operative. May also lead to resentment as it can often end up uneven in who does more of the compromising.	No one person or idea is perfect. There is more than one way to do most things.
Problem Solving or Win/Win	Needs of all parties are legitimate and important. High respect for mutual support. Assertive and co-operative - working together for a shared outcome.	When parties openly discuss issues, a mutually beneficial solution can be found without anyone making a major concession. Focussed on the problem not the personal issues.



Your parents are flying in from Queensland on their way to New Zealand next weekend which is your co-parent's time with the children. The grandparents will only be in Sydney overnight and would like to see the children and take them out for a treat. You're aware that your co-parent had some plans in place for that weekend.



PARENTING TEAM MEETINGS

- Have an agreement in place already about the way and response times for discussion
- Text first to set up a meeting time and the topic to be discussed eg deciding on an extra curricular activity
- Be aware of your triggers
- Consider your tone
- Use a working together approach
- Stick to the topic
- Start with smaller issues first
- Maintaining your parental alliance (the bridge) is always more important than the topic you're discussing
- Use a problem solving approach
- If things get heated you say something like I'm getting a bit upset and re-schedule
- Make sure you call back within the agreed time



PARENTING DILEMMA

Your co-parent informs you that their parents are flying in from Queensland on their way to New Zealand next weekend which is your time with the children. The grandparents will only be in Sydney overnight and would like to see the children and take them out for a treat. Whenever the grandparents see the children they take them out for junk food and buy them lollies and chocolates and hype them up. You have tickets for The Lion King next weekend anyway.

SESSION 5

Looking Back, Moving Forward

- Care arrangements for children
- Group discussion
- Your strengths



CARE ARRANGEMENTS FOR CHILDREN

“... In general children benefit greatly if they maintain good relationships with both parents following separation.”

McIntosh J and Chisholm R, Cautionary Notes on the Shared Care of Children in Conflicted Parental Separation, Journal of Family Studies, Volume 14, Issue 111, 2008



PRINCIPLES OF CARE

- Children love, want and need both their parents. Neither is ever forgotten by their child.
- Every child is different, so what works for one child in the family doesn't necessarily work for another child in that same family.
- Because children change and develop and parent's circumstances change it is important to periodically review the arrangements.
- Parents need to make their legal agreements work on a day-to-day basis.
- The parent's relationship is central to how well their children do. If they have an ongoing battle with each other, then the children become the casualties of their war.
- Parents need to aim for a 'good divorce or separation', that is where there are minimum standards of acceptable conduct.

Reported in Research Report No. 9 2004, Parent-child contact and post-separation parenting arrangements, edited by Bruce Smyth, Australian Institute of Family Studies

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/resreport9/main.html>



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

If you were to ask your children their experiences of the contact arrangements, what would be the answer?

Thinking about what you have learned over the last 5 weeks, share one change you could make which could improve your children's contact arrangements.



SHARED CARE

- The parents were reasonably financially independent
- They had a co-operative parenting style
- The parents were able to have a business-like arrangement with each other
- They respected each other's parenting capacities
- They lived close by to each other
- They had flexibility in their work arrangements
- The parents worked hard to put their children's needs above their own
- They were committed to making the arrangement work.

Reported in Research Report No. 9 2004, Parent-child contact and post-separation parenting arrangements, edited by Bruce Smyth, Australian Institute of Family Studies

<http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/resreport9/main.html>



“Will a shared living arrangement in this parental context lead to an experience for the children of being richly shared, or deeply divided?”

McIntosh J and Chisholm R, Shared Care and Children’s Best Interests in Conflicted Separation, in Australian Family Lawyer, Vol 20, No 1



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

www.keepingkidsinmind.org



Australian Government

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